

## Slayage 3 June 2001 [1.3]

David Lavery and Rhonda V. Wilcox, Co-Editors

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

■ [Charles Taylor](#), *The WB's Big Daddy Condescension* (from *salon.com*)

■ [Joyce Millman](#), *Buffy's Leap of Faith* (from *salon.com*)

■ [Annette Hill](#) and [Ian Calcutt](#), *Vampire Hunters: the Scheduling and Reception of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* in the UK* (from *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*)



**Stacey Abbott**

## **A Little Less Ritual and a Little More Fun: The Modern Vampire in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

(1) The Prophecy, the Hellmouth, The Brethren of Aurelius, The Master, The “Anointed” One, the “Chosen” One, a vampire with a *soul*—the very language used in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* suggests an adherence to a conception of the vampire defined by superstition and tradition. Given the changes within the vampire genre in recent years with modern hybrid films such as Kathryn Bigelow’s *Near Dark* (1987), Joel Schumacher’s *The Lost Boys* (1985) and Steve Norrington’s *Blade* (1998), it is interesting to note that Joss Whedon’s vampires seem to mark a return to a pre-modern representation of vampirism.

(2) Paul Heelas, in his book *The New Age Movement*, argues that tradition is “embedded in the established order of things. By definition, tradition-informed ways of life are those in which the person thinks in terms of external loci of authority, control, and destiny rather than going within to rely on themselves.”<sup>[1]</sup> His argument about tradition based pre-modern culture clearly applies to many of the superstitious villages of vampire literature and early vampire films, where villagers believed in the supernatural and placed their faith in superstition, ritual, and religion. Sunnydale, a small town located on the Hellmouth, appears to mark a return to this type of “tradition informed” culture where all of the world’s evils are clearly projected onto an external force (the mouth of hell), the vampire is simply a supernatural “revenant” defined by superstition, and the slayer is ruled by destiny . . . or is she? I will argue in this article that although the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* appears this way at first glance, it has, with each season of the television series, gradually disembedded itself from these traditions in order to create a modern vampire and slayer, both independent and self reliant.

(3) The process of breaking from tradition is in the first instance gradual manipulation of the conventions of the vampire genre. These conventions are primarily manipulated by emphasizing the physical over the spiritual in the show’s iconography as well as the representation of the vampires and slayers themselves. In her fight against the vampires, Buffy’s main weapons are her wooden stake and crucifix traditionally chosen for their symbolic and religious significance. Although these weapons are key icons of 19th century vampire literature, namely Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and more importantly play a vital role in the early filmic adaptations of *Dracula*, they have little role to play within most recent examples of the modern vampire genre.

### **Iconography**

**(4) The Crucifix.** From the 1970s onwards the significance of the crucifix to vampires has been continually challenged throughout the genre. In George Romero’s *Martin* (1977), the supposed vampire Martin challenges his superstitious uncle’s beliefs and completely undermines traditional vampire iconography by first biting into a clove of garlic and then holding a crucifix to his face while explaining, in the most dismissive tone, “that there is no magic.” Stephen King makes a similar critique of the modern church in his vampire novel *Salem’s Lot* when his failed priest, Father Callahan, stands up to the master vampire, Mr. Barlow, only to have his fear undermine his faith and the power of the cross with it. With his

faith gone, the cross in his hand simply becomes a "piece of plaster that his mother had bought in Dublin" and Barlow plucks it from his hand with ease, snaps it in two and throws it to the floor. Barlow reminds Callahan that "without faith, the cross is only wood"[2] and has no power. This crisis in faith is taken up again in *Fright Night* (Tom Holland, 1985) when the B-movie vampire killer Peter Vincent holds up a cross to the vampire Jerry Dandrige and, in his best ham-actorly voice, commands the vampire to step "back! Creature of the Night!" to which the vampire laughs and responds, like Barlow, "You have to have faith for that to work on me." Both novel and film suggest that in the modern world faith is a rare commodity, a fact that explains the speed and the ease with which the vampire infiltrates the community.

(5) In *Buffy*, however, the crucifix is restored as one of the key weapons in the slayer's fight against evil, suggesting that the show is a return to more traditional vampire mythology. Buffy and her friends repeatedly carry crosses as a means of protection. This is quite anomalous to the rest of the society who, unaware of the existence of vampires, do not wear the crucifix as a sign of faith or protection. In "Welcome to the Hellmouth" Angel gives Buffy a crucifix which she wears throughout most of the four seasons both as a talisman against danger and as a symbol of her secret identity as the Slayer. Despite its effectiveness, however, its role within the show seems to suggest a growing separation between its image and its religious significance. In "Nightmares," the Master explains the nature of fear to the "Anointed One" by explaining his own fear of the cross. As he slowly approaches a large crucifix, a reminder of the ruined church within which they live, he explains that "We are defined by the things we fear. This symbol, these two planks of wood, it confounds me. Suffuses me with mortal dread. But fear is in the mind. Like pain, it can be controlled. If I can face my fear, it cannot master me." As he speaks his final line, he grasps the cross to demonstrate his control of the fear but as he touches it, the skin of his hand begins to burn and the sound of sizzling is heard on the soundtrack.

(6) Similarly in the episode "Angel," when Buffy and Angel kiss on the dance floor, the shape of Buffy's cross is burnt into Angel's chest where it was pressed against him in their embrace. In this case however, the cross does not seem to fill Angel with dread as it does the Master and he does not turn away from it like Dracula in Browning's adaptation of Stoker's novel (1931), but it simply has a physical effect upon him like an allergy. This is supported by other vampires' contact with the cross throughout the series. Spike wears leather gloves so that he can hold the Du Lac cross without any physical reaction in "What's My Line?" while the homicidally insane vampire in "Helpless" ignores Buffy's threat by forcing her cross onto his skin and allowing it to burn into him. This has much in common with the film *Blade* which abandons the use of the cross in this modern secular world and, as John J. Jordan explains, regards the characteristics of vampirism as a scientific phenomenon.[3] For instance, while crosses are ineffective in the film, garlic and silver are not for they produce an *allergic* reaction in the vampire. The Van Helsing character, Whistler, offers a scientific explanation when he argues that the vampire's response to these weapons is to go into anaphylactic shock. My point is, therefore, to suggest that while the presence of the crucifix in *Buffy* seems to maintain the association of vampires with evil, its Christian meaning seems to have faded for the modern generation of vampires, and it has become, like other religious symbols,[4] simply another weapon to be used by the Slayer like a wooden stake, a quarter staff, a cross bow and even a rocket launcher.

**(7) Blood.** Similarly the significance of blood to the vampire has changed *BtVS* from earlier vampire incarnations. McNally and Florescu argue that the notion of vampirism grew out of the moment when ancient man

discovered that when blood flowed out of a wounded beast or a fellow human, life, too, drained away. Blood was the source of vitality. Thus men smeared themselves with blood and sometimes drank it. The idea of drinking blood to renew vitality thereupon entered history.[5]

In Stoker's *Dracula*, the exchange of blood is ripe with symbolic and holy significance evoking or suggesting taboo forms of sexuality, holy communion, birth and death, as well as the creation of a psychic link between vampire and victim (i.e. Mina and Dracula). In *Buffy* blood has simply come to mean food to the vampires. Angel survives on pig's blood which he buys from the local butcher and keeps in his fridge; Darla equates the chaos of a natural disaster with picking "fruit from the vine" ("Angel"); while Spike describes

humanity as little “happy meals on legs” (“Becoming” Part 1). While an exchange of blood does result in one’s transformation into a vampire, to simply be drained and killed means death and nothing more. The taste for blood no longer seems to be the source of the vampire’s immortality but simply a by-product of it.

**(8) Sunlight.** Nina Auerbach has argued that the pre-Dracula vampire was a spiritual creature that gained vitality from the moon for “like the moon, they (vampires) live cyclically, dying and renewing themselves with ritual, predictable regularity. A corpse quivering to life under the moon’s rays is the central image of mid-century vampire literature.” [6] Stoker’s Dracula himself gained power by night and was trapped during daylight hours in a physical form. 19th Century literature produced a series of vampires that seemed to transcend the physical in favor of the ethereal, and it was predominantly with the advent of the modern medium of cinema that the vampire became increasingly defined by his/her physical form. The shift from spiritual empowerment by night to physical destruction by sunlight came about most notably in F. W. Murnau’s 1922 unofficial adaptation of *Dracula*, *Nosferatu*, which used the capabilities of cinema to suggest that vampires could be killed by sunlight. As the sun rises, Count Orlock simply fades into nothingness with the assistance of a slow dissolve. Since then the dangers of sunlight remained a consistent characteristic of the vampire, adopted in most vampire films and literature as a common threat to the vampire if not always the primary method of destruction. Most notably, Hammer Studios’ *The Horror of Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) features a dramatic death scene where Dracula is burned to ash and bone by rays of sunlight.

(9) In recent decades the power of the sun has become increasingly prevalent as a means of destroying vampires in such films as *Fright Night*, *Fright Night Part 2* (Tommy Lee Wallace, 1988); *Near Dark*; and *Interview with the Vampire* (Neil Jordan, 1994). In fact both *Near Dark* and *Interview with the Vampire* suggest that the sun (and fire by association) is the only means of killing the modern vampire. Sunlight is such a key component of the vampire genre that the pilot episodes of *Buffy* self-consciously pays tribute to the tradition when Buffy reminds the vampire Luke about the dangers of the sunlight, before smashing part of the blacked out window, allowing light to stream in. Momentarily distracted by what he thinks is sunlight, Luke screams in pain before finally realizing that it is artificial light and confusedly turns back to Buffy who quips, “It’s about nine hours from now moron” before staking him through the heart in the “old fashioned” way.

**(10) Physicality.** The growing threat of sunlight in vampire mythology however does indicate an increasing emphasis upon the physicality of the vampire. Gone are the traditions of vampires who can transform themselves into vapor or other creatures. Lord Ruthven, in Dr. Polidori’s *The Vampire* (1819), was suspected of having transformed himself into moonlight while Dracula could transform into vapor, wolves and rats. The vampires in *Buffy* are, like the humans that surround them, singularly defined by their bodies. They burn, they feel pain, they can be sick, they can be poisoned. When Darla shoots Angel in “Angel,” she explains that bullets cannot kill vampires but they will hurt like hell. When Spike is rescued from the debris of the church fire by Drusilla at the end of “What’s My Line,” he is injured and is revealed in a later episode to be confined to a wheelchair. In the first part of the third series finale, “Graduation Day,” Faith [7] shoots Angel with a poisoned arrow which causes him to faint, develop a high fever, become delirious, and almost die.

(11) The emphasis upon the physical over the spiritual throughout the series is further demonstrated by the equation of the Slayer’s powers with her physical strength. In classic vampire literature and films, those who face the vampires, like Dr. Van Helsing, have traditionally been learned scientists or religious figures who triumph over the vampire through virtue and intelligence. Peter Haining describes the vampire hunter as “one of the most courageous figures to be found in the pages of horror fiction. A *man* who ventures into the world of the Undead armed only with a crucifix, a wooden stake, a bottle of holy water and some garlic” [8] (my emphasis). While Buffy possesses both virtue and intelligence, which clearly explain what makes her a superior Slayer to Faith, and has all of the accoutrements listed by Haining, it is her physical prowess and skill in combat that distinguish her from the great vampire hunters and make her a threat to the vampire/demon world.

(12) In the third season episode “Helpless,” when Buffy is forced to undergo an ancient rite of passage on

her 18th birthday which takes away her strength and co-ordination, her friends talk about it as if she has lost her "powers" and equate this loss with Superman losing his superpowers. Her training involves developing her skill with different, more sophisticated weapons, and her encounters with the underworld always involve a knockout brawl. Since modern vampires do not sleep rather conveniently in coffins within their own tombs (as in *Dracula*), the Slayer cannot rely on killing them in their sleep but must face them awake, usually in groups and at their strongest. It may seem odd that no matter how demonic the villain, Buffy can win in a good fight, occasionally toting a ritualistically determined weapon. I would argue that this trait is key to the series for both the Slayer and the demons are physically determined beings, bound by the same laws of nature, not as we understand them but laws of nature established and consistently developed in the world of *Buffy*.

**(13) Mythology.** While the show's play with generic conventions begins to demonstrate a gradual break from tradition, it is through the overarching narrative to the series that we witness the self-conscious break from superstition and tradition based conceptions of vampirism to a modern secular view. This narrative unfolds through the evolving opposition between vampire and slayer and as Gregory Waller argues, "the bloody confrontation between man and monster is linked with questions about the role of faith and the status of science in the modern world-in the broadest sense, with the relationship between civilization and the primitive"[9]. That relationship however is not a simple, clear cut opposition but rather a cleverly intertwined relationship, for the vampire and its slayer are intrinsically linked in vampire fiction. Whether on the page or on film, the changes in one prefigure the changes in the other.

(14) The title of this article, "A little less ritual and a little more fun," is a line spoken by the vampire Spike in the second season of the series, after his initial arrival in Sunnydale ("School Hard"), when he decides to forgo the ritualized worship and genuflecting toward the "Anointed One," the vampire successor to The Master, and kill him instead. Spike's entrance marks a decided shift from pre-modern to modern vampire. His arrival in Sunnydale is pre-figured, however, by the arrival of the young Slayer the year before, who like Spike, walked into a ritualized world of vampires and vampire slayers, the Brethren of Aurelius on the one side and The Council of Watchers on the other, structured like opposing religious sects.

(15) Both the Brethren of Aurelius and the Council are presented to the young Buffy as decidedly foreign and "Old." Giles, the representative of the Council of Watchers, is presented as English, cool, officious and linguistically dense, while the Master looks ancient and monstrous in appearance and his language is based upon old world manners of speech. He, like Giles, often speaks in purple prose, quoting rituals and prophecy such as the following pronouncement about the arrival of the Anointed One:

Five will die, and from their ashes the Anointed One shall rise. The Brethren of Aurelius shall greet him and usher him to his immortal destiny . . . "As it is written, so shall it be."

This recitation is quite similar in style and substance to the prophecy of the Slayer as quoted by Giles in the first episode of the series.

Into each generation, a Slayer is born. One Girl, in all the world, a Chosen One. One born with the strength and skill to hunt the vampires, to stop the spread of their evil . . .

As has been observed by Rhonda Wilcox in "There will never be a "Very Special" *Buffy*," this use of language is quite distinct from that of Buffy and her friends. Wilcox argues that the role of language within the series is to establish an opposition between the world of adults and the world of children thus equating the transformation into a vampire with growing up.[10] Although I agree that this is a major element of the series, I would argue that this opposition additionally tracks the evolution of the vampire (and slayer) from the "old world" to the modern world. The series initially equates vampirism with an old world, primarily Christian, conception of vampire mythology. As Paul Barber points out in his book *Vampires, Burial and Death*, the concept of vampirism clearly prefigures Christianity, as myths of vampires exist in virtually every culture dating back thousands of years, but the development of Christianity had a huge effect upon

the evolution of vampire mythology. Within the Eastern European vampire myth, the causes, Barber suggests, for vampirism are many but include causes such as damnation, excommunication, birth on holy days, and conversion to a non-Christian religion.<sup>[11]</sup>

(16) Defined as the antithesis to Christianity, the vampires of the Brethren of Aurelius are like the vampires of 19th century folklore and much of its fiction. They are structured like a religious order worshiping one master, "The Master," like a High Priest. This is demonstrated in the first episode of the series, "Welcome to the Hellmouth" when the Order is introduced by a crane shot moving down from the high school above to the remains of a ruined church buried beneath the town. The space is filled with candles and as the camera tracks through the lair, a voice is heard chanting "The Sleeper will wake . . . The Sleeper will wake . . . The Sleeper will wake." The film cuts to a close up of the speaker, Luke, as he kneels before a large pool of blood positioned in the center of the space like a religious altar and completes his chant with the words "And the world will Bleed . . . Amen." Luke's prayer prefigures the Master's resurrection from the pool later in the episode.

(17) In the second part of the pilot episode, "The Harvest," after the Master has risen, a religious ritual is performed to prefigure the Harvest and release the Master to the world above. The ritual is to prepare Luke to be the "Vessel" for the Master, linking the two so that Luke can go to the surface to feed and transfer his strength to the Master. This ritual is presented as an inversion of the Christian rituals of Communion and Ash Wednesday. First Luke kneels before the Master and literally drinks from his hand, while the Master chants "My blood is your blood. My soul is your soul," to which Luke responds "My body is your instrument." The parallels with the symbolic drinking of Christ's blood in Holy Communion is clearly evoked in this ritual. Furthermore, the Master's gesture of drawing a symbol of "The Vessel" on Luke's forehead with the blood from his hand to mark the beginning of the Harvest, a ritual of indulgence, is reminiscent of the ritual of a priest drawing a crucifix out of ash on the foreheads of his congregation to symbolize the beginning of Lent, a period of penance and abstinence.

