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

- [Lydia Chalmers' Spike Thesis](#)
- [Anthony Bradney, \*Choosing Laws, Choosing Families: Images of Law, Love and Authority in \*Buffy the Vampire Slayer\*\*](#)
- [Cynthia Fuchs, \*Getting His Due\* \(on Season Four of \*Angel\*\)](#)
- [Matthew Pateman, "You Say Tomato": Englishness in \*Buffy the Vampire Slayer\* \(in \*Cercles: Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone\*; Acrobat Reader required\)](#)
- [Donna Potts, \*Claddagh Rings, Convents, and Even the Book of Kells: Representing the Irish in \*Buffy the Vampire Slayer\*\* \(in \*Simile: Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education\*\)](#)



**Alice Jenkins and Susan Stuart**

**Extending Your Mind:  
Non-Standard Perlocutionary Acts in "Hush"**

**Abstract**

In the context of a series remarkable for its interest in linguistic expression and its exploration of the formal possibilities of dialogue and metaphors for dialogue (such as fights), "Hush's" experiment with non-vocal forms of communication demands critical attention. Analysis of this episode reveals dense patterns of authority, community and convention which interplay among characters and between characters and audience. Through a speech act theory-based examination of the public and private language games that are being played, and the uses of vocal and non-vocal communication, we identify examples of non-standard perlocutionary acts and the roles that these acts play in extending the agent's mind into their environment.

**Introduction and Part One**

(1) "Hush," the tenth episode in season four of *Buffy*, silences speech for its central twenty-five minutes. In place of the normal processes of linguistic activity, characters are obliged to communicate by writing down or acting out their thoughts and feelings. Their speech acts become acts of writing. In this essay we want to explore how speech act theory can be extended to communication in non-spoken form. Speech act theory is a philosophical description of linguistic utterances which has been adopted and adapted by literary critics and theorists for the analysis of (usually) prose narratives. In its original form, in John Austin's seminal *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), speech act theory insists that successful analysis of sentences must understand them within the context of the circumstances in which they are uttered--for example, who is speaking to whom and on what occasion. But Austin is anxious about what he terms "parasitic" or non-serious contexts, specifically excluding acting from the contexts in which some kinds of speech act can be said to take place: "a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy" (21-22). This is because in these kinds of context it is unclear whether the person speaking contributes intention to what is being spoken. An actor can speak a line without "intending" its meaning herself; the person who did the "intending" is either the author of the line, or the imaginary character the actor is playing. But in literary criticism since Searle, for example in Mary Louise Pratt's 1977 *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, speech act theory has been extended so as to be applicable to contexts in which intention is similarly complicated, including both the dialogue of characters within a written fiction and the narration itself. At its simplest level, this form

of criticism considers the written sentences that form, say, the third-person narration in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, to be a kind of "speech" on the part of the narrator and thus open to a similar kind of analysis as sentences spoken by a person during a conversation in the extra-textual world. Equally, where the narrator is intradiegetic (i.e., a character within the fiction itself, as for instance Esther Summerson in Dickens' *Bleak House*), his/her utterances can be treated in the same way as the speeches of non-narratorial characters, and analyzed as if the characters were holding a conversation in the world beyond the text. Whether we consider *Buffy* as speech (because of its use of dialogue) or as writing (because its dialogue is scripted by someone other than the character supposed to be speaking it), then, speech act theory can be used as a theoretical tool for analyzing the utterances of the characters.

(2) The remarkable stylistic feature of "Hush," of course, is that utterances are not spoken, but written, despite the fact that both the "speaker" and the "listener" are present at the moment of utterance. Classically, writing has been thought of as a mediation or extension of speech, to be substituted for it in circumstances where the speaker and listener are not both present at the same time. Such a model has tended to conceptualize speech as primary and writing as secondary. Thus, Saussure argued that "language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first" (23). This is characteristic of the privileging of speech over writing that Derrida identifies as phonocentric and hence logocentric, that is, as privileging presence over absence. Writing, in the classical model, is for situations determined by absence and, Derrida suggests in "Signature Event Context" (1971), therefore "carries with it predicates which have been subordinated, excluded, or held in reserve [...]" (329). [1] The iconic moment of writing in "Restless" (the final episode in season four), when Willow inscribes--or, to use Derrida's term, iterates--one of Sappho's odes on Tara's skin, puts the eeriness of writing in the context of presence to erotic use. In "Hush," writing with the addressee present invokes agape rather than eros (as when Giles responds with a consoling embrace to Willow's uncommunicative but phatic message "Hi Giles"). Throughout its silent portion, "Hush" pits the authority of writing against the immediacy of speech, questioning the value of the associations the characters and audience make with each kind of interaction.

(3) Although "Hush" is certainly a particularly interesting example of how the series investigates the kinds of effects that speech can have in and on the world, it is by no means unique in having this concern. Throughout the series, speech acts are under scrutiny because they are part of the fundamental rules of the Buffyverse. In the episode preceding "Hush," "Something Blue," Willow works a spell which aims to invest her spoken words with the power to change the world in accordance with her will. Her spell goes awry so that it is only her expressions of insecurity or resentment that acquire this power, resulting in mishaps for all the Scooby Gang. Willow has attempted to give her speech acts radical perlocutionary force, or extreme power to alter reality. One of her experiments with this extreme power is to order a book to speak its words to her, but the book stubbornly remains silent. Following the denouement in which Willow renounces her power of changing the world by speaking her desires, she appears wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Speak No Evil," a text written on her body contradicting her former speech practices. This sets the scene for "Hush," in which evil cannot be spoken, because evil is the absence of speech, and in this absence writing takes over.

(4) At least for the first five seasons, *Buffy* operates within an economy of textuality, in which writing, reading, and replicating texts is the principle means of exchange within the human realm. But, as a rule, the operations of this textual economy are made clear to the reader via conversation. It is through the Scooby Gang's dialogue that we learn what texts are being received and investigated and what results are being achieved. Of course, television shows rarely ask viewers to read more than a few words direct from the

screen; reading has to be mediated via voice-over or via the characters; but in *Buffy* central characters spend immense amounts of time reading, on-screen as well as off, and this investment in reading is signaled to the audience via spoken commentary. William Wandless is right to insist on the affective structure of the "research" scenes in *Buffy*: "research [in the first three seasons] offered *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a degree of internal unity: the team rendezvous in the library regularly served as a kind of familiar, and often comfortingly familial, intermission between an initial encounter with a threat and the informed response to follow" (para. 2). But the emotional effect of these scenes is a product of their emphasis on the social. The Gang read together, asserting the comfort of presence in the face of the disconcerting absence that characterizes the written text. As viewers we are hardly permitted to recognize this absence; we rarely see more than a glimpse of the pages of the books in Giles' library. We are allowed to see a woodcut of the current monster far more often than we are allowed to read text about it. Instead we rely on dialogic interchanges between the characters about the subject of their reading. We enter the textual economy of the Buffyverse at the stage where written tokens are being exchanged for oral ones, preparatory to the final exchange into violence.

(5) "Hush" is perhaps the most important single episode in the *Buffy* canon in terms of dealing with the operations of this textual/conversational economy. It inverts the usual sequence of exchange so that instead of reading and writing becoming manifest to the viewer through conversation, conversation is translated into reading and writing experiences which are made as available to the viewer as to the characters. This inversion is the result of an invasion by what are named to us, in writing, as "fairy tale monsters." The characters never ask, and we never learn, how these monsters have made their way out of textuality into actuality, but they impose the silence of the written text on Sunnydale, stealing all human voices in order to facilitate their work of stealing seven human hearts. [2] This cardio-theft is a grisly parallel to the romantic entanglements in which all the Scooby Gang find themselves during this episode, a warning to those considering giving their hearts to loved ones. This is a typically *Buffy* metaphor, of a kind which we are, by this fourth season, adept in spotting and "reading." But "Hush" is also doing much more specific work than these large-scale metaphors usually do. In this essay we focus on "Hush" as an extraordinarily dense and rich set of arguments about the manifestations of language in different kinds of community.

(6) "Hush" is not the only episode in which conversation is translated into writing. There are examples in earlier seasons of writing standing in for speech, but these instances are localized and a matter of conforming to social convention. For instance, in "Lie to Me" Willow and Buffy pass each other notes about Drusilla during class; they obey what we assume must be a rule or at least a convention enforcing silence during lessons. But the prolonged, enforced absence of speech in "Hush," affecting the whole of Sunnydale, causes a breakdown in social convention. Indeed, this breakdown is so severe that Riley and the Initiative are mobilized to maintain order in a town which has withstood countless demonic onslaughts but which descends into anarchy, drunkenness, and religious mania in a matter of hours when deprived of the power of conversation. A shot of a broken fire-hydrant jetting water high into the air stands as a metaphor for the fountains of speech which usually characterize Sunnydale social life, but also signals a slide into urban dereliction and social decay.

(7) At the beginning of "Hush," Buffy experiences a spontaneous dream vision of a little girl, possibly her own childhood self, chanting a rhyme about "the Gentlemen." This rhyme and a fairy tale later found in a book belonging to Giles constitute the only authoritative accounts of the supernatural events which take place in this episode. Before the rhyme can be made available to the Scooby Gang and hence useful as a source of information, though, it must be converted into a text. The way in which this is done is an interesting example of how "Hush" reverses the normative process of information

exchange. Buffy receives the words in spoken form, dictates them on the telephone to Giles, who transforms them into writing, which we later see him reading both aloud and silently. When this written text is briefly made visible to the viewer, we see that it has become a palimpsest, the rhyme overwritten with annotations, suggestions and notes, including, interestingly but surely misleadingly, the word "political." [3] This document has become a kind of conversation, text interrogating and commenting on itself in a way that parallels the usual spoken conversations between the characters.

(8) Being unable to speak certainly seems to complicate the notion of presence and absence. Enforced silence affects subjectivity by damaging one's sense of being fully present in a given social situation. Does being able to write compensate for this damage? Does it re-stabilize the presence-absence binary which silence attacks? In the lecture sequence in "Hush," Giles uses a series of overhead projector slides he has prepared which combine writing and images to provide the Scooby Gang with essential information about the nature and aims of the Gentlemen, including the vital fact that they can be stopped by the sound of a human scream. His slides communicate this information to the viewer as well as to the Gang; we are (for once) given equal access to the texts. Towards the end of his presentation Willow interjects with a suggestion, made via gestures, that a recorded scream could be used. But Giles has evidently foreseen this suggestion, since his next slide indicates that only "live" sound will be effective. A recorded scream would be analogous to writing in Derrida's sense in that it remains intelligible despite the absolute disappearance (or death) of both the original screamer and the people to or at whom s/he was screaming. It survives the death of its context, in other words, and this is why it will not do the work of the "live" scream, which is context-specific and which reasserts the power of presence.

## Part Two

(9) In the second part of this essay we intend to examine the use of non-standard forms of speech acts and how they are used as extensions of an individual's mind as a means of communicating complex and, or, subtle information to the audience and to themselves. We begin by examining the nature of different forms of speech acts [4] and how they, but especially perlocutionary acts, are adapted or developed within the silent episode "Hush." We then look briefly at their overall use within the language games manifested between different pairs of individuals and within distinct groups.

## Speech Acts--a quick recap

(10) This is, by now, familiar territory, but a brief iteration of the main features of speech acts cannot go amiss. There are three general types of speech act: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. The first, locutionary acts, are simply the organization of phonemes and words into a recognizable and coherent shape. It must be something other than simply a riot of sounds or the babble of a pre-linguistic child. Willow describes the Wicca meeting in "Hush" as a "babblefest," but not because the utterances are incoherent--they are, in fact, well-formed English sentences--but rather because the language being used conveys little if any meaning in that context. The language game that Willow – and Tara – expect in the Wicca meeting is so far from the girl scout or woman's fellowship language game that they actually experience that they recoil from it in simple amusement.

(11) An illocutionary act is a locutionary act that goes one step further; it does something in the world. A statement like "I thee wed" fits the bill perfectly. It makes a statement, thus declaring that the world is in such-and-such a state, and it performs an action, pronouncing a couple to be married.

(12) The third category – perlocutionary action – is the one with which we are most

concerned in the current essay. An utterance that has, for example, an effect on a listener or reader's behavior is deemed to be simultaneously an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act. All perlocutionary acts are also illocutionary, but that not all illocutionary acts are also perlocutionary. The command "You may kiss the bride" is a perlocutionary act. It is an utterance made by someone in authority to effect a change in the behavior of others, and when Anya exclaims to Xander "You don't care about what I think," she is making a declaration, but it is one which she hopes will affect him, urging him to respond in a certain way. Thus her utterance has both an illocutionary and a perlocutionary force.

(13) But not all speech acts need be spoken directly by a character; they can, for example, be spoken by a narrator in order to convey information to the audience in a sort of theatrical aside, or they can be written messages used to communicate with other characters, with the audience and, we shall argue, with the self. In "Hush" a great deal of the information, the commands, the demands and the promises have to be conveyed by some other means than the spoken word. In the sort of twist we have come to expect, the entire population of Sunnydale has had their means of producing sound siphoned from them. In Sunnydale nobody can hear you scream; nor, for that matter, can they hear you explain what you think is happening, who you suspect might be behind it, or what you think should be done about it. [5]

(14) We would all agree that communication is a difficult and dangerous business. There is such a rich array of mental or intentional states to be imparted, and a misconstruction on the part of the audience or listener is always possible, and even more likely when there is a disruption in the linguistic convention. When the Scooby Gang are rendered speechless they have no medium through which to express the complexity of what they are experiencing and, in their silence, they are momentarily unable to act. We quickly discover that the Gentlemen's strength, silence, is the Scooby Gang's weakness. The Gentlemen have no variety of intentional states that have to be communicated: they have only one aim which is made clear in the form of, seemingly, polite gestures to all who matter, and helpfully unclear to those who do not. The Gentlemen's language is private, and the only way that question of the nature of their existence can be resolved is if the Scooby Gang can fracture the privacy and disrupt their language game.

(15) But there is much more going on here and we should also note that having a "voice" can have a unique set of ontological implications. Characters who do not or cannot speak are not really there. They are peripheral and we, as audience, invest little interest in their progress. But there is something more subtle about the connection between having a voice and existing. The Gentlemen have no voices, they make no sound when they walk, they communicate by gesture alone, and they do not exist in any strong empirical sense. They are characters from a fairy tale existence with a transient ontology. They do not simply exist in some antirealist sense when we perceive them, nor do they exist in some empirically real way, for things with an empirical reality have a genesis and the Gentlemen do not; instead they possess a sort of quasi-realism [6], existing and being able to terrorize only while the people of Sunnydale cannot speak.

(16) Attempts to break the enforced silence begin with message boards, and develop into pictures, newspapers with red circles providing emphasis, body language and overheads; all of which stand in – with unequal efficiency – as utterances, and thus speech acts. But this is a curious episode which plays energetically with the visual voice substitutes, and there are a number of interesting non-standard forms of perlocutionary act that we ought to consider more closely.

## **Non-Standard Forms of Perlocutionary Act**



(17) In the first category we have the gestures of the Gentlemen which have an unambiguous perlocutionary force even if they are not perlocutionary acts *per se*. The Gentlemen's behavior conveys to each of them and their straitjacketed friends exactly which changes they wish to have brought about in the world. For example, one Gentleman indicates with delicate movements of his hand and a gracious, deferential bow of his head, that he wishes his colleague to make the incision in the victim's chest and remove his heart. Their actions are perfect, pseudo-respectable "utterances" that are so well-formed that their content is unambiguous, both to the members of that linguistic community and, with only a little reflection, to the audience.

(18) Similarly, we wish to argue that screaming has immense perlocutionary force whilst not strictly counting as a perlocutionary act. It has perlocutionary force, for if it did not, the Gentlemen would not be so determined to silence their potential victims. In normal circumstances we would hope that screaming will have an effect on a hearer's behavior; it would, we hope, urge someone to run to our assistance. But, in the not so normal conditions presented in Sunnydale, the screaming must be hushed because the effect on the Gentlemen as hearers will be a dramatic, though simple, change in their behavior and ontology: their heads will explode and they will cease to exist.

(19) We have identified two non-standard forms of utterance that have some perlocutionary force, but perhaps Tara's use of a Post-It™ note is the most extraordinarily powerful in the subtlety and complexity of what it manages to convey to the audience, and also in how it is an extension of Tara's mind into her world. The note, telling us of Willow's room number, functions in a number of different ways. It informs us of a significant development in the storyline, the possibly romantic interest that Tara has taken in Willow. It also alters Tara's world in a significant way to augment her cognitive process of remembering Willow's room number. And in the carrying out of these two functions there is a further implicit function, and that is to change the way the audience is thinking or reacting to the train of events. We wish to argue that Tara's expressive use of the Post-It™ note is an extension of her mind because it is a cognitive action, in every way that an "in-the-head" action would be considered cognitive (Clark & Chalmers 12), and in this way her private language has become public. The private language that we have when we speak to ourselves, have thoughts and reflect, is augmented when we extend that speech and those thoughts into our world in the form of writing shopping lists, doing calculations, drawing a map, and so on. These are all cognitive processes that are now in the public realm and may affect others as much as ourselves. Tara's note to herself as an extension of her mind is a perlocutionary act with a demonstrable perlocutionary force, not just on herself but on us, the readers, as well.

## Conclusion

(20) All communication is, in some trivial way, the extension of one's mind, but sometimes when we extend our minds into our world it is to communicate with ourselves. Merleau-Ponty speaks of a system; he says "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism [. . .] it forms with it a system." The system we have in mind is a communicating one, one where mind, body and world are interwoven, where verbal and non-verbal cues are the norm, and where sometimes one is more appropriate than the other. With the entirety of this system in mind we must accept that the mental or inner realm cannot be treated as a realm distinct from the physical body and world. The mind, of necessity, stretches out into the world, leaving clues and "aide-mémoire" for its future self, but also for the audience who need, visibly in a silent episode, to be carried along in their understanding of the relationships that are developing before their very eyes.

