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The Color of the Dark

An earlier version of this essay appeared as a foreword to

Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

(1) We cannot really begin talking about television images without first laying certain old-think presuppositions to rest. Outside of the rare "landmark" broadcast, cultural interpreters of television narratives have often imputed to the creators of television drama a raw avarice that results in technically slick production values supporting only the most basic content for the television screen. Art is seen to occur by accident, if at all, in the otherwise calculated search for mesmerizing images to hypnotize the audience between sales pitches. Meaning, in this formulation, is the outcome of cultural biases filling out a skeletal narrative structure that conforms to the generic expectations of a pleasure-seeking audience.

(2) The cultural critic argues that the "false consciousness" shared by the viewer and the creator obscure the cultural biases and unconscious drives which fuel the "true" message uncovered by the scholar in a display of superior sensibility.

(3) Most critics locate the source of the essentialist message of film in the script. This is patently untrue in cinema, of course, as becomes evident when one contrasts the two defining statements of film production: designers claim that their design is in support of the narrative of the script, and yet the scriptwriter is recognizably the least important member of a film (Tashiro 1998). Even popular cinema belongs to the auteur director such as Stephen Spielberg. Many popular action films targeted to an international audience provide minimal dialogue or plot and aspire only to top their last effort in pyrotechnic visual display. Only in the limited number of producer-director-writer talents like M. Night Shyamalan does one find the script taking even second place in film. Ignoring the contradiction, however, scholars continue to ascribe intentional meaning to the visual image only as it serves the development of character and plot. Critics who complain that the image serves only to forward the narrative continue to ascribe non-narrative pleasure of the image to the unintentional. Tashiro, for example, goes to great lengths to demonstrate how non-narrative images occurring in narrative film actually obstruct or damage interpretation of the narrative intention.

(4) Ironically, of course, what is not true for film is even more an error when looking at television, where "producer" is the title for a senior writer and/or the creator and head writer of the television movie or series. The entire television production serves the intentions of the person in control of the television script, often in conflict with the network executive who may prefer a more homogenized product. That does not mean, however, that the script

encompasses the meaning of the finished production. Rather, the writer of depth can depend on a meshing of the visual and verbal to create both a narrative message and a metaphoric one, as well as metanarrative commentary.

(5) Few scholars until now would credit television writers with the vision to understand the complexity of their own products. By imputing to television drama only a naively defined narrative purpose focused on the lowest common denominator viewer, scholars have served their own agenda. If a scholar denies that a television producer has created meaning beyond the most simplistic level of mimesis, then he can also dismiss the objections of the creator who disagrees with the analysis. The claim of "false consciousness," as described above, strips the creator of his authority to speak on behalf of his own creation.

(6) This interpretation is so pervasive in film and television criticism that some young writers, trained in the film schools where the criticism is taught, skitter schizophrenically between their own love of their medium and the cynical reminder that entertainment television is a "sausage factory," producing lowest common denominator material digestible by the largest number of potential viewers (Sloan; Kindler).

(7) The model is most damaging, of course, because it is partly true. No one scorns their own audience more than some network executives. A newcomer to the industry who has been indoctrinated into the belief that her art is a matter of creating empty intellectual calories for the insatiable maw of a mindless consumer-audience may produce ground-network-product until she either becomes an executive or breaks out of the box the critics and accountants have put her in. Or she may spite the critics and struggle against an industry culture of cynicism and mediocrity to spin television gold from narrative straw.

(8) In studying the scholarship at UCLA or NYU or wherever they trained in their craft, however, the producers, directors, actors, designers, cinematographers in the creative arts, including television, have learned how to apply theory to their work. While some television creators may justify their own lack of talent by adopting the cynicism of the critics, their more gifted (and usually more successful) competitors are perfectly able to construct polyvalent, laminated meanings *on purpose*. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the television gold Joss Whedon has spun out of vampire straw: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

(9) In choosing the extended form of narrative--arc television drama--Whedon has improved upon his movie creation, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as the vehicle for his message about the emotional and psychological morass of high school. In Sarah Michelle Gellar's *Buffy*, he has created the positive heroic role-model for girls which has been lacking in network television.

FANTASY AS DISTANCE

(10) The history of television demonstrates that even with the best of skill and goodwill, approaching the subject of adolescent pain from a realistic point of view won't draw the mass audience required by advertisers. Excellent, critically acclaimed efforts like ABC's *My So-Called Life* (1994) and more recently, NBC's *Freaks and Geeks* (1999) did not even complete a full season on network television.

(11) Introducing a level of abstraction to the drama, one which distances the pain of the audience through the metaphor of the genres of the fantastic--science fiction, fantasy, horror--gives the creator some freedom from the stress of direct confrontation, but sets him a new problem. Such a step begins the process of abstracting the meaning from the plot; the metaphor may turn the audience away because it cannot process the abstraction (Bacon-Smith). For this reason, the genres have experienced not much more success than the adolescent angst drama itself. The original *Star Trek* and, later, *Beauty and the Beast* stayed on the air for several seasons because of persuasive campaigns waged by fans in defiance of low ratings. Later shows, including *American Gothic* and *Now and Again* did not survive a single season on network television. At this writing, there is currently no fantasy or science fiction programming on the three major broadcast networks. Fox, which has used "reality television" to boost itself into the ranks of the major players, has done so in part by jettisoning most of its fantasy and science fiction as well.

(12) Syndication, cable, and netlets such as the WB and UPN, however, offer success by niche fulfillment. A series like *BtVS* can attract its target audience by virtue of its surface narrative, which uses the fantastic as a form of distancing. The audience drawn to that niche may choose to remain at the level of the fantasy, or the viewer may find herself drawn at her own pace into the deeper truths the creator wishes to impart--the lightly veiled message.

(13) While film critics may define cinema by its efforts to achieve a sort of hyper-realism, the fantasist is faced with the truth that the closer he comes to a convincing visual representation of the fantastic, the more difficult it will be for the audience to look past the recreation to the text. Unlike science fiction, which bridges the unreal with what we know to be technically and scientifically real, fantasy bridges the real with what we know to be unreal. A style that seeks realism in fantasy only heightens the sense of discord in the viewer. For that reason, science fiction has succeeded as a visual form much more often than fantasy.

(14) Theater audiences, however, have been trained over the millennia to willingly suspend disbelief about the missing walls and the plywood trees and create meaning in active collaboration with the text and the actors and the props and sets may give. By virtue of its artful dialogue, fantastical plotlines, magicality in the character development, and the striking color saturation of the visual images, *BtVS* sets itself firmly in the realm of the unreal. Its special effects are adequate, as not to be a distraction, but sufficiently schematic that, in combination with the artfulness of the text, they mark the drama, which just happens to be on weekly television, as more suited to a theatrical interpretation than a filmic one. References to theater in the text support the audience's inclination to this reading.

(15) The narrative arc of the series over time allows for the deliberate creation of multiple levels of meaning around the text, in this case used literally to refer to the script. Already hard at work cooperatively with the creators to suspend disbelief of the theatrical screen, the audience is prepared by this work to uncover those symbolic meanings that would remain unquestioned in a realistic production. Armed with this insight, the balance of this essay will consider two ways in which the high school years of *BtVS* used color and lighting symbolically, working both with and against the text.

(16) The fourth year marked both a shift in the underlying themes and in the character dynamics. The characters graduated, leaving high school angst behind them, and Angel left for a spin-off series. When this happened, for many viewers the series seemed to lose much of its focus, and we can see the grasping after a new direction in an increasingly diffused palette. In this essay, however, we will concentrate primarily on the high school years, with reference to later use of color only for contrast.

SIGN VALUE IN IMAGE AND COLOR: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PALETTE

(17) More than traditional narrative, the high school years of *BtVS* relied upon the use of its palette of color and light not only to carry the mood of the series, but to represent its complex message by means of signs and symbols as well. When we talk about the palette used in television or film, we are already talking in metaphor. Since the mid-renaissance, the palette has come to represent the range of colors to be used in a project and their ordering based on theories of light and color and meaning (Gage 1993). When one talks about the palette, therefore, one references a whole range of choices defined not only by laws of contrast and complementarity, but by symbolic value, and sign value as well.

(18) The sign value of a color represents in an abstract form a more concrete object by means of an arbitrarily constructed cultural system (Arnheim). Pink is for girls and blue for boys because we have assigned the gender-specific meanings to those colors. The assignment is arbitrary. When Buffy wears pink, therefore, she expresses her femininity with the sign-value of the color. When the pink she wears is a scanty tank top, she claims feminine sexuality. And when she kicks vampire butt in a scanty pink tank top, she oversets expectations of what feminine sexuality means in the cultural construct of womanhood which is signified by the color pink.