(18) Similarly, the Council of Watchers, as represented by Giles, is also presented like a religious order bound by tradition, rituals, and superstition. When Giles seeks to convince Buffy of her birthright, he recites the prophecy of the Chosen One quoted above. As Buffy and her friends regularly congregate in the library, it becomes a religious center for study and research as well as a sanctuary from the evils of the Hellmouth. It has an altar for the books of knowledge, the folkloric bibles upon which the Council's belief is based, and Giles is the high priest of this knowledge. Buffy and her friends constantly return to consult with Giles in the same manner that the vampires return below to report back to the Master. The opposition between these two sects and their beliefs is supported by the fact that the Hellmouth upon which the Master rests, is directly below the library as revealed in the final episode of the first season, "Prophecy Girl."

### **The Slayer Tradition: The Evolution of Buffy the Vampire Slayer**

(19) The subversion of tradition is gradual from season to season, but Buffy's modern attitude and language, does, however, increasingly chisel away at the ritual and traditions of the Slayer. She regularly mocks the sanctity of her duty, 'sacred Duty, yadda yadda yadda' ("Surprise"), and confounds Giles with her use of slang and pop culture references, "My spidy sense is tingling" ("I Robot, You Jane"), Buffy notes, evoking the Marvel Comic hero. As Giles points out to her mother, who asks about Buffy's difficulties with History, Buffy "lives very much in the now, and history, of course, is very much about "the then" . . . " ("Angel"). In the end it is her embodiment of the "now" that gives her an edge against the vampires with whom she does battle and the council for whom she works, for her actions consistently undermine their expectations and confuse their tradition bound perception.

(20) From the start of the series, however, the hallowed nature of the Council is most subtly undermined by Buffy's independence and the emergence of the 'Scooby Gang'<sup>[12]</sup>—Buffy's friends Willow, Xander and eventually Angel and Cordelia—as more powerful allies to the Slayer than the traditions and rituals of the council. The Slayer is by tradition supposed to work alone in secret with only the supervision of her Watcher. That her friends become a further source of her power is however acknowledged by a number of her enemies such as Spike who complains "A Slayer with family and friends. That sure as hell wasn't in the

brochure" ("School Hard," 2003) and Adam, the demon/human hybrid of season four, who does his best to control her by separating Buffy from her friends.

(21) In "Prophecy Girl" (1012), the final episode of the first season, Buffy undertakes her first real act of rebellion against Giles and her duty when she is told that the prophecy dictates that she will face the Master and die. While both Giles and Angel are afraid for her, they feel bound by an adherence to the prophecy. They believe that what it dictates will come to pass and the threat of the Master is too great to ignore. Buffy, however, demonstrates her refusal to be bound by prophecy and tradition by choosing to quit instead. For the first time, she scoffs at Giles' worship of the books and challenges his usefulness to her by throwing his books back at him and demanding "The Signs! Read me the signs! . . . Tell me my fortune! . . . You are so useful sitting here with all of your books. You "re really a lot of help." To complete her confrontation with Giles, Buffy, in a self-consciously symbolic gesture, rips the crucifix from her neck and throws it to the floor.

(22) This outburst causes Giles to question the usefulness of the Watcher and the Council in the modern world and encourages him to take action that will pre-figure his own break with the Council in the third season ("Helpless") by prioritizing Buffy's safety over tradition. He ignores prophecy, responsibility, and ritual and decides to face the Master himself. In her final act of defiance, however, Buffy returns to the library determined to save the world, knocks Giles unconscious, and resumes her role as Slayer by her own volition. It however, requires each of the characters to defy tradition and prophecy in order to help Buffy destroy the Master. Giles, Willow, Cordelia and Ms. Calendar work together to locate the Hellmouth and fight off the demons and vampires when it opens in the library. Similarly, Xander follows his heart and forms an alliance with Angel to find and help Buffy. This defiant act not only saves Buffy from death when she is found face down in a pool of water after the master has risen, but also defies the prophecy and marks a new phase in her development as a Slayer. After she is brought back to life by CPR, returned to life like a vampire, she is stronger and more in control than before. By the end of the episode, each character has contributed to the fight, defying the traditions of the Council and it is the formation of the "Scooby Gang" that marks the shift in power from old to new world.

(23) From this point onward, Buffy increasingly leads a shift in her ranks away from the traditions of the Council to the modern methods of the Scooby Gang, with Buffy gradually replacing Giles as leader. Both Willow and Xander come to embody the modern institutions of science and the military through Willow's computer science skills merged with a scientific interest in witchcraft and Xander's memories of military protocol from a demonic spell that turned him into a soldier. Paul Heelas argues that in the modern world

Increasingly, . . . people have ceased to think of themselves as *belonging to*, or as *informed by*, overarching-systems. Such disembedded, desituated or detraditionalized selves, the argument goes, have adopted cultural values and assumptions which articulate what it is to stand "alone"—as *individuals*—in the world.[13]

Buffy's emergence as leader of the gang is directly predicated upon her detraditionalizing herself in Heelas' sense and gradually building up her ability to stand alone against her worst fears and enemies. This is most dramatically articulated in the finale of the second season, "Becoming," when Buffy must act in Giles' absence (as he is being tortured by Angel), to protect the gang, rescue Giles and face Angel on her own. As Angel prepares to deliver what he thinks will be the fatal blow, he attempts to use her isolation against her by pointing out how everything she holds dear has been stripped away from her, "That's everything huh? No weapons, no friends no hope. Take all that away and what's left?" to which she responds "Me" as she catches the blade between her two hands and turns the fight back on Angel. The process of seemingly stripping everything away from her has taken her to a new level in her power, given her the strength to "stand alone in the world" and brought her one step closer to independence and her true power. Buffy's independence culminates at the end of the third season when she finally quits the Council and in order to destroy the mayor blows up not only the school but specifically the library itself.

## The Evolution of the Vampire

(24) As I mentioned earlier, the vampire and Slayer are intrinsically linked so as Buffy gradually extricates herself from the tradition of the Slayer so too do her vampire enemies. Therefore when Buffy undermines prophecy and destroys the Master in the first season, she calls forth a modern vampire to take his place. While it takes three seasons for Buffy to fully escape the tutelage of the Council (her graduation from high school is equated with her graduation from the Council), it does not take as long for the show to introduce a shift in vampires from Old to Modern world. Spike is the first vampire in the series to suggest that vampires possess the ability to evolve with the world and embody a new age. Nina Auerbach argues that there is a vampire for every age and that 'since vampires are immortal, they are free to change incessantly. Eternally alive, they embody not fear of death, but fear of life: their power and their curse is their undying vitality.' [14] I would take this further to suggest that it is the vampire's ability to defy time and "change incessantly" that identifies it as distinctly modern. Like Buffy, the modern vampire, as represented by Spike, lives eternally "in the now."

(25) The distinction between Spike and the Brethren of Aurelius is established upon his arrival by his rather irreverent entrance. As Spike enters the room, one of the vampires is proclaiming that the Feast of St. Vigeous, a vampire holy day in honor of their patron saint, will be as glorious as the Crucifixion which he claims to have witnessed. Spike ignores the reverence of the moment and dismisses this remark by pointing out that "if every vampire who said he was at the crucifixion was actually there, it would have been like Woodstock" and continues to steal the limelight by anecdotally pointing out that "I was actually at Woodstock. That was a weird gig. Fed off a flower person, and I spent the next six hours watching my hands move." While the Old World Vampire is claiming to have witnessed the Crucifixion, a claim that suggests that he is one of the ancients and therefore commands a place of rank within the Order as well as attaching Christian significance to their own celebration of St. Vigeous, Spike lays claim to have witnessed a 20th Century pop culture event which resulted in his getting high. Furthermore, Spike demonstrates a great deal of contempt for the prayers and rituals performed by the Order throughout the episode. When Drusilla chastises him for not "playing with the others"---which may put them at risk with the "Anointed One" (or the "Annoying One" as Spike puts it)—Spike reluctantly takes her point but demonstrates his complete lack of faith in all things traditional when he describes this ritual as "going up and get chanty with the fellas."

(26) With the death of the Anointed One, Spike sets up shop in Sunnydale and becomes the leader among the vampires (at least until Angel's transformation into Angelus) based upon his confidence, strength, and humor. Spike is presented as having a great deal in common with the members of the Scooby Gang. In the first instance, he has abandoned the old world language of his predecessors and speaks in the vernacular of the period. Similarly, no longer ruled by ritual and superstition, Spike's attempts to find a "cure" for Drusilla's illness demonstrates how he treats magic like a science. This is similar to Ms. Calendar's and Willow's equation of witchcraft with science as well as directly paralleling their attempts to cure Angel through the casting of a curse. Furthermore, despite his involvement with ritual, Spike constantly maintains his secular cynicism through his post-modern humor. As he performs all of the steps of the healing ceremony, reciting the verses, binding Angel to Drusilla and mixing their blood, he adds his own punchline to the ceremony by finishing the ritual with "Come to a simmering boil and remove to a low flame."

(27) By moving further and further away from the clear-cut opposition between the Brethren of Aurelius and the Council of Watchers, the program emphasizes an ambiguous distinction between the vampire and slayer. A distinction that becomes increasingly ambiguous when Buffy's true love Angel becomes the show's chief villain in season two. Although the show professes to project the evils of the vampire onto a demon inhabiting a human corpse, the show clearly demonstrates that what defines the vampire is unquestionably the human he/she was before. Drusilla is mad because she was driven mad before Angel turned her, Harmony continues to be self-centered and superficial and although Willow is quite shocked to see that her vampiric double demonstrates homosexual tendencies, this does foreshadow Willow's "coming out" in the fourth season.

(28) In the second season, when Angel loses his soul and becomes the monstrous Angelus again, Buffy attempts to console herself with the thought that the monster who is tormenting her is not the man she loved. This becomes increasingly difficult because no matter how evil his actions, Angelus continues to do

and say things that suggest that, like Willow's double, Angelus is simply an alternate version of Angel and not simply a demon inhabiting his body. When Buffy faces Angelus in the shopping Mall ("Surprise," 2013), she tells him that she is prepared to kill him because he isn't really Angel. He undermines her confidence by questioning "You'd like to think that wouldn't you?." In fact, he continually asserts that he is Angel, but Angel released from the shackles of humanity, i.e. conscience and love. Like the other vampires, Angelus' personality as a vampire is defined by who he was as a human. He continues to dislike Spike and mock Xander and his obsession with Buffy is equal to his love for her.

(29) This argument is supported in a third season episode "Enemies" when Buffy and Angel want to trick Faith into revealing what she knows about the Mayor's grand plan. To do this Angel pretends that their ritual to take away his soul was successful and he has become Angelus once more. To carry out the performance, he must mock Buffy, kiss Faith, and punch Xander and he is so convincing that Buffy, who was aware of the ruse from the start, is visibly shaken by it. Buffy must remind the others that Angel was only acting, but as she repeats that phrase again, she is clearly trying to convince herself. It is becoming clear to her that the cruelty that defines Angelus is a part of Angel.

(30) In a first season episode of his own TV series ("Eternity"), Angel is slipped a tranquillizer, otherwise known as a "happy" pill, which mimics the effects of his one moment of true happiness. The result is again the momentary resurrection of Angelus, this time mocking and threatening his colleagues Wesley and Cordelia. The cruel words that he hurls at them, to insult Cordelia's acting ability, to mock Wesley's bravery, come from Angel not the demon. They are things that he has thought but out of friendship, good conscience, and understanding, refrained from saying. This episode completely undermines any suggestion that the evil that is Angelus is the evil of a demon and not the man.

**(31) What makes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** such an effective television program is that the evil that she battles is not a product of an ancient world but the product of the real world itself. *Buffy* has used the past four years to painstakingly dismantle and rebuild the conventions of the vampire genre and work toward gradually disembedding the vampire/slayer dichotomy from religious ritual and superstition. The removal of religious dogma and superstition from the genre and the transformation of the vampire into a physical rather than ethereal being, acknowledges that what we describe as "evil" is a natural product of the modern world.

(32) In the final episode of the fourth season, Buffy makes the final break with the past and her heritage by facing the primal spirit of the first slayer. While the first slayer professes to be alone and live only in the action of death, Buffy asserts both her independence and her existence within the present by declaring "I am not alone . . . I walk, I talk, I shop, I sneeze. I'm gonna be a fireman when the floods roll back. There's trees in the desert since you moved out and I don't sleep on a bed of bones . . . Now give me back my friends." Buffy vanquishes the first slayer by turning her back on her and declaring that her primal force is not the source of Buffy's power. Having cut her ties with the past, the question as to the source of her power, expressed by the final line of the episode, "You think you know what's to come? What you are? You haven't even begun," captures the uncertainty of a secular age, disembedded from tradition, independent and looking for answers.

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[1]Paul Heelas: *The New Age Movement* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p. 155.

[2]Stephen King: *Salem's Lot* (New English Library, 1976) p.365-366

[3]John J. Jordan: "Vampire Cyborgs & Scientific Imperialism: A Reading of the Science-Mysticism Polemic in *Blade*" *Journal of Popular Film and Television* vol. 27, no.2, Summer 1999 p.10.

[4]In "Lover's Walk" Angel and Buffy lob bottles of holy water at a group of vampires, like grenades.

[5]Raymond McNally & Radu Florescu: *In Search of Dracula: The Enthralling History of Dracula and Vampires* ( Robson Books, 1995). p. 117

[6]Nina Auerbach: *Our Vampires, Ourselves* ( The University of Chicago Press, 1995) p.25.

[7]The secular irony of Faith's name is that of all the characters she possesses the least amount of faith in

religion, the spirit world, the council or humanity itself.

[8]Peter Haining: "Introduction" to *The Vampire Hunters" Casebook* edited by Peter Haining (Great Britain: Warner Books, 1996) p. XI.

[9]Gregory Waller: *The Living and the Undead: From Stoker's Dracula to Romero's Dawn of the Dead* (University of Illinois Press, 1986) p. 22.

[10]Rhonda V. Wilcox: "There Will Never be a "Very Special" *Buffy*" *Journal of Popular Film and Television* vol.27 no.2 Summer 1999 16-23.

[11]Paul Barber: *Vampires, Burial and Death* (Yale University Press, 1988) p. 37.

[12]Scooby Gang is a term that is officially coined in the second series (What's My Line Part 1) by Xander who tells Cordelia that "If you want to be a member of the Scooby Gang, you have to be prepared to be inconvenienced." The term is of course a popular cultural reference to the gang of teenagers who investigate crimes of seemingly supernatural origin in the cartoon *Scooby Doo*. Prior to using this term the group are occasionally referred to as a Club or Buffy's Slayerettes.

[13]Paul Heelas: *The New Age Movement* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p. 155.

[14]Nina Auerbach: *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995): p.5.



**Michelle Callander**

## **Bram Stoker's *Buffy*: Traditional Gothic and Contemporary Culture**

[Editors' Note: Dr. Callander's essay was completed before the airing of "Buffy vs. Dracula" (5001)]

(1) In 1797, Horace Walpole, author of the first Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, died. In 1897, Bram Stoker published *Dracula*, the most popular of Gothic vampire narratives. In 1997, Warner Brothers screened the first episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These three chronological coincidences are the key to my approach in this essay: to consider both *Dracula* and *Buffy* as texts which reproduce the "intensely emotional moods, strange atmospheres and supernatural elements" of the Gothic (Waxman 79). This is the most conventional of genres, whose cast of stock heroes, heroines and villains, foreign settings, and dark, nightmarish scenarios has formed the backdrop for a variety of philosophical quests; for explorations of the psyche and allegories of the unconscious; for questions surrounding the status and locus of good and evil; for the contest between light and dark, present and past, modernity and barbarity. This essay will focus on three key figures and themes of Gothic fictions—the hero and heroine of sensibility, the contest between the ancient and the modern, particularly ancient and modern knowledge, and fear of the foreign—and will trace what those figures and themes signify in Stoker's and Whedon's respective narratives and cultures. A comparative analysis of *Dracula* and *Buffy* might promise to reinforce the differences between Stoker's Victorian sensibilities and *Buffy's* reflection of and commentary on contemporary popular culture. However, reading *Buffy* and *Dracula* together reveals some surprising similarities, and offers a way to read Stoker's text as prefiguratively modern, and Whedon's narrative as more conservative, in some ways, than it might initially appear.

### **Buffy: a New Gothic Heroine?**

*Buffy*: I'll never have a normal life.

*Angel*: Right. You'll always be a Slayer. ("The Prom," 3020)

(2) Gothic fictions have, since their inceptions, provided a vehicle for conceptualizing a variety cultural anxieties into imaginative forms:

We now realize that quandaries about class conflicts and economic changes, uneasiness over shifting family arrangements and sexual boundaries, and versions of the 'other' which establish racial and cultural distinctions when traditional economic divisions are being challenged, are projected (or *retrojected*) together into frightening 'Gothic' spectres and monsters, from Walpole's ancestral effigy-ghost to the vampire-Aristocrat from Transylvania. (Hogle 206)

While early Gothic projected its cultural anxieties into ghostly forms and imagined terrors, by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (who also migrates into *Buffy* as Professor Walsh's cyborg / demon Adam) and,

later, *Dracula*, this threat had become physical, solid. While Dracula's form is more mutable than Frankenstein's monster, both are distinguishable for the actual, rather than imagined, harm that they can cause. Moreover, the monster and Dracula aren't just relics from the past, like Otranto's ghosts: they live in the text's present tense, they threaten to live forever, and, in order for culture to regain the peace it enjoyed before the monster arrived, the monster must be destroyed by virtuous men and women[1].

