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2005 Mr. Pointy Awards

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

- M. E. Russell, "The Browncoats Rise Again: The best sci-fi TV series you've never seen has gone from cancellation to the big screen. Will a never-tried marketing strategy work for *Serenity*"? (from ***The Daily Standard***)
- "A Foster Teen's Boyfriend Heads to Iraq" (audio story from NPR's *Day to Day*, June 24, 2005). Listen carefully to see the role *BtVS* plays in this audio-diary. **Real Player** or **Windows Media Player** required.
- **Television without Pity**'s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Site.
- **Buffyverse Database**
- **Whedonverse Chronology**
- **Tea at the Ford**

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David Fritts

Warrior Heroes: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Beowulf

[1] "I call it 'Mr. Pointy,'" says Kendra as she hands to Buffy her "lucky stake," with which she has "killed many vampires." Mr. Pointy proves useless in Buffy's fight with Angelus, though Buffy does eventually send Angel to hell with a sword that Kendra has supplied, a sword "blessed by the knight who first slew" Acathla ("Becoming," Part I, 2021).[1] Kendra had first appeared earlier in the season because "a very dark power [was] about to rise in Sunnydale." With her by-the-book approach to slaying, Kendra quickly wins Giles' praise and favor. Feeling somewhat jealous, Buffy directs a stream of sarcastic remarks at Kendra and even wonders whether Giles "wishes [Buffy] was more of a book geek" ("What's My Line," Part II, 2010).

[2] In the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, as Beowulf sets out to do single battle with Grendel's mother, the Danish warrior Unferth gives him a weapon:

> That hilted sword was named Hrunting
> unique among ancient treasures —
> its edge was iron, etched with poison-stripes,
> hardened with the blood of war; it had never failed
> any man who grasped it in his hands in battle,
> who dared to undertake a dreadful journey
> into the very home of the foe — it was not the first time
> that it had to perform a work of high courage. (1457-64) [2]

Like Mr. Pointy, Hrunting proves useless, and Beowulf defeats the demon with a sword he finds in its cave. Like Kendra, Beowulf has traveled from afar to fight a powerful evil. Upon his arrival, Beowulf is feted in the mead hall and regarded as a potential savior by Hrothgar, the Danish king. "Sorely vexed" by Beowulf's proposed venture, Unferth, seated in an honored position at Hrothgar's feet, begins to taunt and insult Beowulf.

[3] Having been a fan of *Beowulf* for many years before I saw my first episode of *BtVS*, when Kendra handed over that stake with a name and a history to the Slayer, I was struck immediately with appreciation for the clever use of this heroic convention. Looking further into the relationship between Kendra and

Buffy, we notice that the two slayers embody aspects of the warrior relationship. For example, when assessing Kendra's fighting style, Buffy praises her technique but tells her she has no imagination. As Kendra grows angry, Buffy says, "You feel it, right? How the anger gives you fire? A Slayer needs that." Buffy increases Kendra's power by inciting her anger ("Becoming," Part I, 2021). A similar moment occurs in Beowulf after Unferth taunts Beowulf: Beowulf insults Unferth, brags about his previous exploits, and most importantly, reaffirms his boast to cleanse the mead hall. As Buffy had done for Kendra, Unferth incites Beowulf's anger and increases his preparedness for battle. These moments between Buffy and Kendra alert us to the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon warrior hero present throughout the narrative.

[4] Buffy's connection to the traditional hero is well established. Frances Early writes that *BtVS* offers "a fresh version of the classic quest myth in Western culture" with a "personable and responsible young woman cast as hero" (paragraph 16). Laurel Bowman has shown that Buffy's story through the first six seasons follows closely the hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell. Bowman points out that Buffy, unlike any single hero examined by Campbell, has passed through all three stages of the hero's journey. Rhonda Wilcox asserts that Campbell's monomyth, in fact, can be "found many times in the one narration of *Buffy*" ("Pain as Bright"). Similarly, Nancy Holder shows how the hero's journey can be seen in the five final episodes as well as in the seven-season narrative. Much as the hero's journey can be seen in individual episodes or groups of episodes as well as in the overall story arc of several seasons, the Beowulf-like warrior hero can be seen in individual details throughout the seven seasons, as well as in the sequence of story arcs for the entire series, but especially seasons one through five. Sometimes corresponding details may be coincidence, but the broader strokes of the series—its setting, its celebration of the warrior traits of its hero, and the evolution of its hero as she relates to her community—all make Buffy's story worthy of being sung by the *scop* in the mead hall.

[5] Buffy and Beowulf inhabit similar worlds, populated by supernatural demons, providing battlegrounds infused with ambiguous spiritual significance. In a pivotal 1936 lecture, J.R.R. Tolkien responded to the critical tradition that had dismissed *Beowulf* as art because the narrative focuses on monsters and a dragon: "It is just because the main foes in *Beowulf* are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant" than a story more rooted in historical fact.[3] Tolkien continues, "It glimpses the cosmic and moves with the thought of all men concerning the fate of human life and efforts" (87). We can hear an echo of Tolkien's description in Bowman's assessment that *Buffy* "resonates with classical models" because Buffy fights "monsters, large fanged lizard-gods, trolls, demons, vampires, and the whole class of supernatural baddies traditionally found littering a classical hero's path" or, she adds, a folk hero's.

[6] The monsters faced by Beowulf pose not just a threat to the kingdom, but represent evil at work in the world, threatening to unleash chaos. Grendel has taken away control of the mead hall from Hrothgar, the place where the vital activities of the *comitatus* take place—the boasting of the warriors and the doling

out of rings by the king. Being of the race of Cain, Grendel is not only marked with the stain of the Biblical first murder, but with the foulest deed an Anglo-Saxon could commit: the murder of his kinsman. His attacks disrupt the very foundation of the social order, and, worse, lead the Danes to "[offer] honor to idols / at pagan temples, [pray] aloud / that the soul slayer might offer assistance" (175-7). That is, Grendel's attacks open the door for the devil, the soul slayer. Andy Orchard summarizes the many verbal associations of Grendel with hell, for example, "fiend from hell (101) and "hellish spirit" (1274). He also notes the similarity of the mere into which Beowulf dives to fight Grendel's mother to a contemporary description of hell (39). In addition, repeated references to fire and water in the middle episode, such as the mere's description as "an awesome wonder, fire on the water" (1365-6), suggest to Orchard "apocalyptic visions of the end of the world" not usually found outside of religious writing (42). In the final episode of the poem the "ferocious hostility" of a dragon threatens the Geats. (2317). Most significantly, Beowulf's own mead hall, the "best of buildings, had burned in waves of fire / the gift-throne of the Geats" (2326-7). The destruction of Beowulf's seat of power foreshadows how, indirectly, the dragon unleashes chaotic forces that will destroy the Geat tribe.

[7] Similarly, many of the demons Buffy faces, especially those that are the focus of a season's story arc, are apocalyptic; before the fight with Glory, Giles notes that they have already faced five apocalypses ("The Gift" 5022). Many critics have noted that the demons represented on *BtVS* are metaphors for inner demons or manifestations of everyday problems. However, like Grendel and the dragon, some demons threaten to open the door to hell. In "The Harvest" (1002) Giles describes the Hellmouth, which the Master intends to open: "It's a sort of, um, portal between this reality and the next" that, Buffy adds, will "bring the demons back." Xander concludes, "End of the world." After he is free, the Master says to Buffy, "You laugh when my hell is on earth?" ("Prophecy Girl," 1012). In Season Two Angelus intends to wake Acathla, who will, Giles says, "with one breath . . . create a vortex, a-a kind of, um... whirlpool that will pull everything on Earth into that dimension, where any non-demon life will suffer horrible and . . . eternal torment" ("Becoming," Part I, 2021). Three seasons later, Glory's threat is essentially the same as, again, described by Giles: "The energy [of the key] ... would flow into that spot, the walls between the dimensions break down" and "all manner of hell will be unleashed on earth." He continues, "If the ritual starts, then every living creature in this and every other dimension imaginable will suffer unbearable torment and death" ("The Gift" 5022). Season seven takes the threat to the ultimate level as the First Evil plots to send an enormous army of Übervamps up through the hell mouth.

[8] These hellish forces define the perilous world of the heroes. The rhythm of Anglo-Saxon life reflected in heroic poetry like *Beowulf* is the alternation of joy and sorrow, characterized by the formulaic line: "Sorrow is renewed" (1322). This view of life may explain Tolkien's characterization of *Beowulf* as "heroic-elegiac poem," a long prelude to the dirge that ends the poem—"one of the most moving ever written" (85). For me, *BtVS* is similarly elegiac; through the first five seasons, the narrative moves steadily toward Buffy's inevitable death. Each

triumph is followed by a new threat; evil is never vanquished, only subdued. New vampires arise every night. The idea that life on the Hellmouth will never have a happy ending is signaled in the first season as Buffy, Xander, and Willow sit outside the high school, commiserating over their failures at love. Buffy says, "Let's face it, none of us are ever gonna have a happy, normal relationship." Xander adds, "We're doomed." They laugh briefly, and the episode ends as their faces turn somber ("I, Robot—You, Jane," 1008). Like so much in *Buffy*, this moment focused on teen love speaks to the most serious depths of the show. So when Buffy dies, it is the fulfillment of the inevitable for the hero who puts herself in danger. Even when Buffy returns from death and defeats the First Evil, destroying Sunnydale and closing the Hellmouth, Giles is there to remind us that "There's another one in Cleveland" and that they have "a lot of work ahead" of them ("Chosen" 7022). In the uncertain worlds of Beowulf and Buffy, all moments of joy—and sorrow—will pass.

[9] Each successive enemy poses a greater challenge for the two heroes. Beowulf first defeats Grendel in a fight without weapons that takes place in Heorot. Grendel arrives expecting the usual easy pickings, but is completely surprised by Beowulf's strength and immediately seeks to escape. While his defeat is not easy, Grendel turns out not to pose much of a threat to Beowulf. Next, however, defeating Grendel's mother requires a fight with weapons in her own cave under the water. She makes no move to run from Beowulf as Grendel had. In fact, she immediately gives him "requital," grasping him and causing him to fall to the ground. Then "she set upon her hall-guest and drew her knife." He survives only because of the strength of his "linked corselet" (1541-52). Edward B. Irving, Jr., suggests, "The greater difficulty and increased savagery of Beowulf's fight with the female monster are really indications of the greater moral complexities of the second conflict" because Grendel's mother is fighting to avenge her offspring. He continues, "Here we no longer have whitest white against blackest black but something ethically grayer and less absolute" (113-4). Jane Chance points to the "unnatural" quality of a female as avenger to explain the more horrible nature of this fight for Beowulf (101).[4] Finally, in his last battle an extremely aged Beowulf is forced to go to the dragon's cave to face "the heat of battle flames there / steam and venom" (2522-3), using weapons that prove useless to him. The dragon successfully penetrates Beowulf's corselet, dealing a fatal blow before Beowulf dispatches him.

[10] Similarly, Buffy faces an ever-increasing threat over seven television seasons. Buffy's fights to end each of the first two seasons closely parallel Beowulf's first two fights. Her defeat of the Master is accomplished without a weapon. She fights him on the roof of the library and dispatches him with relative ease after catching him off guard when she comes back from death. The fight with Angelus in Season Two requires fighting with swords in his mansion. At one point, Buffy falls and Angelus stands over her with his sword, mirroring Beowulf's near death at the hands of Grendel's mother. In addition, as Beowulf's second fight may have been complicated by "personal" motivations, Buffy's is made more difficult because of her love for Angel. In the third season Buffy defeats the ascended mayor, who resembles very much the fire-breathing, 50-foot

"loathsome serpent" that Beowulf fights (3039). In Season Five, Buffy fights a god, and finally, like Beowulf, gives her own life in order to save the world. In the final season Buffy faces the First Evil's vast army, which she can defeat only by calling on the power of all potential slayers.

[11] To fight these demons, Buffy's choice of weapons almost always resembles the choices that Beowulf has.[5] She often fights, like Beowulf, "hand-to-hand" (*Beowulf* 2137). When Beowulf arrives at Heorot, he announces his intention to fight Grendel alone without weapons because he knows that Grendel does not use them. Buffy defeats the Master without weapons, and fights Angelus with a sword. She fights Faith with a knife, which then figures prominently in defeating the ascended mayor. And she uses a troll's hammer against Glory—somewhat like Beowulf's using the monster's sword he finds in the cave to defeat Grendel's mother. In the final battle with the First, she again uses a weapon taken from an enemy—the Slayer's "scythe," which resembles a medieval bardiche, a variety of long-handled axe, sometimes having an elongated and hooked head. This choice of weapons places Buffy in an almost ancient milieu, one requiring fair fights on equal terms, pitting individual strength against strength—situations requiring a warrior hero.

[12] Into this medieval milieu, Buffy brings the skills of the Anglo-Saxon hero: enormous physical strength, resolve, and courage in the face of the hopeless fight.

[13] The superhuman strength of the two heroes is their most obvious similarity. Beowulf "has thirty / men's strength, strong in battle, / in his handgrip" (379-381). He slays Grendel's mother with a sword "greater than any other man / might even bear into the play of battle" (1560-1561). Similarly, when Anya suggests that Buffy use the troll's hammer to fight Glory, Spike says, "Uh, nah, that thing's too heavy to-." He stops in mid-sentence as Buffy picks the hammer up and weighs it easily with one hand ("The Gift" 5022).

[14] More significant than this outer strength is the inner strength it represents. In *Beowulf*, the hero seeks out and resolutely pursues the hopeless battle as a chance to prove his prowess. Tolkien suggests that "the theory of courage . . . is the great contribution of early Northern literature" (70). Before both battles in Denmark, Beowulf shows a clear understanding of his possible—even likely—death. Graphically, before the fight with Grendel, he tells Hrothgar and the Danes that if he fails in battle there will be no body to bury, because Grendel will have devoured him. As the Geats bed down in Heorot, "None of them thought that he should thence / ever again seek his own dear homeland / his tribe or the town in which he was raised" (691-3). In the second battle, the Geats wait at the mere's edge, but once the ferocity of Beowulf's struggles with Grendel's mother become evident in the blood-stained water, they "did not hope, that they would / see their lord himself" (1603-4).

[15] In the first two seasons of *BtVS*, like the Anglo-Saxon warrior, Buffy embraces the hopeless battle when she faces first the Master and then Angelus. Unlike Beowulf, Buffy is somewhat reluctant in both instances, in the first case because her own death has been prophesied, and in the second, because she must kill Angel even after Willow has succeeded in restoring his soul. These

complications, while putting a modern spin on the story lines, serve to emphasize her resolve. When the world needs to be saved, Buffy does what needs to be done. She knows she will die in her battle with the Master, but she goes forward anyway. In the final episode of Season Two ("Becoming," Part II, 2022), as she fights Angelus, Spike expresses the certainty of her death when he says matter of factly, "He's going to kill her." But Buffy prevails by virtue of her own strength.
[16] Strong and resolute, the warriors stand above others, but they rise to the level of heroes in the degree to which their courage allows them to control their own destiny in an uncertain world. Beowulf says, "*Wyrd* often spares / an undoomed man, when his courage endures!" (572-3). W*yrd* is a formidable force; it has "swept . . . away" Hrothgar's warriors (477) and in the end fails to grant victory to Beowulf against the dragon (2574-5). As Beowulf says, "*Wyrd* always goes as it must" (455). *Wyrd* is often translated as "fate," but Beowulf's ability to overcome it with courage suggests that it does not carry the sense of inevitability that such a translation implies. T. A. Shippey offers a helpful definition of *wyrd*s: "an acceptable translation is often 'what becomes, what comes to pass, the course of events,' not a supernatural and willful Power, but more simply, the flow of Time" (40). All men are "doomed" to die in the course of time, but the hero can defy death—for a time.
[17] Similar to Beowulf, Buffy asserts some control over her destiny through her courageous acts. Giles' words from the first episode identify her destiny as the "chosen one." By series end, of course, she will defy her destiny as the "one" in the most obvious of ways when her plan to defeat the First empowers all of the potential slayers. But as she grows through the first five years of the series, Buffy fights evil on her own terms, not out of a sense of destiny. Buffy's decision to fight the Master in Season One, despite the Codex prophecy, reframes Beowulf's statement: "*Wyrd* often spares / an undoomed [wo]man, when [her] courage endures!" In one sense, the prophecy is fulfilled just as Giles had summarized: "Tomorrow night Buffy will face the Master, and she will die." But Buffy chooses to face the Master after talking with Willow about her dead friends. She then defies Giles, and deliberately takes the hand of the Anointed One to be led "to hell." The earlier portion of Giles' conversation with Angel suggest to some extent Beowulf's relationship to *wyrd*: Before suggesting that the Codex is infallible, he points out that prophecies can be "a bit dodgy" and "mutable." In fact, "Buffy herself has, has thwarted them time and time again" ("Prophecy Girl," 1012). As she battles each successive "Big Bad," she continues to defy authority and convention, noted especially in her unorthodox plans for fighting the mayor and the First. In Season Five, she defies Giles' insistence that they stop Glory at any cost, refusing to consider harming Dawn, leaving, which finally leaves Buffy with only one choice. We may recall that Beowulf, too, defied advice in choosing to fight Grendel and the dragon.
[18] In addition to strength of body and spirit, the identities of both warrior heroes are defined in part by their intellect. For Shippey, the hero "pre-eminently" possesses sense and forethought, "for it is these virtues that help the hero to perceive the inevitable changes of time and to prepare for them" (39-40). The verbal abilities of the two heroes, while not similar on the surface, reveal

their sense and forethought and connect each to a social skill that grounds their superhuman strength in the real world. Both also use humor to maintain a distance from the violence that they inflict and receive. In addition to establishing a distance from the violence, as Joseph Campbell writes, "Humor is the touchstone of the truly mythological as distinct from the more literal-minded and sentimental theological mood" (180).

[19] Those whom Beowulf encounters recognize his greatness in his speech. When he arrives in Denmark, he is asked to make his case in speech three times: to the coast guard, to the herald, Wulfgar, and to Hrothgar himself. After Beowulf "unlocked his word-hoard" (259) to him, the Danish coast guard says, "A sharp shield-warrior / must be a judge of both things, / words and deeds, if he would think well" (287-9). Impressed, the coast guard sends him on to the Danish hall, where, Beowulf speaks more formally, signaled by the use of the verb "*mathelian*." Frederick Klaeber describes speeches thus introduced as "characterized by eloquence and ceremonial dignity" (lv). Beowulf's strength in council speech emphasizes that he understands how to behave properly and that he is able to reason, to approach the problems of a situation from an intellectual perspective. As Beowulf prepares to leave Denmark, vowing to return if needed, Hrothgar says to him,

> The wise Lord has sent those words
> into your heart; I have never heard
> a shrewder speech from such a young man.
> You are strong in might and sound in mind,
> prudent in speech! (1841-5)

[20] Buffy's use of language has been frequently associated with her power. Holly Chandler writes, "Not only Buffy's physical power, but also her verbal power banishes fear of the undead." Karen Ellen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto identify Buffy's language play as "tied to Slayage" and so "not a role that that just anyone can fill" (75). Probably the most obvious way to see the association of language with Buffy's power is to see how words fail Buffy when she is powerless. After she has tricked Kralik into drinking holy water in "Helpless" (3012), she comments, "If I was at full Slayer power, I'd be punning right about now." When Jonathan's augmentation spell causes Buffy to take a secondary role in dealing with demons, her relative powerlessness is symbolized in a confrontation with Spike, in which, after he calls her Betty, she sputters out, "It's Buffy, you big bleached . . . stupid guy" ("Superstar," 4017). Sophie Levy points out the unusual silence with which Buffy responds to Angelus' insulting "I'll call you" in the episode "Innocence" because "Buffy is a woman of wit as well as action."

[21] In contrast to Beowulf, however, Buffy is apparently not eloquent in formal speeches, even those before battle. When she decides to face the Master in Season One and knocks out Giles to keep him from being involved, she tells Jenny Calendar, "Think of something cool, tell him I said it" ("Prophecy Girl," 1012). Before they go off to face Glory, Buffy's blunt directions are characterized by Spike as "not exactly

the Saint Crispin's Day Speech" ("The Gift," 5022). According to Andrew in Season Seven her "motivating speeches" to the potentials "tend to get a little long," so much so that they bore even Willow ("Storyteller," 7016).

[22] However, on occasion, her speeches at critical moments reveal a simple dignity equal to Beowulf's at similar times, most notably in her words to Dawn in "The Gift." Immediately before her death, Buffy says to Dawn, her only surviving blood, "You have to take care of them now. You have to take care of each other. You have to be strong. Dawn, the hardest thing in this world ... is to live in it. Be brave. Live. For me" ("The Gift" 5022). Beowulf shares similar thoughts with Wiglaf, whom he calls "the last survivor of our lineage" (2813): "Now that I have sold my old lifespan / for this hoard of treasures, they will attend / to the needs of the people; I can stay no longer" (2799-2801). Their imminent deaths crystallize their words, to the one who must live and carry on, into what is essential: each other/the needs of the people.

[23] Beowulf's speeches are marked not only by their dignity, but also by their detached humor. E. L. Risden says that "Beowulf's more obvious instances of humor involve irony and wordplay" (71). In particular, Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry makes frequent use of litotes, understatement expressed through a negative assertion. George Clark says that "Beowulf jokes cheerfully" in describing the gruesome result if Grendel should win (278), a description that begins and ends with an instance of litotes:

> You'll have no need
> to cover my head—he will have done so
> gory, bloodstained, if death bears me away;
> he will take his kill, think to taste me,
> will dine alone without remorse
> stain his lair in the moor; no need to linger
> in sorrow over disposing of my body! (445-51)

Irving, who discusses at some length Beowulf's use of humor, calls this a "ghoulish situation totally controlled by humor" (66). He sees "the same boisterous kind of heroic humor" when Beowulf answers Unferth's insults (66). In that speech Beowulf demonstrates "the keenly sardonic wit that is in itself evidence of rational and detached control" (70). Beowulf "has the strength and control of the situation to joke in the face of death" (66).

