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Queer Eye of that Vampire Guy: Spike and the Aesthetics of Camp

[1] "I hate it when people talk about Buffy as being campy.... I hate camp. I don't enjoy dumb TV."^[1] So says Joss Whedon, equating *camp* with *dumb*. While a precise definition of camp is elusive, stupidity is decisively not camp. Fan response to Whedon's remark varies, as postings to the *Whedonesque* Web site attest. The March 29, 2005 postings range from "*Buffy the Series* simply isn't camp" (Caroline) to "There are plenty of other definitions of camp that are broad enough to include *Buffy* without denigrating it" (Biff Turkle).^[2] A thoughtful post by Chris inVirginia points readers to Susan Sontag's foundational "Notes on 'Camp,'" but several fans take a less critical approach, following in the virtual footsteps of charisma who writes, "I don't know what camp means but if Joss says it's not then I believe him." Well, we don't. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, though *smart* TV, can indeed be considered to have clear elements of camp—especially since camp is as much about the sensibility of the beholder as it is about the intention of the creator. Let's face it, either you find the series' basic premise—that a mini-skirt-clad, teenaged girl named Buffy fights vampires—camp or you don't. But Buffy herself is not our current concern since Blondie Bear, aka Spike, is the character around whom the elements of camp sensibility are most explicitly enacted.

[2] First, let's review. Other *Buffy* scholars have already ventured into the camp. Patricia Pender, for example, effectively outlines the politics of *Buffy* "under a rubric of feminist camp" (39). Though interesting, especially in terms of its analysis of gender performance, Pender's work focuses primarily on Xander. William Donaruma notably states that *Buffy* "moves past the clichés of camp" (5); Janet Halfyard discusses Sweet (from "Once More, with Feeling") as someone who plays "with ideas of camp in his performance" (par. 40); and Frances H. Early refers to *Buffy* as a "witty, wildly dark camp action and adventure series" (13). As far as we can determine, however, the only person

who even mentions Spike as camp is Milly Williamson in her book *The Lure of the Vampire*: “He looks and dresses like Billy Idol, and affects the same self-conscious irony of camp. He even speaks like Billy Idol in a put-on mock cockney accent, or ‘mockney’, that plays up to American perceptions of the English bad-boy. This image was deliberately cultivated by the series” (72). Affectation, self-conscious irony, playing up perceptions, deliberately cultivating an image—are these not sites in the camp ground?

[3] According to several theorists on camp, they are indeed.^[3] Thus, although Jonathan Dollimore highlights an inherent problem with navigating the camp ground—that “[t]he definition of camp is as elusive as the sensibility itself”—he also acknowledges a reason for the elusiveness: “there are different kinds of camp” (224). For the purposes of this paper, then, we follow Susan Sontag’s primary definition of camp as “a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization” (1).^[4] Our arguments on Spike will focus on his place in the stylization of *Buffy*—on his role as both self-conscious performer of and spectator on the aesthetics of the Buffyverse. In “Normal Again” (6017), when Spike calls Buffy “self-centred,” Xander responds, “Spike, we need muscle, not color commentary.” Yet the “color commentary” is exactly what is needed to balance the “muscle” of *Buffy*. Spike’s character and pointed commentary, moreover, arguably comprise what Jack Babuscio describes as the four features basic to camp: “irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour” (119).^[5] Notably, of all the regular characters in *Buffy*, Spike most clearly demonstrates these qualities.^[6]

[4] Spike, through his actions and appearance, ironizes and undermines the seriousness of the subject matter. As everyone else runs around trying to prevent various apocalypses and other threats to humanity from coming to fruition, Spike spends a large part of the series trying to get something or someone to take the chip out of his head. His quest (to get his bad back) parodies everyone else’s quest to defeat evil. Similarly, in the aesthetics of the Buffyverse, Spike’s styling also serves to parody through contrast. The carefully constructed *mise en scène* renders commonplace spaces—homes, dorm rooms, workplaces, classrooms—in precise detail to heighten the contrast with the dark lairs of demons and monsters. But Spike’s carefully decorated crypt parodies the lovingly rendered domestic spaces of the humans. In terms of personal styling, the other characters—especially the women—constantly change on the surface, while Spike remains the same: the iconic bad-ass vampire in black. Except, ironically, he isn’t very bad ass and under the surface his character has arguably the greatest arc of change of any in the series. Buffy, Giles and the other Scoobies, the Initiative, and the various Big Bads are all serious about their goals. Through it all, Spike sucks in his cheeks, pouts, and swirls his leather greatcoat, playing the camp vamp. But it is precisely his camp distractions that “[allow] us to witness ‘serious’ issues with temporary detachment, so that only later, after the event, are we struck by the emotional and moral implications of what we have almost passively absorbed. The ‘serious’ is, in fact, crucial to camp” (Babuscio 128). Camp decentres any attempt to be too serious or even sentimental about serious things, and it helps us see what might be overlooked at the centre of our attention. Because Spike distracts us from the spectacle of fights to save the world, he helps remind us that the series isn’t about monsters; it’s about honour and duty and sacrifice and friendship and other big moral compass issues. By openly mocking and undermining many of these values throughout much of *Buffy*, Spike provides the camp detachment that helps remind us of their centrality and importance.

[5] Historically camp has been associated with a gay sensibility (though there are a

number of famous exceptions such as Mae West),^[7] but it also can be read as a sensibility which queers the pitch in the more general sense of disrupting binaries. Vampires typically disrupt the binaries of alive/dead, human/animal, beauty/ugliness, and hero/villain but, unlike Angel, Spike also complicates the masculine/feminine and the heterosexual/homosexual binaries. Spike obsesses about styling (his own and everybody else's); décor (especially his crypt in Season Five); performance (as a neutered bad boy with a chip in his head, he's reduced to fighting on the wrong side); he plays with dolls (the Buffy mannequin and the Buffybot); and he competes with his own vamp grandfather, Angel, for prowess (both sexual and vampiric). He also flirts with flirtation in relation to Angel, as when he tells Willy he's taking Angel for "dinner and a movie" ("What's My Line, Part 2," 2010). Indeed, the rivalry between Spike and Angel plays out with enough sexual tension that it is noted by other characters: Buffy clearly sees the homoerotic potential of Spike's relationship with Angel when she tells Spike she's had enough "jealous vampire crap" and suggests they "rattle it out"; Spike assumes she means a fight, but she replies, "There could be oil of some kind involved" ("Chosen," 7022).^[8] So although camp is normally associated with gay culture and Spike is not gay, he nonetheless exists at the nexus of camp and queer. Perhaps Whedon's resistance to those who see *Buffy* as camp derives from his resistance to seeing Spike's essential queerness. However, since Spike's obsession with the masculinity of other men is written into the dialogue and is not just an interpretive spin Marsters puts on the character, it's hard to see how this reading can be avoided.

[6] Before discussing the specific ways in which Spike *enacts* camp, we must first establish how he fits into the primary categories or features of camp. One such feature is what Jack Babuscio refers to within his discussion of irony:^[9] "Camp is ironic insofar as an incongruous contrast can be drawn between an individual/thing and its context/association. The most common of incongruous contrasts is that of masculine/feminine" (119). As early as his first appearance in Sunnydale, Spike draws ironic attention to his masculinity: in "School Hard" (2003) about to do battle, Buffy asks, "Do we really need weapons for this?" and Spike responds, "I just like them. They make me feel all manly." He is simultaneously replicating and mocking conventions of masculinity: he enacts masculine power by demonstrating prowess with weapons, but saying he needs accessories to make him feel manly is not, in fact, manly—witness the almost cultish status given the dangerous sport of bare-knuckle fighting in *Fight Club* and in staged competitions. Certainly numerous *Buffy* scholars have noted the muddling of this particular binary and others in association with Spike. Lorna Jowett argues, "Spike blurs boundaries between good and bad, 'masculine' and 'feminine,' hetero- and homosexual, man and monster, comic and tragic, villain and hero" (158). Likewise, Jes Battis refers to "ambivalent characters like Spike, who straddle the line between protagonist/antagonist in ways that continually disrupt the audience's perceptions" (29-30). Spike, positioned as straddling these incongruous binaries, is "queer" according to Dee Amy-Chinn:

Both his gender and sexuality are fluid: neither is secure and both are based around excess. [...] Indeed, it is the confidence that he gains from his excessive masculinity that opens up the space in which he can enact his femininity. [...] Spike is an accomplished 'switch', able to take either the man's part or the woman's; he is comfortable being completely submissive or completely in control. Spike is both male *and* female, masculine *and* feminine, vanilla *and* erotically varied. (316)^[10]

