

# Slayage 1 January 2001 [1.1]

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

■ [Grace Anne DeCandido: Rupert Giles and Search Tools for Wisdom in \*Buffy the Vampire Slayer\*](#)



**Rob Breton and Lindsey McMaster**

## **Dissing the Age of MOO: Initiatives, Alternatives, and Rationality**

It is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters but vigilant and insomniac rationality.  
Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

(1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* takes place in a world where reliable knowledge and agency come not from the authority of adulthood but from the arcane experiences of youth. Indeed, *Buffy* recreates reality in ways that reveal adult rationalism to be blind, repressive, and in a word, monstrous. Despite the reason and planning of its formal methods, or even as a result of that mechanized approach, adult rationalism leads to a kind of suburban fascism, to violently irrational effects. In recent episodes, an urge to rationalize the demon-hunt governs the Initiative; they attempt to fight monsters by employing scientific methods, assuming predictability and adopting a policy of maximization: the results are insane. Meanwhile, Buffy and the Scooby Gang, far from upholding the ideal of human purity in the face of monstrosity (as one might expect from monster-hunters), instead transgress those divides at every turn, especially in terms of romance and identity. Buffy may slay demons, but the boundary between good and evil is endlessly complex for her, whereas rationalist authority structures work tirelessly to reinforce the binary. This marks a critical divergence in ways of knowing and dealing with reality. By addressing this contrast in knowledge production, our paper explores how *Buffy* undermines the traditional power structures of rationalist authority. It addresses the way in which *Buffy's* youth culture disses the rationalisms of organized society.

(2) In the third season episode "Gingerbread," Buffy's mother, newly awakened to her daughter's role as vampire slayer, begins by accompanying Buffy on patrol, and ends by leading a parent group to burn her at the stake. In an explosion of officiousness following the unexplained death of two children, she instigates the group "Mothers Opposed to the Occult" at a town meeting: "This isn't our town any more. It belongs to the monsters and the witches and the slayers. I say it's time for the grown-ups to take Sunnydale back." Whereas the adults of Sunnydale have traditionally turned a blind eye to the supernatural—or fabricated explanations like gang violence—MOO sets out to do the Slayer's job for her, and the results demonstrate the profound epistemological gap between PTA-style rationalism and non-rationalist, teenage insight into an extra-rational reality.

(3) Joyce's criticism of Buffy's slaying signals a bias toward predictability and measurable results: "You patrol, you slay, evil pops up, you undo it, and that's great – but is Sunnydale getting any better? Are they running out of vampires? . . . It's not your fault. You don't have a plan. You just react to things. It's bound to be kind of fruitless." Rather than enlisting Buffy as a source of knowledge and expertise in the monster hunt, adult systems demand that her abilities be minimized and dismissed – no teenager could possibly know better than a parent group. Buffy's ad hoc tactics threaten not the purpose of MOO but their governing strategy, which would establish a predictable, systematic world in order to control it. Indeed, Sunnydale's youth are not merely discounted by the MOO project, but are the first objects of suspicion. In fact, Joyce's complaint that Sunnydale "belongs to the monsters and the witches and the slayers" refers more closely to Buffy and her friends than to Sunnydale's hostile monster threat. Despite an organized system being implemented to address the town's subculture of monsters, it is the youth culture that feels the effects of this increasingly hysterical adult elite.

(4) PTAs have long been notorious for purging school libraries of supposedly offensive material, and accordingly MOO confiscates all Giles's books on the occult and later sets them alight at the witch-burning of Buffy, Willow, and Amy. Meanwhile, a locker search is quickly identified by Xander as a fascist enterprise: "Oh man, it's Nazi Germany and I've got *Playboys* in my locker." The very irrational mass hysteria of the witch-hunt, then, revolving around domination and the centralizing of power, is expressed through all the established signs of an invasive, dehumanizing, and *uber*-rational fascism. MOO renders all non-adults suspect and so effectively collapses the categories of youth and monster: hence the ensuing attempt at an organized extermination. The representation of PTA groups as systems tending toward extremism, fascism, and discrimination in a series directed at teenagers is daring, especially insofar as it emphasizes the contradiction between rational, liberal, adult planning and the violent effects of those organizations.

(5) In counterpoint to the rationalism-gone-mad of MOO, the Buffy crowd's habituation to the supernatural allows them to operate on a profoundly different level of knowledge production. This habituation – an inability to be shocked – is typical not only of Buffy's close associates, but of Sunnydale's high school students in general. Early in Oz's tenure on the show, when first introduced to the existence of vampires, he skips the phase of disbelief and remarks that, "Actually, that explains a lot" ("Surprise"). This is a significant diversion from traditional vampire narratives, where the epistemological struggle that ensues from the realization that vampires exist and that reality is not as it seems is often a major part of the narrative (Gelder 54). Human adults in Sunnydale tend not to know about or believe in the monsters that surround them, but when they do recognize them, their reaction is extreme and suffused with the authoritarian impulse. Confronted with an alien subculture which undermines all they took for granted about reality, the adult response is a violent reinscription of the world order they are ideologically wedded to. The teenagers, on the other hand, have arguably less allegiance to the rules of a reality which seldom worked to their advantage anyway; the addition of monsters to it, then, is a difference of degree rather than kind. Sunnydale's youth engage in an alternate epistemology which, like the language they use, is informal, derisive of authority, and elusive of systematized rules.

(6) In "Gingerbread," a rare appearance by Willow's mother Sheila, clearly an academic, exposes the split between adult intellectualizing and teenage ways of knowing. Sheila at once diminishes and pathologizes Willow's witchcraft: "identification with mythical icons is perfectly typical of your age group. It's a classic adolescent response to the pressures of incipient adulthood. . . . I've consulted with some of my colleagues and they agree that this is a cry for discipline: you're grounded." Willow challenges the generalizing tendency of her mother's psychobabble by insisting on the personal: "Mom, I'm not an age group. I'm me – Willow group," but the response is mindless platitude: "Oh honey, I understand." The inability of parents to understand teenagers may be nothing new, but the expression of that in a disciplinary urge escalating to fascism lends a sinister edge to this version of generational strife. Willow's mother brings the authority of academic psychiatry to bear on her relationship with her daughter as if to force a disenchantment with non-scientific claims to knowledge upon her, and the result – that Willow gets grounded – is a disciplinary exercise in containment and control.

(7) Willow's insistence on being an individual rather than an age group is a significant signal of her resistance to categorization and those forms of knowledge that disregard the personal. Both MOO and the Initiative dehumanize and objectify their prey, rationalizing the demon hunt. The results are telling and less than reasonable, as mothers burn their daughters at the stake, and Willow's ex-boyfriend almost falls prey to the Initiative who can only see him as a dehumanized "hostile subterrestrial" ("New Moon Rising"). Both organizations rely on binary thinking to distinguish monster from human; the binary then does their thinking for them, mechanistically organizing good and evil without any need to consult the personal or the particular. As Donna Haraway has argued, when invoking the category of the human it is wise to recall that it long functioned as an exclusionary concept, only recently being opened to non-white-males: "Humanity is a modernist figure; and this humanity has a generic face, a universal shape. Humanity's face has been the face of man" (86). The potential for the human-monster binary in *Buffy* to stand in for other kinds of human division is significant: in the midst of MOO's locker searches, identified as Nazism by Xander, the viewer may remember with a chill that Willow Rosenberg is Jewish. In "New Moon Rising," Riley's shock at

the thought of Willow dating a werewolf strikes Buffy as blatant prejudice, and the terminology with which he voices his disapproval is telling: "Oz is a werewolf and Willow was dating him? . . . I didn't think Willow was that kind of girl." Although he qualifies this by saying he meant "into dangerous guys," the expression "that kind of girl" tends to be used to condemn a promiscuous or unsanctioned sexuality, here with non-humans (though it is also significant that this is the episode which confirms Willow's relationship with Tara). Buffy, given her past with Angel but also given her resistance to dehumanizing even non-humans, naturally takes immediate offence: "God, I never knew you were such a bigot. . . . Love isn't logical Riley. It's not like you can be Mr. Joe Sensible about it all the time." But the personal tension that lends drama to this scene – Buffy's loyalties to Willow, Oz, and Angel versus her involvement with the Initiative soldier Riley – resonates with the epistemological tensions underlying the series. For reasons both experiential and deeply personal, Buffy, despite being a Slayer, will not engage in categorical systems of good and evil; as she argues later to Riley, "You sounded like Mr. Initiative: demons bad, people good." Riley's response, "Something wrong with that theorem?" underlines his immersion in a system where a mathematical theorem might well be expected to map morality. What prevents Buffy's crowd from engaging in this kind of binary logic is their deeply personal relationship with the supernatural, wherein discrimination against werewolves can be a form of bigotry and elevation of the human a form of Nazism.

(8) Opposed to the dispassionate logic of the rationalist elite, Buffy's crowd engages in passionate associations with Sunnydale's non-human element. Far from a clear and absolute human-monster divide, for them it is a boundary compromised at every turn; it is this complex and intimate relation between teenagers and the supernatural that awakes the vicious disciplinary urges of the adults in "Gingerbread" and the suspicions of the Initiative. Riley unites the military paranoia of the Initiative with the jealousy of the boyfriend when he finds Buffy at Willy's demon-friendly bar: "now I see you're not hunting demons – you're socializing with them. Again! I thought you were s'pose to be killing these things, not buying them drinks" ("Goodbye Iowa"). Indeed, with Xander dating an ex-demon, Willow involved with a fellow witch, and Buffy paying occasional visits to her vampire ex-boyfriend, Riley may be the only all-human love interest in Sunnydale. In *Buffy*, the non-human subculture is as much a site of desire as of danger, and the complexities of youth sexuality find their fullest realization in these seemingly unnatural unions. Buffy tries to explain to Riley that when it comes to demons, there are degrees, but faced with Riley's militaristic view of humans and hostiles, Buffy finds her position hard to articulate; hers is a much more shifting, contextual, personal way of knowing: an epistemology riddled with desire.

(9) In the fourth season, the militant, adult, classification-crazed, monster-hunting rationality of MOO is transposed into what is virtually the embodiment of rationalism itself, the Initiative. At first glance, all that was emotionally driven, traditional, and spontaneous about MOO seems to have been checked at the high-tech security gates of the Initiative's headquarters. They embody rationalism, not simply military rationality: the Initiative manifest the over-exaggerated application of formal rationality, formal method, into every area of knowledge. Though it may enact military rationalism, the modus operandi of the Initiative is also indicative of Taylorism and scientifically managed work rationalization, minus the de-skilling of the worker synonymous with automation. One might expect the military to proceed in a systematic fashion, but the hyperbolic rationalism of the Initiative in a sense stands in for the larger social tendency to give supreme value to structure and authority.

(10) In contrast to Giles's archaic library or homey living room from which Buffy's crowd launch their plans is the massive military lab complex of the Initiative: a juxtaposition reminiscent of cottage versus factory-based industry. The strictly observed vertical and horizontal divisions and subdivisions of labor, and the outward display of hierarchy and function in the uniforms; the always available recourse to appeal to positions of authority, to the 'relations of production' inside and outside the workplace; the systemization of conduct; the separation between manual and mental labor; the clock-based work (shifts); the fragmentation of knowledge about the operation; the attempt to implement a linear system of input and output; the instrumentalizing of soldier/worker into a machine; and the demarcation of 'work' and 'life,' all traits of the Initiative—fit under the rubric of rationalism and not only militarism. In Buffy's camp, meanwhile, not only is the work of demon hunting inextricably meshed with social life and personal relationships, but whenever rules and functions become too strictly defined or the assumption of authority too blatant, disruption and discontent quickly erupt. The representation of the non-personal or

dispassionate constitution of the Initiative is not simply for the benefit of pacifists or military critics. The critique of military or work rationalization questions a general assumption of the efficacy of rationalist techniques and blind trust freely given to rationalist method by a world constantly told to revere and rely on logic, experts, and authority.

(11) The Initiative depends on the strictures of rationalism: the principles which govern its structure, goals, and conscious design. Whereas the small-scale operations of Buffy's almost artisanal monster shop respond to specific crises in ways that are particular to the given crisis, or attempt to prevent only the wholesale domination of demons, the Initiative are in quantitative pursuit, their aim to maximize the hunt. A calculating, instrumentalizing orientation to the outside world that thinks in terms of domination underlies its fetishization of volume. They also attempt to conflate maximizing with 'reason' and elevate their procedures, pursuits, and organizing principles over any analysis of their ends. The idea that Buffy would discriminate among non-humans strikes Riley as alien because he has what is basically an economic habit of mind. He and his operatives employ the principle of formal rationality in a place where it doesn't belong.

(12) In "A New Man," Giles's long-time, chaos-worshipping adversary Ethan Rayne describes the rumors circulating in the demon world regarding Room 314:

You know demons, it's all exaggeration and blank verse – pain as bright as steel, things like that: they're scared. . . . I know we're not particularly fond of each other, Rupert, but we are a couple of old mystics. This new outfit, it's blundering in a place where it doesn't belong. It's throwing the worlds out of balance. And that's way beyond chaos, mate.

Ethan Rayne appeals to Giles through a shared knowledge system based on old-world mysticism, which faces the demon world on its own terms; according to this line of thought, what is really dangerous is the interference of the intensely rational Initiative into the enigmatic realm of the supernatural: a disturbance that threatens all-out chaos. The scene cuts to Buffy and Riley play-fighting, but the conflict between them is real. Not only do Buffy, Giles and the Scooby Gang repeatedly throw spanners into the Initiative's clinically-approved works; they are of the world that the Initiative, steeped in disjunctive reasoning, seeks to identify, compartmentalize, and destroy. The idea of Buffy having a calling to be a slayer is in itself contrary and antagonistic to Enlightenment rationalism. The Buffy-Initiative alliance fails because Buffy uses intuition and the Initiative uses "xenomorphic behavior modification" experts ("The I in Team"). It fails because she is integrated or integrates herself into the underworld's core of assumptions: meaning, ironically, a refusal to de-humanize or alienate. She depends on specific, contextualized knowledge. Whereas Buffy is interested in questions of demon motivation, asking, "What do they want? Why are they here? Sacrifices, treasures, or did they just get rampagy?," the Initiative is indifferent to questions which would thus lend consciousness to the monsters, positing that the creatures are "not sentient, just destructive" ("The I in Team"). Where the Initiative looks for empirical and tested facts, Buffy looks for factors, variables; her sense of herself and of monsters is suffused with personal motivations and individual desires, and indeed, her victories over adversaries are as much victories of personality and wit as of physical force. The dry, procedural, impersonality of the humorless Initiative cannot compare.[1]

(13) *Buffy* also emphasizes that what is highly rational – the Initiative and MOO are hyper-organized, impersonal, and quite effective in the short term – in its parts is dangerously irrational as a whole: taken to their logical ends, both organizations engender chaos and destruction. To maximize its performance, the Initiative reconditions not only the monsters (to render them non-mystical and, more importantly, to harness their potential strength) but also their own soldiers through drugs and computer chip implants. In an attempt to cleanse the divide between human and non-human, in order to eliminate the latter, the Initiative paradoxically compromises that divide in the physical manipulation of their own agents. Under its own definition of the rational/irrational split, the Initiative, though rational in its origins, purpose, and methods, spirals into the irrational in its outcome and effects. Maggie Walsh—the mad scientist whose appearance as less mad than scientific underlines the formal rationality of the Initiative—first demonizes Buffy and then plans her execution, saying merely, "she's unpredictable," as though no further explanation

was required. The mechanical objectivity of the Initiative requires strict control over every agent and would demand the same from Buffy. A predictable order of things, because it is thought to accrue maximum efficiency, becomes a higher value than justice. Perhaps, also, because she allows her scientific work to subsume and repress her extra-rational maternal instincts (extra-rational because they are random and because they do not entrain gain, something in it for her or the operation), the effect of Maggie's procedural rationality is a monster, Adam. Not unexpectedly, Adam wants to learn about people, categorize them and himself, and learn how things 'work.' Once he comprehends and classifies, he kills or disregards, not caring one way or the other: the product of laboratory testing and inhumane experimentation, Adam is equally driven by a will to knowledge devoid of conscience. The only way for Buffy and the Scoobies to destroy him is to cooperate and place trust in their friendship (an irrationality from the perspective of formal rationalism), and to summon the highly irrational force of the essential, primal slayer.