(3) At this point, I'd like to consider Gothic fictions' virtuous women: the heroines of sensibility. Born from the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility[2] (the study of the correlation between emotional stimuli and physical responsiveness), these fictional heroines are fair-haired and virtuous, whose goodness illuminates the "forces of darkness"; they are hostages to villains, often in the guise of malevolent father figures; they rely on protection from 'paternal' figures, namely brothers and suitors; and their susceptibility to a dangerous world often leaves them physically incapable of movement or resistance. These heroines are doubly trapped—in castles or dungeons, and in their own bodies. The woman of sensibility featured in hundreds of Gothic novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She is reprised in *Dracula* as Lucy Westenra (before she becomes a lustful vamp); and is revised as Mina Harker. Like the traditional Gothic heroine, Mina is praised for her beauty, sensitivity, compassion (she even pities Dracula); she is surrounded by men who try to protect her from evil; she is saved in the end. However, Mina differs from these traditional heroines: she has what Van Helsing calls a "man's brain . . . and woman's heart" (*Dracula* 234)—she combines the traditional feminine attributes of emotional responsiveness with masculine logic. She is, within cultural limits imposed on women, active: she subverts, to an extent, ideas about female capability by hiding her typing—the work which leads the men to Dracula—within her embroidery workbasket, concealing her 'real' work within the bounds of conventional 'women's work.' Moreover, Stoker emphasizes her importance to the group by showing how, when the men try to 'protect' her by leaving her ignorant of their plans, she is attacked by Dracula: they can only follow his movements when Mina is included in the hunt. Like *Frankenstein's* Elizabeth, most vulnerable when least informed, Mina's real status as the key to the men's success is contingent on her knowledge. Women of sensibility, both Shelley and Stoker tell us, are most useful when most informed: a somewhat radical position in nineteenth-century culture.

(4) Buffy would seem to be light years away from the more typical Gothic heroine. However, there are aspects of Buffy which, on closer inspection, don't seem so different to her hysterical foremother. These similarities seem to congeal around Buffy's twin status as adolescent and Slayer, and cast shadows over Whedon's claims that, after watching "a lot of horror movies that starred pretty blonde girls who walk into alleys and get killed" he decided to write a movie "where [she] could walk through an alley and take care of herself." [3] But on what terms *does* Buffy take care of herself—that is, just how independent *is* she? Physically, she easily outclasses the typical heroine of sensibility. But to what degree can this new heroine function without the aid of her traditional standby, the paternal protector?

(5) To gauge the power of this new, Buffy heroine, let's consider the episode in which both the typical and the new heroine appear—"Halloween" (2006). In this episode, the Scooby Gang hire cursed Halloween costumes; when worn, costume becomes character. Xander becomes a soldier; Willow becomes a ghost; and Buffy, dressing to impress Angel in an eighteenth-century ball gown, becomes a heroine of sensibility. Since we see Buffy in the guise of contemporary and traditional heroine, we can see clearly the differences—and the surprising similarities—between these two female types.

(6) Traditional heroines of sensibility rely on a paternal protector—brother, lover—to protect her from the villain. In *Dracula*, Mina has five men to protect her: father-figure, husband, and 'brothers'. In "Halloween," Buffy reiterates Mina's expectations of paternal protection: "it's not our place to fight. Uh, surely some men will protect us." This dependence, accompanied by fainting spells and inertia, is a form of entrapment within the body as real as imprisonment within a dungeon, castle or kitchen. We'd expect contemporary Buffy to be radically different—and, mostly, she is, staking vampires and protecting the community. Yet this same Buffy is, to some extent, as reliant on a paternal protector as her fore-Buffy was: Giles. Whedon takes pains to establish Buffy as willful, and Giles as a stammering, conservative figure: he presents us

with a strong, capable, seemingly independent young woman who is still under the control of an older, paternal authority—moreover, one who at times seems less capable than she, and who keeps reminding her of her obligations as Slayer, and the limits those obligations place on her personal freedoms. Like her predecessor, trapped within a docile, inactive body, Buffy is trapped within the body, the obligations and responsibilities of a Slayer[4]; an entrapment overseen by an older male authority figure. The twentieth century Gothic heroine, it seems, is still forced to rely on her paternal protector.

(7) One of the most interesting aspects of *Buffy* is Whedon's revision of the heroine of sensibility's relation to the hero. As if to highlight Buffy's status as 'new' Gothic heroine, Whedon has created Xander as her male counterpart: the Gothic hero in reverse. Where typically heroes protect the heroine, Buffy is always saving Xander; where heroines fall for their saviors, Xander has a crush on Buffy; and where heroines are the victims of violent, and often sexually aggressive, villains, Xander is serially seduced by dominating women. From Inca Mummy Girl, to Cordelia, to Faith, and now Anya, the man-hating demon who has now become the obsessive, possessive man-lover, Xander is consistently feminized in relation to strong women. In this, he resembles Stoker's Jonathon, who, trapped in Dracula's castle and 'seduced' by three vampire women, assumes the subject position of the typical Gothic heroine.

(8) In "Halloween," this dynamic is reversed. The episode begins with Buffy and Xander in their usual roles of protectrix and protected: Xander, defending Buffy's honor (as a good hero of sensibility should) ends up being protected *by* Buffy. Embarrassed, Xander quips: "A black eye heals, Buffy, but cowardice has an unlimited shelf life." However, while under the influence of their costumes, Xander can take charge: confronted with a demon, Buffy screams and faints, while Xander hits it with the butt of his rifle. It seems that the only time Xander can behave like a hero is by returning to the gender roles of traditional Gothic. This 'righting' of gender types, however, is clearly ironic, and Whedon obviously intends us to read Xander as feminized in relation to Buffy's heroism: a position perhaps just as radical as Stoker's liberating of Mina.

(9) Although the Gothic was full of suffering heroines, contemporary women readers and later readers as well could also find ways of manipulating the stock Gothic dramas to "explore positive role models for active female behavior." (Fay 147). Ann Radcliffe's heroines of sensibility, for example, could temporarily discover psychological liberty from their literal / physical entrapment in the consolations of sublime landscape; in turn, female readers, taking solace from that liberty, might find similar consolations in their own lives[5]. Buffy, too, despite those limits that I've pointed out, offers a positive model of female action: her ambivalent heroism, her sense of being enslaved to her role as Slayer, could be read as a fictionalization of some of the disempowerment many young women feel—and her resilience, her capacity to combine a degree of independence with the exigencies of male authority, could offer a model for young women to confront and combat the limitations that shape their lives. While Whedon claims he "invented Buffy not as someone I could relate to, but as the person I can never be—that's what a hero is for," [6] she potentially offers the same sort of vicarious empowerment that many early Gothic novels afforded their female readership.

### **The crew of light, the scooby gang, and ambivalent technologies**

(10) Given the hundred years between the two texts, it is interesting just how similar Stoker's and Whedon's 'slayers' are. Some of these similarities occur at the level of character. Stoker creates a self-appointed Crew of Light to track and destroy Dracula. Most of these characters represent a particular branch of modern, Victorian life: Jack Seward and Professor Van Helsing represent the sciences; Jonathon Harker signifies law and commerce; Quincey Morris, the adventurer, is a symbol of the New World; Holmwood represents the liberal aristocracy; and Mina the accomplished, compassionate, ideal wife. There are also other talents in this group; along with science, Van Helsing is also an expert on superstition and the occult; Seward and Mina are both adept at technology, he with phonograph recordings, she with typewriting and stenography. This Crew of modern and (mostly) professional men and women are Stoker's antidote to the ancient, aristocratic Count. Seward's and Van Helsing's knowledge of psychology helps them understand the vampire's mind; Jonathon and Mina use their clerical skills (particularly her typewriting) to compile and order the clues that lead them to Dracula's castle. Moreover, Mina develops a telepathic

relationship with Dracula which enables the Crew to pinpoint and destroy the Count.

(11) In *Buffy's* Scooby Gang, there are similar roles. Van Helsing becomes Giles, learned in the occult and father figure of the group. As we've seen, Buffy shares some characteristics with Mina, particularly her insight and her telepathic link with the vampire[7]; in other ways, Mina becomes Willow, a compiler of data who combines modern technology (the Internet) with supernatural power (wicca incantations). Xander, like Jonathon, is physically inept (a point I'll come back to later), but, along with Willow, he is able to research and compile case histories of demons and vampires. Like Stoker, whose Quincey Morris is arguable leagued with the vampire[8], Whedon allows the 'enemy' on board; Oz, the reluctant werewolf, and Angel, the vampire with a soul, help destroy evil forces.

(12) One of the most fascinating aspects of Stoker's text is its presentation of modern technology. The Crew use new information technologies—typewriters, phonography, stenography, telegraphy, and photography—to track and kill Dracula. The fascinating aspect of this reliance on the modern derives from Stoker's ambivalence about these technologies: trapped in Dracula's castle, Harker, expressing the anxieties of the 1890's, when "rapid innovation was accompanied by fears of a regression to the primitive" (Ellman ix), nervously notes that "the old centuries . . . have powers of their own that mere 'modernity' cannot kill" (*Dracula* 36). As Jennifer Wicke has demonstrated, while the Crew have faith in the power of technology to destroy the vampire, technology in fact mimics vampiric insubstantiality: phonographs, photographic film, typewritten documents all produce images or traces of the human (voice, image, handwriting) without reproducing the substance of humanity. Like vampires, merely the simulacrum of human forms, these technologies circulate and reproduce throughout the community. Because they mimic the vampire's form and movement, Wicke demonstrates that these 'weapons' against the vampire to some extent enable Dracula as much as they threaten him.

(13) This ambivalence about technology is not something we *Dracula* expect from late-twentieth century culture—but it clearly features in *Buffy*. The Scooby Gang frequently use the Net to identify, track, and destroy demonic forces; yet Whedon, like Stoker, seems equivocal towards modern technology. We see this most insistently in "I Robot, You Jane" (1008), in which Moloch the Corrupter, an ancient demon trapped for centuries in a book, is unleashed into cyberspace. This episode draws on *Dracula's* twin methodologies of text and tech, and displays, perhaps surprisingly, a similar ambivalence towards both technology *and* textuality. Moloch the Corrupter, a demon who preys on the vulnerable, offering them power, knowledge, and love if they will do his bidding, is bound in a book by a monks' spell. Five centuries later, the book turns up in Sunnydale High, where Willow scans the text into a computer, freeing Moloch from the binding curse and unleashing him into cyberspace. Calling himself 'Malcolm,' he begins an e-mail seduction of Willow while sending messages to other vulnerable Sunnydale computer science students, offering them power in return for destroying the Slayer. Buffy, Giles and Xander discover that Moloch has been released into cyberspace; Jenny—a technopagan—and Giles recreate the spell, trapping Moloch into a metallic shell; and Buffy tricks Moloch into punching a circuit box and electrocuting himself.

(14) At the heart of the episode are questions about knowledge and power, the forms that these take, and their relationships to demonic, dangerous forces. These questions are bound up with the form that information takes—text or tech—and the way in which those forms either defeat or enable the spread of evil. The lines between text and tech are drawn at the level of character: Giles prefers text, Jenny supports tech. The presentation of Giles as older, book-bound, conservative, and Jenny as young, hip and 'jacked-in,' signifies that Whedon wants his audience to find technology more attractive, because more modern. What is most interesting is the way in which the script makes associations between these different forms of knowledge, and substance: textual information is seen as material, weighty; electronic data is insubstantial, ephemeral. Textual information is bound; electronic information is diffuse, pervasive.

(15) The episode initially seems to celebrate the Internet as the liberation of knowledge: "The printed page is obsolete," says Fritz, "information isn't bound up any more. It's an entity." However, the Internet and computer technology are ambivalent powers: while technology liberates information, technology also

liberates Moloch: once he is scanned into cyberspace, his power is as unbounded as the media he inhabits. We now see different values attached to text and tech: the liberation of information seems dangerous, while information bound, as Moloch was in the book, seems safer. Here, we see *Buffy* mimic Stoker's ambivalence towards modern technology; those mass cultural forms which disseminate insubstantial, disembodied information can aid in the spread of insubstantial, disembodied evil.

(16) Just as in Stoker, however, those same forms which mimic the vampire can also destroy it. Giles and Jenny are able to use the Internet to bind Moloch into a material form, which Buffy can then destroy. But technology, it seems, at the end of the episode hasn't regained the legitimacy and authority that it enjoyed at the beginning. Despite Jenny's insistence that "it was your book that started all the trouble, not a computer," in the light of the relationship that's been forged between technology and the dissemination of evil there still seems something much more convincing in Giles's defense of the book: "The knowledge gained from a computer, is, uh, it . . . has no texture, no context. It's there and then it's gone. If it's to last, then the getting of knowledge should be tangible." Giles's mistrust of cyberspace isn't just technophobia, but an anxiety which, like Stoker's, seems to derive from the possibility that technology mimics vampirism and the demonic. Moloch, we must remember, is the demon who lures his victims with promises of "love, power, knowledge": in this episode, we see Moloch's victims—Willow, Fritz, Dave—as lured by the unbounded, readily accessible information and power (and, in Willow's case, chat-room love) made possible by the Internet. "I Robot, You Jane" offers us a moral lesson in the potential dangers of the Internet, of unbounded, uncensored information, which, Janus-faced, can both empower and destroy[9]. Cyberspace, like vampires, is pervasive, intangible, insubstantial, atemporal, uncontainable, and the information it contains is easily reproduced and circulated. Like the mass culture it 'inhabits,' the mass culture Wicke sees burgeoning in *Dracula*, contemporary media and computer technology are the "social force[s] most analogous to Dracula" and vampirism (469). Moreover, technology doesn't just mimic vampirism, but can be a conduit for the demonic into the community.

(17) Technology's potential as a conduit for the vampiric / demonic is made even more frightening by the fact that technology is the province of women—in *Dracula*, Mina, and in *Buffy*, Jenny and Willow. This presents a problem because both *Dracula* and *Buffy* show women as the most vulnerable to vampiric seduction or attack. If technology can be the conduit for the demonic, and women control technology, then not only are women at risk from tech-aided evil, but they expose the whole community. By compiling information about Dracula into a form that he can trace, Mina "is the one who most consistently and devotedly facilitates the circulation of texts that produces the knowledge so helpful in fighting the vampire" (Pope 211); conversely however, as Wicke argues, Mina's "very prowess with the typewriter . . . brings down Dracula on unsuspecting British necks, even including her very own" (Wicke 467); Jenny's computer files, designed to restore Angel's soul, incite Angelus to kill her ("Passion"); Willow scans Moloch into cyberspace, and is seduced by his almost fatal charm. The very proficiencies which make these women good 'evil hunters' are those which make them targets, and victims, of evil.

### **"Your girls that you all love are mine": women's sexuality and monstrous anxiety**

(18) *Dracula* is frequently read as a thinly-veiled account of male sexual anxiety, and the dangers of sexually liberating women[10]. The Count chooses young women as his victims; he 'seduces' them, and, in the case of Lucy (and almost Mina) vamps them. This vamping turns ordinarily chaste women into sexually voracious predators: Lucy's "purity" is turned to "voluptuous wantonness," while the quasi-vamped Mina wakes next to Jonathan who, swooning and breathing heavily, has either just been bitten, or sexually exhausted, by his ordinarily pure wife (*Dracula* 211). Yet, as Gail Griffin points out, Dracula is a shadowy figure in Stoker's text; the real threat of "active vampirism, with its dimension of sexuality, is dissociated from Dracula and associated instead" with the women he's vamped (138). Vampire reality, she says, "explodes upon the other characters not in [Dracula's] own person but in Lucy's" (139) Stoker establishes a relationship between vampirism and sexually voracious women: Lucy's unconventional attitudes to sex—"[W]hy can't they let a girl marry three men?"—seems to predispose her to vampirism, more so than newly-married Mina (*Dracula* 59). In *Buffy*, too, sexual women are associated with the demonic: dark girl Faith is promiscuous; Drusilla is sensual and erotic; and in "Doppelgangland" (3016) when Anya unwittingly invokes Willow's vampire double, Vamp Willow embodies the 'unseen,' erotic aspect of virginal Willow's

personality. Twentieth-century women, then, are vulnerable to vampiric seduction; they are the conduits through which vampirism will invade England; and, since vampirism is associated with liberated female sexuality, women's sexuality becomes a veiled threat of vampirism.