As these excerpts illustrate, the masculine/feminine binary is only one of several associated with Spike. This multiplicity of binaries also fits Babuscio's understanding of camp, as he too cites various incongruous pairs including youth/(old)age, sacred/profane, and spirit/flesh (119). Spike, as vampire, is all of these. But the whole point of binary thinking is that only one term of the pairing should apply. Because Spike embodies so many incongruous pairings and, thereby, disrupts binaries, he is perfectly positioned to critique others through a camp sensibility. [\[11\]](#)

[7] Spike, like most things camp, is positioned on the margins. People who are successful in mainstream ways have no need of the defensive strategy of camp. As Mark Booth argues, "All camp people are to be found in the margins of society, and the richest vein of camp is generally to be found in the margins of the margins" (34). As with Spike's queering of the masculine/feminine and other binaries, various *Buffy* scholars have commented on Spike's marginality. For example, in their introduction to the *European Journal of Cultural Studies'* special issue on Spike, Dee Amy-Chinn and Milly Williamson discuss marginality in *Buffy* arguing that "Spike's character progression [...] comes to represent the show's key themes of angst and outsiderdom perhaps more fully than that of any other character" and that "it is Spike who expresses this marginality most completely, as even members of the Scooby Gang generally want nothing to do with him. He is, in effect, the outcast's outcast" (279-280). [\[12\]](#) Living on the margins, Spike is positioned as a spectator, able to comment on the inner circle—whether general society or the Scoobies themselves—from an adequately critical distance. In doing so, Spike enacts another aspect of Babuscio's camp theory: "Camp is subversive of commonly received standards: it challenges the status quo. [...] And while camp advocates the dissolution of hard and inflexible moral rules, it pleads, too, for a morality of sympathy" (120). Spike admits as much to Buffy when, in "Fool for Love" (5007), he describes his new-found freedom as a vampire:

Buffy: So you traded up on the food chain. Then what?

Spike: No, please! Don't make it sound like something you'd flip past on the Discovery Channel. Becoming a vampire is a profound and powerful experience. I could feel this new strength coursing through me. Getting killed made me feel alive for the very first time. I was through living by society's rules. Decided to make a few of my own.

Being undead, yet still a *being*, frees Spike, who was fearful and socially awkward as a living man, to be confident and assertive. The self-policing of class-bound morality is hardly going to seem relevant to a monster compelled to live off the blood of his erstwhile fellow human beings.

[8] Spike has the power of his monstrosity, but he can also pass as human whenever he likes; this is yet another way in which he disrupts a binary. In *Angel*, when he loses his embodiment, he is upset because he loses his monstrous power and is reduced to "Casper" status ("Just Rewards," A5002). We see his reliance on his status as monster in an exchange with Buffy from "Fool for Love" (5007). When asked by Buffy whether he was "born this big a pain in the ass," Spike responds, "What can I tell you baby? I've always been bad." As the flashbacks in "Fool for Love" make clear, however, this is far from the truth. Spike began as the naive, lovelorn, would-be poet William. *Buffy* scholars agree in their perception of Spike's earlier incarnation. William, in the words of Gregory Sakal, is "a

sensitive but weak-willed romantic: inept, insecure, and clumsy" (243). William's poetry, moreover, is "bloody awful"; the rhymes incite laughter. He is inept as a poet, inept as a lover in his pursuit of Cecily, inept in carrying on acceptable conversation in his circle of upper-class acquaintances. When asked his opinion on the recent disappearances in town, Spike says, "I prefer not to think of such dark, ugly business at all. That's what the police are for. I prefer placing my energies into creating things of beauty." This sets the stage for the ridicule William endures immediately thereafter when his poetry is read aloud:

Man: It suits him! I'd rather have a railroad spike through my head than listen to that awful stuff!

[...]

Spike: I—I know I'm a bad poet, but I'm a good man. All I ask is that—is that you try to see me—

Cecily: I do see you. That's the problem. You're nothing to me, William. You're beneath me.

I'm a good man, says William, contradicting what Spike will later tell Buffy when compensating for the mockery and humiliation he had once endured. However, as Amy-Chinn argues, "the very grounds on which Spike is mocked are those from which he is able to draw his strength" (314).^[13] We agree, and we would add that the grounds on which Spike, as William, had been mocked are the grounds from which Spike's camp sensibility grows. Philip Core discusses the necessity of vulnerability within camp: "Throughout history there has always been a significant minority whose unacceptable characteristics—talent, poverty, physical unconventionality, sexual anomaly—render them vulnerable to the world's brutal laughter. Hiding their mortification behind behaviour which is often as deviant as that which is concealed is the mainspring of camp" (9). Although Spike gains power after his transformation to a vampire, even as a monster he attracts mockery not just from his peers, such as Angel, but from mere mortals, such as the Scoobies, who should be his dinner.

[9] What must be remembered here is that Spike's underlying vulnerability never completely disappears. Thus, in contrast to Lorna Jowett who claims that "Spike is everything William was not" (158-59), we would argue that Spike remains essentially William—that he *performs* strength and violence in order to hide the mortification of his vulnerability. Even Jowett acknowledges that "Spike is sensitive not only in that he is easily hurt but also in the 'feminine' way of being attuned to situations, relationships, and underlying emotions, as his frequently perceptive comments demonstrate" (161) and, even more importantly in terms of our argument, that "Spike's body is also displayed in scenes of violence and torture, making him the feminized, passive victim as well as the erotic object of the gaze. Spike's body is vulnerable. [...] Spike's body is displayed to be looked at" (164). Ironically, the vulnerability the audience sees is the very thing that draws our gaze to his performance. When vulnerable, he demands our sympathy and, as such, enacts yet another inherent quality of camp, a plea "for a morality of sympathy" (Babuscio 120). Moreover, as Philip Core maintains, one of the "two things essential to camp" is "a secret within the personality which one ironically wishes to conceal and to exploit" (9). Spike's secret is that he has never been able to escape his sensitivity or vulnerability. "Fool for Love" shows this after Buffy, in a verbatim echo of Cecily's words, throws money to Spike saying, "You're beneath me." Spike, on the ground, sobs as he picks up the strewn bills. This moment so cuts him to the quick that his humour and irony desert him. No camp response is possible for a humiliation this deep. Moreover, in this same episode, Harmony says to Spike, "I knew

you'd take this personally. You are so sensitive." Not until Season Seven's "Lies My Parents Told Me" (7017) do we learn that what Spike may fear is the truth: having sired his own mother, Spike explains to her, "Whatever I was, that's not who I am anymore" only to be told, "Darling, it's who you'll always be. A limp, sentimental fool."^[14] His mother's choice of words is a pointed attack on Spike's masculinity—indeed, to a modern-day audience, "limp" invokes images of the stereotypical limp-wristed figure of gay camp.

[10] It is precisely because he knows he is sentimental and he knows how vulnerable that characteristic makes him that he generally performs the cynical, ironic, world-weary clown.^[15] Indeed, Spike makes direct reference to his vulnerability through a type of humour that mocks the very things for which William once was mocked. Compare, for example, his penchant for rhyming. In "Fool for Love," William asks, "What's another word for 'gleaming'? It's a perfectly perfect word as many words go, but the bother is nothing rhymes, you see." The word he chooses, of course, is "effulgent" (a rhyme and descriptor for his heart, which has "grown a bulge in it"). Spike asks a similar question in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (2016):

Spike: Why don't you rip her [Buffy's] lungs out? That might make an impression.
 Angelus: Lacks poetry.
 Spike: It doesn't have to. What rhymes with lungs?

His innocent (albeit affected) search for a rhyme as William in "Fool for Love" becomes a cynical, violent point of humour for Spike in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered." Similarly, in "What's My Line, Part 2," Spike uses humour that plays on past vulnerability when he talks to Willy the bartender about Angel:

Spike: Talk and I'll have your guts for garters.
 Willy: What are you gonna do with him anyway?
 Spike: I'm thinking maybe dinner and a movie. I don't want to rush into anything. I've been hurt, you know.

The point here is that he *has* been hurt. But he has also learned a strategy to protect himself—he has learned to *perform*, to camp it up. By choosing to mock his own emotional vulnerabilities Spike can try to control the amount these same vulnerabilities can be used to hurt him.