(14) Are Buffy and her friends, then, by opposing the hypertrophied and militant rationalisms of the Initiative, representing the irrational? In the final episode of season four, "Restless," the primordial slayer released to defeat Adam haunts and seeks to destroy Buffy's friends. Told through dream sequences, the episode, of course, is suffused in adolescent puns, jokes, and campy narratological devices like references to *Heart of Darkness*. The gags, although postmodern genre-savvy disruptions of fictional purpose which stand on their own, also consistently express a counter-rational alternative. Deep in dream in what might be an overexposed Freudian slideshow, Buffy confronts a very clean-cut Adam, doing some boardroom strategizing with Riley on world domination. Adam asserts that "Aggression is a natural human tendency" but that Buffy and he "come at it in another way." Buffy protests that "we're not demons," and Adam counters, "Is that a fact?" Riley cuts the debate short, reminding us of the existing alliance between demons (Adam) and rationalist bureaucracy ("we've got a lot of important work here, a lot of filing and giving things names"); i.e., the irrational whole shored up by very rational supports. In a sense, the demon-world proclivity for world-domination has ironically revealed itself, not in some marginalized monster-sub-culture enclave, but in the hands of governmental bureaucracy – at the social center of organized power itself. This promotes a reading of *Buffy* as critical of the rationalist authority structures which at once dominate society and subjugate the supposedly irrational youth culture, suggesting a resistance to the current distribution of power and authority in contemporary culture.

(15) As Riley immerses himself in some serious paperwork, Adam, or the subconscious impulse which is conjuring him up, alerts Buffy to the primeval, irrational forces which would only be amplified in a slayer. Buffy, still in dream, the irrational's home turf, then meets the first slayer. Through Tara, it says: "I have no speech, no name. I live in the action of death. The blood cry, penetrating wound. I am destruction. Absolute. Alone. . . . The slayer does not walk in this world." Buffy's rejoinder – "I walk. I talk. I shop. I sneeze. . . . There are trees in the desert since you've moved out" – undermines the idea that modern slayers, modern concepts of forceful and assertive girls, are ruled by an irrational drive; and yet she rejects the irrationalism of the primeval slayer without referring to the grammar or sober sanctimoniousness of rationalism. (Indeed, considering the irrational forces said to govern teenage consumerism, when she says, in a sense, "I shop, therefore I am," she emphatically distances herself from any Cartesian rationality, identifying herself as a non-rational being.) She demands to wake from the dream world, and does. In other words, just as Buffy is a slayer but does not attempt to maximize her slayage as might a 'rational' agent according to economic theory, she again fights for space between rationalism and irrationalism, a non-rationalist *juste milieu* wherein she does not attempt to maximize her dominion, her authority, or her ascendancy.

(16) Though at first their star pupil, Riley ultimately deserts the Initiative, once he witnesses the inhumanity, indeed the torture, camouflaged as scientific experimentation. Because of the hard split between humans and subhumans in the Initiative's paradigm, when Riley aids in Oz's escape, his superior officer, Colonel McNamara, sees anarchy: "Tomorrow I am going to institute a court-martial to investigate the extent of your involvement with the Slayer and her band of freaks. You're an anarchist, Finn. Too backwards for the real world" ("New Moon Rising"). Finally, when the same colonel tells Riley he's a dead man, Riley ironically counters with the colonel's own terminology: "No Sir, I'm an anarchist," and knocks him out. Considering this episode came five months after the WTO riots in Seattle, where self-proclaimed anarchists were fully demonized by the press, the implications of the show's use of this term for one of its

heroes at the moment of his redemption cannot be underestimated. Yet Riley is only an anarchist from the Initiative's point of view, wherein those outside the rationalist project can only be monsters, freaks, and anarchists. Neither Riley's nor Buffy's rejection of the Initiative entails the affirmation of the irrational. Refusing to reify categorical binaries, Buffy rejects both the authoritarian Initiative and the destructive primal slayer. Buffy's way of knowing is a highly mediated one, dependent on a range of personal motivations, demon motivations, and the calls of conscience. The conceptual space she inhabits is one wherein the personal ties of friendship and the bonds forged by desire, not deemed rational by structural – adult – rationalism, take center stage in the organization of highly contextual goods and evils.

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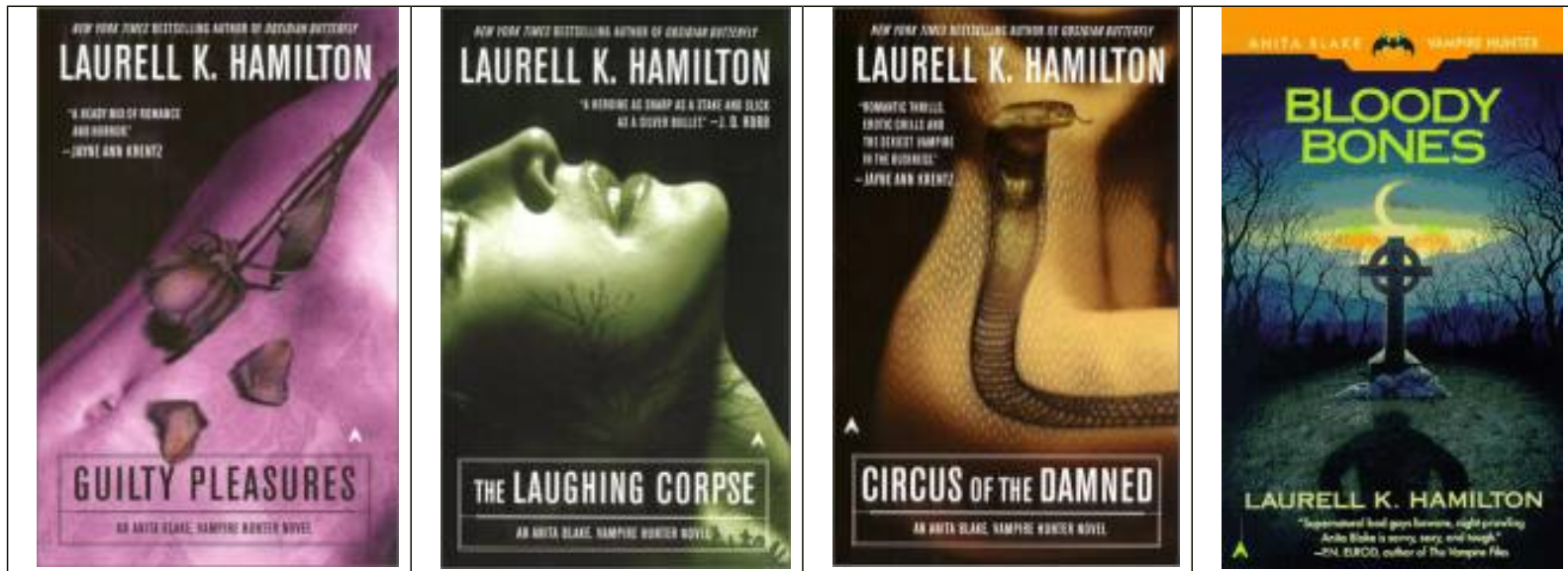
[1] In Max Weber's terms, the Initiative would be formally rational but substantially irrational. An action is deemed formally rational if it is an efficacious means to a premeditated end and is governed solely by that end. 'Substantive rationality' is rationality from the point of view of an ethical end, which entails ethical means. In other words, despite the highly organized set of actions through which a project proceeds (formal rationality), the end result may be devoid of reason or value (lack substantive rationality). Formal rationality means technological control over nature, impersonal or dry self-control, and an economically based (maximizing the pursuit) preoccupation that attempts to elide interruptions from ethics, emotions, caprice, ritual, tradition, or day-tripping. For all the differences between Weber and Marx, Weber's analysis of rationalism nicely intersects with Marx's analysis of capitalism. Marxists generally hold that the rationality of individual economic agents attempting to maximize profits conflicts with what is rational for the system as a whole (Glyn 107). Private ownership eventually leads to the malfunctioning of capitalism itself. Weber emphasizes that what is formally rational for economic agents is not rational for those same agents in terms of their lives as a whole.



**Hilary M. Leon**

## **Why We Love the Monsters: How Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer Wound Up Dating the Enemy**

(1) The title characters of Joss Whedon's television drama *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Laurell K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* novels, are the latest in a distinguished line of protectors of humanity against supernatural threat. Following in the footsteps of Bram Stoker's Professor Van Helsing, they dedicate their lives to the destruction of the monsters threatening the mortal population. Yet the two women possess some unusual qualities which make them unique among the vampire slayers of history. The traits themselves are surprising, but what makes them particularly intriguing is the degree to which they are shared by these modern slayers.



Book covers from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

(2) Anita Blake and Buffy Summers are alike in many superficial characteristics, making comparisons between them inevitable. Both are relatively young: Buffy is introduced as a high school sophomore, while Anita, at twenty-four, is only a few years out of college. Each attracts attention with her petite, pretty appearance, physical dexterity, and intelligence. Both resort to witty, sarcastic remarks, particularly when threatened. As is traditional among vampire slayers of literature and film, the two women take their responsibilities as hunters seriously, giving up a great deal to fulfill their obligations to those they protect.

(3) These sacrifices, and the slayers' painful awareness of them, contribute to Anita and Buffy's most interesting shared quality: both are reluctant slayers. Each longs for a safe and ordinary life, and especially for a normal relationship with someone of the opposite sex. It is this longing that significantly defines these modern slayers. Anita and Buffy seek to resolve these desires, while continuing to fulfill their duties as vampire hunters. In their struggles, they are forced, as slayers seldom are, to confront the ambiguity of their role: as human protectors who are not quite human, as killers whose victims are both predators and prey, and as women whose lives offer little room for ordinary passions.



## The Hand of Fate

<p>Kendra: "You talk about slaying like it's a job. It's not. It's who you are."          Buffy: "Did you get that from your handbook?"          Kendra: "From you."          "What's My Line?" Part Two</p>	<p>"I raised the dead and laid the undead to rest. It was what I did. Who I was."          Anita Blake, <i>Guilty Pleasures</i>, 79</p>
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(4) By an apparent accident of birth, Buffy and Anita find themselves labeled, each in her respective universe, as the salvation of humankind. As a necromancer, Anita possesses some innate defenses against vampiric powers; these, along with her "affinity with the dead" (*The Laughing Corpse* 44), make her uniquely qualified to deal with the various monsters that manifest in Hamilton's alternate St. Louis. Anita's training as an animator and educational background in preternatural biology enhance her inborn abilities. In the few short years of her professional animating career, she becomes a licensed vampire killer, exterminating the murderous undead. Her marked skill in this task prompts her nickname among the vampires: The Executioner. Anita often feels that she had little choice in becoming a slayer. She views it as a natural extension of her necromancy, but in reality her own instinctive skill and sense of social responsibility have driven her into the role. Like her police force colleagues on the Regional Preternatural Investigation Team, she feels personally accountable for utilizing her abilities to avert danger from other humans.

(5) Unlike Anita, who exercises some choice over her future path, Buffy is unceremoniously confronted with her destiny as "the one girl in all the world, [the] Chosen One . . . born with the strength and skill to hunt the vampires" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth"). She protests being pressed into duty by her first Watcher, Merrick, and later by Giles, after Merrick's death; still, like Anita, she ultimately cannot reject her calling. Joss Whedon comments, "Buffy may grouse about it, but she has heroic instincts" (Tracy 48). She comprehends that being the Slayer is, as Giles tells her, a "sacred duty" ("What's My Line?" Part One), on which she cannot turn her back.

(6) Despite their acceptance of the slayer role and its requirements, Buffy and Anita rail against these obligations. Anita expresses early feelings of "battle fatigue" (24) in *Circus of the Damned*; by the time she views the bloody crime scenes of *Obsidian Butterfly*, the numb and emotionally exhausted animator is seriously questioning her choice of lifestyle. She cannot, however, find a way to leave behind her role as the Executioner. The sense of inevitability, of inescapable fate, and of undeniable responsibility overwhelms both women, creating dedicated yet reluctant heroines. Buffy sums up Anita's feelings as well as her own when she tells Giles, "I don't have to be the Slayer. I could be dead" ("What's My Line?" Part One).

## Childhood's End

<p>Buffy: "Nothing's ever simple anymore. . . . It's like the more I know, the more confused I get."          Giles: "I believe that's called growing up."          "Lie To Me"</p>	<p>"But we were all young once. It passes, like innocence and a sense of fair play. The only thing left in the end is a good instinct for survival."          Anita Blake, <i>Circus of the Damned</i>, 250</p>
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(7) The slayers may be chronologically young, but they mature far more rapidly than their peers. This is due, in part, to having faced the death of close friends and family early in life. Buffy experiences Merrick's death during her first year of high school, and Anita loses her mother at the age of eight. These tragedies are by no means isolated incidents in the slayers' lives. In an early episode of the series, Buffy is confronted with further pain when her childhood crush turns to vampirism in order to escape a fatal brain tumor ("Lie to Me"). Anita, in *Guilty Pleasures*, watches helplessly as her new friend Phillip, with whom she feels a strong emotional bond, is tortured and later killed. And this is only the beginning: again and again, both women watch friends and loved ones, along with a host of innocent strangers, slaughtered by the monsters.

(8) Living through this kind of emotional trauma, as well as harboring feelings of guilt about the deaths that occur, forces the slayers to grow up with abnormal rapidity. As A. Susan Owen says, "In Sunnydale, young people must take on adult responsibilities before they have finished being children" (30). Along with this sudden maturity comes a realization of personal mortality. Anita comments, not quite jokingly, that she does not expect to live past thirty (*Obsidian Butterfly* 241), although she takes no steps to prevent such an eventuality. Buffy also accepts, almost without question, the idea that her life will be brief. In "What's My Line?" Part One, she describes her future as "pretty much a non-issue." Her philosophy, related to Willow in "Welcome to the Hellmouth," is, "Seize the moment, 'cause tomorrow you might be dead."

## The Lure of Love

<p>Buffy: "Dates are things normal girls have. . . . You know what I think about? Ambush tactics. Beheading. Not exactly the stuff dreams are made of." "Halloween"</p>	<p>"One bit of advice. People in our line of work don't make good significant others." Edward, <i>Circus of the Damned</i> 281</p>
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(9) Neither of the slayers deliberately sets out to find a lover. Buffy is a sixteen-year-old innocent at the start of the series, naïve and nervous around men, and too overwhelmed by her obligations to consider dating. Anita speaks bitterly of a college fiancé to whom she lost her virginity, only to be abandoned by him when his family did not approve of her mother's Mexican blood. Both women, therefore, harbor certain fears when it comes to pursuing the opposite sex. Then, too, neither slayer feels that her life permits a normal love relationship: as Buffy says, after several abortive attempts, "This isn't the kind of gig where you can just hang it up at the end of the night and snuggle with your honey" ("Doomed").

(10) Buffy and Anita both fear introducing noncombatants into their complicated lives. The object of Buffy's grade school affection dies in a confrontation with vampires during her sophomore year ("Lie To Me"); a later crush, Owen, becomes overly enamored of the near-death thrill that Buffy's lifestyle arouses. "Two days in my world," Buffy tells Giles, "and Owen really would get himself killed. Or I'd get him killed. Or someone else" ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"). She worries not only that a human boyfriend will be a target for the monsters, but that having a man in her life will distract her from her most important tasks. This, she fears, will put herself and others at risk. Similar fears cause Anita to limit her ties with human friends, and to resist the idea of dating mortal men. While she longs for a traditional husband and home, she realizes her life is a battleground and that she cannot risk anyone she truly loves in that environment.

(11) Despite these qualms, Anita and Buffy find themselves yearning for normal, passionate relationships, and for the feelings of safety and stability they anticipate will be inspired by such domestic dynamics. Their unusual requirements for a prospective mate, however, eliminate most conventional men. Two of the most important traits they seek are nearly impossible for any human to fulfill: the ability to protect oneself from the monsters without assistance and an understanding and acceptance of the slayer's role in her world. The only people aware of Buffy's identity as the Chosen One are friends whom she does not view as potential lovers. Anita need not hide who she is; on the other hand, she has trouble finding a man who can accept her strength of will, capacity for violence, and dangerous lifestyle. Neither woman has success in finding a mortal man who can hold his own against the monsters she faces daily.