(19) The source of this anxiety about vampirism making women sexual is not just a moral concern (although, as a Victorian novel, this is present). John Allen Stevenson has taken an anthropological approach to the question of vampirism and female sexuality, and finds an answer in fears of the foreign. Stevenson argues that "the novel insistently—indeed, obsessively—defines the vampire as a foreigner, as someone who threatens and terrifies precisely because he is an outsider" (139). In *Dracula*, the foreign is obsessively identified with the monstrous, and just as obsessively separated from the "good" men who track Dracula. "As Mina puts it, "[T]he world seems full of good men—even if there *are* monsters in it" (*Dracula* 230). The familiar is the image of the good, while foreignness merges with monstrosity" (142). Dracula's foreignness is literal, geographical—he comes from Transylvania—but he is also made foreign by his vampirism: he is 'strange' and foreign because he eats differently, sleeps at different times, looks different, talks differently. It is this definition of the foreign as strange and monstrous that *Buffy* adopts. The Sunnydale vampires aren't all geographically foreign (although Spike, Drusilla and Angelus[11] clearly are), as they tend to be vamped Sunnydale locals: they are foreign because they aren't human. In both *Dracula* and *Buffy*, vampires seek to conceal this foreignness behind a mask of the local, the familiar. Dracula seeks out Jonathon's services in part because he wants to learn how to speak English, and to act English, so that he can move through London undetected. In Sunnydale, vampirism is masked by local identity, disguised as Sunnydale students, workers, family members. Dracula and the Sunnydale vampires and demons infiltrate the community; they become the foreign within the familiar, the domestic, the homely; they are, in Freud's terms, uncanny[12].

(20) One can, however, recognize the changed face of a vampire about to feed. Whedon explains that these different features signify "that a vampire is not a person. It's a monster that looks like a person." [13] This distinction is significant, for it maintains taxonomical boundaries between the human and the vampiric. To cross these boundaries is to endanger the integrity of the human race, to commit what Stevenson calls "excessive exogamy," the sexual theft of members of one group by another (140). Excessive exogamy, the mingling of different 'blood' to create another 'race' is a threat at the heart of *Dracula*: the Count tells the Crew that his plan to vamp Britain is already underway: "your girls that you love are mine already, and through them you and others shall yet be mine" (*Dracula* 306). *Buffy* expresses the same threat: in "The Harvest" (1002) Giles explains the danger of demonic miscegenation:

"[t]he books tell 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 Crew and the Gang need to protect their community from the threat of foreign invasion, a threat of the corruption of their race, their kind. That threat, whether it be to nineteenth-century London, or a twentieth-century middle-class suburb, signifies fears which are both anthropological, cultural and national: and, while these fears may not be as explicitly expressed in *Buffy* and they are in *Dracula*, there is evidence that they still pertain.

(21) In *Buffy*, we see a modified version of *Dracula's* suggestive link between women's sexual desire and the invasion of evil; there is still a sense that women must be protected from the threat of demonic influence. The real difference between Whedon and Stoker's accounts of relationships between human women and demon men is the way men approach these relationships. In *Dracula*, the Crew see it as a duty to protect their women from Dracula: in *Buffy*, the anxiety that demonic forces will corrupt women belongs to the vampire and the werewolf.

(22) Perhaps Whedon's most radical reversal of traditional Gothic conventions is his choice of turning these two traditional Gothic/horror monsters into moral characters and romantic leads. In the tradition of Gothic

novelists, Whedon is clearly targeting a female audience: like Anne Rice, his vampire story “share[s] a number of characteristics usually associated with women’s romance—notably, the tracing out of the vampire’s search for fulfillment, for a ‘complete’ love relationship” (Gelder 109). Buffy’s and Willow’s relationships with Angel and Oz are intensely romantic—Whedon says “all of the relationships on Buffy are kind of romantic.” [14] Angel, arguably more of a romantic focus than Oz, is clearly a combination of Coppola’s Dracula—the seductive, dangerous, but monogamous romantic hero—and Anne Rice’s Louis (*Interview with the Vampire*), the existentialist tormented by his residual human morality. The publicity tag of Coppola’s film, ‘Love Never Dies’, emphasized the love story between Mina and Dracula (an invention of Coppola’s), and transformed Dracula from a sexually dangerous villain into a sympathetic, romantic figure. Angel is plagued by the philosophical questions that trouble Rice’s vampires—particularly Louis. Rice’s vampires are existentialists, seeking the answers to the meaning of life—and death. As Linda Badley has argued, Louis’s existential crisis mimics our own: “Louis finds himself ‘made’ a vampire with all the abruptness as we all, according to Sartre, find ourselves ‘condemned’ to life, freedom, and choice” (108). Like Louis, Angel too is tormented by his vampness: the gypsy curse that reinstated his soul makes him despise his condition, and feel remorse for his victims. Oz is similarly tormented; bitten by his nephew, a werewolf, he is plagued by his own power, and begs Willow to lock him up when he “wolfs out.”

(23) Where Whedon’s modern ‘monsters’ differ most radically from their Gothic predecessors is their guilt towards their monstrosity, and their subsequent determination to protect the women they love from the demons inside them. This narrative thread seems to have its origins in contemporary philosophy: while Gothic novels prefigured such philosophical movements as existentialism, recent Gothic like *Buffy* seems to draw on recent philosophical meditations on “entrapment, escape and individual moral agency” (Waxman 81). To some extent, too, sympathy for monsters was prefigured in *Dracula*: Mina, clearly Stoker’s most admirable character, takes pity on Dracula, seeing him as more hunted than hunter: indeed, at times, Dracula becomes more sympathetic than his aggressive, violent pursuers. In *Buffy*, both Angel and Oz are marked (despite their romances) as lone figures, struggling to “embrace ethical behavior” in the face of their monstrous instincts (Waxman 84). Angel seems akin to early nineteenth century vampires (he is ‘born’ as a vampire around this time) who, “stories suggest . . . are lonesome rather than predacious creatures, suffering from an excess of love,” but unable to express that love fully, and without risk to Buffy (Ellman, xvi). Both Oz and Angel adopt the alienation, guilt and self-loathing that, as Barbara Frey Waxman points out, is part of the human condition; Whedon has his ‘monsters’ experience those emotions and crises that culture teaches humans to repress “in order to perform higher intellectual and ethical tasks” (89). To a large extent, Angel and Oz are marked as more human than human, for their angst isn’t concealed or repressed, but exquisitely conscious. Consequently, we are able to see very clearly just how their moral crises direct their behavior; in this, Whedon presents Angel and Oz as, in many ways, more admirable than most of his human characters.

(24) Despite its sympathy towards its monster heroes, the anxiety about exogamy which haunted *Dracula* returns in *Buffy*: there, it’s Buffy and Willow who risk being ‘polluted’ by demons, and producing a new generation of ‘human form[s] possessed.’ However, while Giles and Xander initially have reservations about both Buffy and Willow dating monsters (Xander, of course, has ulterior motives in both cases), it’s not the ‘paternal protectors’ but the monsters themselves who end the relationships (and, Stevenson might add, end the risk of exogamy). Angel and Oz’s anxieties about corrupting their human lovers are explicit in the ‘break-up’ scenes: Angel tells Buffy she will want someone who can “make love to [her],” with whom she can have “children” (“The Prom,” 3020). Oz and Willow separate after Willow discovers Oz has been mating with a she-werewolf: “You wanted her . . . Like in an animal way?” Veruca reminds Oz of the dangers of exogamy, and the necessity of intra-species romance: “You’ll see that we belong together.” Oz, leaving town, tells Willow that he can’t be with her because “[t]he wolf is inside me all the time, and I don’t know where that line is any more between me and it” (“Wild at Heart,” 4006).

(25) However, while Whedon places the anxiety of miscegenation or exogamy on the shoulders of his ‘monsters,’ Buffy seems to promote a broader culture of mistrust of relationships between monstrous men and human women. While Buffy / Angel and Willow / Oz romances are presented sympathetically, there remains a sense that their separations are not only inevitable, but endorsed. The danger of vampire

seduction, and the impossibility of vampire-human relationships, is clear in "Innocence" (2014) when, at the moment of orgasm, Angel loses his soul and becomes a vampire again. This transformation, however, is outside Angel's control: as such, it doesn't signify Angel's concern about corrupting / destroying Buffy, but presents this corruption from a different, implicitly authorial, perspective. Therefore it's not just Angel and Oz who see the risk to Buffy and Willow: the audience is asked to recognize the dangers of these foreign 'men'—no matter how sympathetic they might be—to our heroines.

(26) Whedon's 'new' Gothic, then, emphasizes that aspect of the old which sees its heroes and heroines as victims of larger forces which they cannot control—a condition that is both timeless and modern. We've seen how Buffy feels trapped within the duties of a Slayer: Angel and Oz, too, are trapped within their 'monstrosity.' The heroes of 'new' Gothic seem just as vulnerable to the exigencies of a cruel world: with one difference. Whedon allows Angel and Oz an agency within their relationships that he denies to Buffy and Willow: he gives Angel and Oz the power of choice. Buffy, telling Angel she "didn't know [she had] a choice" to love him or not, tearfully says "I can't believe you're breaking up with me" ("The Prom"). When Willow, begging Oz to stay, asks "Don't I get any say in this?", he replies "No" ("Wild at Heart"). Buffy and Willow are at a double remove from making choices concerning their lovers; they, perhaps more so than Angel and Oz, become victims of forces that they can't control. The sexual politics of the Gothic, in which heroines remain at a remove from power granted to heroes, seems to pertain in the late twentieth century.

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(27) The Gothic, a genre born in the eighteenth century and most popular in the shadows of the French Revolution, has proven a highly adaptable vehicle for expressing the anxieties and concerns of generations. *Dracula's* reflection of Victorian sensibilities, and *Buffy's* engagement with twentieth-century culture, share more than just Gothic conventions. While we might expect the concerns of Victorian England and twentieth-century USA to be radically different cultures, my reading of *Dracula* and *Buffy* has highlighted a surprising number of similarities. Both texts recognize the limits of choices and freedoms placed on women; both express an ambivalence towards modern technologies; both seem to, at one and the same time, fear yet sympathize with the foreign and the monstrous, seeing their angst as deeply human, and their persecution as one of the more violent aspects of human nature. In the light of comparisons, Stoker seems to prefigure of Whedon's promotion of a strong but limited heroine, mistrust of dehumanizing technology and compassion for the 'Other' in a way that makes *Dracula* seem less a Victorian, than a modern, text: In turn, *Buffy*, a show which on one level promotes female independence and modernity, can now be read as taking a more conservative view of technology and women's freedoms than might be expected from our own, contemporary culture. The Gothic, it seems, remains infinitely adaptable as a genre for reflecting, or revealing, the questions and anxieties confronted by each generation.

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[1] See Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear," in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Form*, (London: Verso, 1988), 85.

[2] See, among others, G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986).

[3] Interview, at <http://www.ms88.com/student/mwwebpage1.html#bottom>

[4] Ken Gelder, discussing the 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, sees Buffy's obligations in a more positive light: because slaying offers a degree of authority that her girlfriends don't enjoy, "for Buffy . . . to believe in vampires is to believe in the possibility of her own empowerment as a woman" (143).

[5] One example of this argument is in Norton Richter, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999).

[6] Interview, at <http://www.ms88.com/student/mwwebpage1.html#bottom>

[7] In "Amends," for example, Buffy is able to enter into and experience Angel's dreams.

[8] See Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear" in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literature* (London: Verso, 1988), for a convincing reading of Quincey as a vampire.

[9] Maud Ellman notes that the *Dracula* story has "been read as a prefigurement of . . . the dissemination of the Internet" (viii).

[10] See, among others, Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Anne Cranny-Francis, "Sexual Politics and Political Repression in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in *Nineteenth Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, ed. Clive Bloom *et al.* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle*

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[11] Spike and Dru have British accents; Angelus is Irish, although Angel, his 'good' incarnation, has a localised American accent.

[12] Freud writes that the uncanny is experienced when the familiar becomes strange—he notes that *heimlich* ('homely') has two possible meanings: "on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight." "The Uncanny," in *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1958), 129.

[13] Interview, at <http://www.ms88.com/mwwebpage1.html#bottom>

[14] Whedon, Joss, interview with *TV Guide Online*, May 8 2000. Whedon's emphasis on romance over sex is clear in series four, with the introduction of Willow's girlfriend Tara; their relationship has evolved less as a lesbian sexual relationship than as an intense romantic friendship.



## **Daniel A. Clark & P. Andrew Miller**

# **Buffy, the Scooby Gang, and Monstrous Authority: *BtVS* and the Subversion of Authority**

(1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, like much of the fare on the WB network (the show's home for the first five seasons), is marketed to and most popular among younger viewers. Like *Dawson's Creek*, *Charmed*, *Roswell*, and *Popular*, it depicts a young attractive cast struggling with the issues that typically face young adult characters on television, if not young adults in real life. A recent promotional spot on the WB for these shows features the stars laughing, dancing, and partying. The spot ends with the phrase "The night is young" on the screen. Current promotional spots feature the same imagery with a hip-hop version of The Who's "My Generation" on the soundtrack. They are young and hip and appeal to a young audience that uses television as one of the cultural texts that informs their interpretive communities. There are a number of elements of *BtVS* that have potential significance for an audience, but the ones on which we choose to focus are the issues of authority and power in the show. Issues of power and authority provide the show with most of its plot lines as well as thematic context.

(2) Authority is viewed primarily through the eyes of the show's teen protagonists and so takes on the guise of traditional figures from the spheres in which the characters travel: school authority embodied by administrators, teachers, professors, and coaches; social authority embodied by parents; and civic authority embodied by local and federal officials and police. The number of supernatural threats that have a basis in these mundane areas emphasizes the show's focus on these spheres of the characters' lives. The relevance that these figures have to Buffy and the Scooby Gang has shifted throughout the course of the show's five seasons, and no doubt that will continue. But these authority figures comprise the landscape or the set against which the show's action occurs. Just as a show like *ER* is set against the backdrop of the economics of rationed medical care in a dangerous and violent world, or *The Practice* is shaped by the struggle between a rigid ethical legal code and an unethical, amoral world, *BtVS* is about young heroes with little or no socially constructed authority struggling against all of the various authorities to which they are subject. In many ways, this description could be used for shows like *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Party of Five*, *Dawson's Creek*, or *Freaks and Geeks*. But in *BtVS*, power held by authority figures is often made literal through some supernatural twist. The power held by Mayor Wilkins comes from more than the consent of the majority of the citizens of Sunnydale; it is demonic.

(3) So while the heroes of *BtVS* must contend with the petty power abuses of Principal Snyder, they must also contend with Mayor Wilkins' plan to devour the graduating seniors of Sunnydale High as he achieves full demonhood. At the same time Buffy must face her first love turning against her, she must also deal with his attempts to kill her and open a vortex to Hell.

(4) What distinguishes the traditional authority figures from the villains in *BtVS* is their relationship to power. As mentioned above, Mayor Wilkins holds socially constructed power since he has the consent of voters to preside, but we find out later that he possesses supernatural powers and plans to achieve more at the expense of the town. It is because of his thirst for more power that he becomes a threat and comes to

the attention of Buffy and the Scooby Gang.

(5) In contrast to the mayor, however, is Joyce Summers, Buffy's mother, who is the representative of parental authority on the show. Joyce has no supernatural powers and has no desire for them. She remains, in terms of the dynamics of the show, a mere "authority figure" with all of the flatness and sketchiness that that phrase implies. While Joyce became an important character in the show's third season and in the fifth season, she is not nearly as integral as the other characters. One sign of her lack of relevance is the fact that, prior to her illness and surprising death in season five, she has never made opening credit status; that is, the actress (Kristine Sutherland) who plays her (and plays her well) has never been featured or named in the show's opening credit sequence. Oz, who never really became too much more than Willow's boyfriend, went from "recurring character" to achieving opening credit status before the actor left the show. Cordelia maintained opening credit status even after she became more and more sidelined by the series' story arc. Even Spike, now a quasi-member of the Scooby Gang, has made it to the opening credits. The show seems to regard parents as obstacles to overcome, get around, or ignore. They control the freedom of the heroes to some extent, but rule mostly by consent of the children.

(6) In the first seasons of the show, Joyce does not know that Buffy is The Slayer. She merely imagines that Buffy is disobedient or has gotten in with the "wrong crowd." Thinking Buffy is a normal child, Joyce imposes (or tries to impose) normal restrictions—curfews, groundings, etc. Buffy must lie and deceive in order that she may fulfill her duties as The Slayer. At the end of season two, when Joyce finds out about her daughter's supernatural abilities, she attempts to prevent Buffy from battling Angel, "forbidding" her and telling her that, should she leave, Buffy should never return. Finally, the only power Joyce has over Buffy is to withhold her love, but even this cannot stop Buffy. And in the end, Joyce is unable to make good on her threat. In the fourth season, Joyce pops up rarely. In one episode she appears mainly just so Faith can menace her. In the final episode, she appears in Buffy's dream sequence trapped inside a wall, talking congenially to her daughter about her predicament through a small hole. Neither mother nor daughter seems terribly worried about it. In the fifth season, Joyce appears more often, especially after the magical creation of Buffy's younger sister, Dawn. But her presence serves mainly to illustrate her own diminished capacity due to her illness and her inability to protect Dawn from Glory and her minions. In this season, Joyce has no authority at all over Buffy and in fact transfers her mother role to Buffy. Buffy first has to take care of the ailing Joyce and after Joyce's death, she must take authority over Dawn. Of course, Buffy is angry that Dawn shows the same lack of respect for parental authority that she always has.

