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

- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (the Movie) Wikipedia Entry
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Wikipedia Entry
- *Angel* Wikipedia Entry
- *Firefly* Wikipedia Entry
- *Serenity* Wikipedia Entry

17 [5.1]	18 [5.2]		

- Joss Whedon Wikipedia Entry

Anthony Bradney

The Politics and Ethics of Researching the Buffyverse

(1) Many things, including the range of material listed on the "*Buffy* Studies Bibliography" of this journal, attest to the robust health of *Buffy* Studies. No other television program and few if any other cultural phenomena have attracted the same weight of sustained academic attention within the short period of time that has seen the rise of *Buffy* Studies (Stevenson, 2003, 4; Wilcox, forthcoming). Yet, at the same time, this work, from its inception to the current day, has been the subject of widespread criticism from a diverse range of sources. Thus, for example, Lavery notes of one of the first academic *Buffy* conferences:

> Though growing by leaps and bounds, *Buffy* Studies has not been without its detractors; the 'brainy bloodsuckers' (as *Entertainment Weekly* once referred to them in what was presumed to be a compliment) who engage in BS have come under attack from a variety of angles. At the final plenary session of the Blood, Text and Fears Conference in Norwich, England, one of the organizers (Prof. Scott MacKenzie) and a member of the panel (Prof. Peter Kramer) both voiced their surprise at a certain lack of objectivity in the conference presentations, almost all of which were given by academics. The *Buffy* scholars gathered there, they suggested, seemed hesitant to ask the same kind of hard questions—about the industry, narrative structure, television flow, merchandizing, demographics, advertising, influences—that have come to be expected in media studies. (33)

More widely, Levine and Schneider have argued that

> [t]here has been much less of the kind of self-reflective work about the nature of *BtVS* scholarship—what it is about and what it is trying to accomplish versus what it should or could be about—than there should be, or than there in fact is within various disciplines in the humanities generally as regards their objects and methods of study. *It is BtVS scholarship that warrants study at this point, not BtVS itself.* Those in English, Film and Television, and Cultural Studies departments would be better off investigating the nature of the unreflective and narrow critical responses to *BtVS* instead of responding to the show unreflectively, narrowly, and mistakenly themselves. (299 emphasis added)

In this context the purpose of this article is twofold. First, it will seek to add to the existing analysis, notably by Burr (2005), Lavery (2004) Turnbull (2004) and Wilcox (forthcoming), of the reasons why *Buffy* Studies has "been met with a certain amount of Parnassian disdain from the halls of the academy" (Battis, 2005, 9), the politics of *Buffy* Studies, and then, secondly, it will look at what impact, if any, these criticisms should have on those academics who are doing research into the Buffyverse, the ethics of *Buffy* Studies.

(2) In her recent study of *BtVS* Jowett notes early on in her exegesis that "I have already stated that I am an academic and a fan, two positions which do not sit comfortably together (it is not always acceptable to admit in academic circles to being a 'fan'. . .) (8). Jowett's unease reflects the widespread feeling, not just restricted to the position of those in *Buffy* Studies, that "scholar-fans are typically looked down as not being 'proper' academics. . . " (Hills, 2002, 21). Scholar-fans are seen as being subversive of the academic project insofar as their passion as fans impedes their academic ability to dispassionately analyse the subject of their enquiry. Hills notes the expectation that "[t]he scholar-fan must still conform to the regulative ideal of the rational academic subject, being careful not to present too much of their enthusiasm. . . " (11). If they fail to do this then their very standing as academics comes into question and

> for television researchers interested in social equity, an interesting question might be: why do some fans get paid to employ their expertise and write articles about Buffy for *Slayage*, while other fans do not?" (McKee, 2002, 69)

Even *Buffy* scholars have queried the role of the scholar-fan. Burr notes of the 2004 Slayage Conference on *BtVS*, "[m]any delegates felt that fandom interfered with academic rigour on occasion" (Burr, 2005, 377).

(3) The apparent marginal status of scholar-fans in the academy seems to provide an attractive explanation for the insistent attacks on *Buffy* Studies. On this view *Buffy* scholars, far from following the proper intellectual course of rational analysis dictated by their position as academics are instead mere enthusiasts; at best, in Weber's dichotomy, dilettantes rather than scientific workers (136). However, whilst this explanation for the rancour that *Buffy* Studies has sometimes met with does have merit, it also raises a number of problems if it is seen as a complete account of the reasons for the hostility that there is towards *Buffy* Studies.

(4) "The rational academic subject," the heir of the enlightenment and modernity, may have held unchallenged sway in the academy at one time but its standing in the current age is much more in doubt. In an era when movements as diverse as postmodernism and feminism have queried the epistemological and ontological basis of notions like rationality and objectivity the concept of the "rational academic subject" cannot be regarded as being seen as unproblematic (Burr, 2005, 380). Given that, for example, "academic feminism is. . . frequently viewed by the establishment as being insufficiently academic" (Morley and Walsh, 1995, 1) scholar-fans, whether of *BtVS*, *Angel* or otherwise, are a long way from being the only kind of academics who fail to

conform to this particular regulative ideal. More than this, to argue that the current rejection of *Buffy* Studies is the result of its identification with scholar-fans is to ignore the fact that the presence of scholar-fans in the academy is not something that is wholly new to the present age. To take only one of the more obvious examples, Leavis' championing of DH Lawrence seems to fit precisely within the category of the behaviour of the scholar-fan. As Leavis himself observed of his work on Lawrence

> [w]hat I am brought to at this point is my own involvement in the history—it is proper that I should mention it only if to make it plain that I do not pretend to have been *au-dessus de la mêlée*. In fact, I had better say that, looking back, I can only see that involvement as a matter of my having been engaged in a long battle to win recognition for Lawrence, and to kill the currency of the grosser misconceptions and prejudices. (12)

Leavis' position as a scholar-fan certainly led to criticism of his work: "Was he an academic? Or a critic? Or a journalist?" (MacKillop, 1995, 174). It may have contributed to his failure to achieve the professional advancement that his then position within his discipline appeared to have otherwise deserved. It did not, however, lead to his writings being dismissed out of hand. Thus Mulhern writes of a journal set up in seeming opposition to Leavis' journal *Scrutiny*:

> The new journal [Essays in Criticism] was not conceived of as an alternative to *Scrutiny*—Bateson's admiration of the latter was explicit—but its main objective was to transcend what its editor regarded as the chief limitation of *Scrutiny* criticism: a lack of scholarship. (297-298)

Other scholar-fans in the past and other scholar-fans in the present, the work of Ricks on Dylan for example (Ricks, 2003), have met disapproval but not dismissal tout court. What is different about the work of scholar-fans on *BtVS* or *Angel*? Indeed, rather than accepting as given the inferiority of the scholar-fan's motivation and impulses, Lavery's analysis of the position of *Buffy* Studies, drawing on the work of Hills, has argued for superiority of scholar-fan's commitment to their subject (Lavery, 2004, 7) as did scholar-fans who responded to Burr's survey (Burr, 2005, 378-379). Finally, to dismiss the work of scholar-fans on the Buffyverse is one thing but to dismiss *Buffy* Studies as a whole is another. Not every academic who writes about *BtVS* or *Angel* can be described as a fan. For some, whilst the programmes are a compelling focus for analysis, they are just that, grist for academic lives, texts whose many layers demand to be unraveled but no more. Scholar-fandom therefore seems to provide part of the reason for the hostility to *Buffy* Studies but not the whole answer.

(5) Turnbull has argued that the fact that *BtVS* is part of popular culture leads to resistance to its study within the academy.

> When people ask me what I do, or what I am studying, I almost always have to explain myself in ways which I would not have to if I were researching the works of William Faulkner, particle physics or orthodonture. Studying popular culture simply isn't taken seriously. . . . (2)

Once again this seems to be an attractive explanation for the position of *Buffy* Studies. As Turnbull ably demonstrates the study of popular culture has struggled to find acceptance within the academy and *BtVS* and *Angel* as artifacts of popular culture thus seem likely targets for hostility. Commenting on a recent *Buffy* Studies conference at the University of Huddersfield in the United Kingdom, Nicholas Seaton, Chair of the British "Campaign for Real Education," opined that

> [u]niversity academics should be concentrating on literature that has stood the test of time, rather than spending their time on trendy, modern TV programmes, no matter how popular. It's very hard to see how it will benefit academic study. (need page # for this quote)

The fact that *BtVS* is not just a part of popular culture but is also a television series further increases its marginality within the academy.

> [T]elevision has tended to be seen as less important, less worthy of serious attention, than other media (such as literature, cinema and the press). It has attracted few major theorists, either academic or political, and it is often dismissed as a bastard medium, whose only interest lies in the way it debases purer forms and people's consciousness. (Hartley, 128)

Nonetheless, although the fact that it engages with popular culture and is a television series may be part of the reason why *Buffy* Studies is regarded by some with scorn, this explanation, like the idea of scholar-fandom, has its limitations.

(6) *BtVS* and *Angel* are programmes that are less likely to be attacked as not being fit for study simply because they are examples of popular culture than is the case with many other television series. At the beginning of his article on *BtVS*, Macneil asks

> [w]hy is a TV show like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* so *bloody* brilliant, when others, in the same time slot, age demographic and generic vein, like *Charmed*, are so utterly charmless? (2421, emphasis in original)

Implicit and sometimes explicit in much of the scholarship in *Buffy* Studies is the proposition that *BtVS* and *Angel* are examples of popular culture that differ from the norm in a variety of ways. Most important for the argument in this present article is the notion that "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be viewed as a morality play: every week Buffy and her friends fight evil in some form and in doing so make complex moral decisions" (Greene and Yuen, ¶1). The combination of the overt moral turn to *BtVS* and *Angel* and the subtlety of approach to that turn is one of the things that distinguishes them from most other examples of popular culture. Both *BtVS* and *Angel* are about, amongst other things, morality but neither series moralises. They suggest questions, issues and directions for answers but they do not dictate a position; their subject is the inevitably of making ethical choices but they are not a prospectus for the right moral choice. In this the programmes mirror the movement in literature from the romance to the novel.

> The novel is at the present time universally recognized as one of the greater historic forms of literary art. . . .
>
> Among the last apologies for the novel—an apology in which we fully sense, however, the surge of confidence and power generated by the phenomenal rise of this relatively new genre—is the preface that the Goncourt brothers wrote for their novel *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864). 'Now that the novel,' they observed, 'is broadening, growing, beginning to be a great, serious, impassioned living form of literary study and social research, now by that means of analysis and psychological inquiry it is turning into contemporary moral philosophy, now that the novel has imposed upon itself the investigations and duties of science, one may make a stand for its liberties and privileges.' (Rahv, 222-223)

For some in the present day this remains one of the chief justifications for the study of the novel within the academy (see, for example, Bloom, Part One). Given that this is so, it does not seem too difficult to make out a similar case for the legitimacy of the study of *BtVS* and *Angel*. *BtVS* as a case-study of the travails of adolescence and *Angel* as a study of angst, detachment and connection in modern urban life are, on this argument, as worthy of investigation as the novels that litter the lists of departments of literature. But the argument can be taken further. Both *BtVS* and *Angel* are examples of programmes that transcend the idea of popular culture not just in the fact that they may also be seen as being high art but in their prominence within public life.

> Since its inception, television has supported what can be called, to use a later coinage, 'watercooler shows'. Such programmes passed beyond the boundaries of the text to become more widely circulated, to become programmes which even non-viewers knew about. Not simply watched by large audiences, they also became part of the culture in which they were broadcast. An imperative existed, not simply to watch these shows (although many did), then to know about them as party of the condition of living in a public culture. (McKee, 2003, 184-185)

Such is their ubiquity and quality,

> each minor event on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is contextualised with hours of prior narrative or 'backstory' that invests each moment, and the character's responses within it, with a weight of nuance and significance. (Janovich and Lyons, 1)

BtVS and *Angel* are part of the culture, not just the popular culture, of modern society in many countries with even those who have little knowledge of television being aware of at least some of their elements. Even if studying popular culture were to be regarded as suspect such "watercooler shows," particularly when they are also examples of Quality Television (if a fantasy programme can be Quality Television) (Wilcox, 2005, 174-175), do not seem the most obvious candidates for venom.

(7) One possible explanation for the large-scale rejection of *Buffy* Studies that is hinted at in some of the criticisms above but that has been little explored is the place that *Buffy* Studies has, and necessarily has, in the structure of academic life. In their ethnography of academic life Becher and Trowler note that

> [i]t is a common finding of studies of what motivates academic researchers that what moves them is primarily factors intrinsic to the discipline itself, particularly the desire to develop a reputation in the field and to contribute significantly to it. (75)

Most academics are not engaged in a solitary quest for truth but rather see their work as being validated by the place that it takes in the community, usually the academic discipline, to which they owe allegiance. In part this is a response to the pressures consequent on the ever-increasing quantity of information with which the academic must wrestle.

> Only by strict specialization can the scientific worker become fully conscious, for once and perhaps never again in his lifetime, that he has achieved something that will endure. A really definitive accomplishment is today always a specialized accomplishment. (Weber, 135)

(8) If "[i]t is arguable that disciplines are the life-blood of higher education: alongside academic institutions, they provide its main organising base" (Becher, 151), where does this leave those who study *BtVS* and *Angel* and where does this leave *Buffy* Studies? It has been argued that *Buffy* Studies is a discipline:

> And now we have Buffy Studies. Now we have a regional institution of higher education, in an American state with a second rate university system, a state better known for the spawn of Graceland and as the home of country music, *internationally known as a result of [Buffy] studies.* (Lavery, 12, emphasis in original)

However, is *Buffy* Studies an academic discipline in the usual sense of the phrase and can those who work on *BtVS* and *Angel* make a contribution to and find their place in the discipline in the manner that is normal in academic life?

(9) Assessing the disciplinary status of *Buffy* Studies is predicated on an understanding of what it means for something to be a discipline within the academy. Consideration of some of the literature on the notion of an academic discipline suggests that *Buffy* Studies does have some claim to being a discipline or at least a nascent discipline.

> Disciplinary cultures, in virtually all fields transcend the institutional boundaries within any given system. In many, but not all, instances they also span national boundaries. That this is the case is to be seen through the existence of national, and often international subject associations which embody collective norms and exercise an informal control on undergraduate and graduate curricula, as well as providing a shared

> context for research. It can also be observed in the easy mobility of academic staff from one institution to another; the common readership of academic texts (whether books or journals); the frequent informal communication between individuals in different geographical locations; the existence of international conferences; and the incidence of collaborative enquiry which involves researchers in more than one university (and often more than one country). (Becher, 153)

Buffy Studies has some of these required features of a discipline. It is international in character, it has one academic journal that is subject specific, it has an ever-increasing range of essay collections and monographs that are beginning to form a canon of secondary material and there have been a number of large-scale conferences in different countries with more planned for the future. There are already courses on *Buffy* Studies and a future research centre devoted to *Buffy* Studies does not seem inconceivable. However, it seems doubtful that all of this does, or can ever, add up to a discipline of *Buffy* Studies.

(10) Academic disciplines find their place in the institutional structures of the academy.

> Any full understanding of how the higher education system works must depend on an understanding of the basic units which together make up its constituent institutions. By basic units we mean the smallest component elements which have a corporate life of their own. Their identifying characteristics would normally include an administrative existence (a designated head or chairman, a separately accounted budget); a physical existence (an identifiable set of premises); an academic existence (a range of undergraduate training programmes, usually some provision for graduate work and sometimes a collective research activity). (Becher and Kogan, 87)

Disciplines are intellectual entities but they need concrete physical settings to attach themselves to and they need to do this on an international basis. Disciplines need departments, faculties or schools and the infra-structure of administrative assistance and budgets to thrive; they need them in not one institution but in many institutions; they need them not just in one country but in a number of countries. The establishment of any significant number of units of *Buffy* Studies seems implausible as does any frequent movement of staff from one institution to another because they are *Buffy* experts as opposed to their movement because they are cultural theorists, academic lawyers or whatever and their pursuit of *Buffy* Studies is seen as legitimate within that discipline and by those departments. Thus there is, in strict terms, no such things as *Buffy* Studies.

> “What exactly is *Buffy* Studies? If we set out to categorize existing scholarly writing on *BtVS* as I have done in a bibliography now available on the *Slayage* website[http://www.slayage.tv/EBS/buffy_studies/buffystudiesbibilography.htm], we discover that *Buffy* Studies currently comprises at least fifty (**fifty!!**) disciplines, methods, and/or approaches. . . ." (Lavery, 13, emphasis in original)

Buffy Studies is the work of a wide range of scholars drawing on a wide range of often disparate disciplines, methods and concepts to analyse a common subject. It is a truly interdisciplinary endeavour.

(11) The interdisciplinary nature of *Buffy* Studies, in part, both explains and answers some of the criticism that it has met with. The fears expressed after the first *Buffy* conference were whether the "hard questions" of media studies would be addressed by those in *Buffy* studies (Lavery, ¶33) but those in *Buffy* Studies who do not come from media studies might find these "hard questions" tangential or irrelevant to the intellectual agenda with which they are familiar. Levine and Schneider's criticisms about *Buffy* Studies are directly addressed to those in English, Film, Television or Cultural departments (Levine and Schneider, 299) but there are many other disciplines in *Buffy* Studies and there is no obvious reason why one discipline's agenda should take priority over another. McKee's concern is with "social equity" (McKee, 2002, 69) but there are other concerns that equally, urgently demand academic attention. And for those writing about *BtVS* and *Angel* who do come from the disciplines named by critics the issues and concerns of others writing about the programmes may take on a greater importance than the questions and problems of their home discipline; interdisciplinarity leaches out some of the disciplinary power that is otherwise exercised.

(12) The interdisciplinary nature of *Buffy* Studies is no more a complete explanation of the academy's hostility towards such work than is the notion of scholar-fandom or the ire raised by the notion of the study of popular culture in general or television studies in particular. However, to the degree that it provides any kind of explanation at all it suggests a more intractable difficulty for *Buffy* Studies than either of the first two problems. The problematic position of scholar-fans can, in principle, be met either by raising that status of such academics, as Lavery suggests, or by encouraging work by non-scholar-fans on *Buffy* Studies. One can argue and re-argue, as does Turnbull, for the importance of work on popular culture in the academy. Not only those who work in Television Studies have argued for the importance of analysing television; thus, for example, Steiner, whose work has been on comparative literature, has written that "film and television—now the commanding instruments of general sensibility" (Steiner, 1997, 156). The position of interdisciplinary work is, however, inherently difficult within the academy. The paradigm within the academy is the discipline and work done outside disciplines seems to be perpetually destined to be marginal. Yet, even here, there may be limited hope for the position of *Buffy* scholars.

(13) Reflecting on his long career Steiner has written that "[m]y belief that cows have fields but that passions in motion are the privilege of the human mind has long been held against me" (Steiner, 1997, 155). Steiner's rejection of the notion of research fields, his celebration of interdisciplinarity, "the carnival of understanding and judgement" (Steiner, 1997, 20), reflects the fact that whilst working with disciplines is the paradigm within the university there are other ways of being an academic and indeed, as Steiner's career, with posts at Princeton University, the University of Geneva, the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge and Harvard University, demonstrates, other ways of being a hugely successful and influential academic. Within

an academic universe of disciplines *Buffy* Studies may be destined to be marginal; that does not mean that all of those writing about *Buffy* Studies must themselves be marginal.

(14) Consideration of the reasons for the criticism of *Buffy* Studies raises one final and more provocative question. Why, if at all, should those working in *Buffy* Studies concern themselves with such attacks?

(15) Basic principles about the nature of the university tell us that researching into *BtVS* and *Angel* needs no special justification and attacks on *Buffy* Studies thus need no response. Newman's classic nineteenth century defense of the university, reiterated more recently by writers such as Nussbaum, argued for the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself. Questions that can be asked, whether about *BtVS* and *Angel* or anything else, should be asked. "[T]he asking of questions is the supreme piety of the spirit. . . " (Steiner, 1978, 149). "More than *homo sapiens*, we are *homo quaerens*, the animal that asks and asks" (Steiner, 2001, 16). However, this fact in itself necessitates consideration of why and how we are asking the questions that we ask. Although *Buffy* Studies does not need validation by others within the academy, the fact that some scholars wish to ask questions about the Buffyverse is sufficient warrant for them being asked, nevertheless self-reflection must be as integral to the pursuit of *Buffy* Studies as to any other aspect of life. Questions about the process of questioning are themselves part of the process of questioning; an unconsidered life for a scholar of *Buffy* Studies, as much as for anyone else, is not worth living. In this sense there is a necessity to examine and re-examine critiques of *Buffy* Studies in order to see whether they provide or provoke suggestions about the way in which work within *Buffy* Studies can be improved. Given the politics of *Buffy* Studies described above, *Buffy* Studies may need pragmatic defense if it is to be given an appropriate budget but, more than this, the ethics of *Buffy* Studies demands that scholars within it attend to their own motivations and methods if they are to fulfill their scholarly role.