(12) Drawn inexorably by their slaying duties into the world of the creatures they fight, Buffy and Anita spend much of their time among those who are not human. In her roles as necromancer, police advisor, and executioner, Anita is surrounded by criminals, killers, and practitioners of the dark arts. She is also, inevitably, faced with non-humans who do not fit her original, rather simplistic definition of "monster." Buffy faces a similar dilemma: her closest contact with undead activities in Sunnydale turns out to be himself a vampire, a fact she discovers only after their first passionate kiss. Neither woman intentionally seeks a lover among her enemies, but for each a variety of factors culminates in an unexpected and powerful attraction to the predators she is sworn to destroy.

## Loving the Monsters

<p>Buffy: "I love you. I don't know if I trust you." Angel: "Then maybe you shouldn't do either." Buffy: "Maybe I'm the one who should decide!" "Lie to Me"</p>	<p>"I, Anita Blake, scourge of the undead—the human with more vampire kills than any other vampire executioner in the country—was dating a vampire. It was almost poetically ironic." Anita Blake, <i>Blue Moon</i>, 7</p>
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(13) Anita and Buffy do not, at first, have any sympathy for the monsters they kill. Buffy reacts with disbelieving horror to the revelation that her mysterious informant, Angel, is a vampire. That initial response, however, is followed quickly by a desire for her feelings toward him to be somehow permissible. Desperately, she asks her Watcher, "Can a vampire ever be a good person? Couldn't it happen?" ("Angel"). According to Giles, however, the undead are not people, but human bodies possessed by demons. Although a vampire may retain the memories or personality traits of its human host, it lacks any humanity: "It's still a demon at the core, there is no halfway" ("Angel"). Due to this straightforward perspective, until meeting Angel, Buffy's wholesale slaughter of the creatures has caused her little concern.

(14) Yet Buffy faces in Angel, for the first time, a natural enemy whose actions declare him as a friend. Even after

discovering his status as a monster, she is hesitant to destroy him, both because he has never offered her violence, and because their mutual attraction complicates matters. Her slayer instincts are aroused only after she sees Angel appearing to attack her mother. When she confronts him, he taunts her by questioning her motives for executing him, suggesting that she views his kind merely as animals. She expresses her hatred at the way he has deceived her about his true nature; he responds, "Feels good, doesn't it? Feels simple" ("Angel").

(15) The problem, of course, is that things are no longer simple. What angers Buffy most about the deception is the conflicted feelings that result. She cannot help but see Angel not as an animal, but as a person with complicated emotions and motivations. As it turns out, she is right to view him in this way: Angel's soul has been restored by a gypsy curse, thus purging him of his demonic self. While he retains his lust for blood and his vampiric abilities, these are tempered by his very human sensibilities. As a result, he intends to fight on her side against the other monsters.

(16) In her dealings with the opposite sex, Buffy is ruled by her heart, rather than her better judgment. Although she knows something of Angel's sordid past, and he, too, questions the wisdom of further intimacy, by the end of "Angel" they are in each other's arms. Their relationship proceeds in fits and starts, but by "What's My Line?" both Slayer and vampire give in to their passions. Angel remains Buffy's boyfriend, but not her lover, until the show's second season; at that point, a combination of sexual passion and the terms of his curse cause him to revert to traditional vampiric evil. Buffy's recovery from the bloody aftermath of the relationship requires months of soul-searching, and leaves behind terrible scars. A devastated, deflowered Buffy later insists to a would-be suitor, "I'm not seeing anybody, ever again actually" ("I Only Have Eyes For You"). As Mim Udovitch states, "Buffy has developed trust issues from the fact that if she trusts the wrong person, the whole world comes to an end" (Udovitch 66).

(17) In Buffy's world, Angel is introduced as the single exception to Giles' vampire lore; his fellow vampires are considered wholly evil. For Anita, the undead represent a more complex problem. While for some superhuman powers and perceived immortality breed corruption and evil, others manifest much the same personalities as they once did in life. In the opening pages of *Guilty Pleasures*, Anita meets with Willie McCoy, a man she once knew as human who has now become a vampire. Her ambivalent feelings about him will later be reflected in her reactions to many other vampires whom she cannot view as truly evil. Buffy can accept her passion for Angel without questioning her role as the Slayer; Anita's lot is not so easy.

(18) Nevertheless, Anita's stronger prejudices against the monsters, particularly the undead, allow her to resist her own desires longer. Over the course of nine novels, she is pursued by a master vampire, Jean-Claude, and Richard, a powerful werewolf. At first Anita remains stoic without much difficulty: in *Guilty Pleasures* she admits her physical desire for the vampire, but insists, "I know who and what I am. I am the Executioner, and I don't date vampires. I kill them" (266). Later, after meeting Richard and learning of his lycanthropy, she reminds herself that "loving the monsters always ends badly for the humans. It's a rule" (*Circus of the Damned* 328).



Book covers from Amazon.com.

(19) Like Buffy, Anita feels a strong physical attraction to presumed enemies; despite her best efforts, she also develops strong emotional attachments to both Richard and Jean-Claude. Absorbed in these complicated romances, almost

against her will, Anita struggles with the fear that her love for vampire and werewolf compromises her own humanity. She dreams of white picket fences and domestic bliss, away from the monstrous world in which she lives, but does not accept that her future holds such potential. As she tells Edward, the bounty hunter against whose cold-blooded persona she often compares herself, "I do believe in marriage, but not for people like us" (*Obsidian Butterfly* 171). Her relationships with Richard and Jean-Claude fill a void left by the husband and family she is certain she will never possess. In spite of her love for both men, Anita refuses to commit to either, prompting Edward to wonder aloud what might happen if she allowed herself to be ruled by her emotions, rather than her sometimes questionable good sense (*Obsidian Butterfly* 43).

(20) A number of factors contribute to the slayers' surprising changes of heart toward their traditional enemies. Simple proximity plays a significant role: Anita and Buffy spend more time, and share more emotionally charged experiences, with their future lovers than with any human males. Anita is surrounded constantly by the monsters, including Jean-Claude in early novels, and both the vampire and Richard in later books. While Angel's presence in Buffy's life is not at first so obvious, he appears at pivotal moments, brings warnings of danger, and leaves her with the impression that he is perpetually watching over her.

(21) It is also no coincidence that the slayers find the physical prowess of these men attractive. Angel, Jean-Claude, and Richard all possess supernatural strength and fortitude. Finding men who can fight alongside them, and whose safety is not a constant cause for concern, understandably reassures both women.

(22) Acceptance by society, or lack thereof, becomes another important issue. The slayers are largely rejected by their own kind, and ultimately find intimacy more feasible among the monsters and other social exiles. Anita's powers brand her as insufficiently human among the civilians she protects, so much so that she and the other animators are excommunicated by the Catholic Church. Buffy is a social outcast throughout most of high school and has a troubled relationship with her single mother; both situations can be attributed primarily, at least in the show's first two seasons, to her secret identity and its accompanying requirements. Even when, as with Owen, ordinary humans do display an interest in Buffy, the complications that arise prevent her from reciprocating ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date").

(23) While neither woman is devastated by the negative attitudes of those around her, each seeks out companions with similar experiences. Jean-Claude may be master of St. Louis's vampires, but he must fight the humans to protect his kind's hard-won legal rights; Richard and his fellow lycanthropes are branded as diseased, and face daily discrimination. As a vampire, Angel is feared by humans but loathed by his own kind for possessing a soul. All three men readily comprehend Buffy's and Anita's difficulties in inhabiting both human and supernatural worlds.

(24) Most importantly, the slayers gravitate to men with whom they can share their true selves. Buffy agonizes over hiding her identity from potential boyfriends and searches for someone to whom she can reveal her other life. Far from being ignorant of Buffy's responsibilities, Angel learns of her calling long before he meets her. In "Becoming," Part I, led by a demon named Whistler, he watches from a distance as Merrick first approaches Buffy and later trains her in her duties. Angel sees the difficult road that lies ahead and vows to help the Slayer in the years to come. His awareness of her identity, and willingness to support her efforts, make him an ideal choice for her.

(25) Anita, who wears her slaying as a badge of honor, needs a lover who can accept not only her humanity, but her lack of it. Both her necromancy and her role as vampire executioner brand her as a special kind of monster, and even Richard is troubled by these aspects of her personality. Still, it is, ironically, only among the monsters that Anita and Buffy find men capable of accepting who they really are.

### Facing the Consequences

<p>Kendra: "It's as I feared. [Angel] clouds your judgment. . . . He's a vampire, he should die. Why am I the only person who sees it? Are you that big a fool?"</p> <p>"What's My Line?" Part 2</p>	<p>"You just spend too much time with the damn monsters, Anita. I don't mean who you date. I mean all of it. You've played by their rules so long, sometimes you forget what it's like to be normal."</p> <p>Rudolph Storr, <i>Burnt Offerings</i>, 40</p>
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(26) The slayers recognize, with regret, that a relationship with an ordinary human may be an unrealistic goal. However, choosing lovers among their potential enemies brings its own complications. Anita, only beginning to recover from her own hatred of the monsters, faces the rampant prejudices of her society. For Buffy, giving in to her passion for Angel encourages her to lie to those she trusts, and blinds her to the threat he may one day represent. In addition, both slayers must accept the potential necessity of destroying their lovers in order to protect themselves, their loved ones,

and society as a whole.

(27) Anita knows there will be opposition to her growing feelings for both vampire and werewolf. She attempts to keep her affair with Jean-Claude from becoming public knowledge, primarily to prevent her devoutly Catholic father from learning of it. When Anita's closest friends become aware of her budding relationships, they rapidly confront her with objections to her choice of lovers. Sergeant Rudolph Storr, who heads the Regional Preternatural Investigation Team, bluntly expresses his disappointment, as well as his diminishing trust in her loyalties. Detective Zerbrowski, also an RPIT member, cautiously encourages her to bring Richard over for dinner, but rejects Jean-Claude outright (*The Killing Dance* 198). Similar opinions are put forth by Edward, who offers to help her kill Jean-Claude if she'd prefer to remain with the werewolf (*Obsidian Butterfly* 25). He and Zerbrowski, like many of Anita's friends, exhibit a stronger prejudice against the undead variety of monster—a feeling Anita once shared.

(28) Among Buffy's confidantes, thornier problems arise. Although her friends are largely accepting of her relationship with Angel, the loss of his soul results in heightened tensions among them. After initial confusion, Buffy learns that her passion for Angel has rid him of the gypsy curse, returning him to the evil "Angelus" persona. She cannot bring herself, at first, to kill the man who was once her lover, and her hesitation yields disastrous consequences. In addition to various small torments, Angel ultimately tortures Giles and murders Giles' girlfriend, fellow teacher Jenny Calendar. Buffy, at last facing her responsibilities, sends Angel to Hell.

(29) Rather than face her friends and family after this experience, Buffy runs away. After she comes back, she struggles to regain the trust of Giles and the others, especially her mother. Only a few episodes later, Angel returns from Hell, traumatized but alive and with his soul intact. Buffy begins seeing him in secret; when her friends discover this, she faces their disbelieving anger. Giles in particular demonstrates his disappointment in her, for a variety of reasons. Partly it stems from Buffy's dishonesty, which manifests whenever she and Angel are together. He also reminds her that Angelus caused him great personal pain. But most importantly, Buffy's protection of her former lover puts Angel's safety above her responsibilities as the Chosen One ("Revelations"). Buffy has no defense against these charges.

(30) While combating the disapproval of their colleagues, family, and friends, the slayers must also confront their own ambivalence about their chosen mates. Each is forced to accept the knowledge that she may one day have to kill her lover, in order to fulfill her responsibilities to the wider community. Buffy actually carries out this act. Anita, though never required to put her own strength of will to the test, informs both her lovers that she is capable of killing either man if he threatens her life or loses control of his beast. A. Susan Owen's comments on Buffy's situation apply to both slayers, in that they each "experience the anguish of putting community before self-interest" (27).

(31) Yet all this only scratches the surface of the challenge created by the slayers' love lives. While they must accept that their significant others are inherently and irreversibly not human, they must also face the reality of their own love for these men. Anita and Buffy demonstrate understandable discomfort with the depth of their feelings for and identification with creatures that prey on humanity. The bonds they form with these monsters, and their constant involvement with the supernatural world, require that they examine their own not-quite-human status. Each slayer is called upon to either reject or embrace not only the monsters she both loves and fights, but the monster she perceives within herself.

### The Abyss Gazes Also

"He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (qtd. in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1979)

(32) Both Anita and Buffy are forced to confront these issues, although Anita does so most directly. It is she who admits that, as a necromancer and vampire slayer, she lacks moral high ground among the monsters: as early as *Bloody Bones*, she labels herself as one of them (271). Yet, on the whole, she accepts her inborn powers without questioning her humanity. When the Pope excommunicates practicing animators, she becomes Episcopalian rather than trying to suppress her abilities (*Guilty Pleasures* 186). In her opinion, what matters is her personal relationship with God. She is confident that He does not object, a belief bolstered when she successfully confronts a demon in *Blue Moon*.

(33) Rather than her magical abilities, it is the slow erosion of her once stringent morality that troubles her most. The hatred and prejudice she exhibits toward the monsters, for instance, which are readily apparent in early novels, come frequently into question as her character evolves. This change can be attributed in part to her passions for Jean-Claude and Richard, as well as her friendship with other supposed monsters. However, it also owes a debt to her dealings with

fellow humans such as Edward, whose ethics and morality are infinitely questionable. These relationships with both humans and monsters cause her to examine the validity of her distinction between the two.

(34) Anita does not welcome this release from a black-and-white worldview. Instead, she fears for her immortal soul, wondering if this unfamiliar ambiguity will someday destroy her (*Bloody Bones* 370). In *Burnt Offerings*, Rudolph Storr questions her loyalties outright: "It's not the fur or the fangs that make you a monster, not always," he informs her. "Sometimes, it's just where you draw the line" (40). For Anita, this is the crux of the matter. She fears that, as Nietzsche would have it, the closer her actions and feelings come to that of her monstrous victims, the more like them she becomes. In *Obsidian Butterfly*, she comments, "And that was perhaps my biggest problem. I was always willing to compromise my soul if it would take out the great evil. . . . I couldn't let the monsters win, not even if it meant becoming one of them" (251). Anita's problems are twofold: on one hand, she empathizes with the monsters, befriending many and loving others; on the other, immersing herself in their culture has burned away her innocence and soft edges, turning her into the sort of remorseless killer she frequently combats.

(35) As Storr impugns Anita's allegiance, so does Kendra accuse Buffy of losing her perspective in the war against the vampires. Kendra, the Slayer called when Buffy momentarily dies in "Prophecy Girl," indicts Buffy for her sympathies, particularly her relationship with Angel. Foreshadowing Giles' later complaints, Kendra maintains that Buffy's love for Angel blinds her to danger, and prevents her from fulfilling her obligations as the Chosen One. Although Kendra eventually accepts their mutual passion as defensible, her point is well taken, especially considering Angel's radical change in *Innocence*, and its consequences.

(36) While Buffy is not often forced, as Anita is, to question the moral value of her actions against the monsters, she does have to consider the fine line she walks between destroying them and becoming one of them. The entrance of a third Slayer, Faith, who appears after Kendra's death, brings these issues to the fore. Faith insists that Buffy enjoys what she does, and that she ought to; after all, "Slaying's what we're built for. If you're not enjoying it, you're doing something wrong" ("Bad Girls"). After a night of slaying, Buffy describes to Willow the exhilaration she felt when Faith led her impetuously into the sewers to attack several vampires: "It was intense. It was like I just . . . let go and became this force. I just didn't care anymore" ("Bad Girls"). Faith exerts a dangerous influence over Buffy, encouraging her to take more and more pleasure in the kill, rather than the ultimate purpose of slaying: the safety of the human world.