## Afterthought

(21) It is interesting, and entirely in-keeping with the subject of this episode and the

ontological questions that we have touched upon, that the final words that are spoken are between Riley and Buffy; Riley says "I guess we have to talk" and Buffy responds by saying "I guess we do." It is only through talking that their relationship will continue to exist; they are human with empirical reality – or so we are led to believe – and the silence between them has to be broken if they are to survive together.

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1

Jacques Derrida, 'signature Event Context,' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 307-330 (p. 329). In this paper Derrida engages explicitly with Austin on the nature of the context needed to understand speech acts and concludes that "context is never absolutely determinable, or rather [...] its determination is never certain or saturated." (p. 310).

2

We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that comparison might be



made with season 3's episode "Gingerbread," in which a demon in the guise of two murdered children incites hysterical revanchism against witches. During this episode Giles advances the theory that fairy tales may be a way of recording real events, and it might be argued that the fairy tale from which the Gentlemen emerge has performed a similar task. The Gentlemen would thus have reality before they have textuality. From the narratological point of view, however, it is not clear that a fairy tale that is not known to the viewer or the Scooby Gang (with the possible exception of Giles) before it is referred to as an explanation can operate in the same way as a tale like Hansel and Gretel, which is immediately familiar to the Gang and assumed to be so to the viewer.

3

A similarly misleading text is the inscription "Revelation 15:1," which appears on a sign indicating a religious gathering's reading. The relevant verse in Revelation ("And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God") has no perceptible bearing on any of the events in "Hush," nor is it at all clear how it would be of consolation or help to the people of Sunnydale in this emergency.

4

See also Overbey, K.E. & Preston-Matto, L. (2002).

5

It is now harder for Xander to know what Anya is thinking, even if he does care, and we know that he does. The more usually public world of Xander and Anya is no longer being broadcast, and Xander's wish to suppress Anya's public pronouncements on their private life has--if only temporarily--been realized. However, Anya's copulatory hand gestures once more manage to bring their private life out into a public arena. It is a marvelous moment because the viewer can almost feel Xander's exasperation with the garrulous Anya. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who suggested that these gestures are also nominated as illocutionary.

6

We are aware of the technical sense in which Blackburn (1984) uses this term to explain why nonfactual judgments behave like genuine factual judgments. His usage is most particularly directed at talk of psychological states which enable a subject to express value judgments that project their inner states onto the world. There can be nothing that corresponds directly or indirectly to their value judgment, thus they have a quasi-realism. It is the suggestion of this half-life, expressing the possibility that judgments about the Gentlemen cannot fully behave like factual judgments since they do not correspond to anything that has a real existence.



**Holly Chandler**

## **Slaying the Patriarchy: Transfusions of the Vampire Metaphor in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

I saw so many horror movies where there was that blonde girl who would always get herself killed, and I started feeling bad for her. I thought, you know, it's time she had a chance to take back the night. The idea of Buffy came from just the very simple thought of a beautiful blonde girl walks into an alley, a monster attacks her, and she's not only ready for him, she trounces him.  
Joss Whedon

[1] In this and other interviews, Whedon, creator of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, has stated that his show has a feminist agenda. His use of the phrase "take back the night"—a national rape awareness slogan—immediately suggests that the war between Buffy and the vampires is intended to mirror the real-life feminist battles against rapists, domestic abusers,[1] and other side effects of male-dominated society. However, the show has since evolved beyond its original concept. Vampires on the show do more than embody the dangers of a patriarchal society; they are fluid metaphors, changing to allow the show to reflect different facets of feminist problems. Drawing on the horror film tradition, *Buffy* adapts popular metaphorical meanings of vampires for a feminist narrative, not only to portray the unhealthy consequences of patriarchy, but also to offer a fantasy (in two senses of the word) in which one woman successfully disrupts this oppressive system. Diverse vampiric characters such as the Master, Angel, Spike, Darla, and Drusilla each make unique contributions to the feminist text of *Buffy*. In essence, Whedon plans to do to the patriarchy what Buffy does to vampires: "Set 'em up, and knock 'em down" ("School Hard," 2003).

[2] In the first episode, the character Rupert Giles describes how a girl becomes a Slayer: "Into each generation a Slayer is born, one girl in all the world, a Chosen One, one born with the strength and skill to hunt the vampires . . ." ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001). The title character is an ordinary, white, middle-class American teenage girl who, at the age of 15, is magically endowed with superhuman strength and is called on to protect humanity from vampires, demons, and the end of the world. Every night she must plunge her trusty stake (or any convenient piece of wood) into the heart of each vamp she encounters; the vampires promptly turn to dust, leaving no bodies behind for the police to wonder about. The first season of the show begins after Buffy turns sixteen, when she moves to the ironically named Sunnydale, "a center of mystical energy" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth") where the forces of darkness are perpetually on the verge of taking over. However, Buffy doesn't have to fight them alone; Giles, her "Watcher" or mentor, provides her with academic knowledge of the demon world, and her friends Xander and Willow also help, battling the enemy alongside her as well as doing research. As the series progresses, an odd assortment of characters joins the original gang: Cordelia the cheerleader, Oz the werewolf, Tara the witch, Anya the former demon, and Riley the paramilitary agent. Angel and Spike, two highly unusual vampires, also decide to fight the good fight.

[3] Using its demonic characters as metaphors, *Buffy* engages the viewer in a dialogue on the difficulties of contemporary American culture, including "shifting gender scripts, sexual maturation, sexual violence, drug use, peer pressure, clueless adults, the numbing banality of educational systems, the fragmented

heterosexual, middle-class family unit, and the failures of the rational world paradigm" (Owen). The staple metaphor for the show is the interdimensional portal—or Hellmouth—that lies under Buffy's high school. By portraying high school as a literal hell, the show uses the fantasy genre to express emotional realities. Critics of *Buffy* group the significance of the vampire threat with the Hellmouth; both represent the dangers and fears associated with growing up in America (Wilcox, "There").

[4] The world of magic and monsters into which Buffy and her friends have been initiated is the literal expression of the underground in real-life society—an extremely marginalized subculture. A humorous exchange between Xander and the owner of a demon bar employs this metaphor for a pun: "I heard a few things, you know, from the underground." "The underground?" "Yeah, you know. From things that live under the ground" ("Amends," 3010). Buffy, Willow, and Xander are also outcasts, having been rejected by the "in" crowd at school. Thus, the fight between good and evil is fought entirely below the radar of mainstream society.

[5] Moreover, the demon-filled world on *Buffy* is cast as the "real" world; the sunny world of American middle-class culture is a façade, concealing the dangers inherent in its very structure. A scene in the first episode makes this analogy explicit. The camera cuts from Buffy expressing her disbelief that anything evil could be lurking in such a sunny and boring suburban town to an exterior shot of the school supposedly substantiating her claim. Then, the camera moves downward through the ground, and the audience sees a gothic chamber where vampires are chanting ominously.

[6] In the third season, it is revealed that the mayor of Sunnydale, an evil politician, is actively preventing people from finding out that they live on a hellmouth. Although he spouts nothing but traditional "family values," he turns out to be a hypocrite; he wants to eat Sunnydale's children, whom he professes to be so fond of—a disturbing vision of what family values do to children. The adults in Sunnydale, like people in real life who fail to question the system, never notice what's happening under their noses. As Giles explains, "People have a tendency to rationalize what they can and forget what they can't" ("The Harvest," 1002). Furthermore, one character later reveals that, "The mayor built this town for demons to feed on" ("Enemies," 3017). The literal structure of the town—its sewer systems and other pipelines—supports the evil plan of the patriarchal figure who runs it.

[7] Here, *Buffy* subscribes to the theory, made popular in the 1970s by feminists like Adrienne Rich and Jill Johnston, that the structure of American society was intentionally built and maintained by men, who wanted to keep women out of power. Despite recent advances in civil rights, many feminists believe that the roots of oppression have not yet been destroyed. Reading Sunnydale as a microcosm of society in general, the culture of the vampires and demons is a manifestation of the continued presence of unconscious sexist attitudes often ignored by the complacent. Women's Lib may have changed laws and modes of expression, but the underlying attitudes remain, hidden beneath layers of legislation and "politically correct" terminology.

[8] Sexual politics play a prominent role in the *Buffy* narrative. In popular culture, vampires have taken on a wealth of meaning, from their representation in classic horror films and novels as devils incarnate to more recent portrayals as relatively sympathetic outsiders.<sup>[2]</sup> Many would agree that the key ingredient to the myth of the vampire is his—and the pronoun is intentional—seductive, often forbidden, sexuality.<sup>[3]</sup> Vampires are sexy. Yet, vampires are also predators, and their sexuality is coded as a threat, not only to conventions, but also to their victims, mostly women. The vampire's bite is generally read as a form of rape—a forced exchange of bodily fluids. By using vampires as a concrete expression of the sexual dangers of the patriarchy, *Buffy* first exposes and then defeats the menace.

[9] However, like the metaphorical significance of vampires, their literal definition on the show is fluid; they have evolved considerably over the course of six seasons. In contrast to those of other recent narratives, *Buffy's* vampire mythology relies heavily on *Dracula* (1931) and other classic horror films. Stacey Abbott remarks that, "Joss Whedon's vampires seem to make a return to a pre-modern representation of vampirism." Religious objects—crosses and holy water—can hurt vampires on the show, although the source of their power, Christianity, is rarely mentioned.<sup>[4]</sup> Furthermore, vampires are defined as pure evil because they lack a human "soul" (a nebulous attribute that seems to mean less and less as the show progresses). According to Jules Zanger, most depictions of vampires since the 1970s have excluded religion entirely and often ignore the concept of evil (Zanger 22).

[10] On the other hand, Abbott contends that the show has "gradually disembodied itself from these traditions in order to create a modern vampire and slayer, both independent and self-reliant." A few of the show's undead characters demonstrate many qualities Zanger ascribes to the "new" vampire—moral ambiguity, complex emotions, and the ability to gain the viewer's sympathy (Zanger 21-22). In addition, many of the vampires form groups or "families," and their social interactions are comparable to human relationships. Yet, in an early episode Giles states unequivocally that a vampire is a demon that inhabits a

dead human body, and that unlike the creatures in (for example) Anne Rice's novels, it has no conscience. [5] "A vampire isn't a person at all. It may have the movements, the memories, even the personality of the person that it took over, but it's still a demon at the core" ("Angel," 1007). Later, other characters reveal that this view is at worst a human prejudice and at best an oversimplification.

[11] The vampire mythology on *Buffy* is unusual; whereas most narratives treat vampires as unique creatures, Giles equates them with demons, which, in the series, include everything from a large snake to things resembling the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Ultimately, *Buffy's* vampires are a blend of the old, the new, and the original. This blend lends flexibility to creating the vampires' meanings and personalities, allowing the writers to discuss a diverse set of feminist issues, including, but not limited to, rape.

[12] Nevertheless, Giles' definition has its uses; *Buffy* draws on the imagery of the "old" vampire to create a parody of it. Like Dracula, the creatures on the series are for the most part characterized as irredeemably evil; they kill humans and feel no regret. However, the vampires whom Buffy kills on a nightly basis have none of Dracula's more frightening qualities. In the 1931 version of the movie, Dracula is an aristocratic, handsome (to the character Lucy, anyway), foreigner with a dignified and polite demeanor. His pale skin, an indication of vampirism, is the only clue that he is a monster and not a man. On *Buffy*, vampires can easily be distinguished from humans by their ugly "game faces"—ridged foreheads, yellow eyes, and large fangs. They can lose these features at will to look human, but the minor guest stars almost always wear their game faces, thus reinforcing their demonic status (and consequently preventing Buffy from seeming a murderer in the audience's eyes). Their animalistic growls and violent attacks have replaced Dracula's graceful movements and hypnotic gaze. (Owen) In contrast to his trademark elegant black cape, many of the vampires that Buffy encounters wear Grateful Dead T-shirts. In fact, Buffy is often able to identify them based purely on their outdated clothing, as she condescendingly explains, "[O]nly someone living underground for ten years would think *that* was still the look" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth"). Where Dracula maintains a gothic aura of mystery, these vamps hide nothing.

[13] Indeed, it is this very lack of mystery that eliminates much of the fear that *Dracula* inspired in its original audience. Whatever is unknown appears infinitely more powerful and dangerous than what is known. After all, it is difficult to combat effectively something one does not understand. The episode "Fear, Itself" (4004) explores this concept; a noncorporeal demon that feeds on fear terrifies the protagonists until the end of the episode, when Buffy accidentally forces the creature to become solid. In a moment of hilarious visual effect, the demon comes roaring out of the ether, only to reveal that it's two inches tall. Buffy squashes it easily. There's nothing to fear, especially not fear itself.

[14] Significantly, Buffy only trades blows with vampires wearing game faces; because the demon in these creatures is visible, it can be fought. Giles' collection of archaic volumes on demon lore, in addition to the easy-to-read markers of vampirism, work to demystify the threats that Buffy faces and give her the tools to defeat them. By creating concrete demons for the girl to fight, the series responds to women's frustration when trying to combat male domination in society. Because ideas are more elusive than smelly monsters, it is difficult to change, let alone recognize, attitudes that are not expressed. Thus, the fight between slayer and demon can be seen as a physical manifestation of a more abstract, often subconscious battle between women and deep-rooted sexist attitudes.

[15] Buffy herself, accustomed to solving the world's problems with violence, expresses the frustration of trying to fight an immaterial concept. When the "First Evil"—an unspecified, noncorporeal force—comes to town in the episode "Amends," she desperately demands that her watcher give her a concrete opponent: "Find me something I can pummel." Eventually, she finds and beats up the First Evil's henchmen, who are corporeal, but she never defeats the First Evil. After all, as the F. E. says, "you have no idea what you're dealing with."

[16] Like ignorance, silence is a key element of terror in the film tradition. In *Dracula*, when a villager utters the name "Nosferatu," his wife fearfully covers his mouth. In the 1922 film *Nosferatu*, directed by F. W. Murnau, the character Jonathon reads a book that warns, "That name rings like the cry of a bird of prey. Never speak it aloud." No problem there—it's a silent film. Instead, he hides under the bedsheets. Although in later films, the victims add screaming to their arsenal of fruitless gestures, their incoherence still marks them as powerless. In contrast, not only Buffy's physical power, but also her verbal power banishes fear of the undead. Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto examine in detail how this "materiality of language" acts as a weapon on the show (73). On occasions when the blond female victim in a horror movie would scream helplessly, Buffy instead playfully remarks, "You have fruit-punch mouth" ("Prophecy Girl," 1012). Thus, she undermines the confidence of her enemy while bolstering her own.

[17] The act of speaking shifts power from the (male) vampire to the girl (Owen). Using puns as well as fists, she asserts her identity as an independent, powerful young woman. "We haven't been properly introduced. I'm Buffy, and you're history" [6] ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date," 1005). The punch line is

literal; in mid-sentence, she introduces the vampire to her weapon, a sharp wooden stake. Not only does the clichéd phrase “you’re history” acquire a double meaning in its unorthodox position in the sentence, but it also adds a third connotation: Buffy makes no secret of the fact that she doesn’t like history as a subject, and, no doubt, there are times when she would like to do to her history homework what she proceeds to do to the vampire on this occasion. Many vampires can’t even get a word in edgewise before she stakes them; Buffy does all the talking. “You were thinking, what, a little helpless coed before bed? You know very well, you eat this late ... you’re gonna get heartburn. Get it? Heartburn?” He doesn’t have a chance to respond, since she has already staked him—through the heart (“Wild at Heart,” 4006).

[18] Laughter undermines fear. It is fear that immobilizes Dracula’s victims, as much as his hypnotic gaze. The ridiculous figures that vampires cut on *Buffy* serve to remove the audience’s fear not only of them, but also of the thing they stand for—the patriarchy. As Xander tries to articulate with a quote from *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, one must overcome one’s fear in order to act. “Buffy, this is all about fear. It’s understandable, but you can’t let it control you. ‘Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to anger.’ No wait, hold on. ‘Fear leads to hate. Hate leads to the dark side.’ Hold on, no, umm . . .” (“The Freshman,” 4001).<sup>[7]</sup>

[19] The main villain of the first season, a vampire called the Master, presents a more sophisticated parody of the “old” vampire than *Buffy*’s weekly stake fodder. Unlike the minor vampire characters, he has a sense of humor, as he demonstrates during an earthquake: “This is a sign! We are in the final days! My time has come! Glory! GLORY!” After a pause, he undercuts the melodramatic tone of his own speech. “What do you think? 5.1?” (“Prophecy Girl”). Thus, he combines the stylized diction of the traditional supervillain with an ironic awareness of the modern world. His wit and intelligence indicate that he poses a real threat to Buffy, and, in fact, he is the only vampire she truly fears; in the episode “Nightmares,” she dreams that he kills her.

[20] However, the Master’s tendency to use archaic phrases like “three-score years” (“The Harvest”) links him to the old horror film tradition and, by extension, the patriarchal values behind it.<sup>[8]</sup> He is the leader of a clan of devoted followers called the Order of Aurelius, but he describes the order as a family (Wilcox, “There”). An evil father figure, he instructs his child protégé, an eight-year-old vampire named Collin, on how to behave in his hierarchical society. “Pay attention, child. You are the Anointed,<sup>[9]</sup> and there is much you must learn” (“Angel”). After another member of the order suggests a plan for killing the slayer, he turns to Collin and says enthusiastically, “You see how we all work together for the common good? That’s how a family is supposed to function!” (“Angel”). As Rhonda V. Wilcox notes, “There could hardly be a nastier incarnation of the patriarchy than the ancient, ugly vampire Master” (Wilcox, “There”).