(19) In one sense, the pink tank top forwards the narrative and the character development: Buffy wants to be a cheerleader ("The Witch," 1003) and go on dates like a regular girl ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date," 1005). But

Buffy asserts her right to be both a feminine teenager and a superhero in a way that usurps the irony within the text as a defense against her outrageous fortunes. The audience is invited to share with Buffy's creator the metatextual irony implicit in the overturning of the gender expectation the designer sets up when Buffy wears pink. Girls who admire Buffy's tank top can identify with her anguished desire to be both competent and normal in a society that considers maleness normal and femaleness defective and dangerous.

(20) Whedon's designers do not limit the visual field to one image of gender, of course. Willow, the faithful Wiccan companion, has shown dramatic shift in dress and color to mark her movement from the child-savant techno-wiccan of high school to the earthy witch of college. The shift has not come easily to her. From the first we have known that Willow has body issues, preferring disguises that hide rather than heighten her femininity ("Inca Mummy Girl," 2004; "Halloween," 2006). In a confrontation with a rival for the affections of the supercool musician-werewolf, Oz, however, she comes to realize that she must begin to relinquish her hold on childhood and move forward in her life ("Wild at Heart," 4006). Gone are the childlike references of episodes as late as "Graduation Day" (3021) in which Willow dresses in nursery colors--a fluffy pink sweater and carries, alternately, a handbag in the shape of a shaggy blue stuffed toy and a round backpack in yellow plush with a smiley face on it--that mark her immaturity. By the time of "Initiative" (4007) the first hints of the later peasant-style have started to emerge. As Willow uncovers new complexities in her sexuality and magical practices, her clothes take on earthy colors. Loose, feminine lines reminiscent of the sixties "flower children" signal both her spirituality and her sexuality, which are less flamboyant than Buffy's sensuality but earthier and more centered at the same time. **[Editor's Note]**

(21) Xander, the poor relation of the Scooby Gang, signals both his material lack and his insecurity in the clashing, muddy colors of the patterned retro shirts he wears. As time has passed, Xander signals his resistance to growth in his increasingly discordant fashion; we see the social separation from his more comfortably middle-class companions in the uniforms of the working underclass he wears. And just in case we have become so accustomed to seeing Xander in his mufti that we fail to read the signs, we are given leather-boy vampire Spike transformed, to his horror, by the loan of Xander's clothing ("Doomed," 4011).

(22) Rupert Giles, the watcher turned magic shopkeeper seems, on first glance, to be the most stereotypical of the characters in the series. His tweed jackets and pin-striped vests in masculine browns and grays, his pressed white shirts and spectacles, combine with his hesitant, uppercrust British accent to offer us the perfect repressed English librarian. The gradual revelation of the character's history and context, however, undermine our image of Giles as the restrained authoritarian. We discover that in his youth Giles wore the black leather that acts as a complex sign of violent rebellion and dark sensuality in *BtVS* ("Halloween"; "The Dark Age," 2008). In "Band Candy" (3006) we see yet another Giles, a young man of contrasts: faded and torn jeans and a white tee shirt send the contradictory message of purity and danger. Giles was a bad boy; even his speech has lost its high polish, but we know the rebellious youth will give rise to the honorable watcher.

(23) Homes likewise act as important signs both to further the narrative and to undermine it. *BtVS* speaks directly to the suburban experience of adolescence. Most characters live in houses, not apartments, with all the outward signs of normative middle class. Beneath the surface, however, nothing is at it seems. Buffy's house is a typical bright and sunny suburban home, but her mother is divorced and works to support her daughter and her suburban dream. Buffy's bedroom is decorated in a froth of white flounces: innocence. Like the pink lipstick, the frilly, girlish bedroom is at odds with the beat-up chest of well-used weapons in the closet ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001 and others). When Buffy visits home from college looking for sanctuary and the symbolic return to the innocence of childhood, the audience, like Buffy, is shocked and unnerved to discover Buffy's bedroom full of angular brown--masculine--crates ("The Freshman," 4001). The world of her mother's work has supplanted Buffy, and the straw that lines the crates visually recreate the real nest from which Buffy must learn to fly.

(24) Xander's house, and his relation to it, establish visually the estrangement of the character from home and family which the audience may only guess from the passing jokes the character makes. In "Amends" (3010) it is Christmas. Everyone else is with someone--Willow with Oz, Faith with mother-figure Joyce, Buffy with Angel. Xander is lying alone in the dark, in a sleeping bag in a backyard. As it begins to snow, he pulls the sleeping bag more tightly around himself, protection from the cold. In season four, Xander's friends have gone to college, but we find Xander working odd jobs in various garish uniforms and paying rent to live in the dingy gray basement of his parents' house.

(25) Giles lives in a contradictorily sensuous Spanish style apartment with an elaborate heavy door and rich

yellowy, warm earth tones on the walls. "Passion" (2017) leaves the audience in no doubt as to the sensuous side of Giles's nature. Returning home, Giles finds roses in a vase and champagne cooling in an ice bucket, and candle flames soften all the colors and suffuse the room with gold. Giles follows a trail of glowing candles up the staircase, where he knows his recently estranged lover must await a romantic reunion.

(26) In the context of a Whedon text, of course, the audience knows that the pleasure promised by the scene must quickly be overturned. With horror the viewer discovers, as Giles does, the body of his dead lover arranged amid rose petals scattered on his bed. Desire, opened up and beckoning in the heat of the yellows and reds--candle glow and roses, champagne and staircase--ends in death, poetically displayed for maximum pain.

LIGHT: ABSTRACTION AS COMMENTARY

(27) "Passion" demonstrates more sharply than any other episode the complex meaningfulness of light and shadow in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. While *BtVS* often uses color for its sign value, color can also function symbolically. Rudolf Arnheim adopts the definitions of semiotics to describe the difference between a sign and a symbol. As we have seen above, a sign is an arbitrary construct meant to convey in a higher level of abstraction, something that is less abstract than its sign (pink=girl). A symbol, on the other hand, conveys in more concrete terms a higher level of abstraction. Unlike the mostly denotative sign value of color and design to enhance character and context development described above, light and its absence act symbolically in *BtVS*, to connote higher complexities of conflict in the multivalent meaning. That is, unlike Tashiro's construction of visual images that act as roadblocks by throwing one out of the narrative, light and its absence in *BtVS* often act deliberately to remove the audience from the narrative and reestablish the voyeuristic point of view. From this position, the viewer may contemplate the contradictions that are a part of the message, intentional, and not a failure of transmission of meaning. In fact, the symbolic construction of light and dark in *BtVS* conforms to the Kandinsky model of the spiritual meaning of color.

(28) Influenced by Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, the artist and theoretician Wassily Kandinsky posited that colors have their own intrinsic values. By a set of binary polarities (antitheses) Kandinsky shows that colors not only trigger a subjective response that is the visual perception of the color, but themselves carry a weight that lends meaning to their use in art. In a scholarly world that regularly denies agency in the arts, in which theory has become a dead thing as separated from the art it studies as the tombstone from the life it celebrates, one might pause here to consider that I write this particular bit of scholarship as a novelist using the theory of a painter influenced by a poet, each reaching across dead centuries with living understanding.

(29) Kandinsky sets colors in opposition based on their relative warmth or cold, and their relative darkness or light. The oppositions work to explain the effect colors have on each other in terms of the palette and how they lend their meaning to the works of art in which they are thoughtfully used. Of most interest to the viewer of *BtVS*, an inclination to yellow, according to Kandinsky, gives the viewer a sense of warmth. Yellow reaches out to the viewer, in the sense that it seems to expand beyond the space of its shape. An inclination to blue, on the other hand, draws a color in on itself in a cool way. Kandinsky ascribes to yellow the weight of the physical, while blue has a more spiritual level. Yellow approaches white, which is light, while blue approaches black, which is dark. The closer yellow approaches white, the more it represents discordant possibility, femaleness, birth, life; the closer blue approaches black the more it represents discord as well, but descended into maleness, immobility and death. Blue and yellow, when joined, create green, which is peaceful, having brought life to death but calmed the aggressive outreaching of yellow. But green cannot exist for long without producing irritation by reason of its absence of movement.

(30) Color, at its most perceptually subjective, evokes responses which the mind must read symbolically in order to process the response. An artist uses colors not only to replicate the natural environment, therefore, but to tap into the primal meanings that resonate to the warmth or cold, the light or darkness that those colors evoke. In this sense, the concrete symbol of color is used to represent to the viewer something that is both more abstract and less so: the emotional, even limbic response the artist covets for his more cerebral message.

(31) From the very beginning it is clear that Joss Whedon is using light and darkness, yellow and blue, for both their traditional resonances and, symbol-like, for their opposites. Buffy, a pale young blond, moves to a new town, a clean small city suffused with California sunshine--bright, almost white yellow light. With frequent repetition, Joss

Whedon signals the viewer to pay attention to the light: Buffy's context has a name, Sunnydale, California, which Whedon uses as a sign. "Warning: symbolic sunshine ahead." So, immediately the viewer knows that the light suffusing the frame in Buffy's daytime has more than its transparent, or "reality" function.