(7) Joyce is the only parent of the members of the Scooby Gang the viewers see regularly. In the one episode in which we see Willow's mother Sheila, the mothers exercise their authority very firmly, nearly killing their children for their disobedience, but in the end we see that they were under demonic influence. [Ironically, it was a demon taking the form of children that manipulated the parents ("Gingerbread," 3011).] In the episode "Ted" (2011), Joyce begins dating a man who tries to impose further restrictions on Buffy by obligating her to "family time." Buffy's refusal to accede to his authority results in a violent confrontation in which it appears Buffy kills Ted. Of course, she does not kill him; he is a robot – a Stepford step-father—who is seeking to create (and imprison) a perfect (and eventually dead) family. In the episode "Witch" (1003), Amy's mother seeks to relive her youth and uses witchcraft to switch places with her daughter. She uses her powers to eliminate her competition in joining the cheerleading squad — the ultimate cheerleading Mom. Of course, the Scooby Gang defeats her, but she is a notable exception to the rule that parents are generally irrelevant in *BtVS*.

(8) If it isn't clear enough that parents hold very little power on the *BtVS*, the episode "Bad Eggs" (2012) explicitly questions the concept of parental control. In this episode, Buffy and her fellow students in health class are given the assignment of caring for eggs for two weeks so that they can begin to learn about the chores of parenting—not an uncommon assignment in a sex-ed curriculum. In the Buffyverse, however, the eggs hatch little mind-controlling creatures that turn the "parents" into the slaves of a demon who is trapped beneath the school. Buffy escapes the control of the little creatures because of her quick Slayer reflexes. Xander, whose parents we never see (and we learn from anecdotes that they are at least negligent and perhaps abusive), boils his egg. But Willow's protective maternal instincts leave her totally vulnerable to being controlled by the little egg-creature. "Bad Eggs" suggests that parents are little more

than drones or interchangeable “parental units” (to use the phrase coined in the *Saturday Night Live* “Coneheads” sketches) and that the children are far from innocent little cherubs.

(9) Like parents, most teachers and school administrators hold minor supporting roles on the series. Rather like the parents and teachers of Peanuts cartoons, they are garbled background noise. Like parents, school authorities are there to be subverted, overcome, or ignored. Principal Flutie, for example, is shown to be ineffectual in “The Pack” (1006); faced with a pack of students possessed by hyena spirits, he attempts to discipline them and is devoured. But the school authorities are often shown to use and abuse power that parents in the Buffyverse do not have. Flutie's replacement, Principal Snyder, embodies every negative stereotype of school principals. He is a bully who favors the jocks and the school elite at the expense of the already marginalized students. He resorts to extortion to force Willow to tutor the jock Percy. (Ironically, as we find out in “Band Candy” (3006), he was once one of the marginalized nerds he now torments.) He even challenges the ascended Wilkins in Part II of “Graduation Day” (3022) before being eaten by him. He is a petty and manipulative “stupid little troll” (as Buffy calls him in “Becoming” Part II [2022]), who, we find out in “School Hard” (2003), is involved in covering up the supernatural causes of violence that occur at and around Sunnydale High. Prior to this revelation, we have seen a teacher who is really a She-Mantis in disguise and a Gypsy-witch “technopagan” computer teacher, but with Snyder we see school authority as corrupted by the supernatural powers that have preyed so heavily upon the students of Sunnydale High and the citizens of Sunnydale. It's a minor comment in “School Hard” that he makes to the police about blaming the violence at Parent-Teacher Night (brought on by Spike and his cohorts) on gang members on drugs. It implicates both Snyder and the police in a cover-up and suggests that Snyder's dislike for Buffy goes beyond her disruptive presence in school—that he would rather let the Forces of Darkness prey on his students than have a Slayer whom he cannot control in their midst to protect them.

(10) The abuse of authority doesn't end with high school. When Buffy goes to college she meets a cruel pop culture professor who kicks her out of class after accusing her of draining all of the energy out of the room. And she meets Professor Maggie Walsh, a woman who describes herself as a “bitch-monster from hell” (“The Freshman,” 4001). Though this is not a literal description (one has to clarify that in writing about the Buffyverse) she is co-opted, if not corrupted, by her relationship with the demons of Sunnydale. As a leader of the Initiative, she attempts to create a weapon using computers, mechanical parts, and parts of demons—a cyber-demon (a “kinematically redundant, biomechanical demonoid” [“Goodbye, Iowa,” 4014]) she calls “Adam.” Like Snyder, she has a control fetish, and although she initially values Buffy as a force to be used against the demons of Sunnydale, she ultimately finds Buffy too hard to control (something Snyder, Giles, Wesley, Joyce, and any number of other adults have already found out for themselves) and she attempts to have Buffy killed.

(11) Between Snyder and Walsh, we see teachers both as victims of the Forces of Darkness and as agents. Buffy's guidance counselor, a man who has the potential to actually help Buffy cope with some of the events in “Becoming” and the aftermath, is killed by a student who has become a Jekyll/Hyde monster (“Beauty and the Beasts” [4004]). Jenny Calendar is killed by Angelus (“Passion” [2017]). Several anonymous teachers are killed, assaulted, or otherwise victimized in episodes such as “School Hard” (2003), “Go Fish” (2020), “Bad Eggs” (2012), “Invisible Girl” (1011), and “Pangs” (4008). Aside from students, teachers probably make up the largest group of victims in the Buffyverse. But they are also villains, usually with exaggerated desires for order (as in the case of Snyder and Walsh) or for glory. In “Revelations” (3007), Gwendolyn Post, a Watcher-gone-bad, uses Giles, Buffy, and Faith to obtain the Glove of Myhnegon. Coach Marin uses old Soviet performance-enhancing drugs to create a champion swim team (“Go Fish” [2020]). The coach in “Nightmares” (1010) terrorizes a boy so much that his nightmares become reality for Sunnydale.

(12) National and civic authority come to dominate the third and fourth seasons of *BtVS*. In season three, the story arc of Mayor Wilkins' preparation for his ascension into full demonhood dominates the action. In season two, with Principal Snyder's comment to the police about covering up the true causes of violence in “School Hard,” we began to infer that the civic authorities at the very least *know* about the Hellmouth, if not actually operate in collusion with the Forces of Darkness. The only other times that civic authority is invoked are in “Ted,” in which Buffy is interrogated by police for Ted's “murder”; “Becoming” (2021/2022),

in which Buffy is sought for Kendra's murder; "Dead Man's Party" (3002), in which Joyce threatens to go to the mayor if Buffy is not allowed to return to Sunnydale High (Principal Snyder scoffs at this threat, which foreshadows events to come); and "Homecoming" (3005), in which the mayor hires the vampire Mr. Trick. At that point we are launched into the ascension story arc.

(13) So civic authority, when not at the center of a story line, is represented as incompetent and easily thwarted. In both "Ted" and "Becoming" the civic authorities are the police. In "Ted," we the audience are perfectly aware that Ted's "death" is accidental and that his behavior was outrageously provocative. The police are not impressed by Buffy's explanations, and, in fact, do not believe them because Buffy's recuperative powers have already healed the marks left on her by their struggle. It is the fact that Ted is not dead—not an understanding of the circumstances—that puts an end to the case. In "Becoming," Buffy is accused by Snyder for Kendra's murder. Buffy manages to escape arrest because of her Slayer strength and reflexes and continues to elude police until she leaves Sunnydale after closing the vortex. Upon her return, there is a passing comment that the police now know that she did not commit Kendra's murder. Who they think did it and why Buffy suffers no legal repercussions for beating up the police and resisting arrest is never explained. More than anything, else the police seem to appear in the show as an indication of how much Buffy's role as The Slayer marginalizes her. A normal teenager might naturally be angry or suspicious of a mother's new boyfriend. Add to that the fact that her friends and mother think he's a great guy and she feels even more alone. Add to *that* the life Buffy leads as Slayer, and she's *got* to feel isolated. The police threat disappears once Buffy returns to the comfort of her friends and Watcher. Even though she does "kill" Ted, everyone else (including Joyce) sees she was right about the guy. And when she returns to Sunnydale after her self-imposed exile, she has the companionship and sympathy of Watcher, mother, and friends. The warrant for her arrest evaporates.

(14) National authority first appears in "Invisible Girl" in the form of two FBI agents who appear at the end of the episode to "recruit" Marcie, but it doesn't appear again until season four in the guise of the Initiative. In "Invisible Girl," Buffy and the audience are surprised by the appearance of the FBI; we almost wondered if *BtVS* was going to crossover with *The X-Files*. As in *The X-Files*, the government appears to be engaged in insidious activity. Buffy offers no resistance and the episode has less of a sense of closure than most episodes. "Invisible Girl" precedes "School Hard" by several episodes, so it is the earliest foreshadowing of some kind of collusion between governmental authority and the Forces of Darkness.

(15) In season four, The Initiative is a project designed to capture and study supernatural beings, learn about the source of their power and create a weapon based upon both science and the supernatural. Our first glimpse of the Initiative is the sight of commandos stalking demons and vampires on the campus of UC-Sunnydale. At first we are not sure what they are doing with or to the bad guys; we just see these menacing figures in camouflage advancing on creatures they have rendered helpless. Seven episodes into season four in "The Initiative," we find out that Riley Finn (Buffy's new crush) and Professor Walsh (Buffy's psychology teacher) are part of the Initiative. Riley is a commando and Walsh is some sort of high-ranking project leader. This softens the image of the Initiative for awhile, but we soon learn there are many secrets being kept in the tunnels under UC-Sunnydale. When the Initiative is mysterious, Buffy and the Scooby Gang are suspicious and distrustful. Once the Initiative is given the shape of people they know and like, most of the wariness disappears. Buffy trusts Walsh and Riley, but soon learns that some of that trust was misplaced. The initial impression of national authority is that it is suspect—that it is keeping secrets. Season four complicates this view by having well-intentioned people involved in the government's secret activities. Ultimately, however the secretiveness of the government becomes one of the elements that leads to its failure.

(16) Whatever the source of their power, authority figures in *BtVS* are usually either corrupt from their first appearance, like Mayor Wilkins, or eventually corrupted, like Gwendolyn Post and Faith, by the seduction of power. However, the corruption of authority and power in the Buffyverse literally means not only a loss of morality and ethics, but also the loss of one's soul. In other words, authority leads to power, power leads to corruption, and corruption leads to the Dark Side.

(17) The search for power motivates many of the minor villains in the show as well as the major villains like Mayor Wilkins. Those without power or authority will often seek it through evil or corruptive means. For example, in "The Harvest" (1002), Jesse, Xander's friend, prefers being a vampire with all of the power it entails over his mortal life. In "Lie to Me" (2007), Buffy's old friend, Billy Fordham, seeks the immortality and perpetual youth of being a vampire and is willing to betray Buffy in order to get them. On a lighter note, Jonathan in "Superstar" (4017) uses dark magics to make his every wish come true, but he redeems himself by giving up his power to save Buffy and the others.

(18) Though power tends to be an absolute corrupter in BtVS, the show provides a few alternatives to that scenario. For instance, characters can retain their soul and moral integrity if they are removed from the position of power and authority. Giles is a good example. First, his authority over Buffy as her Watcher is questionable to begin with. Buffy usually does as she pleases, how she pleases. She subverts Giles authority over and over. As he tells Kendra, he threw out the Slayer's Handbook soon after meeting Buffy. But the critical episode is "Helpless," when Buffy turns 18 and must undergo a rite of passage that has been traditionally inflicted upon any Slayer to survive to that age. She is to be locked in a house with a vampire and must kill it without her Slayer powers. Though Giles objects to this hazing, he complies with the wishes of the Watcher's council and administers the drugs that will keep Buffy from accessing her abilities. Giles eventually reveals everything to Buffy and she is furious, feeling betrayed by Giles and the Council. Giles obviously has an internal conflict with the whole ordeal as well. He finally rejects the Council and its authority and helps Buffy survive. Because of his actions, he is removed as Buffy's Watcher. His position of authority is taken from him, but he can keep his soul.

(19) After being dismissed from the council, he firmly steps into the role of Buffy's foster father, another possible position of authority. But Buffy is now 18 and a legal adult. Therefore, a foster father can provide emotional (and in this case slaying) support but is no longer an authority figure and no longer in a position of power. He becomes a helper instead.

(20) Wesley Windham-Price undergoes a similar change in status. Sent to be Faith's Watcher, he is given charge over both slayers after Giles is removed. Buffy subverts and refutes Wesley's authority even more than she did Giles'. She has an open contempt for him and the subsequent episodes demonstrate that it might be well placed contempt. He is a klutz, he fawns over Cordelia, and he "screams like a woman" when in danger. When he tries to tell Buffy what to do about saving Angel, she severs all ties with the Watcher's Council, effectively cutting off Wesley's power and authority ("Graduation Day"). He later joins in the Scooby Gang's final fight against the mayor, but not as a representative of the Council. (And as we find out in the first season of *Angel*, he is later fired from the Watcher's Council and this is a good thing, as the Council seems to be becoming more amoral, if not outright immoral, and Machiavellian.)

(21) Riley Finn is another example of a character who has to be removed from authority and power in order to save his soul. When the Initiative is first glimpsed in the first episode of season four, they are shadowy figures armed to the teeth and hunting vampires. They continually appear in the early episodes of the season four, and all the foreshadowing techniques, as well as viewers' previous experience with watching the series, lead viewers to believe that these GI Joe guys are going to be the season's villains. So when Riley is revealed to be a member of the Initiative, viewers are dismayed that Buffy has once more fallen for the wrong guy.

(22) For awhile though, Buffy looks like she has met her perfect match, a mortal demon hunter with no soul-stealing curse attached. And she, and the viewers, seem to have been mistaken about the Initiative. Buffy is welcomed into their midst by Riley and Maggie Walsh. She thinks about how much she can accomplish working with them. But then Buffy starts questioning authority, literally. Her repeated questions about why they are collecting demons disturb the well-ordered and quiescent ranks of the Initiative. The possibility that she might infect Riley with her impertinence and independent thinking marks her as dangerous, and Professor Walsh tries to have her killed. When Maggie Walsh reveals that her power and authority have made her corrupt, she loses both life and soul ("The I in Team," 4013). Killed and

reanimated by Adam, she becomes the monster in reality that she appeared to be in personality.

(23) After Walsh's "outing" as the bad guy, many of the secrets of the corruption of the Initiative come out as well. Drugged food. Secret testings. The abomination of Adam. Riley is a part of all of this. After losing a battle to Adam and suffering from withdrawal, Riley is confused about his role in the Initiative and whether or not he's on the right side. He continues to question what is going on, but does not leave the Initiative right away. It is only after the Initiative captures the werewolf Oz that he decides he must act it. This results in his capture and eventual escape from the Initiative, only to become a fugitive. And his commanding officer calls him an anarchist, because he rejects the rigid order and corruption of the Initiative ("New Moon Rising," 4019).

(24) But the show emphasizes that Riley's defection has saved his soul. This is done through comparison with Forrest. Forrest remains a loyal and unquestioning member of the Initiative. He even suggests that maybe there was a good reason why Professor Walsh wanted to kill Buffy and that murder is acceptable. He is antagonistic towards Buffy once she becomes a "threat" to the rigid, patriarchal order of the Initiative. The cost of Forrest's intransigence? He is also captured and converted by Adam, becoming part demon. But he seems to revel in his new power and evil, like many of the "hostiles" he once hunted. He has lost his soul, like so many before him.

(25) Of all the characters who wield power and authority, Buffy is the only one that doesn't succumb to the temptations and corruption of power. There are several reasons for this. One, she is the hero of the series and therefore must remain uncorrupted. Of course the reason she works as a hero is because she does reject the corrupting influence of the power she has. She does not particularly like being the Slayer, no matter how powerful it makes her. This power also prevents her from leading a normal life with normal friends and loves. She knows she may die at any time and in fact, she does. (First in "Prophecy Girl," but she gets better, and later in "The Gift," though we doubt that this death will be permanent either.) Yet she does not shirk her destiny and refuses to give up. She has a moral compass that points her in the right direction. In "Bad Girls" (3014), we see her being tempted by Faith into giving into the seduction of the Slayer's power, as she smashes glass cases and takes what she wants. For awhile, she revels in the feelings Faith evokes. But after Faith accidentally kills the deputy mayor, Buffy sees what happens when you give into the corrupting nature of power. She refuses to give in and become like Faith.