[21] Because the actual lessons he imparts in his persona as a parent concerned with his kid’s education label his family as dysfunctional, he saturates another common paternal role—the disciplinarian—with negative connotations. When three members of his family (appropriately called The Three) whom he sends to kill the slayer fail, he has them killed. Significantly, Giles is at the time the only other father figure on the show—Buffy lives with her divorced mother—but his role is much less authoritarian than the Master’s. He is incapable of disciplining Buffy, since, as she points out, he cannot physically compete with her if she chooses to disobey him. Furthermore, his gender is de-emphasized by his tendency to stutter and his stereotypically feminine profession—librarian (Owen). This leaves the Master as the only male character acting as the head of a household. As if the Master’s murderous behavior isn’t enough to condemn male-dominated societies, his name implies that his children are his slaves. *Buffy* clearly disapproves of social inequalities.

[22] The Master also resembles a classic vampire character—Count Orlock in *Nosferatu*; they are both bald, pale, and stick thin. The Count has a deformed head, hooked nose, and bad teeth. The Master’s countenance, permanently stuck in game face, resembles a fanged rat. When they fold their hands in peculiar, similar gestures, their overgrown fingernails become apparent. Moreover, both Orlock’s and the Master’s behavior lack the sexual element of vampires, yet their relationship with the heroine supplies this motif.

[23] One of the main characters in *Nosferatu*, Jonathon’s wife Nina, in a rare moment of initiative, consults the vampire book to determine how to get rid of the Count and discovers that, “Only a woman can break his frightful spell—a woman pure in heart—who will offer her blood freely to Nosferatu and will keep the vampire by her side until after the cock has crowed.” Despite the fact that Nina is married, “pure in heart” suggests virginity. (Considering how childish and effeminately Jonathon behaves throughout the movie, one could almost believe that she *is* a virgin.) Moreover, given the popular reading of the vampire’s bite as sexual intercourse, Nina is essentially consenting to rape. Appropriately, the action is set in her bedroom. The fact that the camera doesn’t capture the actual bite reinforces the sexual interpretation; in 1922, films generally didn’t show any hanky-panky.

[24] Buffy, too, is a virgin when she faces the Master. For sixty years, he has been stuck in a cave near the opening of the Hellmouth, trapped by the mystical energies surrounding it. In the season finale, Giles discovers a prophecy that states that the Master will finally "rise" and kill her. Buffy decides to fight the Master anyway, knowing that she will die, yet hoping that she can still kill him before he escapes. In direct contrast to the events of *Nosferatu*, she learns (too late) that the way he is able to free himself is by drinking her blood. He gloats, "You're the one that sets me free! If you hadn't come, I couldn't go" ("Prophecy Girl"). Because he has Dracula-like hypnotic skills, he immobilizes her, bites her, and lets her fall face down into a pool of water. She drowns.

[25] The entire scene is disturbingly reminiscent of more traditional vampire narratives. Buffy's terrified face, her helplessness, and her white prom dress all force her to be read as the passive female (Krimmer and Raval 158). Indeed, the white dress is the most telling marker; the fact that everyone, including the Master, compliments her on it, brings its symbolism to the foreground. Not only does it signify her virginity, but also, as Elisabeth Krimmer and Shilpa Raval discuss, it represents a wedding dress; the act of biting can be read as a "form of sexual initiation" (Krimmer and Raval 158)

[26] However, unlike Nina, Buffy doesn't stay dead; her friend Xander resuscitates her. It is interesting to note that whereas in the earlier work, a woman's death is required to destroy the threat, on *Buffy*, a woman's death creates a threat that can only be subdued by her resurrection. *Buffy* sends the message that passive self-sacrifice, however noble, is not only a waste of a good person, but also unhealthy for society as a whole. The show subverts the Western tradition that "the death of a woman is necessary for the establishment or the restoration of civil order" (Krimmer and Raval 157)

[27] Emphasizing that her death was a threshold event, Buffy notes, "I feel strong. I feel different." After a season of having nightmares about the Master, she "wakes up" and discovers that he no longer has any power over her; since the worst that could happen has already happened, she has nothing to be afraid of anymore. Furthermore, this conflation of power and confidence reminds the audience that being afraid to face a threat is as fatal as the threat itself.

[28] When they meet again, the Master is bewildered by Buffy's apparent failure to conform to her assigned (gender) role. "You were destined to die! It was written!" She replies with a trademark pun, indicating that she has regained the power that she lost in their previous encounter. "What can I say? I flunked the written." He can't hypnotize her, and she confidently kills him. A. Susan Owen writes, "Buffy's embodied strength, power, and assertiveness destabilize the traditional masculinist power of the vampire character in the horror genre" (Owen). The show enacts this destabilization with the physical act of killing the Master.

[29] Although the sexual aspects of vampirism and biting are relegated to subtext in the early episodes, during the second season, in Giles' words, "I believe the subtext here is rapidly becoming text" ("Ted"). In the second season, Buffy becomes romantically involved with a vampire named Angel. Gypsies cursed him with a soul a hundred years ago, so he's wracked with guilt over his former evil deeds. Dating the enemy has given her a new arsenal of vocabulary to use in battling vampires. In "Bad Eggs" (2012), when the slayer rescues an unsuspecting woman about to be bitten in an arcade, both Buffy and the vampire use the language of dating as a code for their true intentions:

Lyle: (to Girl) Well, ain't you just got the prettiest little neck I ever did see.

Buffy: Boy, you guys really never come up with any new lines, do you?

Girl: Do you mind? We were talking here.

Buffy: (stares down the vampire) But you promised you'd never cheat on me again, honey.

After they fight for a few minutes, he runs away, saying "This ain't over," and she comments sarcastically, "Oh, sure. They say they'll call."

[30] Meanwhile, two of Angel's vampire acquaintances, Spike and Drusilla, [10] come to town to kill the slayer and restore the ailing Drusilla to health. Both Spike and Angel are unusual. Diane DeKelb-Rittenhouse describes how the text emphasizes their sexual desirability, not only by focusing on their handsome human faces and "cool" clothing, but also by showing that female characters (both guest stars and regulars) drool over them (146). Spike also has a self-consciously "cool" Cockney accent. His language marks his interest in Buffy as sexually charged; he calls Buffy "love," "pet," "cutie," and later "gorgeous" (146-47). Both vampires desire Buffy; Angel wants to have sex with her, and Spike wants to bite her.

[31] The connection between biting and sex is made explicit in the fourth season episode "The



Initiative" (4007) when Spike tries to bite Willow, Buffy's best friend. DeKelb-Rittenhouse marks this scene as a transition toward a more open acknowledgement of "sexual tension between Spike and his purported enemies" (147). He strolls confidently into her room, turns on the radio so no one will hear her scream, throws her onto the bed, and pins her down so he can get at her neck. Read as an attempted rape, this scene uses the show's tradition of associating vampires with the hidden dangers of American society. The cinematic tradition of the vampire as a metaphor for sexual predator is also invoked. But there's a comic reversal; Spike can't "perform" because a demon-hunting paramilitary group (the Initiative) has recently captured him and performed an experimental operation on him. Consequently, the following scene recasts the situation as a couple coping with impotence instead of a frightening image of rape. Spike, sitting on the bed and holding his head in his hands, mutters, "This sort of thing's never happened to me before." Willow, sympathetic to a fault, tries to assuage his ego with suggestions like, "Why don't we wait half an hour and try again." As if the parallel between lust and bloodlust weren't clear enough, she also asks him if the reason he can't bite her is that he doesn't find her attractive enough. Once again, *Buffy* takes a potentially terrifying event and dissipates fear through humor.

[32] In fact, the entire episode equates the vampire's pursuit of Buffy with a human male's interest in her. Riley Finn, a psychology graduate student and secret member of the Initiative, is attracted to her. In one scene, Riley says, "I'm gonna go see a girl." The camera then cuts to Spike escaping from the Initiative, and he remarks, "Sorry, can't stay. Got to go see a girl." Both men walk into Willow's room to ask about Buffy and eventually try to comfort the obviously depressed Willow. Recently dumped, she reveals her insecurities about her appeal—"I know I'm not the kind of girl vamps like to sink their teeth into"—but Spike assures her that she is very attractive: "I'd bite you in a heart beat."

[33] The characters of Spike and Riley, as well as their situations, are linked. While Riley pursues a degree in psychology, Spike demonstrates a native talent for reading the hidden feelings and motivations of other characters. While the love-struck Riley indulges in clichéd "spontaneous poetic exclamations" ("A New Man," 4012), the audience learns in the following season that Spike wrote bad love poetry before he became a vampire ("Fool for Love"). Moreover, the fifth season reveals that Spike's interest, like Riley's, is not only sexually charged, but also truly sexual; unbeknownst to even himself, he's been in love with Buffy all along.

[34] The juxtaposition of their pursuit of Buffy has disturbing implications for the dating game in general. Is it true, as a cynical character posits, that "All men are beasts . . . They're all still just in it for the chase" ("Beauty and the Beasts," 3004)? *Buffy* certainly applies the tradition that vampires articulate the suppressed darker impulses of men. The structure of patriarchal society, as indicated by the Master's and the Mayor's presence in the narrative, fosters the very elements that it is ostensibly opposed to; according to feminist Adrienne Rich, sexual violence is subtly encouraged by cultural institutions (13).<sup>[11]</sup> Consequently, Spike's behavior represents an unraveling of the elaborate rituals of courtship into its purest form. Although Riley's behavior is explicitly coded as socially acceptable (he uses words like "courted" and shows no interest in killing her), he does end up hitting her, albeit unknowingly. On the other hand, his intentions toward her are not violent, so Riley succeeds in getting the girl, whereas Spike fails abysmally. Dangerous sublimated desires or no, politely asking girls out on dates is better than stalking and murdering them.<sup>[12]</sup>

[35] This philosophy reflects badly on Angel, Buffy's first love and the cause of much angst and melodrama in the series. The first time she meets him (which is not the first time he's seen her), he follows her into an alley, and she attacks him, thinking he's planning to harm her. In fact, this scene is the one most similar to the image Joss Whedon describes in the quote at the beginning of this paper; Angel is the symbolic rapist Whedon imagined. Ominously, he has several qualities in common with Dracula; he's secretive, mysterious, and sexy, and he wears black clothes. He can also enter or leave a room so quickly and silently that the exasperated Xander sarcastically remarks, "Okay, that's it. I'm putting a collar with a little bell on that guy" ("School Hard"). Moreover, his character is a sincere representation, rather than a parody of Dracula; because he is neither funny, nor an object of fun, Angel has the potential to be much more frightening than the minor guest stars.

[36] Despite the fact that Buffy loves him, she doesn't know him very well; he remains silent on the subject of his past. The portents are justified in the middle of the second season, when he loses his soul and reveals himself to be one of the most evil vampires ever created. His name signifies a frightening irony instead of the straightforward description that Buffy unconsciously assumed. One of the conditions of his ensouled state, which he doesn't learn until too late, is that he must be miserable; if he experiences "one moment of true happiness . . . that soul is taken from him" ("Innocence," 2014). Sex with Buffy does the trick.

[37] As Wilcox comments, "The symbolic implications of seventeen-year-old Buffy's first sexual encounter being with a vampire of course emphasize the dangers of sexual encounters" (Wilcox, "There"). Moreover,

in "Innocence," the now evil Angel represents the boy who doesn't call after sex; he sarcastically remarks, "I'll call you" (Wilcox, "There"). His dialogue reflects a common occurrence in real life: a man's pretense of affection in order to seduce an inexperienced woman. "You know what the worst part was, huh? Pretending that I loved you. If I'd known how easily you'd give it up, I wouldn't have even bothered." The dramatic reversal of any such boy's behavior confuses and hurts the girl; from her perspective, he has "changed," although in reality, his motives have simply been unveiled. On *Buffy*, the emotional reality of many teenage girls' point of view becomes literal.

[38] Angel's transformation allows the show to examine "common fears and apprehensions about what might happen when we explore our sexuality" (Sieman 128), but where do these fears come from? For centuries, Western society has been suspicious of female sexuality; even in contemporary American culture, women are often criticized for being sexually active, as evidenced by the often-cited limiting definition of a woman as either virgin or whore. Angel invokes this tradition when he calls Buffy a "pro" (prostitute), even though he knows that she's never had sex before and takes her decision to have sex with him very seriously. Similarly, girls in real life are often labeled "slut" even if they have had sex only once.

[39] Having sex makes people emotionally vulnerable to their partners, and sexist attitudes expressed by a lover can hurt women more than what passing strangers might say. Consequently, Angel is a danger to Buffy not in spite of the fact that she loves him, but because of it. Furthermore, he knows it and plans to use it to his advantage: "To kill this girl, you have to love her" ("Innocence"). In the space of a single episode, he purposefully runs through a catalog of lines traditionally ascribed to misogynists, from "Like I really wanted to stick around after that" to "Was it good for you, too?" The show illustrates how emotionally destructive this disrespectful attitude is; Angel cannot batter her physically, but he hits her with such a barrage of words that she is too emotionally wounded to return his taunts with words of her own, a significant change for someone known for her clever use of language. However, by the end of the episode, she draws on her slayer reserves to kick him in the groin—a symbolically appropriate gesture.

[40] The feminist text of *Buffy* denies the "slut" label, not only by reasserting the title character's heroic strength, but also by reversing gender roles. As the hero in a fantasy battle between good and evil, Buffy plays the traditional masculine role; Angel, as her sidekick, is feminized.<sup>[13]</sup> As Xander points out in "Teacher's Pet," even his name is effeminate. "What kind of a girlie name is 'Angel' anyway?"

[41] The gender switch is made literal in the episode "I Only Have Eyes for You" (2019), when the two characters are possessed by the ghosts of dead lovers; Buffy becomes James, a teenage boy, and Angel is taken over by Ms. Newman, the female teacher with whom James has an illicit affair. The identifications of Buffy with James and Angel with Ms. Newman are reinforced by their parallel situations. Both Buffy and James feel responsible for "destroy[ing] the one person [they] loved the most in a moment of blind passion"—Buffy for sleeping with Angel, James for accidentally shooting Ms. Newman. Both Angel and Ms. Newman believe that the relationship is unfair to the younger party: "I just want you to be able to have some kind of a normal life. We can never have that."

[42] Consequently, Angel, instead of Buffy, is ultimately subjected to the binarism normally reserved for women. The distinction between souled Angel and soulless Angel mimics the virgin/whore dichotomy; he turns from angel to devil. Thus, the patriarchy's attempt to compartmentalize women into binary categories is reflected back on itself, an extraordinary feat considering that vampires can't look at themselves in the mirror.

[43] However, although the dichotomy between pre-sex and post-sex characterization of women is reversed, it doesn't appear to be subverted; the feminized Angel still suffers binary categorization. Only the evil Angel directly questions the polarization that the other characters force on him. When Buffy finally figures out that he has lost his soul, although she is understandably grieved, she is also slightly relieved to know that the Angel who doesn't love her is literally not the same person as the one she slept with. "You're not Angel," she declares in response to his taunts. Angel replies, "You'd like to think that, wouldn't you?" ("Innocence").<sup>[14]</sup>

[44] In "Passion," Angel represents another danger women face when sleeping with someone they don't know well enough—the stalker boyfriend. When he confronts Buffy's clueless mother, she assumes he is exactly that—a boy who can't accept the fact that his girlfriend dumped him. She says, "I'm telling you to leave her alone." Playing on her interpretation, Angel responds, "I'll die without Buffy. She'll die without me." Joyce thinks he's threatening her, which, according to the audience's knowledge of evil Angel, is a gross understatement. Buffy then gets the equivalent of a restraining order for him—a deinvitation spell. Significantly, she doesn't rely on the (traditionally masculine) police to stop him, but rather on her witch friend Willow, who performs the spell. Through its use of magic, *Buffy* gives women the power to contain the threat of male violence.

[45] Angel's behavior in "Passion" (2017) not only explores the psychopathic, murderous behavior of the stalker, but also presents the viewer with a modern argument for the dangers of a philosophy expressed in the European visual art tradition. John Berger explains in *Ways of Seeing* that paintings of female nudes assume a male viewer (in this case, Angel) and that the passive expressions and postures on the canvas reveal more about the desires of the observer than the figure's desires. Feminist film critic Laura Mulvey posits that the "male gaze" strips women of their agency as well as their clothes; possessive and dominating, it treats them as passive objects whose sole purpose is to give visual pleasure. "Men act and women appear" (Berger 47). While Dracula's hypnotic gaze gives him real power over women, Angel's display of merely symbolic power is disturbing enough. The moment when Angel caresses Buffy's unconscious face, reclaiming his (sexual) possession of her, makes explicit the connection between the male gaze in visual art and the treatment of women as sex objects.

[46] Later, Angel first chases and then kills Jenny Calendar, Willow's teacher and Giles' love interest, and artfully arranges the body on Giles' bed. [15] When Giles walks in, the dead Jenny appears to be returning his gaze, but her body is arranged in a passive position—her arms laid out with palms upward, her torso twisted to achieve maximum visibility. Of course, she's not really looking at Giles, but at Angel; the last thing she sees before her death is Angel's game face.

[47] Jenny's posture, although not her clothes, expresses the same idea as Sir Peter Lely's 17th century painting "Nell Gwynne" discussed in *Ways of Seeing*. In the painting, a female reclining nude passively displays her body and stares languidly at the viewer. Historically, the primary viewer was King Charles II, who commissioned the painting as a portrait of one of his mistresses. Consequently, the painting can be read as an affidavit of her sexual submission to him (Berger 52).

[48] However, there is an important difference between the scene and the painting; Giles has never "possessed" Jenny (or had sex with her), and now he never will. Through this heinous act, Angel is intentionally thumbing his nose at Giles. By placing Jenny on the bed, the vampire seems to communicate his awareness that Giles was planning to have sex with her that same night, while simultaneously claiming exclusive possession of her because he got to her first. Angel's unstated assumption in this scene is a Western cultural belief that to rape a woman is to "defile" her, to render her unusable for legitimate purposes by anybody else.