(32) But Sunnydale sits on a Hellmouth, and horrors ascend upon the town after dark. Vampires, which are the very symbol of death, creep in disguise among the unwary who do not heed the warning to turn away from the dark. Teenagers, of course, never heed warnings, and Sunnydale's teens spill into the dark, dancing, with only their golden heroine to protect them from the predators that circle just beyond the light ("The Harvest," 1002).

(33) To this point, no expectations are overset; symbols function at their simplest level. Then, bad things begin to happen in the daytime. A mother magically supplants her daughter to relive her own youth as a cheerleader ("The Witch," 1003), a predatory teacher entices male students to her home to seduce and kill them ("Teacher's Pet," 1004), a pack of students eat their principal ("The Pack," 1006). The apparent and the deeper meanings are thus set in opposition. The clean and bright high school in the golden town of Sunnydale are set in ironic counterpoint to the darkness that preys within: Buffy goes to her death in a literal pit of darkness, dressed in white like the sacrificial virgin she is. ("Prophecy Girl," 1012) She is the heroine, so she returns to her life, of course, but the point has been made. Adolescence is, in a way, a painful but necessary symbolic death of the child so that the adult can be born.

(34) In all its seasons *BtVS* makes its point about the emotional danger of high school so effectively that, in the wake of the massacre at an equally sunny and clean Columbine High School, a wary Warner Brothers seemed finally to recognize the metaphor for what it was. They pulled two episodes from the schedule ("Earshot," 3018; "Graduation Day," Part 2, 3022). Real deaths in high schools had been going on for years, of course, but only Columbine caught the national attention enough to make it recognize what shows like *BtVS* had been trying to tell them for years. While many faithful viewers criticized the delay in airing the episodes, and went to extraordinary lengths to obtain the banned material, artistically this censorship makes a sort of grim sense. It was too late for warnings, and metaphors that allowed a resistant public to hide in the artificial light from the real message had become pointless. Chillingly, this culmination in the real world of a warning given in art came at the same time that *BtVS* had come to the natural end of its examination of high school. Buffy was going to college, leaving behind the wreckage of Sunnydale High and the wreckage of our own illusions about safe suburban schools.

THE DARK

(35) It is important to note that the world of Buffy and Angel never really deals in shades of gray which, Kandinsky reminds us, is the frozen point, neither light nor dark. In their world light is very bright, darkness is very dark; in both the viewer finds opposition, conflict, surrender, but never compromise. Buffy sees the world in black and white--or, rather, in yellow and blue. Light is goodness, and Buffy is the physical embodiment of all that brilliant yellow-white light, so blond that, as she passes through the dark on her nightly rounds, she seems to walk in a nimbus of light she creates around her. But light can blind as well as illuminate. *BtVS* offers life in the bright light of Sunnydale and then takes it away again in stories that subvert the visual message. At the same time, however, it offers the danger of darkness, and then subverts the coldness and death of night with Angel, the vampire with a soul, who carries within him no compromise, but only the contradiction Whedon wants his audience to recognize in the name ("Angel," 1007).

(36) Vampires, the evil dark to Buffy's innocent light, inhabit the blue-black world of night. While all vampires are by definition evil, Whedon's vampires show their audience the monster in the mirror. Stupid, cloddish vampires are despised and dispatched with little concern. Smart vampires present more of a challenge, but Buffy and the Scooby Gang must ultimately assert their control over the dark by defeating their intelligent foes as well. Even children, the very symbol of innocence, can be evil vampires, undermining our sense of security in the symbols we know ("Nightmares," 1010, "School Hard," 2003). Young, hip vampires in black leather (Spike) and white lace (Drusilla) play with the viewer's own moral sense. Clearly Spike and Drusilla are evil. Drusilla likes to dine on small children and offers Spike a fluffy puppy for a snack.

(37) The playfulness with which they taunt their victims sets up a cognitive discord; even the symbols are mixed.

Spike wears the black leather that, as mentioned above, marks a dark and rebellious sensuousness: the attraction of the dark side of Sunnydale. Drusilla, by contrast, wears the white of innocence by reason of her insanity. With their arch dialogue and their hip fashion sense, and their love for each other, Spike and Drusilla are the dark side of Buffy and Angel: even the color of their hair turns the pairing around, with Spike's brazenly peroxidized blond exaggerating Buffy's glowing light and Drusilla's dark hair darker by far than Angel's well-moussed brown hair. No matter how terrible the vampire duo are, we do not want them to meet the dusty fate of other Sunnydale vampires. Even at their worst, we are too aware of how close the dark is to the light. In the episode "What's My Line?" Part 1 (2009), images of Buffy and Angel in a loving relationship are juxtaposed with Spike and Dru sharing their own bond of domesticity. Just in case the viewer might forget that, "The Wish" (3009) shows Cordelia (and the viewer) an alternative Sunnydale, where the dark has overwhelmed the light: the Slayer never came to Sunnydale, and Willow and Xander, vampires themselves, have become their own leather-clad Spike and Drusilla.

(38) While Spike and Drusilla confront the viewer with his own attraction to the dark, Angel represents the greatest danger to the light in Sunnydale. As Angelus he has a long history of particularly terrible murders committed artistically to create the greatest level of anguish not only to the immediate victim, but those around them as well. We learn that he turned Drusilla into a vampire after first murdering all her family in acts so terrible they drove her to her present madness ("What's My Line," Parts 1 and 2, 2009, 2010).

(39) While the characters who serve good travel in the light and usually visit the dark night only in their battles, Angel alone is condemned to the darkest of blue shadows. We first see him appearing out of the shadows, and when his message is delivered, he disappears mysteriously into the shadows again. However close he comes to the forces of good that gather around the Slayer, he can never join them in the light, because he remains marked with the evil he has done. Angel is the core of what blue, approaching black, means in the Kandinsky model: inwardly directed and cold, a male force, a symbol of discord and death. Angel's remorse does not result from a pure and repentant heart--the heart of a vampire is dead, after all--but from a curse. Angel must *suffer* for all the evil he has done, the death he has caused. If he experiences true happiness, he will lose his soul and return to the evil that now horrifies him as an ensouled being. Once again expectations are overturned. The character looming in the shadows is a guardian Angel, watching over his beloved, who is fated by her very nature--the light she carries around her--to slay him as a creature of the dark. Cursed to do good, he loses his soul at the moment of greatest joy--the moment, as well, when the virgin heroine gives up her innocence to the pleasure of the dark flaunted by that other loving couple, Spike and Drusilla.

(40) Light and dark, locked in love and combat, battle and die and will not stay dead--not either of them. Which is, after all, the cycle of the day and the seasons from which the symbolic resonances of light and dark arise. The day dies, the night follows and dies in turn, but each comes back in its time. And which brings comfort and which danger depends on the part of the brain you ask. The limbic brain of sex and danger still hides from the great predators that stalk the light. (Slayers, too, are predators, after all, with a great many kills to their existence.) The higher brain, tied to duller vision and a calculating mind, fears the vampire dark of mystery and death and desire.

(41) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* symbolically presents the struggle of good and evil, desire and duty in the playing out of battles between the champion of light and the murky shadow self of the dark. When Buffy and her companions play out the struggle between the light and dark of human nature, the viewer grows to understand that neither side can ever completely win or lose, because each is a part of the whole they make between them.

Notes

*Editors' Note. In "The Body" (5016), as Willow dresses for the aftermath of the death of Buffy's mother, rejecting outfit after outfit, she remarks in disgust, "Why do so many of my shirts have stupid things on them? Can't I dress like a grown up, can't I be . . . be a grown up. . . ."

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Tanya Krzywinska

Playing Buffy: Remediation, Occulted Meta-game-physics and the Dynamics of Agency in the Videogame Version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



"There's nothing like a spot of demon slaughter to make a girl's night."

[1] Alongside other high profile fictional fantasy figures, such as James Bond, Harry Potter and Frodo Baggins, Buffy Summers has entered the virtual arena of the videogame. Key to the attractions of many film and television tie-in videogames is that they extend a pre-existing fictional world into a 3D interactive environment, which can be explored by controlling a predefined character that links the player to that world. The active navigation of an interactive environment, achieved by pressing keypad combinations appropriately in response to events that occur in the

game-world, is combined with the game-challenge of developing the skills needed to live up to the heroic status of the avatar. In the case of the Buffy game, the challenge for the player is to hone their virtually mediated combat and movement skills so that threats can be defeated in an accomplished "slayer" fashion. The player is therefore directly implicated in ensuring that the Buffy avatar acts in accordance with character and that, through the defeat of enemies and the overcoming of obstacles, the game-story is uncovered. While the Buffy game uses many characteristics found in the television show, the particular attributes of videogame form bring additional dimensions and significant differences to the established Buffy-verse.

