

Slayage 18, September 2005

[5.2]

David Lavery and Rhonda V. Wilcox, Co-Editors



Click on a contributor's name in order to learn more about him or her.

[A PDF copy of this issue of *Slayage* is available here.](#)

[A PDF copy of the entire volume can be accessed here.](#)

■ **[Lorna Jowett](#)** (University College, Northampton), [The Summers' House as Domestic Space in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*](#) | **[PDF Version \(Acrobat Reader Required\)](#)**

■ **[Scott McLaren](#)** (York University), [The Evolution of Joss Whedon's Vampire Mythology and the Ontology of the Soul](#) | **[PDF Version \(Acrobat Reader Required\)](#)**

■ **[Jeffrey Bussolini](#)** (University of Staten Island), [Los Alamos is the Hellmouth](#) | **[PDF Version \(Acrobat Reader Required\)](#)**

■ **[Jes Battis](#)** (Simon Fraser University), [Demonic Maternities, Complex Motherhoods: Cordelia, Fred and the Puzzle of Illyra](#) | **[PDF Version \(Acrobat Reader Required\)](#)** This essay is chapter five of ***Blood Relations: Chosen Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel*** © 2005 Jes Battis, and is made available here by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640 | www.mcfarlandpub.com. [You can order the book from Amazon here](#) or [from McFarland here](#).

■ **[Ewan Kirkland](#)** (Buckingham Childterns University College), [A Conference Report on "Bring Your Own Subtext": Social Life, Human Experience and the Works of Joss Whedon](#) | **[PDF Version \(Acrobat Reader Require](#)**

<u>1</u> [1.1]	<u>2</u> [1.2]	<u>3</u> [1.3]	<u>4</u> [1.4]
<u>5</u> [2.1]	<u>6</u> [2.2]	<u>7</u> [2.3]	<u>8</u> [2.4]
<u>9</u> [3.1]	<u>10</u> [3.2]		<u>11-12</u> [3.3-4]
<u>13-14</u> [4.1-2]	<u>15</u> [4.3]	<u>16</u> [4.4]	<u>Archives</u>
<u>17</u> [5.1]			

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

■ Maurice Broaddus, "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Hollywood Jesus: Popular Culture from a Spiritual Point of View*





Lorna Jowett

The Summers House as Domestic Space in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



[1] The first *Buffy* studies collection, *Reading the Vampire Slayer* (2001) included a piece by Karen Sayer on space and place in *Buffy* and its spin-off show *Angel* but little attention has been paid to this since. Taking up some of Sayer's ideas, this paper explores the presentation of the Summers house, its relation to the *Buffy* "family" and to key issues in the show such as gender, emotion and family. This presentation often exposes conflicting ideologies about gender and domestic space. The association of women with domestic space and domestic work stems from the history of "separate spheres" for men and women in the nineteenth century and from a renewed emphasis on domesticity and the home in the 1950s but this association has been challenged and/ or reinterpreted by the first and second waves of feminism. On the one hand domestic space can be a distinctively matriarchal arena; on the other it remains associated with limitation and traditional notions of femininity.

[2] *Buffy* has other significant spaces and places: the school library, Giles' apartment, the Magic Box. But I would argue that such spaces are meeting places for the Scoobies to convene, plan and research, that is, they are *workspaces*. Two – the library and the magic shop – are specifically designated as workplaces, rather than homes, domestic spaces. Giles' apartment occupies a conflicted position in a season (four) that shows growing apart as part of growing up. (Season 4 is also slightly unusual in that the male characters like Giles and Xander live at home/in domestic spaces, while the female characters like Buffy and Willow are living away from home in the U. C. Sunnydale dorms).

[3] Sayer argued that "public space is remade by the group, and though never truly secure, it is always more secure than any individual's 'real' home. Just as the biological family . . . is unstable and insufficient, so the biological family home is represented as a site of conflict and pain, rather than nostalgia and comfort" (111). Sayer's distinction reflects the binary oppositions that *Buffy* likes to play with, and the distinction I made between work and domestic space fits the idea of *Buffy* the character's double life (as the Slayer and as Buffy Summers). Thus both the character and the show work to integrate these two sides, and distinctions between work/home and family/friendship become blurred. I suggest that this is partly because of *Buffy*'s "postfeminist" representation of women. Bonnie J. Dow notes that "a primary issue in media constructions of postfeminism has been the difficulty of reconciling women's expanded roles in the public sphere with their traditional responsibilities in the private

sphere" (166). This adds another dimension to Buffy's dual identity. As Buffy Summers, "normal" girl, she arguably has traditional domestic responsibilities (and these become more apparent after Joyce's death) but as the Slayer her responsibilities take her outside the home into the traditionally masculine arenas of action and law enforcement. Partly because Buffy begins as a teen superhero, but also because she is female, the show combines the spheres of home and "work." *Buffy* is neither a workplace drama about Buffy's role in fighting evil and saving the world as the Slayer nor a domestic melodrama that traces the development of family and other close relationships. It is both, and it includes both the workplace family of the Scoobies, familiar from other dramas that focus on professions (medical or police/detective shows, for example), and the biological Summers family.

[4] Buffy's family home, the Summers house, is consistently represented as *the* domestic space on *Buffy* and this designation is both gendered and integral to the show's representation of family and belonging. Despite its insecurity, through this designation as domestic space the Summers house functions as shelter to the "real" (Summers) family and the alternative Scooby family. While in other areas the show seems to deconstruct gender binaries, the Summers house is consistently presented as the site of domestic and emotional labour, and as female space, fixing an association between the two.

The house and the family

[5] The domestic space of the Summers house is the location for much of the show's representation of both the real and the alternative family. The house initially serves as a site for representation of the Summers family. Sayer makes a distinction between family and friendship but I suggest that the group of friends in *Buffy* is deliberately constructed as an alternative family. As in other television serials, the recurring characters of *Buffy's* ensemble cast form a group with a stable core that has been read (and self-consciously presented) as an alternative family (see Jes Battis' recent book *Blood Relations: Chosen Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel*, 2005, for a detailed discussion of this). A complex web of relationships is constructed and developed around this "family" group. Battis notes that "family life on *Buffy* tends to be either an invisible force in the background [. . .], or a site of chaos and disruption (. . .). The Summers family seems to occupy a middle ground between these poles" (77). I suggest that the house occupies a similar middle ground because it is a focus for both the biological and the alternative family in *Buffy*, and because it is often the site of clashes between the two parts of Buffy's life.

[6] In early seasons domestic space can be constricting for Buffy because it is inhabited by her mother Joyce. This is partly a generational conflict of the sort commonly found in teen drama and thus recognisable to the audience, but it is inflected by a larger generational conflict between women that might (rather simplistically) be ascribed to the shift from second to third wave feminism. In other words Joyce is of a generation for whom (middle class) women's traditional commitment to marriage, home-making and the family made it problematic for them to have a career outside the home. Buffy, in contrast, is of a generation for whom "equality" between women and men seems to have arrived, and (were it not for her position as the Slayer) she might expect as a matter of course to go to university or college and/or to have a career of her own, regardless of relationships, marriage, or children.

[7] Arguably what made “having it all” possible for Joyce and Buffy is the privilege of class and race. Buffy, Joyce, and most major female characters in the show are constructed as middle class white women to whom choices are available that might allow a satisfactory work/ home balance, or, on a more basic level, who can afford to choose between career and family if necessary.¹ Obviously these choices are not available to all women equally and the glimpse viewers have of “single mother” Buffy struggling with low-paid employment in a fast-food outlet during Season 6 undermines (if only briefly) her middle class privilege (see Battis 72). The Summers house itself reinforces Joyce, Buffy, and Dawn’s identity as white and middle-class, as Battis observes: “Just as the Summers house comes to represent a safe and historically significant locus for the Scoobies, it also comes to pre-eminently signify the capital that Buffy and her family possess as middle-class white Californians living in a predominantly color-blind suburb” (69-70). Despite this restricted perspective, notions of domesticity as a limitation for women and the identification of the home and perhaps especially the middle class suburban home as a trap or female ghetto still have strong cultural resonances (as seen in *Edward Scissorhands* 1990, or the *Angel* episode “Underneath” 5017).

[8] As the Slayer, Buffy generally acts outside the private, domestic sphere and she often has to “escape” the house to do so. Thus her life as the Slayer questions the nature of domestic space especially in the early “teen” seasons (one to three). In the very first episode we see Buffy Summers settling into her new home (she unpacks boxes in her bedroom) and then see the Chosen One clashing with her Watcher Giles in the library (“Welcome to the Hellmouth” 1001). The aftermath of a confrontation with Joyce in the next episode shows how Buffy’s two roles position her uncomfortably in domestic space: she hides her weapons in the bottom of a chest in her closet and has to leave by the window to “stop the spread of evil” (“The Harvest” 1002). Buffy uses the window so often that in a subsequent episode (“What’s My Line Part 1” 2009) Angel asks her why, since Joyce is out of town, she doesn’t just come in by the door and Buffy’s sense of restriction is underlined. In another Season 2 episode, Buffy is “confined to [her] room” by Joyce. The final shot here is of Buffy and Angel kissing, apparently outside; the camera pulls away and we see that Buffy is inside and Angel outside the window (“Bad Eggs” 2012), reinforcing the typical gendering of domestic versus public space.

[9] Teen drama also inflects the ways audiences might read such scenes. Viewers very rarely see any of Xander or Willow’s homes except “their” rooms while they are still living at home (we do see the Rosenberg living room in “Gingerbread” 3011). A teenager’s room is a haven within the family home, a private space within a private space (though again this is dependent upon privilege – only teens from wealthy enough families have their own room). In Buffy’s case, this haven is also a gendered space equipped with recognisably “girly” items such as soft throw pillows, decorative butterflies, and the fluffy pig Mr. Gordo.² This sense of personal space within the larger family home becomes complicated for Xander after high school when he is relegated to the basement by his “loving parents” (“and I have to pay rent,” he tells Buffy in “The Freshman” 4001). Xander later gets his own apartment, though it is Anya viewers see performing domestic tasks within it, as in her parody of the 50s sitcom wife during “Selfless” (7005). Willow never actually has her own place, since she moves from her family home to the U. C. Sunnydale dorm rooms, and then into

another family home, the Summers house.

[10] Significant interactions between Buffy and Joyce almost always take place in the Summers house, and often in the kitchen, recognisably the heart of the home for many viewers. In "Surprise" (2013), Buffy's prophetic dream about vampire villain Drusilla takes place at local nightclub The Bronze (a public space designed for young people to socialise in), but the important exchange between Joyce and Buffy actually takes place in the Summers' kitchen (a private, family space) and involves Joyce breaking a plate. This positioning of Joyce in the family house carrying out domestic tasks is integral to her presentation. I have argued elsewhere (2005) that Joyce is always and only Buffy's mother; she is neither an individual nor a member of the team. Thus as J. P. Williams notes, "Joyce's relegation to the private space of the home" is underlined frequently (64). Although Joyce works outside the home, for Buffy (and the audience) she is primarily located within it; this is especially noticeable in comparison with Giles who is initially seen mainly in public spaces and associated with work. Williams further observes that Joyce and Buffy "rarely inhabit the same frame, they are often separated by objects such as the dinner table, and they are placed at different ends of the same room" (65). Certainly in the kitchen scene just mentioned the two are separated physically by the kitchen layout, though this visual separation is not consistent.

[11] A pivotal point in the mother-teen daughter relationship is when Joyce is forced to recognise that Buffy is the Slayer ("Becoming," Part 2, 2022). Buffy exclaims, "Open your eyes, Mom. What do you think has been going on for the past two years? The fights, the weird occurrences. How many times have you washed blood out of my clothing and you still haven't figured it out?" Here, Buffy clearly positions her mother in the domestic sphere (washing the family's clothes) while Joyce's ultimatum, "You leave this house, don't even think about coming back," points to the conflict Buffy's role as the Slayer brings to her family relationships (the 2002 *Spiderman* movie presents Peter Parker as a teen superhero faced with similar conflicts). Buffy must resist confinement to the domestic space of the house because she is the Slayer as well as a troubled teenage daughter and therefore she has a larger public duty to save the world. Yet there is also a connection here between Joyce's domestic labour, and Buffy's own labour of Slaying. Society benefits from both but acknowledges neither: domestic work/ mothering and Slaying are both generally unpaid and "invisible" and are both traditionally carried out by women.

[12] During this argument Buffy takes Joyce's ultimatum literally and runs away from home. Unlike other heroes who get to travel to new places and construct new identities for themselves (as Buffy does briefly in the next episode "Anne," 3001), in general Buffy has to stay at home because of her family ties and her position as a minor.

[13] Although Buffy returns home early in Season 3, she leaves for college in Season 4, a season I have already identified as dealing with growing up and moving apart. Buffy is uncomfortable on the historically male turf of the university campus in "The Freshman" (4001) while Willow is not, perhaps implying that Buffy is more closely tied to "home" and the domestic sphere than she would like to think. In Buffy's segment of "Restless" (4022) she walks down a corridor at U. C. Sunnydale and finds Joyce "living in the walls." Williams suggests that Buffy still assumes "identifying with her mother means entering this smaller domestic space, leaving her freedom behind" (66). Joyce's words, "Well, *it seems that way to you* [my emphasis]," imply

that Buffy's insistence on seeing her mother as domestic and therefore restricted is not the only or defining perspective (even as the show persists in presenting Joyce in this way). Later a shift in priorities changes the way Buffy relates to domestic space and her place in it; she returns to live at home when Joyce is diagnosed with a brain tumour and eventually has to give up university because of her family responsibilities. [14] Developing this further, it is interesting that the sense of Buffy's power presented in "Checkpoint" (5012) is mediated through interactions in public and domestic spaces. The clashes between Buffy and patriarchal institutions like the academy (personified by the male professor who publicly comments on her attitude to his teaching) and the Watcher's Council are located in public spaces (the campus and the Magic Box) and these are shown to demoralise Buffy. Her sense of empowerment comes after a confrontation with Glory who enters Buffy's house and threatens to break up both her families (Glory says she will kill Buffy's mother and sister, and Buffy's friends, the Scooby family). That Buffy's recognition of her own power comes not from clashing with male authority but from facing a female power in her own family home demonstrates the importance of family/ home to her perception of what she does and who she is.

Not a safe house?

[15] Partly because Buffy is also the Slayer, the domestic space of the Summers house can be penetrated by evil and is, on a regular basis. This is part of the larger contrast within the show between the "normal" lives of the characters and the monsters or supernatural foes dealt with in the fantasy narratives. Darla, Spike, Ted, women under a love spell, the bug man, zombies, "evil" Faith, Vamp Harmony, the Quellor demon, Glory, a hitchhiker demon, a demon in a sword, the bullets from Warren's gun, and a *Poltergeist* visitation from Joyce herself have all invaded the Summers house as Buffy's two worlds collide. In the Season 1 episode "Angel" (1007) Buffy takes Angel back to the Summers house after he is wounded helping her fight. Since Buffy does not know that Angel is a vampire, she unwittingly invites him into the house (notably the first time this piece of vampire mythology is raised on the show). Angel's wound is dressed in the Summers' kitchen, heart of the domestic space and he meets Joyce, main figure of domesticity and signifier of Buffy's other life. Later Buffy and Angel kiss, his vampire nature is revealed, and he leaves by the window.³ Joyce then repeats this unwitting invitation to a vampire when Darla knocks at the front door, pretending to be a schoolmate of Buffy's. Both Buffy and Joyce offer shelter and nurturing within the centre of the domestic space, the kitchen. [16] When Joyce steps out of (her) place and enters the action of the show she moves into the other half of Buffy's identity, but these incidents are often confused, forgotten, or reinterpreted. This is exemplified by Joyce's attack on Spike in "School Hard" (2003) which she inexplicably fails to recall when he enters the home with Buffy later in Season 1 ("Becoming," Part 2, 2022). The reverse, the intrusion of Buffy's "work" into the home, is similarly misinterpreted on Joyce's part, as with Darla's entrance in "Angel" (1007) or the "scavenger hunt" in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (2016). At this stage, Joyce is unaware of Buffy's other life and thus, like other inhabitants of Sunnydale, she persists in finding "normal" explanations for such events. In "Angel" the two vampire threats are ultimately dealt with by Buffy, who defends her home and asserts it as a safe space at the end of the episode when she comes through the back door saying, "Hey, I'm home."

[17] Later, when Joyce becomes aware of Buffy's Slayer status, she is more likely to perceive invasions of the home accurately, though neither she nor Buffy herself is ever comfortable with them. As the show continues, it becomes more difficult to decide which threats *should* be kept outside and which are threats that actually *belong* in the home because of their relation to the Scooby family. Even early episodes like "Angel" focus on Buffy's confusion about this: is Angel a potential (boy) friend and therefore welcome in the home, or should he, as a vampire, be excluded? Clearly this is part of the blurring of moral boundaries that the show explores – blurring one set of boundaries inevitably erodes others.

[18] Season 2 continues the theme of invasion. A prime example full of family anxieties is "Ted" (2011). This episode has been discussed at more length elsewhere but I will briefly mention its ending here. Joyce's new "boyfriend," Ted enters the all-female Summers house and seriously disrupts the relationship between mother and daughter. When he is unveiled as a serial killer robot stuck in the domestic values of the 1950s (the visual presentation of his own house reinforces this) Buffy defeats him by using his own cast iron skillet as her weapon. She responds to his patriarchal assertion, "I don't stand for that kind of malarkey in my house," by reclaiming Summers' space – "Teddy, this house is mine" – in a way that conflates defeating an internal domestic threat (as a potential new partner for Joyce, Ted threatens the status quo of the Summers family) with the expulsion of an external threat (he is a serial killer robot).

[19] A slightly later episode revisits Angel's invasion of the family home ("Passion," 2017). Having had sex with Buffy, Angel has lost his soul and reverted to Angelus and "Passion" shows Angelus stalking Buffy in both public and private venues. The Slayer asks Giles for a spell to effectively reverse the invitation she gave Angel previously and Buffy's operation in public and private roles/spaces (a typical clash of roles for a superhero) is highlighted through contrast when later at the family dinner table she tries to explain to Joyce that Angel is "hanging around." Danger threatens when Joyce arrives home by car and Angelus is waiting. Notably Joyce expresses a desire for the safety of home, "I just want to get inside," while Angelus is intent on revealing to her what he and Buffy have done ("I haven't slept since the night we made love") and therefore on disrupting domestic and family harmony. Angelus' immediate threat is defused when he is un-invited by the reversing spell and Joyce and Buffy have "the talk" in Buffy's bedroom, with several two-shots of both close together.⁴

[20] In "Dead Man's Party" (3002), having returned home after running away, Buffy and Joyce once again share the family home. Joyce suggests inviting the Scoobies round for dinner and asks Buffy to get the "company plates." Buffy's complaint, "Mom, Willow and everybody aren't company plate people, they're normal plate people," suggests that the Scoobies are "part of the family." However, the "family" dinner is overtaken by the younger Scoobies' plans for a welcome home party for Buffy, with a band and crowds of young people. Feeling isolated, Buffy goes to her room and starts packing. This culminates in a row between Buffy, Joyce and the Scoobies, situated in the private domestic space of the family home but witnessed and made public by the partygoers. The argument is "resolved" by the team effort of fighting off a zombie attack and in this way not only is the threat of invasion defeated, but the threat of family disintegration (for both the real and the alternative family) is deflected by co-operation. Here, for the first time, Joyce is consciously part of the work/ action aspect of Buffy's life but she is also defending her own domestic

space against attack from outside, as Buffy frequently does.

[21] Thus early seasons show the Summers house as a site of contingent safety, often alternating between safety and threat. These invasions of Buffy's home can be read as micro-versions of her larger struggle as the Slayer: she is fighting to save the world, and that "normal" world is represented by her own home and family. The examples here have been chosen because I also maintain that the most significant threats to and invasions of domestic space are those related to private, emotional interactions, something I develop below.

The centrality of domestic space

[22] Christine Jarvis has suggested that in *Buffy* the action frequently takes place in "marginal" or "liminal" spaces (258). Clearly, domestic space is not "liminal"; it is a fixed and therefore notionally safe part of the "normal" life of the characters. When Buffy returns from hospital at the end of "Killed by Death" (2018) she, Willow and Xander relax in the domestic environment, brought food and drink by Joyce, its key representative. Similarly, in "Restless" (4022) the core Scoobies retire to the Summers house after defeating Adam for a cosy evening of video watching and nibbles. After the invasion of the First Slayer the Scoobies are shown talking over events at the dining table. When Joyce comes downstairs she is told what has happened and her blasé, "Oh," is followed by an enthusiastically welcomed, "You want some hot chocolate?" Joyce thus comes to nurture the larger Scooby family, as well as her own.

[23] Joyce's consistent association with domestic tasks (however small) creates a sense of the house as the key site of domestic ritual. Ann Romines describes domestic ritual as "rituals performed in a house, a constructed shelter, which derive meaning from the protection and confinement a house can provide" (12) and notes that "ritual" involves "regular recurrence, symbolic value, emotional meaning and (usually) a 'dramatic' group-making quality" (Orrin E. Klapp in Romines, 12). Joyce and the domestic work she carries out have symbolic value since she comes to represent the "normal" life that the Scoobies often yearn for. The emotional nature of her domestic work is discussed below, and, while perhaps less than dramatic, her nurturing through domestic tasks fosters a sense of family (group-making). Romines concludes that "a woman who is committed to domestic ritual is participating in an enterprise connected with the continuity of a common culture and the triumph of human values over natural process" (12), which in the very specific context of *Buffy* again links the "work" that Joyce and Buffy do: both seek the continuity of "normal life" and human values in the face of external threats, be they supernatural or more mundane.

[24] Joyce and Buffy are often seen together at the end of threatening or emotional episodes. Thus in "Innocence" (2014) after Buffy's discussion with Giles in his car about her part in Angelus' return, the final shot of Buffy fades to a shot of a television screen showing a black and white movie and a romantic song. Buffy is at home. Joyce enters with cupcakes and a candle to celebrate Buffy's birthday and the final shot is of a needy Buffy accepting the physical and emotional comfort of her mother.

"Ted" (2011) is a similar example: Buffy and Joyce recover from their experience and we see them talking on the porch about renting a movie (Buffy concludes, "I guess we're *Thelma and Louise*-ing it again"). This further overturns Williams' assertion that Joyce and Buffy are generally not framed together; such scenes show the family bond between them, reinforced by the domestic setting. I would argue that this

representation asserts the Summers house as a site of conflict and pain *and* of nostalgia, comfort and nurturing; indeed the former inevitably *leads to* the latter. Furthermore, it is women who do the emotional work of nurturing and maintaining relationships. Battis notes that one of the realisations following Joyce's death is that "that she performed a vast spectrum of emotional labor – for Buffy, Dawn and the Scoobies" (78). This nexus of emotion/ home/ female is what I read as potentially problematic for the show's representation of gender in that it reinforces and naturalises the (domestic) work that women have traditionally done. Joyce's death leads to some acknowledgement of this, but her "work" is then taken over by Buffy, Tara and other female characters so that the Summers house, and the emotional work associated with it, is still gendered female.

[25] Several episodes demonstrate the centrality of the house and its relation to a sense of belonging by using an external viewpoint. Thus in "Passion" (2017) after being barred, Angelus watches Buffy and Willow from outside the Summers house to see their reaction to the news of Jenny Calendar's death. Shots are framed by the window and curtains partially obscure the view as the phone rings and Buffy and then Willow show their grief and are comforted by Joyce.