(16) However, notwithstanding this legitimate reason for considering the criticisms made of *Buffy* Studies, there may also reactions to these criticisms by *Buffy* scholars that are more difficult to justify. Marginality for some *Buffy* scholars may matter in itself; marginality may indicate that their own work is considered unimportant; marginality may mean that their arguments are failing to succeed since other non-*Buffy* scholars do not cite their arguments in academic work outside of *Buffy* Studies. Given the academic concern with reputation noted by Becher and Trowler above, such feelings about marginality would be understandable but consideration of the content of both *BtVS* and *Angel* suggests why it may be difficult for *Buffy* scholars ethically to defend treating marginality as being important.

(17) Many within *Buffy* Studies are concerned with analysing the moral arguments examined in *BtVS* and *Angel*. Most commentary puts a positive gloss on these arguments. Thus Kawal observes

> [w]hat I hope to show in this section is that Buffy holds deep moral commitments that lead her to an ongoing pattern of heroic and saintly

> actions. As such we have good grounds to treat Buffy as a moral role model. (150; see also, amongst others, Stevenson and Reiss)

What these moral commitments are is, of course, a complex matter. However, one aspect of the morality of both *BtVS* and *Angel* does seem clear. "[H]eroism [that is acting morally] is not defined as a grand quest to eliminate evil, but rather as an existentialist determination to fight it, 'to help the helpless' . . ." (Wall and Zyrd, 59). Thus Angel demands that "w[e] live as though the world was what it should be, to show it what it can be" ("Deep Down," 4001). Many episodes of *BtVS* and *Angel* demonstrate this but the final episode of *Angel*, "Not Fade Away" (5022), provides a powerful illustration. Knowing that they will almost certainly die in this particular fight Angel, Spike and the others nevertheless agree first to assassinate the members of the Circle of the Black Thorn and then gather at the alley behind the Hyperion to face the thousands sent to kill them by the vengeful senior partners. *BtVS* and *Angel* are not morality plays about what to do when faced by demons or vampires. Instead what Angel, Spike and the others do is also enjoined to everyone else, including *Buffy* scholars, in their quotidian lives; "everyday heroism" is necessary (Reiss, 11).

(18) Given the ethic of the Buffyverse, the required response to the marginality of *Buffy* Studies on the part of those *Buffy* scholars who profess to accept this ethic follows. There are more questions about *BtVS* and *Angel* that are still to be answered. *Buffy* Studies may in fact be irredeemably marginal within the academy but the ethics of the Buffyverse forbids considering this a matter of consequence when deciding whether or not to attempt to answer to these questions. Local conditions vary and the precise degree of difficulty inherent in doing work on the Buffyverse will be dependant on matters such as the precise nature of one's parent academic discipline and the national structures of higher education within which one works. However the wealth of past writing on the Buffyverse is testimony to the possibility of future research. Therefore, as Angel says at the end of "Not Fade Away," "[l]et's go to work."

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Regeneration through Vampirism: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* New Frontier

[1] After three years at Winchester, an English prep school, Joss Whedon returned to America and began his undergraduate work at Wesleyan University. He knew he wanted to study literature and film, but little suspected the caliber of professors he would encounter at his new school. In an interview, he explains how he enjoyed "lectures that were so complete, so complex, so dense and so simple that I almost had trouble following them, and by the end would realize they were dealing with things that were already in me. They were already incorporated in the way I thought about story, because they are the American mythos. . . . I don't have a thought about story that is not influenced by those teachers" ("An Interview with Joss Whedon"). Among the most significant of those Wesleyan professors was Richard Slotkin.[1]

[2] Slotkin built his reputation through his important studies of the regenerative myths of violence playing through American literature. Slotkin's scholarly trilogy, beginning with *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, argues each step of American "progress" is preceded by violence on the frontier. Each time the American community faces a physical or psychic challenge, whether external or internal, the American spirit is redeemed "through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or 'natural' state, and *regeneration through violence*" (*c*. The call to regeneration through violence springs from the very first Europeans who come to America for a fresh start, personally, politically, and spiritually. They see the possibility of rebirth, but it comes only at the price of wresting control of the land from the current inhabitants: the wilderness and the Native Americans. In his second book, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*, Slotkin envisions the same scenario replayed in the nineteenth century, with the lower classes and those races traditionally assigned to these classes fitting the slot previously occupied solely by the Native American "savages." Finally, in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*, the American frontier fully transforms from geography to ideology. The Frontier and the West become frozen in time, and the archetypes and icons of the mythic West become codified in the Western movies, television, and fiction of twentieth century America. However, after Vietnam American faith in the old myths begins to unravel, and, despite efforts by many to restore that nostalgic footing, America currently resides in a space of uncertainty.

[3] Whedon's most obvious references to the myths of the Western and the frontier

appear in his television show *Firefly* (2003) and the accompanying film *Serenity* (2005), which essentially put archetypal Western characters in space. Less clear, on the surface at least, are the connections between Western myths and Whedon's first television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS)*. This show, with its cast of primarily Southern Californian teenagers, seems far removed from dusty tales of the Wild West. But Sunnydale, the fictional setting of *BtVS*, sits atop the Hellmouth, a conduit to Hell that attracts demons of this world and those beneath. Sunnydale thus acts as a frontier space, marking the border between civilization and the wilderness of the underworld. In this paper, I will argue that not only do Joss Whedon and his writers invoke Slotkin's ideas throughout the series, but that the translation of those ideas in *BtVS* frequently reveals the limitations of America's dependence on viewing itself as a frontier nation capable only of "regeneration through violence." Most significantly, the series finale offers an alternative direction for American myth.

[4] Any discussion of the American West and the myth of the American frontier begins with Frederick Jackson Turner. In his legendary speech of 1893, Turner famously pronounces the American frontier closed. Until his era, Turner argues, the frontier border that ever shifts westward defines America, giving the young country its identity in "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (3). This "meeting point" helps America identify itself by what it is not – primarily Europe, the "savage" native Americans, and the wilderness. Turner felt that as the geographic border closed upon the reaching of the Pacific Ocean, land's end, the first era of American identity closed with it. At this point, a new touchstone would have to be forged. Instead, as Slotkin observes, America turns the frontier myth inward, employing the imagery collectively understood as Old West to clarify America's and Americans' position in the world.[2] Old West and frontier become essentially the same myth, and Americans and American culture both employ the myth and measure themselves/itself against it.

[5] We see such measuring-against-myth very early in *BtVS*. In one of his first conversations with Buffy, Xander laments, "not much goes on in a one Starbucks town like Sunnydale," linking Sunnydale's pokiness to the one-horse towns of the Old West ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001). In the second episode, "The Harvest" (1002), after Buffy's classmate Xander has discovered vampires exist, he asks, "So, what's the plan? We saddle up, right?" employing the mythic language of countless Western movies. Buffy, however, immediately quashes this, warning her task is "deeply dangerous." She recognizes she holds the special powers of the Slayer, while her friends are purely human and thus more vulnerable. Xander, however, reads her rejection through the Western conceptions of man/woman and concludes, "I'm inadequate. That's fine. I'm less than a man." Western man acts; Western woman waits behind. Xander thus finds himself in some strange space that is "less than a man," and yet not woman, who, as in Buffy's case, plays the active role. Xander *wants* to read himself through the Western pose, but the pose fails him and he's left groping for a new identity.

[6] An even more direct example comes in the episode, "Bad Eggs" (2012), when two outlaw cowboy vamps, Lyle and Tector Gorch, mosey into town to stir up trouble and challenge Buffy. Marti Noxon renders the Gorches through our expectations of cowboy Westerners. They speak the twangy Western accent, wear the proper hats and outfits, and enjoy fighting for fighting's sake. Perhaps most significantly, Lyle and Tector Gorch share their names with two characters from the 1969 Western, *The Wild Bunch*. [3] Unlike Xander, the Gorches fit the mold of the Western man. And yet, because they

measure up to the frontier mold – because they are "authentic" Westerners – they clearly do not belong in Buffy's world. The Gorches' "Old West" identity signals they are out of time (nicely made possible because as vampires, they never age) and place (more suited to riding the range than haunting the malls), but primarily they are a joke. They are cowboys, and cowboys belong on the frontier, "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" – which suburban Sunnydale is not.

[7] Before I overturn the last statement, as clearly I must do, let me develop the "suburban" over the "Sunnydale." The suburb seems the anti-frontier. Civilization dominates suburbia – in fact, the typical critique of suburbia is that it is all civilization and no culture. Cynthia Morrill calls suburbia "the fast-food version of the American dream, providing excellent value for its price, but offering little nutritional value for the soul" (Morrill). Especially through Hollywood's eyes, suburbia is the late-fall landscape of *American Beauty* (1999), the teenage wasteland of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), the cookie-cutter pastel housing blocks of *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). The tensions implicit in Turner's frontier have passed on, and instead of flux we have stasis.

[8] The teenagers inhabiting suburban Sunnydale understand this all too well. They long for that which is cool, and that which is cool is that which is on the edge – not too old, not too safe, not too anything. The premier episode, "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001), gives the main characters a chance to declare the numerous ways Sunnydale is not cool. Before inviting her into the popular clique, alpha co-ed Cordelia tests Buffy's "coolness factor" through a few questions assessing Buffy's knowledge of the latest trends. More tellingly, though, she also outlines the geographic pecking order by conceding that since Buffy's just moved here from L.A., a locale of infinite edginess, she doesn't have to take the written. Buffy passes the test, so Cordelia invites her to The Bronze, a club in the "bad part of town," which is "about a half a block from the good part of town." Cordelia is obviously slamming Sunnydale's smallness as a strike against it, but also intriguing is that she highlights The Bronze's location in the "bad part of town." The club gives the safe, suburban teens a place to feel they're testing themselves against savagery – while playing pool, dancing, and listening to bands. They long for excitement while agreeing they live in the most boring of spaces.

[9] However, everything that makes the suburbs so boring for teenagers reassures their parents. Buffy's mother, Joyce, moves her daughter to Sunnydale after Buffy burns down her gymnasium at the previous school (to destroy a vampire nest). Joyce, in classic comic book tradition, has no inkling of her daughter's secret identity and feels Buffy just started running with the wrong crowd.[4] Suburban Sunnydale thus tenders the fresh start, away from the dangers of the city. The suburb offers the American dream, the one-owner home with "natural" lawn contained within picket fence – in other words, perfect, wonderfully dull, security. But the security is, of course, an illusion.

[10] A few critics have observed how *BtVS* takes advantage of its setting to critique the American Dream of perfect security. For writers, Southern California has long been a setting of contrast – the sunny skies drawing eyes to the heavens, the better to disregard the darkness at their feet. Boyd Tonkin argues that although Sunnydale's exact locale is nebulous, the show is particularly Southern Californian, especially in its benign façade concealing environmental and societal upheaval. Cataloging the woes of California, from geological faults to corrupt government to growing pains to gangs, Tonkin relates them to the metaphorical threats that drive the conflicts of the program. He argues *BtVS*, and even more its L.A.-based spinoff *Angel*, follows the classic

California noir stories of Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald with protagonists whose work takes them into the realm of darkness most citizens willfully ignore. The Southern California city, painted as a utopia of climate and opportunity, becomes in art dystopia. It becomes, in Thomas Hibbs' words, a "peculiarly American nightmare" in which the suburban paradise of Sunnydale "is but a storm drain resting over the cauldron of hell" (52). The inhabitants of Sunnydale, for the most part, choose not to see the events occurring around them, preferring to envision a vampire feeding as a gang hopped up on PCP or to pretend a bizarre incident never happened rather than expose the dark underbelly of their shiny locale. Parents feel secure by believing their suburbia is deadly dull, and their teenagers feel secure by complaining how their suburbia is deadly dull.

[11] Sunnydale is fascinating, though, precisely because it may be deadly, but not dull – and here I return to emphasize the "Sunnydale" over the "suburban." Despite its suburban character, because it sits atop the Hellmouth, Sunnydale marks a frontier space between the realms of demons and humans, "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." The frontier battle in *BtVS* determines who controls the physical and ideological space of Sunnydale, and despite Buffy's frequent desire to live the life of a normal teenage girl, this battle is precisely what shakes her and the Scoobies from laconic suburban life. Whedon makes this clear in the first season finale when Willow discovers a group of boys slaughtered by vampires in the Sunnydale High School AV room. She cries to Buffy, "I'm not okay. I knew those guys. I go to that room every day. And when I walked in there, it . . . it wasn't our world anymore. They made it theirs. And they had fun" ("Prophecy Girl," 1012). High school should be dull. It should have its difficulties of not fitting in and of being ignored – themes the show deals with in its early seasons – but these are dramas played out in a bubble of safety. [5] The vampires bring violence into the literal. They strip the high school, the suburbs, of their dullness and, as Willow notes, have *fun* doing so. The vampires' presence helps the main characters realize the ridiculousness of high school jockeying and suburban angst (and also long for the delusions of their classmates) – in their way, the undead vampires bring the characters to life.

[12] As with the slaughter in the AV room, for all of Sunnydale it's the "unreal" elements that rip away the broader illusion suburbia typically imposes. In other words, it's the unreal that's real. Rarely does anyone outside the Scooby gang publicly acknowledge that Sunnydale's a little different from everywhere else, but when they do, the revelation comes courtesy of the supernatural. In one instance ("Gingerbread," 3011), a demon takes the form of two small, dead children and inspires Joyce to found MOO, Mothers Opposed to the Occult, and start a witch hunt. At a press conference, after the mayor's offered some platitudes, Joyce steps to the microphone:

> Joyce: Mr. Mayor, you're dead wrong. (people begin to murmur) This is *not* a good town. How many of us have, have lost someone who, who just disappeared? Or, or got skinned? Or suffered neck rupture? And how many of us have been too afraid to speak out? I-I was supposed to lead us in a moment of silence, but... silence is this town's disease. For too long we-we've been plagued by unnatural evils. This isn't our town anymore. It belongs to the monsters and, and the witches and the Slayers.

By publicly declaring what everyone chooses to ignore, Joyce brings the darkness into

the light. But it takes the continual presence of magic for the citizens to acknowledge magic. Once the demon's been killed, the citizens go back to studiously ignoring the "unnatural evils" that plague them.

[13] This willful ignorance ties in nicely with one of the biggest complications with Slotkin's theories about regeneration through violence. As stated earlier, Slotkin says that nearly since its inception, American culture (including colonial America) has looked to violence to solve all perceived challenges thrown at it. Like a phoenix rising from ashes, something in the American mythos needs the purging fire to allow the glorious rebirth. The frontier becomes the locus for the regenerative violence, the clashing point where "good" Americans will face "evil" in a time of conflict, in order that stability can be imposed. Slotkin shows how America tells and retells itself the story, recasting the "evil" and redrawing the frontier as necessary. Always, however, the frontier is viewed as temporary – a pause on the way to stability.[6] The frontier space is always in the process of becoming, either evolving forward or slipping back. If we conceive the frontier in terms of American imaginings of the Old West, the frontier town is always becoming increasingly civilized or a ghost town. This shifting nature compels a longing for wholeness and away from instability. So the citizens of Sunnydale, rather than acknowledging the frontier/instability has not moved on, *choose* not to see it. They choose to believe the myth – that their violence has purged them from their problem – rather than see what's "really" happening.

[14] The frontier conception of the American West, in other words, forces us into viewing space as a binary, with one possibility (civilization) naturally and rightfully superior to the alternative (nature/savagery). Slotkin recognizes this happening not only in American culture, but as a problem with myth itself. He agrees with Roland Barthes that all myth simplifies reality, "buttonholing" (Barthes' term) life into "a few traditional 'either/or' decisions" (Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment* 19).[7] The "regeneration through violence" myth imposes this bind – the society must devolve into primitive, animalistic violence before it can regenerate itself, leaving the primitive behind and embracing its future. We're left again with being/becoming wholly one or the other in an effort to avoid living in uncertainty.

[15] This, of course, works only until the myth fails to accommodate life's events. Slotkin spends much of *Gunfighter Nation* detailing how the myth plays through the Western movie bonanza of the mid-twentieth century and encourages American involvement and understanding in World War II and even Korea. But, for Slotkin, the myth fails with the U.S.'s war in Vietnam. There, facing an enemy that refuses to abide by the rules the myth sets for it, violence seems not to solve the problem but instead accelerate it. The frontier pushes not steadily forward, but remains in place – and even spreads to American shores through societal unrest. The only solution the myth can offer, more violence, fails. In an analysis of how the Western film *The Wild Bunch* signals this failure of myth, Slotkin writes of the protagonist Pike and antagonist Mapache:

> As with the American "mission" in Vietnam, Pike's "failure of intelligence" leads to a surprising catastrophe. Instead of greeting the *gringos* as liberators, Mapache's people assault them as the enemy. Had the Americans understood the "revolutionary" implications of their role – had they understood the nature of the conflict in which, for their own private reasons, they had enmeshed themselves – they might have predicted the Agua Verdean revulsion against them, and they

> would certainly have understood that a conflict with Mapache could not be settled by personal duel or even *coup d'état*, that only the power of a social order equivalent to that of Agua Verde – the power of the village/revolution – would be sufficient to the task of undoing Mapache (610-611).

America may try to employ the myth again, say in the Middle East, but because there is a cultural crisis of faith in the myth, there may not be the will or desire to trust the old solutions will work. Whedon picks up on such doubts on *BtVS,* in the famous musical episode "Once More with Feeling" (6007). Confronted with yet another menacing demon, Buffy sings, "Apocalypse, we've all been there / the same old trips / why should we care?" Her line can be taken both as a call for bravery and as an admission of malaise. Violence works to put down a demon, but another always pops up. This leaves three options: one can ignore what's happening, as the town does; stick with the myth and its accompanying violence-as-solution, as Buffy does for the first six seasons; or find a way to rewrite the myth and forge a new way to envision the conflict. I argue that the genius of the *BtVS* series finale is that it does exactly this by valorizing hybridity over wholeness.
[16] To work my way towards the importance of hybridity, I want to first return to Joyce's claim that demons are "unnatural." Although all the characters think of the demons and vampires drawn to the Hellmouth as "unnatural evils," the show clearly links them more closely to nature than humans will ever be. Buffy's Watcher Giles explains,

> This world is older than any of you know. Contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons demons walked the Earth. They made it their home, their...their Hell. But in time they lost their purchase on this reality. The way was made for mortal animals, for, for man. All that remains of the old ones are vestiges, certain magicks, certain creatures. ("The Harvest," 1002)

If we define nature, as is common, by what precedes human involvement, then demons are nature. To establish their claim to this world, humans have two options.
[17] First, they can erase or rewrite demon history, as Giles refers to with his reference to "popular mythology." Suburbia markets itself a place to get away from the city but not go back to the wild; a small town, new-old-world living that never was. With its meticulously furnished model homes, themed developments, and ad campaigns designed to sell a feeling of belonging to another time or place, the suburbs take a physical place and actively redefine it. Like the frontier that is always shifting and never truly locatable, the suburban ideal exists only in the mind – it's a utopia, a no-place. In order to exist in physical space, both frontier and suburb must actively erase the world that preceded them and establish themselves as the new idea that will replace the old. In the American West, cries of Manifest Destiny and national progress encouraged Americans to see themselves entering an empty land (that was, of course, far from empty), a paradoxically ancient, virgin wilderness that could be conquered through violence in the name of this young civilization. Similarly, the residents of Sunnydale must mask the past to stake their claim to this space. Giles explains how the Spanish inhabitants of this space called it "Boca del Infierno," translated into English as "Hellmouth" ("The Harvest," 1002). That name, however, won't sell many houses. "Sunnydale" is lain down like a rug over a bloodspot to mask the "real" nature

of this place. In the same way that Spanish settlers use language (in addition to unnamed acts) to name and thus claim the area as their own from previous inhabitants and American settlers proceed to write out the Spanish, humans have written demons from truth into "popular mythology."