[2] With developments in videogaming technologies most PC and console based games allow players to travel in real time through a given game world. Videogames are constructed to motivate the player to respond physically and actively to a game's environment and the events that occur there. The types of actions that a player can perform in a game are structured by a game's design and programming infrastructure. This includes the look, sounds and spatial organization of a game world as well as the physical rules that dictate how objects operate and what a player can do within that world.

Videogames are designed to engage the player in periods of intensive activity, marking a crucial distinction to the way that other screen-based media such as cinema and television are engaged with. As Espen Aarseth argues, games are “ergodic” because “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (1997:1). While we are *spectators* of the television show, we are *players* of the game; a difference that has an important effect on the way that a text is experienced and negotiated. In analyzing how the Buffy game generates patterns of emotional and physical engagement, I identify the ways in which themes, particularly that of exercising agency, and textual strategies present in the television series, translate or are remediated into the media-specific attributes of videogame format.

The game-world of Buffy the Vampire Slayer

[3] There are currently two videogame versions of the show on the market, one for the Nintendo’s GameBoy Color released in 2000, and a more recent offering for Microsoft’s X-Box, developed by The Collective for EA games and Fox, released in 2002. The X-Box version was originally slated for the PlayStation, but was abandoned in favor of the more sophisticated X-Box platform. Building the game on the new platform enabled sharper and more nuanced graphics, subtler character movements, such as facial expressions, as well as extending the scope for event-related dialogue, dynamic lighting, and game event related sound effects and music. These attributes are expressly deployed to minimize some of the media-specific distinctions between the game and its televisual counterpart. The use of voice talent provided by many of the show’s actors provides an important touchstone with the show. As does the participation of two writers that have authored well-received franchised Buffy novellas (Christopher Golden and Tom Sniegowski) to construct the storyline and write dialogue, thereby ensuring that the game carries the type of language and storyline that characterizes the show. Another element that reinforces the connection between the game to the show is the use of “motion-captured” movements from two of the stunt people used on season three of the television show. Each of these factors deepen the game’s relative realism and authenticity, and help blur the differences between the live-action format of the TV show and the digital mediation of the game. In lessening the gap between the two the game guards itself against failing to live up to expectations set by the show. The game version of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1999), for example, presented blocky unrealistic representations of the show’s characters that failed to capture the appeal and defining characteristics of its televisual referent. The success of the Buffy game’s “remediation” of the television show relies on it being both true to the spirit of the show and exploiting the interactive game media to extend players’ engagement with the predefined Buffy universe. Remediation is a term coined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin to characterize the reuse of one medium within another, which they claim is a “defining characteristic of new media” (2000: 45). Importantly for this paper, they claim that this process may “refashion the older medium . . . while still marking the presence of the older media” (46) or try “to absorb the older medium entirely” (47). In the case of the Buffy game the presence of aspects of the TV show interacts and exchanges with the newer elements of interactive game media.

[4] Third person action adventure formats are more commonly used than the first person mode in film/TV tie-in games as they enable the franchised character to be seen (*Xena* and *Harry Potter* games are other examples). Locations, music, characters, and themes present in the TV show connect the game to the Buffyverse, but it is the fact that we, as players, can *do* things within that space that creates the game’s media specific and marketable “value-added.” You can of course play the game without having watched the show, but knowledge of the show provides greater meaning and gives context to the actions performed in the gameworld. The Buffy game exploits and rewards such knowledge by actively inviting player’s to read the game events against those that have taken place in the show. Such intertextual maneuvers aid a player’s immersion in the game world and enable the Buffy ur-text to transcend its various media contexts and formations.

[5] One of the distinctive features of the game is that it combines two established and popular game genres. This creates greater diversity in the types of challenges offered as well as linking the game to the multi-generic nature of the show. Action-adventure style puzzle solving and exploring, similar to the *Tomb Raider* series (1996-present), are mixed with the “beat-em-up” format, similar in kind to that of the *Tekken* series (1996-present). Action-adventure games involve exploring spaces, gathering various objects and avoiding or defeating potential threats. The format is strongly dependent on the way that 3D videogame technology allows the player to roam around in the game world. Within this format the game-story is uncovered through the player’s actions: finding an object may facilitate access to another space in the game or trigger a cut scene. In the “beat-em-up” game genre a player controls an onscreen character who is in combat with either another player’s character or one controlled by the game engine itself. Games within the beat-em-up genre are composed of a number of skirmishes that usually take place in a fairly limited arena and use motion captured movements of martial arts specialists mapped onto the game’s characters. Players must produce combinations (combos) of movements, controlled by

pushing button sequences, to defeat enemies. Within the Buffy game, all enemies are controlled by the game engine rather than in the two-player mode available in most other beat-em-ups. Unlike most beat-em-ups the Buffy game has a complex storyline that is in many ways reflective of the narrative formations used in the show (although the way that the storyline is accessed and its temporal delivery are dissimilar). Players are also engaged in a wider diversity of activities than in most standard beat-em-ups and the combination of genres help to broaden the target market for the game. Within the game action-adventure style exploring dovetails with combat sequences, calling on a number of different skills and creating a rich and varied game experience, that reflects, in some respects, the rhythm and generic mix of the show.

[6] Like the generic hybridity that characterizes the show, the game too draws on a number of game types and genres to create a sense of textual richness and mythic resonance. The third person format follows that used by the *Tomb Raider* series, and many of the moves virtual Buffy performs are similar to Lara's: including the jumping elements and the "shimmy" to propel herself along ledges. Lara and Buffy are mostly seen in rear view mode, and both move and respond to controls beautifully, providing a key gameplay pleasure. Game Buffy is, however, far more human than "femme-bot" Lara (Carr, 2002: 178). Unlike cold, silent and doggedly metronomic Lara, who defeats her enemies from a distance with her iconic guns, Buffy's weapons are far more domestic (brooms shovels etc), her movements are more flexible and diverse, and she is very vocal during fights (this is also the case in the show with Buffy's bot-doppelganger who is combat evolved *and* emotionally quirky). In most cases it's hands on punches and kicks that allow her to get close up and personal with the enemy (the subtextual sexual dimension of this is noted reflexively by Spike at one stage in the game). In making the fighting more "hands-on," accompanied by smart retorts and Buffy's characteristic soprano grunt, and less reliant on specialist equipment, a crucial sense of immediacy and presence is heightened, which operates in some way to mask out the markers of remediation. There are other notable references to other games: in particular *Resident Evil* (1996-present) and *Blood Omen 2* (2002): a third person action adventure vampire game, where you play a vampire who stays healthy by drinking the blood of hapless mortals (similar to how game Buffy stays healthy). The topsy-turvy "dreamer" world, encountered in the game's last level, is stylistically close to the alternative realities that appear in both *American McGee's Alice* (2000) and *Clive Barker's Undying* (2001). Throughout the game, as with the show, witty one-liners are constantly present. These are frequently referential and make a strong connection between gameplay and our knowledge of the show and its family tree. Far from seeing these intertextual references as simply derivative, such borrowings lend textual richness. They draw on a player's cultural capital and supply a crucial connection between the show and the game. A further effect of the plethora of inter and intratextual referents is to minimize the markers of remediation, helping to make the Buffyverse seem more than simply the sum of its media-specific articulations.

Navigating Remediation

[7] The game uses spaces, places and characters from the show and offers a virtual experience of life in Sunnydale, although no live action footage appears. All cut scenes are generated digitally by the game engine, so that there is little difference in terms of quality between interactive and non-interactive sequences (something that has been the case in other games and which can inadvertently disrupt the sense of a seamless game world). While the game's cut scenes use all the features of editing and omniscient camera we would expect from the television show, during the game's interactive sections what we see on screen is welded to the position of the Buffy avatar, whom we play. The anchored third person mode enables *Tomb Raider* like moves to be made (particularly the jumping feature that provides the central challenge in some of the levels where knowing the avatar's exact spatial position is key to making a successfully timed and co-ordinated jump). The anchored third person view means you can see Buffy during all interactive sequences. During gameplay the "camera" (not a physical lens-based artifact but an effect of the game engine and its coding) keeps Buffy more or less in the center of the screen. The anchored third person point of view constitutes a key enunciative and narrational difference to that of the show, entailing an important distinction between the way the two media handle the orientation of space and time. This has an impact on the way that tension and suspense is constructed. Third person anchoring means that no parallel activities can be shown that are not within the frame of Buffy's view. It is because of this that cut scenes are regularly punctuated throughout the game, proving important in forwarding the game's storyline (based on the return of The Master) and in some cases they are used to solve or set up narrative enigmas. They also provide a rounding effect by introducing another point of view or act as a kind of cross-cut by showing an event occurring simultaneously but in another space, thereby aiding the development of both dramatic tension and story.