(37) Buffy is jarred back to reality by Faith's accidental murder of a human, and manages to resist the lure of her fellow Slayer's cavalier attitudes. However, Faith continues to drive Buffy to actions that call into question her own humanity. In "Graduation Day," Part One, Faith poisons Angel with a mystical compound, curable only by drinking the blood of a Slayer. Buffy tracks her down and attempts to kill her, prompting Faith to exclaim, almost proudly, "Well, look at you! All dressed up in big sister's clothes." Both women exhibit shock when Buffy finally plunges the knife into Faith, but Faith takes pleasure in nearly being murdered. Buffy has proven to her that, deep down, they are both killers. Later, in "This Year's Girl," Buffy claims that she tried to kill Faith because, "You had it coming," but Faith demands that Buffy face the truth: the Slayer was willing to trade the life of a human for that of her vampire lover.

(38) The assumption shared by many of Anita's and Buffy's comrades is that their sympathies for the monsters are a direct result of proximity. Rudolph Storr, Kendra, and others believe that, by spending too much time among their enemies, the slayers lose sight of the dividing line between good and evil. As Anita's life becomes intricately entwined with the supernatural world, she develops strong bonds of friendship with many monsters beyond her lovers. Among these are Richard's werewolf pack, the king of the local wererats, and several of Jean-Claude's vampire lieutenants. She even takes on the protection of a wereleopard pack whose violent leader she kills. Buffy pursues similar friendships with Oz, a werewolf; Amy, a witch; and Anya, a former vengeance demon.

(39) These friendships, developed in the wake of passionate relationships with the monsters, contribute to the slayers' rejection of their once-sacred stereotypes. In spite of the beliefs of those around them, Anita and Buffy know that not all humans are inherently good, nor are supernatural creatures by their very nature evil. Possessing human and monstrous characteristics of their own, Buffy and Anita endeavor to straddle both worlds without committing fully to either. Their responsibilities as slayers must come first, but they also allow themselves to experience love and intimacy with the monsters they deem worthy.

## Blurring the Lines

<p>Buffy: "Nothing's ever simple anymore. I'm constantly trying to work it out. Who to love, or hate, who to trust. It's just like the more I know the more confused I get. . . . Does it ever get easy?"</p> <p>Giles: "You mean life?"</p> <p>Buffy: "Yeah, does it get easy?"</p> <p>Giles: "What do you want me to say?"</p> <p>Buffy: "Lie to me."</p> <p>"Lie To Me"</p>	<p>"I execute people, Doctor Cunningham. . . ."</p> <p>"Don't you mean you execute vampires?" he said.</p> <p>"Once upon a time, that's what I meant."</p> <p>We had another long moment of looking at each other, then he said, "Are you saying you kill humans?"</p> <p>"No, I'm saying that there's not as much difference between vamps and humans as I used to tell myself."</p> <p>Anita Blake, <i>Obsidian Butterfly</i>, 241</p>
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(40) Buffy Summers and Anita Blake are neither ordinary women nor strictly human, and their lives are mired in violence, magic, and moral complexity. For these and a myriad of other reasons, they are drawn to lovers from outside the human world. In many ways, their choice is a good one: not only are Jean-Claude, Richard, and Angel better equipped than mere mortals to survive in the slayers' worlds, but they are also a part of those worlds, and therefore capable of accepting Anita and Buffy for who—and what—they are. The support offered by these men helps both women continue to fulfill their obligations as slayers. At the same time, their lovers serve as living reminders that the enemy can sometimes be difficult to define.

(41) Do these feelings of empathy, passion, and even love toward the monsters compromise the slayers' ability to carry out their responsibilities? Are they undermined by allowing ambiguity to temper their actions and opinions? In his essay, "Warrior Women," Michael Ventura suggests that Buffy and others like her "not only tolerate but learn to relish ambivalence—and . . . refuse to let a lack of boundaries demolish their morality" (61). Rudolph Storr fears that the monsters have corrupted Anita's sense of normality, of the accepted line between good and evil, and this is certainly true. Yet Joyce Millman's comments on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* apply to both Whedon's and Hamilton's work: both are "about learning to accept the world—and people—as being more complicated than simply good and evil" (para. 14).

(42) Joss Whedon and Laurell K. Hamilton present their slayers with worlds in which moral and ethical ambiguity are inevitable. Humans and monsters alike are enigmas, as they are in our own world. Good and evil are slippery concepts, right and wrong equally obscure. Accepting these facts requires the slayers to consider the consequences of their own behavior, and to question constantly their motivations. Rather than being forced to choose between the humans and the monsters, Buffy and Anita accept the complexity of their roles, and ultimately address both sets of responsibilities: to humankind, and to their own passions.

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**Bruce McClelland**

## **By Whose Authority? The Magical Tradition, Violence and the Legitimation of the Vampire Slayer**

(1) The American superhero of necessity possesses a dual personality: one, like Clark Kent, that fits, or tries to fit, invisibly into the ordinary fabric of society; another, like Superman, whose reserves of power place him far beyond mortal men. This duality is a response to an underlying, and unresolved, dualism in the society in which these heroes uncomfortably fit. The workaday identity accepts the ability of ordinary authority and enforcement structures to identify and contain undesirable elements, such as criminals. The secret identity, however, tacitly acknowledges the limitations of those structures when confronted with the darker motives of human beings.

(2) Buffy, of course, belongs to this essentially American mythological modality of superhero, yet she differs from classical superheroes in significant ways. The most significant departure from the superhero (ine) format in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS)* is that the undesirables whom Buffy is *chosen* to destroy are not mortal criminals, and law enforcement agencies are not only powerless, they are irrelevant. Thus in the pilot episode for the TV series, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," Willow naively asks Giles, referring to the uncovering of a passel of demons beneath the city, "Shouldn't we call the police?" With his jaded British sigh of acquiescence to the way of things, Giles candidly replies, "They wouldn't believe us, of course." So here we have a shift from the usual mythological pattern in which the hero's good deeds generally result in some punishment of the criminal at the hands of the larger society. As a consequence, Buffy, the ringleader of a band of far more ordinary helpers, is in fact enforcing a kind of vigilante justice. Indeed, her mentor Giles refers to himself as a "Watcher"—a close enough translation of *vigilant*.

(3) American movies and television have always exhibited a fascination with schemes of justice, retribution, punishment, and downright revenge that fly in the face of the overloaded, corrupt, politically controlled system of trial and incarceration. The unexpected success of movies like *Death Wish* and its several sequels reveals a general dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the sanctioned legal system. Yet this glorification of vengeance or at least direct and appropriate punishment remains vicarious, a wish. Classically, such productions always present a lopsided view of the moral dilemma of taking the law into your own hands. At some point, one has to face the music: there is always some tacked-on epilogue in which vigilante justice is condemned as *wrong*, despite its swiftness, clarity, and seeming efficacy.

(4) With *Buffy* the untidiness of having criminals, alive or dead, to hand over to the "proper authorities" is neatly dispensed with by having the targets of Buffy's displeasure turn instantaneously to vapor or dust upon being dispatched. This is possible, we surmise, because these outlaws are *demonic*. Not exactly unreal, but not of the same substance as you or I.<sup>[1]</sup> Yet before these demons are destroyed, sent into oblivion or wherever, they may be indistinguishable from ordinary mortals.<sup>[2]</sup> Giles tells Buffy (and us), "A vampire appears to be completely normal until the Feed is upon them [sic]. Only then do they appear mad." ("Welcome to the Hellmouth") Thus, the task of identifying undesirables who *look like us* (an old sci-fi problem, and certainly at the heart of the story of that alien nobleman and lover, Count Dracula) falls

only to those who possess a skill by virtue of being Chosen. This heightened sense is one that must be kept sharp: "A slayer should be able to see them anywhere." (Giles; "Welcome to the Hellmouth).

(5) Were Buffy's enemies characterized as mortal, we might feel less at ease concerning the absoluteness with which Buffy first identifies, then vanquishes her adversaries, rule of law be damned. Whatever doubt may surround a given suspect's guilt, which is exemplified by unrepentance (since we see that repentant werewolves and vampires, like Oz or Spike, are not destroyed, although they must be confined), vanishes as quickly as the particles of a dead demon once Buffy's perception has homed in. No one ever questions the accuracy of Buffy's judgment, and the proof is in the poof.

(6) We may conclude, perhaps, that this undying faith in the accuracy of Buffy's perception is a result of her repeated success in attacking the demonic. Even Riley, an officer in a more organized paramilitary group of vampire vigilantes, admits, "I think [Buffy] sees things the rest of us don't. We should follow her lead." ("Superstar") But where does this sanction come from? Whence does she derive her authority in the first place?

### Early Slayers

(7) Whether or not the creator of *BtVS*, Joss Whedon, or the show's writers are aware of it, the tradition of the *vampire slayer* has a long history.

(8) In southeastern Europe, where folklore about the vampire originated (in Bulgaria, not Romania, by the way), certain classes of people were, like Buffy, chosen, marked, to become the natural enemies of vampires. Vampires, according to the stories of Balkan villagers, were only about at night and often had no visible form, although it was also claimed that if they survived detection and destruction for a period of a year, they took on the appearance of a local villager. (Indeed, even today, there are Bulgarian villages where the residents are willing to provide the phone numbers of known vampires.)

(9) As corpses terrorizing the living at night, vampires could not be destroyed except by ritual means immediately before or after burial. Vampires that could not be detected became the objects of pursuit of certain vigilantes with the power to identify and destroy them. A *sâbotnik*, who was someone (almost always a man) born on a Saturday (*sâbota* being the Bulgarian word for Saturday, the sabbath), or a *vampirdñia*, the offspring of a woman and a vampire, could detect and destroy ambulatory vampires. So useful were these people at times of vampire epidemics that they might even make a decent living as fearless vampire killers.

(10) The tradition of vampire killers is a topic worthy of investigation, but it is cited here merely to suggest that long before Buffy there was a tradition of investing selected individuals with the magical perceptions and skills necessary to confront the demonic head-on. But since this aspect of vampire folklore is less well-known in the West even than the Balkan vampire itself, there is no point in attempting to deduce some historical continuity between late medieval Bulgarian and late twentieth-century American understanding of the vampire motif.

(11) What is of significance, however, is that the village *vampirdñia* or *sâbotnik* was, in a sense, *chosen*. To become one of these *seers* (and note again the connection with *watching* and *seeing*), one had to have predispositions that were the result of conditions that obtained before or right at birth: physical abnormalities, day of birth, vampire paternity. So even in the old village tradition, one did not choose to become a Slayer. One was chosen.

(12) The imagery of the vampire that pervades *BtVS* is not, of course, derived directly from Eastern European folklore (McClelland 1999). Rather, it is a blend of borrowed literary (essentially post-Stoker and significantly post-Rice) conceptions of the vampire and, to a much greater extent, American and Western European ideas about witchcraft and Satan, especially as they were imagined from the late medieval period

through the Inquisition (Cohn 1975, chap. 8). From a functionalist perspective, it can be argued (Klaniczay 1990; chaps. 9 & 10) that witchcraft and vampirism have related social functions. Furthermore, the complementary distribution of the two seems to correspond to a greater or lesser degree to the distribution of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. It was in Catholic countries, let us not forget, where witches and heretics were subjected to the terrors of the Inquisition. And it was during the Inquisition that another class of "slayers" came to be known, the *benandanti*, who were reputed to be able to leave their bodies during sleep (that is, in an altered state of consciousness) and go off to fight witches at their *sabbats* (Ginzburg 1983). These slayers, too, were marked: they were born, according to the testimony of the trials in which they were accused of consorting with demons, with caul, which are amniotic membranes enveloping the skull at birth.

(13) So whether we are talking about vampires in Eastern Europe, or witches in the West, these groups of ostensibly threatening individuals provoked the creation of a class of antagonists whose function was first to identify evil and then take action on behalf of the larger society. In neither case were these early slayers recognized as official authorities, either ecclesiastical or political; they passed no tests, nor did they work their way up some ladder of patronage. They were simply chosen.

(14) Being chosen, naturally, is a credential that is indisputable, because it is signified by marks or conditions whose chance nature is attributed to an impersonal will. The *benandanti*, *sâbotnici* and *vampirdâni* were hardly responsible for their birth defects, birthdays, or parents. Since the symbolism of being chosen is inclusive and generally agreed upon in advance, almost anyone meeting the proper conditions may be elected willy-nilly to an office whose primary responsibility is to rid the world of evil demons. A slayer may thus be instantiated whenever the need arises: it is not, for example, that hard to find people born on Saturday. And this conformance to a symbolic condition is all that is necessary to legitimate violent actions that in fact violate taboos or laws all in the name of restoring order.

### **The Chosen, Magical Texts, and Legitimacy**

(15) Buffy, we recall from both the original film and the TV series, is similarly chosen. Despite her continuous protestations, she is the receiver of a vocation whose duties are both sacred and obligatory. Conferred upon her through—not *by*—Giles, the mantle of *slayer* is apparently steeped in tradition. And nothing legitimates like the past: "Because you *are* the Slayer. In each generation, a slayer is born. One girl. The Chosen One" (Giles in "Welcome to the Hellmouth"). "For as long as there've been vampires, there's been the Slayer. One girl in all the world, a chosen one." (Giles in "The Harvest").

(16) If the selection of Buffy is ordained, we may ask, what is the basis of her selection? What is the mark by which she is recognized as the One? What defect or superior capacity isolates her from her peers and, in fact, condemns her to an adolescence/post-adolescence in which "normal" (sexual) relationships lie beyond her reach (a situation brought sharply into focus, for example, in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date")? What, finally, is the "tradition" by which authority is conferred—where does it begin and why?

(17) Since Buffy is herself ignorant, until it is announced to her in the gym (*BtVS* original film), of her own powers, she can provide us with no real insight into her own deep nature: before becoming a Slayer, she is nothing but a cheerleader, a blonde California high-school girl whose very name is meant to suggest lightness, lack of substance. Buffy's antipathetic foil, the even more superficial Cordelia, implies that Buffy is more substantial than we might at first think. But in the final analysis, it is the British librarian Giles who, as the currently incarnate guardian of the tradition of the Slayer, reveals Buffy's occult mission.

(18) Without Giles (or Merrick, as the Watcher, Giles' antecedent, in the movie version is called), Buffy would never have figured out for herself who she was. Without Giles, Buffy's serial murders of ugly kids in bad clothes (not to mention make-up) would have landed her in prison. Of course, the real social necessity for dispatching vampires is hard to argue with: "Look at his jacket," Buffy instructs Giles while pointing at a tastelessly dressed boy on the dance floor, trying to prove that she can 'sense' vampires, "He's got the sleeves rolled up. And the shirt? Deal with that outfit for a moment . . . *trust me*: only someone who's been

living underground for ten years would think *that* was still the look" ("The Harvest").

(19) We may consider Giles something of a "keeper of the texts," insofar as he seems to have, in a California high school library, an enormous collection of books with such unlikely names as *Vampyr* and *Witchcraft* and *Witches: Historic Roots to Modern Practice*, the latter unfortunately checked out by Xander. ("The Witch") Giles' personal link to the literate mystical tradition is underscored by a confused reference by Willow to his previous job as "the curator at some British museum, or *the* British Museum." (This might even be an unwitting homage to Bram Stoker, who obtained a good deal of his knowledge of Transylvanian folklore and of Dracula at *the* British Museum.)

(20) Perhaps in no other place on the planet is a high-school library so absolutely superfluous as in Sunnydale, California. It is therefore all the more remarkable that Rupert Giles, as the only constant grown-up in the show, is able to attract a small force of adolescent avengers into its chambers (not remarkably, there are rarely, if ever, any other students there). But it is here, in Giles' rather comfortable and relaxed space, that it is possible to learn the cosmology of the ancestral race of demons, as well as the spells and potions necessary to counteract their evil designs against the present inhabitants of the upper world:

(21) This world is older than any of you know, and contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons, Demons walked the earth; made it their home— their Hell. In time they (the demons) lost their purchase on this reality, and the way was made for the mortal animals. For Man. What remains of the Old Ones are vestiges: certain magicks, certain creatures. ("The Harvest")

(22) The texts that Giles has access to (supplemented by the stuff that computer-geek Willow finds on the Web) are contained in ancient tomes (see, even, the spines of the books on the page called "The Library" at the official Web site (<http://www.buffy.com/library/index.html> as of 9/28/00)). As a very nice touch, the prop masters and set decorators on the show have gone to the trouble of including books with Reformation-style woodcuts and actual Latin text on their pages, though the pages are shown only for a fleeting frame or two, so it is difficult to find out which texts are being consulted, or why. If nothing else, we know that these pages make reference to both the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Psalm 78 and Luke 16, respectively), but beyond that, it is likely that the pages were selected arbitrarily, representing a Hollywood look and feel of "ancient mystical texts." It is not expected, in other words, that the devotees of the show would actually (as I did) freeze the frames of the turning pages in order to read them. Much less is it assumed that the viewers know enough Latin to be able to read these pages if they did bother to freeze them. There are frequent and enormous howlers when Giles recites pseudo-Latin spells, enough to embarrass anyone who remembers even a bit of Latin morphology.