[24] This last statement by Irving echoes a great deal of the commentary on *BtVS* that addresses Buffy's use of humor. Much noted is Willow's comment at the beginning of Season Three that "the Slayer always says a pun or-or a witty play on words, and I think it throws the vampires off, and, and it makes them frightened because I'm wisecracking." This statement follows Xander's sarcasm about Willow's own lame attempt to banter with a vampire ("Anne" 3001). The fact that Buffy chooses punning and wordplay as her battlefield voice suggests control and detachment. Gwyn Symonds calls Buffy's wordplay "liberating," without which she "would appear more brutal." Symonds continues, "We are given the distance to consider what the violence is being used to do or reveal or

tell."
[25] In addition to establishing the heroes' rational distance from the fighting, their verbal skill and humor help to associate the warriors' power with their role in the community. Joseph Campbell says that the hero's journey is complete only when the boon attained by the hero "may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (193). Both Beowulf and Buffy act not for individual glory but for something larger than themselves. Kemp Malone suggests that for the *Beowulf* poet, "Beowulf would not have been a hero if he had not had a people to die for" (153). The overarching structure of each hero narrative demonstrates the growth of the hero in relation to his/her community.
[26] The first two stories demonstrate Beowulf's greatness as a warrior serving his king, while the final episode shows him as a model king of the Geats. Similarly, Buffy evolves from a rebellious agent of the Watchers' Council to the leader of a team of demon fighters. The connection of each hero to his/her community is best represented by their relationship with a supporting band of retainers. Even though Beowulf has vowed to fight Grendel alone, his band of warriors bed down with him in Heorot to wait for Grendel. Grendel kills one of his men immediately, but the other thirteen attack Grendel with their swords to try to aid Beowulf. These same thirteen stand watch at the mere where Beowulf fights Grendel's mother. The loyal Geats stand in contrast to the Danes who leave dejected when they see the water roiling with blood—seemingly clear evidence that Beowulf is dead. This firmness of the *comitatus* is every bit as important to the survival of the tribe as Beowulf's heroics, as will be shown by the end of the poem.
[27] Similarly, Buffy repeatedly asserts that, as "the chosen one," she has to deal with the evil. However, the Scooby gang is always there to back her up. Much has been written about community giving Buffy her special strength, for example, by Rhonda Wilcox in *Fighting the Forces* (4-9). Each of Buffy's victories requires the help of one or more of the Scooby Gang. They are the research team and her fellow warriors. As time goes on, the Scoobies become more and more integral, their roles symbolized in Season Four's defeat of Adam. In fact, the end of Season Four is famously indicative of the importance of her community. Spike nearly splits the gang up; when they realize what has occurred, they join forces in the most literal sense of the entire series history, combining their individual strengths to channel the First Slayer and defeat Adam. When Buffy fights the mayor in Season Three, she requires back-up from her entire high school class, who had recently recognized her as "Class Protector." In every fight, we see in Buffy the surest signs of a good leader in Anglo-Saxon tradition, the ability to recognize those who will serve valiantly and inspire loyalty in them. For example, she befriends Willow and Xander on her first day at Sunnydale High, despite the social pressure not to. Later in the fights with Glory and The First, she recognizes Spike's value to her cause despite Giles' and the others' opposition. These three allies consistently provide the kind of support that a warrior counts on from a "right hand man."
[28] In the climactic battles in which the heroes sacrifice themselves, the role of

the retainers is even more important. Beowulf does not get support from the warriors he has brought with him. Only one does not run for safety. But this one is almost enough. Wiglaf fights valiantly and deals a weakening blow to the dragon. In contrast, in the fight with Glory Buffy is backed up again by her loyal Scooby gang. Xander hits Glory with a wrecking ball at a most propitious moment, giving Buffy a chance to regroup—just as Wiglaf's effort renews Beowulf's strength. Spike, Giles, and Willow all play vital roles.
[29] Neither of the two heroes is aware of what really will be the result of their deaths. Beowulf, unaware that all of his retainers but Wiglaf have run for safety when they feared the dragon would defeat him, thanks God that he has been "able to acquire such wealth / for my people before my death day" (2797-8). He thinks the dragon's treasure will buy security for the Geats. We don't see the aftermath of Beowulf's death, but the future of the Geats is forecast three times: by Wiglaf, by a messenger, and by a woman who sings at Beowulf's funeral pyre. Wiglaf tells the cowardly retainers,

> Empty-handed
> will go every man among your tribe,
> deprived of his land-rights, when noblemen learn
> far and wide of your flight,
> your inglorious deed. (2886-2890)

The messenger reports back to the Geat people and foresees "a time of trouble" (2911), identifying all of the tribes who have feuds with the Geats. He concludes,

> That is the feud and the fierce enmity,
> savage hatred among men, that I expect now,
> when the Swedish people seek us out
> after they have learned that our lord
> has perished. (2999-3003)

Finally, the Geat woman laments "the hard days ahead, / the times of slaughter, the host's terror, / harm and captivity" (3153-55).
[30] When Season Six of *BtVS* opens, despite the Scoobies' best efforts to maintain order, Sunnydale descends into chaos without Buffy. Giles warns, "We, we need the, the world and the underworld to believe that Buffy is alive and well" (Becoming," Part I, 6001). When the truth gets out that the Slayer is only a robot, Sunnydale comes under attack by marauding Biker demons. Spike identifies them as "Road Pirates" who raid "any place they think is vulnerable" ("Becoming," Part II, 6002). The collapse of the community that each warrior has protected demonstrates their importance to it.
[31] One apparent difference in the two heroes, motivation, resolves into their most profound connection, reflecting their respective importance to their community. Beowulf seeks out the hopeless battle in a desire for fame. Buffy is a reluctant hero much of the time and works under the cover of a "secret identity."

In the end for both heroes, the evidence of greatness comes in how they are remembered. At the end of *Beowulf*, a barrow is built and filled with treasure in recognition of Beowulf's greatness. The poet's last words are that Beowulf "was of all kings of the world / the mildest of men and the most gentle, / the kindest to his folk and the most eager for fame" (3180-3182). To some, this statement comes as a surprise, that the end of a poem marked by violent battles would emphasize the hero's gentleness and kindness. But, of course, the poem has consistently focused on Beowulf's proper behavior and concern for his people, and the poem is, in fact, dominated by speeches that demonstrate that behavior and concern. Similarly, Season Five of *BtVS* ends with a shot of Buffy's modest headstone on which are the words

> Buffy Anne Summers
> 1981-2001
> Beloved Sister
> Devoted Friend
> She Saved the World
> A Lot.

The understated simplicity of this epitaph matches that of the last lines of Beowulf. First is emphasized the human, social, non-warrior traits, punctuated by the simple statement of warrior greatness.
[32] In history class, I learned that tribes like Beowulf's were "barbarians" that overran Rome. As I came to know *Beowulf*, I learned that in fact a model of noble and upright behavior underlies the violence. Like Buffy, Beowulf defies expectations based on appearances. Like the use of "Mr. Pointy" for the name of Kendra's weapon, in which the epic tradition is almost completely disguised as a joke, a laughable ironic distance exists between the punning California slayer and the boasting Anglo-Saxon warrior king. But the two heroic narratives hold up to us heroes whose deeds and words suggest a model of the best that can be achieved in a dangerous world: a model of behavior for anyone, providing a light of hope in a world in which the darkness of chaos seems to constantly threaten. In the words of Kemp Malone, "The hero is he who, like Beowulf, faces the worst without flinching and dies that others might live" (154).

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Notes

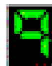
[1] All quotations from *Buffy* have been taken from or verified by the Episode Guide at *The Angel vs Buffy* Website (<www.buffy-vs-angel.com/guide.shtml>). I have reproduced the qualities of speech (stuttering, pauses) reflected at that site.

[2] All quotations from *Beowulf* are from the R. M. Liuzza's translation.

[3] Tolkien's lecture marks a shift in critical approaches to *Beowulf*. Rather than being appreciated only for its historical or archeological insights, the poem becomes recognized as a work of art worthy of literary analysis. Because many find it hard to take *BtVS* seriously for the same reasons literary scholars used to dismiss *Beowulf*, I find Tolkien's discussion particularly appropriate and poignant.

[4] Chance's analysis of the middle episode of *Beowulf* is, for me, definitive in defining how the fight with Grendel fits in the narrative structure. Of interest to *Buffy* fans in comparing this fight to the one with Angelus is her discussion of how "the poet exploits the basic resemblance between sexual intercourse and battle" (102).

[5] One of the few times that Buffy resorts to a modern weapon, using a rocket launcher against the judge, comes about because "no weapon forged can kill" The Judge ("Surprise" 2013). This notion is echoed in *Beowulf* when the poet tells us "that no sword / not the best of iron anywhere in the world, / could even touch that evil sinner [Grendel] / for he had worked a curse on weapons, / every sort of blade" (801-802).



Janet K. Halfyard

Singing Their Hearts Out: The Problem of Performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*

[1] The narratives of film and television have a long history of representing acts of performance, with professional performers playing other performers, both fictitious and factual. These range from the "backstage musicals" so popular in the 1930s and 1940s, to biopics of classical composers and popular musicians, and television series such as *Fame*. More recently, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel* have also regularly included musical and dramatic performances by the principal characters as a feature of the narrative but, unusually, these characters frequently perform very badly. [1] This essay examines the singing and performing of the principal characters, and the curious nature of performance in "Once More, with Feeling" (B6007) from *BtVS* Season Six, to draw some conclusions about the unusual position that performance occupies within the Buffyverse.[2]

[2] The first examples of performing occur towards the end of *BtVS* Season One. "The Puppet Show" (B1009) centers on the school talent show in which all the principal-character students take part. Cordelia is seen singing "The Greatest Love of All" which, of course, is "learning to love yourself", an ironic yet revealing comment on the self-obsessed character of first-season Cordelia. She clearly believes herself to be quite talented whereas in fact she is out of tune and has an awkward stage presence in marked contrast to her off-stage sophistication.

[3] In the same episode, Buffy, Willow and Xander, are forced into performing a dramatic scene, an extract from the Greek tragedy *Oedipus*, and a tragic performance it is, with stilted and badly remembered dialogue, Willow finally fleeing from the stage in panic. The theme of performance is then continued in the following episode, "Nightmares" (B1010, where Willow's nightmare is finding herself onstage expected to sing the role of Madame Butterfly. The trauma of this experience reprises itself in the finale of Season Four, "Restless" (B4022), where

in her First-Slayer induced dream, Willow again finds herself about to go on stage in a production for which she has had no rehearsal and for which she does not know the words. The earlier episode is referenced again when Willow checks to make sure that the production they are about to do is not *Madame Butterfly* as she has "a whole problem with opera."

[4] Immediately, however, we must acknowledge that art is not mirroring life and that characters who cannot perform are rather evidently being played by people who can: Willow may be a hopeless actress and a terrible singer, but Alyson Hannigan is not. We hear very little of her singing in "Once More, with Feeling", but what we do hear is in tune and in time, and therefore competent at the very least; and she is clearly a gifted actress. Likewise, Cordelia sings dreadfully in *BtVS* Season One, gives a terrible performance as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* ("Eternity," 1017) in *Angel* Season One and sings "We are the Champions" drunkenly with Wesley and Gunn in Season Two ("Redefinition," 2011). Again, as with Willow/ Alyson Hannigan we know at one level that Cordelia is a fictitious character who cannot perform well being played by a very able actress called Charisma Carpenter. We already know, from "The Puppet Show" (B1009), that Xander and Buffy can act no better than Willow, although obviously Nicholas Brendon and Sarah Michelle Geller can (and do) act very well.

[5] It is clearly a deliberate script-writing decision that the Buffyverse should be populated by people who perform badly on stage, but it appears to be the stage itself, the formalized act of performing, that is in some way problematic. Away from the stage, Buffy obviously fancies herself as a stand-up comedienne, practicing her slayage one-liners and expressing disappointment when her vampire victims do not seem suitably impressed by her delivery, but this ability is restricted to the 'real' world of slaying. Put her in the field, and she can deliver; put her on the stage and she cannot, something made quite explicit in "Wild at Heart" (B4006), which opens on Buffy running away from the college campus, pursued by a vampire. Her flight is intentional, to get her away from public view, as she then explains as they fight:

> Thanks for the relocate. I perform better without an audience. [She and the vampire fight.] You were thinking, what, a little helpless co-ed before bed? You know very well, you eat this late [she stakes him] you're gonna get heartburn. Get it? Heartburn? [He turns to dust without responding.] That's it? That's all I get? One lame-ass vamp with no appreciation for my painstakingly thought-out puns. I don't think the forces of darkness are even trying. I mean, you could make a little effort here, you know? Give me something to work with.

There are several regular characters who do sing well. Lorne, Darla and Lindsey all acquit themselves professionally at the karaoke bar, Caritas; Giles and Oz are both musicians, Oz with his band and Giles with his guitar, although we never

hear Oz sing as such.[3] Initially, Giles' singing is a solitary activity that is not revealed to us, but in Season Four we see him both performing in the local coffee bar and singing at home. Oz, of course, is a werewolf and one might argue that competent music-making or performance is a mark of the outsider, of Otherness. The Host and Darla are non-humans, whilst Lindsey is a human working for the demons, his loyalties divided in such a way as to make him an outsider in all available camps; in *BtVS* Season Four, the two most obvious musicians are Oz and fellow werewolf Veruca, whose Otherness is quite explicit; and Giles' Englishness might also qualify him as an Other in California.

[6] This idea, however, does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. Almost every principal character on the 'forces of good' side in both *BtVS* and *Angel* can make a claim for Otherness: preternaturally gifted Slayer; gay witch; former demon; werewolf; Englishman and/or vampire. Cordelia ends up part demon, Gunn is the only regular-cast black character in either series and Fred is a physicist: given the largely negative portrayal of scientists in the Buffyverse, as represented by the *BtVS* Season Four confrontation with The Initiative, and the Season One encounters with praying mantis science teachers and demon-infested computers, being a physicist working for Angel Investigations arguably marks Fred as a reformed Other in the same way as Anya and Angel himself. Meanwhile, Xander, a non-supernatural, white, heterosexual human male could probably use this exceptional non-Otherness as a claim in its own right. Otherness is clearly an important concept in the Buffyverse, but the process of Othering characters is less about making them unsympathetic or threatening, and more to do with requiring us to judge characters by what they do rather than by what they are: we cannot make assumptions about characters based on their intrinsic physical nature. Relating this to performance, whilst there are clearly those who are naturally good performers, being a good performer is more of a thing one does than a thing one is. It is a question of confidence, self-awareness, and can be learned through training or experience, including being able to sing in tune. Given the writers' decisions to populate the Buffyverse with characters who variously can and cannot perform well, what are the rules and codes underlying who can sing in the Buffverse?

Singing and singers

[7] Anyone can sing, even if they cannot sing beautifully. Most professional singers will describe themselves as singers rather than musicians, because a musician is usually understood to be an instrumentalist, and there are significant differences between singing and playing music.[4] While many people can sing competently without having had any kind of tuition, it is much more unusual to find a proficient instrumentalist who has never had any formal or informal instruction in how to play.

[8] Another difference stems from the fact that almost all instruments are

positioned across the body (the torso or the face) when one plays them. The singer, on the other hand, stands before the audience with at most a microphone between them, which does not mediate the performance space in the same way, because the 'instrument' is not the microphone but the body itself. The true mechanism of the sound's production is completely concealed within the singer's body and one of the results of this is that singers, unlike instrumentalists, are expected to look at the audience (as the audience in turn gazes back), creating a type of immediacy and intimacy between singer and audience that is different from other types of musical performance: an instrumentalist who fixed the audience with an unwavering gaze would be frankly disconcerting.

[9] Lastly, where a problem in sound production for an instrument might be blamed on some mechanical failure, the singer's voice is, in a very real sense, the singer. A concomitant problem of this is that to criticize a singer's voice is, in effect, criticizing the person, an aspect of singing personified in the figure of the pop diva or operatic prima donna as a hysterical and fundamentally insecure character. An instrument with a poor tone can be replaced: a larynx cannot. This is part of the paradox of the voice: it is inside the body yet it is also the means by which one sends sounds out to communicate with the world. It is both internal and external, and as Jonathan Rée (1999) points out, the paradoxes do not end there. The voice can use language to communicate linguistic, abstract ideas, or can yell or laugh to communicate emotional ones:

> Voices thus encode an intriguing human tension, even a contradiction: they are both expression and communication, both feeling and intellect, both body and mind, both nature and culture. The whole of us, it would seem, is included in the compass of the human voice. (16)

Singing is positioned very firmly within this set of oppositions. When one sings, there is an assumption that the singer is sincere, that we are indeed hearing the person, their self, their soul laid bare. In singing, we reveal ourselves: "[i]t is as if your voice were as private and vulnerable as your defenseless naked body" (Rée 1999, 1).

[10] However, a professional singer is not like an ordinary person when it comes to singing, but takes on a form of Otherness, adopting specialized strategies (disguises, even) to enhance the *appearance* that the soul is being laid bare. In addition, one of the greatest paradoxes of the act of singing is that using the voice, that ultimate expression of the self, the singer is almost always also an actor (explicitly or implicitly), often singing first person, present tense narratives that may or may not represent his or her own history, and using particular vocal tricks in order to convince us that this is real. As Simon Frith (1998) describes:

> In popular cultural terms, good talkers are mistrusted as well as admired: people who have a "way with words"--the seducer, the salesman, the

> demagogue, the preacher--are people with power, and the power to use words is a power to deceive and manipulate. Sincerity may then be best indicated by an inability to speak (as in soul vocal convention) or though an aural contradiction between the glibness of the lyric and the uncertainty of the voice (as in much male country music) (168)

Singers, therefore, negotiate a very slippery territory: in order to sound genuinely convincing, they must not sound too polished. The vocabulary of professional singing is full of subtle tricks which form a cultural code of emotional sincerity, perhaps most obviously seen in the way singers from Pavarotti to Alanis Morrisette allow the voice to break, employing breath noises, catches, sobs and glitches in the sung line and the vocal timbre that indicate the depth of their emotion. These are recreations of the normally involuntary vocal sounds associated with physical and emotional stress: the very mechanisms employed to convince the audience of the singer's sincerity are arguably a form of deception.

[11] With this in mind the politics of singing in *Buffy* and *Angel* become much more transparent, and sincerity appears to be the key issue governing whether a character can be permitted to sing in tune or act well: rather than the intentionally subtly flawed singing of the professional, here the sheer bad singing of the amateur (Frith's "inability" to speak or sing taken to its literal extreme) appears to be an indication of the extent to which we can trust a character to be who or what they appear: they are incapable of deceiving us with vocal trickery, regardless of the abilities of the actors who play them. Being on stage indicates an intention to perform and an intention, potentially, to pretend to be something one is not, which is therefore different from the motivations underlying "performances" in the field, such as Buffy's one-liners. Using this principle, examining the singing in specific episodes reveals how ideas of sincerity (or lack of it) are articulated, and how this in turn informs our perceptions of the characters who sing.

Giles and Lindsey

[12] There is an important distinction to be made with regard to the characters who are essentially on the side of the angels and yet can sing to a high standard, specifically Giles and Lindsey. **[Editors' note]** They have in common the fact that that they are musicians, guitarists, rather than simply singers. [5] Lindsey is the only character who does not sing karaoke when he performs in Caritas: in "Dead End" (A2018) he brings his guitar along and sings a song apparently of his own composition, again enhancing the sense that what he sings is genuinely felt rather than simply the reiteration of someone else's thoughts and feelings.

[13] Similarly, we discover in Season Four that Giles is a musician, a theme which recurs throughout this season in particular. It is first introduced in "Wild at Heart" (B4006) when Oz defends Giles's unexpected appearance in the Bronze.

Having seen Giles' record collection, Oz asserts Giles's right to be there as someone with the correct cultural credentials to be admitted into the youth-and-music subculture of the Bronze: even if he is now a little old and irredeemably English, nonetheless "he was an animal in his day."

[14] The two episodes in which we see Giles singing (as opposed to seeing him dreaming that he is singing, which occurs later) also take steps to mitigate the extent to which he is seen as a performer, and therefore potentially deceiving us. In "Where the Wild Things Are" (B4018), he is discovered in the coffee bar, performing to an adult audience. The Scooby Gang are shocked (and Xander is horrified) by the discovery. However, Giles has tried quite hard to keep this side of himself hidden from them, as if he is aware of the complex problem that performance represents. On the one hand, it is likely to reveal too much about him on an emotional level, making him vulnerable and undermining his status within the group as a figure of authority and unflappable English calm. On the other hand, it sets him apart from them, turns him into a performer rather than simply a person. It is not being Other that creates good performers in the Buffyverse, but being a good performer can create a sense of Otherness, setting the performer apart from normative modes of behavior. Lindsey occupies very ambivalent moral territory throughout *Angel* seasons one and two: his abilities as a performer, revealed just as he is about to leave L.A. and the series, serve to enhance that ambivalence. Giles, aware at some level of the problems of sincerity (whether too much of it or too little) inherent in being a performer, strives to keep his performing hidden. The only other occasion we see him singing with his guitar is in the privacy of his own home, where he believes himself to be unobserved until he is disturbed by Spike (B"The Yoko Factor," 4020).

[15] Xander's horror at the sight of Giles's singing is also worth examining. In many ways, these two—the only human, non-supernatural, "unenhanced" white men in the regular cast of *BtVS*—act as a pair. None of the Scoobies have effective or even visible father figures, and Giles acts as a surrogate father to all of them to some extent. For Xander, however, he is more clearly a role model and, Englishness aside, there are considerable similarities between them, not least the fact that they are both usually represented as being physically powerless—Buffy is the essentially undisputed source of agency until Season Six—but have a hidden and occasionally unleashed ability to act. Giles sometimes reassumes the ruthlessness of his younger self, "Ripper," and Xander is able to access the knowledge from his own alternate self, the soldier he became in "Halloween" (B2007).