[26] Later in "Pangs" (4008) both Angel and Spike are excluded from the "family" and the domestic space it inhabits. Here the teens' growing up is underlined by Buffy's plan to celebrate Thanksgiving outside her real family. Buffy moved away from home to live on campus while she attends U. C. Sunnydale and Sayer argues, "her home is abruptly taken from her as her mom converts her old room for storage" (110). This is matched by Xander's relegation to the basement – but both are temporary situations. "Pangs" presents not Buffy and Joyce in the Summers' kitchen but Buffy and Giles in his kitchen and is an interesting example of the show reinforcing Buffy in the domestic arena, while demonstrating her distance from the actual family home at this stage. Domestic implements such as a turkey pan and potato ricer feature in the conversation and while Buffy tells Giles, "You're the patriarch, you have to host the festivities or it's all meaningless," she is the instigator of this domestic ritual, the matriarch working to draw the Scooby family together. Meanwhile, the visiting Angel is no longer part of the Scooby family and he bemoans the necessity "[t]o be on the outside looking in at what I can't –". This shot immediately cuts to the newly chipped vampire Spike looking in at what he can't have (in this case vampires feeding), though Spike is reluctantly incorporated into the alternative "family" celebration at the end of the episode. This may be evidence that Spike is always more domesticated than Angel in *Buffy* and certainly Spike, like Xander, is presented as a "comfortador," one who enjoys the comforts of a domestic environment.

A safe house after all

[27] Although Sayer states that "[t]hough materially [Buffy's] home withstands these incursions, it never works as a safe haven, a place to which she can run and hide" (110), I have already argued that the house *is* a haven. The penetrability of the Summers house reinforces its gendering as female and it becomes a "safe" arena for expressing emotion. Battis observes that "what happens to these characters *outside* of the graveyard is what fascinates the audience" (78) and (the inside of) the Summers house is strongly linked to the "real" lives of the characters in a way that privileges emotion and character development. Most notably, when a main character dies this is figured in unambiguously domestic space: Jenny's body is discovered at

Giles' home; Joyce and Tara's deaths are at the Summers house.⁵ This situates the deaths as real rather than fantasy events and Joyce's death in particular, since it is from natural causes, is presented as entirely "real" and is most strongly located in her own domestic space (now made *unheimlich* by the situation).

[28] I have already noted that other "real" events affecting the characters' personal and emotional lives take place in the Summers house. For instance, although Angel and Buffy make love at Angel's apartment ("Surprise," 2013), Angelus reveals the fact that he and Buffy have had sex to Joyce outside the Summers house and Joyce then has "the talk" with Buffy in Buffy's bedroom ("Passion," 2017). "You had sex with a boy you never even saw fit to tell me you were dating," Joyce berates her daughter, before telling her, typically, "Buffy, you can shut me out of your life, I am pretty much used to that, but don't expect me to ever stop caring about you because it's never going to happen." Williams notes that Joyce may be seen as a neglectful parent, and suggests that "[t]o counter the charge of neglectfulness, the series has Joyce continually stating just how much she loves Buffy" (64). But Williams does not make the connection between domestic space and the security to articulate such emotion. Later in "Lover's Walk" (3008), even Spike sees the Summers house as a safe haven to discuss his feelings when he returns to Sunnydale after breaking up with Drusilla. He arrives at the back door, saying, "Hello, Joyce," invoking the memorable scene from "Becoming," Part 2 (2022) when Joyce and Spike, juxtaposing the fantasy and "real" elements of the show, met in the Summers house for the first time. At that point, Joyce seemed confused about her previous meeting with Spike outside the home (in "School Hard," 2003); now she not only recognises him but offers a sympathetic ear and a drink, and he asks wistfully, "You got any of those little marshmallows?" Again this reinforces Spike as willing to avail himself of domestic comforts, though Joyce's later comment on his crypt home in "Checkpoint" (5012)—"I really love what you haven't done with the place"—suggests that perhaps he is willing for domestic comfort, physical and emotional, to be provided for him (by women?) rather than spending time on it himself.

[29] Another significant episode must be "Older and Far Away" (6014). Here the Scoobies are trapped in the house at Buffy's birthday get-together after Dawn makes a wish to vengeance demon Halfrek. As the episode plays out several important emotional and family issues are raised, and domestic secrets are uncovered. The evidence of Dawn's shoplifting is revealed. Willow and Tara's wary interaction after Tara walked out is dealt with, and works alongside the discovery that Willow kept magic supplies "just in case" (Tara later stands up for Willow against Anya⁶).

Alternatively, Buffy's relationship with Spike is kept a secret from everyone but Tara. Thus when Spike complains, "Hey, I don't want to keep you all from the touchy feelies but maybe the encounter group can meet later," it is precisely *here and now* that the group can get "touchy feely" because here is their domestic space and now they are all together as a "family."

[30] Similarly, in Season 7 Xander, Willow, and Buffy sit in the Summers' living room discussing whether Buffy needs to kill Anya, lately returned to vengeance and having just engineered a mass murder ("Selfless," 7005). The identical venue underlines that this is a rerun of similar discussions among the Scoobies about Dark Willow in Season 6. Clearly emotion is often aired in the Summers house, and in particular emotional situations are related to how the group functions as a "family." This is demonstrated

again by Spike's later invasions of the Summers house, framed as emotionally motivated and tied to relationship issues. These invasions affect the larger interactions of the group, since they struggle to reconcile themselves with a threatening outsider becoming part of the "family," another key example of the ongoing confusion about what should be kept outside and what is legitimately part of the family/ home. This is then overturned again by Spike's attempted rape of Buffy, an act that causes him to split from the family until he returns with a soul.

The gendering of domestic space

[31] In terms of gendering the domestic space, it is notable that for six out of seven seasons only women live at the Summers house (Buffy's father, the only male biological family member, was always absent). Joyce is the head of an all-female household and various characters use the phrase "the Summers women" to describe the family. In a larger sense Joyce's position is, of course, not entirely realistic and Battis notes the "televisual fantasy" that allows Joyce "to pay for a massive three-story house in suburban California, as well as support two children, on the salary she makes working at an unspecified art gallery" (69). Yet viewers may be willing to suspend this kind of disbelief because Joyce's status as a single working mother is a fairly typical liberal presentation showcasing female "strength" and independence within the race and class boundaries already mentioned and within the limitations of popular feminism in the media. She is meant to be read as a "strong woman" and we accept her as such.

[32] In "The Body" (5016), the impact of Joyce's death is clearly related to her role as matriarch of the domestic space and as signifier of the Scoobies' "normal" lives. The scene right after the teaser shows Joyce, Buffy, and Giles busy with domestic tasks at a Christmas celebration involving the Scooby family and situated at the Summers house (the real and alternative family have merged). Joyce kisses Buffy after some by-play in the kitchen; they drop a pie, and a jump cut moves to Buffy with Joyce's dead body. In the early part of this episode Buffy moves through the domestic space of her home as if it were an alien landscape (not Buffy's house, or even the Summers house, but "1630 Revello"), an estrangement assisted by the framing and lighting of shots (see Wilcox). The whole "family" mourn Joyce's death, and when Tara tells Willow, "We can be strong," the reply, "Strong like an Amazon?" underlines its female nature. The subsequent episode, "Forever" (5017) continues the insistence on the "real" and the domestic as the discussion of funeral arrangements takes place around the dinner table among the core Scoobies.⁷ Even outsider Spike and awkward Anya show their grief; indeed their position as marginal vitally enhances the emotional effect of their respective speeches about Joyce (Anya's in "The Body" and Spike's in "Forever").

[33] Buffy and Dawn have to deal with the absence of their mother and Buffy in particular has to become head of the household. "I can stick wood in vampires but mom was the strong one in real life," she tells Angel after the funeral ("Forever," 5017). Dawn's effort to resurrect Joyce exposes how much both daughters wish to recover the stability and "normality" that Joyce represented, though Dawn finally breaks the spell in the face of Buffy's emotional vulnerability. The final shot from outside shows Buffy and Dawn framed by the open door, a signal that they will mother each other in Joyce's place/space. While this may be "yet another televisual staple, exploited to the fullest by past shows like *Party of Five*" (Battis 74), it also

signals that the house is now theirs, not hers. Dawn realises that she does not want "Joyce" to return in this way at the point that "Joyce" reaches the door and knocks and Buffy is about to let "her" into the space that Joyce once inhabited and they have inherited.

[34] Joyce's illness and death⁸ in Season 5 shift the priorities of Buffy's double life. Now family is more important than Slaying. The Summers house remains the "family" centre and Tara takes over Joyce's role (see Jowett, 52-53 for more on this). Following Buffy's death at the end of Season 5, the opening of Season 6 establishes Tara and Willow in the Summers house, sharing what was Joyce's bedroom and acting as parents to Dawn. This demonstrates that the Summers and Scooby families have merged but continues the all-female inhabitation of the house. Tara's emotional support of the female members of the Scooby family recalls Joyce's declarations of love for her own family and Tara maintains her relationships with the other "family" members despite her split with Willow. Like Joyce, she does a considerable amount of emotional labour within the Scooby family and she also offers physical comfort to Dawn, Buffy and Willow within the Summers house. A key instance is when Buffy accepts physical comfort from Tara after her revelations about Spike ("Dead Things" 6013), as in previous episodes she was comforted by Joyce.

[35] Following her resurrection in Season 6, Buffy has to deal with the responsibilities of being an adult, and these include looking after the house (leaky basement pipes and all) as well as taking over as Dawn's guardian. In response to the mundane problems she has to face, Giles offers Joyce as a role model, telling Buffy that she "dealt with this kind of thing all the time . . . without the aid of any superpower and got through it all. So can you" ("Flooded," 6004). In a development from the previous reinterpretation of invasions of the home, now there are even tongue-in-cheek references to the way the house is constantly being smashed up in fights ("Flooded", "Never Leave Me" 7009), highlighting their consequences for the domestic budget. Buffy's changing position on domestic responsibilities is clearly seen. When former Sunnydale High student and witch Amy is turned back into human form by Willow in the Summers house after spending several years as a rat, Buffy tells her, "You should stay here, everybody does" ("Smashed," 6009), echoing Joyce's hospitality.

[36] "Older and Far Away" (6014) shows family time as restful and necessary in an adult life of work and responsibility. Buffy promises Dawn at the beginning of the episode, "we're going to sit down and have a real dinner someday" but Dawn clearly feels neglected by the Scooby family. As head of the house, Buffy reprimands Spike about his behaviour ("We do not joke about eating people in this house"), while Spike's presence asserts his right both to his relationship with Buffy and to his place in the "family" (indeed Tara's merciless teasing about the former merely reinforces the latter, coming over as a recognisable family interaction). However the fact that everyone becomes trapped in the house exposes lingering anxieties about the restrictive nature of domestic space. Anya starts "freaking out" and says that they are "trapped like animals" while all the older Scoobies admit that they have "better things to do" (mostly work oriented, so that work is reinforced as "outside" the house). Thus in the next episode, when Buffy's ex-boyfriend Riley reappears and his wife Sam asks, "Got a safe house?" Buffy can only respond ambivalently, "I have a house. I think it's safe. Sometimes you can't even leave" ("As You Were" 6015). This episode demonstrates how the teens have grown up and taken on domestic responsibility as well as employment: Buffy is head of the household, Riley is a married man.

Gendering is still an issue here, however; Buffy is restricted to her home town, and her “home” because of her domestic responsibilities; Riley is mobile (Sayer notes the greater mobility of male characters, 112 and in comparison Faith is free to move around the country because she has no “family” ties).

Conclusion

[37] As the show continued locations expanded so that instead of moving simply between high school/ home/ The Bronze, audiences were introduced to U.C. Sunnydale, the Magic Box, the Initiative’s underground bunker, the coffee shop, Spike’s crypt, Xander’s basement, and so on. That is, as the teen characters grow older they take their place in a larger world. Of course, locations were also added as budget allowed, reflecting the success of the show and allowing audiences to take pleasure in seeing the imaginary location of Sunnydale expand and cohere. A dream episode like “Restless” (4022) showed the way these spaces do not necessarily connect in logical, spatial fashion (they are just sets, after all) but taking the show into new spaces like Faith’s apartment, Tara’s dorm room, or Joyce’s bedroom enabled further layers of characterisation. Yet despite the expanding number of locations, the Summers house remains the centre of the emotional and “normal” lives of the characters.

[38] Season 7 begins to reverse the polarity of Buffy’s life again, as work becomes more important than family. The Summers house is “Command Central” for the final fight against evil on the Hellmouth and is positioned again as a site of both safety and threat for the Summers, the Scoobies and the potential Slayers. The private space of the domestic sphere is now conclusively invaded by Buffy’s other life as she becomes a “general” in the last battle and the troops, including male characters, are housed in her home. Private interactions become increasingly difficult as the Summers house turns into a crowded communal space. After the group reject her claim to leadership Buffy even leaves home again, echoing her previous running away. Significantly Dawn asserts her identity as a Summers woman and steps into the matriarchal role at this point: “this is my house too” (“Empty Places,” 7019). Later Dawn refuses to be sent away and returns to the home and the collective struggle.

[39] Effectively by the end of the show, Buffy and the Scooby family are working from and living in the Summers house. Perhaps the interpenetration of work/ home spaces indicates the increasing difficulty in keeping these separate. Joyce is no longer there to anchor “home” and the distinction between home/ outside becomes more blurred. It has been noted that serial drama has become concerned to both valorise interpersonal problems and to integrate men as well as women into the emotional (affective) space of the domestic (Torres 287-8). We still see domestic ritual regularly taking place in the Summers house (usually cooking or washing up) and the majority of those who inhabit the house are female, yet the fact that male characters now live there too does change its atmosphere and draws the male characters into the emotional and domestic labour of everyday life.

[40] The increasing seriality of *Buffy* led to more emphasis on character development and continuing story arcs, hence inevitably to more airing of emotion. I see the Summers house as gendered by its inhabitants and through the linkage of emotion and family interactions, a presentation that runs counter to the show’s apparent desire to present more hybrid constructions of gender in its characters. Xander may be explicitly designated the “heart” of the Scooby family (“Primeval” 4021) while

Buffy is nominally the action hero, yet much maintenance of relationships is carried out in the Summers house by female characters and domestic responsibilities continue to restrict Buffy. Notably while the domestic space of the Summers house (and the “home” town of Sunnydale itself) is destroyed at the end of the final episode, the Scooby family survives more or less intact (“Chosen,” 7022). Buffy stands on the edge of a crater representing the destruction of her domestic space but paradoxically she is on the brink of being able to live the “normal” life she always longed for. Buffy’s “freedom” is not only contingent on her being able to mitigate her exceptionalism as the Chosen One but also, apparently, on her being able to irrevocably leave the domestic space that so often confined her. This sense is reinforced in later seasons of *Angel* when viewers are told that Buffy is taking full advantage of her freedom to travel, and later that she has settled in Rome, Italy (“The Girl in Question,” 5020).

Notes

- 1 There is no clear indication whether Joyce worked outside the home before she separated from Buffy’s father. In any case, Joyce does not succeed in “having it all” since her marriage breaks down.
- 2 Mr. Gordo makes his debut in “What’s My Line,” Part 1 (2009) when Angel is shown looking rather ridiculous holding onto him, perhaps an indication that Angel is out of place in this “feminine” domestic environment. In contrast, Spike has a more relaxed attitude to domestic comforts.
- 3 This episode is the first time we see Angel’s home, and the fact that he has a domestic space of his own is associated with his “humanity” (as Darla says, “You’re living above ground, like one of them”). Yet although Angel has an apartment and Spike a crypt, Spike still seems more domesticated.
- 4 The most striking two-shot has Buffy fore and Joyce back in profile.
- 5 I would argue that Anya’s death outside the home reinforces the fact that she does not really belong to the inner “family” group.
- 6 Significantly Tara repeats the words Buffy used when Tara was adopted into the Scooby family (“Family” 5006) – “you have to come through me.”
- 7 The fact that Buffy’s father has not even telephoned indicates which family is more important.
- 8 Williams observes that “[i]n many television series, characters who leave are simply stricken from the memories of those who remain” and specifically mentions that Jenny Calendar “continues to be a presence” after her death (70). This is even more so for Joyce and ongoing reactions to her death underline the shows’ increasing seriality and emphasis on emotion.

Works Cited

- Battis, Jes. *Blood Relations: Chosen Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005.
- Dow, Bonnie J. *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement since 1970*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996.

Jarvis, Christine. "School is Hell: gendered fears in teenage horror," *Educational Studies* 27.3 (2001): 257-267.

Jowett, Lorna. *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan U P, 2005.

Romines, Ann. *The Home Plot: Women, Writing and Domestic Ritual*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992.

Sayer, Karen. " 'It wasn't our world anymore. They made it theirs': reading Space and Place" in *Reading the Vampire Slayer*. Ed. Roz Kaveney. London: I B Tauris, 2001. 98-119.

Torres, Sasha. "Melodrama, Masculinity and the Family: *thirtysomething* as Therapy" in *Male Trouble*, ed. by Constance Penley and Sharon Willis. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minneapolis P, 1993. 283-302.

Wilcox, Rhonda V. "Pain as bright as steel." Unpublished paper presented at Blood, Texts and Fears Conference, October 2002.

Williams, J. P. "Choosing Your Own Mother: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in *Buffy*" in *Fighting the Forces: What's At Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Ed. by Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. 61-72.



Scott McLaren

The Evolution of Joss Whedon's Vampire Mythology and the Ontology of the Soul



(1) While writers of modern vampire tales frequently discard many elements of traditional folklore for the purposes of their narratives, Joss Whedon has shown a remarkably consistent reluctance to follow a similar course in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. [1] Some critics have suggested, however, that Whedon's particular use and adaptation of vampire folklore results in an irreconcilable contradiction between two distinct but simultaneously held concepts of the soul (see Abbott "Walking the Fine Line" 2-4; Wilcox 15). On the one hand, Whedon, a self-described existentialist with Sartrean leanings (Whedon, "Commentary for 'Objects in Space'"), advances an understanding of the soul as a metaphor for individual moral agency; on the other he fosters a more traditional concept of the soul as the reified and ontological seat of individual identity and conscience. This latter trope, heavily influenced by religious and folkloric antecedents, forms a psychological framework from which entire season arcs depend and leads to a more serious problem that has been frequently commented upon in the literature (see for example DeKelb-Rittenhouse 148 and Sakal 242-243): specifically, how is it possible for one to hold the ensouled Angel (and later the ensouled Spike) reasonably accountable for their crimes as vampires when *prima facie* such creatures, according to the Whedonverse vampire mythology, are beings without souls, without consciences, possessed by demons, and who moreover retain no connection with the absent soul of the host body's former identity? [2]

(2) Whedon might have solved this problem quite simply by minimizing the ontological mythology of the soul set forth in the earliest seasons of *BtVS* with an alternate existential elaboration of the soul strictly as a metaphor for election between good and evil actions. This way a tacit connection between the identity of the "possessed" human and the "demon" vampire—and a marrying of their wills—would have been more readily credible as a context in which Angel might meaningfully seek redemption for Angelus' past crimes. After all, Whedon does just this with the crucifix and other sacramental apotropaics—quietly deemphasizing their importance over the life of the two series without making any overt statement concerning their *de facto* diminishing efficacy. [3] That he did not follow this course when evolving his vampire mythology and the concept of the human soul over the course of the series suggests that he saw some value in maintaining the tension between the ontological and the existential. At the same time, Whedon has also been

widely praised for presenting a fictive universe where moral ambiguity is wrestled with in an authentically nuanced environment tinged with “grey.” As this paper will argue, the ongoing tension between the ontological and the existential—the soul reified and the soul as metaphor for moral choice—that Whedon consistently maintains throughout the whole of *BtVS* and its spin-off *Angel*, far from detracting from the verisimilitude of the series, contributes to the much vaunted and provocative ambiguity that has been one of the Whedonverse’s most commented upon and defining features.

(3) In order to understand how Whedon, an atheist and an existentialist, might have arrived at an ontological mythology of the soul in the first place, it will be helpful to consider very briefly the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the traditional (and still popular) understanding of the soul in the West as well as the manner in which such doctrines affected the subsequent development of vampire folklore in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe. The way in which Whedon adopted and adapted that folklore initially, and how he evolved that mythology over the life-span of the series, will also be considered by making a careful comparison of the way Whedon variously permitted both ontological and existential emphases in the first season of *BtVS*, where the mythology is initially established, and the final season of *Angel*, where it reaches its final expression among a cast that includes two ensouled vampires as well as a third soulless demon who gives many evidences of having integrated herself into a social and moral environment conditioned largely by human values. Throughout it will be observed that Whedon and his writers allow the viewer’s understanding to swing like a pendulum between the ontological and existential views of the soul without ever wholly discounting either.

(4) The concept of the soul finds its most primitive written roots in religious and mythopoeic texts such as the Sanskrit *Rig Veda*, the Sumerian *Descent of Inanna into Hell* and Homer’s *Iliad*. The earliest Greek philosophers understood the soul to be a cosmological agent by which all things, including the sun and moon, moved (see Green and Groff 17ff; see also Aristotle 403b). It wasn’t until Aristotle, however, that a clear and systematic elaboration of this doctrine emerged in a single work with respect to human beings. In his much-studied treatise *On the Soul*, Aristotle extends the notions of his philosophical predecessors by arguing that the individual human soul lends the body its capacity for life by serving as its animating force. Among a number of metaphors to illustrate this point Aristotle suggests that the body is to the physical eye as the soul is to the eye’s ability to see. In this way Aristotle understood the human soul to be inseparable from the body: a body without a soul isn’t an active body (Greek *soma*) at all but merely a lifeless corpse (Greek *nekros*).^[4] Similarly, the soul without the body is as unthinkable a proposition as vision is without an eye. Though *not* understood as the seat of individual personality, the soul for Aristotle is the body’s indispensable animating force without which it cannot live or move.

(5) For the doctrine common among today’s major monotheistic faiths that the soul is an immortal spirit inhabiting the body and lending it intelligence, will, and personality, one must turn to the discursive but influential writings of Plato. In addition to functioning as the body’s animating life force, the soul is, as Plato described it, in command of the body (*Georgias* 493a), the seat of all knowledge (*Meno* 86a), and an immortal spirit separate from the body (*Meno* 86b). By locating within the soul both the life-force of the body and human knowledge, Plato is the first to set forth a doctrine that allows for personal immortality in a separable soul with memories intact.