(23) In "The Witch," for example, Giles retrieves the exact book used by a witch (a cheerleader's envious mother, in fact) to cast a spell on Buffy. Like a high priest, he opens it and begins intoning in a "Latin" whose ungrammaticality we might be able to ignore if he didn't also provide a "translation" of the Latin spell:

*Centrum est obscurus, tenebrae respiratus.* The center is dark, darkness breathes.

(24) Or in "Superstar," while Xander is casually leafing through some powerful book of spells, at the very second he says "Right. You can't just go '*librum incendere*'" the book spontaneously combusts. Angered by Xander's lack of proper respect for the magical power contained in his books, Giles snaps, "Xander, don't speak Latin in front of the books."

(25) This use of broken Latin is intended to invoke, by its very mysteriousness and by its reference to the language of the medieval Church, the Western European demonological tradition. (Egyptian hieroglyphics ('sacred writing') functioned similarly in such movies as *The Mummy*: shorthand for a lost, non-Christian religious system which by nature was linked to magic. The Latin in which the offending Satanic spells were

supposedly written is, of course, the language in which the Church made its high-flown, theologically overwhelming accusations against often illiterate “heretics.” Much later, through the Reformation up to the nineteenth-century theosophical movements with their romantic obfuscation, the projected fantasies of the Inquisitors were reimagined as authentic texts.

(26) It is not the *actual* history of demonology (and certainly NOT vampirism, which in its authentic state was purely oral, after all) that *BtVS* cares about invoking. Rather, it is the vague but widespread sense that the philosophical dualism so vehemently attacked by the Church<sup>[3]</sup> is still heretical. Paganistic and polytheistic beliefs in demons are therefore still deserving of annihilation. The attack on heretical beliefs in demons has been transposed, however, to the demons themselves. The obscure spells dredged up from the demonological writings in Giles’ curiously nefarious collection, by virtue of their links to a period in which real social action was taken with impunity against “witches” are proof enough of the legitimacy of the struggle.

(27) The cosmology of demons, Old Ones, and vampires (the latter monsters resulting from the impure miscegenation between demons and humans (“The Harvest”)) reinforces the interpretation that the conflict between good and evil is ongoing. The eternal nature of the battle, projected into the present and future, itself legitimates all actions taken to destroy the prehistoric inhabitants whose envy and resentment lie behind a plot to reverse what might actually be seen as an injustice. Like the transgressed Native American burial grounds whose vengeful rage is personified and animated in Stephen King movies and the like (e.g. *Pet Sematary*, *Poltergeist*), the aboriginal inhabitants of contemporary Silicon Valley—aka Hellmouth or *Bocca del Inferno*—represent a repressed but persistent threat to reclaim the world of shopping malls and cheerleading to which Buffy belongs.

(28) Here, then, is why Buffy is the Chosen: in the movie more than in the TV show, she is the archetype of the postmodern, the perfect embodiment of the slick democratizing values which would be undercut by any admission of what had been displaced to make way for post-capitalism. She is first discovered by Merrick<sup>[4]</sup> in a shopping mall elevator and again later in a high-school gymnasium after cheerleading practice.

(29) She is common in other ways: we learn that in her past-life alter-ego dreams, she was a “slave in Virginia,” “a servant girl or barmaid” in medieval England or New England. She thus represents the common (read: dominated) individual who is mistreated by the upper classes. With such a reincarnational pedigree, Buffy is not only entitled, but obliged to rectify centuries of social injustice. Disdain for the authorities may be the result of a perception that they are members of the dominant class.

(30) Such a reference to her social inferiority is not anomalous. Rather, this status is frequently associated with those who are chosen to restore social order by means of violent transgression. Indeed, as Bourdieu points out,

Sacriligious transgressions may be delegated to an inferior being, both feared and despised, a sacrificer and scapegoat whose role is to take away ill fortune. (Bourdieu 1990, p. 234)

(32) *BtVS*, then, represents an updating of at least two significant motifs: first, the idea of Satan (paralleled by the figure of the subterranean Master in the show) “having servants amongst living men and women” (Cohn 1975, p. 63), who have a demonic interest in inverting the current social order; and second, the notion that violent rites performed outside the law without benefit of evidentiary proceedings may be legitimated by invoking popular notions about late medieval demonology. Magical invocations in Latin are a means of summoning, or encountering, the repressed demons. Destruction of vampires by ritual means (with the usual paraphernalia) is a legitimate obligation, which must take place outside the law because the

very power of these evil beings allows them to go undetected by ordinary mortals. The drift from the original concern with vampires toward a more generic interest in demons is perhaps not merely a scriptwriter's trick. There is a natural discomfort in the American psyche with the truth of all vampire folklore: the fact is, in the Balkan imagination, killing a vampire is a harmless act, since in reality people who are considered vampires are also known to be dead. The attack on witchcraft in the West, on the other hand, resulted in the torture and murder of living people. The violence of the Inquisition is more deeply embedded in American consciousness than the mock violence of vampire lore.

(33) Buffy becomes a *demon* slayer more than a vampire slayer, and the imagery used to legitimate her actions before an audience more familiar with the fantasies of Satanism (a pseudo-religion which never really took hold in Orthodox countries) and Inquisitorial persecution is clearly derived from popular notions about the Middle Ages. At the very center of *BtVS* is an occult library, and in those obscure books which no one read anyway are to be found the reasons why Buffy is allowed to get away with murder.

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[1] In an interview with Joss Whedon included on the VHS tape of "Angel" and "The Puppet Show" Buffy's creator explains that the series' signature "dusting" serves three purposes: (1) to remind audiences that those Buffy kills are not human; (2) to instantaneously get rid of all the bodies; (3) because it looks "real cool."

[2] The conflation of vampires with the more generic class, demons, is accomplished early in the series, presumably to meet the technical demands of plotting the show week after week. In : "Welcome to the

Hellmouth," Giles says, "Not just vampires . . . Werewolves, *incubi*, *succubi*. They're all real!"

[3]The attacks on dualistic heresies are largely responsible for the emergence of the figure of Satan in Western consciousness as an evil usurper rather than, as he is portrayed in the Old Testament, a tester of moral commitment (McGinn 1994; Forsyth 1987). See also (Stoyanov 1994).

[4]A cryptic reference to Meric Casaubon, perhaps? Meric Casaubon in 1659 edited and published a transcription of a mystical work that involved automatic writing between Dr. John Dee, mathematician and alchemist to Elizabeth Regina, and Edward Kelley, an alchemist-magician whose reputation did not stand up quite so well. The manuscript purported to have been dictated by the Angels in a language called Enochian, which had its own mystical (quasi-Hebrew-quasi-alchemical) alphabet.

Merrick so spelled is a common enough Anglo name, while Meric Casaubon is relatively obscure. The book edited by the latter was known as *A True and Faithful Relation of What passed for many Yeers Between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits: Tending (had it Succeeded) To a General Alteration of most STATES and KINGDOMES in the World*.

A coincidental vampire connection is noted in Donald C. Laycock's *The Complete Enochian Dictionary: A Dictionary of the Angelic Language* as revealed to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley (1978):

Prague during the reign of King Rudolf II was devoted to the Hermetic arts and sciences which fascinated its monarch to the exclusion of all else. King Stephen of Poland, who had his seat at Cracow, was related to the Hungarian Bathori family which legend identifies with Count Dracula.



**William Wandless**

## **Undead Letters: Searches and Researches in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

Buffy, I have volumes of lore, of prophecies and predictions. But I don't have an instruction manual. We feel our way as we go along. And I must admit, as a Slayer you're doing pretty well.

—Rupert Giles, in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"

(1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* banks on a very simple premise: folks dig research. Admittedly, they also love brushes with the supernatural, snappy dialogue, trendy clothes, pretty people, sweltering smoochies, and the occasional bleached-blonde British vampire, but nothing pulls them in like an overhead shot of a man in tweed thumbing through a dusty, leather-bound book. Sadly, squeezing all the requisite trappings of vampire-slaying into forty-five minutes of television time places severe limitations on how much research work can be depicted in each episode. To keep viewers coming back for more, the series teases them with only a few scant moments of tantalizing page-turning per week.

(2) Over the course of four seasons, however, the nature of those moments—and the surrounding narrative content which reflects and is reflected in them—has changed dramatically. While Giles and the Sunnydale High School Library formerly centralized and localized the Scooby Gang's researches for the majority of the first three seasons, their methods and their measures have gradually expanded and adjusted to enable them to understand phenomena and combat adversaries well beyond the realm of everyday vampire-slaying. Research once 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. Reassuring rapport, playful banter, and hushed discussion of the dangers ahead reigned over these calm intervals of intelligence-gathering, and the knowledge gained in these relatively quiet cabals ordinarily proved equal to the confrontations to follow. The characters grew and their relationships changed, but their common alliance against the assorted evils of Sunnydale remained constant.

(3) The onset of the fourth season, however, marked the emergence of new hazards for the team: the threat of group dissolution in the college environment; the presence of the Initiative, a competing group of vampire- and demon-hunters with different methods, ethics, and objectives; and the existence of Adam, an essentially unresearchable foe. In light of the events of the fourth season, the destruction of the library in the battle with the Mayor at the close of the third seems emblematic of a decisive shift in the role of research in the series. The center of the Scooby Gang's research world—and the very heart of their shared high school experience—ceases to be, destroyed in an explosion of their own engineering. The loss of the library occasions physical displacement and movement outward, and Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander begin to forge more fully separate lives as individuals, exploring identities beyond the protective enclosure of the group. The pursuit of knowledge correspondingly turns inward for each of them, and it is only in the final episodes of the fourth season that the collective yield of their independent researches begins to take on a familiar shape, a renewal of the moments before the destruction of the library, when a victorious Buffy can



insist to her friends that “we were great” (“Primeval”).[1]

(4) That expressive *we* epitomizes the characteristic guise of knowledge in the series, a form of understanding that emerges as a consequence of intercommunication and interaction. The central expression of this collaborative condition in the first two seasons arises from the gradual revelation of Buffy’s destiny as the Slayer and in the more understated disclosure of Giles’ related fortunes as her assigned Watcher. The initial friction between them is at once comic and intense, as Buffy’s vehement resistance to ordination as the vampire-hunting Chosen One is met by the arid wit and seemingly encyclopedic occult knowledge of the buttoned-down Brit. Both, however, are victims of comparable tragedies. Buffy has been robbed of any real chance at teenage normalcy, and Giles, too, has been robbed of youthful dreams: “I was going to be a fighter pilot,” he laments, “or possibly a grocer” (“Never Kill a Boy on the First Date”). The analogy between Slayer and Watcher, however, has intrinsic limitations: a segment excerpted from the original teleplay of “Reptile Boy” has Buffy rebuff Giles’ attempt to commiserate with her youthful impulses by reminding him that he doesn’t “know what it’s like to be sixteen, *and* a girl, *and* a Slayer” (Golden 6). The growth of their relationship, as a consequence, is contingent on the ebb and flow of reciprocal discovery.

(5) Giles learns that his assigned Slayer can be governed only loosely, if at all, and he develops a deep and abiding respect for the sacrifice Buffy proves finally willing to make and the unconventional way she determines to make it. Buffy, in turn, gathers that her assigned Watcher is more than just a wooden functionary, and she develops a profound trust in his guidance and his friendship. Though Giles initially attempts to indoctrinate Buffy in the formal trade of slaying, by the midpoint of the second season he admits that, in Buffy’s case, he’s essentially thrown out the Slayer handbook (“What’s My Line, Part Two”). The concession is a significant one, both as a reasoned response to Buffy’s intractability and as a reflection of Giles’ regard for the strength of her commitment and conviction. Though Giles is fully aware of the strictures and rituals of the Watcher’s Council, his understanding of the essential purpose of his office—and the peculiar virtues of his vampire-slaying protégé—makes him wise enough to accept their uncommon relationship. His knowledge, he quickly learns, must be fitted to her power; the converse simply does not work.

(6) Though Giles consequently may not be the ideal Watcher in the traditional sense, as the Scooby Gang’s principal source of arcane knowledge, their chief researcher, and their *de facto* “Superlibrarian” (as Xander calls him in “Never Kill a Boy on the First Date”), his value to the team is manifest. Giles’ role early in the series is doubly important: he not only needs to uncover the information Buffy needs with speed and precision—or at least as much speed and precision as hours of archival research admits—he also needs to interpret and present that information in a language accessible to his young ward, her friends, and the viewing audience. He must, in essence, transform occult research into practical knowledge, something the team can reason with and ultimately apply. In an appreciative assessment of Giles’ efficacy, GraceAnne A. DeCandido summarizes the virtues of his peculiar practice of the researcher’s craft:

Giles believes that what he needs to know for Buffy’s sake lies in his many volumes at home and at work. Giles also makes the necessary leap of faith common to all good librarians: He bridges the chasm between the information as it lives in the text and the transfer of that information into a form the Slayerettes and Buffy can actually use. Sometimes that means literal translation, other times it means recasting what he reads into stories, tag lines, or aphorisms that make sense to the teens he serves. (46)

Giles often works at the periphery of the Scooby Gang, but his researches are frequently central to the resolution of the external crises that beset the group. Though Buffy, Willow, and Xander incessantly razz him for his unvarying “get my books . . . look stuff up” response to their myriad problems (as it is ironically construed in “The Pack”), they never disparage or undervalue his contribution to the welfare and the communal knowledge of the team.

(7) As the primary source of lore and arcana for much of the series, at least during the first three seasons, Giles is usually responsible both for articulating the essence of his research findings, for interpreting and predicting phenomena, and for tendering a responsive course of action. In his own vampiric way, however, he is also responsible for infecting the group with his contagious appetite for knowledge. The entire Scooby Gang often grudgingly hunkers down in the library over dusty volumes in some of the show's most convivial scenes, and in this intent yet collegial atmosphere its members develop an enduring appreciation for the researcher's craft, as DeCandido continues in her discussion of the shared quality that binds the group together in their fight against evil:

The thirst to know . . . is at the core of it all: to know the forces of darkness, to name them, and hence to defang them; to know themselves, as they dance on the edge of maturity; to search out the specifics of how to overmaster a particular demon along with the principles of how knowledge can lead to larger truths. (46)

(8) Research in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* often hinges on such a balanced understanding of knowledge. While the intelligence the team gathers is rarely collected for its own sake— immediate utility, and not simply the abstract value of knowing, usually governs the act of gathering—it also constitutes a crucial part of the group's shared network of experience. Knowledge in the series does not simply turn up in the pages of rare books: it issues from every moment of group interaction, from every discovery Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander make about each other and about themselves. When the usually flippant Xander, in an effort to convince Willow that Giles can take care of himself on a dangerous errand, reminds her "that knowledge is the ultimate weapon" ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"), he succinctly expresses an idea which effectively dominates the first three seasons.