[16] Xander demonstrates extreme and often out-of-proportion hostility to other men in the regular cast and this hostility could easily be interpreted as a jealousy of his father/son relationship with Giles when it is threatened by other male characters having things in common with him that Xander does not share. Angel threatens it through his shared knowledge of the occult, Spike through his

Englishness—in his First-Slayer induced dream, Xander even sees Giles adopting Spike as his successor as Watcher. He never demonstrates the same kind of hostility to Riley or Oz, arguably less because they are not vampires (Xander never seems to have a significant problem with a werewolf dating his best friend despite the fact that he is clearly just as potentially dangerous as Angel or Spike) and more because they never threaten to intrude on his relationship with Giles. Xander's extremely negative reaction to Giles's singing might therefore be seen as another jealous reaction from Xander towards a part of Giles's life that he cannot share, something which emphasizes their differences.

[17] Returning to Giles's singing itself, whilst being a thoroughly convincing performer, he has a distinctive but not conventionally beautiful voice, which fits in very well with his slightly Bob Dylan-esque performance image. The reluctantly revealed intimacy of his relationship with his guitar and the 'rawness' of his voice (exploiting those very catches and glitches, the vocal instability that, in Frith's reading, would partly account for why Dylan himself is heard as being sincere) both add weight to our perception of Giles' sincerity 'despite' the high standard of his performance.

The good, the bad and the outrageously terrible.

[18] Of the remaining characters who can sing, the issue of sincerity operates differently in each case. Lorne can clearly sing but there is no attempt on his part to pretend to soul-baring sincerity in his performance. Both his singing style and his choice of repertoire demonstrate that he is operating in the realms of camp, and camp and sincerity are mismatched partners at the best of times. Camp might be interpreted here as the affectionate parodying of the sincere, taking the vocabulary of (sincere) bad taste and celebrating and exaggerating it knowingly, self consciously and with an unmistakable element of irony. He sings for the sheer joy of the physical excess his repertoire offers him rather than from a need to bare his soul to others. It is, however, extraordinarily revealing that it is through their singing that he is able to see the souls and therefore read the futures of his clientele, this corresponding to another idea from Rée (1999), that in philosophy "the idea of the soul is just a furtive and inhibited metaphor for . . . vocality" (3). This again points to the voice as a direct channel to the singer's inner self, immediate, intimate and revealing.

[19] Lorne notwithstanding, the moment a member of the regular cast starts to sing in tune, we should automatically be suspicious, as when the demonically-enhanced Jonathan reveals himself as a polished crooner à la Sinatra in "Superstar" (B4017). Likewise, Darla's stylish performance of Arlen and Koehler's "Ill Wind" in "The Trial" (A2009) is a textbook example of Frith's singer using vocal tricks to convince us of her sincerity. These are most pronounced during the bridge section of the song:

> You’re only misleadin’ the sunshine I'm needin’ -
> Ain't that a shame?
> It’s so hard to keep up with troubles that creep up
> From out of nowhere, when love's to blame.

[20] It is worth looking a little more closely at exactly what she does here. Although we may hear it as being straightforward professional standard singing, this is in part due to the fact that it is full of timbral alterations and pitch changes that deviate from the written melodic line. There is use of a particularly breathy tone on “only” in line one, “up” at the end of line three, and the “where” of “nowhere” in the final line. There is instability in the sung notes including sliding down in pitch at the end of “shame”; and various kinds of ornamentation, moving away from the note and back again on “needin’”, “shame” and “blame”. Similarly, at the start of the third line, she leaves the pitch of “It’s” early, slipping down a semitone halfway through the word, onto the pitch belonging to the following word “so.” There are a large number of creaks, the introduction of noise into the sung note, something that in speech might be heard as fatigue, misery or illness--that is, all physical or emotional states of vulnerability. These are particularly noticeable on the line “It’s so hard to keep up with troubles that creep up,” where only the breathy “up” is entirely free of creak.

[21] All of these flaws, these apparent failings in the voice, are designed to impress us with her sincerity, a code which declares “look how hard it is for me to talk about this.” But we should not be fooled. That Darla is in deep emotional pain at this point, knowing that she is terminally ill, is not in dispute; but the way that professional-standard singing is coded in the Buffyverse means that we simply cannot trust her. Her singing signposts that her apparent conversion to Angel’s point of view is ultimately just an expedient act of desperation.

[22] The extent to which Angel is prepared to put himself (and everyone else) through the horror and humiliation of his singing reaffirms the selflessness of his character—and we should probably remember that Angel and Wesley can not only not sing, they can’t dance either as they revealed at Cordelia’s party in “She” (A1013). Harmony is potentially an anomaly, a self-proclaimed evil vampire who nonetheless sings appallingly at Caritas in “Disharmony” (A2017): but evil is not the governing factor and Harmony frankly doesn’t have the intelligence to be insincere. She is exactly what she appears to be and we know we cannot trust her, but we also know that she is virtually devoid of guile and at many levels she is impossible to dislike. As a result, she has to be allowed to sing out of tune, not unlike the early, unreconstructed Cordelia (Harmony’s best friend).

Cordelia

[23] Cordelia is perhaps the most interesting character in relation to singing,

performance and issues of sincerity. Like Buffy, she performs badly on stage but does manage to pull off a believable performance in the field when lives are in danger: in "Eternity" (A1017), she is confronted by a temporarily, drug-induced evil Angel and delivers (by her own estimation) an Oscar-winning performance, fooling him into believing that she is armed with holy water. In retrospect, the fact that she sang badly back in *BtVS* Season One might well have been an early clue that Cordelia was not simply the vain and selfish creature she at first appeared. The potential for altruism in her personality is an aspect that appears to be hidden from everyone, including herself, because like Harmony in "Disharmony" (A2017), Cordelia seems unaware that her singing is bad. All the other forces-of-good characters tend to be extremely aware when they are performing badly, but the rehabilitation of Cordelia's character goes hand in hand with her growing awareness that she is not cut out for the performing life. In *Angel* Season One, she is still seemingly unaware of how bad she is in *A Doll's House* and still determined to pursue her acting career, but the gift of her visions is a significant factor in changing her ambitions. We see this first in the Season One finale, when she becomes aware of the sheer amount of suffering in the world, an awakening that almost destroys her sanity. Then, in seasons two and three, Cordelia's development as a character is played out as a confrontation between Cordelia the performer and Cordelia the seer.

[24] Cordelia's character is complex: she is far from stupid, as her multiple acceptances by good colleges demonstrates in *BtVS Season Three*; and she is not as shallow as she almost willfully appears—her feelings for Xander and her unhappiness over his infidelity are entirely genuine, compared to Harmony's vacuous inability to perceive Spike's true feelings for her, let alone have any deeper feelings for him beyond her own sense of the status he gives her (as seen, for example, in "In the Harsh Light of Day," 4003). Cordelia has clearly been spoilt in material terms, but there are considerable hints that she has been neglected emotionally, and more or less abandoned by her family after her parent's problems with the IRS. There are also indications that she suffers from low self-esteem: the constant battle to maintain her popularity at school at the expense of more meaningful relationships in *BtVS Season One*; and her attempt to escape from reality through acting, leading to her willingness to submit to what she clearly believes to be Russell Winters' casting couch in the pilot episode of *Angel*.

[25] However, Season Two of *Angel* uses this aspect of Cordelia's personality to demonstrate her development and the radical changes she undergoes. The very first episode of Season Two begins with a brief introduction to Lorne, The Host at Caritas, so locating the karaoke bar at the centre of the overall season narrative. The second scene of the teaser then takes us to Cordelia at an actors' workshop, apparently doing very well (despite the fact that she gets carried away and physically slaps her co-actor). However, in the midst of receiving praise from her director, she is called away by her other job working for Angel Investigations. As she leaves, the director is still trying to direct: Cordelia exits to the line "Focus on

how conflicted you. . . ." This comment very pointedly highlights the conflict between her two lives, and, as with Caritas, foregrounds it in the open minutes of the first episode as a theme that will run through the entire season.

[26] The final episode of the season begins with a "previously on *Angel*" segment, the first clip of which comes from "Belonging" (2019), the last occasion on which we saw Cordelia in her role as performer, being resoundingly humiliated during the recording of a commercial. She had been excited about making the commercial, excited by the idea that her acting career might be taking off, but as much as anything excited by the perceived glamour of the situation and being the center of attention: in other words, by all the aspects of the performing life which appeal most strongly to the early Cordelia's desire for attention and validation. The use of this clip as part of the teaser for the Season Two finale is, in terms of establishing the sequence of events, completely irrelevant; but in terms of Cordelia's development, it is essential that we should be reminded of Cordelia as the performer who craves the love of an adoring audience. When she is sucked through the vortex into Pylea, her dreams of being a star are suddenly realized when she is made princess and ruler, lavished with luxury and attention. In effect, the dreams of Cordelia the performer have come true: she can play at being the adored star for as long as she wants, complete with the obligatory gorgeous co-star boyfriend, Gru.

[27] Then, however, she learns that Gru's role in the arrangement is to take her visions away from her, and here the conflict between her two roles is brought into sharp relief. To retain her visions, she must give up the starring role she has landed, but the choice would appear to be a surprisingly easy one to make:

> Cordelia: You can't take my visions. I need them. I use them to help my friends fight evil back home.... I can't give up my visions—I like them. OK, so I don't like the searing pain and agony that is steadily getting worse...but I'm not ready to give them up either...they're a part of who I am now. They're an honor.

Her altruistic and humble reasons for wanting to keep her visions are as important as the fact that she is willing to give up her starring role. Performance, and its analogue as a Pylean princess, is again positioned as a form of (self-) deception, a self-indulgent escapism in contrast to the painful, grimly real but honorable nature of Cordelia's role as seer.

[28] In Season Three, the conflict between performance and Cordelia's growing sense of moral responsibility is again made explicit. The visions are threatening to kill her and in "Birthday" (A3011), she reaches the end of her ability to survive them, but the Powers that Be offer her a chance to live by rewriting history. Not unlike her chance at being the princess in Pylea, here she is offered the acting career of her dreams, a life as a nationally-loved television star; but it seems that

the changes that have been made to her character by the visions in the original version of history cannot be erased. She may have been taken to a reality where none of the events of seasons one or two have occurred, but her character's development has remained intact. When she is confronted with what has happened to Angel and Wesley in this version of reality, she is again forced into a moral choice and again does not hesitate: she asks to be made part demon, takes back her visions and rejects the other life she was offered as a performer.

[29] This conflict between her two possible lives again suggests that performance and sincerity are mutually opposed propositions in the Buffyverse. By rejecting performance in favor of the visions, Cordelia chooses service, altruism and engagement with the real, difficult world of the Buffyverse over the potential deceptions and glamours of performing. Rejecting performance, she becomes more credible as an agent for the Powers that Be and more sincerely loveable for herself. In fact, by rejecting performance and its illusions she becomes much more like Buffy herself. Both are chosen ones, chosen by mystical forces and given a gift with which to serve the world; both have to give up the lives they expected to lead in order to do this; both have to give up some of their literal humanity in order to serve humankind better. Cordelia becomes part demon, while Buffy (involuntarily) comes back from heaven in order to keep saving the world with her humanness altered such that she is no longer protected from Spike by his chip. Both are also offered an alternative reality that might well be easier to live in than the one they are currently in, Cordelia in "Birthday" (3009) in *Angel* Season Three and Buffy in "Normal Again" (B6017) in *BtVS* Season Six, running parallel to this season of *Angel*.

[30] In *Angel Season Four*, we lose Cordelia: for the second time, a major and much loved character was written out of the series in a way that left viewers in denial—surely she, surely Doyle, would return: this could not be the end. But, to all intents and purposes, it was: and in retrospect, we can see that Cordelia's journey is framed by her two renditions of the same song: shortly before she is possessed by evil, she sings the opening line of "The Greatest Love of All" as badly as ever, for Lorne to read her. By recalling the song, as in the following episode where all the characters revert to the age of seventeen, we are invited to remember her as she was in *BtVS* Season One, and to marvel at the changes in her, the distance that her character has travelled, making it all the more tragic when we lose her soon after.

[31] At the end of Season Four, Cordelia's position is left in considerable doubt, and all her character's achievements appear entirely undermined. Her assumption into a higher dimension appears to have been a fraud, and her return leaves her first possessed by evil and then consigned to a coma. However, her final appearance in episode 100, "You're Welcome" (A5012) is a final vindication of the true Cordelia, who returns for one last time, to save Angel and put him back on the right track. In her last appearance, the two sides of Cordelia as

performer and servant of the Powers that Be are finally united for at the end of episode we discover that Cordelia has died and that throughout this appearance she has been performing, pretending to be alive and back with the team when, in fact, she is already gone. Her last performance, then, transcends the problems associated with performance and its illusions, for this performance was an act of altruism and of farewell, a performance the intent of which was to protect, to save and to serve rather than to pursue any of the less noble impulses by which Cordelia was once driven.

"Once More, with Feeling"

[32] The most famous example of singing and performance in the Buffyverse occurs in "Once More, with Feeling" (B6007), and this episode is interesting for a great many reasons, not least the peculiar relationship that *BtVS* has with musical diegesis. Essentially, there are two types of song possible in film and television: diegetic song (where the characters are perfectly well aware that they are singing, as in the songs performed at Caritas) and non-diegetic song. In diegetic song, the song is as real and as normal to us as it is to the characters in the context of the narrative: characters know they are singing or being sung to and the source of musical accompaniment is likely to be visible, be it a karaoke machine, a band or a guitar. Non-diegetic song, on the other hand, relies on the suspension of our disbelief to accept that the characters are essentially unaware that they are singing or being sung to and the musical accompaniment is also usually invisible, coming from the underscore. In these circumstances, we are asked to accept that sometimes in musicals characters will burst into song because their emotions have become so intense that they simply have no other choice if they are to express themselves properly. However, these types of song, whilst clearly being sung, are not perceived as being outside the normal course of communication by the characters; nor is the sudden sound of music from an invisible source perceived as unusual. At some quite profound level, the characters do not know that they are singing or have lost the ability to know that singing and music are not normal in this context.

[33] Another important distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic song is the element of volition. In diegetic song, the character must choose to perform. Sometimes this decision is made under forms of duress, but consent is still given. Rose's first strip-tease in the musical *Gypsy*, when she is cajoled by her mother into performing is one example of this; the dramatic scene performed by the Scoobies in "The Puppet Show" (B1009) is another example, as is Willow's attempted to sing in the Madame Butterfly scene of "Nightmares" (B1010). However bad, half-hearted or unwilling the performance, the character has made a conscious decision to perform. Non-diegetic song, however, is imposed from outside the narrative: the character makes no decision to sing, but sings nonetheless. [6]

[34] *BtVS* has played some quite startling diegetic games, “Once More, with Feeling” (OMWF) being the most elaborate, although this was not the first occasion that something of this nature was introduced. In the Season Four finale, “Restless" (B4022), Giles’s dream, like Willow’s, takes the form of a performance event, if a very strange one. We see him performing, as we have done earlier in the season, but now he is on stage at The Bronze, and instead of singing a song, he simply sings his dialogue. This creates a somewhat tangled diegetic web. On one level he is clearly perfectly aware that he is performing: he climbs onto the stage, the audience cheers, there is a visible band accompanying him. He grasps the microphone, and his body language bears all the hallmarks of a straightforward diegetic song, an impression reinforced by the fact that the audience responds to his singing by holding their lighters aloft, flames glowing in the semi-darkness. Yet at another level, the precise content of what he sings makes it clear that he and his audience are unaware that his behavior is being governed by the non-diegetic, by something external to his diegetic reality:

> Giles (singing): It's strange. It's not like anything we've faced before, yet it seems familiar somehow. Of course! The spell we cast with Buffy must have released some primal evil that’s come back seeking... I'm not sure what. Willow, look through the Chronicles. Some reference to a warrior beast... Xander, help Willow and try not to bleed on my couch, I’ve just had it steam-cleaned. We've got to warn Buffy. I tried her this morning but I only got her machine. Oh, wait...

On the one hand, this could be argued as a reversal of Frith’s proposition that intentional faults in singing mediate between “the glibness of the lyric and the uncertainty of the voice”: here, it is the uncertainty of the lyric (i.e. the fact that it is clearly not a lyric at all) that mediates the glibness of Giles’s rock and roll performance. This in turn reveals another reversal at work here: in a conventional non-diegetic song, the characters’ actions usually indicate that they believe themselves to be speaking their thoughts, whereas in fact they are singing a song. Here, Giles’s actions indicate that he believes himself to be singing a song, although he is in fact delivering his dialogue. Effectively, this song manages to be both diegetic and non-diegetic simultaneously. Although Giles does clearly know he is singing, he and everyone else fail to perceive what is clear to us, the audience, namely that the song itself is abnormal, the usual rules of musical diegesis having been suspended by the dream-state.

[35] A comparable circumstance underlies OMWF, although here it is a spell rather than a dream that suspends the normal rules, and the web of diegesis is further complicated by the nature of the relationship between a character and the actor who plays it. Normally, if a song is non-diegetic, the *actor* knows that he or she is singing in a situation where singing would not be considered normal, but the *character* does not, and this situation remains fixed. It creates a very clear boundary between them, placing the actor in the privileged position of having

knowledge the character does not share. There is always going to be an imbalance of knowledge between character and actor, but it is normally hidden by the fact that the actor is rendered largely invisible by the presence of the character being played.[7]

[36] In non-diegetic song, only the character has the abnormality of the singing concealed from them. Both the audience and the actor are aware that singing is occurring in a fictional environment where it would not be occurring in the real world; and the act of singing can itself render the actor slightly more visible than usual. The suspension of disbelief is stretched a little further, with the technical demands of singing potentially making us more aware of the artifice of performance. [8]

[37] However, in the episode itself, songs are only non-diegetic whilst they are being sung. Whilst the songs are in progress, the characters generally behave as if singing in this context is perfectly normal behavior, as one would expect in non-diegetic song: but once the songs are finished, they realize that they have been acting abnormally, that they have been singing despite having made no decision to sing, a sleight of hand that allows a non-diegetic song to become retrospectively diegetic. [9]

[38] This, in effect, renders the actors invisible once more as the characters reassert control over knowledge of their actions. The characters become aware that their universe has been infiltrated by the non-diegetic (even though, by the end, all elements have been accounted for within the series' diegesis) and so the characters themselves are allowed to share the awareness of the actors who play them that they are singing non-diegetic songs. Rather than destroying the fabric of the Buffyverse, this scenario manages to reinforce the credibility of Buffy's world, because the characters are able to perceive the abnormality of this externally imposed singing in a situation when normally, fictional characters would remain oblivious. This kind of diegetic double bluff is also visited in "Normal Again" (B6017) when the closing shot of Buffy in the asylum leaves us with the awful possibility that the entire Buffyverse is a fabrication of Buffy's own insane delusions, and that we have all spent the last few years watching something that is not real even in its own universe.

[39] The fact that the singing in OMWF is externally imposed is the main reason the characters can, from the point of view of this discussion, get away with the fact that none of them sing out of tune. Because they are essentially unaware that they are engaged in an act of performance, and are certainly not in control of their actions until after the song is finished, their singing is able to take on a direct emotional honesty, too direct in some cases. Xander and Anya articulate feelings that they have obviously been keeping quiet about up to this point in "I'll Never Tell" while, having made it clear in the final line of "Afterlife" (B6003*)* that she has no intention of ever revealing to her friends that they brought her back

from heaven, not hell, Buffy finds herself telling them exactly this in the song "Something to Sing About."

[40] The sincerity of the singing in OMWF is further reinforced by the fact that most of them sing in a very 'unsingerly' way. Giles is already established as someone who can sing, and it would make no sense to alter what we know him to sound like at this point. The demon Sweet can also sing: he is not unlike Lorne in this respect, playing with ideas of camp in his performance, and as a troublemaking demon we would not necessarily expect either sincerity or (therefore) bad singing from him.

[41] Tara also sings remarkably well but interestingly, as Giles has a Bob Dylan-esque persona, so Tara takes on the mantel of Joan Baez, an icon of liberated femininity and lesbianism from the same era as Dylan. Her voice has a certain similarity to Baez's in terms of the timbral quality and the text of the song itself evokes something of the Woodstock generation and the influence of folk music on popular song. Tara and her backing singers appear as hippies with their long skirts and flowing hair, while the lyrics of "Under your Spell" use images of nature, reinforced by the song being presented in the non-urban open air, the only song to take place in daylight that is neither indoors nor on the town's streets.

[42] However, in general, the principals tend to sing in a way that does not obviously correspond to the accepted performance practices of classical, popular or musical theatre singing. Their voices sound quite small and very 'natural', lacking the timbral sophistication and vibrato of trained singers which in itself may well be a crafted illusion: singing is more or less compulsory for anyone wanting to make a career as a performer, and the processes of studio production can help fill out most voices to create a more polished sound. The fact that the core Scooby Gang's singing voices are presented to us not as the voices of professional singers, but as those of ordinary people who are not accustomed to singing, again speaks to the idea of the voice as an indicator of sincerity. Although they all sing at least reasonably well, they sing without the vocal expertise of a character such as Darla, an expertise that might mark them out as professional performers and therefore different from us, their audience.

[43] In conclusion, it is evident that singing and performance have a very distinct role in both *BtVS* and *Angel*, and the positioning of singing and the games that are played with musical diegesis serve to reinforce the credibility of the Buffyverse. The very nature of the voice and the extent to which it reveals us and renders us vulnerable to scrutiny is exploited in both series to reveal an apparent direct inverse correlation between good singing and sincerity, while other forms of performance, as explored through Giles and Cordelia, involve similar issues. It is, obviously, not without irony that the act of performance is problematized to explore ideas of sincerity in a television series which therefore relies on

performances by its actors in order to communicate those ideas.

[44] The problem with performance in the Buffyverse largely lies in its tendency to encourage vanity and self-seeking behavior. Giles is safe from this tendency as he clearly does not want to be famous. Perhaps Ripper once did, but Giles keeps his performing private and personal, and does not allow it to distract him from his responsibilities. Cordelia's personal odyssey sees her becoming arguably the most comprehensively transformed character of either series, overcoming the seductive deceptions of performance and discovering the rewards of taking up her own responsibilities.