[8] The anchored third person characteristic, as an effect of the game's remediation of the show, has an impact on the role played by the scooby gang. In general they are peripheral to the fight action, which has become increasingly less the case

in the show. At the end of each level Buffy visits the library and the gang gives her various gifts and information. Interaction with the gang therefore represents a reward for the effort of getting through a level. The gang is rarely directly involved in solving puzzles or in the beat-em-up style fights with various demons and vamps, yet they do perform collective spells to help augment Buffy's powers (cued from the end of season four ["Primeval" 4.21] in which the gang performs a spell to increase Buffy's slayer power). The game therefore draws more on the action-adventure aspect of the show than the more 'soap' style interactions (although these are alluded to). This distinction is related specifically to the videogame context, which, particularly with action-adventure games, operates on a challenge basis. Current videogames, with their emphasis on doing rather than talking, lend themselves to the action format rather than personal interaction (although some online RPG games do allow players to converse with each other). What we are seeing here is to some extent related to the limitations of current gaming technologies and the fact that games have settled into a fairly small number of generic patternings. For some potential players the generic alignment with fight-based action adventure, designed as it conventionally is to attract a male rather than female audience, may prove a step too far from the innovative generic hybridity of the show that expressly sets out to overturn the gendering of genre. This is particularly apparent when measured against the show's increasing focus on the interpersonal sphere rather than fight action. Acting perhaps as form of compensation for the partial exclusion of the interpersonal dimension of the show there are, however, other forms of emotional engagement solicited by the media specific form and organization of the game that are not available so directly in the show.

Temporal Rhythms

[9] Each episode of the show is designed around a 45-minute time slot, appropriate to television scheduling. While the player has more control over when the game is played than when a televised episode is shown, the 22 week season is comparable to the time it takes to complete the game (so far I have been playing the Buffy game on and off for 3 months). Levels give the game an episode-like format, again working to link the game to the format of the show. The time spent on any level depends on a player's gaming skills, but most take at least a couple of sittings to get through when played in "normal" mode. This rhythm represents a clear formal departure from that used in the show, however. In the game the narrative unfolds commensurate to progress made in the game, as such narrative is actively striven for rather than being simply present, as it is in the show. The experience of gameplay and the speed that narrative is uncovered therefore depends on a player's mode of "interaction." The greater your fighting skills the more fluid and less repetitious the game experience will be.

The game levels are also organized around a number of points where the game is saved – approximately 4-6 in each level (less towards the end of the game). If you "die" in the game you will be "resurrected" at the last save point. Because saving the game can't be done at will (as with some games), it can take a long and frustrating time to reach a new save point. This means that each level is often replayed many times, and repetition is largely alien to the show's form. There is a one significant exception: "Life Serial" [6.5] has a game-like repetitious form. The game form reference is to some extent supported because the cycle of repetitions undergone by Buffy is the result of a spell cast by game-playing "nerds." But this is not a simple to one-to-one correspondence as the episode also references the film *Groundhog Day* [1993] and echoes the repeating format that has also been occasionally used in other fantasy/SF TV shows, in which genre alignment allows the rules of linear time to be played with.

[10] The inevitability of repetition during gameplay means that some strategies used to solicit tension and suspense are rather different to those used in the show. The game uses many horror film conventions to create suspense, however – such as sound effects to create atmosphere and indicate threat, yet repetition in itself carries its own often quite unbearable emotional tension and suspense. Will I get through the onslaught this time? Will I manage to perform that particular move, will I manage to avoid this or that obstacle. As a level is played over and over you can come to know the terrain, and the threats that lurk there, very well. You pace out the virtual space with no ellipses or elimination of "dead" time. The adrenaline and frustration produced by trying to get it right and the intimate knowledge of the space promotes rather different types of emotions and physical responses than those solicited by the show. When stuck in a chain of repetitions, you are in some sense "punished" by that stuckness with all its mythic and therapeutic resonances, rather like the paralysis Buffy suffers in the penultimate episode of season five ("The Weight of the World" 5.21). Importantly, for the game, the next installment of the story is withheld – no story before bedtime. Yet stuckness and repetition are very powerful things, soliciting a gamut of emotional responses that are produced by the occulted orchestrations of the game's design.

The “moral occult,” manicheanism and regimes of control

[11] Within a game context it's important to note that you can only play as Buffy. Role-Playing Games, such as *Neverwinter Nights* (2002), by contrast, offer the scope to build your own avatar character (with multiple choices that include the look of the character, ethical alignment, “race” etc). The Collective – the game's developers - chose action adventure over RPG form. As the game's VP of Production has said it “suited the material and there is a larger and more general market for action adventure style games” (Douglas Hare, 2002). Importantly, as we can only play Buffy we are therefore on the side of “good.” The game is set up so that we defeat vamp canon fodder and fight key enemy characters, such as Spike (who can't be killed because he's still a “live” character in the show) and the Master, newly resurrected in spirit form, all in the name of protecting the innocent and keeping the forces of evil at bay. Unlike most First Person Shooters and Role Playing Games, the Buffy game is organized in a substantially linear way. While the player must explore the game environment to pick up clues and artifacts, there's often little time to just poke about in virtual Sunnydale, something that as a Buffy fan initially attracted me to the game. With the use of locked doors and mystical barriers to channel the path taken through the game, your gaming destiny, is quite profoundly predetermined by the game's infrastructure. This is something I want now to explore in greater depth.

[12] In alignment with the moral premise that underlies most other horror-based videogames such as the *Resident Evil* cycle (1997 - present) or *Clive Barker's Undying* (2001), the game Buffy has to restore balance to a world corrupted by evil forces that threaten love, human values and the unfolding of the storyline. The aim of the game is to defeat the manifestation of such forces to restore order and to reveal the game narrative. The game itself is structured and programmed to aid in the attainment of these aims (although you may have to work at it). The game deploys a surface story line and concomitant aesthetic strategies that reference the good-versus-evil format of many horror films; however, this dualism is more deeply embedded in the infrastructure that shapes the dynamic nature of the game's interactivity. This infrastructure operates as kind of “moral occult” (Krzywinska, 2002a). The occulted level of programming, and its inherent ordering, simulates a fixed metaphysical and manichean virtual duality in which events are designated as positive/good or negative/evil. Players can interact with aspects of the surface dimension and the space of the game, but cannot interfere with its determining manichean infrastructure. Because you play Buffy, you are fixed into being an avatar of good. As a predetermined transcendent, metaphysical and extrinsic force, the game's moral occult is at work in the way it channels the player through its predesignated challenges. The game world is entirely geared around the restriction or promotion of a player's agency. These include physical barriers, life giving power-ups and handy weapons. Similarly the act of killing vamps and demons restores Buffy's life and power (enabling the player to progress through a level). The governing moral occult is also evident in other types of help offered to the player, such as Giles' combat lessons, clues as to where to go or what to do next, and in the series of rewards given for overcoming obstacles. Buffy herself is also programmed to help the player. Throughout the game the presence of a higher power – mirroring the role of “The Powers That Be” (a guise enacted by The Collective) - is always in evidence. Programming based pre-determination, which lies outside the player's sphere of agency, is therefore linked to the metaphysical dimension in which manicheanism operates in the show. In using a common transcendent and apparently extrinsic moral system to marry together disparate forms, the media specific differences become absorbed within the overarching mythical and moral fabric of the buffyverse. This is an effect of remediation but operates as if it were an effect of the Buffyverse's manichean metaphysics.

Fig 2 In Control – for the moment



[13] The shared mythology does not mean however that all markers of formal difference are totally erased. The interactive form of the game affords players an immediate and tactile experience of a dynamic between states of *being in control* and *out of control*. This is, of course, a key theme of the show, with its focus on the experience of growing up, which involves the characters in a process of learning what they can and can't control (Willow's use of magic is a good example). The game, by virtue of its interactive form, offers players an active and immediate, hands on / hands off experience of agency and determination. The operation of the game's programmed infrastructure invokes an experience of being subject to a pre-determined, extrinsic, and thereby, Othered force (in the full

Lacanian sense), provided by the tacit alliance between The Powers That Be and the game designers. This works in productive tension with the promise of player autonomy offered by the game's interactive dimension. It also reflects Buffy's own ambivalent and tense relationship with the authors (The Powers That Be) of her Slayer destiny, an aspect that derives from the world of Greek myth where heroes often struggle against the fates and the meddlings of gods.

[14] While the game possesses a deeply manichean structure, there are some incursions to the clear binary division between good and evil at work, which, to some extent, draws on a player's experience real-life moral ambiguities. One such incursion is related to the way the game organizes power ups: Buffy's life force is sustained mainly by her kills. Seen within the context of the show, this aspect of the game's design ties into an ongoing enigma around what Buffy is, something that is raised for the player as much as for Buffy herself. As yet the question whether Buffy is more demon than human is unresolved by the show. Her ambivalent relationship with her supernatural status seems to drive her attraction to Angel and Spike (vampires struggling with morality and redemption in different ways). That she is sustained by violent action in the game has an effect on her firm location as an avatar of "good": the more she kills – which she does with pleasure, expressed in her response "I feel like a new slayer" when an enemy's power passes to her – the stronger and more powerful she becomes. While this is broadly conceptualized morally as the fight for right and good it is nonetheless the case that the both avatar and player benefit from violence; the player is fully implicated in the ambiguously joyful practice of slaying. As Buffy often says during a bout of successful slaying "There's nothing like a spot of demon slaughter to make a girl's night."