[18] The second method humans use to establish their claim to this world is to convert this part of what is natural into the *super*natural, the unreal. This option is more potent than a simple renaming because it not only makes demons unreal, but places them against nature. The demons' very existence offends any sense of "natural" order. This method proves even more potent than early American colonists' efforts to connect Native Americans with nature, and thus merely an obstacle, like a tree, that could be razed if it impeded the progress of civilization. With this technique, demons become not merely uncivilized but unnatural. Because of this, eradicating demons becomes *nature's* will – by sticking a stake through a vampire's heart, the Scoobies are doing nature's work.

[19] However, as Giles' story exposes, and many references within the series reveal, the supernatural is not non-natural, but intricately linked to nature. In "The Harvest" (1002) Xander's friend Jesse is converted into a vampire. Xander, knowing Jesse now must die, says he's sorry. Jesse responds, "Sorry? I feel good, Xander! I feel strong! I'm connected, man, to everything! . . . I, I can hear the worms in the earth!" In an episode from the final season, Willow (now a powerful witch) uses remarkably similar language to explain to Giles how she can use her magicks to grow a Paraguayan flower in the English countryside: "It's all connected. The root systems, the molecules . . . the energy. Everything's connected" ("Lessons," 7001). In both, the supernatural is the natural, and those intimately connected to the supernatural are likewise more intimately connected to nature than the ordinary humans. Even more, the language each character uses reveals the magic makes no distinction between Willow's "good" supernatural and Jesse's vampiric "evil." Those designations originate with whoever gets to tell the story.

[20] Or, as both Buffy and The First (the final season's apocalypse-desiring Big Bad) say in the episode that opens the show's final season, "It's about power" ("Lessons," 7001). This simple line, delivered by both hero and villain, reverberates back through the series. Though each seasons' apocalypse ostensibly threatens the world if not the universe, it's always played out in the frontier town of Sunnydale, so that Sunnydale becomes, in essence, the world. The fight going on here merely, mythically, represents the fight replayed everywhere over who will take this world and make it theirs. The residents of Sunnydale and the Americans in Slotkin's studies long for a return to wholeness and stability – a pristine imposition of one over the other. But Buffy's final battle reaches for different conclusions, seeking not merely to impress the power of civilization over the power of savagery. Buffy, instead, will battle the very concept of the civilized/savage binary.

[21] In the simplest interpretation, the battle between humanity and demonkind on *BtVS* is, using Slotkin's terminology, a "savage war." Slotkin says America early on latches onto a "doctrine of 'savage war'" that allows it to rationalize two key actions. First, because Americans are fighting "savages," the enemies are wholly different and not truly human. This allows a clear "us and them" differential, "pitting the symbolic opposites of savagery and civilization, primitivism and progress, paganism and Christianity against each other" (*Fatal Environment* 53). Secondly, because the savages are less than human and "inherently disposed to cruel and atrocious violence," the "civilized" America must itself become savage in an effort to save itself from

annihilation. Only with total destruction of the enemy – not conversion or diplomacy – will America be preserved (53-54).

[22] Importantly for my analysis, Slotkin writes that the savage war springs from differences "rooted in some combination of 'blood' and culture" (*Gunfighter Nation* 11). Slotkin's word choice is intriguing, naturally, for on a show about battling savage vampires, differences between humans and monsters must clearly involve blood. In the Buffyverse, a human becomes a vampire when they are bitten and then drink the blood of the vampire who has bitten them. Once blood is shared, the human becomes not only connected to nature, as Jesse proclaims, but soulless and evil. This clearly displays old fears of mixed blood; fears of racial purity marked by impurity. At the series' beginning, the characters usually see their world in such black and white terms: humans are good, vampires and demons evil. Such clear delineation allows the main characters to define themselves by what they are not. The character Angel is an exception to the rule, because he is a vampire with his soul reinserted, thus making him potentially a force for good. But even here, there is always the threat that his soul (human part) will be stripped away and he will revert to his savage, natural state.[8]

[23] As the series progresses, however, the main characters find the lines between demon/magic and human increasingly blurred. Willow learns witchcraft and even becomes addicted to and overcome with her powers in season six. Xander falls in love with the ex-vengeance demon Anya. And Buffy, especially, becomes immersed in grayness. Dying at the end of season five, Buffy is resurrected at the start of season six, only to find herself feeling different. In the episode "Smashed" (6009), Buffy is fighting with the now microchip-neutered Spike.[9] Spike has fallen for Buffy, and Buffy, feeling lost after her resurrection, has turned to Spike in an effort to feel emotions of any kind. At the same time, however, she feels disgusted with herself for consorting with him. In their fight, Spike knocks Buffy to the ground and is surprised to find his head not aching. Buffy rises and hits Spike, saying, "You're a thing. An evil, disgusting, thing," clearly distinguishing herself from him, denying him any sense of identity other than thing-ness. Spike soon discovers the chip's working fine – it's Buffy who's changed. He confronts her, gleefully taunting, "You came back wrong. . . . Came back a little less human than you were." Buffy angrily rejects this and later turns the accusation back on Spike, jeering, "Poor Spikey. Can't be a human, can't be a vampire. Where the hell do you fit in?"

[24] Buffy's question to Spike serves equally well for all the characters. Their once clear visions of who is good and who is evil, of who is human and who is demon, of who is civilized and who is savage, become muddied over the course of the series.[10] Like Sunnydale, like the West, like the suburb, they have themselves become frontiers. They have become what Slotkin calls "the man who knows Indians" – the mythic American hero who straddles the borders lain down to demarcate difference and establish proper and improper identity (*Gunfighter Nation* 14).[11] Slotkin says these heroes blend knowledge of both sides, but achieve victory for the American culture by suppressing the "dark" side of their own character. He provides the example of Daniel Boone in early American literature and concludes, "an American hero is the lover of the spirit of the wilderness, and his actions of love and sacred affirmation are acts of violence against that spirit and her avatars" (*Regeneration* 22). The irony here is clear – the hero must quench that within him/herself that makes him/her unique in order that the larger culture can progress. For Slotkin's heroes, and those heroes in *BtVS*, they must eradicate the demon/natural part of themselves in order for American

culture to become whole (fully human/civilized).
[25] To see an example of this in the Buffyverse, we need only look to the finale of the spinoff series *Angel* ("Not Fade Away," 5022). As with *BtVS*, *Angel* ends with its heroes facing an apocalypse. As the rain pours down, the four survivors gather in a dark alley: Gunn, Spike, Illyria, and Angel. They make brave small talk as hundreds of demons approach their position. Asked about his plan, Angel replies, "We fight." As the horde attacks, the shot cuts to focus solely on Angel as he says, "Let's go to work." He swings his sword and the screen goes black. The two characters most removed from inflicting bodily harm have already been removed. Lorne, the gay-coded karaoke singing demon, has done his duty, declared the fight "unsavory," and walked away. Wesley, the acknowledged brains of the bunch, has already been killed. What's left are two vampires-with-souls, a fallen god, and human Gunn – whose primary skill throughout the series has been his ability to inflict violence. Angel's only plan is to "fight," and though all present know fighting cannot work, they will be "men" (though one is a male deity in a woman's bodily shell) and fight bravely until they die. But, because we do not witness their deaths, the ending permits us to still believe in the myth of regeneration through violence as not a solution but the only solution. It's what Americans do when we "go to work."[7]
[26] In contrast to *Angel*, however, *BtVS* overturns the traditional mythic solution in favor of a reimagining of the problem itself. Angel and his crew seek to make the world whole – free from demons/savages and the fragmentation they present. Likewise, as Krista Comer observes, many Western writers of the 1960s and 1970s positioned themselves against the New West's urban spaces in a nostalgic attempt to reestablish those characteristics which, at least in myth, distinguish the region from the rest of the U.S.A. These writers, in other words, worked to make themselves and their region once again "whole" after its perceived fragmentation. Comer says the "ultimate expression" of what Western writers work against, is the hybrid and "notions of hybridity and hybridized subjectivity" that by its very nature challenges wholeness (5). Because of the multiple questions Western authenticity, "There can be no defensible, insider, regional discourse, no ethnic or racial purity, no sure opposition between masculinity and femininity, no 'natural' nature, no final claim on what counts as westernness" (5). Reading both Slotkin and *BtVS* through Comer, we see the heroes' attempts to perform "acts of violence" against the "dark" side of their character as a desire to smother the Other (*Regeneration Through Violence* 22). For Slotkin's "man who knows Indians," civilization wins when the hero smothers his/her inner savage and the larger culture violently puts down their enemies. The hybrid figure, however, challenges the desire to become wholly one or Other and in that challenge, forges the possibility of a new type of mythic figure. It's not the savage who must be defeated – what needs vanquishing is the myth that requires wholeness via destruction.
[27] Seeking the power to defeat the The First, Buffy initially transports herself back to the men who used magic to create the original Slayer, but rejects their solution to give her strength by making her more demon and less human ("Get It Done," 7015). So far, this aligns with Slotkin's model, with the hero rejecting that which connects her to the savage, which gives Buffy her unique strength. Buffy's solution to defeat The First, however, upsets the traditional move toward purity and wholeness as victory/progress. Buffy realizes it was these ancient men who made the rule that there could be only one Slayer at a time, and that like the either/or binary construct, there is nothing inherently "real" about this rule. It exists because they said it exists.

[28] Significantly, Buffy gains both the idea and the tools to implement her solution from a weapon (the Scythe) forged by the "Guardians," a group of women who gathered in Ancient times to monitor the Shadow Men, those men who created and then tried to control the Slayer. Buffy's solution must come from outside the system of power she has believed to be reality. Willow uses the Scythe to cast a spell that passes the Slayer skills onto all "potentials" – all the worlds' girls who could potentially become Slayers – thus negating what had heretofore made Buffy unique.[13] A montage of young women asserting themselves, gaining confidence, shows as Buffy's voice intones, "Slayers . . . every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?" ("Chosen," 7022). Rather than seeking wholeness, Buffy spreads hybridity, as now all those who were before purely human have become part demon and therefore, Slayers. At the episode's end, Faith observes to Buffy, "you're not the one and only chosen anymore. Just gotta live like a person." Rather than eradicating her "dark" side, Buffy exposes the darkness that already existed in all. Her act has made, or maybe better revealed, the hybrid that was always already there to be the norm. Buffy and her band of newly-energized Slayers do beat back an army of übervamps long enough for a magic amulet to shoot the demons with sunshine and dust them. But that violence is secondary – the solution comes with the rewriting of the myth and the acceptance of hybridity over the "cleansing" power of violence.

[29] Further evidence of this comes with what happens to Sunnydale. As the gang speeds away in a school bus, the ground behind them collapses, stopping only when the "Welcome to Sunnydale" sign topples into the chasm that was the suburb. The suburban space that seemed so dead to its teenage inhabitants, but was really quite lively thanks to its undead inhabitants, now truly is a void. Lacking the darkness/ vampirism that energizes the hybrid characters/space, Sunnydale has consumed itself. The city's end hints that rather than seeking regeneration through violence that quashes darkness, progress actually requires the continued *existence* of the Other. For though Sunnydale is gone, as Giles wryly notes, there's another Hellmouth under Cleveland. The frontier was never just Sunnydale and Buffy was never the only hero; that's just the way they understood the story. The finale of *BtVS* becomes more than just the end of one of the finest television series ever produced. It offers a new mythic figure and structure – the hybrid – for America to envision itself outside of regeneration through violence.

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[1] Whedon reveals this in numerous interviews, including, An Interview with Joss Whedon, June 23, 2003, IGN.com, Available: http://filmforce.ign.com/

articles/425/425492p1.html, August 10, 2003.; Janet, "Joss Whedon Answers 100 Questions," February 21, 2003, SFX Magazine, Available: http://www.buffy.nu/article.php3?id_article=366, August 10, 2003.; Holly J. Morris, "Fictional Heroes," August 10, 2001, U.S. News and World Report, Available: http://www.usnews.com/usnews/doubleissue/heroes/fictional.htm, August 10, 2003.; Emily Nussbaum, "Must See Metaphysics," September 22, 2002, New York Times, Available: http://jossisahottie.com/firefly/news/arc8-2002.html, August 10, 2003.

[2] America and Americans here clearly applies primarily to white America. As the dominant majority, the conquering force, they get to write the myths. People of color naturally have a very different vision of the American West.

[3] In *Gunfighter Nation*, Slotkin does an extensive analysis of the movie as a model for how America's Western/frontier myths spin apart in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

[4] Susan Owen takes this comparison further, picturing Joyce "as an exemplar of how clueless suburban parents (especially mothers) are about the dangers their children face." **(Page number?)**

[5] Reality intruded upon the fictional world of Sunnydale when the WB network postponed showing two episodes of season three ("Earshot," 3018 and "Graduation Day" 3022) when they decided the episodes too closely paralleled the recent Columbine High School shootings.

[6] As Patricia Limerick observes, "[Frederick Jackson] Turner's frontier was a process, not a place. When 'civilization' had conquered 'savagery' at any one location, the process . . . moved on" (26).

[7] Barthes uses the term in his work *Mythologies*, p. 124.

[8] In season two, after Angel has sex with Buffy and experiences a moment of perfect happiness, the gypsy curse that forced his soul upon him is lifted and he reverts to Angelus, the evil vampire. That the savage is released through the sex act can be read as a warning against miscegenation.

[9] Spike ends up falling in love with Buffy and, in an effort to win her heart, fighting a demon to regain his own soul. Thus, through, technology, Spike reclaims some of his humanity.

[10] At a *BtVS* panel, the pseudonymed Hercules reports, "Someone asked Whedon how he defined 'a soul' and how Angel (a vampire with a soul) differed from the soulless vampires (like Spike). Whedon posited that soulless creatures can do good and souled creatures can do evil, but that the soul-free are instinctually drawn toward doing evil while those with souls tend to instinctually want to do good." In the quote, then, we see the shading Whedon has instilled into the pure good/evil binary.

[11] In several places, Whedon says he deliberately "built 'Buffy' [herself] to be a cult figure," an "iconic figure," in line with Slotkin's "man who knows Indians," with Buffy crossing the line between demon and human and challenging roles of woman-as-victim and archetypal heroes (see "An Interview with Joss Whedon" and Holly J. Morris.)

[12] In this and many other ways, the end of *Angel* compares strongly with the movie *Bataan*, which Slotkin sees as a key transition text in the revisioning of the myth of regeneration through violence. Even though all the American soldiers in *Bataan* die, the final character's "berserker" charge on the enemy becomes viewed as "a potentially successful model for fighting and winning our jungle war: rage against the 'monkey' race *empowers* the doomed sergeant, for although we know he is about to die, we never see him fall" (482).

[13] Continuing the theme, Willow, pleasantly overwhelmed with power coursing through her, exclaims, “Oh...my...Goddess.”

David Kociemba

“Over-identify much?”: Passion, “Passion,” and the Author-Audience Feedback Loop in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

> In my experience, people worried about reading in, or over-interpretation, or going too far, are typically afraid of getting started, of reading as such, as if afraid that texts—like people, like times and places—mean things and moreover mean more than you know. This may be a healthy fear, that is a fear of something fearful. Still, my experience is that most texts, like most lives, are under-read, not over-read. . . . This is suggestive of a pervasive conflict suffered by Americans about their own artistic achievements, a conflict that might be described elsewhere as America’s over-praising and undervaluing of those of its accomplishments that it does not ignore.
>
> Stanley Cavell (35, 39)

> Willow: “Angel stopped by? Wow. Was there... Well, I mean, was it having to do with kissing?”
> Buffy: “Willow, grow up. Not everything is about kissing.”
> Xander: (to Willow) “Yeah. Some stuff's about groping.” (to Buffy) “It wasn't about groping?”
> Buffy: “Okay, hormones on parade here?”
>
> — “When She Was Bad” (2001)

[1] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* created a process in which the authors, the text, and the audience informed and influenced one another in an especially important manner. Umberto Eco, in writing about the rights of texts and interpreters of texts, provides an apt summary of the feedback loop observed here:

> Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the model reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one and that, in the end, coincides with the intention of the text. Thus, more than a parameter to use in order to validate the interpretation, the text is an object that the interpretation builds up in the course of the circular effort of validating itself on the basis of what it makes up as its result. (Collini 64)

Authors and audiences imagine and construct models of one another by means of the text. The text is built by interpretation but also provides limits for valid interpretation of it. Critical readers make initial judgments about the model audience. They make these judgments largely from their experience of the text while experiencing it, rather than from observing the author or others in the audience. Critical readers then confirm or reevaluate that hypothesis in light of later developments in the text. If a sufficiently negative hypothesis is confirmed, critical readers may then choose to opt out of experiencing the narrative further.

[2] In serial narratives, however, empirical authors (the person or persons creating the text to be shared) create additional texts informed by their imagined model of the audience. Empirical audiences (the persons with whom the empirical authors' work is shared) then change their imagined model of the author in light of the new evidence provided by the evolving serial text. The result, for Eco, is not a direct communication between empirical authors and interpreters. It is an indirect dialogue between empirical authors and their imagined models of their text's interpreters on the one hand and between empirical audiences and their imagined models of the authors implied by the text on the other. This conversation can be repetitive, requiring little alteration in either's model of the other. Aaron Spelling's *Charmed* serves as a useful example of the repetitive author-text-audience paradigm, in which dozens of episodes seem to have been inspired by the costume changes that they would require. Or, an empirical author may create an innovative serial work that challenges empirical critical readers of it to live up to the empirical author's especially demanding model of the audience. Those empirical critical readers, potentially, could then challenge that empirical author to live up to their model of an especially innovative author. Serial narratives that are consistently innovative are created out of an indirect dialogue between authors and audiences in which each encourages the other to strive to embody an ever-shifting ideal.

[3] So which conversation do we have with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: repetitive or challenging? As someone who teaches a course on the series, it's a heated conversation that occurs early in the semester and is returned to frequently. There's something about teaching *BtVS* that elicits hostility and derision. Typically, it begins with the title. As one female former student put it in a posting to my class web site, "This discussion should drop considering we are discussing a show whose lead character is named well . . . BUFFY. For Christ's sakes, need I say more?"[1] Then, the discussion moves towards a suspicion about the general project of taking entertainment seriously. This kind of overt suspicion along the lines also was presented by Adam Buckman, writing in part about David Lavery's media course on *BtVS* in *The New York Post*: "Apparently, some professors think TV shows are as legitimate as books" (Buckman 3). I teach in a media program, so students express this sentiment more subtly. They never bat an eye at material from "serious" material like *Roots* or *Oz* or *Twin Peaks*. But when some students perceive the material to be entertaining, they get suspicious and defensive. One male former student was forthright in his objections along these lines, writing:

> "I feel as though by putting that much thought into viewing a show, you can't really appreciate it for its true purpose—entertainment—or admire its

> technical achievements or lack thereof. Can't we enjoy these works of art for what they are, while still taking in . . . [those] meanings [that] exist? We don't need to go searching for them. . . . does everything have to be analyzed? Can't we sit back and enjoy the show?"

If it's not sad, or boring, or foreign, or at least something high-minded and difficult, students begin to worry about "over-interpretation," as one student put it. Since discussing such fears and insecurities is one central purpose for the serious study of popular culture, *BtVS* serves as a useful catalyst for investigating the possible meanings of entertainment.

[4] But the reaction to the series would be unremarkable if it weren't for a second line of objection: Namely, that *BtVS* is too sexy, and thus too juvenile, to be taken seriously. As another female former student sarcastically objected,

> "In the handful (read: 2) episodes of *Buffy* I've ever seen, I found them both boring and juvenile—and no, I don't think watching a couple more episodes will change my opinion. The methods in which Buffy Summers poses herself as a gender role model seemed tired: not only is Buffy (played by Sarah Michelle Gellar) super hot, but she kicks ass! She's sexually attracted to her nemesis, and they do it! - thus, creating more tension within the plotline. Oh, and did I mention there are VAMPIRES!?!"

Her perception of the horror genre led her to have a very particular audience in mind for *BtVS*: male, adolescent, and leering. Essentially, her imagined audience is composed of people who act like Xander did in the first season, when "seeing scantily clad girls in revealing postures was a spiritual experience" for him, as Willow puts it in "The Witch" (1003). This perception of the audience was central to her critique of even the possibility of taking the series seriously.

[5] Yet, a male former student also objected to taking the series seriously because of his perception of the audience:

> "The show may appear to be feminist, which could be true, but I don't believe that was the writer's intent. I also believe that he just chose a female to play the main character because it would be different from the norm and more marketable. It may also help that girls would want to see a girl on the show too. It seems like this cheesy melodrama is marketed to young females. I do not think that this show is too "deep" because most pre-pubescent girls would not pick up on such things."