This marks an enormous and important distinction from both Aristotle's assertion that a soul without a body is unthinkable and Homer's depiction of souls as imbecilic shadows divorced from their previous lives and memories (see Green and Groff 50ff; *Iliad* XXIII). Plato's thought was adopted and adapted by some of the earliest Christian apologists and had enormous influence on the subsequent development of the Christian doctrine of the human soul, primarily through the writings of St. Augustine (MacDonald 143ff.). From there the concept of the soul as an immortal spirit animating the body as the seat of human will, intelligence, and conscience, has pervaded every corner of Western philosophy and culture. [5]

(6) In many instances vampire folklore, albeit often unconsciously and haphazardly, is an extension of these philosophies and doctrines. Because the soul is identified so consistently in Western philosophy with the capacity for agency, it is not surprising that some of the earliest vampire folklore recounts revenants who are not soulless bodies but bodiless souls—that is, ghosts—who return from the dead to torment their victims. [6] The practice of exhuming bodies in Serbia and Walachia in what are sometimes referred to as the eighteenth century's European "vampire epidemics" (see Barber 5ff.; Senn 39), together with the advent of Enlightenment materialism, however, shifted the onus of blame away from the soul of the deceased and onto the corpse. Indeed, in some traditions the vampire corpse was believed to function entirely without a soul. George MacDonald, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, observes for example that "[. . .] a vampire was a body retaining a kind of animal life after the soul had departed. If any relation existed between it and the vanished ghost, it was only sufficient to make it restless in its grave" (MacDonald, "Cruel Painter" 185). This, coupled with a folkloric belief in many cultures that one's reflection is an image of one's soul (see Barber 179), gave rise to the notion that vampires, because they lack souls, similarly lack reflections. Whedon follows this tradition in several ways by depriving his vampires both of reflections and of breath ("Out of Mind, Out of Sight," B1011; "Prophecy Girl," B1012; "Lovers Walk," B3008; "Ground State," A4020, etc.)—even and perhaps mistakenly in the case of the ensouled vampires Angel and later Spike.

(7) Other branches of vampire folklore, however, are more generally compatible with the Aristotelian proposition that the soul represents both an indispensable capacity for agency and functions as the animating force behind the body's movements. The word animation itself derives from the Latin *anima*. "soul," as well as denoting other functions attributed to it by the early Greek philosophers including life and breath. In this branch of vampire folklore there remained an acknowledged need to explain how vampire bodies could continue to function and move after death in the absence of a soul. A second soul, an animating principle that would lend the body a capacity for movement and agency, was therefore posited. This "second soul" might be either a second human soul, a returned soul, or a demon soul infused into the corpse by the Devil:

It is extremely common, worldwide, for postmortem functioning to be explained as the action of a second "soul." One soul departs at death, but another remains in the corpse, animating it for a time, until it too departs or simply dies. "These [vampires] have two souls," according to a Silesian

source, "of which only the one dies and the second remains in the corpse" This soul, whether it is viewed as the original soul returned after death or a second soul, typically departs when the body is completely decayed. When the body is no longer functioning—no longer changing shape and color or emitting an odor—it is assumed that its animating principle has departed and can no longer do unkind things to the living [. . .] Sometimes an outside agency, not the body itself, brings the corpse to life. In Hungary, evil souls may creep in; in Slavic folklore, the vampire may be created by the Devil. (Barber 191)

(8) This branch of vampire folklore seems to have served as the inspiration for Whedon's vampire mythology as it is expressed in the teachings of the Watchers' Council. Taking this folklore and the philosophy upon which it is based as a context, what more can be said about the soul in the Whedonverse? Ontologically, what *is* it? Existentially, what *function* does it serve? And in what relation does it stand to vampires? Amid a visually astonishing kaleidoscope of antagonists that pass across the screen in the first episode of *BtVS*'s final season, the First Evil, in the guise of the late Mayor Richard Wilkins, taunts Spike for his inability to grasp the nature and significance of his own soul:

So what'd you think? You'd get your soul back and everything'd be Jim Dandy? Soul's slippier than a greased weasel. Why do you think I sold mine? (laughs) Well, you probably thought that you'd be your own man, and I respect that, but . . . ("Lessons," B7001)

(9) In order to make sense of these taunts a number of assumptions must be made. First, the soul must be understood as a *thing*: something reified that can be possessed, owned, and even sold. Here Whedon echoes a tradition that extends back to Plato through vampire folklore: the soul is a distinct entity that is separable from the body. Second, it is also connected to one's identity—another Platonic concept—or else there would be no way to understand the phrase "you'd be your own man." It is the adoption of these Platonic concepts—the human soul as a separable object and as the reified seat of human identity, together with the Aristotelian need to animate the body with a second soul as echoed in Hungarian vampire folklore—that leads to the difficulty of reasonably imputing to ensouled Angel and Spike moral responsibility for their vampires actions. In the Whedonverse vampires are not only creatures without souls but creatures who cannot be identified with the human being whose bodies they demonically inhabit. Whedon imputes to vampires evil or demonic souls because a body lacking a soul, good or evil, is not "undead" but simply dead and wholly lacking the ability to assume any agency. Giles is at great pains to make the demonic identity of vampires clear to Buffy, Willow, and Xander on various occasions in the early episodes of the first season. He says:

The books tell that the last Demon to leave this reality fed off a human, mixed their blood. He was a human form possessed—infected—by the Demon's soul. He bit another, and another . . . and so they walk the earth, feeding. Killing some, mixing their blood with others to make more of their kind. ("The

Harvest," B1002)

Later in the same episode in which Xander continues to impute some of Jesse's identity to Vamp Jesse, Giles's censure is swift and harsh: "Now you listen to me. Jesse is dead. You have to remember that when you see him you're not looking at your friend. You're looking at the thing that killed him" ("The Harvest," B1002). By the second season, Buffy, a good student of her Watcher, propounds unflinchingly the same doctrine: in "Lie to Me" (B2007) Buffy's former heartthrob Ford, who is terminally ill, attempts to make arrangements with Spike to be turned into a vampire so he can be "immortal" and thereby escape his impending death. But Buffy's rebuke is fierce: "I got a newsflash, brain-trust. That's not how it works. You die. And a demon sets up shop in your old house. It walks and talks and remembers your life, but it's not you." The philosophy behind this statement, again, is clearly Platonic: the soul, together with the human's identity and conscience, has fled, leaving the body vacant and habitable by a second evil soul or demon.

(10) The key phrase that defines the Watcher understanding of vampires is "a human form possessed." The memories and personality Giles alludes to above, properties of the soul according to Plato, are presumably mimicked by the demon and not inherited in keeping with the formula that "It walks and talks and remembers your life but *it's not you*" (italics mine). The Watcher understanding of the soul, therefore, is primarily ontological. The soul is a *thing* that can be present or absent in a given body. The lack of a human soul in a vampire body renders that individual less than or at least different from a person. The presence of a soul, on the other hand, carries the potentiality for personhood. By the time Xander solicits Angel's help for Buffy against the Master in the final episode of the first season, his belief in an ontological difference between vampires and "persons" is quite clear:

I don't like you. At the end of the day I pretty much think you're a vampire. But Buffy, man, she's got a big ol' yen for you. I don't get it. She thinks you're a real person. Right now I need you to prove her right. ("Prophecy Girl," B1012)

Angel himself acknowledges the validity of this mythology. In an earlier episode he explains to Buffy not only his unhappy plight but also offers her the one indisputable reason why she should ascribe to him the dignity of personhood: he, unlike other vampires, has a soul:

For a hundred years I offered an ugly death to everyone I met. And I did it with a song in my heart. And then I made an error of judgment. Fed on a girl about your age. Beautiful. Dumb as a post, but a favorite among her clan. The Romani—Gypsies. It was just before the turn of the century. The elders conjured the perfect punishment for me. They restored my soul. When you become a vampire, the demon takes your body. But it doesn't get the soul. That's gone. No conscience, no remorse. . . . it's an easy way to live. You have no idea what it's like to have done the things I've done, and to care. I haven't fed on a living human being since that day. ("Angel," B1007)[7]

In response to Buffy's Season One question about Angel, "Can a vampire ever be a good person?" ("Angel," B1007) Giles explains that "A vampire isn't a person at all. It

may have the movements, the memories, even the personality of the person that it took over, but it is still a demon at the core. There is no half-way." Here then is the crux of the dilemma: if Angel was stripped of his soul, his personhood, and therefore his human identity, when he was turned into a vampire by Darla, then how can he be held accountable for the actions of the demon who "took over" or assumed command of his body during the soulless hiatus between his human life and his ensouled vampire life?[8] In order to answer this question Whedon seems to have developed, in parallel with the ontological definition, a concept of the soul as an existential metaphor for moral choice.

(11) There are numerous hints beginning as early as the first season that Whedon and his writers admitted the possibility of a much closer connection between the "possessed" human being and the subsequent vampire than the Watcher mythology, with its emphasis on the ontological, could admit. Whedon, however, never let go of the ontological concept entirely—that vampires are soulless monsters worthy of death—perhaps for the same reason that he insisted all vampires, regardless of how "fresh," burst into dust after being staked: a soul that is purely a metaphor for choice results in the unsavory image of a teenage girl killing what in the end are not monsters in a metaphysical sense, but criminals, albeit recalcitrant ones, who remain as human as the Slayer herself: "Vampires explode into dust because [. . .] it shows that they're monsters. I didn't really want to have a high school girl killing people every week" (Whedon, "Joss Whedon on 'Angel' and 'Puppet Show'").

(12) As early on as *BtVS*'s first season episode "Angel" (B1007) we find Giles' doctrine of the human soul and its relationship to vampires edged with ambiguity. Although Darla confronts Angel several times in this episode in an effort to tempt him to resume his identity as Angelus, strangely he refrains from slaying her in spite of his stated desire to "kill them all" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," B1001). If she is really only an irredeemable demon, why should Angel hesitate until the very end of the episode to dispatch her? Or perhaps something of her "personhood"—her human conscience, will, and identity—survive in her vampire state? Angel admits as much several years later when speaking with a pseudo-Swami who posits that Darla the human and Darla the vampire are two different beings. "No, it's still her, it's still Darla," he retorts. "It's kinda hard to explain" ("Guise Will be Guise," A2006). When, in the first season of *BtVS*, Angel bursts in on Darla as she begins to feed on Buffy's mother Joyce, remarkably he fails to attack Darla. Instead, while he himself holds Joyce's unconscious and bleeding body, there is every indication that Angel is actually wrestling with a powerful temptation to revert to his vampire ways. Had Buffy not subsequently appeared to end the internal struggle, it is not possible to say with confidence that Angel would not have fed on Joyce with his former lover turned temptress. And surely Darla herself, a very old vampire in the service of the Master, would not waste her energy tempting someone she knew was truly above it (as she continues to do, though without much success, when she returns in "Darla" (A2007)). When Angel finally does slay Darla at the end of the episode, it is an action undertaken with difficulty and, in light of his previous missed opportunities to do so, with reluctance.

(13) All this leads the viewer (of both series) to conclude that the soul can also be defined existentially: Angel resists temptation not simply because he "has" a soul (this would be the ontological explanation) but rather because, existentially, he makes a deliberate moral choice. And, as the seasons of both *BtVS* and *Angel*

progress, a steady stream of hints emerge to suggest that a vampire's relationship to the host body's "absent" human soul is not as simple as the Watcher mythology would have it. But that doesn't prevent Angel from repeatedly reiterating the ontological doctrine, perhaps because it carries the comfort that there is an inviolable line and difference *in being* between himself and other vampires. In this light we can recall ensouled Angel's wish to be reunited with Darla in the year 1900 together with his utter inability to feed on the baby she proffers as a test of his resolve (A2007). His soul seems to render him ontologically incapable of reassuming his former vampire lifestyle. The mere fact that he wishes to resume that lifestyle, however, implies some continuity of identity—with and without a soul. [9] It should also be noted, however, that there are several examples of soulless vampires, including Spike, Harmony, and even Willow's vampire double, who seem to possess some potentiality (and even actuality) for good, just as certain fully-human characters such as Faith are able to function, in spite of their souls, in ways that make them almost indistinguishable from vampires. In all of these ways Whedon and his writers successfully maintain the tension between the soul as an object one possesses, the seat of memory and personality as Plato and the subsequent Christian tradition would have it, and as an existential metaphor for a particular moral orientation. When a fan asked Whedon how he defined the soul and how its presence set Angel apart from other vampires he replied that "soulless creatures can do good and souled creatures can do evil, but that the soul-free are instinctually drawn toward doing evil while those with souls tend to instinctually want to do good" (qtd. "All Things Philosophical on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*" at <http://www.atpobtv.com/vampires.html>). Importantly, Whedon's definition neither dismisses the soul purely as a metaphor nor precludes one taking it, at times, as a reified organ of personality and/or moral agency.

(14) Returning to the original problem, then, we must still come to grips with the fact that in order for Angel's quest for redemption to make any sense he must bear the moral responsibility for his actions as a vampire in a context that is simultaneously existential and ontological. In the novel *The Unicorn* by Iris Murdoch, a twentieth-century writer and philosopher whose works explore the relationship between the ontological and existential, the central protagonist is a woman imputed with the act of attempting to kill her husband by pushing him over a cliff. Although her intention, memory, and degree of guilt all remain unclear, her husband, who survived the fall, retaliates by imprisoning her for years in a seaside house while he lives elsewhere. Two characters in the novel discuss her culpability:

"[. . .] Do you think that she really did push him over?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she does not know now. But there are—acts which belong to people somehow, regardless of their will."

"You mean she'd feel responsible anyway? Do *you* think she pushed him over?"
He paused. "Yes, perhaps. But it is not important to say so. She has claimed the act, and one has no right to take it from her." (66)

Perhaps Angel's culpability as a vampire might be understood in this mysterious fashion that seems to unite both the ontological and the existential. Although Angel's soul, in the Platonic and Christian sense, may have flown his body before it became possessed by the demon Angelus, perhaps Angel *chooses* to "own" the actions of

Angelus, and those around him have “no right” to take those actions from him. Though ontologically innocent, he remains somehow existentially culpable because he chooses to be so. Culpability, in a way, becomes the existential meaning that Angel brings to the ontology of his soul (see Curry 5). It is this, in fact, that may form the kernel of the Gypsy curse. Spike, as we will see in our consideration of the final season of *Angel*, though his crimes are as great and his soul as real, is not automatically burdened with seemingly inexpugnable guilt until he also chooses to accept, even construct, his own guilt (cf. “Damage,” A5011). The presence of a soul, then, is not alone enough to guarantee remorse. Both the presence of a soul and the existential movement of the will are necessary for remorse.

(15) Although the final season of *Angel* as a whole continues to explore the tension between ontological and existential portrayals of the human soul, it begins with an emphasis that is almost wholly existential in nature. This is perhaps not surprising since depicting the soul strictly as a metaphor for moral choice is less problematic at this point in the series because the image of a teenage girl slaying vampires is no longer perpetually before the viewer (cf. Whedon, “Joss Whedon on ‘Angel’ and ‘Puppet Show’”). As Gunn remarks in the final episode of the series, “I haven’t dusted nearly enough [vampires] this year” (“Not Fade Away,” A5022). Instead, the malefactor vampire is largely supplanted by a range of other monsters including ghosts, werewolves, and especially Circle of the Black Thorn demons. Vampires themselves, for the most part, are portrayed as either ensouled champions (in the case of Angel and Spike) or strangely abstinent (in the case of Harmony).

(16) It is perhaps not surprising that most critics who have attempted to account for the disconnect between the Watcher mythology and the complex moral psychology of the show have tended to view Angel and Whedon’s other vampires through existential lenses (see, for example, Stevenson 84-85 and Abbott, “Walking the Fine Line”). [10] In a Sartrean reading of the problem, Abbott places the emphasis on individual agency and moral choice by regarding Angel and Angelus as a single identity for whom personal accountability is unavoidable. This analysis, moreover, seems especially apt when one considers Angel’s “epiphany” and his subsequent abandonment of the quest for redemption through the efficacy of good deeds (“Epiphany,” A2016). But interpreting this epiphany as an outright abandonment of meaning may go too far. Though such an abandonment of meaning may mesh with Whedon’s professed atheism and Sartrean leanings, it fails as a hermeneutic because it takes us too far from the core mythology of the show: we are swung too far in the direction of individual agency so that not only the antecedent folklore but also the larger supernatural context disappear entirely. On the contrary, Angel’s choices continue to take place in a universe that is haunted by the numinous “Powers That Be”—and those Powers continue to exist as a supernatural rationale for choices made and action undertaken because they are “right” (cf. “The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco,” A5006; “You’re Welcome,” A5012). Indeed, as the final season of *Angel* unwinds in what amounts to a “final statement” concerning the nature of the human soul, Whedon and his writers seem at pains to show that the reified soul, though perhaps only one part of the picture, remains an integral part of that numinous universe inhabited by Powers who, though taken lightly in some contexts, are never seriously discounted. [11] Certain of the episodes considered below, in fact, lay enormous emphasis on the soul as object and possession and thereby mark a sharp ontological difference between the ensouled and soulless variety of vampires.

(17) Notwithstanding the season arc as a whole, however, when Harmony appears as Angel's administrative assistant in the first show of the season, Angel and several others take exception to her presence not because she is an ontologically deficient soulless creature whose moral orientation is consequently wholly evil, but because, after gaining the confidence of Angel Investigations in season two's "Disharmony" (A2017), she led Angel and his cohorts into a vampire trap. Their censure of her is based not on *what* she is, but on the *choice* she made—their condemnation of Harmony is existential to the extent that it implies she might have been free to choose a different path in spite of her lack of a soul.

(18) What is perhaps most surprising is that Wesley, who elsewhere maintains a strict ontological view of the soul consistent with his indoctrination as a Watcher, is the one who selects Harmony out of Wolfram and Hart's "typing pool" to be Angel's personal assistant. It should be remembered that Wesley, among all the members of Angel Investigations, took the strongest exception to Harmony in Season Two's "Disharmony" (A2017) by rebuking Cordelia's hospitality in words that closely echo Giles's first season rebuke of Xander for continuing to believe in the possibility of friendship with a former-friend-turned-vampire: "That is not your friend. That thing may have your friend's memories, her appearances, but it's just a filthy demon, an unholy monster" ("The Harvest," B1002). That none of this rhetoric, drawn from the Watchers' ontological understanding of the soul, is used to object to Harmony's fifth season role as Angel's administrative assistant shows the extent to which, by the beginning of the series' final season, Whedon has allowed the emphasis to shift away from that of a Platonic and Christian reified soul towards something that functions much more like a metaphor for existential agency. After all, if Harmony's lack of a soul really did mean she was so evil that choosing good became an utter impossibility, the notion of her serving as a member of Angel's team, however ostracized at various points, would be unthinkable.

(19) "Unleashed" (A5003) continues the existential emphasis by drawing close parallels between Angel the ensouled vampire and Nina the werewolf. Although werewolves are never castigated as soulless, it is clear that when people are changed their souls, in the Platonic sense of being the seat of memory, personality, and agency, are wholly sublimated. In fact, unlike vampires, werewolves are often unable (especially in the early stages of their lycanthropy) to remember undertaking violent actions once they return to their human form ("Wild at Heart," B4006; "Unleashed," A5003; "Smile Time," A5014). In this episode a young woman named Nina is bitten by a rare breed of werewolf and subsequently undergoes the unwelcome transformation into a werewolf herself. Angel befriends Nina and attempts to "manage" her new nature, just as Oz's werewolf nature was managed in *BtVS*'s third season, by confining her for several nights each month when the werewolf emerges. Like Oz, however, Nina is enormously uncomfortable with what she has become. Angel attempts to comfort her by drawing analogies between her state and his own—in spite of the fact that there are clear differences. Angel, for example, can not only choose the moment of his transformation, but, even when wearing his vampire visage, he continues to maintain control over his actions in spite of the demon's palpable presence. In the episode's final scene, Nina asks Angel how he can live with himself knowing that he's killed people. His response is instructive: "At some point you'll be at the grocery store, or with Amanda, and the whole werewolf thing, it will just be a part of who you are." By encouraging Nina simply to accept the werewolf as

integral to her overall identity, Angel simultaneously implies that his demon is as much a part of him as his human soul. This is as close as Angel ever comes to overtly contradicting the Watcher mythology's ontological doctrine that a vampire has no connection to the identity of the person whose body the demon possesses. [12] And, even if we are to admit that Angel is unique among vampires because he has a soul, there remains no necessary connection, outside his own assertion, between the demonic presence and his ensouled identity. In many episodes, moreover, Angel suggests that these two identities remain quite separate (see "The Dark Age," B2008; "Smile Time," A5014, etc.). In "Guise Will Be Guise" (A2006), for example, Angel flatly rejects the pseudo-Swami's assertion that "the demon is you." [13] With Nina, however, Angel places the ontological view of the soul in total eclipse by presenting himself as a single agent capable of, and accountable for, all the moral choices he has made. In this context his quest for redemption—or even his lesser quest to simply do what is right—seems at its most straightforward and credible.

(20) That Whedon cites the battle between Angel and Spike in "Destiny" (A5008) as the highlight of the final season isn't surprising since this episode succeeds in portraying an almost perfect balance between the concepts of the soul as existential metaphor and ontological reality (Whedon, "Angel: The Final Season"). The battle itself is for title to a type of martyrdom where Spike's and Angel's souls function as ontological prerequisites and become, in that sense, both heavy burdens and precious baubles. The ensouled vampire, according to the Shanshu prophecy, is set apart for a unique if unclear role in the apocalypse together with the promise of a subsequent return of humanity; their souls have the effect of making one of either Spike or Angel "better" or at least more important than other vampires (*cf.* A2017). Since the end of the series' first season, Angel has believed that the prophecy, if true, is specifically about him. Spike's sudden appearance as a second ensouled vampire champion throws that conviction into question. During the course of the dramatic battle for both immolation and ascendancy, Spike vents on Angel all his latent anger and jealousy. Though he admits that Drusilla turned him into a vampire, he accuses Angel of making him a monster, and in various flashbacks we see how Angel deprived him of both his dignity and his innocent romanticism. But the accusation itself seems to suggest that, while Spike may have lost his soul when he became a vampire, he had yet to lose something more—not just romantic pretensions but also decency and a sense of belonging to something larger than himself—by choosing to adopt the sadistic and heartless Angelus as his mentor. In an argument to prove he is more worthy of his soul than Angel, Spike further points out that his soul, unlike Angel's, was not inflicted on him against his will as a curse and penalty for past crime: he chose it and pursued it. Indeed, Spike, as a soulless vampire, made himself unique in the Whedonverse by asserting his existential prerogative to seek an ontological change in his being.

(21) Looking back to Spike's slow rehabilitation throughout several seasons of *BtVS*, we can see how this determination formed and hardened within him. The "neutering" chip implanted by The Initiative in Season Four of *Buffy* was initially important because it prevented violence against humans and thereby allowed the members of Buffy's gang to associate with Spike without fear of personal harm. This prolonged contact with humans allowed him to form strong attachments—in themselves movements of the will—especially to Dawn and Buffy. At a certain point Spike's love for Buffy became sufficient to allow him to cross some sort of moral divide so that,

without a soul and eventually without a chip, he would generally, though certainly not invariably (*cf.* B6018), choose to do good. This sea change in Spike's moral orientation altered his agency to the extent that he was as likely to approach choices from a perspective that was basically good as from one that was basically evil. In light of this transformation it only seems to follow that Spike would be rewarded with a soul since he had practically begot one through sheer force of will. And, of course, at the moment he finally passes across the threshold completely, he becomes ensouled in the final episode of *BtVS*' sixth season.