[11] Another technique Spike adopts as a form of protection is self-mocking sarcastic wit. Richard Dyer discusses the wit of camp as "a form of self-defence" (110). Spike, in mocking his own aesthetics, fends off the possibility of others mocking his aesthetic choices. In "Shadow" (5008) when Riley drags Spike out of Buffy's room, through the hall, and down the stairs, Spike warns him, "Hey! Watch it! Easy. You're bruising the leather." He's protective of the clothing that helps form his tough-boy image. In regard to having his chip removed in "Primeval" (4021), Spike asks Adam to "mind the hairline. I don't fancy fussing with a comb-over once I resume my killing ways." (No, a comb-over just wouldn't have the same threatening effect as his slick platinum coif.) In "Blood Ties" (5013) when Buffy pulls the lid of a stone coffin right out from under him, he holds up his hands, exposing his nails, and warns, "Careful, these are wet!" Even moments before his final sacrifice in "Chosen" (7022), Spike critiques his appearance while sporting a "fabulous accessory" and says, "I look like Elizabeth Taylor" (surely an icon of camp). Each of these

sarcastic comments represents a moment of camp humour that works as self-defense. Spike has crafted an image for himself of the bad-ass vampire—complete with leather coat, platinum hair, and black nails. He enacts what Mark Booth calls “the camp preoccupation with toilette” (79). But his humour about these aspects of his image comes in the form of a concern that the image is fragile; it comprises a series of acquired surface characteristics, not essential character. If he draws attention to his own aesthetics, he circumvents others doing it for him or from noticing that these are only surface attributes. As Booth contends, “Camp people’s knowledge of their own foibles forms a line of defence: others cannot call them anything which they have not called themselves” (95). As to the reference to Elizabeth Taylor, certainly the writers could have had Spike refer to the amulet as looking like a rap or hip hop star’s bling, but this would not have the same camp appeal.

[12] Aware (and perhaps fearful) of his vulnerability, Spike obsessively attempts to hide behind a testosterone-charged masculinity, composed of swagger, black leather, and violence, but he cannot camouflage his own nature even to himself. When the clichés turn off, he worries about whether fluorescent lights “make me look dead” (“Doublemeat Palace,” 6012) and discusses the joys of onion blossoms with Andrew (“Empty Places,” 7019). His threat to “bite” Andrew if the latter tells anyone about the conversation is highly ambiguous given how Andrew feels about Spike.^[16] Even his name, “Spike,” has ambiguous origins given its association with William (“I’d rather have a railroad spike through my head than listen to that awful stuff!” [“Fool for Love,” 5007]) and with his vampiric self (“Earned his nickname by torturing his victims with railroad spikes” [“School Hard,” 2003]). Of course, a further irony is always present in Spike’s styling given that his signature black leather coat, key to his self-styled masculinity, is really a woman’s coat (having belonged to the slayer Nikki Wood).^[17] As Rhonda Wilcox has argued in regard to Spike, “Both the name and the coat are part of his performance of himself, and here, performance represents choice” (59). Spike chooses to remodel himself because he is more comfortable with a performance of masculinity than he is with his emotional and hurt self.

[13] Whereas William is unable to perform as either poet or lover, Spike is able to perform as theatrical even when not able to bite.^[18] Camp, as Babuscio notes, “aims to transform the ordinary into something more spectacular. In terms of style, it signifies performance rather than existence” (122). Spike’s awareness of performance is highlighted in two ways: his critique of performance and his own performance as performer, or *meta-performance*. Take Spike’s conversation with Willow in “The Initiative” (4007) as an example. In this scene, having attempted and failed to bite Willow, Spike faces the vampire’s version of impotency. Unable to ‘perform,’ he nonetheless tries to convince Willow that she’s bitable by reminding her of an earlier interaction between them.

Spike: You had on that fuzzy pink number with the lilac underneath.
 Willow: I never would have guessed. You played the blood-lust kinda cool.
 Spike: Mmm. I hate being obvious. All fang-y and “Rrrr!” Takes the mystery out.

Here, Spike acknowledges that he is aware of playing the vampire. He is proud that his performance (prior to his impotency) was more subtle than that of the average vampire—Spike has finesse and mystery where others are obvious.

[14] His self-awareness as performer is likewise evident in the meta-performances of “Restless” (4022) and “Storyteller” (7016). In “Restless,” Giles dreams that Spike tells him,

"I've hired myself out as an attraction." Spike then continues to strike a pose as onlookers gasp, and photographers capture his performed menacing image. Here he forgoes finesse and opts for transparent clichés for the public; this performance is for cash, not reputation. Giles' dream only reconfirms Spike's campiness by demonstrating that even within the show's closed world another character is aware of Spike's parodic, performative, vampire styling. In "Storyteller," Spike's initial anger at Andrew's incessant videography is misleading:

Spike: I thought I told you to piss off with this bloody camera, yet here you are again with that thing in my face. Would you sod off before I rip your throat out and eat—

Andrew: Okay, Spike. The light was kind of behind you.

Spike: (He looks around.) Oh, right. Uh, what? Is this better then? I thought I told you to piss off with this bloody camera, yet here you are again with that thing in my face. Would you sod off—

As these scenes make clear, Spike is aware of both his performance and his audience. Notably, during his musical performance of "Rest in Peace" in "Once More, with Feeling" (6007), Spike is the only character to sing in front of a seated audience—the mourners at a funeral, seated in rows, are reminiscent of a theatre audience.^[19] He literally chews up the scenery, knocking over chairs and frightening the mourners—definitely indulging in a Brechtian alienation effect. As spectators, we the audience see James Marsters performing Spike who, in turn, performs the menacing vampire. We are not so much being invited to suspend our disbelief as we are being encouraged to enjoy our disbelief—it's all fantasy and nonsense, but we're all in the game together. Pamela Robertson argues, "Like masquerade, the activity of producing camp can be located at both the level of performance and at the level of spectatorship—and the line between the two activities will not always be clear" (278). Spike notably references his own spectatorship in a conversation with Angel in "A Hole in the World" (A5015):

Spike: Hey, after we save Fred, we should hit the West End. Take in a show.

Angel: I've never seen *Les Mis*.

Spike: Trust me. Halfway through the first act, you'll be drinking humans again.

Spike understands that an audience won't tolerate being bored. He's willing to go from subtle vampire to scenery-chewing rocker to demonstrate his range and keep his audience of Scoobies happy. He is continually both performer and spectator, as his various self-conscious performances demonstrate.

[15] As early as "Lie to Me" (2007), Spike's performance is set up against a more clichéd performance of vampire aesthetics and lore. In this episode a group of young people, led by Billy Fordham (aka Ford), hope to be turned into vampires. To them vampires, as Chantarelle calls them, are "the lonely ones" or "they who walk with the night," and the vampire wannabes are "true believers." But their efforts to be like their "exalted" heroes are performances of cliché. Wannabe "Marvin," who has changed his name to the more exotic "Diego,"^[20] dresses in what appears to be a blue lamé magician's cape and ruffled white shirt. To him, this represents proper vampiric attire. At one point Ford mouths

the words to Jack Palance's not-notable *Dracula* along with a clip from the film playing on a TV in the background. These wannabes are *playing* at being vampires. When Ford goes to Spike in order to offer him a trade (Buffy for siring), he expects, *demand*s even, that Spike *be* the clichéd vampire:

Ford: I've got something to offer you. I-I'm pretty sure this is the part where you take out a watch and say I've got thirty seconds to convince you not to kill me? It's traditional.

Spike: Well, I don't go much for tradition.

[...]

Ford: Oh, c'mon! Say it! It's no fun if you don't say it.

Spike: What? Oh. [Spike rolls his eyes and bobs his head.] You've got thirty seconds to convince me not to kill you.

Ford: Yes! See, this is the best! I wanna be like you. A vampire.

But Spike's performance here is little more than mimicry—obviously fake, especially with the bobbing head and the drizzingly bored voice. What Ford thinks of as “the best” is not threatening in any way whatsoever. When Buffy later confronts Ford and the wannabes, she refers to their establishment as the “all-you-can-eat moron bar.” She makes reference to their performance and aesthetics in an exchange with Diego:

Diego: She's an unbeliever. She taints us.

Buffy: I am trying to save you! You are playing in some serious traffic here! Do you understand that? You're going to die! And the only hope you have of surviving this is to get out of this pit right now, and, my God, could you have a dorkier outfit?

Buffy can see the artifice and pretension in their aesthetics, where they cannot. The point is further underscored by the contrast between the vampire costume inspired by Las Vegas and the wannabe who arrives dressed as an Angel clone. Angel is visibly disconcerted to see his look interpreted as obvious undead attire. In this instance Angel's self-imposed dress code—an attempt to appear ‘normal’—is revealed to be such a narrow aesthetic of self-presentation that it actually demonstrates the artifice and pretension of camp. As Pamela Robertson explains, “camp is a reading/viewing practice which, by definition, is not available to all readers; for there to be a genuinely camp spectator, there must be another hypothetical spectator who views the object ‘normally’” (278). The wannabes view even the world they imitate as being normal; unlike Spike, they have no sense of irony, no style, no understanding of humour or artifice—in short, they've never been to camp.