(9) Significantly, coming-to-knowledge in the series is neither static nor stable. Dynamic and fluid, it moves in fits and starts, engaging the entire team in different ways on different occasions. Attempting to define a conventional model for internal or external researches in *Buffy* proves virtually impossible. Buffy typically supplies experiential reconnaissance of the hazards at hand, but her intuition and determined reasoning are crucial for countering an unseen threat like *Der Kindestod* in "Killed by Death" or for accidentally talking a distraught Jonathan out of suicide in "Earshot." Giles usually provides the bulk of the team's archival researches, but his resume also features spellcasting knowledge and abilities, as evinced in "The Witch" and a handful of other episodes, and the capacity for explosive violence (see "Angel" and "Graduation Day, Part Two"). Willow customarily offers a salutary dose of modern knowledge and know-how to Giles' archaic scholarship, but she also performs detective work firsthand (uncovering the secrets of Joyce's new beau in "Ted," for example) and her own nascent spellcasting powers—she tells Joyce "I'm a dabbler" in "Gingerbread," even though she has already summoned the formidable soul-binding magic of "Becoming, Part Two"—serve to expand her offices considerably. Xander frequently offers crucial intuitive input to the team, yet he also complements his glib connective inferences with a surprising versatility, showcased in the undercover work of "Go Fish" and the unacknowledged exploits of "The Zeppo."

(10) Moreover, the group also acquires intelligence from a number of external sources: the computer savvy and gypsy lore of Jenny Calendar and her technopagan network, the centuries of lived (or unlived) supernatural experience of Angel, Spike, and other vampires, the underground demonic connections of Willy, and the clues, hints, and sundry intimations offered up, willingly or unwillingly, by a host of other informants.

(11) Unsurprisingly, the intelligence the group acquires from their motley collection of sources varies widely in its reliability. At times, information is trustworthy even when the informant is not, as in the case of the deranged Dr. Carlyle in "Teacher's Pet," who fully grasps the nature of the She-Mantis yet suspects his mother has been reincarnated as a Pekingese; at other times, evidence itself is cryptic, like the violent reenactments or spiritually-chalked messages of Grace and Stanley in "I Only Have Eyes for You."

Occasionally, the group even must deal with information that is appallingly exact—the prophecies of the *Pergamum Codex* in “Prophecy Girl” come immediately to mind—yet proves happily incomplete. In every case, however, what Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander come to know in each episode is invariably enriched by how they come to know it, and the manner in which they put the knowledge acquired to use speaks volumes about the integrity—here indicative of both uprightness and wholeness—of the group.

(12) The formation and development of this integrity through the accumulation of group knowledge, archival knowledge, and self-knowledge provides the foundation for the central narratives of the first three seasons. Though narrative abstraction necessarily detracts from the complexity and sophistication of *Buffy*, each season ultimately focuses on a single primary conflict: the Scooby Gang’s efforts to prevent the Ascension of the Master and the opening of the Hellmouth unify the first, their efforts to come to terms with the dual nature of Angel/Angelus and to thwart his attempt to awaken the demon Acatla connect the second, and their efforts to frustrate the demonic Mayor’s plans for his own ascension dominate the third. Buffy is the nominal Slayer of the series; however, the successful resolution of all three major crises is contingent on the complementary exertions and collective action of the group. Surprisingly, the very existence of a group is anomalous—Slayers, aided only by their Watchers, have historically worked alone.

(13) An encounter with Kendra, the exceedingly orthodox Slayer activated at the moment of Buffy’s death at the hands of the Master, reveals the abnormality of a group arrangement. Startled by Willow’s arrival at a private Watcher-Slayer conversation, Kendra receives a stammering explanation of her presence from Giles:

*Giles:* Kendra, there are a few people—civilians, if you like—who know Buffy’s Identity. Willow is one of them. And they also spend time together . . . socially.

*Kendra:* And you allow this, Sir?

*Giles:* Well . . .

*Kendra:* But the Slayer must work in secret, for security.

*Giles:* Of course. But with Buffy, however, it’s . . . some flexibility is required. (“What’s My Line, Part Two”)

That flexibility, which both Giles and Kendra regard as a token of his immoderate permissiveness as a Watcher, nevertheless serves a crucial purpose. Buffy’s commitment to a close circle of friends, though a violation of the Slayer handbook, profoundly transforms her own existence as an object of knowledge. The forces of darkness, which traditionally only had a single young woman to deal with, find themselves challenged by a team of adversaries, not a single foe. To effect their dark designs, they must outthink and overcome not only Buffy, but her friends and allies as well.

(14) Even a cursory scan of the first three seasons reveals exactly how advantageous Buffy’s various friendships can be and how profoundly they can impact the efforts of the forces of darkness to assess accurately the threat she represents. Buffy’s climactic confrontation with The Master at the close of the first season serves as an exemplary instance in this regard. The episode centers on the fulfillment of prophecy, both for Buffy and the Slayerettes and The Master himself. Buffy must deal with the unequivocally clear prophecy from the *Pergamum Codex*, a volume of unerring lore, on the eve of the conflict: “Tomorrow night Buffy will face the Master, and she will die” (“Prophecy Girl”). The Master, meanwhile, is quite smug in his own knowledge of the prophecies surrounding his Ascension. He, too, knows Buffy will die. Moreover, he knows that Buffy is actually the agent of his escape from his underworld prison. He defeats her readily, affording him ample opportunity for gloating. “Prophecies are tricky creatures,” the Master informs the mesmerized Slayer as he draws her to him—“You’re the one that sets me free,” he hisses, “think about that!” (“Prophecy Girl”). He drinks her blood, the fuel for his exaltation, and releases her; she falls to the ground, where she comes to rest, face down, in a pool of water.

(15) Buffy drowns; both vampiric lore and textual research prove faultless in their prediction of the fate of

the Slayer. They fail to reckon, however, with the consequence of the Slayer's friends. Xander and Angel arrive on the scene following the Master's ascent, and Xander succeeds in reviving Buffy with CPR. Buffy defeats the Master shortly thereafter—when he rages “You were destined to die! It was written!”, Buffy pertly responds “What can I say? I flunked the written” (Prophecy Girl)—thus setting a precedent that will govern the next two seasons. In each of the major conflicts to follow, Buffy's chief adversary fails to account adequately for her special status as a member of a larger social network. In the second season, Angelus successfully deals with the threat of Jenny Calendar and her soul-restoring spell, but he overlooks the possibility that an injured Willow might prove equal to its casting in “Becoming, Part Two.” The Mayor prepares quite deliberately for his own attempted ascension in “Graduation Day, Part Two,” the third season's finale—he adopts his own Slayer and gathers an army of vampires to back him up—but finds himself totally unprepared for the organized resistance of Buffy, the Slayerettes, and the entire Sunnydale High School student body, not to mention a library packed with explosives. When Whistler, the enigmatic demon who brought Angel to Buffy, encounters Buffy herself just before her confrontation with the soulless Angelus, he offers her a bit of existential advice: “In the end, you're always by yourself. You're all you've got. That's the point” (“Becoming, Part Two”). In the first three seasons, that point consistently proves untrue.

(16) The fourth season, however, marks a turning away from collective activity. What Buffy's affronts to her friends (in “When She Was Bad”) and her disappearance following the damnation of Angel (chronicled in “Becoming, Part Two” and “Anne”) could not effect—the dissolution of her core group of friends—is precipitated by a far more banal cause: enrollment at UC-Sunnydale. Though they continue to work together intermittently, the group suddenly disperses. Buffy struggles to adapt to college, enduring her genuinely demonic roommate and seemingly demonic professors, but eventually secures a measure of comfort in the arms of Riley. Willow, in contrast, thrives in the university environment, finding intellectual stimulation, the opportunity to practice her witchcraft, and a friend and lover in Tara. Giles, now an unemployed librarian and ex-Watcher, begins to develop his own interests, an old flame named Olivia and coffeehouse-crooning among them, and becomes more and more distant from the youthful members of the Scooby Gang. And Xander, following a soul-searching road trip replete with mishaps and male strippers, returns to a basement apartment in his parents' house, where his anxieties about being the only non-collegian and the Zeppo of the group soon return. The absence of the library and the regular gatherings it once housed heightens the sense of physical and emotional disconnection among the members of the group. Though Buffy and Willow eventually wind up being roommates, the transition from the third season to the fourth finds the team growing up and growing apart.

(17) Significantly, the increasing distance between Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander is not merely physical. The exchange of knowledge also suffers as a result of their separation, and information becomes a commodity which is sometimes, by accident or design, withheld, not shared. An early catalyst is Willow's separation from Oz in “Wild at Heart,” a separation made doubly painful by the onset of Buffy and Riley's romance. Willow, though she feels like she's been “split down the center and half of [her] is lost” in “Something Blue,” fails to find a sympathetic ear among her friends and eventually resorts to spellcasting to heal her broken heart. Giles, for his part, finds himself increasingly out of the loop. He invests weeks researching the Initiative, “trying to get a single scrap of information about [the] mysterious demon collectors,” only to find out, in “A New Man,” that the remainder of the Scooby Gang already knows quite a bit about the organization and that Buffy is dating one of its members. Soon thereafter, Willow wonders aloud at Buffy's deepening involvement with the Initiative, noting how the time she formerly spent with her friends has markedly decreased (“The I in Team”). In turn, Willow begins spending more time with Tara, and Willow admits that, though she's part of “this group thing that revolves around the slaying,” she would like to preserve “something that's just, you know, mine” (“Who Are You?”). Moreover, Willow conceals the nature of her relationship with Tara as long as possible, afraid her friends will not understand. To complicate the exchange of knowledge even further, Tara successfully impedes Willow's attempt to use magic to find demonic signatures in Sunnydale, Buffy withholds the full details of her relationship with Angel from Riley, and Professor Walsh withholds information about the true purpose of the Initiative from the commandos of the Initiative itself. The channels of communication become radically obstructed, and knowledge itself soon becomes an isolated personal property within the Scooby Gang.

(18) This individuation of knowledge, though it profoundly impacts the relationship of Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander, has little effect on the military hierarchy of the Initiative. The organization of the two groups differs strikingly, as do their research methods and tactics. For Buffy and friends, demons and vampires are subjects of folklore and mythology—monsters, it's true, but monsters with roles and objectives. For the soldiers of the Initiative, however, these monsters are scientific objects, a collection of facts and data to be analyzed and neutralized. In "Doomed," both teams encounter the same trio of demons; what they learn and assume about those demons illustrates the essential incompatibility of their separate approaches. The Initiative commandos collect plain facts about the demon: its height, weight, any special hazards it might present, and the pheromone signature that will make it easy to track. The demon's purpose is immaterial; they assume it's simply "on a basic kill-crush-destroy." The Scooby Gang, meanwhile, unearths far more significant details in their research. The demons, they learn, are not the generic creatures the Initiative takes them to be: they are Vahrall demons, and they are collecting the material components needed to open the Hellmouth. With only a poor understanding of the nature of the threat, Initiative commandos dutifully patrol their assigned quadrants, unaware that, were Buffy and her friends to fail, Sunnydale would be overrun by the denizens of Hell.

(19) The lack of awareness evinced by the commandos in this instance also extends to their understanding of the Initiative itself. Though the organization's ethics are dubious from the outset—the neurologically-neutered Spike is a troublesome presence for much of the season, though the Scooby Gang, satisfied by the impotence of their longtime foe, consider the rectitude of the procedure only in passing—their methods never openly come into question until the final few episodes. Riley's response to Buffy's questions about the researches and practices of the Initiative seems typical: "I know all I need to know. We're doing good here—protecting the public, removing the subterrestrial threat. It's work worth doing" ("The I in Team"). Riley, Buffy, and their respective teams, however, soon gain a far better understanding of the organization's larger designs. Professor Walsh, the Initiative's "mother," sends Buffy into a death trap, and Riley, upon discovering Walsh's apparent deception, walks out on her. In "Goodbye Iowa," the following episode, another wrinkle in the Initiative's methods comes to light: Buffy learns that the commandos have been fed a steady diet of performance-enhancing drugs, offered to them as vitamins. The emergence of this new information understandably shakes Riley's faith in the Initiative and its methods, and his inability to bear witness to the brutal experiments performed on Oz in "New Moon Rising" finally force him to sever his ties with an organization he can no longer accept. He deserts, unwilling to be part of the ethical nightmare it has come to represent.

(20) The ethical transgressions of the Initiative, however, are soon eclipsed by the revelation of its ultimate transgression in "Goodbye Iowa": the "kinematically redundant biomechanical demonoid," Adam. Previously identified only as "Project 314," Adam's existence was known only to Dr. Walsh, his creator, her circle, and the demons aware of his assembly, who considered him an abomination. Adam's escape from the Initiative compound allows him to pursue his own researches into the human, demon, and vampire condition. He is perceptive in the extreme—in "Superstar" he asserts that "No one . . . has ever been as awake and alive as I am"—but he also possesses a childlike curiosity, especially about chaotic elements beyond his control. More problematically still, he has a special interest in Buffy; in his estimation, "she makes things interesting" ("The Yoko Factor"). Though Spike, acting as a double agent in the hope that his violence-inhibiting microchip will be removed, urges Adam to be cautious, he proves obstinate in his desire to introduce Buffy into the mayhem he is intent on creating. The chaos Adam has conceived actually *requires* her presence: he plans to instigate a war between the Initiative commandos and the demons they hold captive, a war that will create a supply of body parts for the demonoid army he seeks to construct, and Buffy is needed, as she surmises in "Primeval," to "even the kill ratio."

(21) Adam is not, however, entirely deaf to suggestions. Spike's history with Buffy—and his understanding of the source of Buffy's peculiar success as a Slayer—brings about a crucial reversal. Adam, an opponent of man-made origins, is not researchable in the traditional sense. Though the Scooby Gang eventually learns that he's powered by a core of uranium, they cannot simply crack open a succession of dusty volumes to discover the readiest way to defeat him. By the fourth season, however, the Scooby Gang itself has become

a researchable quantity, and Spike's intimate knowledge of their collective success causes him to broach the matter of Buffy's companions with Adam:

*Adam:* I will restore you to what you once were. When I have the Slayer . . . how and where I want her.

*Spike:* Easier said. She's crafty. Her and her little friends.

*Adam:* Friends?

*Spike:* There's your—what do you call it—variable. The Slayer's got pals. You want her evening the odds in a fight you don't want the Slayerettes mucking about.

*Adam:* Take them away from her.

*Spike:* Now there's a plan. She's working solo, she won't have a chance to come after us when the wild rumpus begins. Plus, it will make her miserable. And I never get tired of that. ("The Yoko Factor")

(22) Spike's plan to remove Buffy's friends from the picture is a simple one: using tensions already at work in the group, he contrives to sow additional discord. He reminds Giles that he no longer serves any official capacity in the group, adding that Buffy and the gang treat him—and think of him—"very much like a retired librarian." Spike, with unexpected help from Anya, Xander's persistently tactless girlfriend, persuades him that his friends look down on him and think he should join the Army. Finally, in a series of damning *double entendres*, Spike convinces Willow that her computer skills have eroded, a circumstance Buffy and Xander both blame on her involvement with wicca and her involvement with Tara. Capitalizing on his knowledge of each individual's apprehensions about his or her current standing with the rest of the group, Spike heightens their collective anxiety. His plan ultimately works, at least in part, because Spike's words echo what a season of separation and self-examination has taught them to imagine.

(23) The reassembly of the entire group intensifies the doubts Spike set in motion—Buffy's return causes tensions seething beneath the surface of the group to suddenly erupt. Desperate to gain any information that may be of help in the fight against Adam, Buffy complains to Willow of her slowness in cracking the encryption of computer disks Spike supplied. Buffy unwittingly slights Xander as well, underscoring his sense of inutility and inadequacy by refusing to let him help her track down Adam. Giles, for his part, gets sloppily drunk, and gleefully informs Buffy that, because she never trains with him anymore, "[Adam]'s gonna kick your ass." A full-fledged conflagration follows, as a season's worth of pent-up angst finally spills over. Buffy proves equal to the rage of the Slayerettes, however, and, realizing they can be of no help to her until they work through their fury, levels the most withering reproach of the series at them: "So . . . I guess I'm starting to understand why there's no prophecy about a Chosen One—and her friends. If I need help, I'll go to someone I can count on." The fragmentation of the gang seems complete, as each falls prey to the private misgivings borne of living separate lives.

(24) In the penultimate episode of the series, Spike, eager to have the microchip removed, crows of his success in divorcing Buffy from the group: "She's separated from her friends. They want nothing to do with her. She's all alone" ("Primeval"). An oversight on his part, however—he broke up the gang before Buffy could acquire the information encoded on the disks he left with Willow, intelligence that, had it been decrypted in time, would have delivered her to the Initiative compound alone—forces him to play peacemaker. He journeys to Adam's lair to urge Buffy to retrieve the information, an act which awakens her mistrust of his intentions. A reunion of the Scooby Gang brings Spike's machinations to light, and an embarrassed team realizes they've been had. Though they are collectively honest enough to recognize that

Spike only fanned a spark that already existed—as Buffy admits, the “trouble was stir-rippable”—they are also invested deeply enough in their group friendship to confess their doubts and move onward.