(22) It must not be forgotten, however, that his choice to be ontologically changed was existential in origin. Dawn's argument for equivalency between the chip and the soul ("Crush," B5014), moreover, isn't credible in this light (*cf.* Stevenson 86). While the chip was designed to prevent evil action, Spike remained free to approach choices from the darker side of the moral divide—that is, he would still be basically evil—but with a soul, though the end choice might appear to be the same, the direction from which moral choice was approached became wholly different. This puts one in mind of Whedon's much earlier explanation that "soulless creatures can do good and souled creatures can do evil [. . .]." In this episode, with its flashbacks and larger narrative context, Whedon seems most fully to actualize this abstraction. Spike chose to have a soul knowing that the soul enjoins good on the possessor. Though the extent to which it can be considered the essence of personality and agency—as the Watchers' Council asserts in an echo of Plato—is here less certain.

(23) Angel's eventual defeat by Spike causes him to doubt the ontological status of his own soul in "Soul Purpose" (A5010). In this episode, full of symbolism, Fred performs surgery in Angel's parasite-induced delusion and extracts from his body a remarkable and unprecedented symbolic instantiation of Angel's soul in the form of an apparently dead goldfish in a bowl. And though the images are delusional, their meaning is very real: Fred concludes, after Angel's soul has been removed, that "there's nothing left. Just a shell" (A5010)—a phrase that suggests not only Angel's will to choose good but his very identity in the Platonic sense inheres within (and is lost with) his soul. Lacking it, as this episode's teaser suggests, Angel is nothing. That the soul is more than a mere symbol, however, that it is a *thing* most probably if mysteriously connected with identity, becomes throughout this and subsequent episodes an increasingly credible supposition.

(24) In "Harm's Way" (A5009), the pendulum continues a slow swing back toward the ontological view of the soul set forth in the earliest episodes of *BtVS*. The episode's premise centers around Harmony's fear that she may have involuntarily murdered a human male after she finds, with few memories from the night before, his corpse in her bed. Her dilemma is made more acute by the fact that under Angel's tenure Wolfram and Hart has adopted a zero-tolerance policy that prohibits feeding on humans. To ensure compliance, employees are periodically subjected to random blood tests, and the punishment for non-compliance is death. Although Harmony does her best to avoid detection, it is clear that she is both terrified by the potential consequences and discombobulated by the fact that she cannot remember committing the transgression. She remains acutely aware, however, that she is fully capable of committing such a murder (even in a stupor) since, having no soul, she is naturally drawn to such crimes. In other words, her ontological deficiency has diminished her ability, if not deprived her of it altogether, to make conscious moral choices. In this way the existential is made to depend on the ontological. Culpability

is uppermost in Harmony's mind as she pleads with Fred, who is performing a postmortem on the body: "And don't you think it's possible that whoever did it could have blacked out and doesn't even remember doing it, so it's totally not their fault?" Here Harmony is attempting to use as an excuse her lack of conscious agency in committing the crime. When she eventually discovers that she is innocent of the crime, her relief is at least as great as any of those around her. And, in her peroration she reminds those around her of her ontological deficiency and the difficulty that results from it: "OK, I made some bad choices. I mean, it's not like I have a soul. I have to try a lot harder." Stated philosophically, it is harder for Harmony to make choices that are morally good because she lacks the ontological equipment: a reified soul. By the end of the season it becomes clear just how much harder it is for Harmony than for Angel and Spike. Her will, in the end (and perhaps unlike Spike's will), isn't sufficient on its own to effect any major change in her basic moral orientation. Nor is she alone among vampires in this as subsequent episodes show. Spike, instead, becomes the single exception that proves the rule.

(25) In "Why We Fight" (A5013) the viewer is confronted with another vampire who seems to wish, but cannot effect, a different kind of existence because he lacks a soul with which to make morally good choices. Though no firm line is drawn between the soul and human identity in this episode, it is nevertheless clear that the soul is a reified possession and that without it certain things are simply impossible. In flashbacks we meet Lawson, a young submariner who is turned into a vampire by Angel in order to save the lives of several other shipmates during World War II. In this episode Lawson seeks out Angel in present-day Los Angeles because he has become wholly unsatisfied with this vampire existence and wishes either for some remedy or, failing that, to take revenge on Angel for the emptiness and meaninglessness of his last sixty years:

"We all need a reason to live, even if we're already dead. Mom, apple pie, the stars and stripes—that was good enough for me till I met you. Then I had this whole creature-of-the-night thing going for me—the joy of destruction and death—and I embraced it. I did all the terrible things a monster does—murdered women and children, tortured fathers and husbands just to hear 'em scream—and through it all . . . I felt nothing. Sixty years of blood drying in my throat like ashes. So what do you think? Is it me, chief? Or does everyone you sired feel this way?"

Though it is clear that Lawson wishes to return to a simpler life constructed around the wholesome abstractions of family and patriotism, that door is irretrievably closed because as a vampire he no longer has a soul. He wishes so very much to have one that the viewer can't help but wonder if he might not be wholly beyond the hope of redemption. But here the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of the ontological to make sheer will an adequate remedy. In the dialogue that follows Angel is clear that the soul is no metaphor and that Lawson simply does not have one. Nor is there any way for him to obtain or recover one (notwithstanding Spike's own saga in *BtVS* Season Six where the soul functioned in a fashion distinctly more existential):

ANGEL: You're the only one I ever did this to . . . after I got a soul.

LAWSON: Do I have one, too?

ANGEL: I don't think it works that way, son.

LAWSON: Didn't think so.[. . .] You gave me just enough, didn't you? Enough of your soul to keep me trapped between who I was and who I should be. I'm nothin' . . . because of you.

The implication is clear: without a soul Lawson *is*, in the ontological sense, nothing. Angel's worst fears in "Soul Purpose" (A5010) become Lawson's reality. He has no personality, or at least not the personality he would choose to have. Angel, seeing no hope for him, stakes Lawson as much to put him out of his misery as to free the world of a violent killer. Angel himself, in his own words of defense, acknowledges a very stark boundary between his soulless existence as Angelus and his ensouled life as Angel. He even implies that he may be less accountable for his actions as Angelus than he is for his actions as Angel.[14] All of this carries with it an important existential implication: the choices Angel makes with a soul, if not wholly different, at least spring from a different set of moral imperatives.

(26) In "Shells" (A5016) Whedon allows the pendulum to swing even further in the direction of the Platonic ontological soul, a *thing* not only separable from the body but also the exclusive reified essence of human identity. In this episode Fred meets with an agonizingly painful death as her body is possessed by the spirit of one of the "Old Ones" named Illyria. Angel responds by evolving a plan based on the notion that the soul is an ontological entity separable from the body. In short, he hopes to "find" Fred's soul and put it back into her body. The analogy between what appears at first to be Fred's possession and the making of vampires is obvious across a lengthy dialogue (with lacunae):

WESLEY: The infection—Illyria—consumed her. Took over her body.

GUNN: Then it's still Fred, right? This thing is just controlling . . .

WESLEY: She's gone. [. . .] I watched it gut her from the inside out. Everything she was is gone. There is nothing left but a shell.

ANGEL: Then we'll figure out a way to fill it back up.

SPIKE: The thing only took over her body. Just a tip of the theological.

ANGEL: It's the soul that matters.

SPIKE: Trust us. We're kind of experts.

Indeed, Angel's later determined remark that "Fred's soul is out there somewhere. We'll find it and we'll put it back where it belongs [. . .]" is identical in concept with the ontological view of the soul propounded by Giles in *BtVS'* first season. Angel abandons his hope only after taking it on unassailable authority that, "There's nothing left to bring back. Miss Burkle's soul was consumed by the fires of resurrection. Everything she was is gone." And although this destruction represents the most nihilistic image of death in the whole series, little more is said about it.[15] Wesley subsequently refuses Illyria's argument that human identity is "a summation of recollections" ("Origin," A5018) and that because she possesses the whole of those recollections she can simply *be* Fred. Objecting in typical Watcher fashion, Wesley asserts that humans are "more than just memories." It is, of course, necessary that Wesley reject her argument. Had he failed to do so it would also have followed that

vampires would *be* the people whose bodies they possess since they inherit the totality of the human host's memories. And while the word soul isn't used expressly in this dialogue, it seems clear that Wesley is in fact talking about something apart from memory that serves as the essence of human identity. Something that, moreover, is lost when a vampire is made. His objection, then, is wholly consistent with Giles's ontological construction of the soul described in the first season of *BtVS*. The series, at this point, seems to have come full circle.

(27) In the final episode "Not Fade Away" (A5022), Angel's second season words to Cordelia that "Harmony will turn on you" ("Disharmony," A2017) prove prescient. The tension between the existential and ontological begins again to mount when Angel finally confronts Harmony who betrays the group and emerges as chronically untrustworthy:

ANGEL: Loyalty really isn't high on your list.

HARMONY: Oh, is that right? I'll have you know that I am damn loyal dumb ass.

ANGEL: You betrayed me. You are betraying me now even as we are talking.

HARMONY: Because you never have any confidence in me.

ANGEL: No—because you have no soul.

HARMONY: I would if you had confidence in me.

Angel places the blame exactly where Giles and Wesley would place it: on Harmony's ontological deficit. Her protestations about confidence strike the ear, at this point, as so much subterfuge. Though the soul as the Platonic essence of human identity is in eclipse at this moment, its function as a reified moral organ that allows, or at the very least facilitates, certain types of choices is beyond doubt. One can almost imagine that Harmony might have wished to choose another path. But, for the same reason Angel gave Lawson, "It doesn't work that way" (A5013). The rest of Angel's team, on the other hand, are free to make choices about where they will stand in the final battle. When Angel puts it to them by asking, "You need to decide if that's worth dying for" (A5022) Spike, the ensouled vampire champion, is significantly the first to raise his hand. It is also significant that Lorne is the last and Illyria isn't present—though there are passing references to demon souls throughout the series, the status of such souls always remains unclear (see for example Stevenson 90). Even Lindsey, one of the most recalcitrant characters in the entire series, *can* choose because he has a soul. Angel has Lorne shoot Lindsey not because he cannot choose good but rather because he cannot be relied upon to do so consistently.

(28) In many ways this final season presents the viewer with a microcosm of the manner in which the soul is depicted throughout the seven seasons of *BtVS* and the five of *Angel*. At times the emphasis is almost wholly existential and the soul an abstracted metaphor. At other times, the soul functions as an organ of moral choice that facilitates good. And, at the other extreme, the soul is depicted as a Platonic object that comprises human identity and will. The Watcher mythology that dominates the first season of *BtVS* and in many ways this final season of *Angel* is most closely aligned with the last of these modes. As Whedon points out himself, however, objects can be understood in two ways: for what they are intrinsically and what their function happens to be: "I find the meaning of the object to be with the object, both in however it's functional and the fact of its existence. A ball is to be thrown, but it's also just a round thing" (Whedon, "Commentary for 'Objects in

Space"; see also Curry 4). In this light, a soul, then, is variously a metaphor or a reified organ for moral choice. That is its function. Alternatively, it is also at times portrayed as the essence of human identity, as it is in "Shells" (A5016) when the pendulum of emphasis is at its ontological apogee. To see the soul in light of Whedon's metaphysical remarks above, one might say that the metaphor of moral choice is analogous to the ball being thrown in "Objects in Space." The dimension of the ball that is simply "a round thing" might describe the soul as the seat of human identity. Finally, the soul as a reified organ of moral choice, as ontological "equipment" without which one must try so very much "harder" (A5009), might be said to fall somewhere in between.

(29) All three of these modes are variously emphasized throughout *BtVS* and *Angel* without one ever gaining final ascendancy. Nor should this be seen necessarily as a contradiction. Instead, by viewing it through various lenses the soul becomes provocative to the very extent that it remains just beyond the scope of a clear definition. In place of a sharply articulated statement Whedon leaves us with something more amorphous—an image of a fish in a bowl that refuses to swim when watched but that might be anywhere in the water when one's eye drifts back in its direction. Iris Murdoch described the Platonic concept of the Good in a similar fashion by laying emphasis on transcendence. One need only substitute the word soul for the word good to have a close approximation of its reality—and elusiveness—in the Whedonverse:

Good is the distant source of light, it is the unimaginable object of our desire. Our fallen nature knows only its name and its perfection. That is the idea which is vulgarized by existentialists and linguistic philosophers when they make good into a mere matter of personal choice. It cannot be defined, not because it is a function of our freedom, but because we do not know it. (Murdoch 109)

Notes

1. To name just a few instances, he consistently retains the need vampires have to be invited across domestic thresholds ("Angel," B1007; "Lie to Me," B2007; "Amends," B3010; "Pangs," B4008; "The Gift," B5022; "Him," B7006; "Disharmony," A2017; "Destiny," A5008, etc.; their lack of reflections in mirrors ("Out of Mind, Out of Sight," B1011; "Bad Eggs," B2012; "Earshot," B3018; "Darla," A2007, etc.); and their aversion to sunlight ("The Harvest," B1002; "Lovers Walk," B3008; "Into the Woods," B5010; "Bring on the Night," B7010; "City of . . .," A1001; ""Guise Will be Guise," A2006, etc.).

2. There are many instances where possessed persons are not held accountable for their actions, ranging across both series beginning with Xander's possession by a hyena spirit (B1006) and ending with Wesley's exoneration of Cordelia in *Angel's* final season who tells her, "You didn't kill Lilah" (A5012)—and this in spite of the fact that, like vampires, both Xander and Cordelia are able to remember committing crimes when they were possessed.

3. A glimpse into Buffy's arsenal of weapons in the first season, for example, reveals wooden stakes together with crucifixes, holy water, and even communion wafers (B1002). By the seventh season objects of a strictly sacred nature are largely replaced by swords, axes, and other armaments that, while imbued with supernatural

power, cannot be described as particularly religious. For more on the crucifix as a religious symbol in *BtVS* see Erickson 114-115, Stevenson 68-70, Abbott, "A Little Less Ritual" 6, and Playden 135. For an interesting counterpoint to this argument, see Stevenson 257.

4. Aristotle writes, "If the eye were a living creature, its soul would be its vision; for this is the substance of the sense of formula of the eye. But the eye is the matter of vision, and if vision fails there is no eye, except in an equivocal sense, as for instance a stone or painted eye [. . .] That which has the capacity to live is not the body which has lost its soul, but that which possesses its soul" (*On the Soul* 412b).

5. For an excellent overview of the development of the doctrine of the soul to Plotinus, see Green and Groff 151-170.

6. See for example the sixteenth-century "Shoemaker of Breslau" (Barber 10-14).

7. There are at least two subsequent instances where this final sentence is shown to be false (*cf.* A2007, A5013).

8. There is an interesting parallel between Giles's ontological view and St. Justin's second century critique of Gnosticism: "One of his main criticisms of Gnosticism was that it contained a strict determinism with respect to salvation. Those who have *pneuma* [a soul] are saved; those without it are not. Justin recognized, however, that without freedom there can be no moral responsibility, and without freedom the message of Jesus has no point, for it can change nothing" (Green and Groff 154). The Watcher mythology can be criticized on similar grounds.

9. It should also be remembered that Darla, immediately after Angelus kills his father, remarks that the new vampire will continue to seek—in vain—his father's approval for a lifetime because "What we once were informs all that we have become" ("The Prodigal," A1015). Indeed, Darla consistently appeals to the existential view that there is a close connection between the host human and the vampire across the whole of both series from her earliest attempts to convince Angel to reassume his killing ways in *BtVS*'s first season to her insistence, after Wolfram and Hart resurrected her as a human, that "It's still me" ("Dear Boy," A2005).

10. Although some critics have proposed that the vampire be viewed through a Freudian lens (see Fossey 2, Nevitt and Smith), the categories of Freud seem too black and white to support a sustained analysis, not least because no compelling explanation for the psychological transition between vampire and human is ever offered.

11. It seems to have gone unnoticed that Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence—the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious—map onto the characters of the Whedonverse with a striking accuracy that would probably support the moral weight of the series much more easily than other frameworks because they leave room for both human agency and numinous absolutes. Angel's killing of Drogyn to gain the trust of the Circle of the Black Thorn ("Power Play," A5021), for example, might be viewed not as an abandonment of meaning (which it clearly is not) but as an action consistent with Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical.

12. There is also the oft-quoted instance in "Doppelgängerland" (B3016) when Angel begins to object to Buffy's echoing of the Watcher mythology concerning vampires and human souls. But the difference between this and what Angel offers to Nina is the difference between a hint and a full explanation.

13. It is interesting to note that "Guise Will be Guise" (A2006) is one of only two episodes of *Angel* written (or co-written) by the prolific *BtVS* writer Jane Espenson.

14. In "Hell Bound" (A5004), Angel remarks, in his own defense when Wesley points

out a few printed references to Angelus's crimes, that it's, "[. . .] not fair. I didn't even have a soul when I did that." Angel's logic here, of course, only deepens the difficulty one might have in understanding his choice to seek redemption for Angelus' crimes.

15. Illyria's final promise to Wesley, while she appears to him one last time as Fred, that upon his death he will finally "be where I am" ("Not Fade Away," A5022) is either a nihilistic statement or to be understood within the larger context of Illyria's promise to "lie" to Wesley.

Works Cited

Abbott, Stacey. "A Little Less Ritual and a Little More Fun: The Modern Vampire in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 3 (2001). [<http://www.slayage.tv/essays/slayage3/sabbott.htm>].

_____. "Walking the Fine Line Between Angel and Angelus." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 9 (2003). [<http://www.slayage.tv/essays/slayage9/abbott.htm>].

Aristotle. *On the Soul. Pava Naturalia. On Breath*. Trans. W. S. Hett. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.

Barber, Paul. *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality*. Yale U P, 1990.

Curry, Agnes. "Is Joss Becoming a Thomist?" *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 16 (2005). [<http://slayage.tv/essays/slayage16/Curry.htm>].

DeKelb-Rittenhouse, Diane. "Sex and the Single Vampire: The Evolution of the Vampire Lothario and its Representation in *Buffy*." *Wilcox and Lavery* 143-152.

Erickson, Gregory. "'Sometimes You Need a Story': American Christianity, Vampires, and *Buffy*." *Wilcox and Lavery* 108-119.

Fossey, Claire. "'Never Hurt the Feelings of a Brutal Killer': Spike and the Underground Man." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 8 (2003). [<http://www.slayage.tv/essays/slayage8/Fossey.htm>].

Green, Christopher and Philip Groff. *Early Psychological Thought: Ancient Accounts of Mind and Soul*. Westport: Praeger, 2003.

Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Martin Hammond. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.

MacDonald, George. "The Cruel Painter." 1864. *The Portent and Other Stories*. Whitethorn: Johannesen, 1999. 163-212.

- MacDonald, Paul S. *History of the Concept of Mind: Speculations about Soul, Mind and Spirit from Homer to Hume*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- Murdoch, Iris. *The Unicorn*. New York: The Viking Press, 1963.
- Nevitt, Lucy and Andy William Smith. "'Family Blood is Always the Sweetest': The Gothic Transgressions of Angel/Angelus" *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* 2 (2003). [<http://www.refractory.unimelb.edu.au/journalissues/vol2/nevittsmith.htm>]
- Playden, Zoe-Jane. "'What You Are, What's To Come': Feminisms, Citizenship and the Divine." In *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel*. Ed. Roz Kaveney. London: Tauris Parke, 2003. 120-147.
- Plato. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*. Ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton UP, 2002.
- Sakal, Gregory J. "No Big Win: Themes of Sacrifice, Salvation, and Redemption." In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Ed. James B. South. Chicago: Open Court, 2003. 239-253.
- Senn, Harry A. *Were-Wolf and Vampire in Romania*. Columbia U P, 1982.
- Stevenson, Gregory. *Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Dallas: Hamilton Books, 2003.
- Whedon, Joss. "Angel: The Final Season," *Angel Season Five*, Fox DVD, Disk 6, 2004.
- _____. "Commentary for 'Objects in Space'," *Firefly*, Fox DVD, Disk 4, 2003.
- _____. "Joss Whedon on 'Angel' and 'Puppet Show'," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season One*, Fox DVD, Disk 3, 2001.
- Wilcox, Rhonda. "'Every Night I Save You': Buffy, Spike, Sex and Redemption." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 5 (2002) [<http://www.slayage.tv/essays/slayage5/wilcox.htm>].
- ____ and David Lavery, eds. *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.



Jeffrey Bussolini
Los Alamos is the Hellmouth



[1] The concept of the Hellmouth is central to Buffy and the Buffyverse and a significant amendment from the film. Described as a “focal point of mystical energy,” and as “boca del Infierno,” the setting for Buffy is not just a place among others where human life is threatened by supernatural forces and occurrences, but the place itself is a magnet for such phenomena. And, the term, as we know, is meant literally: it is the mouth of hell which threatens to be thrown open, with concomitant human destruction, a number of times throughout the run of the show. The urgency of the ongoing struggle in Buffy and its tragic dimension of continual strife come from being located on such a site, where the yawning chasm of hell is just below them. Los Alamos, where the atomic bomb was invented and which has been a site of U.S. nuclear and national security research ever since, is likewise a place where contact with supernatural forces is made, and where destruction also threatens.

[2] In both of these small, Western U.S. towns, everyday life is set alongside the possibility of annihilation. This paper explores the productive, reflective dialogue about these two distinctive social spaces, considering some of the myriad strong parallels between Sunnydale and Los Alamos, and argues for some ways in which these parallels are useful in terms of scholarship and, beyond that, in terms of life and survival. In addition to general concerns about the Hellmouth, it takes up the similarities between the enterprise of the Initiative from Season 4 and the business of Los Alamos since 1943. Here I would like to argue that Buffy helps us to think about situations such as those we find in Los Alamos and that, as such, it is a philosophical text. Incidentally, Buffy writer Drew Goddard is a Los Alamos native, and I have my suspicions that his portrayals of Caleb and the First Evil in Season 7 were influenced by the culture of our hometown, but I’ll save those explorations for a later paper until I’ve had more chance to talk to him about the matter.

Los Alamos is the Hellmouth

[3] There are a number of ways in which Sunnydale and Los Alamos are intimately related to one another. Both towns are small, out of the way, “safe” towns which harbor extreme danger. Not just any danger, but danger itself: the fate and the survival of the world as we know it. As sleepy towns off the beaten track, both places have a sense of being forgotten by the world at large. Both have downtowns which seem more reminiscent of the 1950s than the 1990s. People don’t go to these places without a purpose—demons, occultists, scientists—so newcomers are always deemed a bit suspicious. Los Alamos is frequently held by its residents to be “idyllic” or “a

great place to raise kids," notwithstanding the evident threat. This town self-identity doesn't seem so far off from Sunnydale: although everyone is well aware of the danger, nonetheless they stay and construct a picture of an ideal small town.

[4] As of a few years ago, Los Alamos and Sunnydale are similar in that they are both "one Starbucks towns," as Xander describes Sunnydale to newcomer Buffy in the very first episode of the series ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001). Los Alamosans are now able to share that feeling of keeping up with the fashion of the outside world which Starbucks represents for the residents of Sunnydale. Peculiarly, there are also an equal number of churches in the two towns. We learn in the episode "What's my Line?" (2009-2010) from Season 2 that there are 43 churches in Sunnydale. Just so there are 43 churches and religious congregations in Los Alamos, and in both locales we's find everything from vestiges of Spanish-Catholic outposts to protestant churches, fundamentalist congregations, Jewish temples, and Wicca circles. Although I am not sure if we ever know how many people live in Sunnydale (fewer all the time, apparently), it wouldn't be too surprising if it were around Los Alamos' perennial size of about 18,000. In any case, 43 churches in each small town is an abnormally high concentration indeed. For both Los Alamos and Sunnydale, the number of churches is not accidental or merely an index of faith, but indicative of a far more menacing underlying reality. Even though the danger in both places is ever-present, it is sometimes acknowledged and discussed, sometimes ignored and denied.