[16] Spike's role as the spectator and performer who does have a camp sensibility is predominantly evident in the sarcastic humour he brings to his focus on the aesthetics of others. Spike's humour is often cruel—*biting* we could say—and this too is an inherent quality of camp: “A lot of camping is extremely hostile; it is almost always sarcastic. But its intent is humorous as well” (Newton 107). Similarly, according to Babuscio, the chief form of camp humour is “bitter-wit, which expresses an underlying hostility and fear” (126). In Spike's case, this type of hostile humour is often directed at enemies, perhaps as a defence mechanism based both in anger and fear. A prime example of this is his response to Glory's “I am a god.” “The god of what,” Spike asks, “bad home perms?” (“Intervention,” 5018). Glory is powerful—arguably the most powerful “big bad” yet—but Spike cuts her down with a

comment on her big hair. Given Spike's concern for his own hair, it's not surprising that hair would be point of his contention and sarcasm on more than one occasion. In a conversation with Harmony, Spike describes what he dislikes about Buffy's aesthetics: "That nasty little face, that shampoo-commercial hair" ("Out of My Mind," 5004). He even has the Buffybot programmed to say, "Angel's lame. His hair grows straight up, and he's bloody stupid" ("Intervention," 5018). He mocks in others the very thing about which he himself has been (and could again be) mocked.^[21] And who could forget his comedic mocking of Angel in "In the Dark" (A1003) when, on a rooftop looking down at Angel and a young woman (Rachel), Spike invents dialogue for the interaction he watches; pretending to speak for Angel, Spike pleads, "No, not the hair! Never the hair! [...] Evil's still afoot! And I'm almost out of that nancy-boy hair-gel that I like so much. Quickly, to the Angel-mobile, away!" Angel becomes a clichéd superhero of the original *Batman* type in this camped-up impersonation. Gods, superheroes, and vampires should not be concerned with their hair—but in *Buffy* they are, and Spike is the one to point out the artifice of these aesthetic details while sporting the most artificial looking hair of all.

[17] Another aspect of Spike's biting humour in relation to his critique of aesthetics involves a mocking of masculinity in relation to style. As Newton points out, "camp is style. Importance tends to shift from what a thing *is* to how it *looks*, from *what* is done to *how* it is done" (104). Spike uses this technique of camp to distract his audience from his target's moral character or actions; focus shifts to the more trivial, and much easier to insult, *style* of his target. For example, Spike mocks Angel's masculinity by comparing him to an urban cowboy: "All hat and no cattle" ("I Only Have Eyes for You," 2019). Angel, according to Spike, "wears lifts" ("Chosen," 7022). He is not, in other words, as tall, (dark or handsome) as he appears.^[22] Spike is always vulnerable in his own masculinity, thus his humour is most defensive in response to his male rivals. He particularly focuses his rivalry on the older and more powerful Angel, but he also verbally attacks Riley, his enemy and Buffy's lover, whom he also refers to as "cowboy" ("Buffy vs. Dracula," 5001) and whom he dismisses as "crew cut" ("As You Were," 6014). Giles, who is more educated than Spike, likewise becomes the butt of Spike's camp touch in "The I in Team" (4013):

Spike: Wipe your feet when you enter a person's home.

Giles: Ah, yes, careless of me. Tracking mud all over your, uh... mud.

Spike: I'll admit it's a bit of a fixer-upper. Needs a woman's touch. Care to have a crack at it?

The handsome vampire, the rugged government operative, the book-smart yet sensitive librarian—their artifice, their cliché, is highlighted by Spike's camp commentary. In pointing up the artifice of these characters, Spike points up the fictionality of the show and, thereby, enacts yet another aspect of camp: "Camp, by drawing attention to the artifices employed by artists, can constantly remind us that what we are seeing is only a view of life. This doesn't stop us enjoying it, but it does stop us believing what we are shown too readily" (Dyer 115). The revelatory effect of Spike's camp remarks can be seen as an advantage for a show that represents a level of violence most people have no desire to *believe* in.

[18] "Tabula Rasa" (6008) demonstrates that Spike is hardwired to critique masculinity and, in doing so, to point up performance or artifice; that is, even as "Randy"—dressed in a Sherlock Holmes-style hat and suit, unaware of his vampire status—he insults Giles' "nancy

boy accent" (only to be reminded by Giles that he too is a member of the "nancy tribe"). Transformed when sired by Dru, Spike reinvents his masculinity, changing his name, his accent, his style—but he continually needs to reaffirm this masculinity to others. Thus in a "Fool for Love" (5007) flashback when Angelus complains about Spike's attention grabbing violence and insists on the need for finesse, Spike replies, "Bollocks! That's stuff for the frilly cuffs and collars crowd. I'll take a good brawl any day." He must make a claim for brawls and masculinity, but his femininity and (albeit metaphorical) frilly cuffs never vanish. Indeed, as he increasingly fetishizes his own vamp style (the coat, the hair, the verbal wit), he becomes less and less masculine because he is so obviously trying too hard. He overcompensates through his rivalry and verbal sparring with Angel and the other men; however, the more he critiques masculine performance in others, the more the audience is aware of Spike's own performance of masculinity.

[19] Spike also acts as camp critic on *Buffy* through his remarks on the aesthetics of interior design and the etiquette of hospitality. Spike's interest in these subjects is camp because he parodies domesticity and middle class aspirations. Thus, when Angel, Spike, and Dru are nest-hunting, [23] Angel's choice garners this response from Spike: "It's paradise. Big windows, lovely gardens. It'll be perfect when we want the sunlight to kill us" ("I Only Have Eyes for You," 2019). Until the last phrase, his response is that of the happy suburban home buyer talking to his real estate agent or partner. Spike's expressions here are funny precisely because we have almost heard them before. In "Checkpoint" (5012) when Buffy asks Spike to look after Dawn and Joyce in his crypt, he plays the perfect hostess, saying, "Ladies, come on in. There's plenty of blood in the fridge." Again, the clichéd expression of hospitality is subverted, in this case by the substitution of an unexpected offering. These subversions are further examples of the "incongruous juxtapositions" on which, according to Esther Newton, camp depends (103). Spike takes on (and simultaneously subverts) the stereotypical female role of the overly house-proud woman when he argues that Angelus shouldn't kill Giles in the nest: "I don't fancy spending the next month getting librarian out of the carpet" ("Becoming, Part 2," 2022). Even Martha Stewart wouldn't be able to help him with that stain.

[20] Susan Sontag cites "all elements of visual décor" as associated with camp taste (5), and Spike certainly pays attention to his crypt's décor throughout the series. In Seasons Five and Six, where Spike has his own crypt, he takes pride in his "sweet little set-up" and "decent digs" ("Crush," 5014) and, long after said digs have been destroyed, he looks back on them as possibly "posh" ("Potential," 7012). He brags to Harmony about getting "a brand-new telly in my crypt" ("Real Me," 5002) and, since he hasn't cash for shopping, he takes a cart around the dump to scavenge home décor along with parts for his Buffy mannequin ("The Replacement," 5003). The décor of Spike's crypt is largely composed of the memorial artifacts one might expect: statues and wall reliefs of puto, urns, stone benches and coffins, and a partially draped statue of a woman. But Spike has added an armchair (which appears nearly new), a leather ottoman, a side table, his television, and multiple trios and sestets of matching candles (surely unnecessary if he has electricity for his television and fridge). He has sex with the Buffybot on a fabulous duvet that complements his cream, gold, brown, and grey colour scheme ("Intervention," 5018). For comparison, we have the vamp nest in "Crush" (5014), which Buffy treats as fairly typical, and which is full of broken junk—the sofa has stuffing coming out everywhere and the vamps appear to be cooking Jiffy Pop in the middle of the room. The vamp nest in "Into the Woods" (5010) is similarly decrepit with garbage all over the floor, an unusable bathtub (we can surmise this since the hot water tank is parked in it), and torn furniture and window

coverings. Spike is definitely house proud in relation to the other vampires we see in their home environments.

[21] Spike also feels some obligation to rise above his class; as he tells the Potentials, "As a group we're not known for our tasteful décor" ("Potential," 7012). Similarly, he finds Xander's basement beneath him; when Anya asks what he's looking for in a home, he replies, "I don't know. Maybe a crypt. Some place, you know, dark and dank, but not as dark and dank as this" ("New Man," 4012). When questioned by Riley, Spike even mocks Dracula's aesthetic pretensions: "But you're not gonna catch him napping in a crypt. No, the count has to have his luxury estate and his bug-eaters and his special dirt, doesn't he" ("Buffy vs. Dracula," 5001). The humour of Spike's comments on decorating and dwellings is entertaining, but his remarks also highlight the essential inconsequentiality of worrying about whether your crypt is up to the neighbourhood standards. As Dyer points out, camp "is a way of prising the form of something away from its content, of revelling in the style while dismissing the content as trivial" (113). Spike has no money and few ways to get any. He is a stylish man, without the means to express that style as he might wish. For Spike, camp can also conceal vulnerabilities of class and status because it allows for the replacement of the authority of taste as style with the bravado of salvage as style. Spike's concerns with décor highlight the artifice of consumption, never more so than when he tells Buffy, in response to a compliment on his place, "Well, I ate a decorator once. Maybe something stuck" ("Dead Things," 6013).