Restriction-Autonomy

[15] Tension and suspense in the show is often intrinsically dependent on the fact that the viewer cannot intervene in the trajectory of events. We might watch and empathize as Dawn tries to resurrect her dead mother but we cannot help or hinder her. This aspect underlies many of the show's tensions, surprises and thrills. The pleasures entailed in this process are founded on an awareness of the inevitability of the events that will unfold without our intervention. Character's actions ultimately remain isolated from the sphere of the viewer, regardless of the extent to which he or she might "identify" or empathize with them. In this sense, I endorse Steve Shaviro's argument that horror suspense trades on an economy of delicious passivity, visceral affect and expectation. But the game offers more than this. A dynamic is set up between the experience of actively, sadistically, staking the vamps in the name of good (aided by sound effects and "real" physical action that make such dispatches feel "good" and satisfying), and a sense of being acted on by the game's infrastructure. This is channeled precisely by the pre-defined contours of the game's structure (with all its metaphysical resonances). The

juxtaposition of the two enhances relatively the experience of both states. This is something not available in such a direct and “hands on” way in televisual or cinematic texts, even if the show itself has a thematic investment in such dynamics.

[16] The metaphysical implications arise in a special relation to the technological context of the game. Potentially, interactivity presents a problem to horror genre suspense, which often relies on managing what the viewer sees and when he or she sees it. As Steven Poole states: “for a game to surprise and move the player with its story line, it must necessarily still keep certain plot developments out of the player’s control” (121). Full interactivity would negate the authorial shaping of interaction and, with it, the possibility for a directed storyline, which is crucial to the development of the horror experience in film or TV. It is for this reason that the game mixes interactivity with predetermined boundaries and intrusive interventions that channel the player’s engagement. The pleasure-suspense dynamics of the game is very much dependent on this combination. The game allows the player to act on events, but only in a manner determined by the game’s internal structure. The game creates scenarios in which the pleasures and frustrations of being acted upon can be experienced: the dialectical on/off dynamics of interactivity create and heighten this. As such it seems mistaken to call games “promethean” as Poole does: there is no real transgression of higher powers; players remain, by and large, dependent on the tips and functionality bestowed on them. Like the show-Buffy, who can never escape her Slayer destiny, during gameplay a player is dutifully, sublimely, in the service of The Powers That Be. The pay-off is, precisely, the experiential gain of suspense and dramatic tension. Yet this is always balanced against the sphere of interaction that promises self-directed agency (with the crunch caveat that it is cast within certain parameters). The game therefore augments what is already present thematically in the show (as noted by various Buffy academics such as Rhonda Wilcox and Roz Kaveney).

[17] The experience of a restrictive inability to act on situations resonates with Buffy’s struggle with her destiny and other comparable themes and tropes. Zombification, various types of possession and bodily invasion are typical horror genre scenarios used in the show that represent a loss of autonomy and self-determination (for example Oz’s monthly werewolf transformation and Willow’s uncontrollable addiction to magic in season six). The thematic interest in restriction reflects reception dynamics, the viewer - like the often beset characters on screen—is also helpless, unable to alter the trajectory of on-screen action. As such the show is less able than the game to provide a formal structure that creates a concrete and immediate experience of restriction and autonomy. While we manically button mash to prevent the vampires from leeching out Buffy’s life, once it happens you can do nothing but watch her groan and die ...and it was your actions (or fumbled inactions) that caused her to die, doomed by the game’s Powers That Be to return to the last save point.

[18] The interactive dimension of the game enables a *more* acute experience of losing autonomous control than that achieved by the show. This is achieved partly because, at times, the player does have a sense of active self-determination (which can only be represented in the shows). When autonomy is lost the sense of pre-determination is enhanced by virtue of the relative difference: something experienced very concretely by the player. As I have shown, game events and the path taken through the game are often imposed on the player, a stratagem that allows access to pleasures closer to those conventionally used by the show (and which derive from both emotion-inducing modes of melodrama and horror). While interactivity promises control and autonomous action it does not mean therefore that the player occupies an unassailable position of mastery (reflecting Buffy’s ambivalent experience of mastery). It is sharply apparent that the game’s virtual world, like that of the show, is a closed system: the authored aspect of narration governs the fabric of the game, channeling the way we negotiate and experience it. The metaphysical framework operates as a bridge between the game and the show. As Andrew Darley notes, and I build on this to underpin my argument about the game’s inherent moral occult, there are points in most video games at which their pre-programmed nature means that the “element of control and choice...is revealed as illusory” (157). I do not see this as a “formulaic” game flaw, as he does. Instead this works in close unity with the guiding restriction / autonomy thematic present in the show. The game and show are working with similar thematic logics, which to some extent diminishes the particularities of the two media forms, but the game raises the stakes by implicating the player directly in a rhythmic cycle of predetermination and autonomy.

[19] The pleasure of horror, in a general sense, is that it seduces through the arousal of anxiety, yet this is often combined with the containment of that anxiety provided by a pre-determined “good will prevail” narrative form. In the game this safety-net is provided by the forces of “good,” with which the player is aligned, that ensure that evil can, potentially, be defeated. At times play is experienced as fluid, smooth and continuous (the occulted metaphysical force is literally with you), your movements flow and you stake the vamp with ease: you ARE Buffy at these times. This is “good” interaction, a player’s movements perfectly co-ordinate with the demands of the game. At other times frustration and stasis prevail, yet the player nonetheless knows that a way out is always provided – even if it means doggedly repeating the level. When things go badly

the experience of playing the Buffy game is often rather like the nightmare scenario of moving yet not moving, swimming, as it were, against the inexorable metaphysical current. And when you perform badly the distinction between superhero Buffy and you as player becomes acutely apparent. However, the frustration (and concomitant anxiety) accrued in not overcoming an obstacle is a positive factor since it motivates the player to improve their skills and work harder to gain the sense of relief that follows from mastering a taxing sequence. Yet, the game is designed to help the player to acquire skills in a progressive way so that the Buffy myth can be lived up to, and the subject/object disjunction minimized.

[20] There are times when the game Buffy does things independently from the player, most of these are in non-interactive cut scenes, but occasionally during game-play Buffy will look in a certain direction to warn the player of an impending problems. Such independently avatar-motivated action solicits, for me at least, something of a small identity crisis because it reminds me of the distinction between her as "other" and myself as player (something I am apt to forget in the thick of successful play, which is more "immersive" precisely because of sustained and progressive play). These exceptional incidents do serve to uncover one the game's guiding logics, however. As with the process of remediation, the game's underlying trajectory is towards unification rather than differentiation at a number of levels. When play is going badly, the player is thrown off this path and, unless the game is abandoned, is motivated to work harder to return to that predestined path (wherein the markers of remediation are diminished). This meta-logic guides the rhythm of game-play: a player oscillates between movement and stasis, achievement and non-achievement, self-determination and pre-determination. Thematically this dovetails with the experiences of key characters in the show, each of whom has struggled with various blocks on desire and achievement (which of course drives both the show's and the game's dramatic structure and tension).

[21] The magics of technological remediation at work in the fabric of the game operate to crystallize the Buffyverse as a meta-textual phenomenon. The show and the game both draw on the curious pleasures and dangers of the ambiguous and fragile status of identity, whether it is personal, generic, or in terms of form and narrative. However, there are some notable differences that are in some ways masked through the process of remediating the Buffyverse into the videogame arena. While the interpersonal is diminished in terms of Buffy's relationship with the scooby gang, other, perhaps compensatory, interpersonal relations are foregrounded between the player and the Buffy character, and the player and the authored gameworld. Yet while various ambiguities of emotion and category might be experienced, and some moral ambiguities are present, ultimately the game consolidates fixed notions of good and evil as discrete transcendent categories. This provides a moral safety valve that provides narrative structure as well as sanctioning stake-em-up mayhem. The backdrop of the supernatural, with its dream dimensions that warp reality and which, in the closing levels of the game, split the slayer into dark and light versions, touch base with very conventional moral binaries. And as such the game sidelines some of the more subtle incursions to the coding of good and evil present in the show: Rhonda J Wilcox (2002), for example, has argued that light, traditionally used to signify good (particularly in vampire-texts), represents pain for Buffy after her resurrection in season five.