Nonetheless, the residents of both places *know* and *feel* the danger, and the presence of so many houses of worship seems tied into the effort to come to terms with such horrifying danger. In light of the apocalyptic and the deadly, people often cling to religion. Of course, the fact that Buffy and the Scoobies are so very agnostic or atheistic is instructive: even in light of the threats they face, they refuse the easy call to religion. In a sense, they have seen too much for standard organized religion to explain and encompass it.

[5] Residents of both Los Alamos and Sunnydale are killed and harmed by their respective demons. Just as certain streets of Sunnydale are particularly dangerous if vampires or other threats happen to take up residence nearby, some areas of Los Alamos seem also to be danger zones. Manhattan loop was the site of a cluster of brain tumors that suggests that something evil was lurking nearby. Workers in Los Alamos have been suddenly stricken mortally ill by lethal doses of radiation just as those from Sunnydale have been struck dead or ill by witchcraft or magic: Buffy is almost killed by a bloodstone vengeance spell in "Witch" (1003), and Xander is infected by a host of diseases after digging into the old Sunnydale Mission ruins in "Pangs" (4008). Among the serene forests of Los Alamos, children have lost limbs or been killed by explosives they happened upon, like the boy Adam encounters in "Goodbye Iowa" (4014).

[6] A similar analysis of living with destruction and possible doom is taken up by Mike Davis in *Ecology of Fear*, where he addresses the imagination of disaster in Los Angeles. Undoubtedly, many of his themes of Southern Californian calamity resonate with Joss Whedon's story of Sunnydale. So-cal combines both an apotheosis of the American dream and the tale of how, as Davis describes it in one of his chapters, "Eden lost its garden." Both Sunnydale and Los Angeles share in this promise and this dread. Davis describes how the residents of Los Angeles are subjected to the risks of earthquakes, fires, and intense floods. In addition to earthquakes, Sunnydale denizens risk death at the hands of demons, just as Los Alamosans are endangered

by dangerous substances and dangerous work. Something that characterizes the imagination of all three places is ongoing risk of catastrophe. Not just that one could die at any moment because of being hit by a car or struck by lightning, but the notion that one could at any moment perish in an eruption of tremendous demonic forces. [7] In fact, in one section of his book, Davis describes “election day demons” in the form of tornadoes which struck Southern California. A particularly destructive family of tornadoes ravaged Los Angeles on election day, November 7, 1966. These storms caused miles of carnage and they destroyed hundreds of homes. Davis describes how, “houses ‘virtually exploded,’ trailers were blown over, and scores of fires were ignited when flying debris collided with power lines” (Davis, 177). Storms like these slashed people with flying debris, picked up buses, shattered windows, and wrenched off roofs. This is not so far off from scenes of pandemonium we see enacted on *Buffy*, as when especially the Hellmouth threatens to open. These aspects of *Buffy* have been discussed in the essay by Boyd Tonkin on “Entropy as Demon: *Buffy* in Southern California,” in Roz Kaveny’s *Reading the Vampire Slayer*. Tonkin considers the hellishness of Southern California as the crucial context for *Buffy*.

[8] Sunnydale and Los Alamos resemble each other as well in that human life *in toto*, and maybe life altogether on this planet, is in danger from the forces, dynamics and events afoot there. If the Hellmouth opens or if the Bomb goes off, humanity in general is doomed, and perhaps all life that we recognize is as well. Giles spells it out directly for *Buffy*, Willow, and Xander in “The Harvest” (1002) when he explains to them, “We’re at the center of a mystical convergence here. We may, in fact, stand between the Earth and its total destruction.” Of course, he goes on to conclude that “the Earth is doomed” after the three students amble off to class. We can recall here the lingering fear among some Manhattan Project scientists, including Nobel Laureate Enrico Fermi, that the first Trinity test of the atomic bomb on July 16, 1945 would ignite the atmosphere and kill all life on Earth. Certainly radioactive contamination or a nuclear winter would be a demonic world. In both Sunnydale and in Los Alamos one is faced with the possibility—the near presence—of the apocalypse (and not just once, but time and again).

[9] In both towns the crux of the danger and the fear is that the human comes into contact with the inhuman, whether it be the supernatural, the unearthly, or what have you. While one meaning of the supernatural is certainly that most commonly seen in *Buffy*: the realm of demons and magic, the term also has another sense which is natural processes and phenomena of a grand scale or force, such as stellar processes or universal events. Clearly this second kind of supernatural is the business of Los Alamos, and Los Alamos and *Buffy* share an interest in multiple universes, cosmology, time, space, and the like. In both settings the scale of the human being (both temporally and in terms of physical size and strength) is overwhelmed by supernatural forces.

[10] The inhumanity in Los Alamos and Sunnydale is not merely a form of nature on a different scale from the human; it is also a destructive Nature. The idea of a destructive Nature was the avowed fundamental philosophy of the Marquis de Sade. Sade called himself a student of nature and has been called a rationalist (something which will hold importance for us when we consider aspects of the Initiative in the next section). He recognized a principle of generation and creation in nature but subordinated it to another aspect of Nature which he exalted and which he thought to be primary: destructive Nature. He devoted himself to the service of this destructive

Nature which finds ready parallel in Buffy.

[11] In Buffy the Earth is older than we know and was once inhabited exclusively by demons who eventually lost their purchase on this reality and were killed off or forced into other dimensions. Yet, the recapturing and the destruction of this reality remains a high priority for a number of the shows evil agents including the Master, Angelus (with Acathla), and Evil Willow (who wants to destroy the Earth and humanity to end all suffering—Nietzsche would call this an “ethic of genocide motivated by pity” and oppose it at all costs [96]).

[12] The Big Bang theory and astrophysics, which also date the world much older than the “popular mythology” that Giles gibes in “Welcome to the Hellmouth” (1001) are intimately concerned with the same forces that are unleashed in atomic bombs, the stellar processes of fission and fusion. Simone de Beauvoir points out in *Faut-il brûler Sade*, that, via his character Jérôme, Sade expressed his greatest dream as “To attack the sun, to snatch it out of the universe and use it to burn the world, those would be crimes!” (45/32). This is precisely the enterprise that was achieved through the Manhattan Project. Reactions usually at work only inside of stars themselves, fueling their intense burning, are made to take place on the surface of the Earth.

[13] In light of the inhuman, the supernatural, and the *destructive*—that which poses a danger to human existence—Buffy provides a set of reflections and a model of resoluteness for existing in such a space of danger and facing it. Is this not all-too-germane for us today, regardless of whether we live in Los Alamos, Sunnydale, Madrid, New York, Baghdad, New Orleans, or any place on the globe? Aren’t we all faced by the danger of the supernatural and the destructive? Nietzscheans are fond of discussing whether there is any art form in our age which could possibly fulfill the vital cultural functions of Nietzsche’s beloved tragedy. I submit that Buffy is that art form. In the face of a destructive Nature, Buffy and the Scoobies persist in fighting for this world and they affirm living in it. Joss Whedon, as quoted on the cover of *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, has said that “I think of Buffy as life and I don’t like to think about the end of that. Life doesn’t stop until it does completely. That’s the whole point of the show, that we’re always changing and growing.” Indeed, Toby Daspit, in his essay “Buffy Goes to College” in the *BtVS and Philosophy* collection, notes that for him Buffy is significant because it highlights “an approach to knowledge and education that may be essential for survival in the new millennium” (126). We certainly have a preponderance of violent and destructive demons loosed upon the world now, so perhaps Buffy isn’t so far divorced from everyday life after all.

[14] Los Alamos is as the Hellmouth in the immediate contact with evil and the imminence of destruction. Here the fragile network of human society threatens to be overwhelmed by older and more elemental forces. If Buffy portrays the ongoing battle with evil and possible death then it also depicts the ongoing *living* in the space of the Hellmouth, it addresses the *vie quotidienne* and the mundane aspects of life on the Hellmouth, in proximity to danger. As such, as a work of art, Buffy undertakes the question of life in proximity to mortal danger as one of its central elements. Is this not both exemplary of the tragic worldview and an all-too-apropos reflection for many dimensions of contemporary existence, not to mention finite existence in general? Furthermore, the mortal danger in Buffy comes from supernatural and inhuman sources which are powerful and often destructive. So it is with Los Alamos as well, where both ultimate questions about weapons of mass destruction and everyday concerns about radioactivity and accident coincide. Otherworldly and inhuman

materials and forces are present in both towns. The fabric of the universe itself is at issue in the Buffyverse and Los Alamos.

The Initiative

[15] In both Sunnydale of Season 4 and in Los Alamos from 1943 until today, the clandestine elements of the National Security State have set up massive projects to attempt scientifically to investigate and control supernatural forces. In both cases the enterprise is ambiguous, Janus-faced, presenting one side which emphasizes basic research knowledge and public good, and another, darker side which aims at developing the most dastardly and powerful weapons possible. Also in each case complex ethical questions are raised: does scientific practice somehow push toward destructive ends like this as part of its method, or is the science devoted to such ends corrupted by the contact with the "evil" forces involved?

[16] The Initiative and the Los Alamos National Laboratory—operated by the University of California such that the scientists and engineers are UC staff members—present in similar ways. Both at first glance seem to be made up of university researchers who are engaged in the usual academic pursuits. But, within the outside frame of disinterested research there is another secret frame of reference and research. Muntersbjorn notes that "The Initiative is an underground complex of laboratories and holding cells for vampires and other demons drawn to the Hellmouth under Sunnydale. This massive covert operation is funded by the U.S. government and run by scientists and soldiers who masquerade as professors and students" (92). A similar set-up and masquerade obtains in both the Initiative and in Los Alamos. The Laboratory in Los Alamos is also a distributed complex (43 square miles among forest and town), some of it underground, of laboratories and holding cells for plutonium, uranium, neptunium, and other demons. It is a massive covert operation funded by the U.S. government and run by scientists and soldiers who masquerade as professors and students. Not surprisingly, we learn from the DVD commentary that the Initiative set was in fact the facilities of an operation known as Skunk Works in southern California which made stealth bombers. As the backdrop for the story of a covert operation building demon soldiers, the Buffy team used a site not dissimilar from Los Alamos where the work of National Security had taken place. Many of the facilities in Los Alamos (nuclear accelerators, plutonium metallurgy research labs, space science labs) do in fact bear a striking resemblance to the particular architecture of the Initiative.

[17] But in both cases the masquerade and the deeper purpose are in tension with one another. While the scientific interest may originate in disinterested pursuit of knowledge and be presented as socially beneficial, stepping onto the uncertain ground of investigating supernatural forces reveals the problematic aspects of this interest. As Toby Daspit describes it:

This principle of mastery, of negation, of desire to *know*, manifests itself in Season Four especially through introduction of the Initiative, the secret U. S. military sponsored program supposedly aimed at removing the demon threat through research and rehabilitation. In *knowing* the "true" nature of demons, the Initiative's goal appears to be to "solve" the demon problem. (121)

The Initiative is distinctive not primarily because it is a military operation, but because it is a scientific project charged with *knowing* about demon threat. While clearly the Initiative hopes to control the demon threat and make use of it for strategic purposes, these objectives can only be approached through discovering the nature of the demon realm.

[18] Just so, Los Alamos is distinctive because it is an ongoing project to understand the *atomic* threat. It was the focal point of the Manhattan Project and it saw the emergence of atomic weapons—much like demons slipping from the Hellmouth. While the government hopes to control the atomic threat and use it for military purposes, this can only be done by studying the nature of the atomic realm and the possibilities to unleash tremendous power there. Los Alamos has remained in the grip of this deadly situation ever since. The Cold War saw the growth and boom of the town as more and more weapons were being researched and designed. Even after the Cold War Los Alamos has remained in the business of maintaining and experimenting on old weapons and building and designing new ones. Even more dangerous material is there now than during the height of the Cold War, and Los Alamos stands to inherit even more if it becomes the sole site for the construction, as opposed to merely the design, of American nuclear weapons. All of this, of course, leads to the storage and accumulation of radioactive material and waste which sit like demons in the vaults, crypts, and forests of Los Alamos. Often the materials and forces exceed their containment, as when a charged particle beam from a nuclear accelerator was found to be cascading onto a public roadway that was the route for the town's school buses, or when tritium was found in the town's water.

[19] Nietzsche elaborates Daspit's line of thought about science and its relationship to being and to knowledge. He is concerned with the relationship between science and life and art throughout his writing. In a section from *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* that bears heavily on our considerations here, Nietzsche is troubled by:

A profound illusion that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakeable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is not only capable of knowing being but even of *correcting* it. This sublime metaphysical illusion accompanies science as an instinct and leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into *art*—*which is really the aim of this mechanism*. (96)

According to Nietzsche the quest for understanding the deepest abysses of nature will only bring us again and again to the awareness of our need for art and myth to be able to understand and to withstand being. On the one hand there is the issue of survival which Daspit and Muntersbjorn have raised, and which is certainly relevant for existence in Los Alamos and the nuclear age. On the other hand there is an "epistemological" question. Some questions, some topics of inquiry, are too bracing and too large for us to be able to think directly, and for taking them into consideration we require art and myth. Nietzsche uses truth as an example of something that it is very difficult to think directly. Certainly intense destruction and the survival of the world are such problems as well. For opening them up to reflection artistic and mythological sources like Buffy are crucial. For how does one think the reality of a nuclear war itself?

[20] Nietzsche's reflections are not outright repudiations of science by any means, but considerations of ground that realize that even in science and alongside science there is a crucial ground for art which serves functions of knowledge and of protection. He was already wary of the kind of enterprise the Initiative represents when he was writing. He could have been describing the Initiative when he noted that:

Science, spurred along by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, it suffers shipwreck. . . . When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy. (98)

Adam is logic at the point where it coils and bites its tail. It suffers shipwreck and it can no longer support a coherent meaning of life for him. Or, perhaps better stated, in trying to figure his consistent logical existence, Adam happens upon the premise of destructive Nature. He shares Professor Walsh's vision of constructing an army of hybrid soldiers, but his plan to generate the components and compel participation is even more ruthless than hers. In this respect we might think also about Dr. Strangelove in the film by Stanley Kubrick, who is obsessed by the power of nuclear weapons.

[21] The Manhattan Project is decisive historically both because it was sustained by the same impulse—the use of science and technology to solve all ills—and because in its aftermath this faith was troubled by serious doubts about whether science and reason might themselves give rise to or intensify social ills. The “logic” that Dasplit describes, and that ostensibly undergirds the Initiative, is startlingly close to the deterrence “logic” which has guided research and strategy throughout the nuclear age—that there are evil actors out there who have, or might be developing, ghastly abilities in destruction, so it is imperative for *our own protection* that *we* develop and make use of such abilities. This turn of reason puts us in the uncomfortable position of participating in the same evil that we nonetheless at the same time ostensibly denounce. Clearly, notions of right and wrong and good and evil soon become deeply confused and confounded in this situation. Just as the United States hoped to “defend” against the Soviet Union, so the Initiative seeks to “defend” against the demon threat. The more troubling imperative behind both projects is to develop the implements of U.S. state power, for which the pretense of research and defense provides a ready cover-story.

[22] The history of Los Alamos contains examples of a reckless faith in scientific solutions for dastardly problems that have themselves been created by nuclear enterprise. In one of the most shocking, some Los Alamos scientists suggested burying tons of nuclear waste in a cavern where a hydrogen bomb would be exploded. Theoretically, the neutrons from the explosion would transmute the waste into a more stable and less radioactive form—perhaps in the same way that the chip would render a fierce demon docile. In both cases, demon and waste-bomb, the casual, person-on-the-street observer would instantly see a grave threat which seems to be overlooked by the scientists.

[23] Another obvious problem with the kind of policies pursued by the Initiative and

Los Alamos is that they are predicated on the need for active deception of the populous. While this is hardly new in history, it is an evident problem in a would-be democratic society. We will have more occasion to consider this in a few paragraphs, when we compare the roles of secrecy in the Scooby gang, the Watcher's Council, and the Initiative.

[24] Buffy, via the Initiative, allows us to consider one of the more vexing questions of the nuclear age, whether science itself contains destructive tendencies or whether it has taken on destructive practices as a result of the priorities which have guided it. Daspit describes a moment of existential doubt about science when Riley confronts Adam and tells him "She (Professor Walsh) made you *because* she was a scientist." For Daspit, "That is, the will to mastery intrinsic in modernist scientific inquiry is itself dangerous. Adam simply personifies the danger" (122). One could hardly help being struck by the same impression vis-à-vis Los Alamos, that the drive to understand natural and supernatural forces in the physical sciences is, itself, dangerous. Here we can think of Goethe's Faust and a host of such tales about nature, limits, and human knowledge.

[25] What might it be that characterizes and drives this danger? Beyond the inhumanity of the frame of reference of the forces at hand, issues of method as well may intensify the danger. Daspit describes a "new mathematical and mechanistic cosmology—a scientific one—that came to characterize modernity" which is exemplified especially by Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton (118). This cosmology, as exemplified by these thinkers, casts nature in terms of machines that can be broken down and understood in terms of their constituent parts—we are all familiar with Descartes' clock metaphor for the universe and his belabored discussions of animals (non-human) as no more than machines. It is precisely this reductive, machine model which proves dangerous, according to Daspit, since the drive to understand nature is soon caught up in the desire to imitate it then improve upon it:

When Romantic poet William Wordsworth wrote in "The Tables Turned," "Our meddling intellect/Misshapes the beauteous forms of things; /We murder to dissect," he undoubtedly could not have predicted the excesses that human attempts to understand, and control, "nature" would bring. [. . .] Indeed, in creating her Frankenstein's monster from demon, human, and mechanical parts, (Maggie) Walsh exemplifies the modernist reductionism to which Wordsworth alludes. That is, by "dissecting" demons, then putting together pieces as if solving some jigsaw puzzle, she believes that science can not only understand reality better, but in fact supersede that reality. Walsh and the "powers that be" behind the Initiative intend Adam to be a prototype of a slew of super-soldiers. (122)

In fact, as Muntersbjorn notes, there is no informed consent inside the Initiative—for demons or for humans: Spike and other demons are subject to behavior modification, Riley and the other soldiers are subjected to performance enhancement technologies (technological and drug supplements) and to behavioral modification as well. This is very similar to the now emerging, and sadly ongoing story of uninformed experimentation that is the legacy of the nuclear age and the drive to national security. Eileen Welsome's book *The Plutonium Files* documents thousands of experiments, often carried out by Los Alamos Health Physicists, conducted on

prisoners, mental patients, routine hospital visitors, and soldiers as part of our nation's nuclear "Initiative." Valerie Kuletz and Ward Churchill have documented how Native American Indian populations have oftentimes served as other human guinea pigs for such "research." The goal behind such research? Supposedly to "protect the U. S. and its citizens" through understanding and controlling the nuclear threat, but, like the Initiative, more fundamentally motivated by the drive to obtain military strategic superiority at all costs.

[26] The litany of crazy experiments that were thought up and performed in the Cold War includes many which seem no more far-fetched than the workings of the Initiative on Buffy. As just two of many examples, we can here think of the attempts to use atomic bombs to mine natural gas (the explosions did in fact release the gas from deep underground, but unfortunately it was far too radioactive to be used) and the proposals that hydrogen bomb explosions above the desert could render it into arable land. Buffy even comments explicitly on this legacy, as Muntersbjorn again points out so well:

Buffy saves the world—a lot. But she doesn't do it alone. In "Primeval" the metaphorical reliance of Buffy on her friends becomes literal. Adam's power source is a radioactive uranium core. Willow suggests a "uranium extracting spell," a reach we can measure by considering the cost of this particular "spell" as part of the Manhattan Project. We have yet to experience the full blowback from that Initiative's monster. (100)

Buffy, as an art form, directly portrays and grapples with the demonic aspects of technology, and here Muntersbjorn points out that that aspect, in concert with the show's tragic ethics of perduring a risk-laden life, makes it a source of philosophical reflections about situations that are everyday conditions for us as we live in the world.

Secrecy

[27] The Initiative and Los Alamos share similar uses of secrecy to control and compartmentalize information about their work. Both, as noted before, employ cover stories, and within both there are multiple levels of secrecy and of access. There is no such thing as free-reign in either place. Both are spatially controlled by armed guards, physical security measures, and high-technology devices like retinal scanners and hand-print identification. Access to the different areas and levels depends upon rank and upon need-to-know, which is the general rule of compartmentalization in both sites. There is a general security perimeter at Los Alamos that requires a Q-Clearance to pass, yet even within that enclosure there are a number of areas and groups that are need-to-know and restricted. Just so, general access to the Initiative obviously requires high-level clearance and the passing of retinal and voice scan, yet within the secure area there are restricted locations where only certain persons are allowed. The most secret and dastardly, yet also most obvious, business of the Initiative is contained in 314 (that is, at least until it gets out—it exceeds the laboratory, we might say), where only a few scientists can enter. Monster manufacturing is hidden within the core of the Initiative the way that X-Division (bomb design) is hidden within the core of Los Alamos, behind handprint gates within the already tight security of the first cordon.

[28] Both the Scoobies and the Initiative have a general rule of secrecy about

matters demonic. There is the memorable exchange with Willow when, after finding out about Buffy's role as the Slayer, Xander exclaims that "it's like we have this big secret" ("The Harvest," 1002). Yet the forms of the rules of secrecy are quite different between them. While there is also a kind of need-to-know with the Scoobies, exigency and chance have admitted a wide number of actors into the realm of knowledge about and participation in the demon world—hence Riley's incredulity at the number of people who know about Buffy's role as the Slayer, and the Initiative's inability to understand the role of good or morally ambiguous demons on Buffy's side or in Buffy's contact. For Riley and the commandos, it is a clear matter of classification where only those with clearances can legally know about demons, and where demons are always and inherently bad.

[29] A major contrast in the use of secrecy between the Initiative and the Scoobies is that the access to information in the Initiative is strictly controlled hierarchically and Dr. Walsh is the only one with certain key information. Except for some notable exceptions, such as Buffy's "test" at the hands of the Watcher's Council on her eighteenth birthday ("Helpless," 3012) and the mind-job that Spike initially pulls on the Scoobies in "The Yoko Factor" (4020), for Buffy and the Scoobies information is generally shared and this is often vital to their success. In their sharing of information, discussion, and cooperation, the Scoobies enact the kind of participatory democracy that was in the air at the time of Season 4. During that season antiglobalization protests took place in Seattle in November and in Washington DC in April, with their anarchist emphasis on autonomous decision-making and cooperative action. Recall that Riley tells his commanding officer that he is defecting from the Initiative because, "I'm an anarchist" ("New Moon Rising," 4015). It is noteworthy that the politics of the antiglobalization/global justice movement are critical of exactly the kind of state-based, hierarchical, and military politics that motivates the Initiative, and Los Alamos.

[30] The Scoobies delegate tasks according to ability and according to a standard of voluntary participation in light of full knowledge about the situation. And, whereas the fighting and the research are strictly divided in the Initiative, Buffy will do research, and all of the Scoobies participate in battle at some turn or other. The bureaucracy and the security of the Initiative are predicated upon the notion of restricting information and assigning duties based on limited information—the soldiers and Riley never ask Dr. Walsh the kind of vital questions and details that Buffy does. Buffy's asking of those questions only serves to indicate the gulf between their respective positions on authority and knowledge, and as we know it causes Walsh to see Buffy as a threat to the Project and to turn on her.