His perception of the melodrama genre led him to have a very particular audience in mind as well: female, adolescent, and shallow. His imagined audience is composed of dateless Willows, getting their "vicarious smoochies" from Buffy ("Hush" 4010). These two students would have agreed wholeheartedly with Whedon's characterization of *BtVS* as "a show by losers for losers" ("Wit and Wisdom of Joss Whedon"). The perceived nature of the audience of *BtVS* was as important to these writers at least as the content of the episodes themselves and influenced their understanding of authorial

intent as well. For example, not even a class discussion of the similarities between the rape myth and the vampire myth could budge them from their position. Each myth features a typically male monster, whose only weapon is his body, who most often catches an attractive woman alone and drains her vital fluids. . . and if he does it often enough, and the right way, the victim begins to actively participate in it. To these students, an interrogation of said subtext wasn't there, or wasn't relevant, because their imagined audience would never pick up on it.[2]

[6] Perhaps the most erudite voice for this kind of suspicion can be found in Michael P. Levine and Steven Jay Schneider's "Feeling for Buffy: The Girl Next Door" in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Levine and Schneider dismissed many of the arguments for the artistic and political merits of *BtVS*. Instead, like my students, the authors state that the appeal of the series is that it offers its viewers two "girls next door" upon which they can "project and direct their narcissistic (and other) fantasies . . ." (Levine and Schneider 296). Before advancing their own Freudian theory, the authors confront some of the many opposing scholarly understandings of the meanings produced by this narrative. They dismiss Stacey Abbott's discussion of how the series "dismantles and rebuilds" the vampire genre by asserting "the symbols in question are employed in *BtVS* superficially and willy-nilly" (297). No examples from the series are used to support this assertion, despite the prior criticism that other scholars present arguments whose supports "often consist of little more than the presentation of plot précis" (295). The authors then flatly state that Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery's "idea that *BtVS* somehow takes these problems seriously, where these other programs do not, is just false" (298). Again, they offer no evidence to support such an assertion. Like my students, they seem to feel that one needn't take a program like *BtVS* seriously even to prove that you shouldn't take it seriously. Instead, they suggest that these scholars (and, by implication, any writer who takes the series seriously) are "acting out their own fantasies in relation to the program" (299). A former student of mine was more direct in an online post to < *www.livejournal.com* >: "I got the impression that he was sort of a perv. He's obsessed with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" (posted 2005-05-29 05:06 pm UTC). This style of argumentation places *BtVS* scholars in an impossible bind, of course. To respond would only demonstrate a defensiveness that suggested that these barbs hit too close to home. It's a critical observation designed to shut down future critical investigation.

[7] Clearly, Levine and Schneider decided relatively early that the narrative was repetitive comfort food and no longer worth critical inquiry. What suggests such a decision is a very representative, very revealing, and quite false statement: ". . . there is no horror in *BtVS* at all" (Levine and Schneider 297). Here, the authors suggest that the series creators tend to activate the off-screen space in pursuit of the "startle effect" rather than produce "true chills, uncanniness, or horror –proper" (297). Again, no examples are offered from the series itself, which makes this point difficult to pin down. While the horror genre is tangential to that particular article's thesis, their declaration is significant because Schneider and, to a lesser extent, Levine, are experienced critics of the horror genre in contemporary cinema. Schneider wrote *Designing Fear: An Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror* and edited or co-edited four books that engage in the theory of that genre. Levine contributed "A Fun Night Out: Horror and Other Pleasures of the Cinema" to *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare*, a book edited by Schneider. With such an academic background, a reader can take seriously

Schneider’s jest that he “majored in slaying” (South 320).
[8] It’s suggestive, then, that *BtVS* embodies many of the traits Schneider deemed essential to understanding the horror genre in his scholarship on the genre. When one applies his theories from “Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticizing Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror,” and “Monsters as (Uncanny) Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror,” one finds that there are quite a few moments that induce chills, uncanniness and horror in *BtVS*. Just as for some of my incredulous students, the imagined nature of the (scholarly) audience of *BtVS* prevented Levine and Schneider from taking the series seriously, so much so that they fail to recognize a clear application of their theory of horror.
[9] In “Murder as Art/The Art of Murder,” Schneider argues that classic era horror films equate monstrousness with flawed, degraded, or corrupt works of art. He cites James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (Universal 1931), where Henry rejects his creation as a reminder of his inability to produce work of sufficient beauty. In *Phantom of the Opera* (Universal 1925/29), Lon Chaney's gruesome makeup and facial contortion make him a hideous thing when contrasted with ornate surroundings. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (MGM 1945) similarly plays with these themes as the portrait reflects the corruption of the protagonist. In German Expressionism, highly stylized set designs and deliberately exaggerated performances provide a reflection of psychological instability of the antagonist. This movement “makes apparent the internal workings of an anguished self” (Schneider 175). For Schneider, it still qualified as derivative version because the “audience’s focus tends to be not so much on these creature’s abnormal psychologies as on the remote manifestations of such perverse and dangerous minds” (176).
[10] These classic horror films defined monstrousness in primarily aesthetic terms, not moral, philosophical, or spiritual ones, writes Schneider. This connection is due not to “culturally enforced equation between inner and outer beauty and goodness, along with its converse” but instead to widespread cultural influence of artistic legitimacy as beauty rather than difficulty or incongruity, as with Marcel Duchamp, for example (Schneider 176).
[11] Schneider then suggests that modern horror films depict the Monster as a corrupt or degraded artist. These films represent murder as an art form and murderers as artists. They showcase murder as an artistic product or as artistic performance. These movies reflect the modern notion that art need not command admiration, as horror paralleled a shift in the meaning of art towards shock, transgression, and offensiveness.
[12] The slasher genre is typically more interested in murder as artistic performance. According to Schneider, the pleasure is in appreciating the surprisingly resourceful killer who dispatches victims in increasingly creative ways. The appeal for audiences lies in displays of ingenuity and showmanship, inviting a complex and partially aesthetic response. Schneider asks us to think of Freddy Krueger as a fictional performance artist whose specialty is the destruction of existing artworks rather than the creation of new ones.
[13] The "Murder as Artistic Product" strand of this theory placed an emphasis on scene of crime and/or remains of victims, rather than the motive, methods or presence of the murderer. One subgenre has dead bodies literally reused for practical purposes, most notably as food or as paint. Hannibal Lecter’s prison cell escape in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Orion Pictures 1991) elicited more than shock for Schneider. It rose to the level of appalled appreciation of ingenuity. Schneider asked us to consider *Se7en*'s

(New Line Cinema 1995) use of dead bodies, carefully arranged to make comprehensive statements on sin, in this light as well. Great emphasis was placed on control in the composition of mise-en-scène. Under this approach, the creative authority shifts from the director to the murderer, who functions as a set designer within the narrative space. Authorship inside and outside of the narrative collapses. The monster becomes the sublimated alter ego of the director, in whose hands the audience finds themselves.

[14] Clearly, there are several "Big Bads" in *BtVS* who might easily be described as corrupt or degraded artists. As an incorporeal being, the First Evil, season seven's chief villain, can only take on the appearance of the dead. It might be thought of as an impersonator and storyteller. After Willow discovers its ruse of claiming to be a conduit to Tara in the afterlife in "Conversations with Dead People" (7007), it solicits a critique of its performance and narrative construction, asking, "Suicide thing was too far, huh? Hmm. You seemed so ripe... I stand by my opinion. The world would be a better place if you took a razorblade to your wrist. . . I can see it now. Candlelight, the Indigo Girls playing, picture of your dead girlfriend on your bloody lap." Given the still-simmering eruption of fan outrage over Tara's death, this impersonation has a particular horror for fans of the series. (For a fine overview of the Tara/Willow controversy at the end of season six, see Julie Tabron's article in *Slayage*.) Jenny Calendar returns twice as a temptress figure, for Giles in "Becoming, Part Two" (2022) by means of Drusilla's hypnotic powers and for Angel in "Amends" (3010) via The First Evil. Jenny's return signaled the power of the audience's memory of her. Her death and life gave her character the power to make this visitation even more of an upsetting violation. The horror is the result of more than just the temptation of Angel and Giles. It's who's doing it as well. And in season seven, Tara as a character had such power and the fandom's emotions were so raw, that the scene of a purported message from her is deeply upsetting without even seeing her. The trauma of a character's death is in precise relation to the amount of emotion invested by the audience. Yet it is important to note that The First Evil does not impersonate Tara, but only claims to be speaking for her. It seems that Tara cannot be represented, visually or in voice. The fact that Tara is one of the few deceased major characters not represented directly by The First Evil indicates not only the character's lingering power but also the creators' judgment of just how horrifying such a scene was likely to be to their fan base.[3]

[15] There are other examples of villains as corrupt or degraded artists in *BtVS*. Glory, from season five, is obviously presented as a diva, with her entourage of incompetent sycophants, her love of bubble baths, her racks of designer clothes, and most especially her temper tantrums. Of course, Glory demonstrates none of the creativity of the diva. Nor does she show much of The First Evil's interest in creative or theatrical cruelty, with the possible exception of taking the time to precisely explain the torment that she will inflict upon Tara:

> "It doesn't kill you. What it does … is make you feel like you're in a noisy little dark room … naked and ashamed … and there are things in the dark that need to hurt you because you're bad … little pinching things that go in your ears … and crawl on the inside of your skull. And you know … that if the noise and the crawling would stop … that you could remember how to get out. But you never, ever will." –"Tough Love" (5019)

The lack of consistently creative performance of evil may make describing her as a diva problematic or it may simply indicate that this figure now connotes epic self-involvement rather than any particular kind of creative expression.

[16] Further, the Trio present a compelling picture of wanna-be artists. Their insipid squabbles over plot points in comic books and the merits of the actors who played the role of James Bond indicate the depth of their knowledge of popular culture. Even the most ordinary of Andrew's lines features incessant quotation of dialogue from popular film and television. A typical example can be found in "Two to Go" (6021), when Andrew starts to panic over Willow's incipient arrival: "You saw her! She's a truck-driving Magic Mama! And we've got maybe seconds before Darth Rosenberg grinds everybody into Jawa-burgers, and not one of you bunch has the midichlorians to stop her." That's three *Star Wars* references jammed into one sentence. Andrew seems to hoard this knowledge to help him perform under pressure, as when he coolly references the traditional parting shot of B-movie villains just before activating his jet pack in "Seeing Red" (6019), saying, "Well played, Slayer. . . . This round to you. But the game is far from over." The black magic dealer, Rack, even guesses that The Trio was the name of a failed rock band in "Villains" (6020). That episode twice shows Warren incredulous at their anonymity as villains. The imagined presence of an admiring audience seems to be as important to him as the pleasures of getting away with the crimes themselves. These three nerds clearly want to become star performers in genre entertainment. And since Jonathan already failed in writing himself into a narrative as the hero in "Superstar" (4017), they'll just have to play the part of the villains. Finally, Andrew, after The First Evil convinces him to murder Jonathan to begin season seven, copes with his loss and guilt by constructing ever more elaborate fictions to rewrite reality to make him a tragic or heroic figure (or even simply an all-knowing narrator) in "Storyteller" (7017). By this point, this tendency has become so apparent that Buffy loses patience with him, saying, "Shut up. You always do this. You make everything into a story so no one's responsible for anything because they're just following a script." The villains of seasons five, six, and seven all fit Schneider's notion of the modern monster as corrupt or degraded artists—as, of course, does Angelus.

[17] The earliest episode that most clearly demonstrates that *BtVS* created an innovative serial work that challenged both authors and audience to live up to each other's ideals is arguably "Passion" (2017), which makes the cool appreciative distance of the audience from the corrupt artist central. (It's also the earliest episode that clearly features a major monster as a corrupt or degraded artist.) Previously on *BtVS*, Buffy made love with her boyfriend, the ensouled vampire, Angel, an event momentous in her sex life (he is her first sexual partner) and his (in the afterglow of the act, he experiences a moment of true happiness which causes him to lose his soul, becoming the soulless vampire Angelus.) The episodes leading up "Passion" (2017) feature Angel going out of his way to torment Buffy and her loved ones, from trying to end the world to inflicting emotional trauma by telling Buffy's mother, Joyce, of his one-night stand with her daughter. His cruelest gambit is in "Innocence" (2014), before Buffy knows that anything is wrong with him. Unable to find Angel all day after waking up alone the morning after, she finally talks to him for the first time since their night together. Angelus makes use of every nightmare cliché of the callous man after a one-night-stand. He downplays the significance of their lovemaking, calling it "a good time." He plays on Buffy's insecurities about her inexperience, observing that "You got a lot to learn about men, kiddo. Although I guess you proved that last night." While pretending

to assuage those fears, he rubs salt in the wound by calling her “a pro” in bed. He ends by off-handedly saying he loves her, promising to call her as he ambles out the door. In “Passion” (2017), Angelus murders Jenny Calendar and leaves her body in Rupert Giles’ bed. As part of this stratagem, Angelus leaves sketches that provide clues as to his activities: a portrait of Buffy lets her know that he’s been in her bedroom, a second (of Joyce) left for Buffy in Willow’s bedroom suggests that he is with her mother, a third portrait (of the dead Jenny) goads the grief-stricken Giles into avenging his girlfriend’s death via a suicidal assault on the far more powerful vampire in his lair. One of my female students remarked that "Passion" (2017) was one of her favorite episodes, but that she disliked watching it. What she was alluding to was the connection of horror to the peculiar bittersweet pleasures of melodrama, crystallized in an appreciation of the skillful performances and fragile formal beauty in the episode’s most heart-wrenching scenes. It's this awful mix of implication and identification that is central to understanding the precise nature of the dynamic between author and audience in this series.

[18] The sense that the fan of *BtVS* is implicated by the crimes of Angelus is the result of his redefinition of the space of the series itself. Karen Sayer offered a productive notion that places are not just location or territory, but are inseparable from the consciousnesses of the people in them. This concept applies to the narrative space of the television series itself, perhaps even more so. As Sayer writes,

> “Places are fusions of human and natural orders and are significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world. They are defined less by unique locations, landscapes and communities than by the focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings. . . . Place, whether fictional or real, is always imagined.” (Sayer 101)

Places are products of discourse: multiple, contingent, and in peril, as Angelus revealed in the case of *BtVS* (Sayer, 101).

[19] The threat of Angelus is not solely that Angel might be slain and that we might be denied the pleasures of further romantic plotting. His threat is that he revealed that no place (and certainly not Sunnydale) has a single rooted identity. Angelus systematically rewrites the settings within the series, the rules of the series itself, and our relationship to the series. Angel’s invitation to the homes of Buffy, Willow, and Giles—an invitation offered by the characters but also by the audience’s own narrative and erotic desires—allows Angelus to seize those places. The despoilment of these sanctuaries elicits a perverse pleasure, providing the chills of horror, but not the screams.

[20] Angelus seizes the place constructed by artistic conventions of the series. For the first time, a villain has power of voiceover, enabling him to serve as the storyteller, the narrative guide. Angelus becomes the center to patterns of editing, rather than Buffy. It is his position that is adopted by the camera as viewers watch Buffy and Willow react to the death of Jenny Calendar. The (false) assumption that these rules are not subject to change perfectly indicates Sayer’s notion that those who deny the hybrid quality of space, “wish to see a place, especially a place called home, as providing stability, oneness and security. . . associate it with stasis, nostalgia, and enclosed security” (Sayer 101). This observation explains the seeming conflict between my student’s praise of the episode and her visceral dislike of it. This episode threatened

the comforting quality of the favored series for the fan.

[21] Revealed here are the fan's conflicting desires for change and for the kind of emotional security and communion offered by an evolving series marked by the devotion of a small band of fans.[4] The violation of narrative and extra-narrative place in this episode threatens the audience's access to these places and past experience of them. The trauma is to the viewers as well as to the characters. Recall Aristotle's description of pathos, "A sort of pain at an evident evil of a destructive or painful kind in the case of somebody who does not deserve it, the evil being one which we might imagine to happen to ourselves" (Singer 45). The trauma that the characters experience parallels our trauma. Angelus threatens to revise our experience of the series, not merely end the world. The meanings of serial narratives are never static in how they are understood. They are always being reconstructed with input from new episodes, especially with moments that reference prior elements and rewrite our memory of those scenes as significant, or telling, or foreshadowing. Audiences know this, consciously, semi-consciously or unconsciously. This episode threatens not simply the future of the narrative but our past experience of it. It presents the possibility of the total destruction of bittersweet, "rather poetic, in a maudlin sort of way" relationship between Buffy and Angel, as Giles put it in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1011).

[22] Umberto Eco writes that the ordinary series promises a constant narrative that gives the illusion of change, within which "the secondary characters must give the impression that [their] new story is different from the preceding ones, while in fact the narrative scheme does not change" (Battis 2-3). Repetition gives the typical series an emotional currency with its audience, for such constancy "consoles us, because it rewards our ability to foresee: we are happy because we discover our own ability to guess what will happen" (3).

[23] Yet, with this episode, the series constructs a different kind of viewing audience, if those viewers can rise to the demands made on them by Joss Whedon and company. "There are serial works," Eco writes, "that establish an explicit agreement with the critical reader and thus . . . challenge him to acknowledge the innovative aspects of the text" (Battis 4). One is, of course, free not to participate in the double codes of foreshadowing and subtext. Commercially successful television is always multi-layered and accommodates those who do not wish to be challenged by their media. One can easily watch *The Simpsons* just for the pleasures provided by Homer's pratfalls or watch *BtVS* for "the draw of schoolgirl sex," as Levine and Schneider put it (307).

[24] In the second season of *BtVS*, Eco's challenge took the form of a betrayal. Viewers placed their faith and their trust in the pleasures of the romance genre, fully knowing that the series made use of the melodrama and horror genres too. Our betrayal mirrors Buffy's in important ways here. But it is Whedon, not Angelus, who is our monster.

[25] Whedon and Angelus together create our awful suspicion as Giles smiles and smoothes his hair upon seeing the bottle of champagne at his flat. Together, they suspend viewers in that dread as he steadily advances up the rose petal-strewn stair. In addition to serving as sketch artist in this episode, Angelus is the diegetic set designer, positioning Jenny's body just so in Giles' bed.[5] But it is also Whedon who is the director here, timing the cut to the close-up of the smashed wine glass as it crashes to the floor to mesh with the crescendo of the aria. Viewers share Giles' position as audience to tragedy here, which can only mean a commonality between Angelus and Whedon. (After all, Angelus even leaves stage directions for the other

characters, in the form of the sketches.)[6] The monster authors these moments as the distinction between the two figures begins to collapse.
[26] Yet, in several important ways, the viewer cannot claim to be different from these monstrous authors. As in all great horror films, the chills result from the recognition of oneself in the form of the awful Other. Like Angelus, viewers have sampled the pleasures of sadism. After all, is there not a visceral thrill when Buffy kicks Angelus in the groin during the final fight of "Innocence" (2014)? After his post-coital callousness, isn't it even better that she steps into it, really letting her right leg fly out to full extension? Is there not a visceral thrill when Giles smashes Angel in the face with a baseball bat at the end of "Passion" (2017)? Is there not a cold joy at the grace with which he swings, lighting it on fire as he reaches back before letting his arm fly? As Schneider wrote, "consumers of these fictions are once again encouraged, occasionally forced, to acknowledge a side of themselves they normally keep hidden, even from themselves—a side that enjoys, appreciates, and admires the display of creative killings." The action genre, after all, shares this common pleasure with the slasher subgenre. It is why Angelus laughs as he's being beaten at the end of "Passion" (2017). Angelus sees himself in Buffy.
[27] Viewers can value the beauty of that scene in Giles' flat, even as they recoil in horror. Even in the midst of Jenny's death scene, viewers can appreciate Whedon's decision to use shots that have moonlight show the audience flashes of Jenny's face as she flees Angelus through the school corridors, rather than mundanely cutting to reaction shots. But later, the audience, like Buffy, shares enough of Angelus' artistic sensibilities to decode the meaning of the murder scene. Viewers know that Xander is both right and wrong when he observes that Giles had a big night planned.[7] This connection between audience and monster is furthered when Angelus, as audience, peers in through the glass frame of a window to witness the sorrow of Buffy and Willow, as viewers have so many Tuesday nights in the past. Whedon forces an awareness of this connection by using Angelus to center a point of view sequence. Our perspective is Angelus' perspective. The pleasures faithful viewers draw from the melodrama of the series bear an uncomfortable resemblance to Angelus' pleasure at watching the emotional distress of Buffy as she slides to the floor and of Willow as she wails in the arms of Joyce. Both the audience and Angelus draw pleasure from pain. As Schneider observes about modern horror films generally, ". . . to the extent that we as viewers find ourselves interested [it is] to that extent we are implicated in the murders he commits to obtain them" (Schneider and Shaw 177). Whedon draws a connection between the appreciation of displays of emotional trauma by the audience of melodrama and the monstrous artist of the modern horror film, who uses violence to create such scenes for his private amusement.
[28] After this episode, the place of the series is no longer defined by its oneness. Conventions are not static but vulnerable. This episode presents the first moment that the series itself and the fan relationship to it were fair game. This intimate connection to it, perceptually and emotionally, can be violated. The series cannot be a virtual home because it cannot again offer security of static underlying structure. If Angelus can rewrite its conventions and seize the narrative center, others may, both inside and outside the narrative. Such malleability anticipates episodes that make the artistic conventions of the series their explicit subject, such as "The Wish" (3009), "Doppelgangland" (3016), "Superstar" (4017), and "Normal Again" (6017).[8]
[29] Most often, the contract between genre and audience indicates that the viewer's

pleasure itself, the thing truly held dear, is not subject to the threat of critique. Horror's underlying structure provides that safety net. That rule is not subject to change without accusations of betrayal, of bad faith. Yet that foundational complacency is precisely what this series challenges here. In threatening the investment of the audience in the series, the series' creators make viewers conscious of their commitment to it so that they might reexamine how they express it. For the series to matter, for it to provide the best pleasure, it must threaten all that is held dear. If fans haven't been doing so already, the series' creators encourage the audience to do what Buffy and the others have done within the school library: make a home by reworking relationships, rather than by accepting what is given. Soliciting such awareness could encourage the production and consumption of fan fiction, rather than disavow it. Fostering such a critical perspective could be a prerequisite for the kind of subversive readings some fans demonstrated in their understanding of Faith's betrayal in season three (cf. Tjardes) and the fate of Tara and Willow in season six (cf. Tabron).