[22] Other ambiguities appear to be present in the game, however, particularly in relation to the player's interaction with the way the game constructs its version of the virtual Buffyverse and how death operates there. In the show, death is treated in different ways, vampires are the living dead but can be killed, Buffy has twice been resurrected by her friends, yet some deaths are very final. In the game, the player and the Buffy avatar dies, yet do not die, which is certainly ambiguous, but while this might look to be a different logic of death than the show, this too operates within the terms of a manichean structure. Like Christ the Buffy avatar never dies in a decisive sense, because she is in the service of good (she is, as the game states, "resurrected," with the easy push of button rather than through Willow's dark magics). Most enemies stay dead when properly killed (unless they have something of the human about them, Spike, Dru, and Angel – The Master is an exception). This difference in death-types links to the way the game and the show express a transcendent moral order at both surface and deep levels. Such a dynamic allows death to be pleasurable because the real finality of death is disavowed (something markedly overturned in the show with the definitive deaths of key characters Joyce and Tara), plus it also defends against the lack of an immanent and incontrovertible moral order. Within the gamespace, you have killed and yet not killed, been killed and not, the order of which is managed and conceptualized by the virtual and occulted mechanics of the game, and this connects to some extent with the game-style resurrections of Buffy in the show.

Nerds, Gaming, and the Rhetorics of "Mastery"

[23] While the Buffyverse has to some extent transcended its various media articulations, it is the case that the game is a remediation of the show, rather than vice-versa. The show remains the prime authoritative source material of the

Buffyverse. However gaming in general, in both its social and formal aspects, can be identified as one of the show's important referents. Many Buffy fans are likely to be gamers or have played games more "casually" and the show often exploits the types of cultural experiences that its audience are likely to have encountered. I have already mentioned the resurrection of the Slayer and the form of "Life Serial" as examples of tacit references to game form, I might also include, as a Quake player, Buffy's use of the Quake-style Rocket Launcher to kill the Judge in "Becoming II" (2.22) [fig 3]. The introduction of the "nerds" saw a bolder step in this direction. The first time Buffy does direct battle with them collectively – they are invisible - is in a games arcade ("Gone" 6.11). In "Flooded" (6.4) the nerds have a game playing in looped mode on their newly acquired widescreen TV (it looks as if it may be *Max Payne* [2001]). Gaming is also referenced in "Never Leave Me" (7.9) where Willow uses Dungeons and Dragons style jargon, commonly used in multiplayer RPG online games, to facilitate an effective communication with Andrew. These examples indicate the way that the nerds more generally frame their bid for world domination and battle with Buffy in terms of both gaming and the type of camp villainy often present in popular culture.



Fig 3 Buffy does Quake

[24] The three nerds seem to represent different degrees of "geek-dom." Of each Jonathan has the clearest notion of the difference between "play" and reality, but is seduced by the power of magic to compensate for ineffectuality, signified in part through his short stature. Andrew is in many ways Warren's catspaw, a result of nascent homosexuality that finds expression through role-play style engagement with his friends. Unlike Warren, Andrew is opposed to killing people, but is roped in through his need to be part of the gang. Warren, however, exhibits the strongest pathological amorality guided by a thirst of power. Jonathan and Andrew's shock at learning that Warren murdered his ex-friend indicates a key difference between them. Warren is most closely identified with evil, he's lost a sense of a division between fantasy and reality and his level of "play" is deeply pathological. A graphic indication of this can be seen in the way he slides from the use of the fantasy-coded magic to the use of a real gun (an artifact never previously seen on the show) to shoot Buffy in "Grave" (6.21). A clear reference to the game-to-gun debate, exemplified by certain press reactions to the Columbine massacre for example, that looms over the episode. As is typical of the show's complex and relativist take on *personal* morality (which contrasts with the presence of a transcendent manichean order) there is no simple equation between virtual gaming and real murder. Tellingly, only Warren is intent on murder, as an overblown form of compensation for the humiliations visited on him by Buffy, rather than playful antagonism. The three nerds each turn to a potent mix of gaming, magic and technological wizardry to compensate for their social impotency. By virtue of her supernaturally charged powers Buffy stands as an emblem of what they do not have, and further presents a challenge to Jonathan and Warren's media-derived idealized notions of masculine identity. As a result they attempt to become her nemesis, in the mode of Bond or Batman style villains. Partly due to this rhetoric of camp villainy, their attempts at mastery are generally a source of comedy and even, at times, pathos. Nonetheless their quest for control is part of a more generalized theme around the limits of autonomy and has strong ties with the way in which the game version of the show orchestrates interactivity. In some sense I often feel rather like one of the nerds when playing the game, in my attempts to control Buffy and master her movements through the remote device of the game handset. Perhaps this is why the nerds are absent from the game: if they were present then such negative geeky connections would be too uncomfortably overt for both players and game designers.

Game Over

[25] The interactive form of the Buffy game creates a complex interaction between bounded choice and predetermination

that resonates with the way in which individuals, including the main Buffy characters, interact with the order of things. This occurs in the "safe" context of modally marked fantasy and its concomitant moral occult. The metaphysicalized determinism of the game accrues for the player a direct and heightened experience of being acted upon. As such the game is carefully designed and authored to exploit the frustrations and pleasures around living up to the Buffy myth as well as lending the act of playing the game greater meaning and resonance.

[26] Players are offered the challenge to defeat the technologically-based big bad (aided by the game's occulted infrastructure); if achieved a pleasurable sense of mastery may be accrued that reinforces the illusion of personal autonomy. Yet this can only be achieved by following the set pathway and fulfilling the quests designated by the game (the game's linear nature gives little scope for so-called emergent gameplay that would transgress the intentions of the game designers). The contract drawn up between hands-on interaction of playing Buffy and hands-off pre-determinism inherent within the game's infrastructure, operates, therefore, with the emotional economics of being acted upon, as much as with the drive to act, colonize, and take charge of the Slayer and her power. The dialectical switching between the two intensifies the experience of both restriction and autonomy, a strategy that neatly dovetails with and augments one of the show's primary themes. The remediation of Buffy into game form adds a media-specific interactive dimension, but the game's inherent moral occult operates to meld the world created by the game into the broader meta-textual Buffverse, which, despite being a hi-tech media phenomenon, has many of the transcendent attributes of the creation myth.

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Claire Fossey

Never Hurt the Feelings of a Brutal Killer: Spike and the Underground Man

Buffy (to Spike): Look at you, you idiot. Poor Spikey. Can't be a human, can't be a vampire. Where the hell do you fit in? ("Smashed" 6009)

(1) The psychological embodiment of a schism: dreaming turned sour and strong will without direction, resulting in an anti-hero who suffers greatly from an inability to properly define himself and the role he is meant to play. It is not difficult to think of describing the popular *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* character of Spike in this manner. As the sensitive and introspective William he is alienated from human society and so turns to the demonic realm where at least the inhuman parts of his nature can find proper expression. Later, a microchip-shackled Spike finds himself prevented from acting as a monster and thus from taking on the role of a villain. Despite the subsequent reemergence of some of the more human parts of his nature, however, he is little more accepted as a real hero than he had come to be as a serious villain. Can't be a true force of good, can't be a true force of evil, just where *does* Spike fit in?

(2) In terms of *Buffy* scholarship, a place as been found for "poor Spikey" readily enough. To Freudian theory, for example, the vampire Spike represents the id and the human William its repression by the superego, while according to Jung he may be seen as both the shadow self which reflects Buffy's dark side and as her animus (she functioning as his anima in turn).^[1] Excellent arguments have been put forward for reading Spike in this way (see Wilcox for example). What this essay will do is draw the psychoanalytic reading back a step, tying the character in with the literary work which did much to inspire Freud's theories, that is to say, with the writing of Dostoevsky. In particular, Spike will be likened to Dostoevsky's Underground Man, the alienated and dual-natured anti-hero first encountered in *Notes from Underground* (1864) and continued in *Crime and Punishment* (1866).

(3) The actual term "Underground Man" comes from the unnamed protagonist of *Notes from Underground*, but it applies equally well to various versions of the sick, spiteful, lonely hero found in Dostoevsky's works. In an introduction to *Notes from Underground*, Jessie Coulson describes the Underground Man as "a man turned in upon himself, a man of heightened awareness and self-consciousness, whose sensitivity to slights drives him alternately to retreat into his corner, his underground, and to revenge himself for his humiliations in humiliating others." The underground in this context is a metaphor for a psychological or spiritual state rather than a physical setting. In *Buffy*, the underground is also given concrete and literal form as Spike's crypt. Though the practical aspect of subterranean living for the vampire is obvious, the manner in which the space is presented to the viewer suggests that it is more than just a retreat from the killing rays of the sun. It is the place he chooses as his haven when his inability to feed on humans and his newfound pleasure in killing demons result in his rejection by the demon world; a place where he practices speeches to a mannequin clad in Buffy's stolen clothing; and in general a place for sulking, ranting, pacing, kinky sex and the occasional ill-planned black market demon egg scheme. Even when Buffy enters the

crypt, there is an unspoken acknowledgment that she is entering his world. In essence, "My house, my rules." ("Crush" 5014). The Underground Man finds such refuge essential, for he is convinced that all of the world outside is against him and exists primarily to thwart his designs (Preben 32-3).