[31] It bears noting that the Watcher's Council's philosophy on knowledge and secrecy is essentially parallel to that of the Initiative: a strictly hierarchical organization where knowledge is controlled by rank and where fighting is separated from research. The Council sees the Slayers as the soldiers of their ongoing battle against demons. Sometimes, key knowledges or aspects of information are withheld by the Watcher's Council, leaving the Scoobies in Sunnydale at a disadvantage and in danger. Likewise we might say that the residents of Los Alamos are also withheld critical information that bears on their situation, putting them in danger (tritium in the water, lots of plutonium nearby, the nuclear threat in general).

[32] The Watcher's Council and the Initiative demand loyalty based on laws and backed up by violence. For both of them the soldiers are obligated to follow orders

and carry out missions devised by the researchers. The conflict between this outlook and that of the Scoobies causes Buffy to quit the Council. Needless to say, the cooperative techniques of the Sunnydale group around Buffy are anathema to both the Council and the Initiative. As we know, the Council harbors doubts about Giles and Sunnydale from the beginning, and the Initiative only makes a brief overture to Buffy and Giles before turning against them. Buffy and gang's reflective and cooperative approach stands as a counterpoint to these more authority-centered models.

[33] For the Scoobies loyalty is motivated by shared respect, and generally no one's participation is compelled or deceived. While of course there are considerations about authority and leadership in Sunnydale that persist throughout Buffy ("The Witch's" "And you'll be stopping me how?" [1003] to Season 7's protracted overture by Buffy that she must be the one in control and responsible for everyone), the Sunnydale crew has for the most part rejected the military and hierarchical form of action and decision-making for one that is more distributed and organic. Their secrets are not based on laws and rules, but pragmatism and ethics. Buffy doesn't initially tell her mom Joyce that she is the Slayer not out of obedience to the rules of the Council, but because the difficulty from the disclosure would be onerous for mother and daughter alike. And the Scoobies don't go to the police because the police *can't* know what it is they do, not because the police *shouldn't* know based on some regulations. The activities of the Scoobies are simply outside of the ken and consciousness of most people in their daily lives. As Giles remarks at the end of "The Harvest" (1002), "People have a tendency to rationalize what they can and forget what they can't." They function outside the notice of most people, yet their actions affect the survival and fate of humanity at large. And, although their outlooks are different, it is the same for scientists in Los Alamos, who also function largely outside of notice, but whose work affects the survival and fate of the planet at large.

Conclusion

[34] The startling resemblance between Sunnydale and Los Alamos makes Buffy's ethics and philosophy of life relevant to reflection on the nuclear age and its ongoing threat to us. Even though some might see Buffy as an empty fantasy, we are living in the same kind of recurring danger that she and the Scoobies are. We live side by side with the inhuman as well and it gives to us a permanent risk and reminder of fatality. It is not just the prospect of individual death, but also that of mass death or destruction of the world—the Apocalypse. As such this seems the stuff of theology, but if so it is not otherworldly theology, but that which pertains to the life in this world. How to live in the face of this risk, how to avoid exhaustion and despair and how to maintain touch with joy? This joy is not some hollow emphasis on distraction or titillation, but the deep question, most forthrightly considered by Baruch Spinoza in his *Ethics*, of how to avoid succumbing to fear and despair in our lives. Joy for him is not merely enjoyment, but is deeply tied to our pursuit of knowledge, our constructive social relations, and our ongoing existence in the world.

Bibliography

Churchill, Ward. *Struggle for the Land: Native North American Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Colonization*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2002.

Daspit, Toby. "Buffy Goes to College, Adam Murders to Dissect: Education and Knowledge in Postmodernity." *South* 117-130.

Davis, Mike, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 1998.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *Must We Burn Sade?* Paris: Gallimard, 1955. Trans. Annette Michelson. Rpt in Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*. New York, Grove Press, 1966. 3-64.

Kaveney, Roz, ed. *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, London, Tauris, 2002.

Kuletz, Valerie. *The Tainted Desert: Environmental and Social Ruin in the American West*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Muntersbjorn, Madeline M. "Pluralism, Pragmatism, and Pals: The Slayer Subverts the Science Wars." *South* 91-102.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.

South, James B., ed. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy*. Chicago: Open Court, 2003.

Spinoza, Baruch. *The Ethics*, translated R.H.M. Elwes, New York, Dover, 1955.

Tonkin, Boyd, "Entropy as Demon: Buffy in Southern California," *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Roz Kaveney, London, Tauris, 2002.

Welsome, Eileen. *The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War*, New York, Dial, 1999.

Wilcox, Rhonda V. "Pain as Bright as Steel." Keynote address at Blood, Text and Fears Conference on Buffy the Vampire Slayer, October 2002.

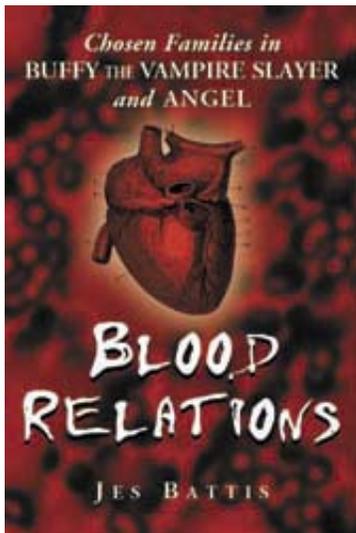
_____. "There Will Never Be a 'Very Special' Buffy: Buffy and the Monsters of Teen Life," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 27:2 (1999): 16-23. Republished in *Slayage 2* (March 2001).

____ and David Lavery, ed. *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.



Jes Battis

Demonic Maternities, Complex Motherhoods: Cordelia, Fred, and the Puzzle of Illyria



"In fact it is not a question of a human incapacity for a state of absolute happiness, but of an ever insufficient knowledge of the complex nature of the state of unhappiness."

Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce* (23)

"I am only bothered because I am bothered."

Illyria, "Timebomb" (5019)

This is chapter five of *Blood Relations: Chosen Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel* © 2005 Jes Battis by permission of McFarland & Company,

Inc., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640 | www.mcfarlandpub.com. You can order the book from Amazon [here](#) or from McFarland [here](#).

Cordelia Chase has what is perhaps the most exotic story arc of any character within *Buffy* or *Angel*. She begins as a self-centered, acerbic, and popularity-obsessed teenager in the first season of *Buffy*, and finishes her tenure on *Angel* as a "higher being", whose last favor to Angel is to remind him that he is capable of leading his extended family without the nefarious resources of Wolfram and Hart. In many ways, Cordelia defines herself in opposition to Buffy, and in just as many ways she resembles the Slayer, and shares her role as mystical protector. Her relationship with Angel, which begins as a slightly predictable romance, deepens over the course of five seasons into a complex familial attachment based on mentorship and unconditional love. And we, as the audience, get to watch Cordelia evolve from the catty teenager who ruthlessly teased Willow, Xander, and even Buffy herself, to the functional "heart" of Angel Investigations, as well as a co-parent to Angel's son, Connor—a relationship whose incestuous elements are indicative of the erotic flexibility that "family" continues to possess within both shows.¹ More than any other character, Cordelia reminds the crew that they are, indeed, family; and, more than any other character, she criticizes, upbraids, and pushes her family-members beyond their

alleged limitations.

(2) This chapter intends to interrogate Cordelia's role as a mother-figure on *Angel* by juxtaposing what I call her "radical ethics of care" against the ambivalent familial position of the character who seems, to me, to be her opposite: Fred. Beginning the series as a socially awkward and painfully shy exile from another dimension—and it really is sentences like these that make me love my job as a cultural critic—Fred's transition into the character known as Illyria, a former "pure" demon with a coldly analytical mind and a strange curiosity for human affairs, is not just a masterwork of acting on Amy Acker's part, but moment of profound fracture within the show. It is one thing for the crew to lose Cordelia, who clearly has duties on a higher plane to fulfill; but it is quite another thing to lose shy, retiring Winifred Burkle, and to lose her so completely, to a consumptive demonic force who still physically resembles the family member that she has effectively murdered.

(3) Both Cordelia and Fred are given storylines that involve aspects of biological motherhood. Cordelia is impregnated by a demon near the beginning of the series ("Expecting," 1012), which serves as a narrative gesture to her more substantial pregnancy in season 4. This pregnancy is the opposite of Darla's—rather than the case of an "inhuman" creature (Darla) producing a healthy human infant, Cordelia is a healthy human who produces a destructive and supernatural offspring. Similarly, Fred's body becomes a site of gestation for Illyria, who uses her as a sort of human cocoon. Both births are monstrous, in that they harm (and, in Fred's case, kill) the mother, while producing something radically different from her in a strange *ex nihilo* fashion, something that wants to destroy her even as it is physiologically nurtured and carried to term by her.

(4) The potential for discussing these monstrous births within a psychoanalytic framework is almost overwhelming, but I don't want to fall into the trap of sketching out fascinating psychological models for these characters which completely divest them of narrative context or emotional significance. I would propose, therefore, a kind of orbital psychoanalytic reading of Cordelia and Fred as mothers—a reading that incorporates some relevant psychoanalytic criticism while staying focused on the *shows* rather than on their instrumental value to Freudian traditions, which really have received enough legitimation through western academic criticism and don't need *Angel* to help them out.

(5) What I want to explore with this discussion is not how these characters might contribute to the towering canon of clinical writing on motherhood, but on how the alternative motherhoods that they represent offer both challenges to, and hybrids of, various critical writings on maternity and mothering within psychoanalytic and literary traditions. I am more interested in exploring the social rather than the psychoanalytic underpinnings of these radical mothering spaces, given that *Angel*, as a television show, draws more self-consciously on previous televisual narratives than it does on the dense and exclusionary writings of Lacan, Jung, or Freud. I would like to propose, then, using the works of Julia Kristeva as a sort of theoretical bridge here, given that she attempts to link textual criticism with clinical psychiatric practices.²

(6) Lest this chapter appear as merely a recapitulation of Chapter 3 on *Buffy* and motherhood, I should stress once again that mothering on *Angel* relies on very different models than on *Buffy*, and that it generally goes to darker and riskier places—with Fred's own fatal labor as a case in point of this. I do not want to suggest that motherhood on *Angel* is somehow more "adult," given that *Angel* itself is supposed to

represent a show about adult relationships. Destructive and ambivalent versions of motherhood should not cohere as adult simply because they are grittier and more interesting, just as it would be insulting to suggest that teen motherhood does not have radical and life-altering consequences. This chapter's goal, then, is to query why biological motherhood is presented primarily as a negative and harmful principle within *Angel*, whereas symbolic and extended-family motherhood—as personified, for example, by Cordelia's role as the crew's unofficial "mother"—is presented as positive and life-affirming.

(7) I do not think the answer is as simple as the fact that *Angel* and *Buffy* both value non-biological family connections over biological ones. It has to be the intersection of generic elements, narrative structures, individual character histories, and audience reception that produces these negative and, at times, frightening simulations of motherhood. And it remains to be seen whether they are, in fact, wholly negative. Although her "birth" effectively results in the death of Fred, the character of Illyria becomes an ambivalent, and at times positive, force within the Angel Investigations crew. And, in a nostalgic sense, Fred's sudden and violent death, like Tara's on *Buffy*, forces the crew to re-cohere as a family.

(8) Her absence is filled in a most interesting way by Illyria, who, despite her homicidal legacy as a kind of fascist demon-princess, is now completely alone, bereft of subjects, stranded on an alien world with her powers severely limited—in many ways, she is as lonely and frightened as Fred must have been when she first landed in the hostile dimension of Pylea.³ What begins as a derision towards human cultural customs on Illyria's part develops, over time, into a knowledge gap that frustrates her, just as Fred's social awkwardness was a site of both frustration and desire in that it forced her to watch from the outside, to linger, a bit like Angel himself, looking in on the warm human dynamics of an extended family she didn't quite know how to penetrate. Illyria's outsidership, although it manifests itself as icy posturing and imperialism-writ-large, is no less predicated on loneliness than was Fred's.

(9) Cordelia is known in both shows for her particular brand of incisive honesty, and Janet Halyfard suggests that her very name is "an ironic equivalent to the Shakespearean Cordelia's unrelenting honesty" (Halyfard, "Greatest Love of All" 2). It is often a self-serving honesty, though, as she tells people what *she* needs them to hear, not necessarily what *they* need to hear. In the early *Buffy* episode "Killed By Death" (2018), Cordelia tells Giles that "tact is just not saying true stuff. I'll pass." In this, she is the opposite of Giles, whose careful speech conveys the brand of civilized liberalism that was discussed in the previous chapter. Later, in the first season of *Angel*, she elaborates on this personal philosophy by stating that "I think it, I say it. That's my way" ("The Bachelor Party," 1007).

(10) Cordelia's truth-telling abilities are interesting, particularly because they have more to do, I think, with cultural entitlement than with a pressing need for honesty. Unlike the character of Drogyn, who is mystically required to tell the truth—a fact that annoys Spike to no end—Cordelia simply chooses to tell the truth (most of the time) because she feels it is her "way." She uses this entitlement to openly criticize Angel, Wesley, Gunn, and, to a lesser extent, Fred and Lorne, using creative epithets ranging from "lunkhead" to "proto-loser." I have to wonder where this entitlement comes from, and how it aligns with Cordelia's later role as a mother. Does her ability to craft honest and unsparing speech in any way presage her ability to produce a child? Are the two related? And how does this compare to Fred's halting, unclear, and

hesitant relationship with "true" speech-acts?

(11) I suppose the question I'm really asking here is whether *veracity*, traditionally held up as a "masculine" model of speech, has some influence on these characters as mother figures—that is, whether their varied uses of speech somehow make them vulnerable to the destructive forces that invade their bodies, and whether this invasion is not, after all, a silencing of their speech.

(12) In the first few seasons of *Buffy*, Cordelia's above-mentioned entitlement is more of a license to ridicule, and its origins seem somewhat obvious. Her first comment to Buffy in "Welcome To The Hellmouth" (1001) is that "you'll be okay here. . . if you hang with me and mine," and later, upon seeing Willow's plain outfit, she 'compliments' her on having "seen the softer side of Sears."⁴ That Cordelia so casually harnesses the language of advertising here to ridicule Willow is, I think, testament to her secure knowledge that the advertising itself is on *her* side. Cordelia's entitlement, then, is implicated with her status as an upper-middle-class teenager who can afford to shop at Bloomingdales rather than Sears, and who conceptualizes L. A. as a Mecca of shoes rather than a haven for vampires. She has, like most teenagers who have never experienced poverty, conflated her economic status with her license to deliver the truth.

(13) In this instance, it is more the truth about people's outfits than any sort of sweeping moral observations, but it remains disturbing that Cordelia's knowledge of what it means to be "true" is inextricably bound to her knowledge of what it means to be rich, so that her searing critiques of other people's lives and lifestyles emerge squarely from her visible privilege. She is therefore at her most classist when she upbraids Xander and Faith, who are constructed as opposing working-class models⁵, and who visually as well as culturally clash not just with her concept of "cool," but with her idea of what a legitimate "person" could be.

(14) When Cordelia discovers that her new L.A. apartment is infested with cockroaches—as well as, we learn later, a nasty poltergeist—she laments to Angel that "my apartment. . . is like the barrio—or the projects or whatever, and I live there! I'm the girl from the *projects*" ("Room With a View," 1005). Two things are clear from this statement. The first is that Cordelia has probably never been to a poor Latin-American or African-American neighborhood, and that her knowledge of the terms "barrio" and "projects" are limited to what she has seen on television. The second is that her white, middle-class sensibilities have allowed her to conveniently conflate one racialized space for another, primarily because she, as a privileged white woman, sees no reason to differentiate between the two. The "projects" are as exotic to her as any of the strange dimensions that Angel or Wesley have told her about, and her chances of entering that neighborhood are about as slim as her chances of leaping into the Hellmouth.

(15) Angel, who spent his days as a human pretending to be an Irish working-class man—when he was actually an aristocrat wasting his father's money on drinking—seems to have no problem with Cordelia's appropriation of these loaded terms. In actual fact, the two come from quite similar economic backgrounds. The only difference between them is that Cordelia moved from the financial stability of her parents' home to the (relative) financial stability of Angel Investigations, whereas Angel himself has experienced material poverty to the point that he had to forage through dumpsters and feed on rats.

(16) I am raising the issue of poverty here because I think that *Angel*, unlike *Buffy*, is

more thoughtful in its presentation of financial instability, and that Cordelia remains a sort of middle-class core standing in opposition to these sub-stories of economic inequality and differential access. It is clear that Angel, like most people who have directly experienced poverty or who regularly live below the poverty line, has internal as well as external poor-bashing⁶ to deal with. His drive to remain financially viable through Angel Investigations, as well as his desire to financially provide for Connor, is in part a result of internalized critiques around poverty, and his inexpressible shame at having been, however many years ago, hungry and homeless. Unlike Gunn, who seems to have been poor for most of his life, but has responded to this poverty by mobilizing communities of access and aid throughout his neighborhood, Angel has taken the 'disavowal' tact and chosen to concentrate on reacquiring financial stability rather than building bridges with other poor communities.

(17) I am aware that this statement might sound a bit heavy-handed. Who, after all, is Angel supposed to reach out to? Other poor vampires? Working-class demon communities? It may seem like I'm criticizing him for not being some sort of outreach worker when, in fact, nothing within the show's narrative points to the idea that he *should* adopt such a role. This is, after all, a fantasy show—not a documentary about poverty in L.A. But the fact remains that L.A., unlike the mythical Sunnydale, is a real locus of economic inequality, and a space within which multiple poor neighborhoods compete with each other, while spectacularly rich neighborhoods define themselves in visual opposition to what they conceptualize as the "barrio" and the "projects."

(18) Gunn and Angel are the only characters on the show who have any idea of what outrageous material inequalities actually exist within such a metropolitan space, yet Gunn's poorness is a 'matter-of-fact' signifier that becomes troublingly conflated with his blackness⁷, while Angel's poor history is something that he only talks about or revisits against his will—as in the dream sequence between Angel, Faith, and Angelus, when Angel's dark counterpart ridicules "poor Angel" by saying that "his fingers never smelled of anything but rat! I'm so sorry. I give up. I'm gonna live in a sewer!" ("Orpheus," 4015). He is referring here to the image of Angel wandering, homeless, through the streets of L.A., but he also connects Angel's poverty with "hiding," which is yet another erasure of real poverty in favor of what Anya might call "metaphor poverty." The only characters in *Angel* who have experienced poverty, then, almost never complain about being (or having been) poor, while Cordelia, who has never actually been poor, complains about her lack of financial stability all the time. This comes back to her cultural entitlement as a middle-class white woman to manipulate "truth," which, in this case, is an appropriation of actual lived poverty for the purpose of feeling "barrio," of feeling like the "helpless" that Angel Investigations is supposed to be helping, despite the fact that all of those "helpless" who walk through the door seem to have the financial means to pay for the crew's services.

(19) Why this digression into Cordelia's co-option of poor narratives, or poor experience? And why just Cordelia? Fred, after all, comes from a firmly middle-class background, a white nuclear family that both emotionally and financially supports her, and that background should link her to Cordelia's experience of privilege. Yet both characters "perform" their privilege in very different ways, and Cordelia is much more vocal about her cultural entitlements than Fred is. I want this discussion of poverty, background, and home-life to provide a framework for treating both Cordelia and Fred as mother figures who experience quite different "births." I think that their arcs as

characters, and their exits from the show, are critically informed by the spaces of privilege that they have been allowed to occupy, as well as their means for articulating that privilege—relentless verbosity, in the case of Cordelia, and embarrassment or guilt in the case of Fred.⁸

(20) These characters' middle-class backgrounds, their whiteness, and their unique discursive strategies all combine to make them appropriate mother-subjects for a correlatively white, middle-class audience. They are coded as "acceptable" mothers, even if their progeny are supernatural and destructive, and to replace them with a working-class, African-American mother, or—even more unlikely on network television—a working-class Latina mother, would be an unacceptable and indeed unwatchable prospect to that same audience.⁹ Their backgrounds, then, are cultural scripts that allow them access to televisual motherhood, but that motherhood has very different manifestations for them which align with their different experiences, and articulatory strategies, of privilege.

(21) Cordelia, who is a vocal advocate of her own privilege, creates a fully-formed supernatural being, Jasmine, who attempts (shockingly) to control the world. Fred, on the other hand, who internalizes her own privilege and cannot express it except in terms of insecurity and social awkwardness, has her body devoured from the inside by the demon Illyria, and ends up metamorphosing into the character who, I think, represents the staunchest and most objective critic of humanity and human affairs on *Angel*. But why in this symbolic framework does *acceptance* of privilege produce a destructive side-effect, namely Jasmine, while allowing Cordelia to live, but *ambivalence* around privilege results in the death and subsequent "evil" transformation of Fred?

(22) I should state here that I have not presented these poles—acceptance vs. ambivalence of privilege—as master guidelines for discussing Cordelia and Fred as characters, or even for discussing them as mother-figures. Both have complex narratives, as well as inconsistent and therefore human practices of social interaction, and neither are reducible to their race or economic background. But I do think that *Angel* sets up a serious paradox in the background with these arcs, suggesting, however unconsciously, that the character who embraces her privilege (Cordelia) gets to become a higher being and exit *Angel* as an overwhelmingly positive force, whereas the character who is conflicted about her privilege—and who finds herself in an interracial relationship (with Gunn)¹⁰—ends up getting possessed by a millennia-old demon who wants only to enjoy the imperial and luxurious existence that she had thousands of years ago. Cordelia's essence, her soul, remains coherent, while Fred's soul is "consumed by the fires of resurrection" ("Shells," 5016). Only Illyria is left—Illyria, who is morally, as well as visually, the opposite of Fred's essential "Fredness." And yet, the two maintain a connection with each other, and can even appear, at times, as the same person. The message here is more than a little baffling, to say the least.

(23) As I have stated earlier, these "births" are both negative, in that they produce destructive forces rather than healthy offspring. Therefore, it is not as if Cordelia's birth, as a result of her experience of privilege, is somehow rewarding—it does, after all, land her in a coma. In some ways, we can even see the "birth" of Illyria as a kind of reward, given that Fred, although she is radically different, gets to "live on" through Illyria, whereas Cordelia is taken outright from the show, and receives no interesting blue-haired reincarnation with a penchant for wearing tight leather armor.