[22] In Season Five of *Angel*, Spike certainly maintains his sarcastic wit and verbal sparring with Angel, but he does not enact camp to the same extent as he does on *Buffy*. Occasionally he critiques décor, such as his comment to Angel in "Just Rewards" (A5002), "I can see why heroes like you get rewarded with shiny new glass and chrome." Similarly, in "Soul Purpose" (A5010), having removed a Selminth parasite from Angel's chest and thrown it against the wall, Spike says, "Well, that'll be a bitch of a cleanup." He refers to Illyria's outfit as "spiffy new threads" and calls her "the leather queen" ("Shells," A5016). But these comments—those that seem flashbacks to his camp sensibility on *Buffy*—are fewer and farther between. He has already earned his hero status and perhaps does not need to mock himself or others as much as was once required. Spike's final performance in the last episode of *Angel* comes in the form of a poetry reading—an act that arguably heals the vulnerability left from his days as William. He reads aloud to a tough audience his poem to Cecily: "...My heart expands, / 'tis grown a bulge in it, / inspired by your beauty / effulgent." The audience applauds, and one member even gives him a standing ovation. By the end of *Angel*, Spike's past and his present are finally reconciled.

[23] Camp need not be feared or viewed as reductive. It is precisely the quality of camp in the series that creates the ironic sensibility that allows *Buffy* to be simultaneously comic, tragic, romantic, and cynical. Camp helps make the relentless violence of the show palatable for many viewers who would not find it tolerable without the layers of irony, artifice, theatricality, and wit. We can extrapolate from much of the writing (both academic and fan) about *Buffy* that the show has many admirers who have no interest in the straight-up violence of horror, vampire, or monster movies. The fact that *Buffy* plays so thought-provokingly with all those binaries our culture holds dear makes the series amusing and fun, not shocking and nightmare-inducing. No one who survived high school is surprised to hear of one situated directly on a hell mouth (aren't they all?) or that dating outside your species might be a good idea (or even inevitable). The series is more fun than fearful, and Spike's camp queer eye, which continuously subverts our expectations, is part of what makes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* smart television. [\[24\]](#)

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[1] See "The Wit and Wisdom of Joss Whedon" at http://www.slayage.tv/pages/Wit_Wisdom_Joss_Whedon.pdf.

[2] See the *Whedonesque* Web site page <http://whedonesque.com/comments/6402> (March 29-31, 2005). For another *Whedonesque* discussion of camp, see <http://whedonesque.com/comments/5569> (December 14-15, 2004).

[3] We will discuss several theorists throughout the paper, but we point the reader in particular to Fabio Cleto's anthology of camp theory. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

[4] References to Susan Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'" are cited by "Note" number.

[5] Esther Newton similarly argues, "It is possible to discern strong themes in any particular campy thing or event. The three that seemed most recurrent and characteristic to me were *incongruity*, *theatricality*, and *humor*. All three are intimately related to the homosexual situation and strategy. Incongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style, and humor its strategy" (Newton 103).

[6] Babuscio's four features of camp ("irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour") are also strong features of the series as a whole. The series itself demonstrates a camp sensibility in addition to the one embodied by the particular character of Spike.

[7] See various essays in Fabio Cleto's *Camp* anthology, especially Jonathan Dollimore's "Post/Modern: On the Gay Sensibility, or the Pervert's Revenge on Authenticity" (221-236) and Pamela Robertson's "Mae West's Maids: Race, 'Authenticity', and the Discourse of Camp" (393-408).

[8] "Spangel" fan fic also draws on the sexual tension evident between Spike and Angel.

[9] Esther Newton refers to a similar phenomenon within a discussion of "incongruity."

[10] See also Arwen Spicer: "Though Spike initially appears as a strongly masculine

character, I argue that he crosses the boundaries of conventional gender identifications, enacting a hybridized identity that is simultaneously coded masculine and feminine" (par. 1). Dee Amy-Chinn and Milly Williamson note, "Spike joins *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in Season 2 with a swagger and a vulnerability which alludes to the many oppositions that he will come to unsettle" (275). This point is also notable in relation to our argument on vulnerability later in the paper.

[11] Dee Amy-Chinn and Milly Williamson make a similar point about Spike and the disruption of binaries: "[T]he key to the appeal of the 'Buffyverse' is the way in which it invites the notion that binary ways of thinking are redundant. The possibilities offered by challenging binary constructions of gender are articulated most completely through the body of Spike" (281).

[12] Milly Williamson likewise notes "Spike is a permanent and central character in *BtVS*, but one who is portrayed in terms of extreme marginality" ("Spike, Sex and Subtext" 292).

[13] Rhonda Wilcox makes a similar statement: "Literally strangled by his sire's sire Angelus, he chokes out, 'It's Spike now. You'd do well to remember it, mate.' Spike is the name of his own choosing: it is phallic, it is violent, and it is clearly embedded in response to the mockery of the shy young poet" (59). Gregory Sakal, likewise, argues, "When Drusilla makes him a vampire, he renames himself 'Spike,' and becomes a reckless adventurer whose violence seems less informed by sheer malice and revenge (as in the case of Angelus), than by a need to rebel against his weak and foppish human counterpart" (243).

[14] Likewise, in the *Angel* flashback episode "Darla" (A2007), Dru contemplates siring "the wisest and bravest knight in all the land." But when, immediately thereafter, William bumps into the group, Darla says, "Or you could just take the first drooling idiot that comes along."

[15] Michele Boyette refers to Spike as having "comic buffoon status" and argues that his "only weapon is his mouth" (par. 12).

[16] See, for example, "Entropy" (6018) where Andrew sees Spike having sex with Anya: "He is so cool... And, I mean, the girl's hot too."

[17] The series' fetishizing of the coat helps mask the violence of its acquisition, thus demonstrating a useful aspect of camp sensibility. That is, the coat is seen primarily as a key component of Spike's style, not as a trophy from a kill.

[18] Milly Williamson relates Spike's inability to bite to his marginal status: "Not good enough to be loved by Buffy and, because of his chip, not bad enough to act vampirically, Spike inhabits an excruciatingly liminal self" ("Spike, Sex and Subtext" 292).

[19] Although we do not see the mourners seated (given that we see them only at the moment of Spike's disruption), they would nonetheless represent an audience from Spike's point of view. In regard to audience, Anya makes reference to feeling "like we were being watched, like a wall was missing from our apartment..."; however, the viewer does not see the audience (or potential audience) during her song with Xander.

[20] This hardly elicits the same effect as the change from "William" to "Spike."

[21] Several characters mock Spike's hair through synecdoche—Xander calls him "bleach boy" ("Crush," 5014), and "Captain Peroxide" ("Smashed," 6009). Buffy refers to him as "peroxidized pest" ("Out of My Mind," 5004). Angel also calls him "Captain Peroxide" ("Chosen," 7022) and refers to his hair colour as "radioactive" ("Hell Bound," A5004). When Glory first sees Spike she asks, "What the hell is that, and why is his hair that color?" ("Intervention," 5018). Harmony affectionately mocks his hair colour by referring to Spike as "Blondie Bear" and "my platinum baby" ("The Harsh Light of Day," 4003). Even Illyria calls him "the white-haired one" ("Timebomb," A5019).

[22] Spike calls Angel "tall, dark and forehead" in "Chosen" (7022).

[23] The *menage à trois* is, of course, another binary disruptor.

[24] We would like to thank Kathryn Barnwell and Nancy Bjerring for their generosity in taking time to read and respond to an earlier version of this paper.

The Wit and Wisdom of Joss Whedon

"I have control over all the shows. I'm responsible for all the shows. That means that I break the stories. I often come up with the ideas and I certainly break the stories with the writers so that we all know what's going to happen. [. . .] The good thing is that I'm surrounded by people who are much smarter than I am. So gradually I have been able to let certain things take care of themselves, because my crew, my writers, my post-production crew, everybody is so competent, that I don't have to run around quite as much as I used to." (ET Online)

"Ultimately you want to move on from [TV]. You just want to say, 'Okay, now I want to do something where I have the time to create everything that's in the frame. Everything.' And that's sort of where I'm starting to be. I'm getting to the point now where I'm like, 'Okay, I've told a lot of stories. I've churned it out.' I just feel like I want to step back and do something where I can't use the excuse of 'I only had a week.'" (*Watcher's Guide* Interview, Vol. 2)

[*Buffy* is] "a show by losers for losers" (quoted at <http://www.crosswinds.net/~tlbin/cast/joss.html>).