[49] By linking voyeurism, stalking, and violence, the series displays the sinister implications of the male gaze—shades of murder and rape. Because Jenny is dead, Angel is able to manipulate her as a painter would. Buffy, on the other hand, has agency to spare, and at the end of the episode, Angel gets punished for his desire to oppress women; she beats him up. Whereas the tradition of female nude paintings assumes that the male gaze is a necessary and appropriate staple of society, *Buffy* unveils the horrifying implications of this attitude.

[50] The presence of female vampires in the narrative has the potential to disrupt the show's treatment of female power as good and male power as evil. These women are physically just as strong as the men, and vampire society is not overtly sexist. Drusilla, who appears in more episodes than any other female vampire on the show, has special talents that her lover Spike lacks; she can hypnotize her victims. In fact, she is so dangerous that she shows up on the prophecy radar: a guest star warns Buffy that, "A very dark power is about to rise in Sunnydale" ("What's My Line," Part 2, 2010).

[51] However, she is a bad example of a strong female role model; sick when she arrives in Sunnydale, she uses her temporary frailty to manipulate her lover. Whenever he gets angry at her, she pouts and whines, and he immediately gives in with phrases like, "Oh, I'm sorry, kitten" ("What's My Line," Part 1, 2009) and berates himself for his insensitivity: "I'm a bad, rude man" ("Lie to Me," 2007). A conversation between Xander and Willow ostensibly about a celebrity couple, the Captain and Tenille, at the beginning of the episode "Ted" (2011) indirectly comments on Spike and Drusilla's relationship:

Xander: You don't know what you're talking about.

Willow: Xander, he was obviously in charge.

Xander: He was a puppet! She was using him!

Willow: He didn't seem like the type of guy who would let himself be used.

Xander: Well, that was her genius! He didn't even know he was playing second fiddle.

After Angel loses his soul, Spike does find out that he's the second fiddle; Drusilla loses interest in him and instead has an affair with Angel. Evil female characters may be strong, but they manipulate the patriarchal system instead of opposing it, thus perpetuating negative stereotypes of women. [16]

[52] In addition, the women are few and far between; the majority that Buffy actually fights are male, and she rarely comes into contact with the females. Instead, the series identifies her with them. In the two-part episode "Becoming," Buffy echoes a line spoken over 200 years before by Darla, the vampire who turned Angel into a vampire. Both women say "Close your eyes" to him just before penetrating his body with pointy objects; Darla bites him, and Buffy shoves a sword into his stomach. [17] Drusilla and Buffy share the same birthday. In "Surprise," the camera cuts from a scene in which Buffy's friends are planning a surprise party for her to a scene in which Drusilla and Spike talk about the female vampire's upcoming party. Later, the camera fades from a close-up of Buffy's face to a close-up Drusilla's face. Moreover, both characters can see into the future—Buffy through prophetic "slayer dreams" and Drusilla through painfully sudden "visions."

[53] *Buffy* destroys the fear of vampires as agents of the patriarchy so successfully that after the second season, the main villains are no longer members of the undead. In the third season, Mayor Richard Wilkins III, a human who sold his soul to become immortal, fulfills this function; his trite phrases and 1950s language [18] identify him as the patriarchy incarnate. Wilcox points out that he is a transparent father figure (Wilcox, "Who," 14); he lectures his deputy about washing his hands, then his adopted "daughter" about drinking milk. Although these lines are played for laughs—family values seem at odds with the desire for world domination—they mark him as the villain. The only similar comments that good characters make are self-consciously humorous: "Sorry, but I'm an old-fashioned gal. I was raised to believe that men dig up the corpses and that women have the babies" ("Some Assembly Required," 2002).

[54] When the Mayor becomes invincible, his continued presence illuminates the reason for the switch from vampire to human as main villain. The show stresses that Buffy shouldn't kill humans, no matter what they do; in the Mayor's case, she literally cannot kill him. Consequently, humans in the series are potentially more frightening than vampires because there is no clear-cut way of eliminating the threat they pose. Vampires can be killed, but the problems of gender relations in America cannot be dealt with so easily. Ultimately, sexist human mind-sets are a real problem, whereas vampires don't exist.

[55] Instead, the vampire characters in the later seasons serve to confuse the binary categories of good and evil. Whereas Angel represents the fusion of polar opposites, Spike's character shatters the idea of absolutes altogether. As early as the second season, there are signs that evil is relative. The Judge, who plans to "separate the righteous from the wicked and burn the righteous down," almost burns Drusilla and Spike because they "stink of humanity. [They] share affection and jealousy" ("Surprise"). Soulless Angel, on the other hand, is judged to be purely evil. "There's no humanity in him" ("Innocence"). However, the ambiguity in Spike's character is developed more fully in later seasons.

[56] Unlike the radical feminists of the 1970s, modern feminist theory suggests that binarism itself, regardless of which side is demonized, is an unhealthy patriarchal worldview. "That the alternative to the archaic 'either/or' is an anarchic 'neither and both' has become something of a critical truism in contemporary cultural studies" (Pender 43). While the characters may prefer binary thinking, [19] *Buffy* itself questions the aptness of these distinctions.

[57] The Initiative and its creation, a Frankenstein-like cyborg demon named Adam, become the fourth season's main antagonists. Ironically, the Initiative, supposedly a champion of humanity, dehumanizes both its victims and its soldiers. Although the Initiative agents, including Buffy's boyfriend Riley, appear to be the good guys because they are human and kill demons, their regimental methods and militaristic dialogue identify them as potential villains. They lump vampires with demons under the neutral classification "Hostile Subterranean Threats" and refer to Spike, despite his obvious masculinity, as "it." Furthermore, the Initiative's scientists perform experimental surgery not only on captured demons—reminiscent of illegal experiments done on dogs and cats—but also on their own men. Consequently, their belief that all demons are bad is portrayed as narrow-minded, and the link between binary thinking and patriarchal values is reinforced. Contradicting the Initiative's position on demons as mindless animals that need to be put down, Spike goes against his nature and reluctantly joins Buffy's gang to insure his own survival.

[58] Spike is a perfect example of how proponents of an oppressive system can become its victims. A left-over representation of the second season's interpretation of the patriarchy, he becomes the victim of a later incarnation; the Initiative captures him and implants a computer chip in his brain that gives him a migraine every time he tries to hurt a human. Just as some feminists suggest that we must save men from themselves, Buffy and her friends repeatedly save Spike from both the military and the demon underworld.

[59] Elaborating on the biting-as-sex metaphor, characters make fun of the Initiative's sterilizing effect on Spike—whose name, like Angel's, turns out to be ironic—calling him "impotent," "neutered," and "flaccid." Even Spike takes a shot at himself when he quips, "Spike took a little trip to the vet's, and now he doesn't chase the other puppies any more" ("Pangs," 4008). Similarly, feminists argue that American society has damaged both men's and women's sexuality by forcing them into constrictive roles. In the past, women

were taught that they should not enjoy sex. Meanwhile, men were encouraged to be sexually aggressive. Angel's transformation has already revealed the catastrophic results of this attitude, but clearly demonizes the aggressor. On the other hand, Spike's predicament is treated quite sympathetically, considering that not long before, he was trying to kill the hero. His pathos emphasizes that men, too, are victims of the system.

[60] If binary thinking condemns the Initiative, it also casts suspicion on Buffy herself. Despite her acceptance of ex-demons, werewolves, and Angel, she still views her nightly battles with demons on an absolute scale; she is Good, and vampires are Evil. Yet, since the first season, the show has identified her, first with the female vampires Darla and Drusilla, then with vampires in general. Her slayer powers are similar to her enemy's; they both have unusually fast reflexes and incredible muscular strength, and they both heal quickly. Moreover, a vampire named Dracula tells her, "Your power is rooted in darkness" ("Buffy vs. Dracula," 5001). [20] If anyone would know, Dracula would. His statement implies that her supernatural heritage is vampiric, a disturbing possibility for someone so righteously committed to the extermination of all vampires.\*

[61] Equating the slayer with vampires not only exposes the danger of absolute morality, but also questions the method of Buffy's feminist war. By appropriating male power, she is subject to the same criticism; other characters chastise her for her overly aggressive tendencies. When authority figures such as Principal Snyder—"a tiny impotent Nazi with a bug up his butt the size of an emu" ("Becoming," Part 1, 2021)—dish out punishment, their disapproval is clearly misplaced; she is usually protecting herself or someone else. But her friends' criticism is valid. After Buffy asserts, "I don't *always* use violence," Xander replies, "The important thing is, *you* believe that" ("Inca Mummy Girl," 2004). Returning violence with more violence works for the supernatural elements of the show, but proves a liability in dealing with humans.

[62] *Buffy* argues, not for women's rights, which are now ostensibly guaranteed, but for women's inherent power and independence, which are still ignored or demonized on many TV shows. Whereas in the classic horror film *Dracula*, vampires represent a threat to society that must be contained by good men, on *Buffy* the vampiric threat is ultimately traced back to these same men. The show does not recommend that women take on sexism in America by blowing up schools and stabbing people with swords. Rather, it offers the knowledge that women are strong enough to confront the dangers fearlessly and successfully. Instead of cowering in fear, *Buffy* confidently yanks the ugly face of the patriarchy out into the light of day, where, she hopes, it will be burnt to a crisp.

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\* Editors' note: In Season Seven's "Get It Done," the powers of the Slayer are, of course, revealed to be demonic in origin.

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[1] In the sixth season of the show, the link between vampires and sexual violence shifts from the metaphorical to the actual; after Buffy ends her months' long dysfunctional affair with the vampire Spike, he tries to rape her. Although the sixth season's lack of metaphoric discourse places it somewhat outside the scope of this paper, the fact that the connection between vampires and patriarchy still holds true is worth mentioning.

[2] In her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Nina Auerbach discusses the evolution and proliferation of the vampire image in the last two centuries, from the literary tradition to TV and movies. The examples in this paper certainly illustrate her point that "There is no such creature as 'The Vampire;' there are only vampires." (5) Not only is the nature of vampires imagined differently in *Buffy*, *Carmilla*, *Dracula*, and *Interview with a Vampire*, but also vampires within the text of *Buffy* demonstrate this range. Auerbach also links the changes in popular vampire images to their specific cultural and political context.

[3] In the homoerotic tradition of *Dracula* (1897), the sexuality of vampire characters on *Buffy* becomes rather ambiguous from the second season onward. The tension between Angel and Spike, Angel and Xander, and Spike and Xander all have homoerotic implications. Vampire Willow, who appears in the third season episode "Doppelgangland" (3016), is "kinda gay." Furthermore, on the spin-off series *Angel*, Drusilla's re-siring of Darla is understood to be a sexual act:



Gunn: No, no, what I'm saying is, that means the granddaughter remade the grandmother.

Wesley: Oh... yes.

Gunn: Man, somehow that weirds me out more than the whole bloodsucking thing ("Reunion").

[4] See Abbott's discussion of Buffy's cross.

[5] Angel: She's cute. Not too bright, though. Gave the puppy-dog "I'm all tortured" act. Keeps her off my back when I feed!

Spike: People still fall for that Anne Rice routine. What a world! ("School Hard")  
(Actually, Angel is lying; he truly is "all tortured.")

[6] Patricia Pender uses the phrase to discuss *Buffy's* problematic relation to political and cultural history in her essay of the same title.

[7] This and other references to pop culture demonstrate the series' awareness of the varied genres and myths that it draws on.

[8] Abbott classifies both the Master and Giles as relics of a medieval, religious "Old World" order.

[9] The "Anointed One" is a literal translation of messiah; Colin is, then, a sort of Antichrist consistent with Bram Stoker's presentation of Dracula.

[10] In contrast to the medievalized Master, Spike and Drusilla are modeled after Sid Vicious of the punk rock group The Sex Pistols and his girlfriend Nancy Spungeon. Abbott states that the overtly secular Spike represents a break from the religious "Order" of the Master.

[11] "Pornography does not simply create a climate in which sex and violence are interchangeable; *it widens the range of behavior considered acceptable from men in heterosexual intercourse.*"

[12] Riley's behavior in the fifth season complicates his "good guy" image; in a scene rife with sexual implications, he first lets a female vampire bite him before killing her while she's busy sucking. Riley, it would seem, is not exempt from *Buffy's* cynical attitude toward the dating game.

[13] Angelus plays on this switch in a sarcastic rejoinder to Spike's question in "Innocence":

Spike: Do you know what happens to Angel?

Angelus: (appears at a side door) Well, he moves to New York and tries to fulfill that Broadway dream. It's tough sledding, but one day he's working in the chorus when the big star *twists her ankle.*

He refers to the musical *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, in which a female chorus member gets a lucky break.

[14] See also Abbott's discussion of the distinction between souled and soulless Angel.

[15] Angel's interest in treating murder as an art form is mentioned explicitly in "Fool For Love" (5007) and

on the spin-off series *Angel*.

[16] The female hellgod Glory, the fifth season's supervillain, is another such example.

[17] Darla also echoes Buffy in the second season *Angel* episode "Epiphany;" after Angel has sex with her, he is jolted awake by a flash of lightning—an allusion to the original coupling.

[18] His last line before dying is "Well, Gosh!" ("Graduation Day," Part 2, 3022).

[19] Buffy explains, "I like my evil like I like my men—evil. You know, straight up, black hat, tied to the train tracks, 'soon my electro-ray will destroy Metropolis' bad" ("Pangs").

[20] This character is *the* Dracula; the entire episode is a heavy-handed parody of the original movie. Miss Mina (Buffy) kills Dracula, while the three sisters seduce Van Helsing (Giles).



**David Lavery**

## **Apocalyptic Apocalypses: The Narrative Eschatology of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

**This essay was originally given as a talk at Spectacle, Rhythm, and Eschatology at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia, July 2003.**

Let's explore the world of our story, shall we?

Andrew in "Storyteller"

What can't we face if we're together?

What's in this place that we can't weather?

Apocalypse?

We've all been there.

The same old trips

Why should we care?

Buffy in "Once More with Feeling"

Stop! Stop telling stories. Life isn't a story.

Buffy in "Storyteller"

(1) As Frank Kermode shows in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, we "make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17). Our fictions record these investments, and in every ending these fictions offer us glimpses of *our* end and *the* end. We strive, always, to convert "chronos"—mere "'passing time' or 'waiting time'—into "kairos": "*the season*, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (my italics; 47). As I hope to show, that amazing fiction known as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* accomplished in its seven television *seasons* (surely Kermode did not imagine his narratology being applied to television), seasons now come to an end, this apocalyptic conversion with ingenious narratological proficiency.

(2) In the 144 episodes (5760 minutes, 96 hours) of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* now completed text, the word "apocalypse" (or some variant thereof) appears scores of times in no less than twenty six episodes. From its first appearance in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" (1005), in Buffy's classic Buffyspeak concession to Giles (who has just given her permission to go out with broody "Emily Dickens" fan Owen) —"Thank you, thank you, thank you! And look, I won't go far, okay? If the apocalypse comes, beep me"—to the Season Seven "apocalypse"-intensive dialogue of the meta-narratological "Storyteller" (7016), in

which we find such wonderful exchanges as this one between would-be storyteller, non-masturbator, went-over-to-the-Dark-Side-just-to-pick-up-a-few-things, and "Buffy, the Slayer of the Vampyres" chronicler Andrew and thousand-year-old former vengeance demon Anya:

**ANDREW:** The world's gonna want to know about Buffy. It's a story of ultimate triumph tainted with the bitterness for what's been lost in the struggle. It's a legacy for future generations.

**ANYA:** If there are any. Buffy seems to think that this apocalypse is going to actually be, you know, apocalyptic. I think your—your story seems pretty pointless.

Our sympathy is with Riley Finn in "A New Man" (4012), as we find ourselves "needing to know the plural of "apocalypse." "This is how many apocalypses for us now?" Buffy asks Giles just before the final confrontation with Glory, just before she will, again, die, and he replies "Oh, uh, well . . . six, at least. Feels like a hundred" ("The Gift," 5022).

(3) The end of time, the end of things is not, of course, the only end *Buffy* offers us. As a television narrative, every episode of *Buffy* offers us a variety of "little deaths," mini-apocalypses as well: the distinctly televisual ends, allowing for commercial breaks, that come within the narrative itself; the ending of each episode (my primary concern here); the endings of narrative arcs; the ending of each season. And finally, we have the final narrative eschatology of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* itself. Television series had ended before. From *I Love Lucy* (1951-57) to *The Honeymooners* (1952-1957) to *Mash* (1972-1983) to *Seinfeld* (1990-1998), comedies offered their last laughs, finally sending characters home from a TV Korean War that lasted eleven years, sentencing Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer to prison for not being good Samaritans; and episodic series from *Dallas* (1978-1991) (did J. R. kill himself or not?) to *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) ("Where's Annie?" asks a toothpaste-extruding Agent Cooper as he stares at the face of the supernatural evil parasite BOB in the bathroom mirror) to *The X-Files* (1983-2002) (Mulder and Scully in bed together? The Cigarette Smoking Man dead again?) kinked their narrative skeins and disappointed their viewers for seemingly the last time. But no series ending had ever been so much about ending as the always apocalyptic *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). And by the end of *Buffy's* story, Buffy herself had already announced, in the story itself, the end of story. Why?

(4) I would like to offer a comprehensive examination of endings on *Buffy* (including the end of the final episode) and propose a classification scheme for understanding the narrative apocalypses, large and small, of individual episodes, story arcs, seasons, and the series as a whole. In her introduction to Michael Adams' recently published *Slayer Speak: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon*, *Buffy* writer (and resident linguist) Jane Espenson admits her temptation to cast her remarks "in fluent Buffinese," but "for your sake and my own, I resist" (Adams vii). I, however, have no such will power and have cast my category schemes in Buffyspeak.