(26) Part of the reason that Buffy does not "go over to the Dark Side" is because she is not alone. Giles and the Scooby Gang provide a support network for the Slayer. She can share her feelings with Willow and Xander and Giles, and they also help to keep her humble. Where most of the authority figures are solitary megalomaniacs seeking personal power, Buffy is chastised for trying to handle things by herself. At the beginning of season two, she insists on working alone and handling things alone and nearly gets Giles and Willow killed ("When She Was Bad," 2001). When she tries to confront Adam by herself, the Gang won't let her. And together, through the help of magic, they provide more power together than even Buffy could by herself. Power shared does not corrupt. This is one of the reasons the show is so popular. Even someone as powerful as Buffy needs a little help from her friends. And those friends just happen to be the (attractive) outcasts and geeks of their high school and town.

(27) The events of season five also serve to illustrate how limited Buffy's power is, how limited any supernatural power is. Glorificus, a god, is constrained by the conditions of her imprisonment in this dimension. Magic cannot truly bring Joyce back. The Slayer's power, which warped Faith's soul and is on par with the power sought by her vampire foes, cannot save her mother or ease her own or her sister's pain. Alone, she is no match for Glorificus. Being the Slayer obligates her to kill Dawn, but loving Dawn prevents her. Her strength and reflexes cannot save the world from another apocalypse. Even as she grows in skill, the nature of her power disturbs her. In her vision, the First Slayer tells Buffy that her "gift is death" ("Intervention," 5018) At first, Buffy takes this to mean that her powers are only those of a killer, a destroyer, not a protector. Buffy recognizes the limitations of her power before anyone else and chooses to flee in "Spiral" (5020), a course of action that she hopes will protect Dawn and her friends. When that fails and she is faced with what appears to be an impossible role -- a destroyer who must preserve-- she falls

into catatonia ("The Weight of the World, " 5021).

(28) Willow helps Buffy to see that even though she has the abilities of a killer, she has always been a protector, that she has always saved the world and protected the helpless. We are reminded of the episode "The Prom" (3020) in which the students of Sunnydale High name Buffy the "Class Protector." Armed with the determination to protect both Dawn and the rest of the world, she leads the Scooby Gang into battle. As in the climactic battles of previous seasons, each of the Gang contributes with his or her particular strength, and Buffy's leadership emphasizes the strengths of her friends: Willow uses her growing magical powers; Spike is charged to be Dawn's protector; Xander (a self-described construction worker who likes to bowl) charges in with a wrecking ball; and Giles, who recognizes the self-imposed limitations of Buffy's role, kills Ben/Glory.

(29) Ultimately, she chooses to sacrifice herself. "She is," as Giles says, "a hero, you see; she's not like us." Though she is the Slayer, she will not harm-- or allow to come to harm-- the helpless. She rejects the killer in herself and in sacrificing her life, she preserves her soul.

(30) *BtVS* is a show about youth and marketed to a youth audience. The heroes are characters who are disempowered by the social structures that traditionally govern or control their lives. That authority becomes corrupted and monstrous (literally) when it abuses its power or seeks power as an end itself. As the conclusion of season four suggests, even the power of The Slayer can be corruptive. The spirit of the first slayer is angry because Buffy shares her power, and it tries to harm Giles, Willow, and Xander. But Buffy knows where true strength and power lie: in the sharing and love of friends. Buffy and the Scooby Gang are not anarchists (no matter what the Initiative might claim), but they do recognize the threat of authority coupled with power. The bonds of friendship and family and love and compassion can save individuals from the seduction of power. They can also provide a measure of wisdom in the responsible use of power. The targeted audience is one that has little influence over its social conditions, but *BtVS* provides a vicarious sense of control. Not only do the young heroes take control over their immediate conditions, they also save the rest of the world from those who would abuse power for their own selfish motives. One can almost hear the villains collectively crying out ". . . and I would have gotten away with it too, if it hadn't been for those meddling kids!"



**Robert A. Davis**

## ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and The Pedagogy of Fear**

[Editors' note: The bibliography for Professor Davis' essay will be available soon. Please check back.]

The mystery years: the sly  
beginnings of secret loves,  
objects flaring, amber in the dark,  
hallowed, like the afterlight of icons.

John Burnside, "Everything is Explained by Something That Happened in Childhood," *Feast Days* (32)

(1) In one sense, the literary and cinematic ancestry of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* seems self-consciously clear. Episode by episode the program makers mischievously invoke the full catalogue of gothic horrors, knowingly parading an endless series of monstrous exhibits whose thoroughbred credentials from the archives of gothic fiction and film make them instantly recognizable to the viewing audience. The intertextual echoes and allusions have also a serious structural purpose, as the conflicts they provoke are skillfully used by the writers to deepen and elucidate the show's underpinning mythology, and to authenticate its ambitiously conceived inflection of literary vampirism.

(2) If there is something counterfeit in this process, then the fakery is also strongly foregrounded in the show's recycling of its thematic materials. Episodes such as "Nightmares" (1010), "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (2016), and most obviously "Halloween" (2006), highlight the program's attractive capacity for exposing the factitiousness of the genre from which it derives whilst continuing to affirm its peculiar allure. Of course, impenetrable layerings of the false, the hybrid and the fabricated have lain at the foundations of gothic art since its beginnings (Hogle 2000), drawing attention to the central place of reproduction and imitation in its motivating aesthetic. Failed imitation and botched reproduction are key gothic preoccupations. Frankenstein's Creature fails to assume the humanity intended by his maker; vampires reproduce an evil simulacrum of life rather than its true essence; even an "originary" gothic creation such as Horace Walpole's house at Strawberry Hill openly selects and exaggerates elements of early medieval architectural style rather than sedulously copying them.

(3) The gothic tradition's obsession with incomplete or sham representation is the source of much of the critical enthusiasm which currently surrounds it. If it is the gaps and shortfalls in the materials of gothic art which produce its distinctive feelings of horror, then criticism seeks always to interpret the slippages in signification which give rise to these responses. They are hence habitually re-read by contemporary theory as encodings of gender, race, class or religious anxieties. The visceral fears which the gothic excites stem, it is argued, from difference and otherness, those displaced tensions which at their most radical succeed in calling into question the unexamined ground of individual subjectivity and social identity.

(4) The critical rhetoric which the gothic attracts assumes its most highly wrought forms in discussions of sexuality, which is repeatedly described as if it were the gothic's truest, most insistent topic, communicating itself urgently through the genre's every shift and evasion. Vampirism is, of course, affirmed as the most achieved and transparent expression of this relationship, exposing to the critical and psychoanalytical gaze a seemingly limitless range of sexual taboos and transgressions thinly disguised in the bloodthirsty predations of the undead (Craft 1984). Robert Mighall has recently challenged the predominance of psychosexual hermeneutics in the interpretation of vampire literature, pointing out that "a vampire is sometimes only a vampire and not a sexual menace" (Mighall 1998, 94). In its handling of its literary and filmic heritage, *Buffy* raises a similarly ironic reservation about the pansexualism which affects critical appreciation of the genre. It does this almost self-parodyingly in its constant and hyperbolic references to sexuality; in the pervasive innuendo of dialogue and gesture throughout the teleplays, and the overt yet stylized intensification of sexual longing in the series' most accomplished plotline: the evolving relationship of Buffy and Angel. There are moments in the show when this suggestiveness is overstated and wearing. At its weakest, the camera in *Buffy* dwells too longingly on the bloom of the pubescent flesh of the preternaturally beautiful characters, as if to accentuate the transience and vulnerability of their youthful allure, showcasing only their victimhood to the observing eye of the audience (see eg "Reptile Boy," 2005). But the popcorn eroticism of the *Buffy* teleplays more regularly subverts the voyeurism which is too often and too readily seen by theorists to be both the appeal and the critical subtext of vampire narratives. The quick-fire wit and sparkling sarcasm in the scripts actually succeed in decoupling the vampire thematics from their allegedly inescapable sexual meanings, not by avoiding sexuality but by mainstreaming it into the most humorous and spontaneous aspects of the dialogue, normalizing what is customarily regarded in the genre and its commentaries as pathological. *Buffy* reminds the viewer that for older adolescents High Schools, with or without vampires, are erotically charged locations for which no spectral or monstrous alibis are required. In this respect, as in others, *Buffy* lays strong claim to the status of a genuinely late, postmodern gothic. It appears to defer to the critical discourse through which its primary ideas are appropriated and understood by the culture it addresses, whilst reflecting that discourse back at the surrounding culture in teasingly playful and ironizing forms. Paying homage to the genre does not preclude questioning it and the meanings with which it is currently invested. Indeed, a sincere engagement with the artifice of the gothic appears to demand such questioning.

(5) *Buffy's* traffic with the imagery and incunabula of the gothic is coolly nonconformist, even at times iconoclastic. It does not, however, exempt the program from intimate involvement with the complex patterns through which gothic romance expresses its contradictory relations with the sources of fear. The gothic is frightening, and stimulates fear even in those comical and postmodern occasions (common if not ubiquitous in *Buffy*) where fear is called forth only to be deflected or denied. Gothic traditions go on renewing themselves at the uncanny sites where culture simultaneously encounters its profoundest validation and confronts its most destabilizing uncertainties: the boundary zones associated with the body, mortality, the law, power, desire and secrecy which the technological and social changes of late capitalism have placed under such considerable stress (Punter 1998). At these locations representation is inverted, undone, "spectralized." Gothic art is therefore not displaced sexuality, rather gothic sexuality, in even its postmodern consumerist versions, furnishes a culture largely severed from traditional religious iconography with metaphors for the exploration of the terrors of selfhood, mortality and the limitations of the human, using and distorting what is perceived to be contemporary culture's only remaining source of possible transcendence: erotic love. Postmodern gothic as it is staged in *Buffy* continues to valorize the redemptive potential of erotic love (most explicitly in the twists and turns of the relationship between Buffy and Angel), but it does so fatalistically, portraying such love as under constant siege by a mocking shadow intent on disclosing its self-deception and inauthenticity. In this respect, *Buffy* extends one of the central strains of gothic polemics - revising and subtly undermining the claims of romantic art.

(6) The Romantic cult of youth and childhood is a particular target of gothic revisionism, and this continues vividly into the imagery and storylines of *Buffy*. The language of the High Romantic mode of representation is invariably loaded with a vitalist rhetoric: children and young people are a unique embodiment of the *life force*, predisposed to an intensity of feeling upon which the health of the human imagination is believed to depend; intermediaries between lived experience and transcendental influences hovering on the borders of

perception. In bestowing these characteristics, Romanticism renders the child or adolescent an unparalleled object of desire, caught in a dialectic of remoteness and proximity (Davis 1992). Youth becomes charged with a numinosity that is quasi-religious in status, but which is denied the authority normally associated with objects of veneration, existing entirely within the ambiguous constructions of adult desire. "For the child," notes Lyotard in his essay "The Grip," "everything is trauma, the wound of a pleasure that is going to be forbidden and withdrawn" (Lyotard 1993).

(7) The language and symbolism which accrue to youth when it is approached in these terms have significant consequences for an understanding of the recurrent association of young people with the occult. It is not a coincidence that in the religious movement known as Spiritualism, which flourished in England and America between 1848 and 1890, among the leading mediums of the day were many children and teenagers (Owen 1985). The accentuation of their alleged spiritual qualities in the Romantic writing of the preceding century created just the right conditions for children to be accepted by the Spiritualist Churches as the best possible links between the realms of the living and the dead. When the apparitions spoke to Kate and Margaret Fox in New York in 1848, initiating the Spiritualist craze, they were doing no more than sowing ground long prepared by a particular set of juxtapositions of children and magic. As Coleridge had recognized long before, seeing children in this way was bound "to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural..." (Shawcross 1907, I, 59).

(8) When they appeared to traffic between the living and the dead, between reality and the transcendent, children and young people in the Romantic vision acquired precisely the kind of symbolic power promised them in fairy tales and folklore. Their voices were listened to, and they were accorded authority in their communities. The Romantic myth was momentarily wrested from the dominion of its adult creators and became a way of speaking and resisting, affording children the means to contest the elaborations of adult desire on its own terms. This turning by children of the figurations of desire back on the adults who perpetrate them highlights an infrequently observed thread in the Romantic mythology of youth and childhood, and casts light upon the ambivalence which haunts all attempts to rationalize the presence of fear in the lives of the young. When children themselves are seen to be *sources* of fear, whether within the life of the imagination or within the life of the communities in which they dwell, a point of crisis has been reached. The resources of art and traditional culture cease to ratify a social or affectional bond, and instead describe a gulf, an absence, an essential alienation of the rival subjectivities of adult and child. In such an arrangement, innocence and guilt, like ignorance and knowledge, become the mutually-defining signifiers of a shame-culture (Postman 1982). Adults and children come to occupy separate spheres bound together only by the costly combination of trepidation and enthrallment with which each regards the other.

(9) This is the juncture at which the gothic imagination begins its task of interrogation. The same cultural mythology which affirms the vibrant authenticity and intensified sensation of the child or young person also encodes childhood, and adult-child interdependency, in a series of troubling forms which, by their obscenity, call into question core Romantic values and assumptions. The archetypal gothic nightmare of the vampire, it can then be argued, circulates elements of the Romantic cult of childhood and youth through the dark underside of Romanticism's unconscious, touching with horrified fascination on the fears which haunt visionary notions of self-begetting, symbolic rebirth, and the organicist metaphors of adult-child continuity in which so much of high Romantic thought optimistically trades.

(10) Literary vampirism, especially, articulates in a cunning gothic irony profound misgivings about the Romantic investment in childhood and adolescence "The children of the night" menace the stability of the adult community with the promise and the threat of their own daemonic immortality: a disastrous arrest of growth and decay which parodies the Romantic yearning for a permanent childlike vitality unencumbered by the biological destiny which subjects real children and young people to the maturational processes of time and change. Vampire sustenance, moreover, involves a parasitic suckling of the body fluid of the living, particularly young women, in a perverse imitation of the life-giving agency of the maternal breast. Stoker's *Dracula* absorbs these fears by dramatizing the conflict between two communities, between, in effect, two species, competing for survival: the voluntary, rational, adult band of vampire hunters led by Mina and Van Helsing arranged against the involuntary, instinctive, mutually dependent phratry of the vampire kindred condemned to their tragic homelessness (Stoker 1983). Parents and parent figures die

with remarkable frequency in Stoker's novel: Harker's solicitor-mentor, Lucy's mother, Holmwood's father, as the dominant order sacrifices its filial connectedness in order to defeat a rival, pseudo-familial grouping in which individuals are bound to each other quite literally by ties of blood. Adults versus children: the vampire mocks the affinities of the Romantic family romance and its elevation of domestic piety. Thirty years before Stoker's invention, one of the most genuinely chilling of all gothic protagonists is the child-vampire Carmilla in Sheridan Le Fanu's neglected short story of the same name (Le Fanu 1993, 243-320). *Carmilla* confirms the association of vampires with perpetual youth, and openly declares the alluring horror of the corrupted adolescent who can be blamed and scapegoated for the confusions of adult desire. "Sometimes the playful, languid girl, sometimes the writhing fiend," Carmilla is condemned and finally exterminated because she outrageously embodies a compelling source of "the rapture of that cruelty which yet is love."

(11) Part of the scandal which Carmilla occasions in the eyes of her antagonists lies in her flouting of the social and symbolic ties of the conventional patriarchal family. Her oft-noted lesbianism is representative of this insofar as it signifies a wider female and adolescent autonomy unheeding of the demands of family and society, repudiating submissiveness and resistant to the imposition of inherited feminine roles and responsibilities (Veeder 1980). Above all, Carmilla's ambiguous sexuality and agelessness have a heuristic function within the story, because they challenge the ambitions of orthodox knowledge and masculine and adult reasoning. Carmilla initially possesses an aristocratic immunity from both the modern bourgeois professionals who are too sophisticated to believe in vampires and the superstitious traditionalists whose feudal deference cannot contain or constrain her version of vampirism. In the end, as in *Dracula*, only the secret knowledge of the career vampire hunter, Vordenburg, proves capable of overcoming Carmilla's self-possession and securing her downfall. In hovering indefinitely between contrasting images of the female adolescent, Carmilla's vampirism casts Romantic representation itself into doubt and refuses, until death, the symbolic order of the family romance and all of its sexual, generational and social identifiers. It is, indeed, for just this perversity that Carmilla must be destroyed (Gelder 1994).

(12) *Buffy's* subversion of the laws and taboos of the kinship system is accomplished through a similar, if altogether more uncertain, disruption of established institutional bonds and the orthodox management of knowledge. In episodes such as "School Hard" (2003), the notion of "siring" is used to hint at the disordered and anti-domestic affiliations which exist in the vampire clans, with their powerful suggestions of incest and intergenerational confusion and alienation (Genge 1998). The lineage of the vampire "community," and its abnormal means of replication, decenter the ethical and emotional economy of the family - preserved by both Christians and their Romantic critics as the essential building block of social renovation - and casts into doubt the structures of moral and intellectual reasoning to which the privileging of the family unit has given rise in bourgeois societies. It is possible in this light to read Buffy Summers herself as an essentially conservative figure, despite her superficially magical trappings, defending a highly traditional, even reactionary, set of assumptions about community, knowledge and power from the menace of counter-cultural versions of youth and belonging. Buffy would then be the latest in a long line of vampire hunters, including Vordenburg and Van Helsing, whose function in the gothic universe is the anti-gothic task of recuperation - suppressing the ideological alternatives the gothic briefly and shockingly unleashes. Within the terms of her own narratives, the anarchy Buffy most consistently contains is the threat of genuinely radical alternatives to the largely docile and normative teen culture she and her friends embody.