[30] The true subject of this episode, like that of the horror film generally for Schneider, is "the struggle for validation of all that our civilization disavows or denies" (*The Horror Film Reader* 173). Seeing ourselves reflected in Angelus as sadistic voyeurs creates an experience of the uncanny such that to escape it we must rewrite our understanding of the series. That project begins, perhaps, with a sense of unease at the lessons Buffy professes to learn from this experience. She becomes similar to Angelus in important ways by the end of "Passion" (2017). Viewing the rose petals and the champagne left behind at Giles' flat, Buffy observes, "this is the wrapping for the gift." She's achieved the kind of emotional distance necessary to critique the scene, but which was also necessary to craft it. At the end of this episode, Buffy adopts the cold voice that had been so suited for the soulless vampire. The only comfort she can offer Giles at Jenny's graveside is that she is "sorry that I couldn't kill him for you." Such cool critical distance becomes disturbing precisely because it is so reminiscent of the dispassionate monologue that Angelus delivered near the end of the episode, in which he states, "If we could live without passion, maybe we'd know some kind of peace. But we would be hollow. Empty rooms, shuttered and dank. . . Without passion, we'd be truly dead." This emotional hollowness seems to be a necessary precondition for his monstrous behavior. The audience has to be able to step back from savage blood lust to understand Buffy's decision at the end of "Becoming, Part Two" (2022), in which Angelus seeks to end the world by creating a portal that will suck the world into a Hell dimension. What they must be prepared for is not why she kills Angel, re-ensouled by Willow's spell after he has created the vortex, but rather why she kisses him tenderly before doing so. The critical awareness of the horror genre here prepares the way.

[31] "Passion" (2017) demonstrates all of the essentials of Schneider's theory of the monster as corrupt artist. Angelus might plausibly be thought of as a depraved artist. The distinction between Angelus and Whedon collapses in "Passion" (2017), as they collaborate to achieve maximum impact in the reception of the crime scene. Buffy serves as the detective/viewer, gradually developing enough distance to share the aesthetic sensibility with Angelus necessary to foil him. Yet this subject position, while useful in this episode, is ultimately suspect in the season as a whole. In "I Only Have Eyes for You" (2019), Buffy's hatred for her former lover overtly impedes her investigation into the episode's murders, which are sparked by a ghost reliving a tragic love affair. Concerned, Giles speaks both to Buffy directly (and the viewing audience indirectly) when he gently chastises her thirst for vengeance by stating, "To forgive is

an act of compassion, Buffy. It's, it's not done because people deserve it. It's done because they need it." Buffy disagrees vehemently with this sentiment, saying, "No. James destroyed the one person he loved the most in a moment of blind passion. And that's not something you forgive. No matter why he did what he did. And no matter if he knows now that it was wrong and selfish and stupid, it is just something he's gonna have to live with." After she stalks off, Cordelia, ever the truth-teller, notes the connection Buffy drew between herself and James' murdered love, saying, "Over-identify much?" In "Becoming, Part One" (2021), Buffy's eagerness to confront Angelus is her undoing, leading to the death of Kendra, the capture of Giles, and serious injuries to Xander and Willow. Even Angelus notes the pattern, laughing, "And you fall for it every single time!" "Passion" (2017) begins the process of implicating the viewer in Buffy's position in a manner very similar to the unease generated by Schneider's modern horror film.

[32] A central technique of this season of *BtVS* is the chilling loss of equilibrium typical of the experience of the uncanny. Curtis Bowman, in "Heidegger, the Uncanny, and Jacque Tourneur's Horror Films," suggested that Heidegger's notion of the uncanny describes an experience in which "however briefly, we are no longer at home in the world, even if only in our imaginations" (Bowman 73). The parallel drawn by the voiceover narration in "Passion" (2017) begins a process of gently encouraging viewers to face their beliefs through the shaky metaphysical status of one vampire. Whedon guides his audience into two "conflicts of judgment," as Schneider described this aspect of Freud's theory of the uncanny. Whedon first exploits fan assumptions about Angel in "Innocence" (2014) by shifting Angel's past into a present alter ego. He then begins a process of creating a second conflict of judgment about that revised judgment in "Passion" (2017), which culminates in "Becoming, Part Two" (2022). In so doing, Whedon guides the audience by season's end to an investigation of their accustomed ways of thinking about identity and being, authenticity and duty, caring and vengeance.

[33] Such a conflict can only occur, however, when the audience believes that the events depicted could really happen (*The Horror Film Reader* 175). And, according to a much-quoted interview on "Fresh Air," Whedon believed that an important segment of his audience did feel that such trauma was authentic, saying,

> "That's why when we aired 'Innocence,' when Buffy slept with Angel and his curse went into effect and he became evil again, I went on the Internet and a girl typed in, `This is unbelievable. This exact thing happened to me,' and that's when I knew that we were doing the show right." (Lavery 7)

A female former student of mine also observed the relevance of these episodes of *BtVS* in her life, writing,

> "Watching the Buffy and Angel relationship again in season two, I realized how much my relationship in high school was similar. My parents didn't like the guy (among other problems with drugs and bad-boy attitude) and we

> had one of those, 'I love you but I can't be with you" [relationships] for my entire high school career. Looking back, I wonder how much of the Angel/ Buffy relationship colored the way that I handled mine."

Authors can challenge audiences to recognize the innovative character of their work and live up to the example of their imagined model audience, but with serial narratives in the digital era, audiences have the ability to challenge authors to live up to the example of their imagined author to a remarkable new degree. That challenge may take the form of informed praise or criticism on message boards, several of which were frequented by several members of the creative team behind *BtVS*.
[34] Indeed, the ill-fated *Firefly* series provided a telling example of how important fan feedback was in pushing the authors of that program onward to greater efforts. (Many important figures in the *BtVS* and *Angel* series' creative teams also worked on *Firefly*, including writers Jane Espenson, Tim Minear, Ben Edlund, and Drew Z. Greenberg.) To support the struggling show, the fan base sent postcards to the Fox network and bought a full page ad to thank the network and its sponsors (*Firefly*). Joss Whedon described the daily impact of fans on the creative team in this way:

> "To know that the fans were becoming as obsessive about the show as we were, that quickly, was really just gratifying. You know, it's easy to discount something like that, but in our situation, it wasn't, because if we had gone on the boards and found a lackluster response or even just 'Oh, that's very nice,' at some point we would have given up. We would have stopped fighting." (*Firefly*)

This interview represents an author acknowledging the importance of the audience of an innovative text for their role in supporting the creation of future texts. Indeed, he would later remark that, "The people who are seeing this understand it. And, you know, there's nothing more important. There's only one reason to make art and that's it" (*Firefly*).
[35] This challenge by the audience to the author to live up to the example of their model author can also take the form of the appropriations, alterations, affectionate kidding and critiques implicit in fan fiction. Jane Espenson, co-executive producer and writer on *BtVS*, highlighted how much her work was informed by fan fiction, when she wrote in *Slayer Slang*: "With so many of us laboring over so many years and with so many fans writing about the show, and indulging in creative fanfic, together we have extended the language of the Buffyverse" (Blasingame 1). In her case, at least, fans and authors used the series to play with language together.
[36] This challenge can also be in the form of direct, face-to-face meetings with fans. In an interview with *The Onion AV Club*, the interviewer asked Whedon how he dealt with the emotional intensity expressed by his fans at a comics convention, in which "many of the people who got up to ask questions were nearly in tears over the chance to get to talk to you. Some of them could barely speak, and others couldn't stop gushing about you, and about Buffy"(Robinson). His response? "Once the critics, after the first season, really got the show, we all sort of looked at each other and said, 'Ohhh-kay...' We thought we were going to fly under the radar, and nobody was going to notice the show. And then we had this responsibility, and we got kind of nervous. You don't want to let them down" (Robinson). Indeed, as early as the addition of Oz as a love interest for Willow in season two, the sense of increased responsibility

manifested itself in increased commitment by the author to the text. Whedon wrote a scene (in which Oz tactfully suggests that Willow may be hitting on him to work out her anger at Xander) specifically designed to persuade those viewers "angry" at the writers for shifting Willow's affections away from Xander. Whedon's standard was that he needed to make this recalcitrant audience ". . . not just accept a plot twist or a character, but making you need them, making you feel about a character the way your character is supposed to. It's the most difficult and important thing" ("Innocence"). For Whedon, letting the audience down meant having lowered standards for them, not just disappointing them.

[37] Of course, this feedback loop of authors, audiences and their models of one another—models that shift in response to the evolving serial narrative and to intermittent contact between the two via message boards, fan fiction, and direct conversation—gets still more complex once one admits the possibility of additional authors into the dynamic. One such addition would be the text itself as an author. In one interview, Whedon remarked that both *Angel* and *BtVS* have ". . . shown me things that I haven't expected. A work of art takes on a life beyond its creator, and when that happens, it's the most gratifying thing in the world. It's like raising a child who becomes a grownup and is suddenly talking to you. *Angel* has started to do that; *Angel* is talking to me now" (Lavery). Built by interpretation, the serial text defines the limits of the valid interpretation of it but also inspires the creation of new texts. In addition, this dynamic becomes much more complex when some parts of the audience believe that interests of one creator within the collaborative text of a television show runs counter to other creators, or even the dominant creator. Eliza Dushku has said that she received "probably twenty [hand-written letters] that say, 'I was being abused by a teacher, a stepfather, a brother, a neighbor. And the first day that Faith made it to my TV box, I started standing up for myself. If Faith has the power to stand up for herself, so can I.' That stuff trips me out. You can't ask for any better or greater kind of verification than that" (Reiss 164-5). They read her character against the grain, at least partially. In a very real sense, they followed Faith's advice to Buffy in her dream in "Graduation Day, Part Two" (3022) to "take what you need." These letters provided more than personal testimony. They expressed support for and solidarity with Dushku's efforts as an author and not Joss Whedon's, or Marti Noxon's, or Jane Espenson's. (After all, it was Dushku they confided in, not them.) They saw Dushku as needing the support that Faith had offered them. Faith, after all, was supposed to be an important villain in season three, even though she was their heroine.

[38] Fan and critical investment, it seems, sparked a greater authorial commitment to the series. These experiences led to an imagined audience marked by their emotional investment, which in turn led to episodes of formal adventurousness and emotional sincerity that depended on such an audience for its impact. Serial narratives that are consistently innovative are created out of an indirect dialogue between authors and audiences in which each encourages the other to strive to embody an ever-shifting ideal. The difficulty of living up to that shifting ideal is suggested by Whedon's nervousness, Espenson's use of the term "labor," and the fact the hand-written letters not only touched Dushku, they "tripped her out."

[39] Whedon and company's imagined audience, based on real experiences with critics and fans, led to a feedback loop of ever-greater commitment on the part of both audience and authors. As a result, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* does produce "true chills, uncanniness, or horror–proper" (Levine and Schneider 297). It provides such

experiences so that it can subvert the pleasures of sadistic voyeurism and blood lust so central to the genre. But this series can only shift the audience in that manner if the audience can hold up its end of Eco's bargain and "acknowledge the innovative aspects of the text." For some incredulous critics and viewers, however, the imagined nature of the (scholarly) audience of *BtVS* is more important than the content of the episodes themselves.

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Kelly Kromer

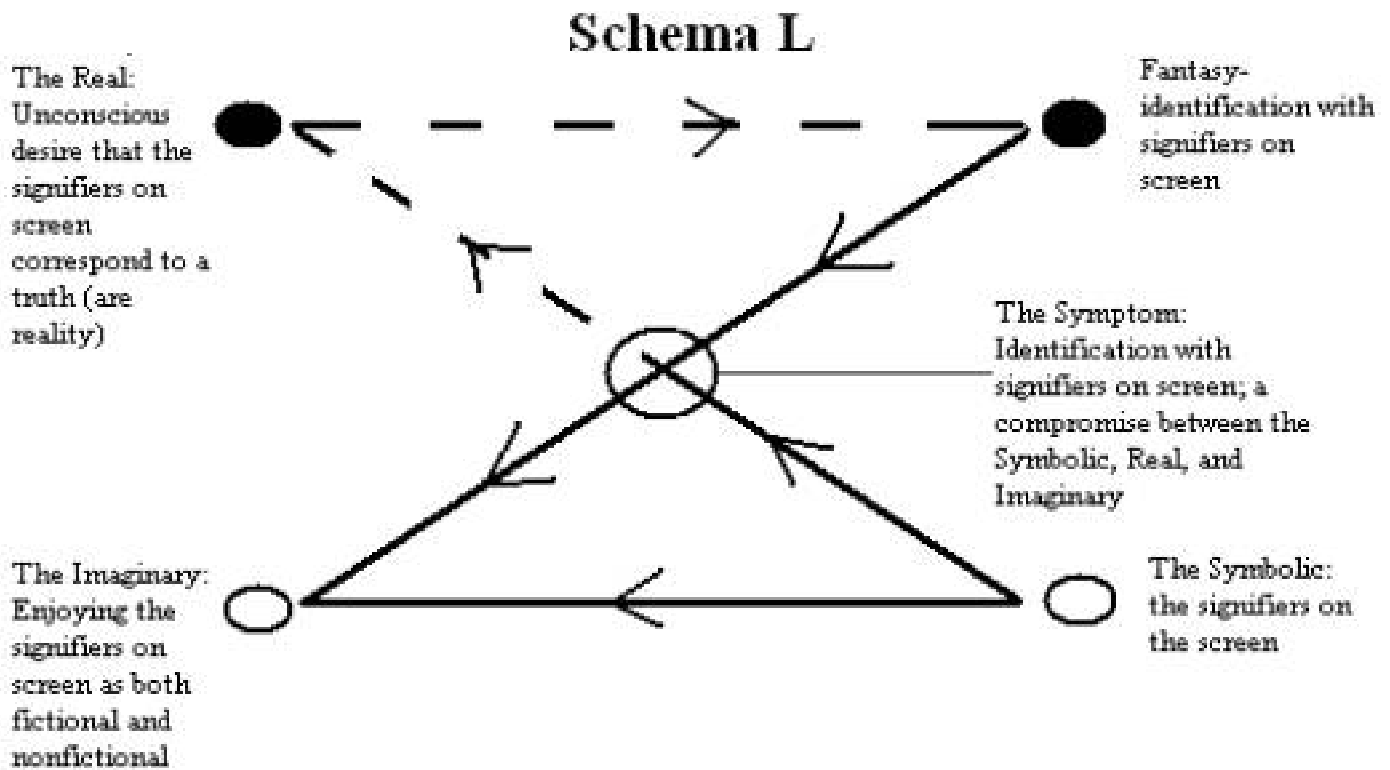
Silence as Symptom: A Psychoanalytic Reading of "Hush"

[1] In the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, language is used to both create a fictionalized world and allow the characters some control over that world. The way the Scooby gang speaks contributes to the way they (and we) experience Sunnydale. Language is a powerful weapon in *Buffy*, and its main use is to structure the reality of the television show. Within the fictional framework of Sunnydale, Buffy acts as Lacanian law. She creates the world around her by classifying Sunnydale's inhabitants as either wicked or good and doling out punishment accordingly. Buffy's power comes from both her superhuman strength and her ability to banter with the monsters and demons. In their chapter "Staking in Tongues: Speech Act as Weapon in *Buffy*," Overbey and Preston-Matto note that "Buffy *is* the speech act. She is the utterance that communicates meaning. . . . she is embedded in language. . . . she embodies language" (83). Buffy, when acting as an effective slayer, is able to observe Sunnydale and classify its inhabitants as either good or evil. In this way, Buffy catalogs and classifies Sunnydale, thus structuring the world around her[1]. Language structures Buffy's universe, but in the fourth season's silent episode, "Hush," this structuring force is removed and Buffy must act without language. Lacan's schema L and his central tenet that the Law results in desire can help to untangle the silent knot that is "Hush."

[2] While Freud used the terms id, ego, and superego to describe the workings of the mind, Lacan defined internal and external influences that shape the psychoanalytic subject.[2] He posited that humans are under the influence of three orders: the Symbolic, a place of language and cultural control; the Imaginary, where fantasies, projections, and identifications produce what we *call* reality; and the Real, an unconscious, unknowable, and indescribable realm[3]. Lacan makes a definite distinction between "reality" and the Real, and while psychoanalytic subjects consciously experience the world in Imaginary reality, our true desires reside in the Real. These three orders shape and impact each other; our secret desires are a product of the restrictions and taboos issued from the Symbolic, and these desires are filtered and fitted into Imaginary reality. Language structures the reality of the psychoanalytic subject, communicating cultural codes of conduct and policing the actions of individuals. As such, the Symbolic is the place of the law. It is only through entry into the Symbolic system that a human becomes part of society. Participation in the Symbolic allows one to become part of the social group, and subordination to the system and its various prohibitions feeds and fuels desire.[4] Lacan states in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* that he "'would not have fancied to lust for the Thing if the law hadn't said Thou shalt not lust,'" and he illustrates this relationship between prohibition and desire using his schema L. The schema L begins at Symbolic language that produces a desire that only fully exists in the unconscious (the Real). Unconscious desire is sublimated or displaced, leading to a symptom—the observable side of the

psychoanalytical object. The symptom, as the conscious object of an unknowable desire, can never be completely fulfilled.

[3] The writers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* use language to create a new fictional reality. This fictional reality is the first layer that can be described using Lacan's schema L:



This schema describes how and why television is an effective medium that can make an audience feel love, hate, joy, and in Buffy's world, fear. The images themselves, the signifiers we see on the screen, reside in the Symbolic dimension. These signifiers, encapsulated in the box of the television, are obviously not anything more than images (we do not believe miniaturized people actually live in the box).[5] The knowledge of this fictionalization of signifiers acts as the law in this scenario, dictating how we see, understand, and interact with television. But knowing the governing forces of television's signifiers is not the same as accepting those forces. The obvious fiction of these images produces a desire for those images to be non-fiction, resulting in a fantasy that the signifiers do exist outside of the television set. A compromise must be met in order for the audience to enjoy watching television—we must identify with the images, convincing ourselves that fiction may be somehow connected with our world. This desire for the images of television to be somehow non-fictional is most apparent in our obsession with "reality TV." The images themselves produce the desire for those images to hold truth. The way signifiers of television function on the imaginary axis allows the images, shows, and characters to affect us. These signifiers must exist in the Symbolic, Real, and Imaginary realms as a compromise between the three. Without the desire for the fictional images to be non-fictional, "Hush" and other scary shows would not work.