But it is still the case that Cordelia's offspring, Jasmine, is never meaningfully connected with the "real" Cordelia. The pregnant Cordelia who schemes against Angel Investigations, who drives a wedge between Angel and Connor, and who even kills Lilah¹¹, effectively vanishes the moment that Jasmine is killed and "true" Cordy wakes up from her coma. Illyria, on the other hand, is a living reminder that "true" Fred is gone, and that only this false and malevolent copy remains. Fred/Illyria become a joined mother/daughter subjectivity, a dual being whose constituent essences are inseparable; Cordelia is never so intimately connected with her evil child, and is remembered as the healthy, vibrant Cordy that everyone knew best. She has no protracted and wrenching death scene like Fred, and her exit is classically cinematic—she simply vanishes—in stark opposition to Fred's physically violent struggles with a cancer-like illness that liquefies her internal organs.¹²

(24) In fact, it is Jasmine's body that becomes the symbolic register for these images of corruption, contagion, and illness. It is Jasmine whose physical beauty masks a putrid and decomposing reality, and whose physical fight with Angel allows her to be visually destroyed, and thus contained, in a way that Fred's illness can never be. Jasmine becomes a metonymic substitute for Cordelia's negative qualities, her selfishness, her cruelty, and thus allows Cordelia to effectively be reborn as a true "higher being," while all of the literal, as well as symbolic, darkness within her is expunged through the birthing process and then eradicated through Jasmine's death. The prospect of a black woman, Jasmine, being not just the supernaturally evil "child" of an enlightened white woman, but also being a site of abjection and scapegoating for white negativity, is as disturbingly racist as it is infuriatingly common within white literature and cultural production. The black body has historically been a locus of traumatic transfer, a site for the breakdown and dispersal of white anxiety around erotic, as well as ideological, scripts, and this symbolic exchange is evident within all sorts of media.

(25) Hazel Carby describes this process at length in her book *Race Men* (2002), and locates it as a complex psycho-historical project of the "western" world that has been operating practically from the first moment of European contact. We can see it visualized clearly in white cultural production—for example, the miscegenation fears in a 'classic' text like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*; the disturbing sex/death imagery that surrounds the black serial killer in the 1990s horror film *Candyman*; and the more recent cinematic offering *O*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, whose eponymous black character begins the film as a successful and highly eroticized athlete only to become a destitute murderer before the last reel. All of these media encode the "negrophilia/negrophobia" binary discussed by Kobena Mercer, which is an "aesthetic idealization and erotic investment in the racial other that inverts and reverses the binary axis of the fears and anxieties invested in or projected onto the other in 'negrophobia'" (Mercer 191). Thus, the necessary white containment of black bodies in visual media, as well as text, must always carry with it an equalizing "scopophilia" of the black body, a hyper-eroticizing or hyper-finessing of it, which serves as a surface fixation and visual incarceration of the bodies that are deemed most threatening to white corporeality.

(25) This "idealization/anxiety" clearly operates around the character of Jasmine, who is fetishized for her supernatural beauty, and whose enthralling of scores of white people—including the Angel Investigations crew—constructs her as the stereotypically

seductive black woman who uses her beauty as a discursive weapon. That she even manages to "seduce" Gunn, a black man, is a kind of ironic testimony to her powers of thrall, as well as a suggestion that Gunn's blackness is, as it has been historically constructed by white audiences, is a kind of moral weakness rather than a form of racial solidarity. Jasmine states that her followers are "my eyes, my skin, my limbs, and, if need be, my fists" ("Sacrifice," 4020), summoning up the image of a monstrous mother who has organically absorbed her "children," and who, even more threateningly, is able to strike out at "normal" people—being constructed here as 'not Jasmine,' and hence, by extension, as 'not black'—by co-opting their very bodies and inciting revolt. This idea of an organic, as well as an ideological, invasion by an "othered" character is made all the more troubling by the fact that a white woman produces this other, and a white man (Angel) ultimately destroys her. Both characters act like normalizing white bookends to Jasmine's chaotic and vitiating black presence, her monstrous maternity that is threatening to destroy the world through enforced love and servitude.¹³

(26) Both Jasmine and Cordelia are 'essentially' mothers, which complicates things, since we have a mythical scenario of a mother being impregnated by another supernatural person (Connor), and then producing a full-grown and seemingly maternal "child." If we try to mobilize Julia Kristeva's theories of motherhood and abjection (*l'abjection*) here, it seems that Jasmine represents a frightening collision of idealized speaking-subjectivity with maternal and consuming "pre-speech," and thus needs to be contained and destroyed in order for the characters around her to continue on with their rational existence—otherwise, they might be swept into the ominous space of Jasmine's "love," which serves, in Kristevan terms, as a site for the dissolution of "speaking" subjectivity and the reassertion of a more poetic, flexible, and prenatal space, a consciousness before official consciousness.

(27) This is not the space that a character like Angel, clearly in possession of his rational faculties, would ever endorse, although the show's privileging of emotional connections and interpersonal relationships actually gestures towards a valorization of this poetic mothering space. Perhaps this is why Jasmine needs to be destroyed—so that *Angel* can continue to celebrate mothering-connections while firmly distancing itself from the possibility that it might ever become "just" a show about mothering, or "just" a series of emotional and affective narratives.¹⁴

(28) I have previously quoted Kristeva as describing the process of abjection, of distancing oneself from a seemingly horrifying presence, as "above all a revolt against an external menace from which one wants to distance oneself, but of which one has the impression that it might menace us from the inside. The relation to abjection is finally rooted in the combat that every human being carries on with the mother" (Kristeva, *Interviews* 118). In a western world that privileges literary communication, coded historically as masculine and described by the semiotician Jacques Derrida as "grammatology"—the valorization of written narratives over other forms of extra-linguistic communication, including oral traditions and body language—the mother continues to psychologically represent an erasure of language, a return to prelinguistic consciousness, which brings with it an unbalancing of this narrative privilege. We distance ourselves from "non-rational" modes of communication, from a sort of maternal dialogism, not simply because we believe in the efficacy of the narrative sign, but because we cohere as humans in part *because of* the narrative sign. If we lose our narrative, we lose our humanity, and that humanity needs to

preserved textually in order for it to be culturally legible, and valuable, within the confines of western historical and literary production.

(29) When Jasmine says scathingly to Angel, "look what free will has gotten you" ("Peace Out," 4021), it is clear that the unconditional love and support that she offered needs now to be recontextualized as coercion and confinement. The only legible sort of love and support that remains within the show's universe is the imperfect and sometimes faltering love of the crew itself, who buttress and hold each other in their own flawed and unique ways. Jasmine's rationalization that "I murdered thousands to save billions" is, in a crucial way that the show never examines, an analytical re-presentation of Angel's own mission statement.

(30) The crew, after all, kill "bad" demons to save "good" humans, and often have to rationalize who gets to live and who has to die on a utilitarian basis of what outcome will produce the most "good." Much of what Jasmine wanted to do is actually in line with Angel's own moral code, and she is right to suggest that he has "eaten" his fair share of people, just as she has. But Jasmine's vision of paradise on earth remains highly flawed, while Angel's musings on the possibilities of a world protected by heroes, a world where the helpless can actually be helped, remains somehow coherent and positive. It is, I think, the disavowal not merely of Jasmine's principles, but of her foreign and dangerous body, that allows Angel's moral compass to reassert itself, and which effectively resignifies the efficacy of his "helping the helpless" project by defining it in opposition to Jasmine's project—which we might as well call "eating the helpless." In the process, Angel gets to expel the black woman who doesn't belong, Cordelia regains consciousness—never giving a lot of thought to such questions as, *how did I produce an evil cannibalizing black woman?*—and normalcy reasserts itself. Normalcy, of course, whose final expression is Cordelia's canonization and death, thus erasing all trace of the foreign other by reasserting the privilege and efficacy of the white mother.¹⁵

(31) While Cordelia's stint with motherhood results in an ultimate absence, Fred's is the exact opposite, producing an overabundant and exotic surplus of presence in the form of Illyria. This "Old One" is one of the original demons, a pure-blooded monster who walked the earth millennia ago and amused herself by murdering and torturing just about anyone that she met. "I walked worlds of smoke," she tells Wesley, "and half-truths, intangible. Worlds of torment and of unnamable beauty. Opaline towers as high as small moons. Glaciers that rippled with insensate lust" ("Underneath," 5017). Her formal and coldly aristocratic language is an inversion of Fred's stammering speech, her fixed glare an inversion of Fred's wandering eyes and crinkled smile, and nothing that she says, with its echoing and authorial tones, can come close to the warm sincerity of Fred's breathless first address to Angel: "handsome man saved me from the monsters" ("Through the Looking Glass," 2021). Later, when the "true" Fred is gone, and Angel finds himself up against the impossibly old and far-reaching evil of the Order of the Black Thorn, he wistfully repeats her words to Spike. Their grammatical inconsistency, their strangeness, nonetheless contain a crucial truth that Illyria's speech can only emulate without ever reproducing.

(32) I should admit that I have a bit of an infatuation with Illyria as a character. Fred took a long time to grow on me, and I didn't especially appreciate her role among the crew until she was abruptly stripped of it, taken away, leaving being something that nobody—not even the most dedicated of spoiler-loving fans—could expect. I was fascinated by Illyria, however, the moment that I first saw her, emerging from the

ground where Fred had just died, looking slowly, curiously, at her hands, and saying with an air of cruel dispassion: "This will do" ("A Hole In the World," 5015). That Fred, lovely Fred, was, to Illyria, simply something that would "do", something to fit her essence temporarily, is a horrifying idea. Yet, who can argue with this strange blue-haired person standing where Fred used to be, speaking in a cold register that Fred herself could never have managed while alive, and looking more resigned at her new body than surprised, or even disoriented?

(33) Of course, *Buffy* and *Angel* have a long history of introducing characters whose rehabilitation, or rather, re-humanization, seems impossible (Spike, Anya, even, at times, Angel), only to grant them human-status after a long, uphill battle. But I could tell, and I'm sure that most of the audience could tell with me, that this was a rather different situation. Illyria was not, was never, going to be anything close to Fred. She was not going to renege on her evil ways and join the crew in their good fight, at least not in a way that was morally simplistic. This was something that neither show had ever done before—killing a character and replacing her with a completely different character who was her absolute opposite, but who could look and behave just like her as a sort of vindictive simulation of the "shell" that had given birth to her.

(34) There is a moment, before Fred dies, when Spike, gazing at the Deeper Well which leads all the way to the center of the earth, observes that "there's a hole in the world. Feels like we ought to have known." In truth, both have known that hole, and known it intimately—both have felt Buffy's death, grieved for her, and then come to accept her return in unique ways. But this is a different sort of hole. This is the staggering possibility that someone, a loved someone, could disappear and not come back—or come back wrong. It is a terrible inverse of Buffy's resurrection, only, instead of bringing back some phantasmal after-effect ("Afterlife," 6.03), what comes back is a seemingly corrupted version of Fred herself. Both vampires know, in this moment, that they've lost. That Fred is gone. But what remains?

(35) When Wesley first speaks to Illyria, she is astonished at his boldness. "I thought the humans would have long died out by now" ("Shells," 5016) she says, duplicating the demonic hubris—and critical underestimation of human resilience—that many creatures before her on *Buffy* and *Angel* have been guilty of. Wesley tries to use this arrogance against her, telling her that "humans rule the earth. . . crying and sweating and puking their feelings all over you. Go back. Sleep." But, as with future conversations that she will have with Wesley, Illyria sees through his attempts at deception. It does not take long for Illyria to become a version of Cordelia, giving everyone the cold and honest truth whether they want it or don't. Unlike Cordelia, however, who knows who she is and what she has to do, Illyria is directionless. She is actually in much the same position that Buffy was in when she first returned from the grave, not knowing what is expected of her, not understanding what she's supposed to say or do, and experiencing the world as a kind of assault. Buffy describes her waking life as "hard and bright and violent" ("Afterlife," 6003), and Illyria describes it as "too small. . . it's too small. I can't breathe" ("Underneath," 5017).

(36) My connection with Illyria here is more than scholarly. I have dealt with depression for most of my life, and I understand very well what it feels like to be rootless, directionless, unable to cope with the world because it all seems like a violent intrusion, as if even other people's kindness is unbearable. Buffy says that, although she doesn't "know about theology, or dimensions," she does know that "I was happy. At peace . . . I was warm . . . and I was loved. . . and I was

finished" (6003). That is, until her friends brought her back to earth, where nothing makes sense anymore. Buffy's strange and disorienting apathy after being brought back from this place, her detachment from the people who matter most to her, is a process that most people with depression, clinical or otherwise, can relate to. But Illyria's detachment, her almost existential anxiety, is also a stage of depression. It is one of the deepest and most difficult stages to escape from, where feeling has literally run out, and there is only an absence, only a "hole in the world," left. Illyria's modulated voice, her rolling eyes, her cold posture and visible disengagement from everyone and everything around her, all reflect a critical kind of depression that is difficult to explain to people who haven't experienced it, and which serves as a terrible reminder to people who have.

(37) I am not suggesting here that Illyria's demonic angst at having been torn from her millennia-long slumber is somehow equal to the experience of clinical depression. But I am suggesting that her disconnection, her apathy, like Buffy's when she is initially brought back to life, remains something that people who have experienced depression can relate to. I connected first with Illyria not because she was impressive or beautiful, or even because she was somehow still Fred, but because she was sad. And the more I thought about that sadness, the more I wondered if it had not, after all, existed in Fred to begin with—if it had not seeped slowly into her physiology, her genetic makeup, and thus been somehow transmitted "in utero" to Illyria.

(38) I suggest this because I know that Illyria isn't sad for having killed Fred, and I suspect that the depth of her dispassion cannot be explained away as a hatred for the human world, or a longing for her previous life as an omnipotent demon. No—I think that Illyria, after a fashion, becomes a mirror for Fred's own living sadness, her outsidership, her social awkwardness that could never be suitably smoothed away by Wesley, Gunn, or even Angel.¹⁶ And she also reflects the grief of Fred's family, who come to fixate on Illyria, to hate her even as they desire her, because she looks and seems so much like what they have lost.

(39) Once she asks Wesley for help, saying that "I must learn to walk in this world" (5017), Illyria begins her transformation into what I think of as a surrogate Cordelia. By virtue of her outsidership, she is given license to ask questions, difficult questions, that even Cordelia wouldn't have approached. She has the experience, the unnaturally long life, that Cordelia was never given, along with the detachment and curiosity to ask even morbidly inappropriate questions at, generally, the worst possible time. This is somewhat like Anya's questioning as well, only Anya's tends to be innocent and bemused, while Illyria's questioning is direct and interrogative, unconcerned by human attachments or proprieties. When Joyce dies, Anya confesses that she can't comprehend human grief, saying that "I don't understand how all this happens. . . Joyce will never have any more fruit punch ever, and she'll never have eggs, or yawn or brush her hair, not ever, and no one will explain to me why" ("The Body," 5016). Yet Anya's question becomes a plea. She has stakes in the answer—she cares. Illyria's interest is entirely clinical when she asks Wesley if there is "anything in this life but grief?" (5017). Wesley answers to the best of his ability, but Illyria remains skeptical. She has the luxury of skepticism because she doesn't need, or want, to believe in anything more powerful than herself.

(40) I am tracing Illyria's evolution as a critical force on *Angel*, here, because I think that it relates to both Cordelia and Fred's positions and tenure within their extended family. If Illyria is indeed a replacement for Cordelia, who can actually push Cordelia's

line of questioning farther, who can interrogate humanity because she has never known what it is to be human, then her "birth" seems to represent a kind of closing of the family circle. Illyria is the strange fused knot that replaces Fred and Cordelia, the presence left behind who is flexible and ambivalent enough to fill both of their absences, however incongruous that might seem. She unlocks all of the doubt, the sadness, the incomprehension, and the fundamental sense of exile that existed in Fred's character all along, giving it the sort of voice and entitlement that only Cordelia could manage. She is, thus, a hybrid of both dead characters, a version of Fred who speaks like Fred never could, and a version of Cordelia who continues to describe her own privilege, her own sense of specialness, while remaining divorced from human concerns and interactions in a way that Cordelia never could.

(41) This leaves us, then, with two ways of classifying Illyria as a hybrid character. Given that Fred didn't say enough about her entitlement as a white, middle-class woman, and that Cordelia said *too much* about her privilege, we can see Illyria as the logical balancing act to these competing models of privilege. Fred, in this sense, is the only likely candidate to produce someone like Illyria, because her shyness, her ambivalence around her own social position, serves as an unspoken threat to middle-class values. Illyria is the containment of this threat—the living embodiment of the privilege that Fred could never quite articulate, and the "finished" model of imperialist entitlement, given a demonic register to operate within so that it avoids any complicit connection with actual human avarice. Illyria, like Jasmine, gets to act as the absorption site for western anxiety around racist colonial scripts, made clear by her demeaning classification of humans and her self-aggrandizement as demonic royalty. Fred *has* to produce Illyria, because Illyria represents her privileged shadow, the parts of her that she has disowned, whereas Cordelia has already accepted, even embraced, those parts. Thus Cordelia creates a monster that can be contained, whereas Fred produces a monster that still *is* Fred, that cannot be destroyed because it is intimately a part of her.¹⁷

(42) If we accept this hypothesis, then Illyria is, in a sense, Fred's punishment for being an ambivalent middle-class citizen. The corporate elements of Cordelia's personality are rewarded, since she gets to leave in a blaze of glory—still uncorrupted—while Fred must remain trapped in the monster that she has somehow created, the demon that her body has nourished, and the psychic manifestation of all her most negative and harmful qualities. As if this were not enough, she, Fred/Illyria, must exist between worlds, not a "true" demon but nowhere close to human, suffering from mortal vulnerabilities but possessed of a demonic consciousness, an Old One's context, which encompasses worlds and dimensions that poor Winifred Burkle could never understand. Illyria is a specter, a shade, a vestige of everything that Angel and family try to disavow on a daily basis, but can't. And now she is one of them. Her reintegration into the crew represents a reincorporation of divested hostility, an acceptance of anger, shame, and doubt, that must ultimately make the crew stronger. So it really is a closing of the family circle after all.

(43) But I also believe that Illyria has another, less abstract purpose as a character, another equally important role to fill. She embodies loss. She is a living absence, a representation of the confusion and debris that death leaves behind. Just as we often see aspects of someone who has recently died in the people who remain, so do Cordelia and Fred's family see constant reminders of their loved ones whenever they look at Illyria, whenever they hear her voice, or watch her walking away. "You are a

summation of recollections" ("Origin," 5018), she tells Wesley, and her comment is more accurate than she knows, for Illyria has become a memorial archive to both Cordelia and Fred. She is the material absence of what their deaths left behind, the excess that can't be rationalized or dealt with simply.

(44) But she is also a space of hope, because she does, after all, learn. She does approach an understanding of humanity, and a curious appreciation that only someone not sure if they even want to *be* human could possibly experience. There is something of Fred still inside of Illyria, and that teaches her, more than Wesley can, about the wonder of feeling, of engaging with the world, of asking questions and *caring* about the answers. It is not a birth, but more of a growing up, a growing into being human, that allows Illyria to experience the inverse of Cordelia's transformation—she transitions from an omnipotent force into a vulnerable human, rather than the other way around. The miraculous thing is that, although it confuses and terrifies her, part of Illyria is pleased by what she is becoming.

(45) When Wesley tries to bring Fred back—in effect destroying Illyria—his plan backfires. Still, he asks her, almost conversationally, "does it sting you. . . my betrayal?" ("Timebomb," 5019). Illyria's reply is fascinating: "I am only bothered because I am bothered." Emotional engagement comes slow to her, and she has never before experienced the sensation of being bothered by something, of being connected to something rather than existing in a state of cold dispassion. She is, in a sense, going backward even as she goes forward, "growing up" by reaccessing the confusing turmoil of emotions that only really exist in adolescence. She calls Wesley her "guide," but he is really a father-figure, seemingly educating her about cultural customs and earthly ephemera when, in reality, he is actually trying to teach her how to be human. At first, it is a uniquely *human* failing of Wesley's that motivates him to do this, because he hopes that the process will somehow bring Fred back. But in the end, he continues to teach Illyria for reasons that he cannot entirely fathom, just as she continues to listen, to learn, for reasons that she can't quite put into words.

(46) "You are what I don't understand," she tells Wesley ("Not Fade Away," 5022). And that is an apt summation of their relationship. When he discovers that Illyria can change her form to appear exactly like Fred, he angrily tells her: "Don't be *her*. Don't ever be her" ("The Girl In Question," 5021), yet he still sees Fred in Illyria, still acknowledges that she is what's left. He insists that "the first thing a Watcher learns is to separate truth from illusion" (5022), but is the audience so adept at this? Is it really possible to separate Illyria from Fred, to avoid the tempting thought that Fred could somehow still return, or that Illyria could be suitably rehabilitated into something more human, something tender and compassionate and wholly new? This uncertainty, this hesitation, is what makes Fred's death even more difficult to deal with than Joyce's, because Joyce was gone—even when it seemed like Dawn might resurrect her, the result never cohered; even when a likeness of her appeared later in the episode "Conversations With Dead People" (7007), it was still clear that she was gone. But Fred is never really gone, never *gone gone*, as Buffy might say, because Illyria remains as her ambiguous substitute. She is the materialization of grief that forces the Angel Investigations family to process their sadness, but she is also an illusion, a temptation. And the audience must let go of this illusion, just as Wesley must. Her presence exhorts us to labor, and we cannot fully appreciate her as a character until we accept that Fred is, indeed, *gone gone*.

(47) Still, it is an illusion that Wesley requests as he is dying, and Illyria delivers it.

"Would you like me to lie to you now?" (5022) she asks quietly, and Wesley replies "yes. Thank you. Yes" with a smile. This is no simple lie, though. As Illyria transitions smoothly into Fred's old form, smiling that Burkle smile, Wesley knows that it is not *just* Fred that he is seeing. He knows that it is both Illyria and Fred, and that he must say goodbye to both of them, because he has grown close to Illyria, intimate even, in much the same way that he grew close to Fred. Their attachment is more complex, but it is an attachment all the same. Wesley does not say "I love you Fred," but simply "I love you," speaking to Illyria and Fred at the same time. And Illyria responds to Wesley's death in a way that is both human and demonic—when Vail, the demon-mage who killed Wesley, tells her to "take your best shot," she calmly, but with a look of unmistakable satisfaction, drives her fist through his skull.

(48) Does Illyria become human? Or "sort of" human? Her last words are "I wish to do more violence," which doesn't suggest that she has embraced an ethic of compassion. But this violence, unlike passionless demonic violence, has an emotional source: her grief over Wesley's death. Her reaction, then, is a seamless hybrid of demon/human, a rationalization that violence must follow grief, and that killing will somehow expunge the leveling power of sadness that she feels. It is the feeling itself that she wants to kill, not the monsters, or the Order of the Black Thorn, or any other corporeal adversaries. It is grief that she wants to do violence to, and even Illyria, confused as she is about her own evolving humanity, knows that this is impossible. But her urge to try, to flout impossibility, to revolt, is also uniquely human. So perhaps Wesley did teach her something after all—something that stuck.

(49) I admit that this chapter has meandered more than a little. I wanted to discuss the mothering roles of Cordelia and Fred, as well as what I conceptualized as the specific spaces of privilege, and their relation to those spaces, that influenced what sort of "births" they would experience. My original idea was that Cordelia, by virtue of her acknowledged and comfortable privilege, was able to create a monster that could be easily subdued, whereas Fred, whose relationship to her own privilege was more ambivalent, needed to create something that ultimately consumed her. Illyria was thus, within this framework, a punishment for Fred's inability to articulate her position, her shyness, her instability as a middle-class subject. Both characters were coded as suitable candidates for motherhood, given their backgrounds, but both needed to produce very different progeny as a result, with Fred's conception being also a containment of her threatening ambivalence, and thus a spectacular corporealization of imperialist values which could then be deferred onto Illyria's phantasmal and negative body.