[45] To revisit one of the ideas at the beginning of this discussion, while good singing cannot be convincingly argued as an indication of Otherness, singing of a less-than-professional standard (be it genuinely dreadful or normally adequate) is a consistent indication that a character is fundamentally just like us: not perfect, sometimes in the wrong, but essentially sincere. This in turn reveals that the Buffyverse challenges the usefulness and the very validity of the idea of Otherness simply because everyone associated with both the Scooby Gang and Angel Investigations is arguably some form of Other. It augments the category of Otherness with that of sincerity, and whether a character is sincere or not becomes far more important in the personal relationships and larger-scale dynamics of the narrative than whether someone is (yet another) Other.

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Editors' note: The vacilating character of Lindsey seems to have chosen the "side of the Angels," and Angel, even as late as the penultimate episode of the series, though Angel makes clear in the last episode that

he does not believe Lindsey has chosen right for right's sake.

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[1] In film narratives, it would be more usual to find the more unsympathetic or purely comic characters performing badly, such as the character of Lina Lamont in *Singin' in the Rain*.

[2] This discussion refers only to instances of singing by principal and regular characters. There are examples of singing from single-episode characters in *Angel*, but there is no overall predictability as to whether these characters will sing well or not.

[3] We see him singing backing vocals with Dingoes Ate My Baby but never explicitly hear his voice.

[4] This observation is largely based on my own experience as a professional singer and on conversations with my students at Birmingham Conservatoire.

[5] It is worth noting that they are both also men. The implications of a gendered positioning of singers as predominantly female against instrumentalists as predominantly male in both popular film and television is another subject I am currently investigating. Both of the principal male characters in the Buffyverse who sing but do not play have ambivalently gendered positions, Lorne as a camp demon and Angel with the musical gender-reversal that I discussed in an earlier paper (Halfyard, 2001).

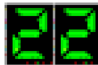
[6] There will always be exceptions to these kinds of rules, done to serve the needs of particular narratives: for example, the musical *Salad Days* uses the device of a magic piano. On hearing the piano play, characters find themselves singing and dancing without having made a decision to do so. However, as in "Once More, with Feeling", exceptions such as these are usually playing with ideas of diegetic and non-diegetic song in a way that makes the nature of the songs highly ambiguous.

[7] This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why successful television actors can find it difficult to establish themselves in the film industry. In film, the audience is used to film actors constantly playing new characters: hence, films are often built and marketed around particular actors, and audiences might go and see a Tom Cruise or Julia Roberts film, accepting the actor as whichever character they happen to be playing this time: our audience relationship with that character will last perhaps two hours. In a television series such as *Friends* or *BtVS,* the actor

becomes firmly established as one particular character over many episodes and seasons, an audience relationship that can be measured in years. The result is that the audience may well identify the character first and the actor second: Monica, Rachel, Ross and Chandler are perhaps names which come more readily to mind on watching films with the *Friends* actors in them than the names of the actors themselves, whereas it is considerably more difficult to remember the names of the characters Tom Cruise played in *Minority Event*, *Magnolia* or *Vanilla Sky*. The continuity of the relationship in television of actor and character, therefore, generally renders the actor much less visible than it does in film.

[8] In fact, the production of OMWF demonstrates an awareness of the heightened level of separation in the actor/character relationship in a musical, as the trailer combined clips from the forthcoming show with footage of the actors both rehearsing in a dance studio and singing in the recording studio, out of costume, out of the Sunnydale diegetic context and therefore evidently out of character. This would seem to be highlighting the extent to which the actors were occupying a privileged position in the context of non-diegetic song, threatening to undermine the coherence and credibility of the characters they had been playing for just over five seasons by this point.

[9] In one instance, this situation is partially reversed: Spike declares himself immune to whatever is causing the spontaneous bursting into song, only to find himself singing a few seconds later--and the expression on his face at this point implies that he is aware and surprised but can do nothing to stop himself. However, this is momentary: as the rest of the song proceeds, he loses this self-consciousness and apparently loses his awareness that his singing is in any way abnormal until the song has finished.



Ewan Kirkland

The Caucasian Persuasion of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Introduction

[1] In his discussion of the representation and construction of whiteness, Richard Dyer (1997) argues: 'There is a specificity to white representation, but it does not reside in a set of stereotypes so much as in narrative structural positions, rhetorical tropes and habits of perception' (12). This paper explores *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a particularly white text. By this I mean, the series is both populated by archetypal white characters, and informed by various structures, tropes and perspectives Dyer identifies as characterising whiteness. The classic *Buffy* episode opens at night, in a graveyard, with the protagonists battling the forces of darkness; it ends in bright Californian daylight, as the victorious Scoobies reflect on events, the world saved once more, and oblivious to their efforts. This simplification of the *Buffy* narrative's symbolic mobilisation of light and darkness reveals a whiteness extending beyond its leading cast's skin colour. White sensibilities inform the series, producing an extremely white view of the world, of history, of the universe, and white people's role within it. As such, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* constitutes a valuable focus for deconstructing whiteness as constructed cultural identity, a text variously representing and reflecting upon what whiteness means.

[2] It is easy to find examples of threatening non-white 'others' in the *Buffy* series. There are the African hyenas who possess Xander and several fellow students in 'The Pack' (1006), whose subsequent descent into juvenile delinquency, rape and cannibalism, accompanied by a ritualistic drum beat, evokes numerous negative colonial and post-colonial tropes of African natives and black teenagers (though these teens are white). There are the Chumash who lay siege to Buffy's Thanksgiving dinner in 'Pangs' (4008), the Inca princess who consumes various Sunnydale teenagers in 'Inca Mummy Girl' (2004), the African mask which brings the dead to life in 'Dead Man's Party' (3002), the black gangsta Mr Trick of Season Three, and the original Slayer who threatens the sleeping Scoobies in 'Restless' (4022). Together with the conspicuous absence of non-white central characters, the barely-noticed disappearance of Olivia, and Riley's black friend Forrest's subsequent transformation into a zombie cyborg,

this suggests a negative or dismissive attitude towards non-white races.
[3] A tentative case might be made for *Buffy* as a white-supremacy text. *Buffy*'s anti-authoritarian streak, identified by Wall and Zryd (2002), includes the proliferation of shadowy institutions such as the Watchers' Council, the Initiative, the Mayor's office, various monstrous Others' infiltration of government and commercial organisations, and frequent indications of conspiracy between Sunnydale's state apparatus to keep residents from discovering demonic truths. Far right American political perspectives are connoted in the white protagonists' survivalist mentality, stockpiling weaponry and rejecting police and military authorities for direct action in their self-appointed role as guardians of the Sunnydale community. The secrecy of the Scoobies' nocturnal activities, their fetishisation of arcane rituals, texts, artifacts and titles, resembles a sinister cult founded on the destruction of non-normative groups. Discussing the racial dimensions of *Buffy*'s suburban Californian location, Boyd Tonkin (2002) notes an anti-desegregation white supremacy group of the 1950s called the Spookhunters (44-5) a connection suggested in the Klan-evoking 'Whitehats' inhabiting the Wishverse Sunnydale (3009).
[4] However, such an assessment ignores the overwhelming whiteness of *Buffy*'s villains, as well as protagonists. It is not my intention to criticise *Buffy*, mobilising familiar discourses of racist representation, stereotypes and positive or negative narratives, or to assume a liberal white male position, criticising my own culture for its representation of social groups to which I do not belong. Furthermore, I am writing as a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with a critical focus on the intersection between my fandom and my ethnicity. Racist representations, together with discourses of white supremacy, constitute limited if comparatively accessible means of exploring whiteness. The former conveniently avoids examining whiteness, focusing instead upon non-white identities; the latter sidesteps more dominant modes of whiteness in favour of political extremism. In contrast, a whiteness not solely associated with demonising non-white others, and more commonplace white identities inhabiting less vocal, less noticeable, more moderate, bland and central spaces, are harder to theorise or even identify. This totalising, embedded, invisible construction of whiteness, frequently defamilarised, satirised or mobilised for *Buffy*'s narrative or thematic ends, will be this paper's focus. Largely with reference to Dyer's work, I shall consider *Buffy*'s generic roots, then its central characters and villains as constituting archetypal representations of whiteness. Finally, I shall explore the ways in which the whiteness of *Buffy* reveals white anxieties and insecurities concerning racial identity.

White Picket Fences: The Generic Whiteness of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

> Mr Trick: Sunnydale. Town's got quaint. And the people? He called me sir. Don't you just miss that? I mean, admittedly, it's not a haven for the brothers. You know, strictly the Caucasian persuasion in the 'Dale. But, you know, you just gotta stand up and salute that death rate.
>
> 'Faith, Hope and Trick' (3003)

[5] In '"My Emotions Give Me Power": The Containment of Girl's Anger in *Buffy*', Elyce Rae Helford (2002) is not alone in criticising the limited class and ethnic representations of femininity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. However, *Buffy*'s predominantly white casting only anchors the series' whiteness. Undeniably central to the show's racial orientation, whiteness extends beyond the proliferation of Caucasian faces populating Sunnydale's streets, malls and municipal facilities, evident in the series' generic sources. Western horror, Dyer argues, is a predominantly white genre, an ethnicity enveloping both monsters and protagonists (1997, p210). *Buffy* sets this white genre within a particularly white district, the small town, a recurring theme and location within American popular culture.
[6] Small town iconography resonates with traditional white representations. Neat rows of identical houses, white picket fences, immaculate lawns, all constitute a façade of order and civility masking dark primeval forces bubbling beneath the surface. The murderous mobs of 'The Lottery' and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the seedy strip joints of Bedford Falls' Pottersville (*It's a Wonderful Life,* 1946), the writhing insects of *Blue Velvet*'s Lumbertown (1986), the prison cells and torture chambers rotting beneath *Silent Hill*'s Historical Society, and the vampires and demons of Sunnydale symbolise the internal primitive which white society regards itself as burdened to repress. Indeed, many recent American small town films, *The Ice Storm* (1997), *Pleasantville* (1998), *American Beauty* (1999), *Far From Heaven* (2002), might be fruitfully analysed in such terms. Combining horror, suburbia and teenage protagonists, while self-consciously mobilising 'B movie' characters and clichés, *Buffy* parallels another popular contemporary series: the *Goosebump* books. Indeed, Tim Morris' (2000) critical description of the series' 'unerringly white middle-class, unmarked Americans' whose adventures represent 'the controlled and processed dark side of white America' (69) applies as readily to *Buffy*.
[7] Contrasting with the small town text, *Buffy* also self-consciously evokes the action hero movie, with its quipping protagonist, fighting sequences and (fairly) clear-cut hero/villain dichotomy. In *White Guys*, Fred Pfeil (1995) defines the narrative formula of the *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* films as:

> a white male protagonist... triumphs over an evil conspiracy of monstrous proportions by eschewing the support and regulation of inept and/or craven law-enforcement institutions, ignoring established procedure and running "wild" instead, albeit with the aid of a more domesticated semi-bystanding sidekick. (1)

Substituting female for male, actual for metaphorical monsters, the ineffectual Sunnydale police force for FBI and government agencies, the Watchers Council for bureaucratic obstruction, and the Scoobies for the traditional action hero's sidekick, this formula remains virtually intact. Buffy's relationship with Snyder frequently evokes that of rogue cop and exasperated police chief, as do early exchanges between Slayer and Watcher. The show's generic debt is knowingly

acknowledged in the *Die Hard* (1988) pastiche episode, 'School Hard' (2003).
[8] As Gregory Erickson (2002) illustrates, the role of Christianity in *Buffy* is neither consistent nor straightforward, and yet it constitutes a repeated presence within *Buffy as* a religion 'thought and felt in distinctly white ways for most of its history' (Dyer, 1997, 17). Evident in recurring crucifixes, holy water, churchyards, demons, hell dimensions and the pervading themes of guilt, redemption and resurrection, Christian themes inform most season's finales: Buffy's sacrifice of herself in Season One ('Prophecy Girl' [1012]) and Five ('The Gift' [5022]), of Angel in Season Two ('Becoming," Part 2 [2022]) and Spike in Season Seven ('The Chosen' [7022]), and Xander's unrelenting declaration of love for Willow in 'Grave' (6022). The union of Giles, Willow and Xander, as mind, spirit and heart constitute a Holy Trinity, creating the ÜberBuffy of Season Four's penultimate episode ('Primeval' [4021]). Elsewhere traditional European myths and narratives inform Buffy's adventures. Anita Rose [2002] observes parallels with Shelley and Whale's *Frankenstein*s in Season Four's Adam (134); Catherine Siemann (2002) discusses the Gothic influence on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, while Sarah E. Skwire [2002] labels *Buffy* a 'modern-day Gothic fairy tale' (195). Traditional folk tales, authentic or fabricated, such as Hansel and Gretel in 'Gingerbread' (3011), Little Red Riding Hood in 'Helpless' (3012) and 'Fear, Itself' (4004), the Kinderstod of 'Killed by Death' (2018), the Gentlemen of 'Hush' (4010), or the horror literature of *Dracula* ('Buffy vs. Dracula' [5001]), *Frankenstein* ('Some Assembly Required' [2002]), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* ('Beauty and the Beast' [3004]) frequently provide narrative themes and imagery. Religious iconography, folk narratives, English literature and Christianity, together with the Scoobies' medieval weaponry, crossbows, stakes, swords and lances, produce a text steeped in white history and white culture.
[9] *Buffy*'s only non-white generic component is the Hong Kong action movie, evident in the series' many fighting scenes. However, Dave West (2002) observes Buffy's moves rarely approximate authentic martial arts culture, and notes anxieties expressed amongst the show's producers that fighting scenes might appear incongruously 'kung fuey' (181), an incongruity resulting from the predominant whiteness of the series' milieu. In a chapter on *Jewel in the Crown*, entitled '"There's nothing I can do! Nothing,"' Dyer (1997) explores white femininity's constructed passivity. On the subject of active screen heroines, Elizabeth Hills (1999), amongst many critics, observes tendencies within (white) female action movies towards transgressive   post-*Woman* woman' gender representations (46). White heroines, such as Ripley (*Alien* series [1979-1997]), Sarah Connor (*Terminator 2: Judgement Day* [1991]) or Thelma & Louise (1991), in gaining narrative agency either abandon or transform their femininity. In contrast, *Buffy* can be understood alongside more recent post-feminist texts (*Charlie's Angels* [2000], *Miss Congeniality* [2000], *Legally Blonde* [2001]) whose heroines retain a recognisable femininity while nevertheless becoming physically active. Refusing to masculinise its protagonist, *Buffy* modifies its white heroine's race rather than her gender in a superficial incorporation of a non-white combat style ethnically located outside the dominant white/black dichotomy, whose balletic emphasis on grace, precision and control coincide with physical virtues

traditionally associated with white women.

Whiteness Chomping On Whiteness

[10] I now turn my attention to the racial qualities of *Buffy*'s cast of characters, representing various stereotypical white constructions.

> Giles: We begin, predictably, with research.
>
> 'Amends' (3010)

[11] Rupert Giles with his clipped upper class English accent, spectacles, tweed jacket and sweater-vests, symbolises many characteristics associated with whiteness: intelligence, authority, control, propriety, but also lack of spontaneity, awkwardness and sexual repression. European, but specifically British, Giles's nationality geographically and historically locates his racial character, a rare reference within *Buffy* to white colonialism. If the Watchers Council constitutes *Buffy*'s clearest representation of the cold, heartless, privileged masculinity controlling white society, Giles' increasing antagonism towards the Masonic organisation, and Buffy's outright rejection, constitutes a negotiation of white history's unsavoury past, even as the Council structures the show's central relationship. Giles enforces the Scoobies' particularly 'white' style of fighting evil: asking questions first, staking later. This extremely academic approach to battling the forces of darkness focuses around meticulous research, calculation, and planning, involving the translation of European text books or documents stolen from other cultures. In battles, Giles' preferred weapon is more leather-bound Latin volume than crossbow, when not dispassionately observing and chronicling Buffy's progress. The training methods Giles employs as Buffy's Watcher typically favour intellect over physicality, less bodily strength, more force of will, concentration and mind over matter. While carrying non-white mystical Eastern connotations, such an approach encapsulates Dyer's (1997) description of whiteness' emphasis on spirit triumphing over body (23). In 'A New Man' (4012) Giles' transformation into a clumsy, incomprehensible, dark skinned monster employs a temporary loss of whiteness to symbolise his estrangement from his friends, while the Watcher's acoustic performance of 'Behind Blue Eyes' ('Where the Wild Things Are' [4018]) bemoans the anguish disguised by an inscrutable white countenance. Parodied by Spike in 'Bargaining Part 1' (6001) as "Cuppa tea, cuppa tea, almost got shagged, cuppa tea", Giles' disastrous sex life is both nationally and racially derived. Giles shares some on-screen intimacy with Olivia, his casual Season Four girlfriend whose race (and nationality) function to reflect the Watcher's temporary estrangement from his white American friends. Lacking the character development or self-contained narratives of other 'orgasm friends,' Olivia's barely mentioned and comparatively inconsequential departure following a racially-loaded confrontation with the Gentlemen in 'Hush' (an episode themed around the Scoobies coupling-up and reuniting), underlies her distance from Giles,' and the show's, primary activities. Arguably, Giles' most orgasmic moment is discovering Jenny's body in 'Passion' (2017), a climax scored by ecstatic classical music, marked by cultural whiteness, a lack of physical contact,

and death.

> Willow: The energy, the collective intelligence, it's like this force, this penetrating force, and I can just feel my mind opening up, you know? And letting this place just thrust in and, and spurt knowledge into...
>
> 'The Freshman' (4001)

[12] Willow's Jewishness might problematise this analysis were it not so marginalised, only occasionally mentioned, and never permitted narrative centrality. **[Editor's note 1]** Indeed, Willow's Jewishness represents the extent of ethnic colour permitted within *Buffy*'s central cast, constituting occasional one liners about crucifixes and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Willow shares Giles' slightly nervous, unassuming, initially sexually inept qualities of mainstream whiteness, together with his thirst for knowledge. The Watcher's enthusiasm for ancient tombs accompanies Willow's New World fetishisation of information technology. If Giles' sexiest moment is discovering his dead girlfriend, early Willow's is attending college, an experience described employing highly sexualised imagery. If nerdy Willow of earlier seasons represents one mode of whiteness, later witch Willow represents another. Discussing teen witch fiction, Rachel Mosley (2002) mentions *Buffy* amongst many contemporary texts which 'predominantly inscribe and validate a respectable *white* hegemonic glamour' (421, emphasis mine). Negotiating feminist and post-feminist constructions of femininity and female power, the benign witches of *Charmed*, *The Craft*, *Sabrina* and *Practical Magic* (1998) are characteristically long-haired, dressed in natural fabrics, floral prints, lace and embroidery. While emerging after Mosley's paper, both Willow and Tara fulfil this traditional model of white femininity, their college dorm a medieval sanctuary of candles, wooden furniture and tapestries, a cultural whiteness overriding Willow's potential Jewish Otherness. Willow's battle with magic, symbolised by her blackening eyes, hair and veiny skin, represents whiteness' struggle to suppress its destructive urges, the devastating consequences of failure personified by dark Willow literally removing the (white) skin of her victim. Light's centrality in white visual culture (present in both *Sunny*dale and the series' heroine, Buffy *Summer*s), is outlined in Dyer's (1997) study of Western pictorial representation, and informs Willow's redemption in 'Chosen', when magical light streams from her face and body, absolving her dark past. Wicca Willow is also lesbian Willow, and Dyer notes that popular representations of homosexuality are predominantly white representations, betraying white insecurities surrounding reproductive inferiority and anxieties that 'white sex is queer sex' (219-220).

> Xander: 'My valentines are usually met with heartfelt restraining orders.'
>
> 'Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered' (2016)

[13] Given the constructed association between whiteness and middle-to-upper

classness, Xander's working class background poses similar problems as Willow's Jewishness, were it not similarly erased. *Buffy* permits Xander few working class signifiers: his cheap clothes, drunken parents, basement habitat, various blue collar jobs and eventual employment in construction. A more substantial class code, like Xander's academic failure is frequently contradicted by his research skills in Giles' library, while his mismatching clothes imply more white nerdiness and eccentricity than less-white poverty. Discussing the series' use of language, Karen Eileen Overbey & Lahney Preston-Matto (2002) describe Xander's quick-witted, word play as generating 'a vocabularic shield' enhancing his status within the group. Using humour through language, 'wrapping yummy SAT words in chocolaty self-deprecation', an expression of his sexual frustration (76-8), aligns Xander with the wordiness of white education, together with the apology and sexual discomfort of white masculinity. Sharing Willow's self-effacing demeanour, the Geek Trio's anal knowledge of white popular culture, and Giles' disastrous sexual history, Xander is regularly feminised or emasculated: almost devoured by potential sexual partners in 'Inca Mummy Girl' (2004) and 'Teacher's Pet' (1004), dressed in drag for the frat boys' amusement in 'Reptile Boy' (2005), catching "funny syphilis" in 'Pangs' (4008), serving as "butt monkey" to The Prince of Darkness in 'Buffy vs Dracula' (5001). In successful partnerships Xander personifies a white masculinity subordinated to women, dating the ball-busting Cordelia from Seasons Two to Three, and the man-hating vengeance demon Anyanka from Four to Seven, losing his virginity to the aggressively sexual Faith in an encounter concluding with post-coitus ejection in 'The Zeppo' (3013), an episode themed around Xander's comparative ineffectuality within the female-heavy Scoobies. Xander's comic role within 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' (2016) explicitly mobilises his whiteness. A spell-afflicted Xander traverses a school corridor drawing admiring gazes from Sunnydale females, and jealous glares from male students. Scored by funk music, this sequence plays upon the disjuncture between the black music and the scene's white subject. **[Editors' note 2]** The over-determined whiteness of *Buffy* feminises Xander's masculinity, queers his heterosexuality, and middle-classes his working-classness.