(25) That forward movement signals a dramatic return to the research-and-action methodology which characterized the first three seasons. The resolution of the Adam crisis requires a synthesis of the unique skills that each member of the team brings to the table, and the original, unified group dynamic returns. Buffy, the Slayer, provides the strength, ingenuity, and tactical skills needed to get to Adam. Giles provides the arcane knowledge, his fluency in Sumerian, needed to cast a specific spell. Willow supplies the actual spellcasting ability, and Xander offers the crucial intuitive leap that brings it all together: “all we need is combo Buffy—her with Slayer strength, Giles' multi-lingual know how, and Willow's witchy power” (“Primeval”). The spell that finally binds them in the depths of the Initiative compounds articulates a complete fusion of individual ability and shared experience, as mind, spirit, heart, and body—Giles, Willow, Xander, and Buffy—work together to tap into incalculable power. Adam gets the chaos that he wished for: a group of friends unites to offer him a kind of resistance that far surpasses his capacity for knowing.

(26) The final episode of the fourth season, rather than serving as a straightforward epilogue to the team's shared adventure, emphasizes instead the limitations of their knowledge. Cryptic dream sequences bring each individual into contact with the essence of the First Slayer and, though everyone but Buffy fails to grasp fully the nature of that essence, they are not destroyed by the encounter. Instead, they find their personal anxieties rekindled and dramatized, though the bond between them—perversely represented by a recurring bearer of cheese—remains intact. Unsurprisingly, the content of the dreams is dense and opaque; interpretation of each sequence can only be speculative, at best, and the knot of dream symbolism remains to be untangled in the fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. What remains clear, however, is that the researches of the Scooby Gang are not yet at an end. The season ends with an unsettling gesture toward the team's collective future, as the voice of Tara—the initial guise of the First Slayer in Buffy's dream—murmurs above the image of a thoughtful Slayer in the closing moments of “Restless”: “You think you know what's to come, what you are. You haven't even begun.” Something, it seems, remains to be understood. Something remains to be done.

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[1] All quoted materials from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are excerpts taken from the episode transcripts located at the “BuffyWorld” web site ([www.buffyworld.com](http://www.buffyworld.com)). When possible, textual extracts from the site were compared against other sources, most notably [www.buffyguide.com](http://www.buffyguide.com) and *The Watcher's Guide*. Conventional spelling and grammar was used whenever possible (“gonna” was converted to “going to,” for example), and vocal effects (Giles' stammer or Kendra's accent) were reflected in the explication of the text or omitted.



**J. Lawton Winslade**

## **Teen Witches, Wiccans, and “Wanna-Blessed-Be’s”: Pop-Culture Magic in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

(1) In an introductory scene of an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, entitled “Hush,” the character of Willow Rosenberg is sitting with a group of young women gathered in what is obviously the lounge of a busy college dorm. She struggles to maintain concentration as one of the women leads the rest in a guided meditation vaguely focusing on feminine energy. The leader then promptly breaks the meditation and begins discussing bake sales and newsletters. This is the Wiccan group of UC-Sunnydale, the fictional college that is the setting for the fourth season of the popular WB show (currently in its fifth season). Though mentioned in previous episodes, this is the only time we see the group and its members. Sunnydale’s young Wiccans toss around all the buzz words associated with the contemporary feminist spirituality movement: empowerment, energy, blessing. Yet when Willow proposes they do actual magical work, like conjuring or casting spells, she is mocked, and accused of both perpetuating negative stereotypes and “sucking energy” from the group. Afterwards, Willow relates her experiences to Buffy. The dialogue ensues:

Buffy: So not stellar, huh?

Willow: Talk. All talk. Blah Blah Gaia. Blah Blah Moon...menstrual life force power thingy. You know, after a coupla sessions I was hoping we could get into something real but . . .

Buffy: No actual witches in your witch group?

Willow: No. Bunch of wanna-blessed-bes. You know, nowadays every girl with a henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she’s a sister of the Dark Ones.

Though the scene with the Wiccan group functions mainly as a way to introduce the character of Tara, the fellow witch who will develop a strong relationship with Willow in the second half of the show’s fourth season, the program’s creator, Joss Whedon, who wrote this episode, has taken the opportunity to comment on a strange culture of which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has unintentionally become a part: popular occultism and marketable new age spirituality. In this article, I will specifically look at how witchcraft functions as an individuation process for the character of Willow, how the series constructs “Wicca” and witchcraft, and how the series’ use of witchcraft is a part of a larger discursive field in popular media in which Wicca is presented as trendy and empowering for teenagers.

(2) A significant part of Whedon’s critique involves subverting popular phraseology. Buffy and Willow’s dialogue highlights the unique use of language characteristic of the show, dubbed “Slayer-Speak” by *Entertainment Weekly*. In the dictionary section of an entire issue devoted to the program, creator Joss Whedon contends “Kids can turn a phrase. . . . They can turn it into something scary” (48). Rhonda Wilcox, in her article “There Will Never Be a Very Special Episode of Buffy,” categorizes several techniques employed by *Buffy’s* teens. They change word order and form, transform adverbs into adjectives, and

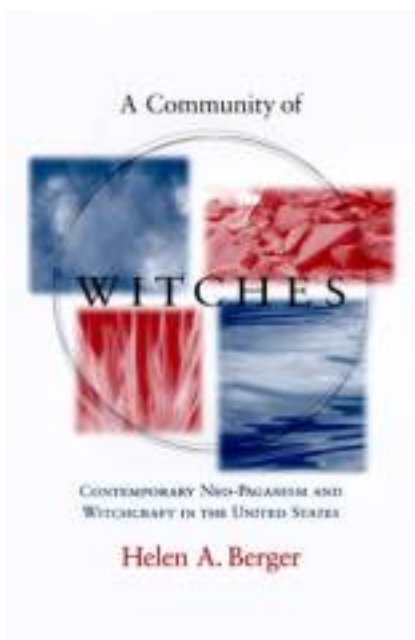
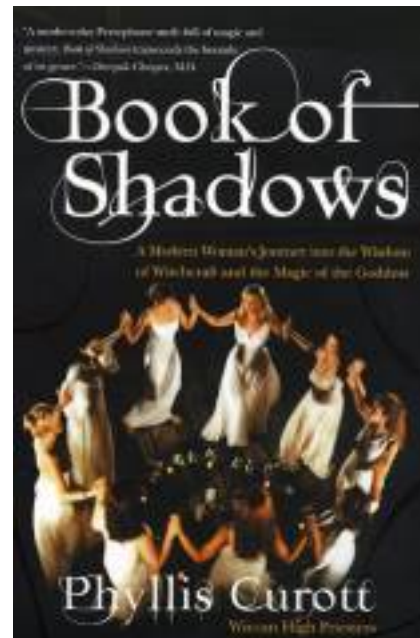


adjectives into nouns, deftly utilize metaphor and metonym, and insert pop culture references where necessary. In this particular instance, Willow takes the pejorative “wanna-be” and combines it with “blessed be,” the standard greeting, response and catch-phrase of the neo-pagan movement, probably culled from the instructional literature on witchcraft in the 1960’s and 1970’s, itself a theft from freemasonry, and put into use in Wiccan practice and ritual. Though Willow is probably not the first to coin the term, its savvy placement in the dialogue disparagingly points to those who want to claim the name but not the acts associated with witchcraft.

(3) Yet not only does the language of *Buffy* “reinforce the theme of adult ignorance” and “embody one element of the heroism of the teen characters” (Wilcox 23); it functions as a magical tool for the powerful teen who wields it. Unlike the graduate student level vocabulary of the teens in the WB’s *Dawson’s Creek*, the language and phraseology of the *Buffy* adolescents is much more economical and can be quite performative. In a television show that continually tackles the theme of acting out of bounds and using extraordinary abilities to deal with mundane situations (and vice versa), magic as both narrative fodder and performative metaphor seems perfectly apt. Language works on the ground here as both cultural marker and streetwise skill. In her study of the contemporary witchcraft scene in England, T. M. Luhrmann (1989) refers to the process of adapting in-group linguistic skills as “speaking with a different rhythm,” in which a particular language and symbolism is shaped and adapted based on experiential knowing (12). *Buffy*’s teens are immersed and experienced in both an everyday world and an occult world, and the differences between the two have become increasingly blurred as the show has progressed. Not surprisingly, clever phrase-turning is part of this blurring. In the liminal space of Sunnydale, words take on magical properties both as powerful incantations and as weapons used by the teens to cope with and gain power over their exceptional situations. Taking the metaphor one step further, the development of the Willow character has relied heavily on the use of both kinds of magic as a way to define and take charge of her initially unstable identity.

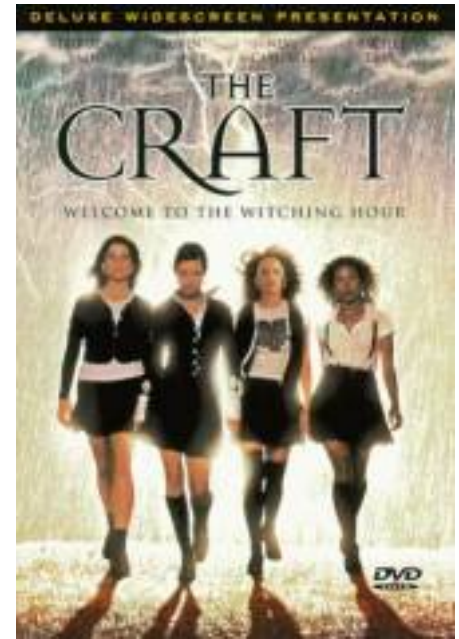
(4) Magic as a narrative device has been present in the program almost at its inception. In addition to the wordy rituals favored by the Master in “Welcome to the Hellmouth” and “The Harvest,” the first non-vampire episode of the series was “The Witch.” Here we start with the basics. We have here the Hollywood witch story complete with a black cat, spells, and a cursory knowledge of the witch’s best friend: Frazer’s law of sympathy and contagion (like attracts like, as in stealing a bit of hair from a brush in order to work magic on a person). As the series progresses, we witness various and sundry incantations, usually in Latin or Sumerian, or some other unintelligible language. At first, Giles plays the role of armchair necromancer. Later, Jenny Calendar, gypsy turned computer teacher and self-designated “techno-pagan” (she stores her spells on disk and performs magic over the Internet), tries her hand. We also have chaos magician Ethan Rayne, who uses a two-faced Janus sculpture to wreak havoc on Halloween just to have a little fun. Even the cynical, Sid Vicious-loving Spike, the vampire who proclaims at his entrance that there was going to be “less ritual and more fun”, tries his skeptical hand when restoring his ailing love, Drusilla, finishing the spell with a wisecrack : “Right then. Now we let them come to a simmering boil, then remove to a low flame.” It is the untimely demise of Miss Calendar, however, that opens the door for Willow to begin training in the magical arts, by inheriting Miss Calendar’s disks, borrowing a few of Giles’ books under his nose, and dabbling while no one’s looking. Before we know it, she’s floating pencils and throwing around the W word: “Wicca.”

(5) Perhaps you've somehow avoided exposure to the pervasive market explosion of products on Wicca, like Phyllis Currott's bestselling (25,000 copies in its first 8 months) *Book of Shadows*, an autobiography that proved that magic isn't just for the metaphysical section anymore. Or maybe you hadn't been paying close attention to 1999's controversies over witches practicing on a Texas military base and Congressman Bob Barr's attempt to challenge the military's stance on religious freedom. In case you haven't heard, Wicca is the name preferred by witches to describe their religion, or the name given to the most prominent, visible, and media-friendly branch of the neo-pagan goddess-oriented spirituality movement, depending on whom you talk to. Practitioners of Wicca, on some of their more imaginative days, claim to be the followers of a matriarchal, pre-Christian religion that revered the earth as a mother goddess figure, a concept not too far from the ideas of Margaret Murray, who proposed a Western European underground witch cult that survived the persecutions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.



(6) The first public witch of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gerald Gardner, made such a statement after the Anti-Witchcraft laws were repealed in England in 1951. Those who approach their practices a little more critically acknowledge that their faith is really a creative reconstruction based on sketchy archeological and anthropological evidence, mythological literature, the works of late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century occultists, and a good deal of environmental politics and feminism. However, what one realizes after studying the vast amount of material available, talking to a few people, and maybe even witnessing a few rituals, is that this at times blatantly fictional reconstruction is quite irrelevant when considering the effectiveness of the basic tenets for those who follow them.[1] Helen Berger, in her recent sociological study *A Community of Witches*, tells us that the fictional history associated with Wicca "provides models of behavior, of responses to adversity, and of a sense of community. . . . The community created by Witches, like all communities, constructs a past that is applicable to their present and that helps them create a future" (72).

(7) Despite the emphasis on community in the Wica literature, Hollywood usually finds it much more interesting to focus either on the solitary practitioner or the very small coven that together suffers from isolation and ostracism (or larger groups with much more nefarious purposes). For instance: *The Craft*, a film that has inspired both the *Buffy* series and the WB's other popular young occult program, *Charmed*, involves a small group of disenfranchised teenage girls aggressively wielding power over the society that spurned them.<sup>[2]</sup> Similarly, in keeping with *Buffy's* theme of youth isolation, Willow rejects her Wiccan group to continue her studies both as a solitary practitioner and, at the end of the episode, as a magical partner with Tara. As we see Willow and Tara's magical and romantic relationship grow, we are witness to a few of their rites. Understandably, the rituals on *Buffy* are very goal oriented and plot-driven: restore the vampire Angel's soul, retrieve a magical object that can place Buffy and Faith back in their own bodies, invoke the power of the first Slayer in order to defeat Adam, etc. They don't seem to be consistent with the usual Wiccan rituals of self-transformation, rites of passage, or activist-oriented activities (Berger 35).



(8) Rather, the magic in *Buffy* is more in tune with a particular early modern type of magic, the kind that would involve chanting Latin, invoking spirits or demons, requiring exotic ingredients, talismans, or other magical objects (Kieckhefer 1998). Another major difference is that Wicca is unmistakably goddess-oriented, while the only specific reference to goddess (outside the Wiccan group) in the magic of *Buffy* is when Amy (daughter of the witch from episode #3) invokes Diana and Hecate in her love spell ("Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered"). The problem here is that these Greek goddesses, while strongly a part of contemporary Wiccan practice, are also the goddesses most often mentioned in materials on the late medieval witch trials, thus preserving the unfortunate Satanic connection. In fact, not until we hear about the mysterious Powers That Be and the *Xena*-esque "oracles" in the *Angel* series, do we have any evidence that there are anything but chthonic entities in the *Buffy* mythos. It is no wonder that we don't see Willow participating in an actual religion.

(9) Willow, however, does develop through her magic. In "Wild at Heart," when she discovers her werewolf boyfriend's infidelity, she confronts a challenge faced by most young practitioners of the magical arts: whether or not to curse the person who has wronged you. In a striking scene, the profoundly hurt young witch, ready to consign the picture of Oz (the boyfriend) to the flame, ultimately resists and stops the spell before its completion. In the *Buffy*verse, the spell may have had deadly consequences. In the Wicca universe, the temptation is very real—thus the need for a simple ethic: do what thou wilt but harm none, a code given ancient roots but invented by Gardner and his cronies, equally ripping off St. Augustine, Rabelais, and Aleister Crowley. It makes sense. Nevertheless, Willow must acknowledge that, as a witch, even her words and thoughts have consequences when she realizes that the chaos she has unknowingly caused has garnered the notice of a vengeance demon who offers her a top spot on his team ("Something Blue"). What Whedon is demonstrating through the combination of teen angst and magical metaphor is exactly what Wiccan practitioners are trying to impress on young women interested in their art: that adolescence is an extremely powerful and volatile time where actions have consequences and magic itself cannot be taken lightly. Unlike the dark fantasy of *The Craft*, the confusion of Whedon's witches, though involving supernatural elements, results from a genuine search for identity and recovery from painful relationships. Indeed, in the series of dream sequences that ended the fourth season ("Restless"), we see from Willow's dream that the great secret that she fears will be revealed is not that she has a same-sex

romantic relationship, or even that she's a witch, but that deep down she feels that she is a nerd, a geekily dressed social outcast.