(13) The paradoxes of Romantic childhood to which modernity is heir are not confined, of course, to the fevered productions of decadent art. Profound and elusive tensions in the cultural construction of categories such as family, childhood and adolescence find expression wherever the unresolved internal pressures of large movements of social feeling enter the discourses of history. Certainly, the late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries - the crucible of the gothic - witness an eroticisation of childhood and of the maternal within which lie the origins of many of the moral conventions of modern child-rearing - from maternal breast-feeding, through the domesticity of the emergent nuclear family, to the centrality of the mother in the play, instruction and intimate socialization of children (Gelpi 1992). "The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order," writes Terry Eagleton, "will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections" (Eagleton 1990). Examination of the culture of fear in the lives and the imaginary representations of children highlights a slippage within one of the key zones of that emergent order, refocusing the imagery of childhood and

adolescence to bring out the ideologically invisible influences of hierarchy, subordination and mutual envy in inter-generational transactions.

(14) The manifestation of such deep cultural fears may rightly be said to occur at moments of social and cultural change. But they need not be confined forensically to the past, and, indeed, their re-emergence in many of the products of contemporary popular entertainment can be seen to align revealingly with current anxieties about childhood in the Western world, made visible at the various problematic locations where modern adults and children negotiate their social and symbolic transactions (Higgonet 1998). *Buffy's* setting in the middle class American High School of Sunnydale evokes inevitable comparisons with the Columbine tragedy, where black-clad teenagers, self-styled avengers, arrived on an ordinary March morning in 1999 and shot to death dozens of their classmates. The eponymous heroine is, like so many young females in the lineage to which she belongs, the "Chosen One," "called forth in every generation" to defend humanity from the depredations of demonic forces which constantly threaten it from its own most dangerously repressed areas of feeling. Unknown to the oblivious staff and pupils, of course, their school sits on top of a "Hell Mouth" out of which there issues weekly a bizarre array of comic-book gothic horror figures - mostly themselves dismorphic teenagers - each bent upon encroachment and destruction. Only Buffy and the Scooby Gang stand between the school and its colonization by the forces of evil. With the exception of the Giles, the librarian who is Buffy's "Watcher" and instructor, sympathetic adults in the series, especially teachers, are portrayed as ineffectual or as monster fodder. The school is a place frequently reserved for sexual display and peer-group rivalries. The only form of learning seen to be valued is the conventionally despised esoteric knowledge needed for uncovering and liquidating supernatural enemies. One episode of the series, "The Pack," depicts (albeit off-camera) the dismemberment of the particularly useless school principal by a gang of students temporarily transformed into hyena-hellhounds.

(15) It is easy to discern beneath these surface fantasies of *Buffy* the gothic intelligence probing a deep-rooted and pervasive malaise associated with contemporary Western culture's confused and ambivalent attitude to youth, which, as has been said, is also an important aspect of the unfinished business of the Romantic revolution. Allied to this is the contemporary American loss of faith in the spaces and institutions of civic meaning - schools, teachers, suburban neighborhoods; the bewilderingly contradictory representation of young people simultaneously as agonizingly vulnerable victims, as calculating perpetrators of meaningless violence from the edges of society, and as sophisticated defenders of mainstream Western values. The strong intuition is that the environment around young people has ceased to be predictable or safe. Like infantilizations such as the "inner child" of consumer psychotherapy, or urban myths of the pedophile, what the fantasy narratives evacuate, of course, is the question of responsibility. If, for example, US schools have become key locations for the unconscious articulation of a *fear for* and a *dread of* children, artifacts of late capitalist consumer culture such as *Buffy* largely efface the issue of adult culpability - the blame which attaches, for example, to the strictly non-occult American practice of affording schoolchildren ready access to firearms.

(16) The relationship of *Buffy* to the gothic pedagogy of fear - the textual strategies by which the gothic contests the claims, and redefines the objects, of romantic desire - is undoubtedly a highly ambivalent one. *Buffy* sometimes succumbs to a kind of narcissism in which it treats its teenage themes too ponderously, as if fascinated by its own production values (eg "Inca Mummy Girl," 2004). Conversely, there are episodes where the series trivializes dilemmas and sacrifices an awareness of moral purpose to the high-octane thrill-seeking of its central conflicts (eg "I Only Have Eyes for You," 2019). But the best storylines of the series succeed in dramatizing the ambiguities of the postmodern gothic, showing how the gothic tradition now struggles to make its fundamental insights meaningful to a culture desensitized by the horrors of its own sense of history, and frequently distanced from the conventional sources of fear by its scientific rationalism and finely-tuned capacity for irony. In skillfully composed episodes such as the climactic "Becoming" (2021, 2022), all of these inhibiting influences are taken up into the storyline and powerfully defamiliarized. The enduring fascination of the notion of radical evil is both exhibited and mocked; the proximity of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century knowledge to the most primordial fears of loss of identity and consciousness of self is cleverly exposed; the much-vaunted immunizing powers of irony are celebrated while their limitations are subtly questioned. Above all, the confinement of young people within what Marina Warner has termed the "manichaeon diptych" of angel and devil (Warner 1994) is seriously resisted by the demonstration of an

independence of will, action and self-fashioning unwilling merely to discharge a preordained destiny. *Buffy's* gothic revisionism places the series very firmly in a genealogy which, for all its history of paradox and self-contradiction, uses the powers of enchantment to disenchant us of some of our most crippling illusions.

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- Le Fanu camilla 1993, 243-320
- Lyotard the grip 1993
- Mighall 1998
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- Postman 1982
- Punter 1998
- Shawcross 1907, I, 59
- Stoker 1983
- Veeder 1980



**Aimee Fifarek**

## **"Mind and Heart with Spirit Joined": The Buffyverse as an Information System**

(1) The fourth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ended with Buffy fighting the first Slayer, Sineya, for the lives of her friends ("Restless," 4022). "Alone," Sineya keeps repeating, reminding Buffy that the Slayer has always been "the one girl in all the world with the power to fight the forces of darkness" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001). "[1] But Buffy replies, "I am not alone." And perhaps for the first time since she has come to Sunnydale, she believes it.

(2) This gang of four—Buffy, Giles, Willow and Xander—represents a new evolution in Slaying, as their presence in this primordial dreamscape confirms. No longer a single point of resistance against supernatural evil, the Slayer is now backed up by a network of individuals who share her goal of keeping the darker urges of both the supernatural and the human in check. By contributing their own unique talents for discovery and action, they form the core of a system that helps Buffy to be the "most powerful Slayer [any demon] has ever faced" ("Innocence," 2014)—and the currency of that system is information.

### **What Do You Know? The Supernatural Meme**

(3) A system is defined as a set of interdependent components (people, materials, machines, etc.) united to serve a common purpose. A system has distinct boundaries, which differentiate it from its environment. In the case of an information system, it processes inputs like facts, observations, and data, to produce outputs, like knowledge. As Buffy, Giles, Willow, and Xander work together they form their own information system. They identify demonic activity (inputs), try to understand it using books, the Internet, magic, and other information gathering techniques (processing) to kill the demons or, at least, rescue the innocent (outputs). They also maintain a boundary that separates them from those who don't know of the reality of the supernatural (environment).

(4) One of the most revolutionary, and hotly contested, ideas to link evolution and information is the idea of the meme. Richard Dawkins, in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, [2] devoted a chapter to "Memes: The New Replicators." Dawkins was interested in transferring into the cultural realm his idea of the gene as a unit which copies itself and, through copying errors, leads to evolution. This "unit of cultural transmission" (192) he called a meme.

(5) Like genes, memes are replicators; their purpose is to infect (i.e. reproduce in) other hosts to ensure their survival. Selfish genes (and, by extension, memes) are those that "have no foresight" (Dawkins 200), that reproduce themselves often at the expense of their host's life. The degree to which a meme can infect a wide variety of hosts is the measure of its survival value. But what makes a meme, in the context of this informational Darwinism, fitter than all the rest?

What is it about the idea . . . that gives it its stability and penetrance in the cultural environment? The survival value of the . . . meme in the meme pool results from its great psychological appeal. It provides a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling questions about existence. (Dawkins

Dawkins is referring specifically to the idea of god, saying that the reason the meme of an unknowable creator/protector has propagated so widely since the first time the idea was thought is because it gives people comfort. Even though they may have no tangible evidence that god exists, they are able to carry on because the meme gives them a way of understanding and coping with the world around them.

### **Ignorance is Bliss**

(6) Prior to Buffy's arrival, the dominant meme among the residents of Sunnydale was that everything is as it appears to be—that life is normal. Any evidence suggesting supernatural activity is conveniently rationalized away. We see an example of this at the end of the pilot episode, when Cordelia tells her group of hangers-on that the people who take over the Bronze and start killing the students were rival gangs. The idea that they could be vampires was never a possibility. It is easier to rationalize the inexplicable than to investigate it. They cling to the normal meme because it lets them avoid any situations that might force them to confront a truth they are unprepared to accept.

(7) But there are a few who recognize this place as the Hellmouth. At first only Giles knows that the city is rife with supernatural evil, but even he is unprepared for its extent until his research uncovers the original name of the town: "The Spanish who first settled here called it 'Boca del Infierno'. Roughly translated, 'Hellmouth'. It's a sort of, um, portal between this reality and the next" ("The Harvest," 1002). The normal meme is obviously strong if the residents can ignore the nature of their environment.

(8) But this is a selfish meme, insofar as it puts the lives of its hosts in jeopardy. To a certain extent, ignoring the supernatural keeps the residents safe. They do not try to dig deeper into the strange occurrences in the cemetery, or investigate the thefts of blood from the hospitals ("Vampire Meals-On-Wheels." "The Dark Age," 2008), so the local demons don't view them as a threat. But they do view the humans as prey. When the supernatural tries to take over, the humans who have conveniently not acknowledged its existence don't know enough to get out of its way.

### **Cordon Sanitaire: computers and books**

(9) The Slayer's role is to fight the forces with which others cannot cope or understand. To protect others from themselves as well as the supernatural, Buffy must propagate the normal meme by helping them rationalize any strange occurrences. This includes explaining her frequently odd behavior:

**Jesse:** Well, you know, we wanted to welcome ya, make ya feel at home, unless you have a scary home . . .

**Xander:** And to return this. (*holds up the stake*) The only thing I can think is that you're building a really little fence. (*hands it to her*)

**Buffy:** (*takes it*) Hah, no, um, a-a-actually it was for self-defense. Everyone has them in L.A. Pepper spray is just so passé. ("Hellmouth," 1001)

Buffy's lie here is actually in defense of the normal meme. To keep people safe she must curtail their curiosity. But when Willow and Xander are attacked by vampires in the graveyard and Jesse is abducted, keeping them out of the game is no longer possible, however hard Buffy and Giles may try:

**Giles:** The Slayer hunts vampires, Buffy is a Slayer, don't tell anyone. I think that's all the vampire information you need.

**Xander:** Except for one thing: how do you kill them?

**Buffy:** You don't kill them. I do. ("Harvest," 1002).

But it is too late. Willow and Xander been very forcefully rid of the normal meme, and Giles and Buffy have provided the explanations that allow its supernatural counterpart to take its place.

(10) Much of the show revolves around the battle for dominance between the supernatural and normal memes. Unlike the *X-Files* (in which the two memes have their personifications in Mulder and Scully), the

battle is not over which one is true [3] but rather which one will increase its survival value by spreading. With Willow and Xander's help, Buffy and Giles are able to keep the supernatural meme in check. They erect a sort of *cordon sanitaire*, a defensible boundary between the "infected" and as yet pristine areas of Sunnydale. In essence, they shield themselves and their demon-battling activities from the rest of the town.

(11) As lifetime residents of the town, Willow and Xander are able to ask questions and go places where Buffy and Giles, newcomers to Sunnydale, would draw suspicion. Willow also brings her computer skills to the mix. While Giles, with his multilingual capabilities and vast historical knowledge, thrives in the realm of ancient occult texts, it is Willow who can use "that dread machine" (Giles' so very British reference to the library computer) to find the current, specific local information they so often need:

Cut to the library. Willow has the city plans on the computer monitor.

**Buffy:** There it is.

**Willow:** That [sewer] runs under the graveyard.

**Xander:** I don't see any access.

**Giles:** So, all the city plans are just, uh, open to the public?

**Willow:** Um, well, I-in a way. I sort of stumbled onto them when I accidentally decrypted the city council's security system.

**Xander:** Someone's been naughty. ("Harvest," 1002)

As the show progresses, the gang will use the computer to access information about the city, their fellow students, and even to call up a group to conquer a demon that has escaped into the Internet ("I Robot," 1008). They also make wide use of the private collection of occult books that Giles keeps behind the desk and interspersed among the stacks. They are often able to expand their information system without venturing outside of the library; when they do it is usually into the anonymity of cyberspace. This indirect method of information gathering prevents them from rousing suspicions among the unsuspecting population by asking too many strange questions, thereby preventing the spread of the supernatural meme.

(12) The *cordon sanitaire* also works in their favor by keeping them hidden from any demons that might view them as a threat. They can work in secret, in the library, without attracting too much attention. When they need information that the books and computers cannot provide, they have their supernatural "spies"; those in whom supernatural infection has been contained, like Angel, Anya and Oz, and the non-contagious carriers of the supernatural meme, like Jenny and Willy the snitch. Each of these individuals can traverse the *cordon sanitaire* because they walk in both worlds, and are, to varying degrees, accepted on both sides.

## THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE

(13) The supernatural manifests itself in many forms, and most of them make an appearance at one time or another in Sunnydale. There are a few benign representatives, like the spies mentioned above, but these helpful individuals are few and far between. For the most part the supernatural cadre is composed of "zombies, werewolves, incubi, succubi, everything you've ever dreaded was under your bed, but told yourself couldn't be by the light of day. They're all real!" (Giles in "Hellmouth," 1001). These monsters don't generally walk around with their game faces on; [4] they masquerade as regular humans, in order to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting. Even though Buffy and the gang are well aware of the persistence and ubiquity of supernatural evil, they occasionally get caught with their guard down.

## The Depths of Knowledge: love and death

(14) Although the gang is deeply committed to fighting supernatural evil, they are still human—and most of them are teenage humans. Their biggest vulnerability is love. All of the members of the gang have become romantically involved with quasi-supernatural beings at one time or another, with most of those relationships ending in near disaster. In some cases, a supernatural predator senses an emotional weak spot and exploits it, drawing a member of the gang into a prey/victim relationship, like Xander's crush on a teacher who turns out to be a praying mantis "Teacher's Pet," 1004), or Willow's brief but torrid online relationship with Malcolm, who is really the demon Moloch, the Corruptor ("I Robot, You Jane," 1008). By

the time the demon's human façade begins to crumble, the victim is too emotionally invested in the relationship to notice. There are also the relationships in which the lover knows of the beloved's supernatural background, but continues the relationship anyway. When the supernatural and the human come into conflict (Oz turning into a werewolf, or Angel losing his soul) emotions frequently prevent them from recognizing the truth of the situation.

(15) In the context of the information system, romantic emotions function as noise. They are unintelligible or false signals that disrupt communication, sometimes destroying it altogether. Emotional noise is the deathblow for the Buffy/Angel and Giles/Jenny relationships. The idea that Angel might "turn bad," revert to being the demonic Angelus, is something that is never far from anyone's mind. In fact, his vampire sire, Darla, preys upon this suspicion by feeding on Buffy's mother, then setting up Angel to take the blame ("Angel," 1007).

(16) But the only one who really knows how Angel can lose his soul is Jenny. Charged by her Romany clan to observe Angel and ensure his continued suffering, she keeps her knowledge of the specifics of the curse secret. Torn between familial obligation and concern for Giles and his friends, she does not tell them (or, indeed, learn the crucial specifics herself) until it is too late; Buffy has lost her virginity to Angel, and he has, once again, lost his soul. Because Buffy cannot bring herself to kill Angelus when she has the chance, he is able to kill Jenny before she can recreate the curse that will restore his soul.

(17) More than just a metaphor for the lure of the dark side, these romantic tragedies act as entropy, or disorder, in the information system. Getting too close to the supernatural interferes with the gang's ability to communicate effectively, producing tragic consequences. Entropy is a natural part of any system. In this one, it gives supernatural evil the opportunity to thrive.