## **BtVS Endings**

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**Cliffhanger.** Leaving some major, suspenseful narrative development to be continued at some indeterminate point in the future.

**Closurey (at the level of action).** Resolution of major, multiple plot entanglements.

**Closurey (at the level of questions).** Resolution of major, multiple thematic and or subtextual problems posed by the narrative.

**Partial Closurey.** Resolution (or seeming resolution) of a single story arc at the level of expectations, though not necessarily at the level of questions.

**Foreshadowy.** Suggesting or prefiguring a development before it takes place. See also **Set-Uppy**.

**Ironicky.** A scene in which humor is caused by a clash between appearance and reality, expectation and actualization.

**Metaphory.** Exhibiting/enhancing metaphoric narrative skeins.

**Not-overy . . .** Suggesting that the plot resolution brought about in the individual episode is only temporary; that there could be more to come.

**Pay-Offy.** Fulfilling/completing a set-uppy ending in an earlier episode.

**Set-Uppy.** Deliberately establishing a narrative development for major or minor pay-off in a subsequent episode.

**Surprisey.** Introducing a shocking, though not necessarily suspenseful, plot development.

**Tear-Jerkery.** Emotionally moving, romantic, cathartic.

(5) Commenting on the pronounced tendency of Buffyspeak to clip verb phrases (turning "wig out" into "wig," "deal with" into "deal," for example), Michael Adams has noted "something subtly different" in the psychology of users of such forms (39). In my own slangy categorizations of *Buffy* endings, I hope you, too, will detect fine distinctions: I mean none of these as absolutes, none as incompatible. My invention of new adjective forms is intended to suggest the tentativeness, the hypothetical nature, of my classification scheme. [1]

(6) Let us begin with an ending contemporary television has made far too common: the cliffhanger. In the wake of the "Who shot JR?" bonanza of 1980, American TV has become so enraptured with the cliffhanger for the final episode of a season that it has now become common even in the sitcom, perhaps the last genre in which we would expect to find it put to use.

(7) Since Joss Whedon has stated his basic antipathy for the cliffhanger on several occasions, it should not surprise us that the basic pattern of a *Buffy* year—established in its first year, in part because Whedon and company were not certain they would be renewed and wanted to finish the story of Buffy's battle with the Master "well within parameters," in the twelve episodes available of a partial season—has been to tell the whole story of the Scooby Gang's battle with and defeat of a new Big Bad. As we will see, in a moment, the cliffhanger nevertheless puts in an appearance.

### Set-Uppy

(8) Many, many episodes, as many as thirty, though not quite cliffhanger, could certainly be described as set-uppy—a narratological cousin, deliberately establishing a story development for major or minor pay-off in a subsequent episode. (Though pay-offs themselves, by their very nature, do not generally appear at the close of episodes, *Buffy* does offer at least a couple of examples, as we shall later see, of the pay-off ending.)

(9) The end of the first episode of almost all two-parters, not surprisingly, is set-uppy, complete with a "To be continued" title. The ending of "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001), for example, as Luke prepares to bite a prone, encoffined Buffy, or of "What's My Line," Part 1 (2009), as Buffy asks of the woman who has attacked her in Angel's apartment "Who the hell are you?" and receives the surprisey (and very proud) reply "I am Kendra! De Vampire Slayer!" are set-uppy. So, too, is the disconcerting finale of "Surprise" (2013), which sets up the coming of Angelus.

(10) The endings of "Becoming," Part 1 (2021), as Whistler tells us in voice-over that "No one asks for their life to change, not really. But it does" as Buffy finds Kendra, slashed by Drusilla's nails, and has a woman cop pull a gun on her; or "Graduation Day," Part 1 (3021), with a gutted-by-Buffy Faith's dive off her apartment balcony into a passing truck, or "This Year's Girl's" (4015) "five-by-five" Faith-in-Buffy/Buffy-in-Faith ending; or "The Yoko Factor's" surprisey appearance of Riley Finn in Adam's lair; or "Bargaining," Part 1's (6001) grim return from the grave; or "Two to Go's" (6021) Giles-to-the-rescue against the seemingly all-powerful Dark Willow—all these endings are set-uppy. Sometimes, we might add, even the second part of a two-parter can be set-uppy, as we see in "What's My Line," Part 2 (2010), with Drusilla carrying a seriously injured Spike out of a burning church.

(11) In non-official two-parters, the set-uppy keeps us hangy as well. Consider the end of "I Was Made to Love You" (5015), in which Buffy talks to her "flower-getting lady" mother, which sets-up "The Body" (5016). "Tough Love" (5019) sets up "Spiral" (5020) as Glory realizes, thanks to Tara's disclosure, who her precious Key is; "Spiral" in turn, leaves Buffy in the coma state in which she will remain throughout most of "The Weight of the World" (5021); and "The Weight of the World" establishes the ground tone for "The Gift" (5022). Similarly, in Season Six, the death of Tara, felled by Warren's errant bullet in "Seeing Red" (6019), sets up "Villains" (6020), and "Villains," with Willow's flaying of Warren, sets up "Two to Go" (6021). At the end of Season Seven the showdown between Buffy and Caleb (with an assist from a crossovering Angel) that ends "End of Days" (7021) sets-up the series finale, "Chosen" (7022).

(12) The versatile set-uppy can establish transitions for crossover episodes as well. The end of "Pangs" (4008), for example, in which Xander spills the beans about Angel's Thanksgiving visit, is set-uppy of "I Will Remember You" on *Angel*; "Who Are You?" (4016) prepares the way for *AtS*'s "Sanctuary" as we watch a clearly lost Faith riding the rails.

(13) The set-uppy can be used as well to introduce us to a new character. "The 'I' in Team" (4013), for



example, gives us a living, breathing, lethal Adam; In "Buffy vs. Dracula" (5001) we get our first glimpse of Dawn ("Mom!"); and in "Never Leave Me" (7009) we meet the *ü*bervamp.

(14) The set-uppy proliferates in other, more stand-alone episodes as well. In "Faith, Hope & Trick's" (3003) return of Angel from Hell; in "Band Candy's" (3006) reminder (paid off in "Earshot" (3018) twelve episodes later) that Giles and Joyce have had sex and are embarrassed by it; in "Hush's" (4010) establishment of a new stage in Buffy and Riley's relationship now that their secret identities are out.

(15) And on at least one occasion, in "Lessons" (7001), what is set-up is an entire season as The First morphs from Warren, to Glory, to Adam, to The Mayor, to Drusilla, to The Master, and then to Buffy, lecturing a cowering Spike on the nature of power.

### **Cliffhangery**

(16) As I suggested earlier, the set-uppy sometimes comes to seem more like the classic cliffhangery. The end of "Becoming," Part 2 (2022), the finale of *Buffy's* second season, could justifiably be termed cliffhangery, though admittedly not suspenseful, as Buffy, destination unknown, leaves Sunnydale. "Grave" (6022), a season-ender as well, is even more cliffhangery, not to mention surprisey, as Spike's soul is returned. Certainly "Sleeper's" (7008) climax, with a Bringer's ax about to decapitate Giles, is cliffhangery—so much so that fan speculation that Giles was dead and possessed by The First would run rampant. The dream-vision that closes "Get It Done" (7015) is cliff-hangery, offering as it does, with its *Lord of the Ringsish* cgi of thousands of *ü*bbervamps, a glimpse of the reality of the final battle in "Chosen" (7022). And could the end of "Touched" (7020) be any more cliff-hangery clichéd with its ticking time bomb finale?

### **Pay-offy**

(17) On at least two occasions the endings of episodes are pay-offy, fulfilling/completing a set-uppy ending in an earlier episode. In "Enemies" (3017), with its repeated Angel/Buffy exchange ("You still my girl?" "Always."), we are paid off (in a tear-jerkery way) for the same lines in "Beauty and the Beasts" (3004). And when Buffy chastises Giles—"Sure. We can work out after school. You know, if you're not too busy having sex with my MOTHER!"—"Earshot" (3018) pays off, in an ending that could be classified as ironicky as well, "Band Candy" (3006).

### **Foreshadowy**

(18) The endings of no less than eighteen episodes might be deemed foreshadowy. A close cousin of the set-uppy, the foreshadowy suggests or prefigures, in less palpable or overt ways, a development before it takes place. "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" (1005) ends on a foreshadowy note as the Master quotes scripture about The Anointed One leading the Slayer into Hell and greets his new disciple, as does the lame "Bad Eggs" (2012) with Angel and Buffy making with the smoochies. "Passion's" (2017) close is foreshadowy, ending as it does with Jenny Calendar's computer disc (containing the spell to restore Angel's soul) falling between a desk and a filing cabinet. So, too, is "I Only Have Eyes for You" (2019), foreshadowing Spike's return to the game and the end of his "Sit and Spin" status. Faith's journey to the Dark Side is foreshadowed by her indifference to the murder of Allen Finch at the end of both "Revelations" (3007) and "Bad Girls" (3014). In "Choices" (3019), the Mayor's harsh words in the library, even considering the source—the "big, stupid, evil guy" who runs Sunnydale—nevertheless foreshadow Buffy and Angel's breakup. The existence of The Initiative is foreshadowed in "The Freshman" (4001) as mysterious commandos capture a Sunday minion, and the existence of something secret within The Initiative is hinted at in the end of "A New Man" (4012) as Maggie Walsh enters the very "314" Ethan Rayne had spoken of earlier in the episode. And the mysterious final shot of the extraordinary "Restless" (4022)—Buffy looking into her bedroom with Tara's dream voiceover repetition of "You think you know . . . what's to come . . . what you are. You haven't even begun"—also the final shot of Season Four, foreshadowed we knew not what. Now, three seasons later, and the series over, we can see now what was foreseen there: Seasons Five, Six, and Seven, nothing less than, nothing more than the rest of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

(19) "The Real Me" ends with a foreshadowing of revelations to come concerning an enigmatic brand new sister and invites us to be ready before Dawn. The end of "Out of My Mind" (5004) is likewise foreshadowy, hinting at Spuffy sex that will not be consummated for another year. And at the end of "Bargaining," Part 2

(6002) we see Buffy's Season Six post-extraction-from-heaven turmoil foreshadowed in her face.

### Not-Overy

(20) Another half dozen endings might be designated as not-overy, suggesting as they do that the seeming plot resolution brought about in an individual episode is only temporary—that there could be more to come. The ending of "The Witch" (1003), for example, is not-overy in its suggestion that we may not have seen the last of Amy's mother, now trapped inside a cheerleading trophy in a display case at SHS. The ending of "Teacher's Pet" (1004) is likewise not-overy, showing us another She-Mantis egg hatching; as is the suggestion at the close of "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1011) that Marcie may have found her true calling in "assassination and infiltration." In "Halloween" (2006) a note from Ethan Rayne intended for the eyes of Giles ("Be seeing you") shouts not-overy. "Go Fish," too, hints of things to come as we watch three monsters swim out to sea. The not-overy will not appear again till Season Four, in the for-laugh ending of "Living Conditions" (4002) in which Buffy's obsession with demon roommate Kathy's irritating habits seems about to be transferred to Willow. Only one of these not-overies is actually paid-off—Ethan Rayne will indeed be back in "Band Candy" (3006) and "A New Man" (4012). Is it merely coincidence that, with the exception of "Halloween" and perhaps "Living Conditions," the not-overy episodes are *Buffy* bottom feeders? Ever since Brian DePalma's *Carrie* (1976), after all, the not-overy has become an anything but surprise cliché.

### Ironicky

(21) Given the centrality of tongue-in-cheek, mordant, and sardonic humor to the series as a whole, many *Buffy* endings—perhaps forty—can be characterized as ironicky, as finishing with humor caused by a clash between appearance and reality, expectation and actualization.

(22) When, at the end of "The Harvest" (1002), Giles concludes, based on the ironic banter of his new charges, that "the earth is doomed"—a scene evoked 142 episodes later in the series finale—we are experiencing the ironicky. When in "I Robot, You Jane" (1008), the Scoobies grasp for the first time that (in Buffy's words) "none of us are ever gonna have a happy, normal relationship"; or in "The Puppet Show" (1009) we are offered a doubly ironicky finale (a confused Principal Snyder wondering if the aftermath of the battle with the demon Marc—Willow holding a hatchet, Buffy carrying the ventriloquist dummy Sid—is "avant-garde" and, as an epilogue, the hilariously awful performance of *Oedipus* by the Scooby Gang in the talent show), or in "Nightmares" (1010) Willow answers Xander's "I'm sick, I need help" with "Don't I know it"; or "Prophecy Girl" (1012) comes down from the final battle with The Master with talk of partying and formalwear; or "When She Was Bad" (2001) gives the last words—"I hate that girl"—to "The Annoying One," we are doing the ironicky. When the close of "School Hard" (2003)—in which Spike kills The Master's protégé and then tells Drusilla "Let's see what's on TV," simultaneously endearing Spike to us and reminding us of the true primal scene of the narrative in which we are immersed—are we not at the ironicky's epicenter?

(23) The exchange between Buffy and Giles which ends "Lie to Me" (2007)—

**Giles:** The good guys are always stalwart and true, the bad guys are easily distinguished by their pointy horns or black hats, and, uh, we always defeat them and save the day. No one ever dies, and everybody lives happily ever after.

**Buffy:** Liar.

--is wonderfully ironicky, as is Giles' "Bay City Rollers" admission in "The Dark Age's" (2008) final moment, and the Gang's gross-out (at seeing Giles and Jenny Calendar kissing) at the end of "Ted" (2011). The ironicky is used to encourage us to continue to fall for "werewolf in love" Oz in "Phases" (2015), to feel Cordelia's pain in sticking up for Xander in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (2016), to glimpse

Joyce's soon-to-be-altered cluelessness to her daughter's secret calling in "Killed by Death" (2018)—her response to a picture, done by one of the children Buffy saved in the hospital, of Der Kindestod lying with its neck ripped open and blood pouring out is "How . . . nice."

(24) In "Dead Man's Party" (3002) the ironicky offers a delightful glimpse of Willow and Buffy's capable-of-sarcasm ironicky friendship as they hurl mock insults ("quitter," "whiner," "bailer," "harpy," "delinquent," "tramp," "witch") at each other. In "Homecoming" (3005) Cordelia and Buffy finally agree on something—they've been gypped out of a title. In "Lovers Walk" (3008), Spike is a very punk, very ironicky, vampire-in-love, doing it his way, covering Oldman/covering Sid Vicious/covering the Chairman of the Board. After the supreme darkness of "The Wish" (3009), we are returned to the Sunnydale we know and love as Cordelia continues to make wishes Anyanka—now forever Anya—cannot fulfill, and Buffy, Willow, and Xander, each killed only moments before in an alternate universe, chat amiably. In "Helpless" (3012) we are reminded of Xander's *schleimelness* as he attempts to demonstrate his strength before a still powerless Buffy and cannot even open a stubborn jar. In "The Zeppo" (3013), however, we grasp his indispensableness as the man who saved Sunnydale High irritates a caustic Cordelia with an enigmatic, knowing smile. At the end of "Gingerbread" (3011) Buffy and Willow contemplate getting the rat Amy "one of those wheel thingies." "Doppelgängland" ends as Willow appreciates her new, post-Vamp Willow status, with Percy now her slave (ready to report on both Roosevelts). At the end of "Graduation Day," Part 2 (3022), Oz's coolness brings an entire season, and high school itself, to an end. In the delightful end of "Fear Itself" (4004) the Scooby Gang realizes its stupidity as Giles notices the "actual size" inscription in Gaelic under the illustration of Gachnar, the miniscule Fear Demon. In "Doomed" (4011), a chip-neutered Spike can't wait to make use of his newly rediscovered power to kill demons.

I say we go out there and kick a little demon ass! . . . Come on! Vampires! Grrr! Nasty! Let's annihilate them. For justice - and for - the safety of puppies - and Christmas, right? Let's fight that evil! - Let's kill something! Oh, come on!"

All are ironicky endings.

(25) The dark, apocalyptic irony of the final scene of "Dirty Girls" (7018) final scene, with Caleb's voice-over, spoken to The First, accompanying a montage of Buffy's despair after a disastrous first encounter with the sinister, seemingly all-powerful preacher, offers us a final, very, very dark *BtVS* ironicky ending—an ending, recursively, about endings:

Now, it's a simple story. Stop me if you've heard it. I have found and truly believe that there is nothing so bad it cannot be made better with a story. And this one's got a happy ending. There once was a woman, and she was foul, like all women, for Adam's rib was dirty—just like Adam himself—for what was he, but human. But this woman, she was filled with darkness, despair, and why? Because she did not know. She could not see. She didn't know the good news, the glory that was coming. That'd be you. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. You show up, they'll get in line. Cause they followed her. And all they have to do is take one more step, and I'll kill them all. See? I told you it had a happy ending.

### Surprisey

(26) Closely related to the previously discussed set-uppy is a type of ending, occurring on at least eight occasions, we might call surprisey, in which the close of an episode introduces a shocking, though not necessarily suspenseful, plot development.

(27) The close of "Consequences" (3015) is certainly surprisey, as Faith, fresh from killing his henchman Mr. Trick, offers her services to the Mayor. We witness the surprisey in play as well at the end of "Crush" (5014) as a crushed Spike poignantly realizes his entrance privileges at 1630 Revello Drive have

been cancelled. And, of course, we are deeply surprised at the end of "Smashed" (6009) as Slayer/vampire sex brings down the house. Riley's revelation to Xander—that he knows Buffy does not love him—at the end of "The Replacement" (5003), Quentin Travers' blockbuster news—that Glory is a god—in "Checkpoint" (5012) are clearly surprisey, and "After Life's" (6003) conversation between Buffy and Spike outside The Magic Box, in which Buffy reveals that her friends have rescued her from heaven, not a hell dimension, couldn't be more so. And the final scene of "Normal Again" (6017) was so surprisey it caused many to wonder (wrongly as it turned out) if Buffy the Schizophrenic was not merely the result of a demon's poison—if Whedon and company were about to subvert the origin myth and foundation of the entire series.