[14] *Buffy*'s supporting cast are equally white coded. Angel - literally whitened-up by the use of make-up in early episodes - shares Giles' European origin, his name evoking whiteness' Christian associations, the luminous depiction of white people in visual culture, religious models of white men's closeness to God (Dyer, 1997, 22), and white women's association with angels (126-7). Consumed by guilt, Angel's angst represents white misgivings over its genocidal past. Fittingly, Angel's curse is cast by European gypsies. Cordelia constitutes a spoiled, selfish, shrewish feminine whiteness. Like Willow's dark Wicca/Wishverse double, Oz's inner werewolf symbolises the white spirit's struggle to master the white body, repressing appetites and urges heavily sexualised through Oz's bestial tryst with Veruca in 'Wild at Heart' (4006). By 'New Moon Rising' (4019) Oz has triumphed, but sexual jealousy shakes his white spirit upon discovering Willow's relationship with Tara. If *Buffy* evokes the 1980s action movie, Spike most embodies its male protagonist, personifying Pfeil's (1995) description of the 'taut, torn, upper torso

of the white star brandishing his lethal weapons' (3). Extremely white visually, Spike combines Angel's paled skin with bleached hair, the Aryan superman with white subcultures of punk and Gothicism, Giles' Britishness together with traces of all components Dyer (1997) lists of muscle men movies: Classicism, Californianism, barbarism and crucifixion (150). Finally, the race of Principal Robin Wood, *Buffy*'s only non-white major character, undergoes a similar erasure as Willow's ethnicity and Xander's class. Wood contrasts with *Angel*'s Charles Gunn, whose voice and body language, allegiances to an urban black community, and frequent references to his cultural and ethnic heritage distinguish him from his white colleagues. Less culturally marked, Robin Wood resists simplistic assumptions about his African American roots, dryly informing Buffy his formative 'hood' is Beverly Hills ('Help' [7004]); his ethnicity derived instead from maternal parentage, son of Slayer Nikki from 'Fool For Love' (5007), whose racial coding functions largely as kitsch shorthand locating Spike's narration temporally and geographically in 1970s New York via the Blaxploitation film cycle. Characterising Wood's racial assimilation, in 'Storyteller' (7016) Buffy places a pink band-aid on the principal's forehead without comment (reproducing the Sandy Huffaker cartoon 'White is a flesh coloured band aid' [Dyer, 1997, 41]), representing a particularly white liberal blindness to racial difference, celebrated as politically positive and affirmative of 'racial minorities', while ultimately reinforcing white hegemony.

[15] Yet *Buffy*'s whitest character is Buffy herself. The principle joke of the series, located in its title, concerns the incongruity between '*Buffy*', a harmless white-evoking combination of 'bunny' and 'fluffy', and the strength, power, violence, darkness suggested by '*the Vampire Slayer*'. Buffy is unsuited to this role, as female, middle class, Californian, diminutive, blonde, young and white. Whiteness (particularly white femininity), and its associated frailty, ineffectuality and weakness, is mobilised by *Buffy* for comic effect and narrative tension. Dyer's (1997) discussion of the blonde white woman's significant position in visual discourses of whiteness (124), together with Rhonda V. Wilcox & David Lavery's (2002) observation that Buffy has grown blonder and blonder (pxviii) suggests an increasing investment in her whiteness, her blonde hair frequently indistinguishable from her blonde tanned skin, often echoed in beige, grey or white backgrounds. Buffy's ice skating scene in 'What's My Line? Part 1' (2009) characterises racial identity's construction through *mise-en-scène*, the whiteness of ice, protagonist and culture producing a striking fit, paralleling Dyer's description of the Romantic ballerina as exemplifying Victorian white femininity (1997, p130-1). Buffy's whiteness is further emphasised by all other pre-Season Seven slayers' non-whiteness: the African first slayer of 'Intervention' (5018), the Korean slayer mentioned by the dummy in 'The Puppet Show' (1009), the black and Chinese slayers killed by Spike in 'Fool For Love' (5007), and Kendra, Buffy's replacement in Season Two. Excluding Potentials, only Faith breaks this rule, her character foregrounding class over race.

[16] The relationship between Buffy and Kendra deserves significant consideration. Lynne Edwards (2002) describes Kendra as an updated 'tragic mulatta', seeking legitimacy and acceptance within the white community through

assimilating white cultural values, symbolised by Buffy's more relaxed approach towards slaying. Initially perceived as a threat, Kendra's eventual acceptance, Edwards argues, is contingent upon adopting Buffy's (white) attitudes and perspectives, although ultimately doomed to failure. More critical of Kendra's status as Other, and the privileging and normalising of white values inherent within this process, Elyce Rae Helford (2002) interprets the many instances where Buffy ridicules Kendra's difference as anti-immigrant racism (26-30). Certainly, Buffy is openly hostile towards her replacement, their growing friendship predicated on Kendra modifying her behaviour to accommodate Buffy, while the heroine remains unchanged. Kendra's death in 'Becoming Part 1' (2021) acknowledges her incongruity and disposability, serving largely as plot complication when Buffy is suspected of the murder. Her treatment recalls Yvonne Tasker's (1993) description of the cinematic convention whereby black sidekicks sacrifice themselves for the white hero (36). More complexly, Kendra functions to secure Buffy's whiteness as another contrasting non-white slayer, while highlighting that Buffy is not *too* white. While black in skin colour and accent, Kendra embodies many stereotypically white characteristics absent in Buffy: coldness, studiousness, obedience, control, a lack of emotion, humour and personableness. Kendra arrives at Sunnydale readily-assimilated, evident in her immediate bonding with Giles along academic lines. In contrast, Buffy appears impulsive, rebellious, emotional, and reckless, characteristics traditionally associated with non-whiteness. The conflict between Buffy and Kendra, between black and white-coded sensibilities in which the ownership of racial characteristics is reversed, parallels the biracial buddy action movie's 'invigorating tale of cross-racial influence' discussed by Pfeil (1995, p13). In encouraging a more sassy, streetwise, less book-bound slaying style, Buffy bestows upon Kendra qualities white culture traditionally regards as lacking in itself, and excessive in others, neutralising non-whiteness while constructing its Caucasian heroine as benevolent, invigorating, and cool.

[17] The easily-identified presence of non-white villainy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been noted. However, this apparent prominence results not from the villains' frequency but from their contrasting visibility against the white backdrop of the show, and the explicit mobilisation of ethnicity this frequently involves. Mr Trick's introductory comments on Sunnydale's Caucasian persuasion highlights *Buffy*'s whiteness, the racist anxieties evoked by white culture's black villains, and America's history of segregation. In contrast to the assimilated Principal Wood, Trick's race saturates his accent, body language and clothing, many exchanges between Trick and The Mayor being inflected with subtle racial undertones. Similarly in 'Pangs' (4008) vengeful Native American spirits are racially historicised, the injustice inflicted upon the Chumash regularly vocalised by a conflicted Willow, a typical display of white guilt which nevertheless contextualises the violence suffered by Native Americans in the Westerns 'Pangs' transforms into pastiche. The black-coded dance demon Sweet ('Once More, With Feeling' [6007], the only African American performer to grace the Bronze stage, pays tribute to black musical traditions, while his villainy recalls Dyer's (2000) discussion of non-white exclusion within classical musicals. Even Kendra's first

appearance in 'What's My Line,' erroneously suggesting she is a demonic bounty hunter, is founded on racial difference.

[18] However, as Tonkin (2002) notes, the series more frequently 'refuses to encode its infernal crews with a clear racial identity' (45), meaning they frequently assume the non-racialised identity of whiteness. Considering the relationship between whiteness and death, Dyer (1997) discusses whiteness's prominence within vampire mythology. Despite being drawn from the liminal whiteness of Southern Europe, Judaism and New Orleans, vampires are characterised by pale white skin, and the bringing of whiteness, as well as death, to victims. Images of 'white people chomping away at white people' recur within the horror genre (211), and despite exceptions, *Buffy*'s whiteness characterises both heroes and villains. The generic vampires, demon gangs and villainous Sunnydale residents constitute a predominantly white challenge for the series' white protagonists. Representing various ethnic stereotypes, these include: Ethan Rayne, Giles' old school chum in 'Halloween' (2006) and 'Band Candy' (3006), the redneck vampire brothers in 'Bad Eggs' (2012), the wannabe vampire teenagers, eager to be eaten by the Other, in 'Lie to Me' (2007), the huge white impotent demon in 'Bad Girls' (3014), the unscrupulous werewolf hunter of 'Phases' (2015), the sexually repressed children in 'Where the Wild Things Are' (4018), the Scandinavian troll in 'Triangle' (5011), the tall, pale, effete Gentlemen of 'Hush' (4010), coded, according to the director's commentary, as Victorian industrialists, and Season Seven's Caleb, a southern preacher fashioned after Robert Mitchum's character in *Night of the Hunter* (1955). Female vampires are similarly white: the sardonic blonde Sunday ('The Freshman' [4001]), the unicorn-collecting Harmony ('The Harsh Light of Day' [4003]), 'Real Me' [5002]), described by Spike as his 'little foam latté', and Season Two's Drusilla, whose cockney British, frail, neurotic, hippy femininity complements the whiteness of Spike, Angel and Darla. There is Kathy, Buffy's anally-retentive secret demon roommate from 'Living Conditions' (4002) who enjoys light FM, drinks decaf lattés, and labels her hardboiled eggs; the cookie-baking computer salesman and homicidal robot dating Buffy's mother in 'Ted' (2011); and the Zeta Kappa frat house boys in 'Reptile Boy' (2005), a monstrous cult feeding women to a prehistoric lizard, linking generations of rich powerful (mostly white) men to ritual sacrifice and satanic practices.

[19] Each season's main villain bears prominent white codes. The Master of Season One, clearly modeled on the original European *Nosferatu* (1922), combines a lifeless white complexion, prissy feminine masculinity and fascistic black outfit; while Angel, Spike and Drusilla constitute the Big Bad of Season Two. The Mayor of Season Three, described by Wilcox (2002) as a 'gosh-darn, germ-hating, *Readers' Digest*-reading ... emblem of the all-American politician' (14), and Shuttleworth (2002) as combining 'homespun folksiness and demonic plotting' (224) represents a more complex, critical reflection on whiteness. As all-American, Midwestern, middle class and middle brow, the unerringly chipper Mayor Richard Wilkins III (also I and II) suggests white power maintains itself through a quasi-aristocratic, quasi-eugenic, ultimately incestuous, demon-coded system of arcane inheritance. Wilkins' feminine counterpart is

Season Five's Glory, a spoilt, selfish, borderline insane god, surrounded by adoring flunkies with diseased complexions. Representing the fetishised blonde femininity central to white self-image, the pampered privilege of whiteness, and its constructed associations with heavenly light, Glory maintains her composure by consuming others' sanity, evoking whiteness' investment in intellect, its fragility and parasitic nature. The Knights of Byzantium, a medieval order bent upon destroying Glory and Buffy's sister, despite containing black recruits, bear the cultural and historic signifiers of a white European Crusaders. The Initiative, Season Four's secretive government organisation, overseen by another blonde female, Dr Maggie Walsh, represents the cold clinical scientific disposition of white civilisation, enhanced through a *mise-en-scène* of white lab coats and silver surfaces. A history of colonialism and genocide synthesise in the castrating chip implanted within Spike's head to neutralise his difference. Adam, the Frankenstein-monster like creature constructed by Initiative scientists, his name recalling white religious genealogical mythology, exhibits similar calculating emotionless detachment from his surroundings and violent actions. Season Six's villains are the Geek Trio, three puerile young men who exemplify Willow and Xander's white nerdy characteristics, testified by Xander's affinity with Andrew in Season Seven. Sci-fi cultural references litter their conversation and habitats; their designs on supervillainy appear inspired by both sexual frustration and over-immersion in comic book culture. The joke of Jonathan taking over Sunnydale in 'Superstar' (4017), like Buffy as Vampire Slayer, is founded on white ineffectuality. Finally, Season Seven's villain, The First, having no form or substance, assuming only the appearance of dead people, recalls whiteness' lack of identity, its tendency to presume a universal, depersonalised position, and its close relationship with death.

The Overrated Experience of Being White

> Trying to think about the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category in mainstream film is difficult, partly because white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular but also because, when whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death.'
>
> (Dyer, 2002, 126)

> Angel: Looking in the mirror every day and seeing nothing there. It's an overrated experience.
>
> 'Out of Mind, Out of Sight' (1011

> Buffy: I could be dead... Wouldn't be much of a change. Either way, I'm bored, constricted, I never get to shop, and my hair and fingernails still continue to grow. So really, when you think about it, what's the diff?

'What's My Line Part 1?' (2009)

Buffy: Give me something to sing about.
'Once More With Feeling' (6007)

[20] As this catalogue of white-coded villains illustrates, *Buffy*'s construction of whiteness is hardly unproblematic. From Glory's psychosis to Adam's emotionless dismembering of his victims, to Warren's misogyny, whiteness is a far from angelic condition. Anxieties represented within *Buffy*, relating to Dyer's discussion of whiteness as death, whiteness and queer sexuality, and whiteness as an invisible, insubstantial, non-existent identity will now be explored.

[21] White people's affinity with death is inherent in Buffy's Slayer status, bringing death to the dead, her actual deaths in Seasons One and Five, and her necrophilic sexual relationships. Told by the first Slayer that 'Death is your gift ('Intervention' [5018]), Buffy emphasises the Slayer's proximity to death when addressing Season Seven's potentials, stating: 'This whole thing is all about death... Death is what a slayer breathes, what a slayer dreams about when she sleeps. Death is what a slayer lives" ('Potential' [7012]). Many episodes, 'I Only Have Eyes For You' (2019), 'The Body' (5016), 'Dead Things' (6013), 'Conversations With Dead People' (7007), revolve around death and the dead, while Season Seven's The First in some ways personifies death itself. Whiteness is a double edged sword, both purifying and annihilating. The white light of 'Chosen' (7022), which absolves Willow, also destroys Spike.

[22] Discussing the whiteness of Andy Warhol's artistic persona, Ruth Adams (2000) draws upon many characteristics identified by Dyer. Warhol's extreme pallor, personal and artistic affinity with death, vampiric Dracula associations, the affected blankness of his dumb blonde mannerisms, his frustrated desire to possess no reflection, and aspiration to become machine-like, all reflect whiteness' darker elements. The white man as android, Adams argues, embodies the Enlightenment ideal of observing without subjectivity, passion or personality. Robots in *Buffy* are infrequent but notably sexually motivated: the cyborg internet stalker of 'I Robot, You Jane' (1008), the android Bluebeard 'Ted' (2011), Warren's sex slave April ('I Was Made to Love You' [5015]), and the Buffybot, Spike's 'checkers partner'. **[Editors' note 3]** This sexualisation of robots in *Buffy* recalls Dyer's (1997) consideration of non-reproductive androids in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Alien* (1979) as a 'contemporary mode for approaching white non-existence' (212), revealing suspicions that whiteness and sexual reproduction are mutually incompatible (216). Abortive reproduction runs throughout *Buffy*. In 'Witch' (1003) Amy is possessed by her ex-cheerleader mom striving to relive her glory days. 'Bad Eggs' (2012) sees students distributing brain-controlling monsters that hatch from their sociology project surrogate children. 'All the Way' (6006) suggests Sunnydale's Lovers' Lane is primarily a hunting ground for vampires. Discussing the slash-friendliness of *Buffy*, Esther Saxey (2002) describes a show in which 'the whole gamut of non-normative sexual expression is thrown together' (203). Buffy's frequently catastrophic romps with sterile

vampires, Willow's bestial relationship with Oz, Xander's various abortive trysts, Spike's relationship with Angel, Walsh with Riley, Giles with Ethan: if white sex is queer sex then there is something peculiarly white about *Buffy*'s propensity for queer readings. The sterility of white sex is personified by Buffy and Riley's lovemaking in 'Where the Wild Things Are' (4018), a cold, deadening, almost mechanical activity with disastrous repercussions.

[23] White identity has traditionally constructed itself as no identity at all: as non-specific, impartial, representing everything and nothing. While a significant component of white hegemonic power, the identity-less status of seeming to be nothing in particular leads to a certain existential angst amongst white people, equally represented in *Buffy*. Instability of identity is a recurring theme. Xander's personality is split in two in 'The Replacement' (5003). 'A New Man' (4012) has Giles transformed into a (black-coded) demon. 'Halloween' (2006) sees the Scoobies possessed by seasonal costumes, assuming new personas as army guy, ghost and gothic heroine. In 'Tabula Rasa' (6008) *Buffy*'s characters suffer from amnesia, (often wrongly) constructing their roles and relationships from clothes and surroundings. Angel becomes Angelus, Faith becomes Buffy ('This Year's Girl' [4015]), Willow becomes Warren ('The Killer in Me' [7013]), Drusilla becomes Jenny ('Becoming," Part Two' [2022]), Buffy becomes Anne ('Anne' [3001]), becomes Joan ('Tabula Rasa' [6008], becomes Faith ('This Year's Girl' [4015]), while the First becomes anyone dead. Identity in *Buffy* is unstable, illusive and easily stolen, testified by the emblematic image of Sarah Michelle Gellar concluding Seasons Six and Seven's opening credit montage being not Buffy herself, but the Buffy-bot and the First respectively. "I can't even see if this is really me", Buffy sings in 'Once More With Feeling' (6007). "I don't know if there's a me left to save" bemoans Anya in 'Selfless' (7005). "What am I? Am I real? Am I anything?" demands Dawn ('Blood Ties' [6013]) upon discovering her status as the key, a mystical energy made human, personifying whiteness as absence, without authentic history, memories or identity. Sexlessly constructed from nowhere, with a fabricated past and personality, in realising her non-existent past, Dawn confronts the emptiness at the heart of white identity and cuts her own skin.

[24] Whiteness as invisibility is a recurring theme in Dyer's (1997) study. Given colour's symbolic association with life and presence, the apparent colourless-ness of 'whiteness' also signifies a more general absence. The translucence of white photographic representation, the transparency of white faces on film, the illumination of white figures in pictorial discourse, renders white subjects as without substance. The purity of idealised whiteness may, Dyer suggests, constitute a non-existence. The disembodied, depersonalised, dispassionate position from which white authority claims to speak seeks to erase the speaker's presence and detectability. In *Buffy*, the invisibility of whiteness becomes literal invisibility, running through 'Out of Mind Out of Sight' (1011) featuring an invisible schoolgirl, 'Gone' (6011), in which Buffy is herself turned invisible, and 'Same Time Same Place' (7003) in which Willow becomes invisible to the other Scoobies, and vice versa. The Season One episode features Marcie, a student experiencing the white paranoid fantasy of fading from view, as colleagues and

teachers stop noticing her. This process, represented in sepia-tinted white-coded flashbacks, significantly featuring a black literature teacher previously seen discussing anti-Semitism in *The Merchant of Venice*, foregrounds the racial dimensions of Marcie's invisibility. Buffy's transparency in Season Six will eventually result in her disintegration, the reversal of which Spike tellingly labels returning Buffy to 'living colour'. One of Season Six's most memorable images is of a love-sick Willow constructing an invisible Tara from her estranged girlfriend's clothes, a moment touching and poetic, but tinged with whiteness' absence, longing and loss.

[25] If such reflections on whiteness inscribe the pernicious '"me-too", "we're oppressed", "poor us"' position Dyer resists, such discourses arguably characterise the whiteness *Buffy* represents. If being a Slayer constitutes a metaphor for being white, Buffy increasingly suffers under the white woman's burden. Described by Wall & Zryd (2002) as: 'a power that was never sought, merely bequeathed' (60), Slayerdom confers great strength, status and authority, but also overbearing responsibility. If guilt consumes and personifies Angel, it frequently characterises Buffy's actions. Guilt at her failure to save cousin Celia motivates her actions in 'Killed by Death' (2018). Transferred guilt at Kendra's murder in 'Becoming,' Part 2 (2022) turns her into a fugitive. Guilt at her inability to protect Dawn renders her comatose in 'The Weight of the World' (5021). Guilt at her apparent murder of Katrina in 'Dead Things' nearly leads to imprisonment. Time and time again Buffy expresses anguish at her failure to save another vampire victim, her desire to lead a normal life free of obligation to fighting evil, her sense of loneliness and isolation. Buffy never stops complaining, despite the privileged position she enjoys. But as Anya says "You didn't earn it. You didn't work for it. You've never had anybody come up to you and say you deserve these things more than anyone else. They were just handed to you. So that doesn't make you better than us. It makes you luckier than us" ('Touched' [7020]). Although speaking of Buffy's slayer status, Anya may equally be describing her race.

Conclusion

[26] This paper aims to make whiteness visible. Arguing that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a text resonant with whiteness, I have illustrated the ways in which whiteness expresses itself, through white characters, white iconography, white cultural traditions and white anxieties. Rather than naturalising these qualities, I hope this analysis throws into relief the constructed nature of whiteness, so that white hegemony may be better understood, deconstructed and ultimately challenged.

[27] From its often-quoted opening sequence, where female vampire Darla turns the tables on her would-be male seducer, *Buffy* consciously signals its operation within discourses of gender. Rhonda Wilcox (2002) observes the prominence of readings of *Buffy* as feminist television (3). Anne Millard Daugherty (2002) labels *Buffy* a '"post gaze" production' and 'a feminist spectator's dream' (149), while Frances H. Early (2001) describes Buffy as a transgressive female warrior interrogating patriarchal institutions. This emphasis on gender, it might be

argued, has deflected critical discussion from the show's racial characteristics; but *Buffy*'s ethnicity might be productively considered alongside its gender representation, the programme's extreme whiteness being a symptom of the text's femininity. In foregrounding its progressive gender politics, other identity formations, namely race and class, have been compromised. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* consequently constitutes a revealing insight into the limits and negotiations of progressive popular television.

Editor's note: See Naomi Alderman and Annette Seidel-Arpaci, "Imaginary Para-Sites of the Soul: Vampires and Representations of 'Blackness' and 'Jewishness' in the Buffy/Angelverse."
Editors' note 2: This scene also visually and musically recalls the opening credit sequence of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), in which John Travolta struts to music down a New York street.
Editors' note 3: See Bronwen Calvert's "Going Through the Motions: Reading Simulacra in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*."