(10) Willow's study of magic is also consistent with the show's theme of the outcast developing a special talent to protect herself from both the adult world and the demon world. The show consistently highlights its social negotiations between the "real" human world and the world of demon slaying. These negotiations often demonstrate a savvy use of a particular type of postmodern occultism, in which the occult is not only a narrative construct with resonant psychological tropes, but a significant, continually contested discourse involving the characters' conflicted desire for both a stable and fragmented identity. Not unlike the desire of many of Whedon's demons to survive, even assimilate, in human society, the young characters of *Buffy* struggle to maintain a normal life while developing secret and powerful alter-personas. These personas are not just Clark Kent/Bruce Wayne comic book secret identities (to which Buffy's beaux Riley and Angel, respectively, are often compared on the program) but fragmented constructions that are constantly being redefined. Indeed, the instability of these constructions is one of the main strengths behind the program's unique and successful character development. These characters' struggle with selfhood usually involves either the negotiation of a dual identity or a search for one. The most obvious examples are the lovers: Angel must constantly battle between his lusty, violent vampire self and his human soul, Buffy with her calling and her desire for a "normal" teenage life. The character of Riley, though he is accustomed to a secret identity himself - psychology T.A. by day and commando leader against demons at night - is thrown into considerable turmoil when he is confronted with Buffy's grey, morally ambiguous world ("Goodbye to Iowa). Xander, in one of the few episodes focused on his character ("The Zeppo"), struggles to create a secret life for himself so that he can feel confidently empowered to fight the dark forces, and ironically, obviate exclusion from his friends' world-saving activities. Buffy's maturation process is deeply inflected by her street knowledge that not all demons need to be slain and that there are no clear cut answers to life's (and vampire slaying's) dilemmas. Indeed, the Initiative, the more technologically advanced paramilitary organization dedicated to demon experimentation in season four, is a threat to Buffy's world primarily because it wishes to solidify the blurry boundaries she negotiates.

(11) For Willow, magic becomes a way for her to gain true empowerment, rather than the lip service of her so-called Wicca group, and to help her cope with her particular experiences of isolation and rejection. Yet she also negotiates boundaries between community and isolation. In the third season's "Gingerbread," where the social issue of witchcraft is tackled head-on, Willow uncharacteristically becomes associated with a community of young practitioners. Here, writer Jane Espenson revisits *Craft* territory, by placing Willow in a group with Amy and the stereotypically "Goth," Michael. When two young children bearing occult symbols are found murdered, the usually oblivious town goes into an uproar and suddenly we've entered the territory of media-frenzied incidents of "occult crimes." Even though we later learn the two children are manifestations of an ancient demon associated with the Hansel and Gretel stories, the episode is both amusing and chilling as the mothers of the town (the aptly titled MOO – Mothers Opposed to the Occult) turn on their own children and provoke a literal witch hunt. In some of the most salient scenes of the episode, we see for the only time Willow's mother, a psychologist and intellectual, who admonishes her for taking part in silly practices. We realize that the scene being enacted is probably common in many households where the children are involved in activities grown-ups consider "strange." In a direct implication of academia's narrow view of social phenomena, Espenson writes a scene in which Sheila Rosenberg explains away Willow's attraction to witchcraft in condescending psychological terms taken from the papers she has written rather than seeing the importance of these practices to her very real daughter. In addition, this break from the family, not uncommon in those who take on the practice of magic, marks a movement from Willow's somewhat liberal Jewish background to a new community of both magical practitioners and demon slayers that the program has chronicled. This community is established by a dynamic in which people "in the know" acknowledge the supernatural goings-on in Sunnydale. The core group is often expanded by the characters that the original members (Buffy, Willow, Xander) date. In fact, mirroring the college experience, the fourth season concentrates mostly on the splits within the core group, until, in the amusingly titled "Yoko Factor," those divisions are manipulated by Spike, who because of his powerlessness and charm has actually become an unofficial member of the group.

(12) The Yoko factor in Willow's case is Tara. Since their meeting in "Hush," the two witches have grown

quite intimate. In one of their early spell casting scenes, Tara looks at Willow with deep, imploring eyes, asking her what they'll be doing, and we know the question isn't limited to just magic. They speak of experimenting, and at this point, Whedon makes it clear that magical experimentation is a close metaphor for sexual experimentation. In "Who Are You," Tara and Willow perform one of their most elaborate spells to rectify the Faith/Buffy body switch. The scene is beautifully shot with 360 degree camera movement and slow dissolves, and the ecstatic looks on the character's faces pushes the magical/sexual metaphor to its limit. If that wasn't enough, in "New Moon Rising," the return of Oz prompts Willow to finally become open about the fact that her relationship with Tara is undeniably romantic. Regarding the treatment of the relationship, Whedon explains, "On a [bigger] network, you don't have an opportunity with a same-sex relationship to show the kind of graphic coupling that you do with, say, Buffy and [boyfriend] Riley. So you have to use your imagination, and to me it's the best thing that could have happened to us. It forces you to come up with something that is a little more primal and I think much sexier than if we were allowed to do anything we wanted" (*Cinescape Online*, 5/8/00).

(13) Fan reactions on the official website's posting board were strong after this particular episode. While most "Bronzers" – the board is called "The Bronze" after the main teen hangout joint on the show – supported the risky choice, some aggressively voiced their objections, claiming that they would no longer watch the show, some even resorting to insulting the actress playing Tara, Amber Benson. Whedon, in his usual style, entered the forum with what seemed a long apology, saying that he took a risk but he should have known better to represent a minority of the population, and that as a result, Willow will no longer be Jewish. In more formal forums, Whedon defends his choice: "To me it feels just right. ALL the relationships on the show are sort of romantic (Hence the B Y O Subtext principle) and this feels like the natural next step for her" (*Cinescape Online* 1/31/00). Interestingly enough, the program skillfully avoids using the "L" word (lesbian) and simply presents it as what Buffy calls "an unconventional relationship." Moreover, in the program, "lesbian" could be seen as the shadowy, unspoken other of "witch." Both words are charged with cultural expectations and fears, just as the two groups are often associated with each other in areas of feminist spirituality. Indeed, much of the politics surrounding Wicca seem to parallel the gay and lesbian movement, even down to Wiccans borrowing a few terms, including the performative act of "coming out of the broom closet."

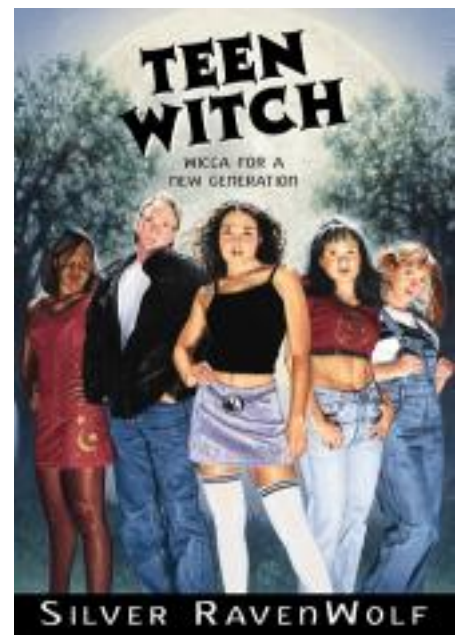
(14) Helen Berger makes the comparison most aptly: "Both communities [witch and gay/lesbian] are defined by their participants' position outside the mainstream, sharing a life world, and participating in some aspect of politics" (66). In addition, the use of the closet trope by both homosexuals and witches speaks to the fear of negative repercussions of their revelation. These communities offer visibility for their members through festivals, gatherings, and rituals. Also, the community provides modeling for its younger members, which involves teaching ways to interpret life experiences. Finally, Berger borrows the term "life world" from Alfred Schutz (1964) to describe a community based not on geography but on experiences, concerns, and world-view. She concludes, "Both the Neo-Pagan and homosexual communities have permeable boundaries. People may be considered members who do not have face-to-face interactions and who, in fact, do not know one another. Both communities involve people who are dissimilar from one another in many of their beliefs and practices" (69). To take the comparison a step further, the word "witch" has some of the strange power that "queer" has, as a derogatory term reclaimed as an epithet of power by those who have adopted it. The Wiccan activist Starhawk, one of the most prominent writers on the subject, tells us "The word witch should rub us the wrong way" (1982: 25). Indeed, during the witchcraze of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, muttering the word "witch" in the right place could guarantee the accuser the lands and possessions of the accused, and it could obviously mean certain torture and death for the unfortunate victim. Thus, a certain sort of dangerous performativity occurs.

(15) In Judith Butler's discussion of the term "homosexual" in relation to military policy, she writes about how the utterance of the word is mistakenly seen as producing the act: "In effect, a desirous intention is attributed to the statement *or* the statement is itself invested with *contagious* power of the magical word, whereby to hear the utterance is to "contract" the sexuality to which it refers" (113). Invoking both Frazer's law of contagion and Freud's application of such in *Totem and Taboo*, Butler claims that the term takes on a certain magical power working beyond rational constraints: "The utterance appears both to communicate

and transfer that homosexuality (becomes itself the vehicle for a displacement onto the addressee) according to a metonymic rush, which is, by definition, beyond conscious control" (115). She further avers that the performative act of coming out itself can be "intended as a contagious example, that is supposed to set a precedent and incite a series of similarly structured acts in public discourse" (124). Applying these discursive principles back to witchcraft, one can see how naming oneself "witch" [3] confuses the name with the act, that talking about, writing about, and institutional recognition of, witchcraft, "is not exactly the same as the desire of which it speaks" (Butler 125). Thus, the "witches" in Willow's Wiccan group become caught up in witchcraft as a discursive production rather than as a set of ritualized acts. Finally, in "Gingerbread," one can see the contagion principle in full swing, since we are shown how the word "witch" historically contributes to communal madness: through its use both in the magically contagious sense, and in the sense that guilt by association leads to further accusations and a larger sense of evil conspiracy.

(16) In a series about vampires and magic, where words have visible magical effects and vampirism itself is based on a quite literal contagion, *Buffy* seems a perfect text to explore such linguistic and performative productions. Yet, the series is only a fraction of a larger discursive field, where "witch" and "Wicca" are constantly thrown about. Because of the media attention and popularity of the movement, Wicca has been presented in various lights. In the first season of the popular CBS series, *Judging Amy*, a child custody case is brought to trial over the mother's Wiccan beliefs. In one of the few instances when television has presented a somewhat realistic view of the neo-pagan community and its inner politics, a representative of the Wiccan Anti-Defamation League - a real organization started by well-known witch Laurie Cabot (Berger 77)—decides not to defend the mother because of fear of negative publicity. Intriguingly, *Scooby-Doo*, one of *Buffy's* spiritual forefathers, and the source for the core group's nickname - the Scooby gang—features Wiccan themes in its full-length video, *Scooby-Doo and the Witch's Ghost*. In the *Scooby-Doo* movies, the monsters are *real*, as the advertisement is fond of saying, and this witch is a real witch. However, she is initially presented as a Wiccan, a midwife and town healer during Salem times. The cartoon's anachronistic use of the term is further complicated by the fact that the so-called "Wiccan" is actually the evil witch, and the intimidating fang-wearing local girl band, the "Hex Girls" who call themselves "ecogoths" ("and we don't need your approval!") are the real Wiccans, only becoming aware of their powers at the climax of the film. In the closing credits, when the sexily animated "Hex Girls" are singing about casting spells and respecting the Earth, the message is clear. In these instances, along with whatever identity defining characteristics can be derived from such works as *Charmed*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *The Blair Witch Project*, among others, the form that the contemporary witch takes based on media representations is quite a strange one. What media adds to popular folklore, then, is how the witch is constituted as a subject through language, or, to borrow Butler's borrowing from Althusser, how the witch is "interpellated," thus "given a certain possibility for social existence" (2).

(17) Has the term "witch" become more palatable with more exposure? One might think so, with the trends changing rapidly, especially in publishing. A *Publisher's Weekly* article cited Carol Publishing as a house that prints first runs of 25,000 for its Wicca titles, about 10,000 more than for its non-Wicca offerings. Magic is hot property these days. What Phyllis Currott's *Book of Shadows* has done for women, Silver RavenWolf's *Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation* has done for teenagers, as has the *Harry Potter* series for children. [4] According to Von Braschler, director of trade sales for industry leaders Llewellyn Publishing, a significant trend began "when the company started repackaging 'classic' pagan titles with more youthful covers, and sales often jumped tenfold as a result" (Kress 25). In fact, RavenWolf's book, with pert, sexy, and stylishly drawn teenagers on the cover—no more scary goth outcasts clad in black—is in its fourth printing and has sold more than 50,000 copies [5]. Willow and Sabrina seem to be in good company.



(18) Through tropes like witchcraft, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* speaks to current trends of identity construction, particularly with Willow's pursuit of empowerment through magic and involvement with Wicca. In this context, Wicca and its current popularity among young teens exemplifies an existence that demands the secrecy and hiddenness already part of adolescent culture and applies it to occultist practice. The pervasiveness of the occult in the everyday life of the characters and their remarkable nonchalance towards the horrific events they experience strongly parallels the trials of adolescents searching for identity and belonging in their peer groups, be they social or magical. A. Susan Owen claims that the program utilizes an "uncritical embrace of American capital culture" and that this cultural view, combined with Buffy's desire for normal adolescence (complete with boyfriend) somehow co-opts its transgressive potential (30). However, despite Buffy's protests to the contrary, she and the other young characters are well aware of the contingency of their constructed "normal" identities, displaying a self-awareness increasingly common among youth at the end of the millennium. As the show continues its successful run, many fans wonder, "Will Tara and Willow last?" or "Is Tara secretly evil?" [6] Joss Whedon answers, "I can only promise you two things for sure: We're not going to do an *Ally* or *Party of 5* in which we promote the hell out of a same sex relationship for exploitation value that we take back by the end of the ep, and we will never have a very special *Buffy* where someone gets on a soapbox..." (*Cinescape Online* 1/31/00).

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[1] In this article, I will only cover Wiccan beliefs and practices insofar as they relate to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. For more information, I recommend the works I have cited.

[2] One of the few exceptions, the recent Sandra Bullock/Nicole Kidman vehicle *Practical Magic*, targeted a slightly older crowd and dealt with issues of communal acceptance amongst women. Though the film concentrates on the family of hereditary witches, the scene with the women of the small New England town welcomed into the main characters' household to assist in an exorcism, mixing both horror film seriousness and playful female bonding, does leave open the possibility of a coven or community of witches forming.

[3] The popular etymological theory among practitioners is that witch comes from the Old English *Wic*, to bend or shape, and that the terms *Wicca* or *Wicce* are Middle English derivations of *Wic* (Berger 11).

[4] My colleague at DePaul University, Wiccan author Patricia Monaghan, recently offered advice to authors at New York's yearly pagan festival, Starwood. She explained that children and Wicca, once a taboo combination, is a hot buy for publishers thanks to *Harry Potter*. She also informed us that publishers were scrambling for the next *Book of Shadows*, so pagan memoirs are also in demand.

[5] RavenWolf's products and their associated market strategy are not without their controversy. The appearance of the *Teen Witch Kit*, an instructional set complete with teen-oriented spells and tools for working magic, caused quite a stir on the message board, *Wiccan Ways*, for instance, among concerned Christians for obvious reasons, but also among pagans who felt that presenting magic outside of its religious and communal context could be ethically suspect.

[6] The implication that Tara may be evil is explored in the fifth season episode "Family", written and directed by Joss Whedon. Her backwoods family visits Sunnydale and has apparently brainwashed her into thinking that she will turn into a demon on her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, since that's what happened to her mother. In another intriguing Whedonesque take on feminism, we learn that the demon story is a lie merely used to control the powerful, independent women in Tara's family. At the end of the episode, the Scooby gang fully accepts Tara's break from her family, her place in the gang, and her romantic relationship with Willow.