[4] While Lacan's schema L is helpful in explaining why we identify with the signifiers of television, Freud may offer a clue as to why other episodes of *Buffy* are not as unsettling as "Hush." Freud discusses how fictional works can produce eerie or scary effects in his text "The Uncanny." He separates what happens in fiction and literature from what happens in our (in Lacan's terms) Imaginary reality. Freud sees the

difference between fiction and reality as a difference in expectations. We expect our reality to function following certain laws—monsters do not exist, people do not have magical powers, one cannot see into the future, and we cannot come back from the dead. In literature, however, it is the reality the author writes or depicts that holds force. The rules governing the worlds of novels, plays, fairy tales, and myths are different from the rules of our own reality, and the rules governing these worlds are decided upon by the author. Magic and monsters are possible in Joss Whedon's world of Sunnydale; as a result, the occurrence of magic or the appearance of monsters does not seem out of the ordinary. Freud tells us that "we adapt our judgment to the conditions of the writer's fictional reality and treat souls, spirits and ghosts as if they were fully entitled to exist, just as in our material reality" (156). As he goes on to say, "many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature, and that in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life" (156). One such opportunity to achieve an uncanny effect occurs in "Hush."

[5] The writers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* use language as a structuring force in their show. Buffy's and her friend's constant manipulation of language serves to set up the boundaries of the show. As long as Buffy can refer to season one's "Big Bad" as "fruit punch mouth," the audience knows that she is still able to fight. Words have power, and in *Buffy* the "tongue is as pointed as the sword" (Overbey and Preston-Matto 84). Buffy's wordplay is just as common in the show (especially in times of duress) as her physical fight scenes; the two interact to highlight Buffy as capable and in-charge. Overbey and Preston-Matto continue, telling us that "words and utterances have palpable power, and their rules must be respected if they are to be wielded as weapons in the fight against evil" (73). Buffy is the law in both deed and word. But the rules of Buffy's universe change during "Hush." Without her voice, Buffy cannot make the cutting remarks that once indicated to the audience that she was in control. While she still must function as the law in Sunnydale, dealing out death and deciding who is good and who is evil, she suddenly must fulfill this role outside of language. Silence in any television show might feel a bit disconcerting, but in *Buffy* the silence is downright uncanny precisely because so much of the show's universe is built on the characters' ability to use and control language.

[6] "Hush" introduces the theme of language throughout the first act of the episode. In the first scene of the show, Buffy's psychology teacher's lecture centers on language. Dr. Walsh makes a difference between "communication" and "language," telling her students that the two are different things. Before everyone's voices are stolen, there is too much talking and absolutely no communication: Riley and Buffy cannot communicate because all they do is "babble;" Willow's Wicca group, a group of "wanna-blessed-be's," only talk; and Spike won't shut up when Xander tries to sleep. In her conversation with Willow, Buffy comments on her inability to talk with Riley the way she wants to, telling her friend "every time we talk, I have to lie." Buffy and her friends seem, at least on some level, to realize that language structures reality. Each character is frustrated by the inability to shape experiences effectively. This is especially true for Buffy, who, while usually able to throw demons off their game by using witty banter, cannot interact successfully with Riley using language. While everyone seems frustrated by language at first, when speech is taken away the silence is unnerving. "The absence of language in "Hush" is a helpless horror: unable to speak to each other, the Slayer Squad cannot fight" (Overbey and Preston-Matto, 74). Sounds become magnified— the crying in the hallway, shattering of a glass, sound of the footmen's chains, news broadcast, and Maggie Walsh's automated voice—all contribute to the spooky feel of the episode. Sounds that would have only existed in the background as white noise suddenly take center stage, and the audience feels the absence of language even more strongly.

[7] While the silence of the episode is uncanny, "Hush" also taps into common childhood fears through its portrayal of The Gentlemen. Giles describes The Gentlemen as "fairy tale monsters" and Buffy's prophetic warning—"Can't even shout, can't even cry. The Gentlemen are coming by. Looking in windows, knocking on doors. They need to take seven and they might take yours"—has a haunting nursery rhyme quality. The

Gentlemen are old, white, Victorian, ultra-polite, well-dressed, clean, and precise. As such they tap into childhood fears of adults and old age, medicine, surgery, and the unwanted penetration of one's body. As Rhonda Wilcox notes, The Gentlemen "symbolize mortality and something about sex" (151). The Gentlemen's Victorian look combined with their shiny metal teeth and scalpels highlights a fear of industrialism (and historically links these monsters with a Freudian or more general psychoanalytic reading). The fact that The Gentlemen have to repeat their gruesome surgery seven times is reminiscent of another aspect of Freud's uncanny- the compulsion to repeat. Everything associated with The Gentlemen is nightmarish. The old Victorian clock tower they use as a home base suddenly appears in Sunnydale, and their henchmen are gimp-like personifications of the tension between sanity and insanity (they are dressed in straightjackets that have come undone). Their arms hang down at their sides like primitive apes, and their animal-like behavior further contributes to the horror. The fears that these silent monsters access bring us back to Freud again: the "uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (132). The Gentlemen's sudden unexplainable appearance in Sunnydale is very much like a nightmare, and it is highly significant that Buffy first encounters them within a dream (cf. Wilcox 152-54). The nightmarish, dreamy quality of The Gentlemen and the episode in general seem to indicate a regression from the logic of Imaginary reality. When the town wakes up unable to speak, they regress to an infant-like position, and as such are more susceptible to the nightmare of "Hush."

[8] The Gentlemen function by stealing all the voices of Sunnydale's residents, capturing and housing speech in a wooden box until the end of the episode. According to Buffy's dream, they want to steal seven hearts while the townspeople are rendered mute. The importance of language becomes truly apparent—the people of Sunnydale have no idea what's going on, they can't speak to each other or hear the cries of attacked residents. Without access to language, the town is left with only non-verbal forms of communication. Signifiers on message boards substitute for conversation. They cannot scream when chased by monsters or yell for help when attacked. If we position language as Lacan does in the Symbolic and accept language as a structuring force, then the silence of Sunnydale produces a shifted fictional reality. In the instant the ability to speak is taken away from the townspeople, the Imaginary is turned upside down—the Real reigns supreme while the Symbolic becomes fictionally inaccessible and societal Law begins to disintegrate. Lacan states in *Écrits*, "it was certainly the word (*verbe*) that was in the beginning, and we live by its creation" (61). The Imaginary axis produced through the interaction of Symbolic language and the Real begins to break down, and the protection it once provided from the Real disappears. Without the power of words, Buffy is left without one of her main weapons. Buffy must speak in order to destroy The Gentlemen and reassert the Symbolic order; making the Real symbolic provokes the destruction of the Real: in Lacanian terms, "the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing" (104). Buffy, in the position of Giles' princess[6], must reassert her power over The Gentlemen, and just as the monsters violate their victims, Buffy's voice violates them. As Buffy screams The Gentlemen cover their ears—and then their heads explode.

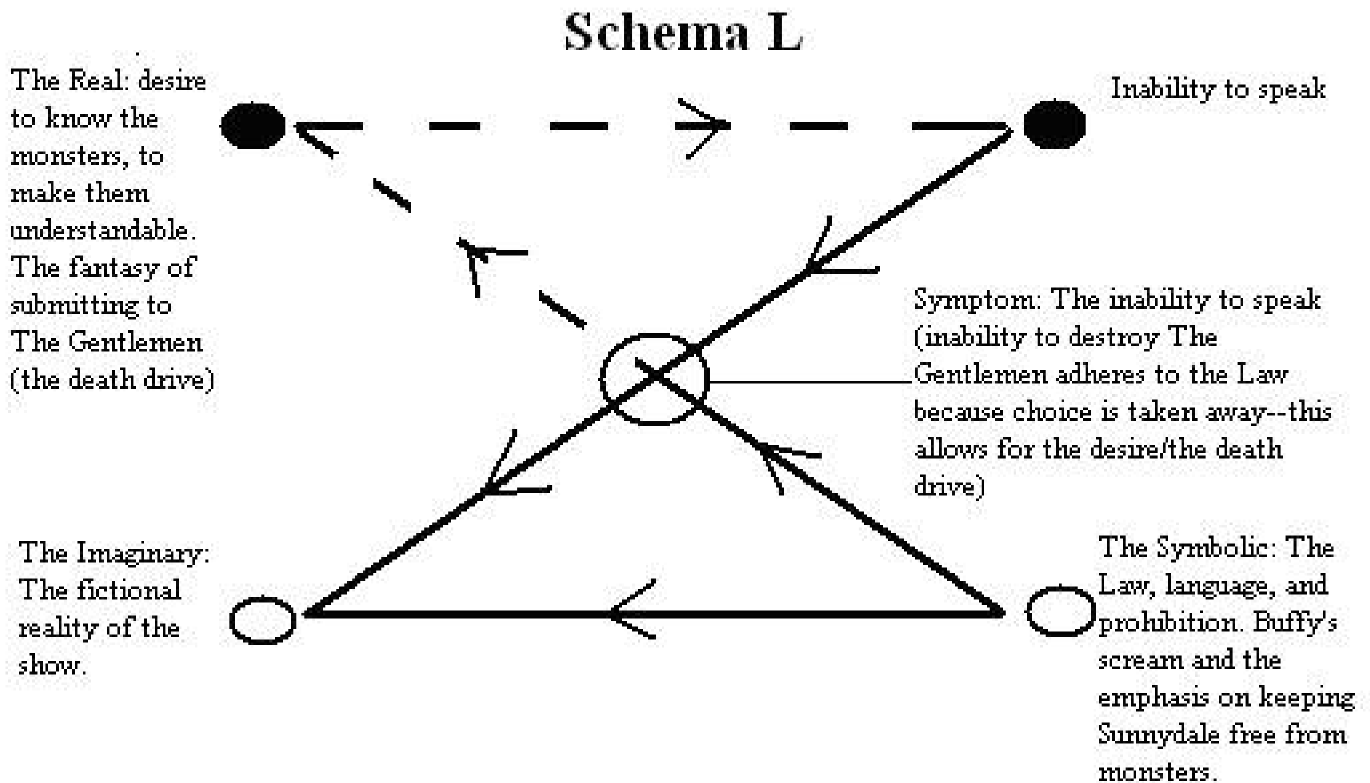
[9] While the town cannot speak, Lacan's realm of the Real takes over. It is an indescribable world not only because the townsfolk literally cannot speak, but also because The Gentlemen cannot be readily described. They are the scariest monsters of the series, so removed from reality that they do not even walk on the ground but float just above it. While they steal the voices of the townspeople, they are also silent themselves—communicating with nods, hand gestures, and gruesome smiles. Disconnected from language, they are also disconnected from reality. Because they are described as "fairy tale" monsters, the link to the Real is even more apparent. These are the monsters that inhabit the stories we tell children to get them to listen to their parents, the monsters that we seem secretly to desire to know. They cannot be described—when Giles tries to explain who they are he must use primitive drawings that are not easily interpreted by the group.

[10] While the world of The Gentlemen is situated in the Real, Buffy herself can be viewed as a personification of the Symbolic order. The Symbolic shapes imaginary

reality, and Buffy is the character who shapes Sunnydale. As "The Slayer" (a powerful signifier that marks her as a chosen superhero), Buffy must act as the law. She decides who will live and who will die, and her character is always doubly inscribed. Buffy is the law but does not want to be (a symptom of personifying the symbolic order)—she has superpowers but constantly communicates her desire to be a "normal" girl. Within the fiction of the television show, I would place the following in Lacan's Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic orders:

Real = there is... = the death drive/the desire to know the monsters
Imaginary = there is similarity = fictional reality of Sunnydale/the Hellmouth
Symbolic = there is difference = Buffy as "The Slayer"/ the Law

I derive the above placement from Lacan's schema L:



[11] On the right bottom point of the schema, there is the Symbolic, including language, prohibition, and Buffy's scream[7]. Buffy as a fictional personification of the Symbolic order is charged with protecting Sunnydale from monsters and keeping the townspeople from being murdered. Buffy's prohibition of monsters and murder produces an unconscious desire for those things—producing the fantasy of submitting to the monsters and the death drive. The town's inability to speak is the symptom, a compromise between the Symbolic law and the Real, and a regression into a world of childhood nightmares. This symptom allows the townspeople to fear The Gentlemen while not having the ability to destroy them. It is interesting to note that the newscaster reports on Sunnydale's silence as a possible "epidemic" of laryngitis and tells us that "The Center for Disease Control has ordered the entire town quarantined...

until the syndrome is identified or the *symptoms* disappear" (emphasis mine). With the power of language taken away from them, they are able to submit to the fantasy in the Real; their silence is the symptom of this desire. The only way to overcome this bout of laryngitis is through Buffy's interdiction. She, as the law, must scream, thus rejecting The Gentlemen and providing an entry point back into language. It is important that The Gentlemen can only be destroyed after Buffy can speak. As the law, she must wield both physical and verbal power to defeat The Gentlemen. Overbey and Preston-Matto comment, "Simultaneous physical and verbal combat gives Buffy twice the power for her punch" (76). Silent Buffy is armed with only half her arsenal, and therefore she is only half as powerful.

[12] The way The Gentlemen remove the hearts of their victims can also be linked to authoritative paternal knowledge and the incest taboo (at least as a motif of bodily violation). Wilcox, when discussing the "threshold" imagery of "Hush," links The Gentlemen's entry into the homes and bodies of their victims to sexual penetration. This "sexuality" of The Gentlemen is even more disturbing juxtaposed to the sterility of their operations. These monsters do not tear or rip hearts from bodies; instead they remove them expertly with scalpels. They keep themselves clean, allowing their henchmen to do the messy work of pinning the victim down (Wilcox 150, 153). They carry their tools in old-fashioned medical bags and congratulate each other with silent claps after successful operations. In this way, they display an authoritative knowledge of the human body and medical practices, but it is knowledge turned sour—a desire to gain access to the innards of their victims. The prohibition of incest is the prohibition of a sexual desire. This prohibition occurs when someone says "no." Without Symbolic language however, The Gentlemen are not prohibited. They force their way into the inner recesses of their victims, violating their body cavities in order to destroy them. The Gentlemen's violation of their victim's bodies should be read as a sexually aggressive act. When the audience actually gets to witness the operation, the victim we see is held tightly down to a bed while he screams silently.

[13] Not only are The Gentlemen's actions sexualized in the episode, the silence of "Hush" also allows Buffy's own sexual desire to be explored. Recalling the discussion of the schema L above, Buffy herself experiences the unconscious desire to submit to the death drive and The Gentlemen. As the keeper of the law and order, a desire for death, destruction, and chaos is produced. Buffy dies twice during the course of the series, and the second time she greatly regrets being brought back to life. Not only does her life revolve around death, her sexual relations do as well. Two of her three major love interests are vampires—the undead personifications of her unconscious desire. Discussing Buffy's first romantic vampire interest, Krimmer and Ravel assert that "though the obstacles imposed upon the lovers seem to foreclose any hope for intimacy; they are, paradoxically, the very features that sustain the couple's relationship" (159). But Lacan argues that the production of desire through interdiction is not a paradox, it is instead a necessary aspect of sexual relations. Krimmer and Ravel go on to note that "the deferral of desire not only is at the heart of Buffy and Angel's relationship but also the structural principle of the show itself" (159). This structural principle can be seen even in Riley, the one everyone thought was normal. He turns out to have a dark side, and Buffy seems unconsciously to know this. Perhaps this knowledge is most apparent in the opening dream sequence of the episode; when Buffy finds the young girl singing the warning, Riley is standing behind her, as he touches her shoulder and she begins to turn around, he turns into one of the monsters she will have to fight. While Riley is connected to powerful institutions (as a teaching assistant at the university by day and a covert commando by night), he also has a dark side (which is even more apparent later in the season when he begins visiting vampire dens and allowing himself to be bitten). But even the light and dark sides of Riley are not enough for Buffy; there is something more that she desires. Later in the series, when she finds herself in a sadomasochistic relationship with Spike, a vampire, the audience sees her unconscious desire for death (here literally the undead) even more clearly. Buffy, as keeper of order and life, desires chaos and death. While she does not normally exhibit a symptom of this desire in her work slaying monsters (with the exception of her own silence in "Hush"), she does in her sexual relations.

[14] “Hush” is one of the most disturbing episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The episode is truly scary not only because The Gentlemen are downright spooky, but also because it throws us, as audience members, off balance. It is an example of what Freud would call the uncanny—something that is counter to what should be. In *Buffy,* language normally serves as a structuring force of the show and speech is one of Buffy’s favorite weapons; therefore, when language is taken away the rules of this fictionalized reality are thrown off-kilter. Neither the audience nor the characters know exactly what is going on, but everyone realizes that swords and crossbows will not be enough to defeat The Gentlemen. What’s missing from the arsenal is the speech act itself—without it the social order begins to become chaotic and unstructured. Buffy must find an entry point back into the Symbolic through her voice. But before she can defeat The Gentlemen in this way, we all are reminded of how powerful the latent forces of Lacan’s Real can be.

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[1] When Buffy is less effective as “The Chosen One” however, her ability to structure the world through language is diminished. This is painfully the case in season seven, in

which Buffy's incessant speeches have little effect. Buffy's inability to use language makes sense within the context of the season's story arc, in which Buffy must transform from The Chosen One to one slayer among many. As her status as The Slayer begins to diminish, her ability to structure Sunnydale through language does as well and she is forced to obtain a weapon from Caleb to supplement her physical strength.

[2] If a correlation were to be made between Lacan's and Freud's terminology, however, the id would be closest to the Real, the ego to the Imaginary, and the superego to the Symbolic.

[3] The Real, while unknowable, is also the place of individuality, a place unique to each subject.

[4] Desire, as opposed to natural, animalistic drive, is the product of interdiction. For one to desire a thing, that thing must be placed "off-limits." It is similar to what happens when a friend orders you not to think of an elephant—you can't think of anything else.

[5] Editors' note: Pace Buffy in "Beer Bad" (4005).

[6] Wilcox notes that Buffy "expects to take the role of the princess" (148). Because Buffy generally takes on the role of protector her assumption here is not too surprising. When she fulfills the role of the princess however, the scream she destroys The Gentlemen with is "purposely *not* princess-like" (Wilcox 150). This makes sense within the series as a whole—Buffy is not usually characterized as girly-girl princess-y when fighting monsters—and within a psychoanalytic reading of the episode itself—her scream is the exit mechanism out of the monster's nightmare realm of the Real and back into the Symbolic; a place where Buffy's role is decidedly not that of a fairy tale princess.

[7] Language can be read as the entry point into the Symbolic. It is through language that one is given the "rules" of society—especially specific prohibitions. Language serves as both the ability to prohibit and the ability to protest. When the town is unable to speak they are unsuccessful in fending off The Gentlemen.

Matthew Pateman

Restless Readings—Involution, Aesthetics, and *Buffy*

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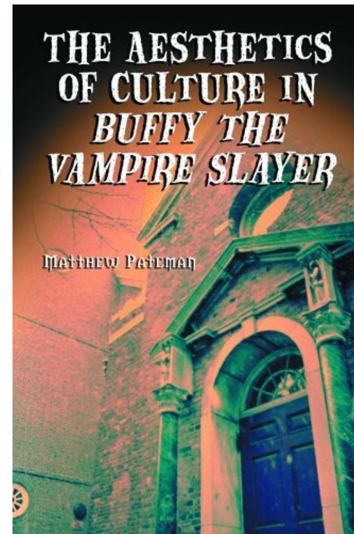

(1) May 23, 2000 saw the first airing of "Restless" (4022), the finale of Season Four. Along with a number of other episodes, "Restless" would assume for *Buffy* fans and critics a position of pre-eminence. While almost all episodes of the show display a quality of production, writing and acting that are exceptional, these particular instances propel the possibilities of television drama. Apart from "Restless," episodes in this mould would include Season Two's "Passion" (2017), Season Three's "The Wish" (3009), Season Four's "Hush" (4010) and 'superstar" (4017), Season Five's "The Body" (5016), Season Six's "Tabula Rasa" (6008), "Once More with Feeling" (6.7) and "Normal Again" (6017) and Season Seven's 'storyteller" (7016)[1]. Each of these episodes, and others, will be engaged with at some point in this section, but all of them will be arrived at through the conduit of "Restless."