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Jeffrey Middents

A Sweet Vamp: Critiquing the Treatment of Race in *Buffy* and the American Musical Once More (with Feeling)

[1] With its non-descript high school, architecturally classic Main Street, and single Starbucks café, Sunnydale evokes contemporary suburban America. Despite the Scooby gang's having to fight off all sorts of demons, the characters are meant to be otherwise everyday people with everyday lives and everyday problems. In a sense, the outer appearance of Sunnydale is that of a utopian (if otherwise non-descript) suburbia: friendly, pretty and relatively peaceful, if only with an awfully high death rate. The town—along with its inhabitants, blissfully ignorant of its location over a Hellmouth—indeed helped establish the universality that brought the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a large and committed audience.

[2] But Sunnydale itself cannot exactly be seen as "everyday America" with its characters representative of "typical American youth" if for no other reason than everyone seems too white, especially for Southern California where about half the population is not white.[1] This is not to say that the series has been ignorant or unresponsive to representations of the Other; indeed, one of the show's hallmarks confronts issues of the dangers of Othering through its treatment of demons. Specific key examples include the realization that Oz might be a good person despite his outward appearance and habits as a werewolf in "Phases" (2015) from Season 2, the Scooby Gang's acceptance of Tara as a witch in "Family" (5006) from Season 5 and the general acceptance of Anya as a flawed yet human character throughout the series once she ceases to be the demon Anyanka. Nonetheless, for the large majority of the first six seasons of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there is an absence of people of color in Sunnydale. Such an absence is only articulated once by evil sidekick Mr. Trick (played by K. Todd Freeman) upon his entrance to town during Season 3's "Faith, Hope and Trick" (3003) when he says, "admittedly, it's not a haven for the brothers. You know, strictly the Caucasian persuasion in the 'Dale. Trick's comment reflects not just the main cast (who are all at least coded as white [2]), but also among the

cameo and extras casting.

[3] Several articles have already been written about the lack of racial integration in *Buffy*, particularly Kent Ono's hallmark piece, "To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and ('Other') Socially Marginalizing Positions on Horror TV," Lynne Edwards' "Slaying in Black and White: Kendra as Tragic Mulatta in *Buffy*" and Mary Alice Money's "The Undemonization of Supporting Characters in *Buffy*." Indeed, this paper does not aim to add much new to the discussion of race within the first five seasons. [3] By showing how a similar trend occurs in racial critiques of Hollywood musicals of the 1930s, 40s and early 50s, however, I propose that director, creator and episode lead writer Joss Whedon comments on the racial inequities that can be leveled against both the musical genre and his own television series through a subtle critique that will continue through *Buffy*'s final season.

[4] The "success" of stand-alone musical episodes as an "event" seems to depend largely on how delicately it is treated with the trajectory of the series as a whole. [4] This process is distinct from and yet related to how audiences have accepted (or not) the cinematic musical. The significant audience skepticism with which some contemporary film musicals have been met may be due to unfamiliarity with the genre. As such, audiences must "buy into" the believability of a world of spontaneous singing and dancing, rather than accept it as a possible generic characteristic. The problem for contemporary audiences is that they must accept the fantastical tenets of this unfamiliar genre at the same time that they are being drawn into the narrative, which may be too much for audiences to embrace simultaneously. [5] Television series like *Buffy* and other series that have recently employed the musical within single episodes (such as *The Drew Carey Show, Scrubs, Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Oz*) can do so only because the audience already is familiar with the characters and realities of the series as a whole. Indeed, the special nature of the musical episode depends on the audience's recognition that this is not the normal reality of the series. This necessary "audience participation" in quickly justifying the musical "reality" is acknowledged within this episode of *Buffy* in the penultimate number "Life's A Show" when Buffy turns to the camera and invites the audience to "sing along."

[5] The step from the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—and, indeed, from horror, superhero and/or fantasy genres in general—to the film musical is actually a very small one when thinking syntactically. [6] In his seminal article on the musical "The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative," Rick Altman maintains that the main character-driven (often romantic) storyline in the musical is interrupted periodically for song-and-dance numbers which, more than just adding slight momentum to the overall plot, practically halt it for the sake of the *spectacle* of a musical number. The same can be said of *Buffy*, for which an episode cannot go by without the titular heroine kicking someone's butt. Both dancing and butt-kicking are physically strenuous exercises and, as Altman maintains in his larger book-length work on the musical, often indicate sexual tension, if not outright substituting for sex. [7]

[6] Also like *Buffy*, however, the musical is a film genre marked by racial

segregation. The classic period of musical production featured very few characters of color, particularly the MGM musicals (such as Stanley Donen's *Singin' in the Rain* [8] [1952] and Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis* [1944]) now seen as defining "integrated" examples of the genre. [9] Prominent writers on musical—Rick Altman, Richard Dyer and Jane Feuer, among others—have noted these films function within an idealized, fantasy world where problematic social issues did not interfere nor overpower the main romantic story between the male and female leads. The genre seems to demand this to maintain its characteristic happy, light tone. In defining a significant portion of musicals, Rick Altman notes, "The fairy tale world must be a utopia, but in order for that utopia to have substance it must be a limited realm, one seemingly cut off from the outer, evil world, accessible only through the magical action of song, love and belief" (158). Social issues such as acknowledging the problematic constructions of racial interactions would necessarily be part of the "outer, evil world" that would interfere with the entertainment involved in singing and dancing. [10]

[7] As such, most musicals of the 30s, 40s and early 50s avoided the question of race entirely by simply not showing races mixing, if interacting at all. If a studio musical featured black actors, it was often because the entire cast was black: for example, the enormous cast of Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954). If black performers appeared in otherwise all-white musicals, they often simply did that: *perform*, not act. In many cases, such as *Down Argentine Way* (1940) and other 20th Century Fox non-integrated musicals, these performances were featured in breakout sequences unrelated to the plot. [11] In his book-length work *Disintegrating the Music: Black Performance and American Musicals*, Arthur Knight summarizes how Hollywood studios regarded the question of race:

> From an African American perspective, the so-called integrated musical [in terms of integrating song and dance within the plot]–whatever its powers and pleasures—was manifestly *not* integrated [racially]. In fact, as the originating texts of *Oklahoma!* and *Carmen Jones* along with *Show Boat*, [12] *Hallelujah!*, and *Porgy and Bess* suggest, the creation of the ultimate utopian feeling in the integrated musical relied on an explicit social-racial segregation, and no quantity of formal intervention could hide that. In a perverse way, though it specifically circumscribed "utopian" aspirations, the "integrated" musical clarified in nation, song, and dance an important and for African Americans painful American circumstance of long standing. (16)

[8] Knight's articulations coincide with *Buffy* scholars' concerns with the series' treatment of race. While Mary Alice Money notes convincingly that the series' fleshing out of supporting characters, both human and demon, "stand[s] in for race in American society" (98), this does not excuse the conspicuous fact that the Sunnydale population shown to audiences has been white, which is patently unrealistic for a show set in Southern California. By not giving "face-time," much

less the opportunity to voice an opinion, racial others can actually be viewed as even more marginal than the vampires and demons which Money would argue stand in for them as American Others. Kent Ono argues that, among the minorities that *do* appear, "*Buffy* relies on what have now come to be conventional depictions of racial (and other) marginalized characters, depictions that may appear to be harmless, if one simply blocks out the similar way marginalized characters appear in everyday news discourse" (178). Ono's discussion does not emphasize the fact that the two subjects he examines—Jamaican Slayer Kendra and Incan Mummy Girl Ampata (both from Season 2, played respectively by Bianca Lawson and Ara Celi)—are not just two of the only people of color, but they also happen to be coded as foreign, *non-American* minorities. This trend continues beyond the scope of Ono's article into further seasons with Giles' love interest Olivia (Phine Oruche) and First Slayer Sineya (Sharon Ferguson), both in Season 4, as well as the Chinese Slayer (Ming Liu) in Season 5's "Fool for Love" (5007). The only *American* characters of color within the first six seasons are almost all African-American: in addition to Mr. Trick, cameo speaking appearances are made by obtuse Initiative member Forrest Gates (Leonard Roberts) in Season 4, Dawn's best friend Lisa (Rae'Ven Larrymore Kelly) and the ambulance driver that informs Buffy that her mother is dead (Kevin Kristaldi) in "The Body" (5016) and Nikki Wood (originally played by April Weeden-Washington), the New York slayer in "Fool for Love." [13] These characters are in addition to a number of otherwise "faceless" vampires and demons of color as articulated in Ono's article. Interestingly, there are no Asian-American nor Latino-American characters in Sunnydale, reflecting a mistaken idea that race is "simply black-and-white" without the myriad complexities. [14]

[9] "Once More with Feeling" (6007) begins its racial critique by addressing Ono's notion of the "faceless" black vampires. The only two vampires that the audience sees dusted during the show happen to be African-American—and in this episode, their dusting is conspicuous since both occur at poignant moments lyrically in the opening number "Going Through the Motions": the first dies during the pause in "Nothing seems to penetrate my—heart," while the second explodes in a swirling, mass of dust to reveal Sarah Michelle Geller in a close-up singing the last word of the song, "—alive." That both vampires are black may be coincidence, but their dusting at the opening of the episode serves to remind us of the series' usual treatment of "faceless black demons" in order to upend that notion by the end of Act 1 with the episode's central demon, referred to in the published script as "Sweet." [15]

[10] The episode consistently references either standards intrinsic to the (white-centered) film musical tradition or specific films that follow them: the opening orchestral overture within the credits sequence, the overture, the long camera takes ensuring maximum coverage of the performers' routines, the chimney sweeps in the background straight out of *Mary Poppins*, the complete Technicolor palette displayed through costuming in "Where Do We Go From Here?" similar to "You and I" from *Meet Me in St. Louis*, the disparate voiced rendition of "Walk Through the Fire" reminiscent of the quintet version of "Tonight" in *West Side Story*, even the *Oklahoma!*-inspired ballet in the middle of the episode. Most

explicitly, Xander and Anya's duet, "I'll Never Tell" clearly hearkens back to the 40s-style sexual-battle-through-song-and-dance numbers associated with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and even finishes with a fall onto a sofa that references the closing of "Good Mornin'" from *Singin' in the Rain*. [16] This even causes Anya to despair as she recognizes the "outdated" nature of the tune: "Clearly our number is a retro pastiche that's never going to be a breakaway pop hit." Even when the episode strays from the cinematic nostalgia represented, the musical styles performed by the main cast characters are also fairly "white-centric": the guitar-driven rock behind Anya's "Bunnies" and Spike's "Rest in Peace," the folk-inspired performances by Tara in "Under Your Spell" and Giles in "Standing" and (to use Anya's words) the "breakaway pop" of both of Buffy's major solo numbers, "Going Through the Motions" and "Something to Sing About."

[11] The episode takes a decided turn with the full introduction of Sweet in the jazz-inspired song "What You Feel." By itself, perhaps neither the character nor the performance would be coded as particularly "black" since, although the actor actually *is* African-American, he is completely covered in red makeup and wears ice-blue contact lenses. Within the context of the episode as a whole, however, the differences stand in relief. The song stands apart from the remainder of the soundtrack in two significant ways. First, in referencing jazz, the syncopated rhythms of "What You Feel" call attention to a musical tradition generally overlooked within the film musical, primarily its association with African-American origins. [17] This is also a musical first for the series, which does not generally feature music typically associated with non-white American ethnicities, even those which have nonetheless crossed over into mainstream music, such as hip-hop, reggae, or *corrido*. [18] Sweet also wears an brightly colorful outfit that is something akin to a zoot suit, which was emblematic of an ethnic identity—largely, but not exclusively, Chicano—during World War II. More notable, however, is the quality of actor Hinton Battle's performance. While part of the fascination with the episode is that each of the regular actors actually sings his/her own part (and thereby provides verisimilitude for the concept that a demon is making everyone in Sunnydale sing, whether they can or not), Hinton Battle's vocal quality and performance single him out as the sole professional performer among the cast, displaying why he is a three-time Tony-Award winner singer and dancer. [19]

[12] Battle's singular performance comes dangerously close to what critic Donald Bogle calls "the Negro Entertainment Syndrome," typical of 1940s Hollywood films and particularly evident in musicals, where black characters would be featured performers instead of integral to the narrative: "Rather than include him in the regular plot of the movie and have to stop in the middle of the serving scene while a Negro sang his song, producers introduced specific musical interludes in which the entertainer could perform unhampered by a story line" (119). Hence black characters made quick entrances and exits, but otherwise were featured only as entertainers, not characters. Among other reasons, this made it very simple for theaters who refused to show pictures with black characters, particularly in the South, to cut out the performance sequence

without detracting from the overall plot. The Nicholas Brothers' performance in the Fox non-integrated musical *Down Argentine Way* (1940) serves as a good example of this: far more showstopping than any of the performances by lead actors Betty Grable or Don Ameche, the Nicholas Brothers steal the movie with a superior tap number. Sean Griffin points out that this performance, while not integral to the plot, was nonetheless so important to the success of the film that it was advertised in newspapers giving the time the number would appear. Other black actors of the period, including Lena Horne, Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, also appeared in other musicals of the period in "safe" entertainer roles, with superior performances that rose above but were otherwise isolated from the white-centered plot.

[13] Hinton Battle's performance differs—within both the Buffyverse and the discourse of black entertainers in white musicals—in that Sweet is not just an entertainer but indeed the most powerful character in the episode. Summoned unwittingly by Xander, Sweet uses his powers to affect all characters, human and demon, within Sunnydale; the evil nature of this power is that all the secrets which could not be said are instead sung aloud. Unlike the African-American vampires dusted at the beginning of the episode, Sweet is powerful enough to not let a single act of violence come to him. Even Buffy must *sing* "Life's a Show" rather than simply fight once she encounters Sweet. More to the point, although he is thwarted in his attempt to drag Dawn off as his new bride, *Sweet does not lose*. Although he says "Big smiles everyone, you beat the bad guy," this is stated ironically, punctuated by Sweet's final vamp, the reprise of "What You Feel" which gives the episode its title: "And there's not a one/Who can say this ended well./All those secrets you've been concealing,/Say you're happy now—once more, with feeling." As such, unlike the previous characters of color on the show that are either staked (Mr. Trick and countless "faceless" vampires), dispensed with (Kendra, Ampada, Forrest, Nikki Wood) or simply ambiguously left to fade away (Olivia), Sweet leaves of his own volition. Sweet's presence lingers, however, as evidenced through the cast's needing to sing "Where Do We Go from Here?" even after his departure.

[14] The main characters are left unsteady and shaken up because they must now confront the future with the knowledge obtained from these previously concealed secrets; I would argue that one of these secrets involves the show's previous refusal to address race in the otherwise "blissfully ignorant" previous five seasons. As stated earlier, up until Season 6, characters of color are few and far between; in the final season, however, many more characters of color start to appear in extended, higher profile roles. If the musical episode is a subtle commentary on race, however, this same subtlety is admirably maintained throughout the final season: *Buffy* deals with the race issue by not making it an issue at all by slowly adding significant characters of color to the cast without explicit fanfare. The introduction of Robin Wood, son of former Slayer Nikki, provides a love interest first for Buffy, then for Faith and becomes a major player in the ultimate demise of the First. As noted above, Nikki Wood only finally gains an actual voice when played by K.D. Aubert in Season 7 when she speaks to her son as the First in "First Date" (7014). The same episode also features singer-

actress Ashanti playing Lissa, a young woman whom Xander becomes interested in and tries to date before discovering she is a demon. Most notably, the Potentials (those next-to-be-called) that are summoned to battle in Sunnydale feature not only Slayers of different nationalities (the British Molly and the Chinese Chao-Ahn, played respectively by Clara Bryant and Kristy Wu) but also a number of American races: clearly both Chloe and Rona (played respectively by Lalaine and Indigo) are characters of color (both Latina and black) that play major and complicated supporting roles in the final showdown. [20] It seems as if the show finally commits to addressing the complicated issue of race by simply and subtly developing these new characters that are complex, vulnerable and indeed developed as *characters* rather than as anonymous fodder.

[15] Given Willow's empowerment of *all* potential Slayers in Season 7 and the overall message that Buffy is not as much a superhero as much as channeling a power that all women have inside, Whedon wisely chose to subtly re-address the conspicuous absence of multiple ethnicities on the series through use of the musical genre. While we as audience members "can sing along" with the musical "Kum Ba Ya-Yas" of "Once More, with Feeling," we can also swallow the racial implications that Sweet's outstanding vamp reveals: that characters of color on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are not all "faceless" vampires, "tragic mulattas" or foreign imports, but may also have some memorable power themselves.

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Notes

Special thanks goes to those attending the "Race" panel at the *Slayage* 2004 conference in Nashville and particular thanks goes to Lynne Edwards, Neil Lerner and Ewan Kirkland for fresh ideas to integrate into this essay, as well as to the anonymous *Slayage* reviewers.

[1] According to the 2000 census, 48.3% of California's population is white, 31.5% is Hispanic, 12.5% is Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.7% is black and 1.0% is "other" (State of California, 1).

[2] Although there has been some debate as to whether Charisma Carpenter is Latina, for the purposes of this article, I am labeling her as "white" since the character Cordelia is not coded ethnically.

[3] This article is also not concerned with the addressing of racial problematics with the spin-off show *Angel*, which features the introduction in Season 2 of black character Charles Gunn, played by Panamanian-American actor J. August Richards.

[4] An excellent article, "It May Look Like a Living Room...: The Musical Number and the Sitcom" by Robynn J. Stilwell, traces the history of the musical number within television comedies; however, she dismisses the episode in *Buffy* as being "about magic and fantasy to begin with" without examining the nature of such episodes within television audience reception.

[5] This would also explain the failure of the musical-centered series *Cop Rock*

(1990).

[6] In discussing syntax, I am referencing Rick Altman's seminal work on film genre, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre": "The distinction between the semantic and the syntactic, in the way that I have defined it here, thus corresponds to a distinction between the primary, linguistic elements of which all texts are made and the secondary, textual meanings that are sometimes constructed by virtue of the syntactic bonds established between primary elements" (689).

[7] Likewise, the connection between sex and slaying in *Buffy* is made explicit during Faith's interaction with Xander during "The Zeppo" (3013).

[8] Although Rita Moreno gets a title credit for her co-starring role in *Singin'*, the character Zelda Zanders is not coded as Latina at all; it will not be until her role in 1958's *West Side Story* where she will be identified as a singing, dancing Puerto Rican actor.

[9] Here, "integrated" refers to the type of musical, one where the film's musical numbers are "integrated" into the plot itself.

[10] Some exceptions to this viewpoint of race can be found in Fox's non-integrated musicals (as noted by Sean Griffin in "The Gang's All Here: Generic Vs. Racial Integration in the 1940s Musical"), Paul Robeson's performance in 1936's *Show Boat* and Bill Robinson as Mr. Bojangles in the Shirley Temple vehicles.

[11] The fascinating approach to race used in the spectacles of Fox musicals in thoroughly detailed in Sean Griffin's "The Gang's All Here: Generic Vs. Racial Integration in the 1940s Musical"

[12] Knight later explains *Show Boat*'s otherwise incongruous inclusion in this list: "[*Show Boat*] uses an interracial cast, the members of which interact with one another; it makes several opportunities to comment directly on racist inequities, particularly of opportunity and labor, and it uses the malevolent social construction of racialized and miscegenated identity to drive its secondary plot. At the same time, several aspects of *Show Boat's* structure undermines its progressive features. Most obviously, the black characters disappear as the main plot proceeds. We follow the romantic lead couple of Magnolia and Gaylord Ravenol, and in the face of this need for their story to resolve satisfactorily, the black characters become problems. Julie, the mulatto who sacrifices her own singing career so Magnolia can have an opportunity, is an explicit social, as well as a plot problem; Queenie and Joe ("Old Man River"), who have supported Magnolia and provided her with distinctive musical materials, are excess plot, but also perhaps social baggage. All three are absent at the end…" (22).

[13] Interestingly, little has been written about the Season 4 Thanksgiving episode "Pangs" (4008) which explicitly addresses tensions between Native Americans and the founders of Sunnydale. This episode is referenced by Anya in "One More, with Feeling" when she sings of Xander in "I'll Never Tell": "His penis got diseases from a Chumash tribe." Likewise, no one has addressed the complicated racial dynamics surrounding the Romani character Jenny Calendar (Robia La Morte). Certainly both issues deserve address in future *Buffy* studies concerning race.

[14] Tellingly, the only Asian-American I could find quickly looking through the series is the unnamed girl, played by Korean-American Nicole Bilderback, whose body is quickly drained of blood using the Master's machine in "The Wish" (3009) . . . which is, of course, in a parallel universe.

[15] It is unclear how much the name "Sweet" is meant to be significant. The demon is not named within the episode; when Buffy asks for a name, he replies, "I have a hundred." The online Buffy Trivia Guide indicates an apocryphal origin for the name: "as the credits say 'Sweet [slang for "cool, awesome"] Make-Up By…' everyone assumed the character was named Sweet." However, the published shooting script for the episode indicates the following description for the first entrance of the character at the end of Act 1: "…a man nattily dressed in a retro kind of suit, almost a zoot suit. … No one knows his name, but we will call him SWEET" (16). The name's presence in the script may intentionally reference Melvin Van Peebles' seminal 1970 blaxploitation film *Sweet Sweetback's Baad Asssss Song*, where a black hustler witnesses the beating of an innocent black man by white cops, goes on the run from the police force that is after him and survives the film to become a legend. Though there are few similarities between the film and "Once More, with Feeling" beyond the color of the actors' skin, the episode may be playing on the *Sweet Sweetback*'s revolutionary depiction of a strong black man who does not submit to a white-dominated narrative viewpoint. Van Peebles has said consistently that he made the film to "get the Man's foot out of my ass" and that "To get the Man's foot out of my ass means to me logically to get the Man's foot out of all of our black asses" (12). The film's militantly prophetic final title cards declaring "WATCH OUT – A BAAD ASSSS NIGGER IS COMING BACK TO COLLECT SOME DUES!" was a lightning rod for black-produced pictures, ushering in the era of the "blaxpolitation" film but, more importantly, also Hollywood's recognition of a black audience. The name might also refer to the voodoo-knowledgeable jazz musician Toots Sweet from Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987).