"As far as I am concerned, the first episode of *Buffy* was the beginning of my career. It was the first time I told a story from start to finish the way I wanted." (*Entertainment Weekly*, Jacobs Interview)

"I think everybody who makes movies should be forced to do television. . . . Because you have to finish. You have to get it done, and there are a lot of decisions made just for the sake of making decisions. You do something because it's efficient and because it gets the story told and it connects to the audience." (*The Watcher's Guide*, Vol. 2)

"The two things that matter the most to me: emotional resonance and rocket launchers. *Party of Five*, a brilliant show, and often made me cry uncontrollably, suffered ultimately from a lack of rocket launchers." (DVD Commentary for "Innocence")

"I think my father's best work was probably done at our dinner table. . . . It was great to live around a writer, and my mother also wrote in her spare time, so the sound of typewriters was probably the most comforting sound in the world to me. I loved that. And while I really enjoyed all of the funny things my dad was working on, it was really just being around someone who was that funny. And all of his friends were comedy writers. So the house was constantly filled with these very sweet, erudite, intelligent guys just trying to crack jokes—my father's friends, my mother's friends, teachers, drama people. It just had a great air to it, and what

you wanted to do is to go into that room and make those guys laugh.”
(Longworth)

“I’m a very hard-line, angry atheist. . . . Yet I am fascinated by the concept of devotion.” (Nussbaum, “Must See Metaphysics”)

“It’s about the show, and I feel the same way about it. I get the same way. It’s not like being a rock star. It doesn’t feel like they’re reacting to me. It’s really sweet when people react like that, and I love the praise, but to me, what they’re getting emotional about is the show. And that’s the best feeling in the world. There’s nothing creepy about it. I feel like there’s a religion in narrative, and I feel the same way they do. I feel like we’re both paying homage to something else; they’re not paying homage to me.” (*Onion*)

“Ultimately, stories come from violence, they come from sex. They come from death. They come from the dark places that everybody has to go to. . . . If you raise a kid to think everything is sunshine and flowers, they’re going to get into the real world and die. . . . That’s the reason fairy tales are so creepy, because we need to encapsulate these things, to inoculate ourselves against them, so that when we’re confronted by the genuine horror that is day-to-day life we don’t go insane.” (Longworth)

“I’m sure a lot of writers want to direct because they’re bitter, which is not a reason to direct. I want to speak visually, and writing is just a way of communicating visually. That’s what it’s all about. But nobody would even consider me to direct. So I said, ‘I’ll create a television show, and I’ll use it as a film school, and I’ll teach myself to direct on TV.’” (*Onion*)

“I hate it when people talk about *Buffy* as being campy . . . I hate camp. I don’t enjoy dumb TV. I believe Aaron Spelling has single-handedly lowered SAT scores.” (Nussbaum, “Must See Metaphysics”)

“Don’t give people what they want, give them what they need. What they want is for Sam and Diane to get together. Don’t give it to them. Trust me. . . . People want the easy path, a happy resolution, but in the end, they’re more interested in . . . No one’s going to go see the story of Othello going to get a peaceful divorce. People want the tragedy. They need things to go wrong, they need the tension. In my characters there’s a core of trust and love that I’m very committed to. These guys would die for each other, and it’s very beautiful. But at the same time, you can’t keep that safety. Things have to go wrong, bad things have to happen.” (*Onion*)

“It’s better to be a spy in the house of love, you know? . . . If I made ‘*Buffy the Lesbian Separatist*,’ a series of lectures on PBS on why there should be feminism, no one would be coming to the party, and it would be boring. The idea of changing culture is important to me, and it can only be done in a popular medium.” (Nussbaum, “Must See Metaphysics”)

"I designed the show to create that strong reaction. I designed *Buffy* to be an icon, to be an emotional experience, to be loved in a way that other shows can't be loved. Because it's about adolescence, which is the most important thing people go through in their development, becoming an adult. And it mythologizes it in such a way, such a romantic way—it basically says, 'Everybody who made it through adolescence is a hero.' And I think that's very personal, that people get something from that that's very real. And I don't think I could be more pompous. But I mean every word of it. I wanted her to be a cultural phenomenon. I wanted there to be dolls, Barbie with kung-fu grip. I wanted people to embrace it in a way that exists beyond, 'Oh, that was a wonderful show about lawyers, let's have dinner.' I wanted people to internalize it, and make up fantasies where they were in the story, to take it home with them, for it to exist beyond the TV show. And we've done exactly that. (*Onion*)

"I think it's always important for academics to study popular culture, even if the thing they are studying is idiotic. If it's successful or made a dent in culture, then it is worthy of study to find out why.

'Buffy,' on the other hand is, I hope, not idiotic. We think very carefully about what we're trying to say emotionally, politically, and even philosophically while we're writing it. The process of breaking a story involves the writers and myself, so a lot of different influences, prejudices, and ideas get rolled up into it. So it really is, apart from being a big pop culture phenom, something that is deeply layered textually episode by episode. I do believe that there is plenty to study and there are plenty of things going on in it, as there are in me that I am completely unaware of. People used to laugh that academics would study Disney movies. There's nothing more important for academics to study, because they shape the minds of our children possibly more than any single thing. So, like that, I think 'Buffy' should be analyzed, broken down, and possibly banned." ("10 Questions for Joss Whedon")

"Because when a joke works, I know it. I can hear the audience laugh, and I still watch the show with a bunch of people. I still watch it with people who haven't worked on it, so I can see when they laugh, and when they get scared, and when they think it's ridiculous, and when they cry, and all that good stuff. And that's the fun. So it's very hard for me *not* to make a joke, because I know that a laugh is a surefire reaction, whereas if you're playing something more dramatic, I don't know if they liked it till it's over because they'll just sit there, and that's very nerve racking." (Longworth)

"That to me is the essence of what I'm interested in. It's something you see in the Hong Kong films that [Quentin] Tarantino has followed. You don't *know* what kind of scene you're in. Something can be very funny and then suddenly very terrifying—very exciting, and suddenly very ridiculous. I think that's what life is like, that's what interests me. But ultimately, while humor is definitely the voice that I'm the most comfortable with, drama is the structure that will always attract me." (Longworth)

"I always wrote things. Stories, poems, songs, plays, comic books. Whatever came to mind. And I always sort of vaguely associated writing with my life, in that I thought I could make movies. I always assumed making them meant writing them, but I never really thought about that. I thought about directing, and when we

studied film we really didn't study writing at all. I was doing various things, but I wasn't doing any heavy writing and I never studied at all. I never thought of myself as definitely becoming a writer. I tried to write several novels as a kid, and I'd usually get to page twelve." (Longworth)

"I mean, I knew I wanted to do something that wasn't a real job, because I just can't do it. I'm pathetic that way. I knew I wanted to be an artist. I loved drawing, I loved singing, I loved acting, I love every kind of art that there is. So I had never really narrowed it down, and it wasn't like I was slaving away. I did write a couple of screenplays when I was a kid, but I always thought that was just part of the process. I didn't think of myself as a writer. And then I got out of college, and I swore that I wasn't going to write for TV because I had actually not been raised on American TV much. I was more into the sort of highbrow British stuff that my mother watched. I was a PBS kid." (Longworth)

"I've heard people say nice things about how we should get an award, and I work so very hard on this show that, of course, in my heart, I believe it, but I never expected that we would. I do think it's a little strange, a bit of a hybrid, and it is tough. You know, I think the Academy has proved itself kind of stodgy in the last couple of years. Not to say that we should be getting it. I watched the first *Sopranos* and was like, 'Give it to *these* guys. Oh my God!' I watch *The West Wing* and say, 'Give it to these guys!' There's great shows out there. I'm not like, 'Oh those stodgy voters, they don't get how great we are, blah, blah, blah,' because the fact that I'm *ever* having a conversation about the Emmys in regards to a show called *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* means that something's gone horribly right (*both laugh*), so the critical understanding of this show has been so gratifying. The fact that the critics got it and appreciated it from day one, and the rabid, almost insane fan base is great. Anything else is just gravy. The thing, though, about the show that I think holds it back is the wacky tide. You know, people don't like the wacky tide. It's not serious drama if you have a wacky title. But it's the fact that it is so schizophrenic and has so many elements. One of the things that TV is about is comfort, is knowing exactly where you are. I know they're going to invite Jessica Fletcher over, one of them is going to get killed, she very politely is going to solve it. I J' know what's going to happen when I tune in to a particular show. With *Buffy* we'll do French farce one week and *Medea* the next week. We try very hard structurally not to fall into a pattern either, so there's not a shoot-out in a warehouse every episode, because there *are* elements of comfort, obviously, *Buffy* will appear in the film at some point, but, at the same time, I'm very much committed to keeping the audience off their feet. It's sort of antithetical to what TV is devised to do. Not that there aren't surprising and delightful shows out there, but not to have that particular comfort level would throw people to a certain extent. It's like when we decide what show to send to the Academy voters, it's always a big question. Do we send the drama, the comedy, the horror show?" (Longworth)