(50) But the more we look at these births, the more complex they seem. That Cordelia produces a black woman, Jasmine, who must then be contained and destroyed, is to me a troublingly racist ideation that needs to be explored more fully within a framework of critical race studies. It remains peculiar that both characters are unconventional mother-figures, with Cordelia often being more vindictive than maternal, and Fred often being too reserved and inarticulate to express her true loyalty to the crew. Yet both manage to produce powerful and confusing "children" who end up ultimately destroying the vessels that gave them life. If there is a message here, it seems to be that motherhood is a prospect that destroys the maternal body, and that physiological birth—as in the case of both Cordelia and Darla—can only lead to death.¹⁸ On the flip side, "death" itself, or a destructive force like Illyria, is able to gestate within Fred's body, using her up, and emerging stronger

because of her.

(51) I don't think that these are the only options, or that *Buffy* and *Angel* conceptualize birth as an immediate presage of death. I do think that both shows like to create anxiety that is as complex as possible, and that the only thing that could make dealing with a characters' death more difficult is to introduce the idea of birth, to suggest that they might not really be dead. As Joss Whedon says when discussing the episode "The Body," "grief is boring." It is about getting through each hour, each day, and on the outside it appears simple, but on the inside it remains a constant negotiation of wonderful illusions with cruel and edged realities. These "births" are not just wrenches thrown into the works in order to complicate what is already a complex situation in itself—the removal of a beloved character—but the necessary realization that birth and death are intertwined, that life continues, stubbornly, after someone has died, and that the very process of living through grief is often a strange one, creating new fractured subjectivities, new ways of looking at the world, and even, in a sense, new lives.

(52) My corporate analysis of Cordelia and Fred, then, is accompanied here by a more esoteric analysis, a more instinctual reading. Call it a hybrid analysis if you will. I do think that, for every purely analytical and academically-informed reading of *Buffy* and *Angel*, there is an equally visceral, gut-informed, soulful reading that has nothing to do with the specters of Marx or gender analysis or psychotherapy. The trick is not letting one subsume the other, and placing them side by side in order to produce a responsible and fully informed treatment of the shows. I am endeavoring to do this, and I apologize if the result skips at times, or becomes less than coherent. I blame it on Illyria.

(53) The next chapter will discuss *Buffy* and *Angel's* relationship to academic, comparing the family models present in both shows to the "families" within academic communities. *Buffy* has some of the most obsessed and loyal fans of any television show—really, any cultural artifact—in history, and many of those fans are also dedicated academics, working at universities and writing on popular culture. What I want to explore, in this final chapter, is what, precisely, makes *Buffy* and *Angel* so attractive to fans (academic and non), and why the families presented in both shows tend to subsume the biological families of the fans themselves. At the heart of this question is the more complex question of why we love *Buffy* at all, and what we take the show's various and radical families, as well as what they take from us in return.

Endnotes

1. Cordelia sleeps with Connor in the episode "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" (4004), thereby completing the circuit of erotic incest within *Buffy* and *Angel* by becoming a mother who sleeps with her "son." I am aware of the outrageously visible oedipal connections here just begging to be discussed, but will avoid that particular psychoanalytic road, given my preoccupation with sociological and family-based criticism (rather than psychoanalytic theorizing).

2. Kristeva describes her own career-long project as a bridging of psychiatric practices and literary discourses, describing how, initially, she wanted to "analyze the acquisition of language and psychotic language as critical discourses. For neutral description or observation is not enough: I had to involve myself in order to understand how the people I hear are contributing to the transformation of a

relationship" (Kristeva, *Interviews* 147). For her, the psychiatrist who is also a linguist represents the ultimate conjunction of analytical techniques, and psychoanalysis remains the necessary ground from which all literary analysis must emerge.

3. Fred's exposure to, and subsequent enslavement within, a hostile dimension represents a parallel of Illyria's experience, for both are rendered "slaves" of a sort, stripped of their essential subjectivity and marooned within a world that disdains or threatens them. And, just as Fred was duped by a professor (see the episode "Supersymmetry," 4005) who she trusted and used as part of his science experiment (which results in her being transported to Pylea), so was Illyria, in a sense, violently resurrected by her last surviving follower (the character Knox) and transported into a world that has no place for her.

4. This is based on a Sears advertising campaign that ran in 1997, and was designed, one presumes, to highlight the mega-department-store as a fashionable clothing outlet rather than simply a place for buying VCRs and ride-on mowers. As a bizarre conjunction of *Buffy*, advertising, and family, I should admit that my mother works for Sears, and that she remembers this ad-campaign well, given how much her family ridiculed it. "Seen the softer side of Sears lately, mom?" I often asked her, to which she would roll her eyes and insist that she didn't write the advertising copy.

5. Xander is the poorest member of the Scoobies, although he still lives in a modest house and gets an entire basement to himself before moving into what looks suspiciously like a luxury apartment. Faith's economic background is uncertain, but her speech resembles a kind of Boston working-class vocabulary, and her aggressive characteristics, I think, are uncomfortably linked here with her speculative poverty. Either way, *Buffy* clearly demonstrates that characters who aren't middle-class, or who are living somewhere on the borders of middle-class economic security, have far less stable family atmospheres and backgrounds.

6. Jean Swanson, in her book *Poor Bashing*, describes the extent to which people living in poverty internalize critiques leveled at them by various media sources. This leads them to feel ashamed about their living situation, rather than realizing that it is an unequal capitalist economy—which encourages competition among the poorest of the poor—that creates this situation, not the poor themselves. (Swanson 1-10).

7. This book treats the character of Gunn only peripherally, and I hope that forthcoming scholarly articles and book-chapters by writers of color will discuss him in greater depth. As a white scholar, I feel myself coming up against the limits of experience when trying to discuss Gunn's blackness. I have thus opted to create a space of criticism around his character, without fully trying to explore his multiple perspectives as the sole recurring person of color within either *Angel* or *Buffy*. For a more detailed discussion of Gunn, see "From Rogue in the Hood to Suave in a Suit: Black Masculinity and the Transformation of Charles Gunn," Michaela Meyer's troublingly-titled chapter in Stacey Abbott's forthcoming *Investigating Angel* collection (IB Tauris).

8. We should bear in mind that Fred actually leaves her supportive family (who find her after years of searching) because she feels more at home with Angel and company ("Fredless," 3005). Cordelia doesn't appear to have much of a family to go home to, and her choice to stay in L.A. is originally a career decision—she wants to become an actress—rather than a result of feeling "at home" in the city.

9. Robinson and Skill point out that, even as late as 1995, the percentage of white families on television was 80.5%, and that, while Hispanic and African-American

families had an extremely peripheral presence, "Asian or American Indian families were less likely to be found in a series featuring a family than was a family with an alien boarder from the planet Melmac" (148; 158).

10. As with *Buffy's* "matter-of-fact" queer relationship between Tara and Willow, wherein the characters experienced no real homophobia or discomfort among their friends, Gunn and Fred's interracial relationship is de-politicized by *Angel* and presented as merely a quirky romance. I am not suggesting that a televisual romance, because it is interracial, must deliberately make reference to the historical criticisms from white audiences that such relationships have received, both on television and in film. But I do think that, in their attempts to maintain narrative rather than political coherence, both *Buffy* and *Angel* often sidestep critical issues around race, gender, and sexuality that ought to be addressed, unless we are willing to accept that these characters live in a utopian world without violence, homophobia, racism, sexism, and poverty (which they clearly do not, given that these material, as well as discursive, inequalities, find their way into both shows through various channels).

11. Lilah's entrepreneurial individualism, her intense ambition, and her subsequent disconnection from any coherent group of family and friends, makes her a troubling and fascinating character. Her death codes her, in a way, as a failed New Woman, whose greed and ambition end up destroying her, while her only redeeming characteristic seems to be her emotional connection with Wesley. I don't think that *Angel* intends to construct Lilah as an irredeemable super-bitch who "just once" experiences something close to love with a heterosexual man, but the stereotype does stick. For a more nuanced reading of the Lilah/Wesley relationship, along with a discussion of "female agents" in *Angel*, see Jennifer Stoy's chapter "'And Her Tears Flowed Like Wine': Wesley/Lilah and the Complicated(?) Role of the Female Agent on *Angel*," in Stacey Abbott's *Investigating Angel* collection.

12. Amy Acker's performance in this death-scene is tremendous, and also critically interesting because her character seems to hover between a child and adult state. She insists that her death be as painless as possible for both her biological and extended families, even choosing to die in her bedroom, with Wesley, rather than in a hospital. But her final words, "Please, Wesley, why can't I stay?" ("A Hole in the World," 5015) are the plea of a terrified child. Wesley is both her partner and her caretaker, here, and thus fulfills his ultimate role as Watcher by being the only witness to Fred's death and Illyria's subsequent birth.

13. I attended a panel at the *Slayage* conference on racial representation within *Buffy*, and was more than a little anxious to discover that it was a room full of white scholars. I was made even more anxious when *nobody* mentioned this fact, and found myself sinking into an uncomfortable silence during the presentations, angry at myself for not being able to say anything—and, furthermore, not being quite sure what I *wanted* to say. The whole situation rose all sorts of uncomfortable questions about white scholarly investment in racial representation. Ewan Kirkland delivered a self-critical paper on the cultural entitlements of whiteness within the series, and was careful to mention the potentially ridiculous idea of a white scholar talking about whiteness to a room full of white people at a panel on *race*. Jeffrey Middents, who identified as Mexican-American, gave a paper discussing themes of minstrelsy and racial stereotyping within the "Once More With Feeling" musical episode, and included demographic information on the racial breakdown of California, pointing to the fact

that Hispanic audiences, given the size of the Hispanic community within California, were severely underrepresented in *Buffy*. At one point, the sole woman of color in the audience, who never introduced herself, criticized Jasmine's depiction as a tyrannical ruler because the idea of a black woman controlling the world seemed frankly unrealistic. I was extremely relieved when I heard her speak, but I also knew that part of this relief stemmed from my own white guilt around the voyeuristic nature of discussing non-white representation in a room full of white people. Much, much more work on *Buffy*, *Angel*, and race needs to be done in scholarly, as well as popular, media.

14. Despite *Angel*'s careful reinscription of its narratives as action-based in Season 5, the show was still cancelled, which leads us to believe that sometimes a cultural vehicle can "have it all" and still not satisfy the networks. As a reminder of this, Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, which now has a huge and devoted cult fan-base, was cancelled because, in its first (and only) season, it seemed to be more a show about character development and emotional connections than a show about space-ships, train heists, and explosions.

15. Given that Cordelia gets to be both saint and mother as a result of this storyline, I wonder if the creation of Illyria is not, after all, some kind of exchange for *Cordelia*'s specialness, rather than a punishment of Fred's ambivalence. As Spike reminds Willow and Xander after Buffy has been resurrected, "that's the thing about magic. There's always consequences" ("Afterlife," 6003), and perhaps Illyria is a kind of consequence.

16. Kristeva, describing the insider/outsider binary within academic communities, says that "I think it's a question of an individual fighting spirit—almost animal-like—for someone to remain vigilant while being on the inside" (*Interviews* 125). In much the same way, I think, Illyria becomes an "animal-like" vigilance on the inside of *Angel* Investigations, maintaining her essential outsidership while criticizing the human relations that she sees as damaged, flawed, or inexplicable.

17. On a more abstract level (could I possibly *be* more abstract?), Illyria also represents the theme of exile and outsidership that pervades the narratives of both *Buffy* and *Angel*, the feeling of not belonging anywhere. Dawn is similar to Illyria, in that she is not quite human, yet wants to be part of human intimacy and interaction. Willow is the same, knowing that she has the power to destroy the world, yet wanting desperately to fit in and be loved by the people who knew her when she was an awkward and inarticulate nerd. I don't think the message here is as reductive as *nobody fits in anywhere*, but I do think that certain characters in *Buffy* and *Angel* operate at a fundamental remove from everyday society for very specific reasons having to do with gender, sexuality, and cultural background, which I have attempted to discuss throughout this book.

18. For another troubling example of maternity producing a hybrid child, and resulting in the death of the mother, see the character "Blade"—a vampire hunter who is part vampire himself. Blade began as a comic-book character, created by Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan, and was adapted into a hit series of films beginning with *Blade* in 1998 (Stephen Norrington, director; David S. Goyer, writer), and culminating in the soon-to-be-released *Blade: Trinity* in 2004 (written/directed by Goyer). Fascinating intersections of race (Blade's/Wesley Snipe's eroticized and hyper-masculinized black body), technology, and inventive vampire traditions (such as the 'corporatization' of vampire families) have produced a lot of interest within academic

communities. For a critical exploration of mysticism vs. technology within *Blade*, see John J. Jordan's article " Vampire Cyborgs and Scientific Imperialism: a Reading of the Science-Mysticism Polemic in *Blade*," in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol 27, no 2, Summer 1999: 4-15.



Edited by
David Lavery & Rhonda V. Wilcox

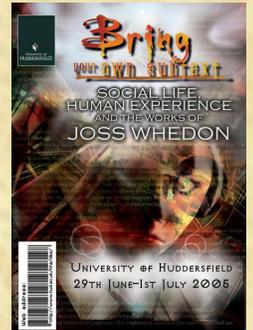
Brought to you by
*Slayage: The Online International
Journal of Buffy Studies*

The Encyclopedia of Buffy Studies

**"Bring Your Own Subtext": Social life, human experience
and the works of Joss Whedon, University of Huddersfield
29 June– 1 July 2005**

[PDF version of the Conference Website](#)

**A Conference Report by
Dr Ewan Kirkland, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, UK**



(1) Summer 2005, the University of Huddersfield (UK) hosted an event which, although tactically avoiding the 'B word', focused largely on the media academic's favorite vampire slayer. The three-day conference was organized around two parallel streams, each presentation followed by five minutes' dedicated discussion time. With papers still fresh in delegates' minds, this facilitated lively and focused debate, while rigorous timekeeping allowed listeners to hop between streams with minimum disruption. A similar mix and match approach characterized this multi-disciplinary conference itself, papers drawing upon feminist theory, psychology, linguistics, mythology, philosophy and pedagogy to explore *Buffy*, its associated culture, and other manifestations of the 'Whedonverse', namely *Angel* and *Firefly*.

(2) The opening keynote paper by Tanya Kryzwinska (Brunel University) exploring player positions within *Buffy* videogames indicated the conference's broad remit. In drawing connections between female warriors Xena, Lara Croft, and Buffy, Kryzwinska highlighted the Slayer's location within wider cultural trends; she focused on the fact that *BtVS* translations onto Game Boy Advance, X Box and Playstation 2 emphasized the television show's penetration of other cultural forms. Using gaming footage to illustrate her argument, Kryzwinska discussed the ways videogames challenge traditional approaches to representation and spectatorship. Criticism surrounding the felicitation of women for heterosexual male pleasure, and the association between fighting and agency are complicated by the empowering potential videogame player/avatar relationships provide for gamers to play at being Buffy. Kryzwinska's account of the complex intersection between Buffy as character, show, figure of female empowerment, and videogame avatar proved extremely challenging and insightful.

(3) In an equally thought provoking paper, Professor Don Adams (Central Connecticut State University) and Dr Christine Jarvis (University of Huddersfield) outlined Buffy's relationship to classic and feminist concepts of leadership, focusing on costumes. Clothing in *Buffy* is highly coded, both using and subverting traditional meanings associated with women's clothes. Buffy's dress defies masculine conventions of combat ("I've patrolled in this halter many times." 'The I in Team' [4013]), while variously defining her relationship to Faith, the Slayerettes and other regular characters. Observing Buffy's rejection of antisocial punk and gothic teen dress codes, associated with the show's villains, Adams and Jarvis acknowledged the series' adoption of mainstream fashion tastes, but argued against a straightforward correspondence with gender stereotypes and consumer capitalist ideologies. A detailed analysis of Buffy's dungarees in 'Helpless' (3012)

illustrated the semiotic complications and contradictions of costume within the show. A similarly astute deconstruction of masculinity and clothing was evident in Catherine Bradley's (University of Huddersfield) detailed reading of *Angel* episode 'Guise Will Be Guise' (2006).

(4) Several presenters focused on Whedon's use of language. In the first of two papers, entitled 'The Infiltration of Buffy into the Real World', Bill McDaniel (Abode Systems) examined the dissemination of 'Buffy-speak'. Buffy-isms, such as the 'Uber' prefix of Uber-vamp, or 'age' suffix of 'painage', were observed in discursive spaces from popular television, to non-*Buffy* websites, to corporate documents. Dr Susan Mandala (University of Sunderland) provided a social linguistic interpretation of the Scoobies' unusual use of the 'y' suffix (eg 'crayon breaky', '*Heart of Darknessy*') throughout *BtVS*. Analyzing three seasons' worth of dialogue using social network theory, Mandala presented statistical evidence of the linguistic quirk's function in marking group allegiance. Giles and Anya employ few awkward-sounding 'y' suffixes, registering their comparative distance from the core gang, while Tara's eventual use of the Scoobies' verbal eccentricity ('surfacey', 'Dead Things' [6013]) ironically prefigures her imminent departure from the series. Mandala's paper testified to both the sociolinguistic complexity of *Buffy's* dialogue and the insight afforded by rigorous textual scrutiny.

(5) A philosophical strand was evident in many papers. Dr Deborah Thomas (University of Sutherland) illustrated the confusion between 'persons and things' in *BtVS*: frequent instances of humans losing their humanity, vampires and robots acquiring human qualities, and 'personhood-testing scenarios'. Insofar as Spike and Anya's personal journeys question the nature of humanity, Thomas aligned *BtVS* with the existential perspective that humanity is not an inborn essence, but something acquired through an individual's actions and choices. Similarly Bryan Townsend (independent scholar) illustrated how both characters' transformations illustrate Aristotelian ethics. For Aristotle, virtue was not innate but a quality developed through performing initially-involuntarily good deeds (due, for example, to a behavior-modifying chip in the skull) which eventually become second nature and a source of pleasure. Employing personal construct theory, Dr Nigel King (University of Huddersfield) applied the psychological tendency towards bipolar world views to the manifestation of good and evil in *Buffy*. While evil within the show remains unambiguous, demons are destructive and take pleasure in their destruction, good is characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty--evidence, King argued, of a humanist and existentialist morality in the work of Joss Whedon.

(6) Mutual appreciation of the depth, quality and richness of Whedon's work informed the conference. James Wells' (Northeastern University) paper celebrated *Buffy's* skilful balance between verisimilitude and supernatural fantasy, between the familiar and the unexpected. Focusing on 'Hush' (4010) and 'The Body' (5016), Wells argued the show's employment of stock generic characters initially familiar to audiences, but developed across the seasons, was central to sustaining episodes containing little dialogue or supernatural elements. Louie Stowell (independent scholar) explored *Firefly's* Jane and the *Angel* television satire 'Smile Time', alongside the comic contributions of Anya, Andrew and Oz, illustrating tensions between humor and emotional depth. Dr Janet Halfyard (Birmingham Conservatoire) delivered a fascinating analysis of vocal performances in *Buffy* and *Angel*. The voice as mark of individuality, as site of power and agency, and as index of character relations and hierarchies was related to Buffy's high pitched voice, Drusilla's sing-song delivery, and the digital sound manipulation used to express Willow's transformation into Dark Willow. In 'Polysemy and the Quest for Female Agency', Christina Köver (University of Luneburg) criticized the dualist critical logic which constructs Buffy either as transgressive feminist heroine or affirmation of patriarchal stereotypes. Köver convincingly argued *Buffy* offers multiple meanings, both subversive and conformist, and called for a reconfiguration of the critical frameworks within which *Buffy's* strategic feminist potential is evaluated. A necessarily critical perspective was evident in Dr Chris Richards' (London Metropolitan University) consideration of racial whiteness. Observing the absence of urban youth culture, the prominent rhetoric of Christianity, and themes of insecurity and sterility, Richards

argued the show betrayed white anxieties, particularly concerning sexuality. In highlighting the entirely white social world of *BtVS*, Richards questioned the universality of 'human experience' represented within the Jossverse.

(7) Accepting the conference invitation to 'bring your own subtext', many papers displayed originality in both focus and perspective. Caroline Ruddell (Brunel University), in considering the division between Willow Rosenberg, vampire Willow and Dark Willow, introduced the issue of split personalities and identities, a theme recurring throughout the conference. Observing *Buffy's* popularity amongst teachers, the strong pedagogic strand at Slayage 2004, and the comparably large amounts of schoolroom footage within the series, Michele Paule (Oxford Brookes University) explored the show's representation of education. Marcie's disappearance through lack of pedagogic attention in 'Out of Mind, Out of Sight' (1011), the praise Buffy receives upon regurgitating her teacher's analysis of *Othello* in 'Earshot' (3018), the Buffybot's success at parent-teacher meetings, Paule argued, all resonate with contemporary concerns surrounding teaching, theories of pedagogy and teacher's experiences. Body modification and identity fragmentation was considered in Tuna Erdem's (Istanbul Bilgi University) paper 'Tattoo Renaissance comes to Sunnydale'. Discussing the bodily adornments of Faith, Angel and Giles, Erdem argued the Mark of Igon in 'The Dark Age' (2008) reflects the watcher's split identity, its appearance signaling the return of the repressed Ripper. How, asked Erdem, does Angel see his tattoo? And if vampires have no reflection, are they also, in a Lacanian sense, denied a mirror phase? Romantic relationships in *BtVS* were discussed from a critical feminist psychology perspective by Dr Angie Burns (Staffordshire University). Emphasizing the show's contradictory messages concerning love, the possibility of lasting romance, relations between the sexes, and what constitutes an abusive relationship, Burns located particular confusion in moments when male characters (The Trio, Spike) fail to recognize the sexual violence they have considered or perpetrated. Exploring this darker side of sexuality, Deborah Finding (London School of Economics) identified contradictions in Whedon's representation of prostitution. Riley's use of 'vampire whores', Darla's pre-vampire profession, and the sex/drugs-coded exchange between Willow and Rack were explored as reinforcing or refuting myths surrounding sex workers.

(8) Zoë-Jane Playdon (University of London), the final keynote speaker, closed the conference in fine style. Discussing *Buffy's* relationship to lunar hero traditions, Playdon related her successive deaths and resurrections to the waning and renewal of the moon. Combining a scholarly knowledge of classic texts, insightful familiarity with the seven-season series, and a stylish playfulness in bringing the two together, Playdon presented a lunar reading of the enigmatic cheese man in 'Restless' (4022), while arguing Anya's fear of bunnies related to the hare-image in the moon, itself representative of the passage of time and her own newly-acquired mortality.

(9) Our hosts did a sterling job of orchestrating the panels, providing necessary technical and personal support, and refreshments. Suitably scheduled coffee breaks, buffet lunches and wine receptions encouraged a friendly and supportive atmosphere for participants joined as much in their knowledge and appreciation of Whedon's work as by their academic vocation. A closely-fought pub quiz extended discussions beyond the comfortable conference rooms of The Centre for Construction and Identity into the nearby pub; winning contestants were presented with Huddersfield's equivalent of a Mr Pointy. The sing-along following a conference dinner rivalled anything witnessed in Nashville the previous year.

(10) Testimony to the fertility of Whedon's work, the variety of theoretical perspectives the Jossverse can sustain, and the imagination and the enthusiasm shows like *BtVS*, *Angel* and *Firefly* can generate, the 'Bring Your Own Subtext' conference was a friendly and fascinating event, representing the academic study of popular culture at its most lively and insightful