### **Tear-Jerkery**

(28) One need not be a Shipper to experience the great appeal of *Buffy's* over two dozen tear-jerkery finales (the estimate is admittedly conservative). These emotionally moving, romantic, cathartic endings are absolutely essential to the series' tremendous emotional appeal.

(29) Think of "Beauty & the Beasts" (3004) reconciliation scene—"You still my girl?" "Always."—between Buffy and the just-returned-from-Hell-via-a-Claddagh ring-Angel. That's tearjerkery, as are the reunion of Buffy and her mother at the end of "Anne" (3001), the hanky-demanding, wordless close of "Amends" (3010) and the equally satisfying close of "The Prom" (3020). "New Moon Rising" (4019) offers us perhaps the first tearjerkery, "extra-flamey," lesbian moment in television history as Willow turns to Tara in order to be with the one she loves after Oz's exit. The poignancy of "Goodbye Iowa's" (4014) goodbye—Riley holding on for dear life to a piece of Buffy—is tearjerkery for all but the most fierce Riley-haters. And endings don't come much more tear-jerkery than the close of the rich and suggestive "Fool for Love" (5007) in which Spike, who has come to kill Buffy with a shotgun, instead joins her on the back porch of the Summers home, comforting her, tentatively patting her shoulder, as she deals with her mother's unsettling health news. Although most people remember "Into the Woods" (5010) as ending with Riley's tear-jerkery departure in a helicopter, the episode offers us as well Xander movingly professing his man-making love to Anya.

(30) Spikeaholics were certain to be moved by the ending of "Intervention" (5018) when Buffy comes to Spike's crypt to find out how much he told Glory about the real identity of The Key. And it goes without saying that an episode like "Dead Things" (6013)—"Empty Places" (7019) would be another example"—ending on a crying Buffy (as she confesses her affair with Spike to Tara) would be counted among the tear-jerkery.

(31) "Entropy" (6018) provides the best Willow/Tara tear-jerkery since "New Moon Rising" (4019). Tara's "Can you just be kissing me now?" is all the more poignant in retrospect since she will be dead by the end of the subsequent episode. And "Showtime" (7011) opens the tear ducts by having Buffy rescue Spike from the First Evil's lair. In Season Seven's "Potential" (7012), Xander again gets to have a tear-jerkery ending as he realizes in his dialogue with Dawn that he is not just the guy who repairs the windows, but the one who sees and knows, powers perhaps worthy of a cape.

### **Metaphory**

(32) Some **tear-jerkery** endings might also be deemed metaphory, offering as they do some kind of (usually visual, sometimes verbal) metaphor or trope, which exhibits and/or enhances new or in-progress metaphoric narrative skeins. Needless to say, no series in television history has been more consciously metaphoric than *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, so it should not surprise us that its endings are sometimes metaphory. Allow me to isolate only four.

(33) The ending of "Angel" (1007), with Buffy's crucifix searing its mark into Angel's flesh after an embrace, is certainly metaphory, as is the touching denouement of "Innocence" (2014), in which, after Buffy has defeated The Judge with a rocket launcher and been unable to kill Angelus in their first battle, she and her mother celebrate her birthday and watch an old movie together. And we find the metaphory, of course, in the gravity-defying final scene of "Family" (5006), Willow and Tara dancing in the air, and in the memorable last shot of "The Body" (5016) as Dawn reaches out toward her mother's cold corpse but does

not connect . . .

### **Closurey**

(34) Before we consider closurey *Buffy* endings, first allow me to offer a caution. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbott defines closure as a narrative which "ends in such a way as to satisfy the expectations and answer the questions that it has raised." "Expectations" and "answers," Abbott warns, must not be confused. We expect Lear to die by the end of the play—an ending assumed as soon as we recognize the play as tragedy, and we are not disappointed. "But," Abbott notes, "major questions are raised over the course of the play that for many viewers are not answered by the conclusion" (188). Hence, *King Lear* offers closure at the level of expectation but does not offer us closure at the level of questions.

### **Partial Closurey**

(35) The endings of numerous *Buffy* episodes might be thought of as partial-closurey in intent, as resolving (or seemingly resolving) a single story arc at the level of expectation, though not necessarily at the level of questions. With one exception, each season-ending episode offers partial closurey by putting an end to that year's Big Bad (The Master, Angelus, The Mayor, Adam, Glory, Dark Willow, The First Evil). The exception is, of course, "Primeval" (4021) which closes down—"Burn it down, and salt the Earth"—not only The Initiative but The Initiative story arc of Season Four in the penultimate episode. Other episodes offering partial closurey include "Wild at Heart" (4006), which seems to say goodbye to Oz and to the Oz/Willow relationship, "As You Were" (6015), which puts an end to Buffy and Spike's sexual relationship, and "Lies My Parents Told Me" (7017), which shuts the door (literally) on seven years of mentoring The Slayer by Giles.

### **Closurey (at the level of expectation)**

(36) Only two episodes can justifiably be called closurey (at the level of expectation), resolving major, multiple plot entanglements. The first, of course, is "The Gift" (5022), putting an end simultaneously to Buffy herself, Season Five, and *BtVS*'s tenure on the WB. And the other, of course, is "Chosen" (7022), closurey (at the level of expectations) of the war with The First, of Buffy's vocation as "the one girl in all the world," of Sunnydale, California, and of seven years of narrative.

### **Closurey (at the level of questions)**

(37) No single episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be characterized as closurey (at the level of questions). Indeed, not surprisingly, the final line of the show, spoken by Dawn, is in fact a question.

### **Conclusion**

(38) In *The Sense of an Ending* Kermode observes that there are really only two sorts of fictions: those "which seal off the long perspectives" and those which "move through time to an end, an end," Kermode explains, that "we must sense, even if we cannot know it." Now the "sense" with which we come to experience such ends, as Kermode makes clear, is nothing else but the generation of fictions. The fate of the former is to end up, "When the drug wears off," in "the dump with the other empty bottles" (170).

(39) Most fictions, including, of course, most television programs, are, regrettably, frequently just such empty bottles. But those fictions which continue to interest us, which through their very subject matter and form give to us a "sense of an ending" and facilitate our imaginative deconstruction and construction of our world, include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a fiction which will "continue to interest us" because it "move[d] through time to an end, an end which we must sense even if we cannot know it."

(40) "Stop. Stop telling stories," Buffy screams at Andrew at the end of "Storyteller," as part of her scheme to elicit his tears, which are needed to close the seal of Danzalthar. "Life isn't a story." Andrew seems to take her admonition to heart, for at the end of "Storyteller" he abruptly turns off his video camera, pointing his remote at the camera and at us.

(41) Now "Life isn't a story" would be a startling, self-referential assertion in any serial narrative, but coming as it does in a series created by an "angry atheist" who nevertheless espouses his continued belief in "a religion in narrative" (see Lavery), it seems especially problematic. [2]

(42) As Rhonda Wilcox argued in her talk at "Staking a Claim" the question that ends the series—Dawn's "Yeah, Buffy. What are we gonna do now."—"means that we get to answer the question." Offering no closure at the level of questions, forever "[b]oth complete and incomplete," the text of *Buffy* "invokes the imagination of the reader . . . to finish the story in their own fashions, . . . to write, and live, our own stories." For life isn't stories, though it cannot be lived without them.

(43) Is it possible to imagine a happier ending? Contemplating the end of *Buffy* in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* back in May, Carl Wilson would observe that "Once *Buffy* was invented, it couldn't be unsaid. The endlessly generative Buffyverse lives in our heads, a high-kicking new voice in the chorus of imaginative possibility. . . ." Willow's spell in "Chosen" universalizes Buffy's power. Joss Whedon's spell, 1997-2003, transferred *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* narrative power to us all.

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## Notes

[1] I have considered only the very end of episodes in this initial investigation. Future examinations of *Buffy* endings will need to take into account not only the final final moments of episodes but the entire final act.

[2] We should note that the realization that "Life isn't a story" put in an appearance over a year earlier, in "Once More with Feeling" (6007), in the slightly different metaphor of the song Spike sings to Buffy after he stops her spontaneously combusting dance. "Life's not a song," Whedon's lyrics insist,

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.



**C. W. Marshall**

## **Aeneas the Vampire Slayer: A Roman Model for Why Giles Kills Ben**

*Author's Note: the following contains spoilers both for the fifth season of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and for Virgil's Aeneid.*

[1] At the end of season five of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in the television show's 100<sup>th</sup> episode, the main character dies. Buffy's self-sacrifice saves the world, averts an apocalypse, and defeats a god ("The Gift," 5022, written and directed by Joss Whedon). Her death is the gift she can offer, saving her sister, her friends, and the world from destruction. Greater love hath no man than this, clearly. This final episode of the season closed with the camera lingering on a gravestone that reads "Buffy Anne Summers | 1981-2001 | Beloved Sister | Devoted Friend | She Saved the World | A Lot." A pretty effective cliffhanger, really, which sent many fans to the internet for more information, even leading some to suggest that rumors of the show's move from one network to another (WB to UPN) were in fact a hoax.[1] Was this the end of the series? If so, the sense of closure was magisterial. As it turns out, the imagery of the Christ-like sacrifice of the main character continued the following September with a resurrection, as *Buffy* was brought back to life for two more seasons.[2]

[2] Popular culture today can easily appropriate Christian *topoi*, so that, for many viewers, Buffy's self-sacrifice was clearly The Right Choice: "it is in line with our sensibilities" (Held 238)[3] Though it involves loss for her, for the other characters (the image of the vampire Spike weeping when he realizes that Buffy is dead was particularly moving, unexpectedly), and—at the time—for many fans, it was, in its way, inevitable. Which is why another death in the same episode is as problematic as it is. Glorificus ("Glory", the "Big Bad" of season 5) is a minor deity that exists inside a human host, a young doctor named Ben who has also served as a possible love interest for Buffy throughout the season. The hypostatic union of Glory and Ben means that only one of the two can appear at a time, and Glorificus has power only in Glory-form, not in Ben-form. Glory is seeking a mystical "Key" that she needs to wreak hell on earth. The Key is Buffy's sister Dawn, a character introduced at the beginning of the season, though the narrative establishes that from Buffy's perspective she has always had a sister, and that this is her closest blood relative[4] (Buffy's mother, Joyce Summers, had died earlier in the season, in "The Body," 5016). Both Ben and Dawn are vessels for a greater power, and "The Gift" emphasizes that connection, as well as their respective innocence. Xander directly compares the two as he contemplates killing Ben: "What about Ben? He can be killed, right? I mean, I know he's an innocent, but, you know, not, like 'Dawn' innocent. We could kill a ... a regular guy... God." The link between Ben and Dawn at the human level directly mirrors the link between Glory and the Key at the non-human level, so that any interruption at the human level (such as by killing Ben or Dawn) will prevent Glory from attaining the Key. Buffy's self-sacrifice interrupts this pattern, substituting herself for Dawn in the equation.

[3] The climactic duel features some particularly tight scripting. Lighter episodes from the season, seemingly introduced as respite from the increasingly dark principal story arc, contribute elements that are



recapitulated in the fight with Glory: the Buffybot, Xander's job as a construction worker, and Olaf the troll's enchanted hammer all become instrumental in the defeat of Glory. In the final battle, Buffy slams the hammer into Glory repeatedly, until, bleeding and exhausted, Glory morphs into the human Ben. Then Buffy hesitates. She clearly has the ability to kill Ben, and with him Glory, but she refuses. She tells Ben/Glory to stay away from "me and mine," drops the hammer, and leaves to rescue her sister.

[4] Then Giles appears. Rupert Giles, Buffy's Watcher and surrogate father-figure, asks in his quiet English accent, "Can you move?" Ben, defeated and prostrate, says haltingly, "Need a minute. She could have killed me." Giles pauses, then answers: "No she couldn't. Never. And sooner or later Glory will re-emerge, and make Buffy pay for that mercy—and the world with her. Buffy even knows that, and still she couldn't take a human life. She's a hero, you see. She's not like us." The speech is delivered calmly: he takes out his glasses and puts them on while speaking. The heroism of the Vampire Slayer is defined in Christian terms, with mercy and self-sacrifice as cardinal virtues. Ben doesn't understand what Giles is saying—"Us?" he asks—whereupon Giles calmly suffocates Ben until he no longer breathes.

[5] Giles eschews mercy and takes a human life, an act not without consequence in the Buffyverse. His words deny this is an act of heroism, but in that he is, arguably, wrong. His murder of Ben serves a greater good—Glory is finally stopped—and it protects those he loves, particularly Buffy. His solution has been considered as a possible course of action previously in the episode, but it was rejected outright by Buffy. It has been argued "Buffy Should've Killed Ben" but she fails to do so because of her (implicit) retributivistic sense of justice (Held 236-38). Contrasting this with Giles's utilitarianism does provide a "hard case" that allows intellectual exploration of justice and justification. However, the hard case is premised on some assumptions that are not necessarily valid for a decision made by a character in the series. For example, justice is defined in terms of the relationship between an individual's act and the state, and the discussion is framed in terms of state justice. Buffy is not a representative or agent of the state (whatever that might mean in this context), and makes her decisions based on individual values (perceptions of sisterhood, blood ties). So, indeed, does Giles, who is motivated by his duty ("I've sworn to protect this sorry world") and concern to maintain Buffy's heroic status ("She's a hero, you see"). [5] The act will have repercussions for Giles (he will return to England early in season 6, recognizing that Buffy no longer needs his guiding example), but it does serve to lessen the Slayer's burden, if only slightly and (in the minutes before her death) momentarily. [6] Indeed, there is no indication that Buffy ever discovers what happens to Ben. Giles exhibits a pre-Christian heroism, and it is in fact very similar to the situation in which Aeneas finds himself at the end of Virgil's *Aeneid*, book 12, lines 919-52. [7]

[6] In making this association, I am not requiring there to be a causal relationship between the two works. Certainly, many of the writers and producers associated with *Buffy* may have read the *Aeneid* in translation. At the level of the characters within the series, it is more certain that we should expect Giles to have read the *Aeneid* in Latin. Not only does the poem remain a fundamental text in Latin pedagogy in England, but in addition the depiction of the Underworld in *Aeneid* 6 may be imagined to be a basic component of Giles's training as a Watcher, alongside other works of Latin epic, such as the *Necromancy* in book 6 of Lucan's *Civil War (Pharsalia)*, if such a hypothetical bibliobiography may be constructed for a fictional character. The connection I am suggesting instead operates for the modern audience of both works, whereby the knowledge of one enriches and amplifies the ethical context of the other. Does the literary representation of an ethical choice in Virgil allow for a better understanding of why Giles kills Ben?

[7] Like Aeneas, Giles feels an obligation to those institutions larger than himself: the Watchers' Council, the Slayer, and those supernatural powers of Good with whom he is allied in the fight against Evil. This cosmic dimension assures us that what he feels is *pietas* in the Roman sense. Aeneas is paradigmatically *pious*—it is his standard epithet in Virgil, occurring e.g. at *Aeneid* 1. 305—and this characterizes him throughout the poem. His sense of duty to the gods and his destiny motivates much of his action of the poem, and serves to keep him in many ways distant from much of the poem's readership. Further, Giles's paternal concern for Buffy can profitably be read against Aeneas' guardianship of Evander's son Pallas, granted at *Aeneid* 8. 514-19, though the analogy is not perfect: while younger like Pallas, Buffy remains the central character whose existence is necessary within the dramatic world to maintain cosmic balance.

Giles does not appear to act out of passion—at least not any more. Previous episodes in the series (particularly “The Dark Age,” 2008, and “Band Candy,” 3006) have made clear that in his youth Giles had been wild. “Ripper” Giles was impulsive, aggressive, and much more traditionally masculine than the tweed-wearing Watcher the series presents. He was also more committed to direct action in his past, and thus in several ways evokes the guts-for-glory attitude of Aeneas in the Trojan War, which exists in the back-story of the *Aeneid*. Recalling his conduct as Troy was attacked, Aeneas recounts, “I went where I was driven [. . .] into the fighting and the flames, where the grim Fury of war called me” (*Aeneid* 2. 337); “like wolves foraging blindly on a misty night, driven out of their lairs by a ravaging hunger that gives them no rest and leaving behind their young to wait for them with their throats all dry, we ran the gauntlet of the enemy to certain death” (*Aeneid* 2. 355-59). Both Giles and Aeneas have matured in their travels, but the sense remains that obligation is a coat covering a passionate tumult beneath. Aeneas usually keeps his passion repressed, but it does break through to the surface when Turnus kills Pallas and exults over the corpse, taking Pallas’ baldric as a spoil (10. 474-509). Once the news reaches Aeneas, “Everything that stood before him he harvested with the sword, cutting a broad swathe through the enemy ranks, and burning with rage as he looked for this Turnus flushed with slaughter” (10. 513-15). The *furor* is always there, and it can surface as it does at the end of the *Aeneid*, or at the beginning of “The Gift” (“Yes we bloody well are [talking about this]!” Giles yells at Buffy). This brings us to each man’s moment of decision.