### **IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT (BUT I FEEL FINE)**

(18) The fact that these human/demon relationships succeed at all shows that the supernatural can be embraced without a subsequent loss of humanity. Buffy and the gang have a live-and-let-live attitude toward the supernatural. They are not looking to wipe it out but to coexist with it—and sometimes use it to their advantage. Willow incorporates her chemistry experience, Giles's early tutelage, and Jenny's technopagan files in an increasingly successful study of witchcraft. The gang regularly employs supernatural weapons, charms and spells to defeat demons, often employing the same ones the demons try to use to defeat them. The supernatural is not inherently evil. Usually the only supernatural types that Buffy proactively goes after are vampires, because their existence is predicated upon the destruction of humans. Demons that don't necessarily have any quarrel with humans, like the ones found in Willy's bar, are more or less left to their own devices. But occasionally there are those überdemons who want nothing less to take over the world: The Master with his Harvest, The Mayor and his Ascension, and Angelus' activation of the Judge, to name a few. This is a retrograde impulse on the part of the supernatural population, since the blindness of Sunnydale residents makes it a pretty good place to be a demon. The vamps can pick off a tasty little treat anytime they like—if Buffy isn't around. Giles tells us in the pilot episode that the Earth was once their private, hellish playground, and some want to remake that world. This would seem to be demonkind's very own selfish meme. Each of these very public attempts to dominate the system lead not only to many demon deaths, they bring the Sunnydale residents that much closer to understanding the truth of the Hellmouth.

### **INFORMATION EXPLOSION**

(19) In Buffy's first two years at Sunnydale High, she does what she can to keep her identity a secret and knowledge of alternate realities to a minimum. But in the process of thwarting at least three major attempts by supernatural evil to take over the world, not to mention the machinations of several minor demons, some things have slipped out (like Willow's evil twin from the demon dimension in Doppelgängerland [3016]). The only natural resistance the community of high school students has to the supernatural is ignorance. Those who Buffy cannot save are usually destroyed, learning the price of their self-delusion only when it is too late. The system retains its balance by a process of natural selection in which those who know but are unprepared for the knowledge are destroyed, and those who are ignorant remain. Eventually it becomes apparent to many of the survivors that Buffy's presence is not exactly a coincidence. While this

may be a failure of the group's ability to propagate the normal meme, it actually helps prepare the community to accept the supernatural presence in their midst. The students come to this realization almost unconsciously, but it is the crucial first step to surviving the biggest day of their lives.

### **EPIDEMIC: KEEPING THE MEME ALIVE**

(20) Because the students can't yet comprehend the supernatural, they don't really understand the dangers from which Buffy has saved them. In "The Prom" (3020), they make their first overt acknowledgement of this fact:

**Jonathan:** This is actually a new category. First time ever. I guess there were a lot of write-in ballots, and, um, the prom committee asked me to read this. "We're not good friends. Most of us never found the time to get to know you, but that doesn't mean we haven't noticed you. We don't talk about it much, but it's no secret that Sunnydale High isn't really like other high schools. A lot of weird stuff happens here."

**Crowd outbursts:** Zombies! Hyena people! Snyder! (laughter)

**Jonathan:** "But, whenever there was a problem or something creepy happened, you seemed to show up and stop it. Most of the people here have been saved by you, or helped by you at one time or another. We're proud to say that the Class of '99 has the lowest mortality rate of any graduating class in Sunnydale history." (applause from the crowd) "And we know at least part of that is because of you. So the senior class, offers its thanks, and gives you, uh, this." Jonathan produces a multicolored, glittering, miniature umbrella with a small metal plaque attached to the shaft.

**Jonathan:** It's from all of us, and it has written here, "Buffy Summers, Class Protector." ("The Prom")

(21) They still don't understand, but they have demonstrated their faith in Buffy because she has demonstrated her ability to protect them. Unlike the god meme, which often replicates in spite of evidence to the contrary, believing in Buffy's power does not require blind faith. The tangible evidence of her actions, even if it is little more than noise at this point, is what allows the students to take their first step beyond willful ignorance of the supernatural. This public acknowledgement is proof that the normal meme has begun to lose its hold on the class. When the gang enlists the aid of those they have helped in the past—Harmony, Jonathon,<sup>[5]</sup> Percy<sup>[6]</sup>, and Larry<sup>[7]</sup>—they are more than ready to spread the word of what needs to be done at graduation. The epidemic replication of the supernatural meme proceeds for the most part offscreen, so we don't know exactly how it happens. But it's easy to imagine the small group fanning out, gathering friends, saying "Something big is gonna happen at graduation today. Buffy needs our help," and multiple versions of this earlier conversation:

**Xander:** Vampires are real; a lot of 'em live in Sunnydale. Willow'll fill you in.

**Willow:** I know it's hard to accept at first. . .

**Oz:** No, actually, it explains a lot . . . (Surprise)<sup>[8]</sup>

(22) Under the leadership of the gang, and with Angel's help, the whole class rises up to fight the Mayor and his vampire minions. It is the survival of the fittest. Although there are casualties,<sup>[9]</sup> the class as a whole survives because the gang has helped them make a successful transition from the normal to the supernatural meme. Buffy finishes off the Mayor by leading him on a chase through the halls of the school and eventually to the library where Giles has planted tons of fertilizer and explosives (after packing up his books, of course). With Buffy by his side, Giles throws the switch—and the library explodes.

### **The Center Cannot Hold**

(23) The exploding library is symbolic of the information explosion itself. The normal meme is selfish, and has become so detrimental that the system can no longer compensate for it. As Xander says while regaling Giles' super-librarian status, "Everyone forgets, Willow, that knowledge is the ultimate weapon." ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date," 1005). It is important that the traditional information provider to throw the switch:

**Buffy** (turns to Giles coming up beside them): "You feel up to it?"

**Giles** (taking off his glasses): "Ah, I suppose it should be I. It's strangely fitting in a grotesque

fashion." ("Graduation Day, Part 2, 3022)

By spreading the supernatural meme and exploding the library, the librarian recognizes the transformation of information and its role within the system. It is no longer something to be protected, or to protect other from. As Fritz said about information and the Internet in a bit of first season foreshadowing, "Information isn't bound up anymore" ("I, Robot," 1008). His actions give the students the knowledge, the power, to defeat that which threatens their lives.

(24) The students move from denial, to awareness, to action—the crucial vector of transformation in the system. The information explosion causes the boundaries of the system to collapse so everyone can participate in their own defense. Accept the meme, join the system, and defeat the threat. But this systemic expansion is temporary. While the knowledge that precipitated it cannot be lost or easily rationalize by the students, most of them will probably assume that the Mayor's death means that all of the demons have died, and they will go on with their lives as before. But the supernatural meme now floats free, and in its freedom lies the possibility for its survival.

### **SCIENCE AND MAGIC**

(25) Since the information in the Buffyverse is no longer contained there is no way of knowing into whose hands it will fall. The government invades Sunnydale to try to subvert its resident supernatural power for its own ends. Like the überdemons that have come before, the government wants to take control of forces they don't understand to dominate the system. They don't realize that rules of their environment don't necessarily apply to this one. At the same time, Willow is expanding her enquiries into the supernatural world by enlisting others in her quest. She does not seek to transform the system but does succeed in transforming herself.

### **THE HEIGHTS OF KNOWLEDGE: LOVE AND MAGIC**

(26) Willow's forays into magic have been (with a few notable exceptions) small and unsuccessful. Since Jenny's death at the hands of Angelus, Willow has had to explore the world of magic in isolation. She tries to join the Wicca group that meets in her dorm, but they are more concerned with bake sales than binding spells. But it does give her the opportunity to see Tara for the first time, a fellow student and practicing witch. Like Willow, Tara has been studying magic in isolation, since the death of her mother (also a witch). Neither one alone has confidence in their powers, or themselves. But combined, the mystical, physical, and emotional come together for them in a new way. Their explorations of the supernatural free them from many of their inhibitions.

(27) Unlike those who have gone before, Willow and Tara's relationship seems to actually remove noise from the system. When Willow brings up the subject of casting spells at Wicca group, the "wanna blessed be's" ("Hush," 4010) look on her with disdain, but Tara is intrigued. The two don't talk at that point because Tara's self-conscious stutter won't let her get a word out. So when the entire town loses their voices, Tara seeks Willow out, hoping they can do some spellwork to try to help. They meet up while the murderous Gentlemen are pursuing Tara, and take refuge in the dorm's laundry room. There is no lock, and they are unable to barricade the door. Willow tries to move the soda machine with telekinesis, but her powers are too weak to make it do more than shake. But when she and Tara join hands, they are able to fling the soda machine against the door, preventing the Gentlemen from coming in and stealing their hearts. This wordless manifestation of their combined powers hints at the powerful union ahead.

(28) Their skills develop in parallel with their relationship. In some cases they use their powers much as Willow used the computer in the past—to gather information from a safe distance. They locate demons, cast spells, and in "Who Are You?" (4016) they are the first to realize that Faith has taken over Buffy's body. Together, they are able to progress into more active magic, which lets them create a talisman that Buffy uses to reclaim her body from Faith. Their powers provide them with a manner of communicating that emotions facilitate rather than hinder.

### **She blinded me with science: The Initiative**

(29) On the other end of the supernatural spectrum is the Initiative, a government shadow project whose

purpose is to study and harness the power of supernatural beings. Composed of scientists and commando types, they capture vampires and demons of all sorts and, after study and tests, implant the “hostile sub terrestrials” (“hostiles” or “HSTs” for short, in “Doomed,” 4011) with anti-violence chips to neutralize the threat they pose to humans.

(30) While this may not seem to be as overt a takeover of the system as those engineered by the Mayor and the Master, the potential is there. After escaping from the Initiative’s underground lab, Spike (a.k.a. “Hostile 17”) teams up with Buffy and the gang to fight back, despite the fact that any attempt at violence against “any living creature [produces] intense neurological pain” (Riley, in “The Initiative,” 4007). It is not long before Spike discovers that he can fight other demons without any painful consequences. Soon he is eager to vent his pent-up aggression on other supernatural beings—a breach of demon-loyalty that he is resoundingly beaten for later in “Goodbye Iowa” (4004).

(31) It is unclear if the Initiative is aware that the anti-violence chip would let implanted demons attack other demons, but having neutralized hostiles acting as collaborators to aid in the capture other demons is an advantage they could not help but exploit. The Initiative’s activities bear a striking resemblance to the Nazi research agenda in WWII: white-coated scientists in an underground bunker perform excruciating tests on individuals they believe to be less than human (including Oz, who is human for all but three days a month). When Spike is first captured by the Initiative, he makes this association instinctively. An anonymous vampire in the next cell tells Spike not to drink the blood they give him because it is drugged. He says that after you’re unconscious “that’s when they do the tests.” Spike replies “And, uh, they are? The government? Nazis? A major cosmetics company?” (“The Initiative,” 4007). Even the fact that Spike is labeled “Hostile 17” is suggestive. In the movie *Stalag 17*, a POW captain is suspected by his fellow prisoners of being a Nazi collaborator. This is a kind of foreshadowing of Spike’s demon-beating activities, although he does it in collaboration with Buffy and the gang, not the Initiative.

(32) It is inevitable that the Initiative and the gang will come into conflict, despite their early attempts to work together. The Initiative makes no effort to distinguish between the supernatural and its evil components. To them, demons, werewolves and vampires are nothing more than valuable lab rats. This doesn’t sit well with a group of people who have had intimate relationships with just such entities. The gang knows there is more to a supernatural being than just bloodlust and fangs. So when Dr. Walsh tries to have Buffy killed, the two camps get ready to face off. But there is a threat that neither group expects—one that will require significant changes on all sides.

### **Frankenstein’s Demon**

(33) The Initiative has a shadow project within its shadow project. Room 314 houses Dr. Walsh’s creation, Adam, a man-like creature assembled from various demon, human and machine parts. We do not know if this is part of the Initiative’s plan, or just Dr. Walsh playing at Dr. Frankenstein. Adam’s function is unclear, since he kills his “mother,” before she has a chance to set her plans in motion. Using the disks on which Dr. Walsh kept her journals, Adam decides that his purpose is to kill, “to extinguish all life wherever I find it” (“Who are You?” 4016).

(34) Adam is a threat unlike any other the gang has faced, not just because he is a hybrid creature. Adam is a pure union of mechanics and biology, driven by a demonic need to kill. He has knowledge, but by killing Dr. Walsh and her colleagues, he has cut himself off from the source of that knowledge, the intellect behind his creation, and any perspective on him they may have provided. He intends to fulfill his perceived destiny by recruiting a pack of vampires to help him build a master race of demon/human hybrids like himself. Adam also employs some “human” assistance: he reanimates the corpses of several Initiative members (including Dr. Walsh), and enlists Riley via the behavior-modification chip Dr. Walsh had implanted in him. Through these actions, Adam begins to build a network of his own, composed of hybrid beings. In order to fight this new threat, Buffy and the gang must also become a kind of hybrid system.

### **The Tomorrow People**

(35) With his ever-present reductionism, Xander sums up the solution to the problem, “all we need is combo-Buffy—her with Slayer strength, Giles’s multi-lingual know how, and Willow’s witchy

power" ("Primeval," 4021). Willow (spirit), Giles (mind), and Xander (heart) use an enjoining spell to call upon the strength of all of the Slayers who have come before, in order to spiritually join with Buffy (the hand) and lend her their strength, knowledge, and power to defeat Adam. The term "enjoining" has a dual meaning. In the obvious sense it means to join, or to yoke together. But it can also mean to prevent, or forbid ("I enjoin you from telling a lie"). Both meanings are active here. The group joins together so that Buffy can enjoin Adam from moving long enough to rip his uranium-based power source from his body, thereby killing him.

(36) This transfiguration is the latest and most dramatic evolution of the Buffyverse, allowing the gang to transcend the temporal and spatial boundaries that separate them from the knowledge and powers of their ancestors. For a brief time, the Slayer is no longer "one girl in all the world"—she is a network, a continuum of Slayers. Like the temporary expansion of their system on graduation day, it allows the gang to incorporate resources they do not normally have access to. But this is an evolutionary step that cannot be sustained if the system is to survive. The enjoining spell ends when Adam is destroyed, and the four revert back to their individual selves. The system continues as before, interdependent, working with Riley and the other commandos to stop the slaughter that is happening in the Initiative's lab.

(37) This teamwork stands as a foil to the government's desire for ultimate control. During the dénouement of the episode we hear a voiceover of some military-types reviewing the failure of the Initiative: "The Initiative represented the government's interest in not only controlling the otherworldly menace, but harnessing its power for our own military purposes . . . the demons cannot be harnessed. The end result cannot be controlled" ("Primeval," 4021). By acknowledging the failure of the Initiative, they recognize the impossibility of dominating the system.

(38) The gang's brief transfiguration causes a sort of backlash. In the odd, yet frightening, final episode of the fourth season, Sineya, the first Slayer, haunts the dreams of those who dared to call upon her power. She represents the contradictory force wielded by the Slayer, which can both protect and destroy. A Slayer joining with others to fight the supernatural enrages Sineya. "Alone," she insists. But Buffy maintains her commitment to the system and its evolution. "I don't sleep on a bed of bones" ("Restless," 4022). The two Slayers fight in the dreamscape, but there is really no winner. Buffy and Sineya are not enemies, merely fighters of different times. Once they acknowledge each other's power, life returns to normal.

(Joyce enters, wearing a bathrobe.) **Joyce:** I'm, uh, guessing I missed some fun?

**Willow:** The spirit of the first Slayer tried to kill us in our dreams.

**Joyce:** Oh, you want some hot chocolate? (Everyone says "yeah" or "yes please.")

This primordial dream episode also serves to remind us of the legitimacy of the balance between human and supernatural in the system. "As long as there have been demons, there has been a Slayer." ("The Harvest,") It is a reminder that the supernatural has existed as long as humans have, both within the Buffyverse and without. And perhaps a reminder that, with no external forces, no demons to fight, the only battles left would be with ourselves.

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- [1] All dialogue, unless otherwise noted, is taken from Psyche's Transcripts, <http://www.psyche.com>
- [2] Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. 1976. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- [3] In *The Pack*, Buffy does tell Giles that he was the last one she expected to "Scully" her, when he tries to write off Xander's behavior as adolescent male hormones, when he is actually possessed by the spirit of a hyena.
- [4] "Game face" is how Buffy refers to Angel's vampire face, as opposed to his normal human appearance. ("Prophecy Girl," 1012.)
- [5] Buffy stopped him from killing himself, thinking that he was planning a massacre at the school (*Earshot*).
- [6] Percy is the basketball player Willow turned around academically when her vampire twin beat him up. (*Doppelgängland*).
- [7] Larry is the chauvinist football player who Xander thinks is a werewolf, until he comes out to Xander as being gay (*Phases*). In the fight on graduation day, he is with the flame units.
- [8] Golden, Christopher and Nancy Holder. *The Watcher's Guide*. (Pocket books: New York, 1998) 40.
- [9] We find out in the 4<sup>th</sup> season that Harmony was turned into a vampire (*The Harsh Light of Day*).