[16] The episode's use of explicit sexual double entendres within the song lyrics, necessary for broadcast television, also relates to Hollywood maneuvering around Hays's Code censors during the 40s and 50s. This is most clearly seen during "I'll Never Tell" (the "tight embrace") and "Under Your Spell" (particularly the syllabic

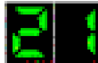
breaking of the last word in Tara's line "surging like the sea/spread beneath my [W]illow tree/You make me complete").

[17] Although several traditional musicals reference jazz – most notably Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* with its George Gershwin song catalog – they are racially "whitewashed," with virtually no black characters performing on screen.

[18] One exception to the use of "non-white" music occurs in "Listening to Fear," when Buffy turns on the radio while washing dishes and listens to salsa. This uncharacteristic music, however, functions as counterpoint: we as viewers are struck by the anomaly that the radio is tuned to such music in the first place (since no one has given any prior indication of affection for Latin music) before we find the happy, peppy beat only heightens the sobbing that Buffy experiences thinking about her mother's illness.

[19] *Sophisticated Ladies*, 1981; *The Tap Dance Kid*, 1984; *Miss Saigon*, 1991. No disrespect is meant to the remainder of the cast with this comment; fans were particularly fascinated by the wonderful vocal talents of Amber Benson, Emma Caulfield and James Marsters – although no one was surprised that Anthony Stewart Head was an excellent singer...and that Sarah Michelle Gellar is, at least musically, not quite the superpower that she is in the show.

[20] This analysis does not include the Potential, and Willow's new love interest, Kennedy who, while not explicitly coded with a particular race in the series, is played by Chicana actress Iyari Limón.



Richard S. Albright

"[B]reakaway pop hit or . . . book number?": "Once More, with Feeling" and Genre

An abbreviated version of this essay was presented to the *Slayage* Conference on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in Nashville, Tennessee, May 2004[1]

> A soundtrack. Of My Musical. It took a year . . . to get it out, but now I have a real soundtrack album of my musical. With endless, pompous liner notes, just like the real thing. This makes it real. It makes it forever.
>
> Joss Whedon, liner notes, "Once More, with Feeling" soundtrack

(1) The Buffyverse, the world in which the characters of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* live, is clearly not our world; yet it exists in close connection to it, and this creative tension between reality and fantasy, between truth and artifice, enhances our interest in the series. To be sure, the fantastic elements of *BtVS* have much the same appeal to us as other examples from the fantasy and science fiction genres. We derive pleasure from what is not real; yet, as J. R. R. Tolkien observed in his landmark 1947 essay, "On Fairy Stories," we can only truly be satisfied by our sojourn into imaginary worlds if such worlds possess "the inner consistency of reality" (Tolkien 47). For us to be able to suspend our disbelief, according to the framework articulated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*, ch. 14), we must be able to transcend our awareness that the world of a drama, or a poem, or a novel is only a representation of reality. The ancient Greeks realized this; hence their emphasis on the dramatic unities of time (all action within a single day), place (all action in one geographic location), and action (no plot digressions). The unities facilitated the escape. We are in a theater watching a play, or a film, or in our easy chair reading a novel, and yet we are able to immerse ourselves within the secondary worlds of literary representation, if they are well crafted.

(2) While suspension of disbelief is required in order for us to fully appreciate a fictional work, the genres of fantasy and science fiction depend on a creative tension between the real and the unreal worlds; the unreality is part of our fascination. Tolkien notes that we enjoy the "arresting strangeness" of fantasy (47-48). Similarly, Darko Suvin accounts for the appeal of science fiction by positing the "interaction of estrangement and cognition" (7-8), the perception of difference between our primary world and the secondary world of the fictional text. The fictional world is not our world; yet it operates in a way that seems

logical, despite the presence of a "'*novum*' (novelty, innovation)" (Suvin 63)—an element of strangeness, such as time travel, alien contact, or an alternate universe. *BtVS*, however, is perhaps unique (at least among television series) in its creative and often explicit exploitation of this tension between the real and the unreal, a tension nowhere more brilliantly depicted than in the musical episode from Season Six, "Once More, with Feeling" (episode 6007). This paper will explore the episode's deployment of the stylized genre of the musical, the way its own dialectic of fantasy and reality represents an analogy to the dialectic between the Buffyverse and our own world and contributes to the Season Six story arc.

(3) Despite its supernatural elements—the existence of vampires, demons, and the Slayer—the Buffyverse partakes of many elements of our world. Aside from its location over a "hellmouth," Sunnydale, California looks and feels as we would expect a real California town to look and feel. When they aren't saving the world, the members of the Scooby Gang deal with the rituals and challenges of adolescence and young adulthood, and despite her high calling, Buffy yearns to live a normal life. The fantastic elements of the series—in Darko Suvin's terminology, its *novum*—are juxtaposed against moments of realism.[2] In fact, series creator Joss Whedon's stated goal was "to create a fantasy that was emotionally completely realistic" (*Fresh Air* interview).

(4) Especially during Season Six, the series employs a network of ironies to manipulate our suspension of disbelief. Sometimes this strategy is obvious and dramatic, as in the episode "Normal Again" (6017), where Buffy hallucinates that she is in a mental institution hallucinating about vampires and her career as the Slayer.[3] A more common (and more subtle) approach is the way that correspondences between the Buffyverse and our world are hyperrealized, not by means of references to current events, but through a sharing of imaginary works between both worlds. This is particularly evident in the Evil Trio story arc. For Warren, Andrew, and Jonathan, the boundary between fantasy and reality is permeable and they seem motivated to make their lives imitate art, to live in the imaginary worlds that supply so much of their dialogue. For example, in "Life Serial" (6005), these adolescent, self-proclaimed "crime lords" argue endlessly about trivia from science fiction films and television series (*Star Wars* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) and comics (*Superman* and *Spiderman*) and they have a lengthy discussion about which actor played the best James Bond.[4] (This isn't the first time such a phenomenon has occurred, nor will it be the last; for example, in "Helpless" [3012], Xander and Oz argue about the effects of various forms of kryptonite upon Superman before Buffy reminds them to concentrate on "reality." And there are at least three references to the *Harry Potter* novels, in "The Real Me" [5002], "Lessons" [7001], and "Empty Places" [7019].) These details correspond to our knowledge of our own world—or at least our own world's fictional representations. The result is that, even though the Buffyverse is imaginary, it stands in the same relation to its own imaginary worlds as our reality does to those *very same* imaginary worlds. These imaginative texts are part of what Tanya Krzywinska terms "cultural vocabulary" (193), and the result of sharing them is the "illusion that the viewer is living in the same cultural space and time as the Scooby Gang" (190). That the Buffyverse has its own fictions gives it depth and complexity, part of the "inner consistency of reality" that Tolkien described. That these fictions are also *our* fictions reinforces our sense that the world of Buffy—despite its supernatural elements—could almost be our own.[5] And the fact that the characters themselves struggle with their acceptance of these supernatural elements further cements their bond with the audience. During the first few seasons, most of Sunnydale's citizens refuse to believe in the existence of vampires and demons, and local authorities exploit this disbelief. For example, in "School Hard" (2003),

Principal Snyder and the chief of police conspire to explain away a vampire attack by invoking "the usual story . . . gang-related. PCP." It's only when denial becomes unsustainable (the "natural" explanation more absurd than the supernatural), that some residents begin to believe the evidence of their senses. Joyce only reluctantly accepts her daughter's role as Slayer at the end of Season Two ("Becoming, Part Two," 2022). For others, however, belief comes more easily. When Oz is told that "vampires are real," a fact that Willow warns him is "hard to accept at first," he responds, "Actually, it explains a *lot*" ("Surprise," 2013).

(5) Besides its juxtaposition of the fantastic and the realistic, *BtVS* is also a generic hybrid. Joss Whedon wanted the series to be a "cull-from-every-genre-all-the-time thing" (*The Onion AV Club* interview). The series gleefully employs conventions from horror Gothic (vampires and demons), from fairy tales (Der Kindestod in "Killed by Death" [2018], Hansel and Gretel in "Gingerbread" [3011], the Gentlemen in "Hush" [6016]),[6] and from science fiction (such as humanoid robots—Ted in Season Two, April and the Buffy-bot in Season Five, and the Trio's freeze and invisibility rays, cerebral dampener, and quantum devices in Season Six),[7] blending these fictive elements with the speech patterns and alternative rock music of our world's popular culture.

(6) *BtVS* also blends the comic and the dramatic, so that light and dark elements and story arcs often coexist, even amid some of the bleakest moments of the series. The Evil Trio's exploits are an excellent example. Their adolescent obsessions with science fiction and their desire to be crime lords and rule Sunnydale are comic, but they soon spiral out of control, resulting in attempted date rape by electronic means, and then murder. But even after Warren's murder of Katrina, and his botched attempt to kill Buffy (Buffy is wounded, and subsequently saved by Willow, but Tara is killed by a stray bullet), we can't help but be amused by some of their juvenile antics—at least those of Jonathan and Andrew, such as when the pair find themselves in the Sunnydale jail. ("The joint changes you," Jonathan melodramatically insists in "Villains" [6020].) And, when Giles returns from England in order to prevent Willow from destroying the world ("Grave," 6022), and Buffy fills him in on what he has missed, he manages to laugh at the absurdity of Buffy's having slept with Spike, a revelation that shocked and horrified most of the Scoobies. These unexpected shifts in mood —"from Dracula to Jack Benny in a heartbeat," as Whedon puts it (referring, in the Director's commentary to "Chosen" [7022] to James Marsters's acting ability) —are a by-product of Whedon's "cull-from-every-genre" approach. *BtVS* rejoices in its postmodern refusal to be pinned down to a single generic formula.

(7) In the context of *Buffy*'s generic hybridity, then, a musical episode seems almost logical, as it affords Whedon a perfect opportunity to play with generic conventions on a more ambitious scale. What is characteristically *Buffy*-like is the way Whedon joyfully and self-consciously manipulates the genre to his own ends.

(8) "Once More, with Feeling," which originally aired on 6 November 2001, begins conventionally enough with a "previously on Buffy" segment[8] followed immediately by opening credits and music that are reminiscent of a 1950s musical. The "previously" thus serves as a transition device from the style of the series as we have come to know it to this point, to the retro style of the musical. The sharply different look of the opening credits signals an abrupt shift in genre, accentuating its hybridity.[9] Uniquely, this generic shift is actually experienced by the inhabitants of the Buffyverse as well as by the audience.

(9) Unlike most musicals, in "Once More, with Feeling," the characters are aware of, and frequently discuss, the musical conceit. Jane Feuer has noted that "a large percentage of early musicals took for their subjects the world of entertainment . . . . 'Putting on a show' was a formula that made breaking into

song and dance plausible, thereby justifying the inclusion of musical numbers in a film" (ix). The so-called "backstage musical" was a film that contained (or "framed") an embedded play, film, or other musical performance, such as a rehearsal. *Showboat* is an excellent example of a backstage musical. Other musicals incorporate singing and dancing as a folk motif. These are usually set outdoors, often in frontier settings, as in *Oklahoma!* But in all these musicals, the characters' awareness of the musical conceit is confined to their attitude toward the embedded object. In other words, they live in a real world; it is the world of the performance that is a fantasy. "Putting on a show" preserves the plausibility of the primary diegesis by enclosing the singing and dancing within a secondary diegesis.

(10) In "Once More, with Feeling," though, there is no secondary diegesis, no separate world of the performance. It is *not* normal behavior for characters to sing and dance, as the previous 106 episodes have demonstrated, and this is much discussed. The opening song sequence depicts Buffy in the graveyard slaying vampires and demons and rescuing citizens.[10] The next day, Buffy asks the other members of the Scooby Gang if anyone else had "burst into song," and all her friends look at her in astonishment for a long moment before everyone begins to talk at once. They had all experienced this, but each believed she had experienced an isolated phenomenon[11]:

> XANDER: Merciful Zeus!
> WILLOW: We thought we were the only ones! It was bizarre!
> GILES: Well, I sang but I have my guitar at the hotel and I often . . .
> TARA: We were talking and then . . . It was like . . .
> BUFFY: Like you were in a musical?
> GILES: . . . of course, that would explain the huge backing orchestra I couldn't see and the synchronized dancing from the room service chaps . . .
> ANYA: Xander and I were fighting about Monkey Trouble.
> BUFFY: You have monkey trouble?
> [. . . .]
> ANYA: And we were arguing and, and then everything rhymed and there were harmonies and the dance with coconuts.
> XANDER: It was very disturbing.

Note Giles's reference to the orchestra and dancing, although his words are nearly impossible to distinguish, in the rush of everyone talking at once. The song "I've Got a Theory" expresses the Scooby Gang's awareness that something unusual is going on and that people do not normally act as if they are in a musical. Indeed, it expresses their resistance to the musical conceit, which is decidedly not typical behavior for characters in a musical. Willow theorizes that "Some kid is dreamin' / And we're all stuck inside his wacky Broadway nightmare," and Willow, Anya, Xander, and Tara even observe that "It's getting eerie," and wonder "What's this cheery singing all about?" Whedon has stated that

> this whole sequence was there very simply to say, "Hey, we're in a musical and we don't like it," because people have trouble accepting musicals . . . . So already they're in the same boat as the audience . . . and that gets you past the biggest problem with musicals that people have, that they just don't buy it. (Director's Commentary to "Once More, with Feeling")

(11) Yet, despite the self-consciousness that this is not normal behavior, even in Sunnydale, there is an intriguing tension between the elaborately stylized

and choreographed conventions of the musical, the sense that this is not real or normal, and the subjects of their songs.[12] Whedon even mocks the seriousness of the genre by including a few songs (sung by bystanders, who are played by David Fury and Marti Noxon, two of *BtVS*'s producers, who have thus entered its diegesis) about subjects that are entirely mundane: a man rejoicing that the dry cleaner has removed mustard from his shirt ("The Mustard"), a young woman arguing with a policeman about a parking ticket ("The Parking Ticket").[13] We soon realize that each of the characters sings what they secretly feel, so the songs represent the real and the true, a truth that is at times painful for the others to hear. In Xander and Anya's duet, "I'll Never Tell," they pointedly do tell, revealing to each other their doubts and fears about their forthcoming marriage, as well as behaviors or physical characteristics that each finds annoying in the other. We see this painful honesty particularly in Buffy, who, in her opening song, reveals that she feels she is only "going through the motions / Walking through the part." This song actually provides a rare opportunity for a direct view of Buffy's inner feelings, as the series seems only rarely to have used the device of the interior monologue, and so we usually know what Buffy is feeling only when she discloses it to the other characters.[14]

(12) When Buffy first reveals to the other Scoobies that she has experienced this singing phenomenon, they ask what she sang about. She pauses, and then says, "I don't remember. But it seemed perfectly normal." Clearly, she remembers, but wants to spare their feelings. (She is "going through the motions" because she has been pulled, not from the "hell dimension" in which Willow was convinced she was trapped, but from what Buffy increasingly comes to regard as heaven.) Near the end of the episode, of course, she reveals the disturbing truth in the song "Something to Sing About."

(13) The second part of Buffy's statement—"it seemed perfectly normal"—is intriguing. Singing and dancing through the graveyard as she slew seemed normal to her. Of course, in a further layering of the ironies, we must remember that Buffy was singing that "I always feel this strange estrangement / Nothing here is real, nothing here is right" ("Going Through the Motions"). Here again, Whedon is toying with the tension between the normal, and behavior that is decidedly not normal, unless you happen to be a theatrical performer. It goes almost without saying that this song erodes the barrier between the actors and the audience, and accentuates our awareness of them as a cast. We seem to partake of some of Buffy's "strange estrangement," in a process reminiscent of Darko Suvin's "interaction of estrangement and cognition." Buffy complains in her song that she feels she is only playing a part. We can't help but be reminded that Sarah Michelle Gellar is also playing a part. The fact that the cast does not consist of professional singers enhances this effect. That is not to say that their singing is unpleasant, and in several cases (Anthony Stewart Head, James Marsters, Amber Benson, and Emma Caulfield), they show obvious talent. However, except for Head (whose roles included *Godspell* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and guest star Hinton Battle (*The Wiz* and *Miss Saigon*, among others), they do not have professional musical theater experience (though, as rising actors, several of them may have appeared in musical productions). In any case, the combined effect is of a group of people for whom singing is not their usual milieu, and this nicely amplifies the unnaturalness of the musical conceit. [15]

(14) The characters' varied responses to the effects of Sweet's spell depict this tension, or perhaps more accurately, slippage, between the real and the represented, as the musical genre strikes them differently. Buffy says that singing and dancing "seemed . . . normal"; Xander found the same phenomenon "disturbing. And not the natural order of things"; Willow and Tara are enchanted by the romanticism of it; and even Dawn is briefly caught up in the novelty of

singing about math in school. And of course there is a layer of irony in the way Whedon has crafted the musical, assigning the serious love theme (and potential breakaway pop hit) to two lesbians (Anya and Xander's own love theme being in a mode that Anya terms "retro pastiche"), but without the fanfare that seems to accompany situation comedies that call attention to their gay characters. There is also a dark side to all this fun: A man dances himself to death via spontaneous human combustion immediately after Dawn says, "Come on, songs, dancing around . . . what's gonna be wrong with that?" Clearly, what is wrong is too much of a good thing. Excessive truth can hurt the feelings of those we love; the excessive energy of our emotions can even kill. As Sweet will later sing, in "What You Feel":

> All these melodies
> They go on too long
> Then that energy
> Starts to come on way too strong
> All those hearts laid open—that must sting
> Plus, some customers just start combusting
> That's the penalty
> When life is but a song.[16]

(15) As the episode progresses, more of the characters' innermost thoughts and emotions are revealed. Sweet's assertion to Dawn that "I know what you feel, girl / I'll make it real" is applied to everyone. Giles reveals to Buffy his anxieties about going away so that she can stand on her own (though she does not hear him, so this, too, functions as the equivalent of an interior monologue ["Standing"]); Spike, who notes that he has seen some "damn funny things" such as a "[s]ix hundred pound Chorago demon making like Yma Sumac," believes that he is immune to the spell, and then, surprising himself, gives the lie to that assertion by revealing to Buffy the ambivalence (or at least frustration) of his love for her ("Rest in Peace"). Tara sings of her discovery that Willow had used magic to make her forget their fight about Willow's too-casual use of magic ("Under Your Spell—Reprise"). Dawn wonders if anyone notices or cares, as she contemplates a necklace that she stole from The Magic Box ("Dawn's Lament").

(16) The character most conscious of the musical conceit is Anya, who makes frequent comments about the various musical styles of the songs, lamenting to Giles that her duet with Xander "was clearly a retro pastiche that's never gonna be a breakaway pop hit." All her comments about the various songs frame her discussion of musical styles in the context of popularity, and depict an insider's view of the discourse of musical theater, an insider's view that emphasizes her awareness of the relationship between theater and the marketplace.[17] Fittingly, Anya's duet with Xander is—possibly excepting the "and you can sing along" lyric in Buffy's "Something to Sing About"—the episode's strongest example of the direct address form (in which one or more characters speak or sing to the audience directly). Virtually all the other songs are either sung to another character ("Rest in Peace," for example, sung to Buffy by Spike); as a form of interior monologue (Buffy's "Going Through the Motions"); a hybrid of these two forms (Giles's "Standing" is sung to Buffy, but she doesn't hear him, so it could be regarded as a monologue); or involve several members of the cast singing together ("I've Got a Theory" and much of "Walk Through the Fire"). But in "I'll Never Tell," both Xander and Anya are clearly addressing the audience. The direct address form simultaneously exposes the artificiality of the musical world and makes the audience a part of it. Feuer refers to this seemingly contradictory phenomenon as a "pattern of demystification and remystification operating in the filming of onstage numbers in backstage

musicals" (43). Demystification and remystification interact exactly as estrangement and cognition do for Suvin. In many musicals, the opening shot will reveal the stage and the surrounding theater audience, and we know that we are viewing a performance. But then the camera focuses on the performers and we become immersed in that secondary reality (Feuer 28). We are (re)mystified when we become part of the illusion of the musical-within-a-musical, viewing the action from the perspective of a member of the theatrical audience. Shots that depict "a more grim reality backstage" (43), shatter that illusion; they are demystifying. According to Feuer, these two contrasting techniques always operate together:

> Demystification splits open the narrative, exposes the world backstage, speaks in the first person. But the narrative gets sutured back together again for the final bow. It is unusual for a number to end on a demystifying shot. The preferred closing shot is a cut or dolly-in to a close-up of the performer, sealed into her third-person reality. (44)[18]

In "I'll Never Tell," there is no illusion-shattering demystification—until the scene immediately following the song, when Anya deconstructs their performance for Giles. "It was like we were being watched . . . Like there was a wall missing . . . in our apartment . . . Like there were only three walls and not a fourth wall." (So immersed in their own quest to unravel the mystery, they seem unaware of all the singing and dancing going on all around them, as street sweepers dance with their brooms and a young woman protests a parking ticket. Or perhaps they have become desensitized to the novelty of such behavior.)

(17) Later, when she learns that Spike has also sung a song, Anya asks if it was "a breakaway pop hit, or more of a book number." Anya's comment may be seen as a form of direct address by Joss Whedon himself, the writer entering his created reality. Describing his exhilaration at the completion of the score for the musical, Whedon enthused, "My head was suddenly filled with visions of greatness. The music would be a phenomenon. 'Under Your Spell' would go straight to the top of the charts! Videos! Soundtrack album! Emmys Emmys Emmys!" (CD liner notes). In her desire for the "breakaway pop hit," Anya wishes to break away from the bounds of her supporting role (which she seems to be conscious of *as* a role), just as Whedon may have wished to transcend the bounds of genre television. Anya demonstrates that in this musical, the characters pointedly do *not* suspend their disbelief.