[8] For Aeneas, the slaying of Turnus is an act during wartime against an enemy inscribed in the context of the poem with historical and literary precedents so that their combat and Turnus’ death could have been completely unproblematic. Aeneas will not be going to the Hague anytime soon for killing Turnus. The difficulty comes in intention. Virgil lets us know something that would only be evident to Aeneas and Turnus in their final moment: that Aeneas is thinking of Pallas as his sword strikes home. This moment of anger, in which Aeneas’ behavior evokes the *furor* of his opponent Turnus, has been much studied,[8] but its deliberate ambiguity is what is relevant here. Multiple and conflicting motivations inform the series of specific moments leading up to the climactic duel. Defeated, Turnus supplicates for mercy and even begins to persuade Aeneas to spare his life (12. 938-41). Then Aeneas sees Pallas’ baldric now worn by Turnus. This introduces a new motive, one that is completely intimate. The glance evokes “a whole nexus of feelings [which] may be seen working on Aeneas” (Lyne 225) privately and instantly that serve to remove any certainty from an understanding of the work. Virgil’s reluctance to tease out implications means that Aeneas cannot be censured within the poem. The *Aeneid* masterfully has anticipated for its readership all that will follow from this act, from the marriage to Lavinia and the birth of Silvius to the founding of Alba Longa and Rome, down to the day of Augustus and beyond (see especially *Aeneid* 6. 756-66, 6. 788-97, 8. 47-48, 8. 626-29, 8. 675-81, 12. 937). There is a darkness present in the future, too. It will not be filled with *res laetae* (“happy times,” *Aeneid* 2. 783), as future Romans will have to fight Carthaginians (*Aeneid* 4. 622-29). Aeneas himself will have a short life (*Aeneid* 1. 263-66), but will be deified (*Aeneid* 1. 259-60, 12. 794-95). A safe and prosperous future for his people is guaranteed in the slaying of Turnus, but there are contradictions that remove certainty that Aeneas’ action is “justified.” [9] Similarly, the complex emotions fostered by Aeneas’ glance at Pallas’ baldric makes it difficult for us to see this action in its unmitigated glory.

[9] So it is with Giles. In killing Ben Giles recognizes his own culpability: “She’s not like us.” Ben himself may be innocent, and the audience may like him—just as it is hard not to enjoy the wall-leaping heroics of Turnus (*Aeneid* 9.691-818), who in turn may evoke historical figures such as Coriolanus (see Plutarch, *Coriolanus* 8; Scott-Kilvert 20-21.) But within Ben is the power to destroy the sense of order for which the Slayer strives. We do not see rage in Giles—his detachment instead evokes Aeneas from most other parts of the poem—but we do have his recognition of the ethical problem he faces. When he kills Ben, he acts quickly, deliberately, and, unlike Aeneas, never looks away. Earlier in the episode, Giles and Buffy had articulated their relationship to the coming events: “This is how many apocalypses for us now?” asks Buffy; “Oh, uh, well...” says Giles, sitting and taking off his glasses, “Six, at least. Feels like a hundred.” Giles has concluded that once Glory’s ritual sacrifice of Dawn begins, the only resolution is to kill Dawn in order to prevent the ritual’s completion. This Buffy refuses to do. She also says she will stop Giles if he acts on this intention. In the end the alternative is to give her own life, which is in a way easier—it is the culturally sanctioned “Christian” answer.[10] Giles’ view is different: “I’ve sworn to protect this sorry world, and sometimes that means saying and doing what other people can’t. What they shouldn’t have to.” He is

talking about sacrificing Dawn, but the statement plays itself out in the decision to kill Ben, who is not a friend, not among the Slayer's inner circle of Scoobies, and consequently more easily classified as an enemy, despite his lack of agency in Glory's actions. Ben's threat exists only in potential. Neither he nor Dawn choose to be active in the situation, and so the audience reasonably expects the story to avoid both deaths.

[10] Rather than problematizing the situation as in the *Aeneid*, "The Gift" presents a moral dilemma apparently simplified from the one anticipated, which can be read against the principal heroic model the episode and series presents, that of Buffy the Slayer. That doesn't make Giles's decision unproblematic. Giles' calm does not provide the explanation of motivation that Aeneas' glance at Pallas's baldric does for readers of the *Aeneid*. But it does remain a private act, lost in the confusion of the season-ending apocalypse, which the show and its characters are unwilling to judge. An earlier invocation of the St. Crispin's Day speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (IV.iii.20-67) by Giles and Spike provides a further ironic distance between the nature of the battle they expect to fight and the one they do. The difference between Buffy and Giles resides in the presumed default morality of the situation: that is, in what ethical framework each member of the audience brings to the episode. The moral positions staked out by the characters will not correspond to that of a given audience member, in most cases. The conflict does provide an opportunity for the audience to evaluate the differences between a "Christian" decision in a post-Christian context and a "Roman" decision in a post-classical context, and this in turn echoes with a larger debate about the inherited values a culture possesses. That the killing might have been excusable if it were not completely tied up with personal emotions should make the audience less comfortable with Giles' action and not more. The choices made by Aeneas and Giles both recognize the ambiguities of the human condition, drawing contrasts between the expression of private emotions and the public face of leadership. Virgil encourages us to be wary of any direct evaluation of another's ethical choice. Even given the intimate details not available to us in life, uncertainty will always exist. Both "The Gift" and the *Aeneid* are profound human explorations of the excuses we provide under the guise of ethics. Neither allows the audience easily to put aside the concerns of morality, but it is only in making choices that we have a chance for heroism.

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[1] See Millman.

[2] Christian symbolism is a central component to the series, beyond the trappings that might be expected in a vampire story, and about this there have been some valuable discussions. Wendy Anderson concentrates on "Amends" (3010), an episode in which Whedon himself acknowledges "it's hard to ignore the idea of a 'Christmas miracle' here" (cited in Anderson, "Prophecy" 213); Anderson (225-26) and Hertz see Christological associations in "Grave" (6021), the final episode of season six. Erickson connects the series' religious perspective particularly to the postmodern (some would say post-Christian) expressions of Christianity in America.

[3] Held criticizes Buffy's choice, however, as discussed in paragraph 5.

[4] One online magazine, awarding Buffy the title "Theologian of the Year," compares the relationship between Buffy and Dawn in this episode with Christ and the Church (Skippy R).

[5] All of these motives are open to examination, and from the perspective of state-imposed justice both characters might be culpable. I would argue that neither is concerned about Held's questions, however. Whatever measure they use to justify their own actions, the scale is simultaneously individual and cosmological; it is not concerned with society or the state (Giles is not concerned that he might go to jail if he kills Ben, for example). This is why Held's concern about whether an action is "justified" (e.g on 238) sits somewhat uneasily with me. In the absence of an absolute scale by which to measure these things, both Buffy and Giles can believe themselves to be justified in their decisions.

[6] Petrova diminishes the moral implications of Giles's decision in three ways. First, she perceives the consequences of murder in purely psychological terms ("...whoever does it will be incurring feelings of guilt otherwise he would have left Buffy to do it"). Second,

since the guilt is not evident, she concludes, "Giles objectifies the evil [. . .] it is not in him, but he is merely the carrier" (this then parallels Giles with Ben). Both of these assumptions seem incompatible with a cosmology where Good and Evil are locked in a timeless battle across dimensions. Third, she later claims "We cannot say that Giles is evil when he kills Ben, because he doesn't seem to have any choice about it." This effectively removes even the possibility of heroism from Giles. Of course he has a choice: it may be a crummy choice, but it is a choice nonetheless. Buffy chose to leave Ben alive and face the risk of Glory's return to spare a human life. Giles chooses to eliminate that possibility. Right or wrong, it is a choice. I would instead argue that both choices are heroic, but by different standards of heroism.

[7] All Virgil references are to the Latin text; lineation in translations may vary. West is cited here.

[8] Representative views from different perspectives can be found in Anderson, *The Art of the Aeneid* 91-100, Burnell, Galinsky, Horsfall 192-216, Little, Lyne, Putnam, West.

[9] O'Hara 88-122, argues that the prophecies of the *Aeneid* deliberately mislead Aeneas, and that the fulfillment is consistently bleaker than the prediction.

[10] While mercy (Latin *clementia*) is a virtue in Stoic ethics and clearly informs the ethical choices of the *Aeneid* (see Lyne), it does not extend to self-sacrifice.



**Stacey Abbott**

## **Walking the Fine Line Between Angel and Angelus**

[1] Much of the discussion and analysis of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has focused upon the show's moral complexity in its representation of good and evil. Joss Whedon's world is a world of grays rather than crisp black and white oppositions. The character Angel, the vampire with a soul, was one of the earliest introductions of this ambiguity into the series. The slayer and her friends were forced to accept that a vampire could be good. Difficult to accept but not as difficult as a loving boyfriend who can turn evil over night . . . again embodied in Angel. He offered the young Slayer, her friends and the audience a lot to think about in those first two seasons. While initially morally complex, as the series has developed and explored the far reaches of moral ambiguity through the actions of all of the Scooby Gang, Angel's representation seems too neatly split across polar oppositions: the good Angel versus the evil Angelus. These two sides of Angel have been described by Beth Braun as "tortured soul" and "soulless demon" (90) and by Mary Alice Money as "soulful vampire extraordinaire" and "evil über-vampire" (98-99).

[2] Rhonda V. Wilcox suggests, in "Every Night I Save You: Buffy, Spike, Sex and Redemption," "[that] since Angel is good because he possesses a soul, he still represents an essentialist definition of good." This is in contrast to the vampire Spike, who, she argues, "owns no human soul, yet repeatedly does good; if he can be seen as capable of change, capable of good, capable of *love*, then he can represent an existentialist definition of good" (paragraph 15). Angel's soul would seem to make him one in a long line of sympathetic, reluctant vampires, from the nineteenth-century *Varney the Vampire* through to Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows* and Nick Knight in *Forever Knight*, an "essentialist hero" whose goodness in his case is determined by his possession of a soul. Richard Greene and Wayne Yuen further suggest that "since plenty of persons with souls do harm others," as demonstrated by Warren in season six of *BtVS*, what differentiates Angel from the traditional vampire is that because he "has a 'good' soul, he has no desire to harm people" (paragraph 2).

[3] While these readings of Angel's character on *BtVS* are sound, the *idea* of a vampire with a soul is a complex concept that has been more fully explored on the new series *Angel*. On *BtVS*, Angel's strict embodiment of an opposition between good and evil is largely a result of the fact that Angel is a significant, but peripheral love interest for Buffy. His existence is defined in relation to her. For instance, in a flashback in "Becoming", it is revealed that the good Angel is in Sunnydale purely to help Buffy on her mission and it does not take long to become apparent that the evil Angelus only remained in Sunnydale to torment Buffy. This clear-cut image of Angel helps Buffy cope with her feelings for him. She is able to love Angel because he has a soul despite all of the evil things Angelus has done to her, a fact that she holds up as her reason for being unable to love Spike.

[4] It is only when Angel is moved from peripheral love interest to the central protagonist of a new series that his representation breaks from strategically polarizing his good and evil sides.[1] In *Angel*, as a

means of developing the character to sustain its own serial narrative and to shape future narrative arcs, the many ways in which Angel and Angelus merge are examined. Angel does not necessarily possess a particularly 'good' soul but rather that what differentiates Angel from the other vampires, and which is the subject of much of the narrative arc of the series, is the fact that he has become a curious hybrid between human and vampire and through this hybridity he must constantly choose not to harm people.[2] The curse did not determine his 'good soul' but rather put into play a conflict between vampirism and humanism that fuels Angel's identity, despite his soul. In this article I want to look at how the series *Angel* undermines the distinction between Angel and Angelus and presents the hybrid Angel/Angelus as a self-defining existentialist protagonist struggling within himself to make the right choices, for the greater good, the good of his friends and for his own benefit, within an increasingly complicated world in which it is often impossible to distinguish right from wrong.

[5] Jean-Paul Sartre argued in "Existentialism and Humanism," that if God does not exist then man's existence pre-dates his essence, i.e. "before it can be defined through any conception of itself." Humanity must define itself through choice and action, rather than assume the possession of an essentialist quality. Sartre claims that "man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing but the sum of his actions, nothing but what his life is" (28, 36).

[6] That the series *Angel* has links to existentialism is supported by the relocation of Angel to Los Angeles, as well as its adoption of other conventions from the detective film and *Film Noir*, most notably the reinvention of the character Angel as an LA detective surrounded by the visual trappings of both genres (Jacobs). The series largely takes place at night, which is equally a Noir and Vampire genre convention. It often uses the chiaroscuro lighting associated with *Film Noir* and constantly emphasizes the city location through repeated uses of establishing shots of the bright lights of the city throughout each episode and in particular in the credit sequence, which features a montage of urban locations superimposed over images of the night life of the LA landscape.[3] This presentation of the city captures what Andrew Spicer describes as the Noir city's "fundamental ambivalence." It is "dangerous, violent, squalid and corrupt but also exciting and sophisticated, the place of opportunity and conspicuous consumption" (67).

[7] Robert Porfirio, in his analysis of existentialist motifs in *Film Noir*, argues that while the genre was not directly influenced by existentialism, it was influenced by the American hard-boiled school of fiction and the "symbiotic relationship they had with the French existentialist writers" (83). For instance, according to Andrew Spicer, the adaptations of Cornell Woolrich, the most existential of the hard-boiled writers, "show paranoid protagonists, adrift in the cities that are monstrous, hallucinatory and actively malevolent" (67). Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward further suggest that in films such as *The Dark Corner*, the protagonist is not concerned about working and living outside the law, but rather that it is his inability "either to discover or to control the underlying causes of his distress, that is mentally intolerable" (4). The idea of characters being lost within a city that is "monstrous, hallucinatory and actively malevolent" is one that is made literal through the series' 'demonisation' of Los Angeles. While Angel both protects the lost and needy from the city's demons, he is often presented as being adrift and under threat himself, instigating the crisis of the Noir protagonist unable to control the events of his life.

[8] Of course, *Film Noir* and the detective film are not the only generic allusions that *Angel* draws upon. The series is, in fact, a curious hybrid of genres, but most significantly in terms of its representation of Angel and the urban landscape, between the *Film Noir*/Detective genres and the superhero narrative such as *Batman*. While Angel often circulates within the hidden underworld of LA, this is usually counterbalanced with images of him looming over the city, acting as its guardian. Again in the credit sequence for the series, the images of the lost and suffering of the city are juxtaposed with Angel bursting onto the scene to save the day. While this hybridized presentation of the city and the character Angel explains certain inconsistencies within the series' relationship with *Film Noir*, I would argue that this is fundamental to Angel's character development. The dramatic arc of the series is structured around this generic tension as Angel is regularly pulled down from his position as the empowered hero, watching over the helpless, and into the morally ambiguous, labyrinthine underworld of the Noir city where events and actions are random and "the only certainty is death" (Walker 22).

[9] Robert Porfirio outlines certain motifs that recur within *Film Noir*: the non-heroic hero; themes of alienation and loneliness; choice; man under threat of death; meaninglessness, purposelessness and the absurd; chaos, violence, paranoia; and sanctuary, ritual and order. I would argue that all of these motifs recur across the series *Angel*. In his battles against the evil law firm Wolfram and Hart, Angel is constantly embroiled in a chaotic and violent battle and like the Noir detective he alone finds sanctuary within the confines of his office or home. Furthermore, with the launch of the new series, the character Angel is introduced as being alone, stripped of the community to which he briefly belonged on *BtVS* and, as Porfirio argues, the character is intensely aware of this loss. While much of the series involves the rebuilding of a new community of similarly alienated souls (Doyle, Cordelia, Wesley, Gunn, Fred, Lorne and Kate Lockley) all of whom are damaged or in need of redemption like Angel, a theme that is not usually associated with *Film Noir*, each season sees Angel stripped of his friends and forced to go it alone. In season one, Wesley and Cordelia are put in the hospital in order to isolate Angel; in season two Angel fires his staff; and most dramatically of all, season three ends with Angel locked within a steel coffin and dropped to the bottom of the ocean while his friends have each gone their own way.[4] It is through the series' expression of the motifs of the non-heroic hero, choice, meaninglessness, purposelessness and the absurd, however, that the series explores more fully the complexity of the vampire with a soul and places Angel on the path to an existential realization.

### Angel as Vampire

[10] While Angel is clearly presented as a hero, a champion, the series takes great pains to present him as a problematic one. He makes mistakes, his personal obsessions get in the way of his mission,[5] and most importantly we are never allowed to forget that he is a vampire. Angel's vampirism is foregrounded in the series, no longer as part of the tragic irony of his love affair with the Slayer nor simply in the threat of Angelus' return, for which his colleagues Cordelia and Wesley are always prepared, but through the physical reality of his vampirism. The series emphasizes the demands of his vampire body and that he must continually overcome these restrictions and *choose* not to give in to his hungers.

[11] Firstly, Angel is confined to shadows. On *BtVS*, he similarly avoids sunlight but this was primarily achieved by his mysterious appearances at night rather than by drawing attention to the sun's lethal effects. Two exceptions to this occur in "Earshot" (3018) and "The Prom" (3020) when, in both cases, Buffy inadvertently opens the curtains in Angel's mansion and lets the sun into the room forcing Angel to jump out of the way. The effect of these scenes is to emphasize how different they are and the hopelessness of their relationship, prefiguring Angel's departure from the series and Buffy's life. On *Angel*, however, he is constantly seen during the day but avoiding direct light. Two episodes in the first season, "In the Dark" (1003) and "I Will Remember You" (1008), particularly draw attention to this by briefly allowing Angel to emerge into the sunlight through magical means, reminding us that he is usually trapped in the dark. Oz comments on Angel's unnatural pallor. In both cases Angel *chooses* to return to the shadows and his vampire existence. In the first case it is because he doesn't feel that he has yet atoned for his sins and in the second because he believes he can do more good as a vampire.[6]

[12] The second way we are reminded of Angel's vampirism is his thirst for blood. In the first episode of the series "City Of" (1001) he saves two young women from vampires but sends them away when they try to thank him as he is clearly drawn to the blood from their wounds. Doyle warns him that when he drank Buffy's blood, he regained a taste for it and must therefore reconnect with humanity in order to avoid giving in to this thirst. In "Somnambulist" (1011), Angel has vivid dreams of attacking people and drinking their blood, which turn out to be telepathic images of the actions of one of his vampire offspring who happens to be in LA. While the narrative reassures the audience that these images originated elsewhere, the episode ends on a disturbing note when Angel admits to Cordelia that the dreams weren't nightmares, he enjoyed them (despite possessing a soul). In "The Shroud of Rahmon" (2008) as Angel goes under cover as a Vegas vampire taking part in a museum heist, the mystical energies of the shroud they are stealing drives everyone in its proximity insane. This brings out the vampire in Angel, causing him to threaten Gunn, hit Wesley and attack and drink from the police officer Kate Lockley. While it is later



revealed that his attack on Kate was a ploy to save her from one of the others, Wesley and Cordelia express concern that this may have awakened his blood lust. The episode implies that their fears may be well founded as it ends with Angel all alone in his room, vividly flashing back to the moment he drank from Kate. Finally, in "Sleep Tight" (3017), his pig's blood is spiked with the blood of his son Connor causing Angel to drink blood like an alcoholic falling off the wagon. His thirst is unquenchable, he becomes increasingly violent and he even describes Connor as smelling like food. In this manner, the series reiterates that Angel's soul or guilt for his crimes has not taken away his thirst for human blood, but rather he *chooses* not to give in to it.