(2) The reasons for this is that "Restless" falls just over half way through the complete *Buffy* corpus. As such, it is, at the very least, a useful pragmatic decision to flow back and forth across the whole story from this point. But this itself implies something about both the programme and my approach to reading it. While *Buffy* exists as a story spanning seven seasons and 144 episodes, and while this, clearly, invokes a conception of a narrative that begins at episode one and ends at episode 144, to contain *Buffy* solely within the straightjacket of a superficial linearity would be to deny it one of its greatest achievements: the aesthetics of involution.

(3) This introduction will begin by offering a definition of "the aesthetics of involution." It will then move on to discuss some of the structural and formal features of "Restless" that will contribute to an overall sense of the analysis of the episode and its possibilities, as well as providing a small glossary of useful terms related to the study of narrative in its more classical, literary and film studies sense. Finally, it will present a brief reading of the opening scene which occurs before the dreams themselves start.

(4) The extent to which Buffy plays with ideas of narrative can be seen to have implications beyond the immediately aesthetic, or even thematic, to much more general issues.[2] In many ways, this study of Buffy is also an attempt to re-cast television narrative, as exemplified by Buffy, with all its attendant aesthetic attributes, as a contribution to these more, seemingly abstract, points of enquiry. One of the reasons for this is the extent to which Buffy is so far in excess of many of the categories of classical narratology. This is in large part because narratology was at its inception a literary exercise, though it is still possible to see the ways in which its claims are transferable to films, one-off television shows and other media. It is far less capable of offering a theoretical model that will account for what Buffy is: a television serial. While any one scene in Buffy, or even a whole episode, may be amenable to narratological analysis (to very interesting ends), the relation between one episode and another is less easily counted for, still less the relationship between one season and another.
(5) There are two very obvious reasons why this is so. First, a television serial can develop much more slowly and over a much greater amount of time than a novel or even a film; second, the visual aspects of television do not open themselves up to the same sorts of narrative elucidation. How, for example, does the use of a lighting effect from an episode in one season that is repeated in an episode in another season work in terms of narrative? It does, I will argue, but in ways that literary and filmic narrative cannot emulate of mimic. In an environment where television criticism is still regarded primarily as a sociological rather than aesthetic venture (that reserved for Literature and certain Films), it can be hard to assert that a television show is worthy of serious analysis as much for its aesthetic / production values as for its "themes" or sociological aspects.[3] The simple fact of *Buffy* being a television show means that there is an immediate snobbery in relation to its status as a worthy object of academic scrutiny. However, the question of its seriality, and the particular sorts of possibilities that the show explores with this, seems to insist on respectful serious thought. The question has been addressed by Philip Mikosz and Dana C. Och. The predicament outlined by Mikosz and Och is that accounts of narrative drawn from literary and film studies do not really provide a vocabulary sufficient to the needs of televisual serial drama. Where such an account does exist they say, for example in Umberto Eco's "Interpreting Serials" in *The Limits of Interpretation*, the arguments are wholly unable to account for the ways in which *Buffy* works. One that does work, I hope, is the concept of the "aesthetics of involution."
(6) I am indebted to Alfred Appel Jr.'s introduction to, and annotations of, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* for making known the idea of "involution" to me as a tool of criticism. While I have developed the term for my own uses, his work is a magnificent example of its potential. Appel's general argument concerning *Lolita* and his idea of involution is as follows. To read *Lolita* as the confessions of a murdering paedophile, recounted in prison over a certain number of days with the intention of explaining the motivation and history of his relationship with the young girl (in other words, to read it as a realist text) is to miss the point. While Nabokov goes to great lengths to give the impression of a realist discourse amenable to psychoanalytical interpretation, the text is not itself realist; it is a pastiche of realism.
(7) The point of *Lolita*, for Appel, is its allusive, referential, artificial qualities. These exist as either complex relations with other literature (including his own) or else as self-contained, hermetic devices that circulate within the text itself. In the latter category

would be the puns and coincidences, especially of number; in the former an enormous range of reference to literature and other cultural forms. At the heart of the novel, for Appel, is its relationship with Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" and from this (though with other aspects interfering) grows all the rest. He says, "[T]he verbal *figurae* in *Lolita* limn the novel's involuted design and establish the basis of its artifice" (lvi). As I have mentioned in various ways in Section One, *Buffy* plays with the codes and conventions of realism in order that it can further explore the possibilities of its own artifice both in terms of the imagined world of Sunnydale and environs and also in terms of the production techniques employed to represent this world. Like *Lolita* in some ways, it provides the veneer of a realistic technique in order that this formal pastiche can elaborate and bolster the emotional, thematic and narrative concerns.
(8) Additionally to Appel's use, I am drawing from a range of its potential meanings drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd Edition, including: 2a "An involved or entangled condition [...] intricacy of construction or style" and 3 "A rolling, curling or turning inwards." Together, these meanings, and other subsidiary ones, allow for an examination of *Buffy* that pays attention to specific moments within an episode, a particular episode, a relationship between episodes, a relationship between seasons, and also the inter-, intra- and para-textual elements.[4] "Involution" is, then, a necessarily relational term but one in which the relation between two or more points is not simply additive. Meaning six in the *OED* includes "the raising of a quantity to any power, positive, negative, fractional or imaginary." Cognisant of Alan Sokal's timely attack on badly used science and maths in bad theory, I will only allow for the metaphorical translation of the term from its arithmetic birthplace to my aesthetic adoption[5]. The fact that the word's own meanings seem to encourage a sense of the entangled, commingled, complex, even messy provides a perfect opportunity for it as an aspect of engaging with a text (*Buffy*) that revels in its own textual excess, that seems to enjoy re-writing its own premises, dismantling the world it had created, that invites the audience to laugh at itself and the show, while being utterly serious in its commitment to a notion of art and artistry that pushes television to places it has not been before.
(9) One may also wish to have in mind Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the "tensor sign" as presented in his book *Libidinal Economy*. Lyotard's very difficult argument can best be presented via a small section of his book "Intensity, the Name." Here the writer of *Libidinal Economy* poses a common problem, which is that the name

> refers in principle to a single reference and does not appear to be exchangeable against other terms in the logico-linguistic structure: there is no intra-systemic equivalent of the proper name, it points towards the outside like a deictic, it has no connotations, or it is interminable. (55)

While I would be very keen to look at the importance of the name "Buffy" as a version of a tensor sign, this section is rather more concerned with a broader array of signs and signifying practices and the relationships between them. Luckily for me, then, Lyotard claims that names are not a privileged category of the tensorial sign, but are a good example because a name, as tensorial sign, "covers a region of libidinal space open to the undefinability of energetic influxes, a region in flames (56). A tensorial sign, by which is meant in principle *any* sign, refuses to be subordinated to a lack and, therefore, blocks its insertion into a system of replacements / equivalences whether

these be in terms of absent signified or adjacent signifier. Importantly, there is no decision to be made between sign as semiotic unit and sign as tensor. The sign is both of these. The extent to which it acts as one or the other is an effect of the intensities that flow through it at any given instance. Or, in my phrase, "involution."

(10) This notion of involution will tend to operate across episodes and seasons, but it has a certain purchase at the level of individual episodes insofar as these episodes themselves, even when they are stand-alone, operate as part of the structure of a season and have formal qualities that intimately tie them to this. If we think briefly about "Restless" in this regard, the discussion can then broaden out to a consideration of the ways in which the structure of episodes in and of themselves, and as parts of seasons, contributes to the involutional qualities of them.

(11) Before "Restless" (4022) was aired it was already an anomaly. The three previous seasons had all had the finale episode as the climactic culmination, the end point, of the season's main story line. Season one ends with Buffy fighting and defeating the Master (Prophecy Girl," 1012); Season Two sees Buffy leaving Sunnydale after having killed Angel ("Becoming II," 2022); and Season Three ends with the killing of the mayor and the thwarting of his ascension ("Graduation Day II," 3022). Season four had revolved around the Frankenstein's monster-esque Adam and the secret government Initiative that had spawned him. The penultimate episode has seen the great battle leading to Adam's death and the supposed destruction of the Initiative's headquarters and laboratory ("Primeval," 4021). So, what would the finale be, and how should it be read? Would there be some additional strand that had appeared peripheral and which would, in fact, mark the end of the story? If not, where should "the end" of the season be located? Would this simply be an afterthought, a curious addendum or, as Joss Whedon has called it, a "coda"?[6] The choice a term usually associated with music implies the extent to which the seasons are planned in terms of emotional intensities, the rising and falling of the patterns of the shows having a metaphorical relationship with a sonata whose own sense of repeating phrases, returning to motifs and so on has its own involutional aspect[7].

(12) To a certain extent then, "Restless" is already posing questions about narrative and seriality by subverting what had appeared to be a structural requirement of the show: the end of a season is the end of that season's overarching storyline. Here, whatever was to happen, was clearly something other than that. Its opening certainly offers a sense of an ending, an "afterwards." We enter just as the Scoobies and Joyce are saying goodbye to Riley, apparently after a gathering at Buffy's house, seemingly not long after the events of the previous episode. Joyce goes to bed, leaving Buffy, Xander, Willow and Giles in the lounge preparing to watch videos for the rest of the night.

(13) This little scene has echoes and presentiments of its own, before we engage with main aspect of the story. The group left on their own at the end of the season is also the group that begins the entire series. The four of them, despite others becoming involved (Cordelia, Oz, Wesley, Angel, Tara) are the focus of the show and their fights and estrangements over the seasons so far, including this one, are here annulled as all others leave the kernel of the show to rest. However, the scene has a morbid prospective element to it too. The group gathered at Buffy's house, seemingly restful and happy as Joyce (as she does here) plays the caring, attentive and understanding mother is also the organizing principle behind the most harrowing of *Buffy* episodes, "The Body" (5016) which occurs in the next season. While "The Body" (5016) also has

Tara, Anya and Dawn present, the familial structure of Joyce, Giles and the gang operates in an organisationally and emotionally similar fashion. Seriality, allied with technology such as DVDs, allows for these moments of stylistic or organizational similitude to be engaged with. The effect of this, or one of them, is to dissipate a linearity of reading. While story arcs and character development occur on an episode-by-episode basis, thereby maintaining the necessity of linear narrative in that respect, points of contact between episodes remote from one another (temporally, emotionally and so on) can be adduced (or more powerfully, simply exert their own force) in the act of re-watching. For me, at least, I cannot watch the opening of "Restless" (4022) without "The Body" (5016) being brought into critical focus. Similarly, the opening of "The Body" (5016) always forces me back to "Restless" (4022). This is not an act of narrative, but an act of involution, the text, as it were, folding back in on itself, to occlude narrative patterns in order to invoke relationships that have no necessary causal pattern.

(14) Even before this moment, however, the episode has already begun and its involutional aspect has been brought into view. The usual form for the beginning of episodes from about half way through Season Two is a "previously on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" montage of clips from earlier shows that have an influence on the direction that this episode will take. This is then followed by the teaser, which varies in length, but is usually fairly short and sets up an action which will reverberate after we have had the next section, the credits, and then (in America, anyway) the first commercial break. This pattern is not absolute and there are variations, but it is general. I would like to spend a little time thinking about each of these aspects first, before moving onto the episode itself.

(15) The "previously on" section offers to *Buffy* and, in principle all serial shows, the chance to fundamentally dismiss one of the abiding claims made about television serials. This has been posited most notably be Umberto Eco:

> [A] series works upon a fixed situation and a restricted number of fixed pivotal characters, around whom the secondary and changing ones turn [which gives] the impression that the new story is different from the preceding ones while in fact the narrative scheme does not change. (86)

And, additionally, for the viewer, the "recurrence of a narrative scheme that remains constant [...] responds to the infantile need of always hearing the same story, of being consoled by the return of "The Identical," superficially disguised" (87). In other words, seriality, for Eco, is a simple repetition of the same, a same which, moreover makes no progress forward, keeping the characters and the viewer in a mythical (because, for Eco, de-historicised) present untainted by such concerns as demise or failure: the future is constantly deferred in a present that remains constant, informed by a secure and total past.

(16) *Buffy*'s past is not constant. Nor for that matter is its present at these moments. The voice that says "previously" is Anthony Stewart Head's. The viewer then is placed in a position of undecideability. Either s/he accepts the voice as the actor's in which case an attendant acceptance of the fictionality of the show is understood, as the character is recognized as being just that, and part of a fiction; or the voice is heard as Giles's, in which case the possibility that Giles is both a character *in* the show as well as

a commentator on it *externally* to the show is accepted. In either case, the show's constructedness, its artifice is highlighted and the sort of questions relating to different levels of ontological negotiation discussed in section one are again rehearsed.
(17) The montages that are introduced render the past of the show unstable. This is not to say that they destroy the past, nor that the past of the show is somehow erased in the moment of its attenuated recapitulation. It is, however, to insist that these moments upset the narrativity of *Buffy*. Mikosz and Och's claim that *Buffy* is not a narrative show at all. They write:

> *Buffy* the series, by contrast, although it partakes of elements of narrative, does not amount to a narration. Season by season, and even episode by episode, the series accumulates a multiple past, elements of oftentimes incongruous combinations. Moreover, the series seizes upon the clichés "Buffy" and "Vampire Slayer" and posits them as axioms, as simultaneous conditions that nonetheless retain their incommensurability (this is, after all Buffy's existential crisis!).

I would dispute the general claim and maintain that each season does present an overarching narrative which, while being lost for episodes at a time in some instances, nevertheless does belong to the realm of narration. This is true even for the story (narration) from Season One to Season Seven. It is, however, true, that *Buffy*'s games with narrative present difficulties for narration that are brought into immediate focus by the "previously" sections. Before moving forward with this point, a small account of narrative as derived from structuralist theory and narratology might be helpful.
(18) A very limited, definition of narrative would be the one offered by Seymour Chapman in his 1963 *Theory of Literature*. This book, heavily influenced by structuralist theory says:

> [...] narrative has two parts: a story (histoire), the content or chain of events (actions happenings), plus what may be called existents (characters, items of setting): and a discourse (discours), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated.[8]

In other words, there is a set of events (the story) and then the means by which those events are put together and represented to a reader (discourse) and the combination of these two elements makes the narrative. This distinction is rather easier to keep in mind if the terms used are 'story" and "plot." A basic 'story" might be something like: "I woke up. I went to the window. I saw a wolf. I ran away." The "plot" aspect is the arrangement of the 'story" in a fashion that is not simply its order of happening. So, for example" "I ran away after I had woken up, gone to the window and seen the wolf." This comparatively simple conceptualization is made much more specific and sophisticated by Chapman and the other great narratologists like Propp, Tomashevsky, Bakhtin, Genette and others through the analysis of a number of other aspects that contribute to each of these parts of the combination. While this is not going to be a narratological analysis in the sense implied my referencing the writers above, there are some categories of explanation that classical narratology offers that will be useful to bear in mind during parts of this discussion. Readers who are either familiar with narratological theory, or those who are not interested in the finer points of the theory should probably jump ahead a couple of pages as I am going to enumerate and briefly

define some of the aspects from narratology that might be helpful in considering certain moments in *Buffy*. These, in themselves are not at all sufficient for looking at the ways in *Buffy*'s aesthetics of involution operates, but they do provide a way into the more straightforward aspects of 'story-telling" that the show deploys. This list owes a debt of gratitude to that at the end of *The Narrative Reader*, edited by Martin McQuillan:

Act – an event that is narrated and which brings about a state of change by an agent. ("Buffy sleeps with Angel," is an act; "it rained yesterday" is not).
Actant – a category of character (hero, sought-for-person, dispatcher, helper, donor, villain/false-hero) rather than a character itself. Buffy, the character, might, at different times be the hero or the helper, the sought-for-person and so on. In *Buffy* the characters" inhabitation of any number of these actant positions provides much of the opportunity for drama, comedy and so on.
Action – a series of connected events that have unity and purpose and (in many instances, at least) a beginning, middle and an end.
Anachrony – The placing of an event out of sequence in the telling or re-telling of the story. The most obvious examples of this in *Buffy* are the flashbacks (analepsis) to Angel's life as a vampire.
Anterior Narration – the narration of events that occur before the events happen. In *Buffy* there are the occasional prophetic dreams (such as those in "Restless") but it is with Doyle's and later Cordelia's visions on *Angel* that this is most prevalent.
Aporia – a situation where what makes thing possible is also, and paradoxically, what makes the thing impossible at the same time. This results in an impasse of interpretation or a moment of undecideability. The episode "Normal Again" (6017) plays with this notion to some considerable effect as we are left not knowing whether Buffy is insane or not.[9]
Conative function – a narrative act that focuses on the narratee. Jonathan's seeming address to the viewer in 'storyteller" (7016) is a complex example of this, as is Lorne's account of events in 'spin the Bottle" from *Angel* (*AtS* 4.6).
Defamiliarisation – a technique by which the world and / or the artwork is "made strange" to heighten, among other things, the artistic effect. The lack of music in "The Body" (5016) is, curiously, a prime example of this, though *Buffy* is constantly in the process of defamiliarising, especially in terms of genre.[10]
End – this seemingly obvious term which is little more than the last incident in a plot or sequence of actions actually has the force of making all the rest of the narrative lead to that point and act as a site of meaning for the whole. The end of *Buffy*, then, is the final shot of the group looking at the hole that used to be Sunnydale.
Extradiegetic – external to any diegesis (outside of the world or space of the narrative). Most often in *Buffy* this will be found in the music played over the top of a scene (as opposed to, for example, a band playing in The Bronze who are part of the scene and, therefore, part of the diegesis or *intradiegetic*).
Genre – a type or style of narrative. The question of what, if any, genre *Buffy* is will be part of this discussion.
Intertext – one or more texts that are referenced or rewritten by another text and which provide, at least, some of the meaning of the latter text. The plethora of

intertextual moments in *Buffy* will also be a part of this discussion.
Montage – the placing side by side in juxtaposition of a sequence of events that gain meaning from this rather than from contiguity. The "previously on..." sequences are a prime, though not only, example of this in *Buffy* – Andrew's re-introduction of Faith in "Dirty Girls" (7018) is another example.
Teleology – the study of the end; the compulsion of a narrative towards its end point which gives shape and coherence to the preceding events. Chapter 3 has a long discussion about teleology and its related, though different concept, eschatology.

The "previously" sections by virtue of their formal aspect as montages cannot operate as "actions" in the way described above as they derive their meaning through juxtaposition and not continuity. As a consequence, aspects that we might ordinarily associate with narrative as a linear concept are displaced. There is no teleology as such, no end point except the formal cessation of the clip which may or may not have had a structural and thematic end. What we have instead is a set of scenes (or, more usually, partial scenes) spliced together in order that the story to which they refer is brought back into the mind of the viewer. Each section of the montage, then, is synecdochic of a larger story. This juxtapositional synecdoche re-assembles the narratives that have gone before. These scenes initially existed as a combination of 'story" and "plot" but now are decontextualised and have no narrative power at all, in their own terms.
(19) What they do have, and are clearly intended to have, are a different sort of combinatorial capacity whose effect is to provide a specific context for the episode to come. This means that the immediate pre-history to an episode can be made up of excerpts from all and any parts of the existent history of *Buffy* which can be re-assembled such that these histories are foreshortened, contracted. The history that is alluded to from one excerpt is then placed in juxtaposition with a history that may have had no bearing on its own trajectory but now become enmeshed in a new re-visioning of the past of the show in order that the future (the immediate episode and its aftermath) can be altered. The past becomes infinitely malleable, subject to any number of re-visions, thereby opening up the possibility of any number of possible futures. Eco's assessment of the mythical fixed present built on an absolutely certain past denying the fear of futurity is significantly undermined, even just from the paratext of "previously."
(20) The "previously" section on "Restless" (4022) begins with a shot of Adam, and Buffy's assertion that they shall stop him. Immediately this brings the Big Bad of the season to the fore, and reminds us of his genealogy in terms of monsterness. He is part human, part cyborg, a 20th century revision of Frankenstein's monster and as such part of an on-going dispute concerning the legitimate experiments of science.[11] The initial shot, then, provides a simple reminder of the narrative of the season and a re-enforcement of the inter-textual[12] links of the monster to Mary Shelley's text. The extent to which this might, in turn, broaden out to a much wider inter-textual[13] relationship with Romanticism in general will be addressed later. One of the important aspects about involution as a strategy is that it is potentially endless both in terms of its intra- and para-textual elements, but especially of intertextual relations. The relationship of a text to its intertext is never simple or singular. *Frankensein* cannot have a relationship with *Buffy* that is linear, exclusive and hermetic. Even if a linear

relationship were possible, *Frankenstein* would have other points of contact with other texts (therefore it is not exclusive) each of which has, theoretically, also a relationship with *Buffy* (so it cannot be hermetic). Wilcox and Lavery draw on the work of Robert Stam to indicate the ways in which this is fundamental to a reading of *Buffy*:

> As any new-comer to the series quickly realizes, Buffy constantly and pervasively draws on its own past history, but it casts its nets widely beyond its own developing text. "Any text that has slept with another text," Robert Stam has noted, extending a central insight into STD prevention into the realm of film theory, "has necessarily slept with all the texts the other text has slept with" (202) [...] the series offers us humor that only the textually promiscuous are likely to get. (xxiv)

It is not only the promiscuous nature of the text that is important for an involutional reading of *Buffy* but, to continue the sexualised imagery, the incestuous, the exogamous and the fetishistic. Adam takes us, promiscuously to Mary Shelley's text and thence to Romanticism and the gothic. He moves us incestually as described below to other parts of *Buffy*. He demands exogamy by insisting on relations outside of our community not only via intertext, but also through the body of the actor George Hertzberg who brings in from the outside memories of him from his appearances in, for example, *3rd Rock from the Sun* and, more interestingly, *Home Improvements* where he appeared in an episode entitled "Desperately Seeking Willow" which returns us incestually to *Buffy* through Willow, but also opens up through promiscuity Madonna and her gamut of possible meanings, the other star Rosanna Arquette, director Susan Seidelman and the rest of her work and so on. And he provides us with the fetishistic route by virtue of a supposed belief that he (or any other character, event, reference, allusion or whatever) might somehow provide us with the ability to control and stay the superabundance of meaning delivered at almost every moment of the show. The fetishist is always disappointed, of course.