"I have always felt an enormous obligation, I mean, since I was a kid. Since I was writing stories alone in my room that nobody else was going to read, I worried about how much I needed to mix what my political beliefs were with the story I wanted to tell. How much I needed to protect good role models, how much I needed to make a statement, and how much I needed just to dig to some dark place and write whatever the hell I wanted. That's a huge part of it. I've thought about this a lot, particularly when I've been confronted by it, by events like this. To an extent, I think we have a grave responsibility. I think it would be belittling

our audience to say that if we poke a stick in somebody's eye on the show they're all going to go do it, because they're a little more intelligent than that. But you absolutely have to think about what it will mean. At the same time, I feel strongly, and I've only come to realize this in the last few months, that we have a responsibility to be irresponsible. As storytellers, I've always been very offended by the whole, 'lets rewrite all the fairytales' where the three little pigs settle their differences with the wolf by talking about their feelings." (Longworth)

"Well, it does, and it doesn't because, ultimately, stories come from violence, they come from sex. They come from death. They come from the dark places that everybody has to go to, kind of wants to, or doesn't, but needs to deal with. If you raise a kid to think everything is sunshine and flowers, they're going to get into the real world and die. And ultimately, to access these base emotions, to go to these strange places, to deal with sexuality, to deal with horror and death, is what people need and it's the reason that we tell these stories. That's the reason fairy tales are so creepy, because we need to encapsulate these things, to inoculate ourselves against them, so that when we're confronted by the genuine horror that is day-to-day life we don't go insane." (Longworth)

"When I say we have a responsibility to be irresponsible, I'm not just talking about, 'Oh, I'm trying to help kids deal with the world.' I'm talking about the process of telling a story. These stories come from this place, and I think that stories are sacred. I think that creating narrative is a basic human function. It's why we remember some things and not everything. It's why everybody's version of the same event is different. Everybody creates narrative all the time. I think it's a really important function. And it has to come from this base place to be pure, to be art, to be anything other than a polemic. So I'm not just talking about 'Well, I've got to help kids deal with their problems by showing them scary stuff.' I mean, I've got to fulfill that human need for scary stuff, and sexy stuff, and racy stuff, and wrong stuff, and disturbing stuff. Because I think that's what storytelling is. Now, am I saying that sex is bad? Unfortunately, because it's a horror show everything that happens is bad. *(Both laugh.)* Everything that can go bad, will. Buffy's gonna drink beer, and it's going to turn her into a caveman. Now, I've been to college, and that's what happens. *(Both laugh.)* But we sort of undercut that specifically at the end of the show when Xander said, 'And what have we learned about beer?' And Buffy says, 'Foamy.' I don't want to make a reactionary statement. I don't want to say, 'Never have sex.' I don't want to say, 'Quick, go have it now.' I want to say, 'Some people have it. Everybody thinks about it. Here's how we deal with it.' The thing with Angel wasn't, 'Don't sleep with your boyfriend.' Giles very clearly comes out and says, 'I think you were rash, but I know you loved him and he loved you, and I'm not going to upbraid you for that.' That wasn't about that. It was about what happens when you sleep with a guy and he stops calling you. What happens if you give him what he wants, and he starts treating you like shit. It was about the emotion of it. And that's a very real, emotional thing that everybody goes through. You consummate a relationship, and it disappears out from under you, and it happens to both sexes." (Longworth)

"I've struggled with my ability to write women. My whole life I've wanted to make sure that I didn't idealize them, that I just didn't sort of scratch the surface. And sometimes I don't get it right. When I don't understand, I go to Marty Noxon, one of our female writers, and ask, 'What did you go through?' But I have always been interested in feminism, partially because I was raised by a very strong woman,

and partially because being small and 'fragile, and not taken seriously by anybody, I could identify with the way I perceived women were being treated once I got out of my house, where they 'were treated like equals, lender and feminism has just always been a big area of study for me. It's what I concentrated on in film. And I think the other side of that is I'm a fell One of the reasons why I was always able to do well in my feminine studies is that I never came from a knee-jerk, lesbian separatist, sort of perspective. I understand the motivation of the man with the murderous gaze, of the animal, of the terrible objectifying male, 'cause *(laugh)* I'm him. So it was very easy for me to sort of get into the mind set of, shall we say, the enemy." (Longworth)

"You know, I am incredibly undisciplined. I'm very lazy. I'm a big procrastinator. I happen to love doing this, which makes it easier. And, sometimes I can stay up all night if I have to, because I have no choice. Any discipline that I have comes from my desire to make the shows as good as I possibly can before I let them go. I reach a level of exhaustion, and this year I only reached it sooner, because I had two shows going. But ultimately, how disciplined I am doesn't matter because I have this huge amount of work to do, and I get scripts in late, and it's not great in that sense. But I don't really have the opportunity to be as lazy as I really am because the show just doesn't allow it. I've often said that everyone who does movies should be forced to work in television for two reasons. One, the story actually matters, and two, you have to get it done. I think movies get sort of mired in this place of, 'Well, we can do anything we want. We don't know what the fuck we're doing.' *(Both laugh.)* In TV you have to tell the story, and you have to bring them back next week. And it has great discipline in terms of structure, in terms of meaning, in terms of what matters, and it's got to be done by tomorrow." (Longworth)

"It is the most fun I'm ever going to have. I love to write. I love it. I mean, there's nothin in the world I like better, and that includes sex, probably because I'm so very bad at it. It's the greatest peace When I'm *in* a scene, and it's just me and the character, that's it, that's where I want to live my life. I've heard about guys who find it strenuous and painful and horrible, and I scratch my noggin. I don't get it. I definitely get tired of rewriting, something that I'm not creating from whole cloth is tough. So every now and then I have to drum up the enthusiasm to write this exposition (scene. It's a real drag. But, ultimately, the moment I break into a scene, the moment I figure out what it is, I'm there, I'm loving it." (Longworth)

"Well, what I wanted was to create a fantasy that was, emotionally, completely realistic. That's what really interests me about anything. I love genre, I love horror, I love, you know, action, I love musicals, I love any kind of genre, and 'Buffy' sort of embraces them all. But, ultimately, the thing that interests me the most is people and what they're going through, and that's why I loved 'Roseanne,' that's why I wanted to work on it, because it was the only sitcom I felt was genuinely funny and also very real and very kind of dark. And that's what I wanted to bring to this." *(Fresh Air Interview)*

"Well, I'm very, very much aware of it as being like a novel. You know, the only equivalent to what you can do with a soap opera (unintelligible) to me is, you know, what Dickens was doing, and he happens to be my favorite novelist, the idea that you can get invested in a character for so long and see it go through so many permutations. It's fascinating to me, the shows that I've always loved the

best, 'Hill Street Blues,' 'Wiseguy,' 'Twin Peaks,' have always been shows that did have accumulative knowledge. One of the reasons why 'The X-Files' started to leave me cold was that after five years, I just started yelling at Scully, 'You're an idiot. It's a monster,' and I couldn't take it anymore. I need people to grow, I need them to change, I need them to learn and explore, you know, and die and do all of the things that people do in real life. (*Fresh Air* Interview)

And so we're very, very strict about making sure that things track, that they're presented in the right way. Because, ultimately—and this is one of the things that I did find out after we had aired, the soap opera, the characters, the interaction between them is really what people respond to more than anything else. And although we came out of it as a sort of monster of the week format, it was clear that the interaction was the thing that people were latching onto. So we were happy to sort of go with that and really play it up and really see where these characters were going to go. So now it is very much a continuing show, and we're always aware of that." (*Fresh Air* Interview)

"The important thing is always to match whatever your characters are going through to whatever you're going through as a creator to what the audience is going through. When people worried about, 'How are you ever going to give Buffy a boyfriend after Angel, how are they ever going to get over each other?' Well, that's exactly what Buffy was worried about, that's exactly what Angel was worried about. You know, it's taking the challenges, it's taking the fears that you have and letting everybody go through them, because, ultimately, everybody always does." (*Fresh Air* Interview)

"What we don't have, which is what some science fiction shows have, is we can't just do a thing because it seems cool. Everything that we pitch, everything that we put out there, whether or not it works, is based on the idea of: The audience has been through this. A normal girl goes through this. A normal guy deals with this. You know, it's issues of sexuality, popularity, jobs. Whatever it is, it's got to be based in realism. We can't just say, you know, 'The warship's come and, you know, they transmogrify, the—blah, blah, blah.' We can't do that. We can go to some pretty strange places, but at the start, we always have to be about, 'How does the audience relate to having done this themselves?' (*Fresh Air* Interview)