(18) Just as in "I'll Never Tell," which simultaneously calls attention to its own unreality even as it invites us to be a part of its figurative theater audience, the episode constantly negotiates a tension between the real and the true (which is often hidden) and the fantastic, stylized, and artificial. Yet it's a complicated dialectic and is not always what it seems. As Patricia Pender has noted, "*Buffy* is a television series that delights in deliberately and self-consciously baffling the binary" (35). For example, the songs often contain an ironic subtext, even when the singers are trying to be open and honest, such as Tara's love song to Willow, which ends with her repeating the line, "You make me complete." Yet we know that her joy in her relationship with Willow is based on a notable *in*completeness: Willow's editing of Tara's memory. And even though Xander and Anya express their anxieties about their relationship, Nikki Stafford points out that the pair sing in harmony, which demonstrates that they are "meant to be together" (Stafford 332). Of course, viewed from the perspective of the season as a whole, we see that the doubts they reveal here foreshadow the end of their relationship nine episodes later in "Hell's Bells" (6016).[19]

(19) Fittingly, the most complex emotions belong to Buffy, and her song,

“Something to Sing About”—appropriately “full of syncopated beats and dissonant chords” (Stafford 332)—comes at the episode’s climactic scene. This “reflexive” song (a “[n]umber in which a performer sings and dances *as* he sings about singing and dancing” [Feuer 50]) negotiates the tension between emotional truth and the artifice that glues society together. “Life’s a show,” Buffy begins, “and we all play our parts / And when the music starts / We open up our hearts.” Even those first few lines express an apparent contradiction, between playing parts in a show and opening our hearts, an opening that suggests emotional truth, not playacting. But her next few lines do nothing to resolve the contradiction:

> It’s all right if some things come out wrong
> We’ll sing a happy song
> And you can sing along.

“Wrong” here is clearly ironic, for it is associated with truth, but represents a breach of social propriety that we must remedy by “sing[ing] a happy song.” Buffy goes on to sing a series of clichés as she is punching out Sweet’s minions, but a note of sarcasm is evident; notice also how her frustration at not being able to lead a normal life breaks through in the lyrics:

> Where there’s life there’s hope
> Every day’s a gift
> Wishes can come true
> Whistle while you work
> So hard
> All day
> To be like other girls.
> To fit in in this glittering world.

Backed up by Tara and Anya, she proceeds to articulate her dilemma: “Don’t give me songs / Give me something to sing about.” Buffy needs to *be* happy, not just to *seem* happy, but she can’t take any joy in family and friends because her life is so abnormal that she can’t even *die* and not be brought back (by those same friends). And then comes the revelation of the most painful truth of all, what she had previously confided to Spike must never be revealed to her friends:

> I live in hell
> ‘Cause I was expelled from heaven
> I think I was in heaven.

(20) Her friends, Willow in particular, are stricken with horror. Now Buffy dances faster and faster, and is about to combust, when Spike saves her, and she gets a lesson on living from the undead:

> Life’s not a song
> Life isn’t bliss
> Life is just this: It’s living
> You’ll get along
> The pain that you feel
> You only can heal by living
> You have to go on living
> So one of us is living.

Spike’s prescription is for, not joy, but a continued existence that is reminiscent of the vampire’s life. Vampires do not age or die naturally, but simply continue.

No wonder Angel was reading Sartre's *Nausea* during the "Lovers' Walk" episode (3008)!

(21) Continuing on this joyless note, Sweet goes on to exult in the hurt that the unvarnished truth has caused the Scoobies, observing that

> . . . there's not a one
> Who can say this ended well
> All those secrets you've been concealing
> Say you're happy now—
> Once more, with feeling. ("What You Feel—Reprise")

The episode's title, "Once More, with Feeling," refers to a rehearsal direction to a performer to repeat a song with more emotion, and is obviously meant ironically here. Yet there is truth in Sweet's advice. These characters have certainly hurt each other by some of their revelations. This may be one of the reasons why, at the end, Buffy turns away from the logically true and embraces a different kind of truth, the emotionally true, when she sings "This isn't real / But I just want to feel" and begins an affair with Spike on somewhat false pretenses. (It can be argued that she is up front about her motives, and Spike goes into it with eyes open, seeming to echo her emotionally as well as musically, when he sings "I died / So many years ago / But you can make me feel" ["Coda"].) If Buffy can truly feel, she'll have something to sing about, after all. What the Scoobies need to do is go on living, even if it means embracing the "life's a show" ethic to survive. In a way, what they must do is suspend their disbelief, to follow the advice of Alcoholics Anonymous and "fake it to make it." This resolution is consistent with the Hollywood musical's synthesis of its multiple narrative levels. The primary world of the musical (which is analogous to our own reality) is joined to the secondary world of the show (the play or film within the film). The success of the show leads to the successful resolution of the main plot, usually a romantic plot that is fulfilled through marriage—or at least the romantic union of the lovers (Feuer 67-85). Whedon even calls attention to the conventional nature of this resolution with the lyric "The curtains close on a kiss— / God knows / We can tell the end is near" ("Where Do We Go From Here?"), a lyric that is heard from offstage, from within the Bronze, just before Buffy and Spike make it come true.

(22) To be sure, there are some elements of this episode that make our own suspension of disbelief problematic. Sweet seems to concede too readily at the end, after all the mayhem he has caused, and the seriousness with which he had regarded his contest with Buffy and her friends. The episode seems conscious of this shortcoming; Giles notes in the song "Where Do We Go From Here?" that "we kinda won." (This somewhat unsatisfactory and qualified victory might be regarded as a moment of realism, however, since it is more akin to the kinds of victories we experience.) And the explanation for Sweet's summoning in the first place—not so much Dawn's stealing of the amulet, but Xander's confession that he "thought there were going to be dances and songs" is not very well developed.[20]

(23) But even these shortcomings can be forgiven in the context of the larger issues the episode raises. In addition to the dialectic between reality and fantasy, as already discussed, the relationship of "Once More, with Feeling" to the series as a whole makes an interesting statement about genre. In *BtVS*, as noted by Philip Mikosz and Dana C. Och, the real "'unit' of discussion," (thus the genre) is not the individual episode, but the series. This is true of all television serials, but Joss Whedon takes this a step further. Roz Kaveney points out that *BtVS*'s "use of foreshadowing and echo across seasons indicated a real commitment to, and respect for, the intelligence of its viewers" (2), later commenting on the "subtle[ty]" of some of the "continuity points" (36) that are sometimes separated

by several seasons.[21] This reflects a great deal of planning on Whedon's part as he envisioned at least some of the major developments of the series several years ahead.

(24) "Once More, with Feeling" was a long time in the making. Whedon grew up with a love for the musical genre and was inspired by the idea of producing a musical episode of *BtVS* during the fall of Season Five when he had the cast and crew over to his house for one of his Sunday evening Shakespeare readings and discovered their musical talents during a sing-along around the piano. By the end of Season Five, he already had the first few episodes of Season Six planned and knew that the musical would be the sixth episode,[22] which he wrote over the summer. Whedon was adamant that the episode must advance the "emotional arc" of the season, and that the songs must be married to the plot; he stated that he "get[s] very cranky about TV shows that do musical episodes that are basically variety shows where they play a scene and then they'll sing an oldie that has something vaguely to do with the scene, but the scene is over already" (*The Script Book* 63-64). Clearly, he prefers the classical Hollywood musical to the teen musicals of the 1980s (such as *Flashdance* and *Dirty Dancing*) which rely on "non-diegetic" music (Feuer 130).

(25) Whedon seeks a kind of continuity that is often missing when a generic experiment is employed for nothing more than the effect itself. He never loses sight of the fact that the series is the true genre, not the individual episode, and Whedon has stated that he always envisioned the series as being "like a novel" (*Fresh Air* interview). This makes M. M. Bakhtin's theories of the novel especially relevant to our purposes. In "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin notes that:

> [t]he novel permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra-artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others) . . .
>
> Each of these genres possesses its own verbal and semantic forms for assimilating various aspects of reality. The novel, indeed, utilizes these genres precisely because of their capacity, as well-worked-out forms, to assimilate reality in words. (Bakhtin 320-21)

In the case of "Once More, with Feeling," the musical genre is incorporated into the series and provides its own assimilation of reality. The episode transforms the reality of the series by transmitting the reality of the musical. It makes possible some plot developments that would be difficult to accomplish by other means. For example, Buffy unwillingly transcends her inability to tell anyone but Spike that the reason she is so depressed is because she feels her friends pulled her from heaven when they resurrected her. This is rendered plausible by the device of the spell that compels her to sing about it. Her resistance enhances our awareness of her inner turmoil. Indeed, the musical form depicts emotional conflict with an intensity greater than can usually be represented in narrative television. Spike's conflicting feelings for Buffy are vividly and dramatically expressed in the song "Rest in Peace," as he simultaneously wants her to leave him alone and keeps following her. These feelings are summed up even more succinctly, later, by the lines, "I hope she fries / I'm free if that bitch dies / I'd better help her out" ("Walk Through the Fire"). Such revelations reverberate throughout the entire season. Also, getting Spike and Buffy together, but clearly

in a way that suggests it is not true love (at least not on Buffy's side) is accomplished very efficiently through the musical shorthand of this episode. As Whedon has remarked, "[a] musical is a chance for people to express things they couldn't otherwise express" (Director's Commentary to "Once More, with Feeling").

(26) One reason that the musical format seems to work so well is that, despite its artificiality, we "assimilate [its] reality." We have certain expectations about the musical genre that we "buy into" as a result of our familiarity with the genre's conventions and traditions. One of these is the storybook romantic ending that we might not have accepted so readily in a nonmusical format. (We suspend our disbelief.) We also accept as a matter of course that music operates in the affective realm and often conveys one's true, inner emotions.[23] As Feuer notes, "In becoming song, language is in a sense transfigured, lifted up into a higher, more expressive realm" (52). This makes the musical genre a good fit for an episode in which several characters have secrets that are troubling them, but which they fear to disclose because such revelations would hurt others' feelings. (These range from the serious, that is, Buffy's true feelings about coming back to earth, to the more comic, e.g., Xander and Anya's fears about their impending marriage.) And the very artificiality of the characters' experience—their awareness of being in a world that is one step removed from their own reality—is strikingly akin to our own vicarious experience of the Buffyverse. They experience the interaction of estrangement and cognition even as we do.[24]

(27) "Once More, with Feeling" accomplishes two goals. It makes possible an elaborate dialectic on fantasy and reality, through the plot device of Sweet's curse that the residents of Sunnydale must sing their true feelings, as well as through the incorporated genre of the musical and its own particular way of assimilating reality. And, as Whedon intended, the episode unites several themes that had been established in the first few episodes of the season and moves the emotional arc of the season forward. As befits a series that so delights in transcending binary oppositions, "Once More, with Feeling" is at once *both* "breakaway pop hit" and "book number." The episode has been enormously popular on its own, but, as Whedon noted, that was not his primary goal; he wanted to advance the story arc. *The Script Book*'s glossary of musical terms defines a book number as "a musical piece written largely to progress the plot, as opposed to a stand-alone number that can be understood separate from the larger work and released to the general public" (59). "Once More, with Feeling" facilitates plot developments such as Buffy's revelation of her true feelings about coming back from the grave and the beginning of her romantic connection with Spike. In accomplishing both objectives—breakaway pop hit as well as book number—the episode transcends the limitations of its genre in a way that is unique and enormously pleasurable.

(28) For Whedon, the soundtrack album and its "endless, pompous liner notes" assimilate reality. For *Buffy* fans, the appeal of "Once More, with Feeling" is the same as that of the series. We love its fusion of emotional truth and "arresting strangeness." This unique blend "makes it real."[25]

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Notes

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[1]I wish to thank Rhonda Wilcox for her encouragement and her many helpful suggestions as I developed this essay, and in particular for directing me to Jane Feuer's *The Hollywood Musical*, an excellent resource.

[2]During the first few seasons of the series, while Buffy is a high school student, critics such as Tracy Little have interpreted her supernatural encounters as metaphoric representations of the high school experience. See "High School is Hell: Metaphor Made Literal in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*.

[3]Buffy's revelation to Willow that her parents had sent her to "a clinic" for "a couple of weeks" after she had first told them that she had been seeing vampires, and her tearful questions, "What if I'm still there? What if I never left that clinic?", amplify the uncanny quality of this episode.
[4]Andrew is still arguing that Timothy Dalton is under-appreciated in this role in "Showtime" (7011).

[5]In addition to the cultural similarities between Sunnydale and our own world, Karen Sayer notes that *BtVS*'s use of commercial products, such as Willow's Macintosh Powerbook, lends authenticity to the Buffyverse. See Sayer.

[6i]Even these examples illustrate the eclecticism of Whedon's generic borrowings. Of the three episodes cited, only "Gingerbread" utilizes recognizable fairy tale figures—Hansel and Gretel—although with a twist, as they're revealed to be a single demonic entity; moreover, the episode owes as much to popular conceptions of the Salem witch trials as to fairy tale narratives. "Killed by Death" and "Hush" are constructed from plot devices and villains typical of the genre, but, notwithstanding the prominent display of Giles's book of *Fairy Tales* in "Hush," these episodes aren't based on actual fairy tales. Note that in "Gingerbread," Giles's explanation that "some regional stories have actual, um, very literal antecedents," is quickly simplified by Oz to "fairy tales are real," further conflating fantasy and reality.

[7]Both the Trio and Willow blend knowledge of science with knowledge of magic.

(Andrew Aberdein has discussed Willow as an adept in both science and magic [85]). In both cases, they begin with a strong grounding in technology, and eventually extend their toolsets to the use of magic. Willow sometimes net-surfs for information by interfacing telepathically, which is more efficient for her; and the Trio blend superscience and the supernatural, as when they use the the "musk gland of a Homja-Maleev demon" to "charge" their "cerebral dampener" ("Dead Things," 6013).

[8]Whedon's script maintains that this is not actually a teaser, but just a "previously."

[9]The Season Six DVD collection is consistent with DVDs from previous seasons. The American version omits the teasers, so some of the emphasis on generic hybridity is lost.

[10]The original broadcast ran about eight minutes long, and a few scenes were cut for subsequent broadcasts and syndication, including a few opening "wordless scenes" (*The Script Book*) while the overture played over the credits. In both versions, "Going Through the Motions" is the first song sung by a member of the cast.

[11]There are slight differences in dialogue between the published version of the script and the episode as it actually aired. (Even the DVD's sub-titles do not seem to include all the overlapping dialogue in this scene). In scenes such as this one, where the dialogue consists of several characters all speaking at once, it is very difficult to discern all the words with complete accuracy. Accordingly, I have chosen the published *Script Book* as the most authoritative source, since it is the officially licensed text. In order to be consistent, I have used the official script throughout this paper, unless dialogue differences between the broadcast and published versions are obvious and essential to the discussion. However, for song lyrics, I have used the CD insert as my authoritative source, since it corresponds more accurately to the songs as recorded than *The Script Book*.

[12]Among the many musical conventions, we observe that there are a variety of musical styles, that certain melodic themes, or leitmotifs, are associated with specific characters and recur, and that themes are sometimes reconfigured or interwoven with others in counterpoint. (Chris Neal has suggested that "Once More, with Feeling" does not really employ leitmofis so much as what he terms "leit*styles*," with certain musical styles associated with specific characters and races). The first two characteristics are self-evident. A fine example of counterpoint occurs in the Tara/Giles duet when they both reprise former solos, Tara singing "Under Your Spell" to Willow at the same time that Giles sings "Standing" to Buffy. Each of the two singers seems unaware of the other (the script direction says that they are "unheard by everyone, even each other" [*The*

Script Book]); their songs are joined on the word “believe” (Tara’s “You made me believe” evolves into “Standing” when Giles sings “Believe me I don’t wanna go”) and they harmonize for the rest of the song. “Walk Through the Fire” interweaves the voices of most of the characters and elements of many of the songs in the show. This technique whereby several characters are singing different lyrics at the same time is a common feature of musical theater, and is usually used to bring the action toward a climactic moment.

Another convention typical of the genre is the use of allusions to musicals of the past. “Once More, with Feeling”’s many “quotations,” as Jane Feuer calls them, encompass virtually all the components of musical film, including plot developments, song lyrics and styles, orchestration, choreography, and cinematography. Whedon notes, for example, that Buffy’s “Going Through the Motions” is self-consciously in the Disney musical tradition; he characterizes the song as an expression of what is missing in her life, one of a class of “I want” songs reminiscent of those sung by Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* and Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. The closeup of Buffy’s face through the dust of the slain vampire was deliberately designed to suggest what Whedon calls “two classic Disney moments,” the revealing of the face and a shot of swirling leaves. Similarly, Whedon calls “I’ll Never Tell” “my Astaire/Rogers feeling kind of number” (DVD Director’s Commentary).

[13] Michael Adams has pointed out that the young woman's song, though mundane, expresses a universal plea when she sings “I think I've paid more than my share.”

[14]One of the few examples of the interior monologue is Dawn’s voicing her thoughts as she writes in her journal in “The Real Me” (5002). Another is Xander’s talking to himself from time to time in “The Zeppo” (3013). Angelus’s narration in “Passion” (2017) employs a similar technique.

[15]Feuer observes that, in many Hollywood musicals, the professional entertainers play the roles of amateur performers. According to Feuer’s analysis, the players’ amateur status helps dissolve some of the characteristics of professionalism (including its economic motives) that may distance the performer from the audience. The resulting performances are therefore rendered more “natural and spontaneous” (14). At first glance, Feuer’s point seems contrary to mine, but I am suggesting that the very unnaturalness of the Scoobies’ singing makes the effect more natural. This seeming contradiction is consistent with Feuer’s explanation of demystification and remystification, discussed below.
[16]In a discussion of a 1955 MGM film, *It’s Always Fair Weather,* that hauntingly anticipates the situation in “Once More, with Feeling,” Jane Feuer states “We begin to see the dangerous undercurrent to the musical’s wholehearted endorsement of spontaneous energy” (108).
[17]Anya’s zealous capitalism has been developing since early in Season Five (“The Real Me,” 5002), when her experience with a classic board game, *The Game of Life*, taught her that money was good, and of course continues during her proprietorship of The Magic Box. Evidently Anya’s ideology has shifted; in a

flashback scene set in St. Petersburg in 1905, she remarks to Halfrek that, "The worker will overthrow absolutism and lead the proletariat to a victorious communist revolution, resulting in socio-economic paradise on earth. It's common sense, really" ("Selfless," 7005).

[18]Rhonda Wilcox also cites part of this passage in "'Singing and Dancing and Burning and Dying.'" She goes on to discuss the way the episode's orchestral arrangement of the opening theme and the visuals of the titles and actors serve a demystifying function.

[19]Nothing on *Buffy* is ever that simple, of course. Even after Xander leaves Anya at the altar in "Hell's Bells," the renegotiation of the terms of their relationship proceeds during a good part of Season Seven, when Anya temporarily returns to the vengeance fold, and on at least one occasion she and Xander have sex ("Storyteller," 7016). There's an appropriate musical coda to "I'll Never Tell" in the "Selfless" episode (7005), when vengeance demon Anyanka, in the midst of her battle with Buffy, flashes back to 2001 (the year of "Once More, with Feeling") and sings the song "Mrs.," which celebrates her then anticipated union with Xander. This song reveals Anya's conviction that a life without Xander is a life without meaning and purpose. ("I've boned a troll / I've wreaked some wrath / But on the whole / I've had no path.") See also Wilcox in "Singing and Dancing" on "Once More with Feeling" as extending through the series via the "Selfless" episode, for example.

[20]This has always been the biggest flaw in the narrative logic for me. No possible explanation seems to satisfy. It's hard to believe that Xander could fail to see the connection between some conscious action on his part (a ritual of some kind? Simply acquiring the amulet in the first place? From where?) and the events that transpire. To suggest that he doesn't realize his part until he sees the amulet around Dawn's neck at the Bronze defies credibility. Yet if he did realize that his action (which we never see) had brought about Sweet's advent, why did he allow the Scoobies to continue their research without a hint of a confession, especially when people began to die? Xander's own frustration with the phenomenon, in the scene after "I'll Never Tell," certainly seems genuine, so this is a conundrum. I suspect it's a narrative thread that Whedon did not have time to fully develop, which is not surprising, since the episode ran long as it was. Curiously, the Director's Commentary on the DVD edition, which is comprehensive in its attention to the details of the episode (including pointing out lines in songs that Whedon considered weak), gives no indication that Whedon regards Xander's explanation as in any way deficient.

[21]A good example is the numerology in the dream imagery of several episodes that apparently foreshadowed Dawn's arrival two years before it took place. See Keller, and Wilcox, "T.S. Eliot Comes to Television."

[22]Whedon was counting "Bargaining" (6001-6002) a double-length episode that aired 2 October 2001, as one.

[23]This association of music with emotional truth is a long-standing tradition. No less a cynic than Huckleberry Finn even proves subject to it. In the midst of a funeral sermon by that notorious con-man known as "the king," a speech "full of tears and flapdoodle," Huck contrasts the "rot and slush" of the king's lying words with music:

And the minute the words was out of his mouth somebody over in the crowd struck up the doxolojer, and everybody joined in with all their might, and it just warmed you up and made you feel as good as church letting out. Music *is* a good thing, and after all that soul-butter and hogwash, I never see it freshen up things so, and sound so honest and bully (Twain 138).

[24]The very next episode in the series, "Tabula Rasa" (6008) continues the exploration of these issues via a different generic formula—the amnesia story. When Willow casts a spell to make Buffy forget that she had been in heaven, her spell misfires and affects the whole Scooby Gang. The characters don't know who, or even what, they are, but the audience does. The gang's assumptions about their identities and relationships are sometimes comically off-base (as in the hypothesis that Giles and Spike are father and son), and sometimes comically on-target. (Willow's "I'm all sweaty and trapped, no memory, hiding in a pipe from a vampire . . . And I think I'm kinda gay" is a fine example of an unexpectedly accurate perception, and will remind attentive fans that Willow uses exactly the same words—"And I think I'm kinda gay"— to refer to her vampire self from an alternate reality in "Doppelgängland," 3016.) And Buffy's statement, as they are attacked by vampires, that, "Monsters are real. Did we know this?" reprises the whole issue of what we do and do not know.

[25] At the *Slayage* Conference in Nashville, I closed my presentation of this paper with two verses in the mode of "Something to Sing About," the first to the tune of Buffy's part, and the second to Spike's:

> It's a show
> The soundtrack makes it real
> Its truth is what you feel
> And this will end my spiel.
>
> How does it fit?
> "Once More" is more
> Than a book number bit
> It's a pop hit—
> A breakaway pop hit.