## Flashbacks to Angelus

[13] While reminding the audience of the physicality of Angel's vampirism, the series further emphasizes his past as Angelus. While Angelus makes a brief, although memorable appearance in the second season of *BtVS*, Angelus is a very real and constant presence on Angel. In "Enemies" (3017) in *BtVS*, the effectiveness of Angel's performance as Angelus in order to trick Faith is unsettling to both the audience and Buffy because it undermines the separation that has been established between the two sides of Angel's character (with and without soul). In "Eternity" (1017) on *Angel* that separation is completely shattered when a drug that simulates 'perfect happiness' briefly unleashes Angelus showing that the "über-vampire" is merely lurking beneath the surface of Angel's goodness. While Angelus' obsession with Buffy was an inversion of Angel's love for her, in "Eternity" Angelus simply says what Angel's been thinking but is too good a friend to say. He ridicules Wesley's masculinity, and mocks Cordelia's acting. Wesley admits in this episode that Angel walks a fine and unenviable line.

[14] The most important way that Angelus' presence is felt is through flashback.[7] Angel has a privileged relationship with the flashback. Flashbacks are not commonly used on *BtVS* with the exception of "Fool for Love" (5007) in which Spike recounts how he became a vampire and killed the two slayers, "Amends" (3010) in which Angel comes face to face with his past victims and "Becoming Parts 1 & 2" (2021 & 2022) in which we are witness to the implementation of the Gypsy curse and Angel's first sight of Buffy. While the flashbacks in "Becoming" do show Buffy's being called as a Slayer and the difficulties of her broken home, the focus in these scenes is upon the impact of this sight of Buffy upon Angel. It is his story being told. While unusual on *BtVS*, the flashback is a major element of the narrative structure of *Angel*. Angel is constantly being confronted by figures from his past such as Darla in "Dear Boy" (2005) and "The Trial" (2009) and his many encounters with Holtz that come to dominate the third season. Each of these confrontations is conceptualized by flashbacks to the past. His noble actions in the present are, therefore, set against his history of cruelty, sadism and viciousness, serving to reinforce the need for redemption, a major theme of the series. The flashbacks also serve to flesh out Angel's character before and after the curse, highlighting the similarities rather than simply the differences between the two sides of his identity and the impact of the *choices* he has made throughout his undead existence.

[15] For instance, a flashback of Angel's life with Darla and the direct aftermath of the gypsy curse reveals that Angel returned to her (with his soul) asking to be accepted back into the fold in "Darla" (2007). While the implication on *BtVS* was that Angel had never drunk human blood between regaining his soul and losing it in "Surprise" (2013), Angel's past has been rewritten in this series to reveal that this is not true. According to the *Angel* narrative, even with his soul Angel tried desperately to maintain his vampire identity, by living, hunting and drinking blood with Darla, though choosing to kill only the "evil-doer" and as a result being abandoned by Darla. This revision to Angel's backstory serves to reposition the significance of Darla given her reintroduction on *Angel* and the role she plays in the narrative arc of season two and three. It also presents the newly ensouled vampire as suffering a conflict of identity, torn between his vampire and human self.

[16] In "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" (2002) flashbacks to the fifties reveal an Angel that is detached from humanity. He has stopped drinking human blood, but he still has a contempt for humanity that is reminiscent of Angelus but without the sadism. He is cold, uncaring and withdrawn. This contempt is briefly alleviated by his desire to help a young woman who is a victim of racial discrimination. When she

later betrays him to a paranoid mob out of fear for her own life, he abandons humanity again, leaving the girl and the mob to be slowly destroyed by a paranoia demon. When the demon mocks his attempts to help the girl by suggesting that this made her all the more rewarding to destroy, he points out that the hotel is full of people who need Angel's help. To this Angel responds by turning his back and telling the demon to "take 'em all." The demon's mocking words predict the futility Angel comes to feel for his 'mission' later in the season, while his own words and action foreshadow his decision to abandon the lawyers from Wolfram and Hart to Darla and Drusilla's hunger in "Reunion" (2010).

[17] These flashbacks demonstrate that it was not the curse and the return of his soul that set Angel onto the path of goodness, but rather it was Buffy. Through her, his mission was clear. Without her, he is alone on a path struggling to walk a fine line between Angel and Angelus and to make the right *choices* in a world where nothing is clear. It is this solitary path that forces Angel into the existential crisis that dominates the second season and recurs in season three.

### Meaninglessness, Purposelessness, the Absurd

[18] It is the sense of meaninglessness of Angel's existence that pushes Angel into crisis. His return from hell and his miraculous rescue from the rays of sun in "Amends" on *BtVS* urged Angel onto his solitary path as a champion for good and gave the writers of *Angel* a narrative drive for the new series. The Powers That Be and the visions first possessed by Doyle and later passed onto Cordelia are introduced in this series as means of placing Angel at the center of a grand battle between good and evil. The overt introduction of the Powers That Be in this series seems to place the narrative more firmly within a fatalistic world and to contradict any links with existentialist thought. Sartre's philosophy was based upon the belief that there is no God and therefore no pre-determined human nature or fate. Man simply is (28). Furthermore, it distances the series from the Noir tradition that also denies the existence of any moral certainty. While in the Detective Noir, protagonists like Sam Spade and Philip Marlow work outside the law much like Angel, they do possess their own code that influences their choices. This, however, is more of a professional code rather than a moral one influenced by external forces. Frank Krutnik argues that the "private eye occupies a mediating position between the world of crime and legitimate society. He proves himself by his ability to withstand any challenges to his integrity and to his very status as the active hero (i.e.. to his masculine professionalism, or his professional's masculinity)" (92). While Angel occupies a similar mediating role between the underworld (i.e. world of evil, vampires and demons) and 'normal' society (i.e. the helpless), his position as the active hero is tempered by his brooding self-torment.[8] In this respect, *Angel* seems to be leaning toward the superhero narrative in which the hero, like Batman or Blade, may be conflicted but the moral certainty of his mission helps him find a place in the world and overcome his internal conflict.

[19] The presence of the Powers That Be and Angel's role as their champion suggest a world of meaning and order in which good and evil are defined by external forces. The sense of purpose and all-knowingness that they seem to advocate, however, is constantly undermined by the suggestion of their fallibility. Cordelia's linguistic reduction of the Powers to the "PTBs" serves to undermine their position as higher beings, while the murder of the Oracles (the voices for the PTBs) at the end of season one demonstrates that, like so many of the demons that populate the series, they are not supreme beings but rather a different race of being. Furthermore, as on *BtVS*, prophecy is always shown to be duplicitous and fallible. The prophecy that Angel will redeem himself and become human again is undermined in "Judgment" (2001) by the assumption that if Angel kills enough demons he will gain his reward. This causes Angel to mistakenly murder another champion. Similarly, Wesley's downfall at the hands of prophecy in season three, when he comes to believe the prophecy that the vampire with a soul will kill his own son, demonstrates not only the risks in acting upon prophecy rather than personal choice, but also that prophecy can be manipulated and rewritten.

[20] Most importantly, the powers are shown to be most fallible by their absence when things turn particularly dark for Angel. There is a randomness to the moments when they intrude upon Angel's existence that undermines the notion of a grand scheme or purpose. They do not directly intervene during Angel's vengeful pursuit of Wolfram and Hart nor do they warn Angel about Darla's pregnancy or Holtz's

arrival in Los Angeles. It is particularly at these moments that Angel tries to find meaning to his life and is confronted by a void. It is possible that while the PTBs seem to present themselves as higher beings, that they themselves advocate choice over a sense of pre-determinacy. In "Birthday" (3011) when it is revealed that Cordelia's visions are slowly killing her, the PTBs, represented by Skip, lead Cordelia on a personal journey seemingly to show her that she wasn't meant to have the visions but that her true path was to be a star. They suggest that meeting Angel, and the events that followed, was a glitch in her destiny. The journey, however, actually leads Cordelia to make a choice and determine her fate for herself as she explains to Skip: "I know my purpose in the world and it includes the visions. And if the Powers That Be aren't complete dumb-asses, they know it too!" The absence of the PTBs during Angel's darkest moments may suggest that he has also been set upon a personal journey to determine for himself his place within the good fight.[9] Without a doubt, Angel turns away from 'the mission' and the Powers That Be in season two, in much the same way that Buffy turns away from the Council in "Graduation Day Part One" (3021) and the Slayer Heritage in "Restless," (4022) in order to choose his mission for himself. The major distinction between Buffy and Angel is that while Buffy's choices bring her closer to embracing and defining her role as the Slayer, Angel's choices bring him closer to the dark side of the Angel/Angelus hybrid.

[21] Angel's journey begins with Darla's resurrection as human by Wolfram and Hart, through which Angel tries to attribute meaning to his life as Angelus by saving Darla's soul. His failure to do so, as well as his inability to save her from her pending death or to stop her rebirth as a vampire, forces Angel to question the nature of good and evil, the cosmic order and his purpose within it. As Robert Porfirio argues, "existentialism is an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept" (81). This is a very precise description of Angel when he returns to the hotel after Darla has been turned by Drusilla in "Reunion." Like the protagonist of Sartre's *Nausea*, Angel's recognition of the meaninglessness of his existence produces in him an existential angst, but rather than create the feeling of nausea of Sartre's title, Angel is consumed by despair, causing him to embrace the line between Angel and Angelus and embody the hybridity of vampire and man. Drusilla recognizes this hybridity in "Reunion" when Angel arrives at Holland's wine tasting seemingly to save all of the lawyers from Darla and Drusilla. When he enters the room, Drusilla pouts and whimpers "it's not daddy, it's never daddy. It's that Angel-beast." Later, however, when Angel cruelly locks the lawyers in the wine cellar leaving them to die, Drusilla stares after him, calling out to "daddy." Angel's action causes Drusilla to recognize the Angelus in Angel.

[22] In "Redefinition" (2011), Angel withdraws from both humanity and vampirism to embody most fully the hybridity of Angel and Angelus as well as the moral ambiguity of the *Film Noir* "seeker-hero". As Michael Walker explains in the seeker-hero noir film, the detective's investigation becomes a quest into a dangerous and threatening world where moral certainties are absent. "Even though the *noir* seeker hero solves the case, there is usually the sense at the end that little good will come of this or that the cost has been absurdly high" (12). Angel's obsession with destroying Darla becomes such a quest.

[23] The series' use of the visual style and iconography of *Film Noir* are taken to extremes in this episode to express Angel's angst as he prepares for a confrontation with Darla. Most notably, the episode is dominated by Angel's voice-over: he doesn't speak a word of dialogue throughout. He retreats to his office as a sanctuary to train and prepare for the coming battle. Michael Walker further argues that while the city is itself a character within *Noir*, "the focus is on the seedy underside of the city." As previously mentioned, the series' presentation of the city usually offers both aerial and subterranean views, drawing upon both *Noir* and superhero imagery. In this case, however, Angel literally submerges himself within the city's underground network of sewers, tunnels and sordid hangouts as he tracks Darla and Drusilla, murders a group of vampires to test how ready he is for battle and tortures the underworld snitch Merle for information. Visually Angel is filmed throughout the episode in distinctively high contrast lighting, expressing, in true *Noir* fashion, his inner nature. In every shot half of Angel's face is in shadow, suggesting his dual nature as both Angel and Angelus.

[24] This duality is reinforced when he actually confronts Darla and Drusilla at the warehouse where they are planning to hold auditions for a team of demon henchmen. As Drusilla looks at Angel she sees only a shadowy reflection of his former self and Angel is visually engulfed in shadow as he then sets fire to the

women. The brutality of his actions, along with the iconic image of his smoking (for Angel only smokes when he's Angelus) suggests the presence of the "über-vampire," and yet his brooding and silence suggests Angel. He is in fact neither and he is both. Darla immediately recognizes that his crisis has transformed Angel into a new being, when she says, "that wasn't Angel, that wasn't Angelus either . . . who was that?" He is a new being of his own creation and no longer predetermined by our expectations of Angel or Angelus. That he has become something new is reinforced by Cordelia in "Reprise" (2015) when Angel comes to her for a book with a vital clue to Wolfram and Hart's destruction. He threatens her when she won't let him take the book and she articulates the primary theme of the series up to this point: "I don't even know what you are anymore." Angel suggests that he has come to his own conclusion about his identity when he responds, "I'm a vampire. Look it up." If the return of his soul has no greater purpose, Angel chooses not to deny the vampire inside him but embody both man and vampire.

[25] Angel however continues to search for meaning, no longer in the PTBs, but in Wolfram and Hart and their destruction; as he tells Lorne "getting to these senior partners . . . that's my destiny" ("Reprise"). Rather than accept the responsibility for his actions, that Sartre argues is the burden of existence, Angel places the responsibility on his enemies by setting himself a new mission: to win the war against Wolfram and Hart (29). Again, Angel has the meaning ripped from his existence when he goes to confront the "senior partners" in the home office only to be shown that the home office is here on earth. As Holland Manners tells him: "the world doesn't work in spite of evil Angel, it works with us. It works because of us." Angel realizes that there is no war to win, just an endless battle. Rather than turn him over completely to Angelus, as Wolfram and Hart presumably expect, this culmination of Angel's despair leads him to the epiphany that "if what you do doesn't matter, then all that matters is what you do," a doctrine that echoes Sartre's advocacy for the responsibility of existence ("Epiphany" 2016). While the search for meaning may not be consistent with French existential thought, the realization that there is no meaning, no grand scheme but only action, is fundamental to Sartre's philosophy. It is this realization that sends Angel back to rejoin his crew and take action once again.

[26] This is not to say, however, that Angel returns to being the "soulful vampire" as his experiences in the Pylea episodes demonstrate. In Pylea, Angel finds himself in a dimension that physically segregates his vampire and human sides. While this enables him the pleasure of walking in the sun and seeing his own reflection, it also forces him to confront the unbridled demon inside him. The pure separation of his two sides reinforces the fact that on earth, Angel is the embodiment of both. The narrative trajectory of the second season of *Angel* is a personal journey that prepares Angel to accept this fact about himself and choose his own fate.

[27] Having resolved his crisis however, Angel is once again thrown into turmoil in season three with the birth and abduction of his son. Confounded by the seeming absurdity of having a miracle baby only to have it taken away, Angel embraces the hybrid human/vampire again by allowing Angel's passions and Angelus' obsessive and cruel nature to fuel his *choice* of actions when he tortures Linwood Murrow (Division President Special Projects, Wolfram and Hart) and threatens to kill Wesley for his role in Connor's abduction ("Forgiving" 3017). The repetition of this crisis reminds us that to repeatedly choose to fight the good fight, and in the process define what the 'good fight' is, is a constant struggle for the Angel/Angelus character and is a defining theme of the series. So if, as Sartre suggests, man is nothing but the sum of his actions, then Angel is the sum of his actions, for good or ill, as both the "soulful vampire extraordinaire" and "the evil über-vampire." Throughout the series Angel's character development forces him to walk this fine but unenviable line, and as a result the series challenges the distinction between good and evil in a godless world where there is only choice.

### Notes

[1] As Rhonda Wilcox commented at "Blood Text and Fears: Reading Around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" UEA, 19-20 October, 2002, it is worth noting that Buffy's representation is equally black and white in her brief appearances on *Angel*.

[2] We must remember that the soul he possesses is presumably the soul of his pre-vampire persona Liam, whose drinking and whoring undermines any suggestion that he possessed a particularly good or altruistic soul.

[3] Los Angeles is one of the dominant locations for the hard boiled novel and *Film Noir*.

[4] Season four is structured in the opposite way as it begins with the group completely separated and gradually as the season progresses they are brought back together and rebuilt as a team. The ending of the season, in which they take over Wolfram and Hart, does beg the question: what have they been rebuilt into?

[5] Obsession being a key characteristic of many *Film Noir* protagonists, while many superheroes are equally presented as traumatized or internally conflicted.

[6] We should also note that in "I Will Remember You" Angel not only gives up a chance at humanity but perhaps his only chance at a lifetime with Buffy.

[7] This article was written prior to the start of season four of *Angel* in which Angelus once again returns. The events of season four simply confirm the observations that are made in this argument.

[8] Although Frank Krutnik does argue that Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* is atypical of the Detective Noir as most 1940s Noir "tend to be obsessed with lapses from and failures to achieve, such a position of unified and potent masculinity" (93).

[9] In Season Four, the role of the PTBs is rewritten yet again to take the narrative arc in a different direction and as a result suggests that their motives are far more ambiguous and questions whether there is a clear-cut 'good fight' to fight.

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