(21) Intratextually (incestually) Adam as a monster and his relationship with Frankenstein does draw the character, and therefore this opening moment from the "Previously on..." montage, back to 'some Assembly Required" (202) in which the brother of a disfigured school sports star tries to create a perfect girlfriend for his brother from the bodies of dead students. The fact that this episode has as "Consulting Producer," Howard Gordon who is also a writer and producer of the *X-Files* provides another intertextual link and involutional contortion.

(22) The next scene in the "previously on..." section is a reprise of the spell undertaken in the previous episode where the four main characters joined in order to provide Buffy with the skill, strength, intelligence and heart of the whole group.[14] The viewer is not necessarily certain exactly what power has been invoked in order for the spell to work, but that it did and that Buffy defeated Adam is certain. "Primeval" (4021) acts in some senses as final episode in terms of the resolution of the story, so this episode (which begins by reminding us of that one) is re-framed as already strange. It is intriguing that a small clue as to the potential direction of "Restless" (4022) was given in "Primeval" (4021) by Spike referencing yet another English Victorian literary classic, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. While Buffy is no Alice, the surreal dream of Carroll's book has some resonance with what, we discover, is to come.[15]

(23) The clearest intertext in the opening sequence is to *The Matrix*, the Wachowski

brothers" groundbreaking, intelligent, cinematically startling 1999 sci-fi thriller. Whedon's admiration for this film is well known and the shot of the dissolving bullets being pulled out of the air and turned to doves is a clear homage. The fact that both the episode and the film engage with questions of "the human," though from significantly different positions, allows a depth of analysis and philosophical speculation to seep into the show by sheer virtue of the connection. This is one of the main strengths of involution: the contact between two points (whether intra- or inter-textual) that magnifies the connotative and interpretive power of both.

(24) The death of Adam that marks the last part of the "previously" montage much more simply tells the audience where the narrative has got to, before the opening credits occur. Even though this montage is nearly all located in the previous episode, and therefore has less revisionist possibility than other montages, it has re-defined and re-focussed what the current episode regards as the most significant moment of the previous one.

(25) The importance of this in terms of a notion of involution is that the programme has an in-built structural feature that already provides elements of seasonal fore-shortening and the juxtaposition of moments of it that might previously have had no obvious narrative relation to each other at all. These elements of the montage then usually move straight in to the teaser. Karen Sayer has pointed out how the teaser tends to work in contrast to the main action that will unfold later. Often this is a movement from light to darkness, or vice versa[16] or from domestic peace to some sort of violence. She continues:

> Even without a cut to violence, any happy moment in the teaser will inevitably be framed by the shows" [*Buffy* and *Angel*] credits, which recycle predominantly dark scenes overlain by sudden energetic bursts of action. (103)

The teaser, then, stands in dramatic juxtaposition to the initial montage (that reframes the past of *Buffy* to re-contextualise the present), and with the opening credits.

(26) "Restless" (4022) has no teaser section. After the "previously" section we move straight to the credits and thence to the commercials. In itself this provides a moment of defamiliarisation for anyone who has watched the show regularly. The already strong expectation of an unusual episode is augmented by this formal shift. This formal choice has the effect, by doing, literally, nothing, of furthering the audience's potential excitement or anxiety with respect of the episode (on a first viewing, in sequence, anyway). It is useful to note, however, that this aesthetic moment (the attributes of which work as I have described and are, therefore, properly part of the artistry of the show) comes about due to pragmatic requirements. There were such a lot of guest appearances on this episode that the contractual requirements regarding the placement of actor's names meant that a teaser before the credits was simply impossible.[17] An external, legal responsibility has an effect on a formal expectation that influences the viewer's response to the opening of an episode whose position within a seasonal structure is already curious. So, lacking a teaser, we head straight into the credits.[18]

(27) These also offer a montage. This time, however, the clips can be from any previous season or the present-forthcoming one, though once chosen the credits remain the same throughout the season. In addition to the visual aspect of the credits, there is also the musical element and this has been discussed marvelously by Janet K. Halfyard. In her essay, Halfyard shows how *Buffy* plays with allusion (involution) even

at the level of music and not just in relation to the horror tradition, but also with its own off-shoot *Angel*. In terms of the horror tradition as it is presented to us via the music used in the credit sequences, she writes:

> Firstly, there is the instrument itself: we have the sound of an organ, accompanied by a wolf's howl, with a visual image of a flickering night sky overlaid with unintelligible archaic script: the associations with both the silent era and films such as *Nosferatu* and with the conventions of the Hammer House of Horror and horror in general are unmistakable. ("Love, Death, Curses and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*")

Halfyard then offers a brief history of the use of the organ in horror, from *The Phantom of the Opera*'s explicit diegeitc use to "Dr Jekyll playing the organ in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1932) and the sound of the organ becoming synonymous with Hammer Horror in the 1960s and 70s." From this the turn to comedy and parody is noted in, for example, *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1996). *Buffy*, then opens with a musical trope that both pays homage to its filmic heritage at the same time as recognising the potential for cliché that this invites. Involution takes us to the general trope and then to specific films all of which inform and bleed into our reading of the present show. However, being *Buffy*, this already extravagant aesthetic turns the cliché in on itself, recognises its own complicity in its perpetuation and radically shifts its sensibilities:

> It removes itself from the sphere of 1960s and 70s horror by replaying the same motif, the organ now supplanted by an aggressively strummed electric guitar, relocating itself in modern youth culture, relocating the series in an altogether different arena than that of both Hammer and its spoofs. (Halfyard)

The repetition of the motif means that, in addition to "relocating" (which it most certainly does) it nevertheless remains moored to its old reference: the aesthetic shift signifies its movement away from a particular tradition of horror while simultaneously insisting on a certain relationship with it, however ironic or iconoclastic. The juxtaposition of the two styles, related through the repeated motif, encourages an involutional set of readings via the filmic tradition and then appears to deny that very tradition at the moment of its invocation

(28) This process is compounded in the episode 'superstar" (4017). As mentioned above, the credit sequence tends to provide a montage of shots from previous episodes and season as well as the present. This is played beneath the music with all its attendant involutional and ironic possibilities (as well as its sheer exuberance and strength). This episode is considered by Mikosz and Och in their discussion of seriality in *Buffy*. They first offer a description of Jonathan's usurpation of the credits:

> Here is Jonathan upstaging all of the usual suspects: shooting a crossbow; disarming a bomb; smiling back at Xander (Oh Xander you dawg!); some smarmy dude in a tux; secret agent-like in a tux with a gun; doing a kung-fu move; and, finally, walking in grim- reverse-Angelesque-slow-mo towards the camera, trench coat and all.

Following on from this, they provide a wonderful cross-analysis of this with Jon Moritsugu's *Fame Whore* and a discussion of the generative power of cliché. The re-imagined Jonathan and his many versions on the credit sequence draws attention to the images with which *Buffy* is working and, in so doing, cause a re-appraisal of their supposed radicalism from a gendered view-point:

> He is one cliché, yet he—rather, his image (for he is nothing but an image: Adam recognizes this instantly, Buffy actually intuits it from the opening scenes) has proliferated to the degree that it has acquired a monopoly over all of the other images. This is why he can simultaneously be Michael Jordan, a swimsuit model, the inventor of the internet, the author of the book *Oh, Jonathan!*, Hugh Hefner, Frank Sinatra, Angel, James Bond, a hard-boiled detective type, a witty roué, friend and advisor to the traumatized and the lovelorn and the downtrodden, military tactical analyst, and so on, and so on. Jonathan literally becomes all things and everything to all people. He is not a superstar, he is THE super-duper-star. (Mikosz and Och)

What Jonathan's alternative credits provide is a counter-point to their usual function. His pastiche version forces us though defamiliarisation to recognise what the credits do. They assert certain sorts of attributes to each of the characters by choosing images from sections of seasons that best fit what we consider those characters to be. They are a moment of structural and formal stability that help (in a fashion similar to that mentioned by Eco, but much more precariously) to render known and safe the narrative space that we shall soon enter. In relation to 'superstar" (4017), however, this supposed solace of the same is undermined, as McNeilly, Sylka and Fisher describe. They take the inevitably discursive nature of characters on television shows to be the source of a specific engagement with a more broadly conceived notion of identity as discourse, though the 'superstar" (4017) episode:

> "Near the middle of the episode, Adam sits before an array of surveillance monitors – like us, he watches the Buffyverse on t.v. – and points to the mediatized nature of Jonathan's magic, its mucked up reality effect: [...] Jonathan's image is rendered extensive by mass media; he is a superstar because he appears as the superhero – because he represents himself as a t.v. 'star" [...] The unstable perfection of "Jonathan" comes to appear as a patchwork of deception that cannot resolve into a coherent character; that perfection, after all, is a discursive construct, rather than an ontological given."

(29) The opening sections to 'superstar" (4017) have foregrounded to an exceptional degree the discursively constituted nature of the show, but in so doing have enabled questions about its ontological status to be asked. And we have not even got to the first commercial break yet. From "previously" to teaser, to credits to commercials: it is a surprisingly long journey before we get to the episode's first Act. The commercials, clearly, provide an enormous level of possibility for re-contextualising and de-contextualising what has just gone. Lorne on *Angel* is given a marvellous moment in the excellent 'spin the Bottle" (*AtS* 4.6) where his recounting of the episode's story to the audience in his club, and thence to us, is punctuated, of course, by commercial breaks. After the third commercial break he simply comments (evidently not to the

audience in the club, but to us, in a knowing meta-fictional moment), "Well, those were some exciting products. Am I right? Mmm. Let's all think about buying some of those" 'spin the Bottle" (*AtS* 4006).
(30) After the episode has finished its story-telling, there is till more that should properly be called a part of the world of the show which would include the closing credits and the legal declaration of ownership of the programme via the company logo. An excellent example of the ways in which involution can operate through paratext is given to us via the logo, the fabulous monster who goes "grr arrgh" at the end of, nearly, every episode. This will be discussed as part of chapter 8.
(31) Bearing in mind all the questions already raised by the preliminary sections of the show, we can now begin an analysis of the opening scene. As mentioned above, we are in Buffy's house, saying goodbye to Riley and seeing Joyce go to bed while Buffy, Willow, Xander and Giles sit up to watch videos. By the time of the season's end, the franchising of *Buffy* was well under way, and the VHS box sets of earlier seasons were selling (outside of the US before in the US due to syndication issues). The fact that such an enormous number of fans would be sitting round having *Buffy* nights in a fashion much akin to our heroes in this episode is a gently affectionate form of the involutional. This is made much more emphatic when Xander places the first video in the player and the whole screen is taken up by the FBI warning against property theft and the enforcement of copyright law. The FBI aspect throws us back to the Initiative and the presence of government and conspiracy with which the season has partly dealt (which will also remind us of Marcie Ross in "Out of Mind Out of Sight," 1011); and the fact of the image at all means that we understand that we are watching a show that is also available on video and DVD and which is under the same protection and uses the same laws, signaled by the same warning of the same organisation as that which we are currently watching. This moment opens up a possible mise-en-abyme that is significantly more pronounced when viewing the same scene on video or DVD.
(32) The videos have been a source of concern to the group as Xander wants to watch *Apocalypse Now* which Willow is concerned is too *Heart of Darkness*-ey. The constant threat of apocalypse is one with which the characters are always contending; the promise of an imminent demise as suggested by the film (especially as the previous episode saw the defeat of a potentially apocalypse-inducing machine) is a pleasingly subtle self-reflexive joke at the show's expense. However, the role and important of both *Apocalypse Now* as a film and Conrad's novella is much more central to some of the overarching concerns of the show: the battle between archaism and modernity; the construction of "the human" and the possibilities of narrative.
(33) The questions which *Buffy* raises in general terms about modernity, find a particular aesthetic recapitulation with the show's occasional engagements with Modernist writings. Indeed, one need only look at *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses* or *Mrs Dalloway* to see modernity turned inside out, and it is clear that these texts can also be read alongside *Buffy* in its entirety or individual episodes. Rhonda Wilcox has written an excellent essay 'T.S. Eliot comes to television: *Buffy's* 'Restless'' in which she draws out some of the structural and thematic linkages between Eliot's text and Whedon's. It is difficult to imagine a more perfect example of comparative media analysis. *Heart of Darkness* explicitly manifests a relation to modernity that is both aesthetically challenging and morally outraged from a political perspective, especially as to the question of what constitutes the human, and this, it seems to me is part of its strength in the context of *Buffy* and especially of Xander as he is the only character who remains singularly human in the sense of having no obvious extra- or super-human qualities. The notion of what exactly the 'human' is in terms of the

Buffyverse is still moot.
(34) Even before the dream sections, then, the episode has been dealing in the allusive, referential, involuted games that are such a core element of the show's aesthetic. So pervasive is involution that to pretend to be able to enumerate even each single reference, let alone provide a critical assessment of the possible strands of these, is impossible. There will, inevitably, be many examples of the "attentive viewer" (Rambo) who extrapolate their own involutional threads in directions which I have not followed, or who dispute some of the connections I have made. This is to be welcomed; involution invites such multiple readings, such tangled critiques, and *Buffy* possibly more than any other television show revels also in its own multiplicity and variousness. Involution celebrates the multiplication of possibilities and, along with Xander, would seek to disavow the stringent reductionism of the critical equivalent of "tick-box" psychometrics who cannot allow deviation: "That would allow too many variables into their mushroom-head, number-crunching little world" ("What's My Line I," 2009).

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[1] The GEOS guide has as the top ten episodes as voted by fans being: 10th 'selfless" (7.5), 9th "Innocence II" (2014), 8th "Fool for Love" (5007), 7th "Becoming I" (2021), 6th "Conversations with Dead People" (7007), 5th "The Body" (5016), 4th "The Gift" (5022), 3rd "Becoming II" (2022), 2nd "Hush" (4010) and 1st "Once More With Feeling" (6.7). "Restless" is counted as 30th. http://www.geos.tv/index.php/index/

buf accessed July 25, 2004 (The list is open to change, though the favourite five have remained in place since the time of my initial check).
[2] See, for example, the relationship between narrative and history and narrative and knowledge in chapters 1 and 3 of my *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.
[3] Sue Turnbull provides an excellent palliative to this in the previously quoted "Not just another *Buffy* paper: Towards an aesthetics of television."
[4] Intertexts are those text from the "outside" of the show that are drawn "into" it by reference, allusion, quotation, parody, pastiche or any other formal device (drawn from literature, television, film, but also including food stuffs, brand names, sports, and all the other cultural artefacts that become textualised in the show); intratexts are the allusions and references made in one episode to another episode and these include obvious aspects such as plot development and character-growth, but also visual styles, camera angles, lighting techniques and so on). I use paratexts in the way described by Umberto Eco to include "the whole series of messages that accompany and help explain a given text -; messages such as advertisements, jacket copy, titles, subtitles, introduction, reviews and so on" (*Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* pp. 144 – 45). Donald Keller goes on to say "In a television programme such as *Buffy*, paratext would include the intoned "In every generation [...]" that appeared before early episodes, "Previously on [...]" reminders of past episodes, commercials with previews of future episodes and so on." 'spirit Guides and Shadow Selves" in eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery, *Fighting the Forces*, p.176.
[5] See Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers" Abuse of Science*.
[6] Joss Whedon DVD commentary to "Restless" (4022).
[7] Roz Kaveney's "Introduction" to *Reading the Vampire Slayer* says *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has "a structural pattern as coherent as the statement, development, second statement, recapitulations and coda of the sonata form" (12).
[8] Quoted in ed. Dennis Walder, *Literature and the Modern World*, pp. 106 – 07.
[9] See section one, chapter 1 of my *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for a further discussion of this episode.
[10] Defamiliarisation as a literary concept outlined three *devices* which could be used to make the work unfamiliar. These were: (1) Canonisation of the junior branch - taking a "degraded" genre (ballad, detective story etc.) and working it in to a more elevated genre thereby upsetting expected formulations: defamiliarizing genre. *Buffy* constantly interjects generic instability not only by including degraded (or for that matter seemingly elevated) genres, but also by the surprising juxtapositions between and within scenes. (2) *Syuzhet* and *Fabula* - the relationship between plot and story. The story would be "a" then "b" then "c" then "d" then "e." The plot (the order in which the story is recounted in the text) might be "d" the "a" then "b" then "e" then "c": Defamiliarizing sequence and causality. This aspect of formalism developed in to the structural / narratological enterprises of Gennette who spent his life finding increasingly sophisticated ways of describing all the possible variations of plot structure (analepsis and prolepsis being the two most common - flash-back, flash-forward). (3) *Skaz* - the differing relationships between narrator and narrated. Famous examples of especially complex relationships are in *Wuthering Heights*, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Bleak House*. Not only is it whole books, however, but moments within books where the

narrative voice seems to be displaced or disrupt the narration up to that point. This happen in nearly all novels at some point, and in *Buffy* by the changing point of view from which a scene is shot.

[11] The immediate involutional thread to *Frankenstein* provides one extension of the show's hermeneutic possibilities, and the invocation of the debates on science that Shelley's novel and *Buffy* engage in extend this formal aspect to broader notion of cultural critique: the aesthetics of culture.

[12] Inter-texts are part of the process of involution (internal involution not being an "inter-text" as such but an intratext, if one accepts the entire corpus as a single entity comprised of many parts, like a many-chaptered, or a multi-volumed book). Though the terminology is different, Robert A Davis's article "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Pedagogy of Fear" makes the point with its usual elegance: "The intertextual echoes and allusions have also a serious 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."

[13] While inter-texts certainly do operate as involutional markers, they also have other functions. As Rhonda V Wilcox notes in her discussion of language on the show ("There Will Never Be a Very Special *Buffy*"), many of the references (in addition to involutional properties) operate as demarcations of cultural positioning, with the youthful characters creating a linguistic community from which the adult members are excluded by virtue of their failure to recognise the allusions to, for example, popular culture."

[14] Aimee Fifarek provides a probably unintentional account of how the enjoining spell is itself involutional. She writes, "for a brief time, the Slayer is no longer "one girl in all the world" – she is a network, a continuum of Slayers." The extent to which this foreshadows the unleashing of a network of Slayers in (7022) indicates its involutional power.

[15] Talking to Adam about their plan to lure Buffy into the Initiative's headquarters, Spike says "Alice heads back down the rabbit hole": the allusion to Carroll's 1865 text is clear, the involutional link to (4022) rather less so, perhaps.

[16] See chapter 4 of my *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vamopire Slayer* for a discussion of light and dark in *Buffy*.

[17] Joss Whedon DVD commentary for "Restless" (4022).

[18] The accidental or purely pragmatic nature of some of the aesthetic decisions is commented upon by Kaveney in relation to an aspect of involution: "[while] the show's use of foreshadowing and echo [...] have been largely opportunist improvisations [they] have emotional and metaphysical resonance." In "Introduction" to ed. Roz Kaveney, *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, p.33.