"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." (*Fresh Air* Interview)

"Then the question just became how much do we play in metaphor and how much do we play as, you know, her actually expanding her sexuality? And you're walking a very fine line there. The network obviously has issues. They don't want any kissing. That's one thing that they've stipulated. And they're a little nervous about it. Ultimately, they haven't interfered at all with what we've tried to do, but, you know, they've raised a caution about it. And, you know, at the same time, you have people—the moment Tara appeared on the scene, saying, 'Well, they're obviously gay. Why aren't they gay enough? They're not gay enough. You need to make them more gay.' You know, people want you to make a statement. They want you to turn it into an issue right away. So you sort of have forces

buffeting you and you're trying to come up with what is both emotionally sort of correct as a progression and also sort of mythically significant in terms of your greater arc. You're trying to wield all these things and, week to week, sort of make this thing progress." (*Fresh Air* Interview)

"Generally speaking, I come into a season with the arc for the season, the main fill-in, you know, the main sort of journeys for each of the characters, where are they going to go and some benchmarks—certain episodes. Somewhere around episode 10, this has to happen. Somewhere around episode 15, this has to happen. We have to keep it flexible, because you come up with better ideas or an actor falls out or something happens, you know. The process of creating TV is entirely fluid. You always have to be ready to be thrown a curve, and in our case, every time we have, I think it's helped us out a great deal. I really think what we're doing with Willow and Tara is interesting. And Amber Benson's a wonderful actress. That might not have happened if we hadn't lost Seth." (*Fresh Air* Interview)

"I'm doing a limited series for Dark Horse called *Fray*, about a Slayer that takes place 500 years in the future. I need some flying cars, damn it! It's set in the *Buffy* universe, except that nobody from *Buffy* would appear in it. The comic book exists in its own way, and I can't mess with that history. I was going to do something about Faith, but then I was like, 'I'm bringing Faith back,' and it would interfere with that. By setting it in the future, I don't have to create a whole new world; I can sort of play off of this mythology but not through jeopardizing the characters from the show. We're just talking to an artist. I've written the first one and a half issues. The tone is a gritty, action-adventure, sci-fi fun thing. It's not quite as based in the day-to-day experiences of a girl's life the way that *Buffy* is. It's a much more broader-scoped adventure. It's really fun. Writing the first issue was different from anything I've ever done." (Gross interview)

"[T]he show I anticipate is always so staggeringly brilliant that it makes the Earth rotate in the other direction, but [*Angel*] has done what *Buffy* has done in that it has lived up to my hopes to be a decent show, and then it has shown me things that I hadn'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. It could have been just a nice solid formula show, and I think it's going to be something more than that." (Gross interview)

"It's easier to write an episode than direct it. Well, not easier, but scheduling-wise, I usually direct an episode when there is something I desperately want to say—where there's a moment that I want to capture, an idea I want to try out. To create something, that means actually writing it. I may actually direct a couple of episodes that I don't write next year, just because of my time being as it is. By and large, the only time I've done it is when I've co-written with David Greenwalt. The bottom line is that I like to create. To me, the writing is the most important thing, and if I'm going to take the time to direct something and it really pulls a lot out of my schedule, usually I want it to be something of my own. At the same time, it would certainly be interesting to direct somebody else's script." (Gross interview)

"But nowadays I'm really cranky about comics. . . . Because most of them are just really, really poorly written soft-core. And I miss good old storytelling. And you know what else I miss? Super powers. Why is it now that everybody's like 'I can reverse the polarity of your ions!' Like in one big flash everybody's Doctor Strange. I like the guys that can stick to walls and change into sand and stuff. I don't understand anything anymore. And all the girls are wearing nothing, and they all look like they have implants. Well, I sound like a very old man, and a cranky one, but it's true." (Dark Horse interview)

"Redemption has become one of the most important themes in my work and it really did start with *Angel*. I would say probably with the episode 'Amends,' but even with the character itself and the concept of the spin-off was about redemption. It was about addiction and how you get through that and come out the other side, how you redeem yourself from a terrible life. I do actually work with a number of reformed addicts, if that's what you call them. I call them drunks. But my point is a good number of people that are most close to me creatively have lived that life, and it informs their work. I never have, and so I'm not sure why it is that redemption is so fascinating to me. I think the mistakes I've made in my own life have plagued me, but they're pretty boring mistakes: I committed a series of grisly murders in the eighties and I think I once owned a Wilson-Phillips album. Apart from that I'm pretty much an average guy, yet I have an enormous burden of guilt. I'm not sure why. I'm a WASP, so it's not Jewish or Catholic guilt; it's just there. Ultimately, the concept of somebody who needed to be redeemed is more interesting to me. I think it does make a character more textured than one who doesn't." (10 Questions)

"[E]very time somebody opens their mouth they have an opportunity to do one of two things—connect or divide. Some people inherently divide, and some people inherently connect. Connecting is the most important thing, and actually an easy thing to do. I try to make a connection with someone every time I talk to them, even if I'm firing them. Because a connection can be made. People can be treated with respect. That is one of the most important things a show runner can do, is make everybody understand that we're all involved, that we're all on the same level, on some level. I'm shocked that there are so many people that live to divide. Whether it's to divide people from each other, or from themselves—but it is a constant in everything." (*Film Force* interview)

"I did want to make a movie where a poor girl that kills would have to get her own back. Then, I started out with 'Martha the Immortal Waitress.' The idea of somebody that nobody would take account of, who just had more power than was imaginable. Which is such a pathetically obvious metaphor for what I wanted my life to be. Like, 'I'm the guy that nobody paid attention to. What they didn't know was that I'm really important. I can save the world. So, you know, that's pretty cool, too.' In the interview, you have to say, 'He whined.' [Interviewer's note: Joss whined.] So, you know, when I hit on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it was right around the time when *Revenge of the Bimbos*, or *Attack of the Killer Bimbos* or something—there were a lot of movies coming out that were proto-silly '50s style titles. They were on the video store shelves. I worked at a video store. I would watch them, and I'd be like, 'You know what? This is just another bimbo movie. These women aren't empowered at all. They just made up a funny title.' I was like, 'I would like to make a movie that was one of these crappy, low-budget movies, that like the Romero films, had a feminist agenda, had females in it who were

people, and had all the fun, all the silliness. *Night of the Comet* was a big influence. That actually had a cheerleader in it. With a title that would actually make people take it off the video store shelves, because it has to sound silly and not boring." (*Film Force* interview)

"Directors have to be storytellers and all that stuff, and some are better than others. I'm talking about movie directors, because a TV director has to do that as much as they can, but ultimately are in service to the executive producer. The producer is the one who has to do that. But, you know, as Jeanine put it once, or probably more than once, 'A director doesn't have to create anything, but he is responsible for everything.' Same thing goes for an executive producer on TV. I don't have to write a line of the script—although there's not a script for my shows that I don't have a line in, or a scene, or a pitch, or something. I don't sew the damn costumes, I don't say the words—but I'm responsible for everything in every frame of every show. That's my job, whether or not I'm directing the episode. So that's why you have to have that complete faith, that kind of blind faith in a leader who has the ability to lead. I don't know... I just also think leadership is something that is earned. I respected those above me, and demand the same from those below me. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. That's one thing that helped keep the show together, is I had a clear vision and I was willing to share the credit with my extraordinary staff, crew, and the cast. I mean, obviously, I'm not writing novels—I'm doing collaborative work. But at the same time, I had a couple of people challenge me on my authority, and they found out quickly that they do not brook that." (*Film Force* interview)

"People becoming unhappy if I changed something or if I was controlling or if I had something ... either pull something out from under me, or complaining about me to staff or something. I'm all for giving people their due and all, but I wouldn't let it lie. You just can't. . . . I would take them either aside or up to my office and explain why they mustn't do that. It's very simple. I said to one director... he said, 'One of these days, I'm going to come down and look over your shoulder while you're shooting.' I brought him up to my office the next day and I said, 'Let me explain something to you. It is my job to control the way you shoot, not your job to control mine. My name comes at the end of every show. You do very good work and you're going to come back for us, but I am never going to let you do something that I don't approve of.'" (*Film Force* interview)

"I didn't want to say 'Look, we're better than a TV show.' I wanted to say 'You can do all of this in an episode of television. It just depends on how much you care.' . . . I love TV. I love what you can do with it. . . . It's not better, it's just TV in all its glory. The way I celebrate musicals I celebrate this medium." (DVD Commentary to "Once More with Feeling")

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