(4) Rejection and alienation are central to the character of the Underground Man. He feels separated from his peers and from society in general, and so he seeks out a state of isolation which renders this separation even more real and literal. He is at once scornful of others and hurt that they care as little for him as he professes to care for them. In *Notes from Underground* this leads to feverish and more than a little ridiculous plots to take revenge on an officer who has offended him by purposely colliding with the man in the street or to snub old school friends who respond with genuine and unfeigned indifference. In *Crime and Punishment* the protagonist, Raskolnikov, reasons that he is not simply isolated from but actually above society and sets out to prove this through the brutal yet (according to his rationale) justifiable murder of an old pawnbroker, simply "one of those acts which one must commit to be sure of escaping the limits of ordinary humanity" (Madaule 43).

(5) This facet of the Underground Man is most applicable to Spike as he appears throughout the second half of Season Four of *Buffy*. After the implanting of the chip which prevents him from harming humans in "The Initiative" (4007) he can neither participate in vampire society nor can he join human society. There is some suggestion that the Scoobies might be willing to accept him, but Spike is scornful of the idea:

GILES: Thinking about your affliction -- as well as your newly discovered ability to fight only demons. It occurs to me - and I realize it's against your nature - but have you considered there may be a higher purpose--

SPIKE: Aagh. Made me lose count. What are you still doing here?

GILES: Talking to myself, apparently. ("The I in Team" 4013)

Spike is contemptuous of the Scoobies and vehement about his desire to have nothing further to do when them. At the same time, he refuses to leave Sunnydale, citing plans to take revenge on the Initiative for what they have done to him. These great plans come to little more than attempting to stir up trouble between Buffy and Riley by trying to implicate Riley in Professor Walsh's foiled plan to kill the Slayer ("Goodbye Iowa" 4014). And, despite his ongoing variations in the key of "I can't stand the lot of you." ("Entropy" 6018), it is clear quite early on that Spike's assertions of his disregard for the Scoobies belie, if not always a need for their unconditional acceptance, a need for their recognition and respect. If he truly did not care what Xander or Giles thought of him, then he would not be continually be drawn into "trading jabs" with them, particularly when they (at least initially) are much more authentic in their disregard. Xander's response in "Crush" to the observation that he might have hurt Spike's feelings with his dismissive "Hey, Evil Dead, you're in my seat." is at first meant as a joke. "You should never hurt the feelings of a brutal killer" indeed.

(6) Rejected by those whom he at once looks down upon and requires the regard of, the Underground Man retreats to his hole in the ground. His time is spent "resenting his situation, hatching elaborate revenge plots but never acting upon them" (Johnston). For all his seething about those who have wittingly or unwittingly humiliated and offended him, though, there is a part of the Underground Man which is plagued by inaction. This may seem the antithesis of Spike, and indeed by Season Six Buffy and Dawn have come to rely on him as an active fighting force. However, by that point his regard for Buffy has inspired the beginnings of an emergence from the underground and a desire to manifest within himself some measure of the good she embodies. More on this later. The Underground Man fails to be a man of action because he is too preoccupied with his own struggle with alienation, with "the abyss into which he sank of his own will" (Madaule 44).

(7) The inaction of the Underground Man is not total, rather it tends simply to be a function of erratic and often ineffectual *action*. Though the chipped Spike of Season Four is furious about his "little trip to the vet" and dearly hopes that some harm will come to the Scoobies, his efforts to either be rid of the chip or find some way of hurting Buffy and her friends that will not result in a migraine are not nearly as serious as one would expect from someone Riley later characterizes as "deadly, amoral and opportunistic" ("As You Were" 6015). Given Spike's understandable humiliation and rage at having been rendered vampirically impotent, one would think he would make the chip's removal more of a priority than the two occasions in which he has made an actual attempt to be rid of it ("New Moon Rising" 4019 – "Primeval" 4021, in which Adam makes a deal with and double-crosses him; "Out of My Mind" 5004, in which he and Harmony kidnap Riley's military doctor who fakes the removal procedure) [2]. Though the problem is attacked with gusto at the end of Season Four, when we next see Spike in "Buffy vs. Dracula" (5001), it appears to have left his mind entirely. Instead, he is busy disparaging Dracula and acting offended that the count came to Sunnydale in search of Buffy and not him. As for "Out of My Mind," the episode which begins with Spike looking forward to being able to at long last kill and eat Buffy ends with him realizing that he is hopelessly in love with her. The issue of dealing with the chip is promptly forgotten. Likewise, his efforts to hurt the Scoobies in ways which do not rely solely on sarcasm and character assassination tend to be impulsive and fleeting.

(8) This trend of sporadically attempted, often abortive action is distinctly at odds with Angel's assertion when we first meet Spike in Season Two: "Once he starts something he doesn't stop until everything in his path is dead." ("School Hard" 2003). The statement would presumably have been true for that time period, when Spike was motivated by a desire to please and to protect his sire and paramour Drusilla. After her rejection of him, he retains his strength of will he possessed before, but it has become a will lacking in direction. He now oscillates seemingly at random between rash, violent action and equally violent self-pity, something which is apparent even as early as "Lover's Walk" (3008). Drusilla having just left him at this point, he comes storming back to Sunnydale to take his revenge of Angel and Buffy, who he blames entirely for his misfortune. Then he decides that it is Drusilla who needs to be punished -- "I'm going to get what's mine... Teach her to walk out on me." -- and forces Willow to undertake a love spell which will compel his ex to come crawling back to him. From a rather effectively frightening menacing of the novice witch, Spike is next found drinking cocoa in the Summers' kitchen and whining about his love life to a sympathetic Joyce. One good fight later and he has remembered his mantra of violence as fun and excitedly heads off back from whence he came. Of course the viewer knows from "The Harsh Light of Day" (4003) that Drusilla soon leaves him again, inspiring him to come back to Sunnydale and make another abortive attempt on Buffy's life.

(9) Just why is the Underground Man's will so chaotic? Spike's answer to this regarding himself would be immediate and indignant: "It's the chip. Steel and wires and silicon. It won't let me be a monster. And I can't be a man." ("Seeing Red" 6019). He cannot accept that it is his own nature and not his "little handicap" which makes him such a tangled web of psychological traits. As should be apparent from the above paragraph, however, Spike was having difficulty deciding upon and attaining a means of self-fulfillment long before the Initiative got hold of him. Though certainly magnified by it, the conflict does not stem from the chip but from his latent humanity, something which the demon in "Villains" (6020) seems to sense:

VOICE: Look what she's reduced you to.

SPIKE: It's this bloody chip, not-

VOICE: You were a legendary dark warrior - and you let yourself be castrated.

The "she" here is Buffy and the demon's mention of castration refers not to the chip but to the effect her goodness has had on Spike in inspiring very human feelings of love. There always was some measure of humanity in Spike, embodied by his devotion to Drusilla[3], but she herself was a creature of darkness and thus desired from him darker expressions of love -- sentimental presents of jewelry might please her for a moment, but the gift of a fresh human heart would bring her far greater pleasure -- and so everyone

(viewers, the demon world and the vampire himself) found little cause to doubt that his nature remained primarily evil.

THE JUDGE (of Spike and Drusilla): You two stink of humanity. You share affection and jealousy.

SPIKE: Yeah, what of it? ("Surprise" 2013)

At this point, his humanity functions as what Christopher Golden aptly describes in his novel about Spike and Dru's pre-Sunnydale days as "a phantom limb": a small presence, as annoying as it is disturbing, which can be easily shrugged off. By Season Six, this minorly troubling and ultimately ignorable phantom limb has grown into a whole other self, a double. It is the resulting duality, the "diametric contrast of his humanity with his evilness" (Spah) which leads to the character's sense of inner chaos, a sense which increases in strength as the questions increase in scope.

(10) No longer is it sufficient for Spike to question whether it would be better to kill the Slayer today or Saturday, to drag Dru back or simply mope because she is gone. By the end of Season Four he has come to question whether he is defined by action or inaction (though he still blames the latter on the chip). At the end of Season Five and throughout Season Six he has arrived at the truly big questions: is he evil or good, psychologically inhuman or human, monster or man? Furthermore, he has lost all certainty of which of these he wants to be. As Victoria Spah points out, the "I know that I'm a monster. But you treat me like a man." line in "The Gift" (5022) demonstrates that at this moment, Spike is humbly grateful at having been thus elevated in her estimation. Later, after Buffy has kissed and then rejected him anew, Spike decides that he would rather be a monster, even if this requires a bit of a self-pep-talk to make himself believe this is indeed his true nature:

Creature of the night, here yeah? Some people forget that. [...] Just because she's confused about where she fits in, I'm supposed to be too? 'Cause I'm not. I know what I am. I'm dangerous. I'm evil. ("Smashed")

The fact of the matter is that he is at least as confused as Buffy when it comes to matters of identity. After his attempted rape of Buffy in "Seeing Red"^[4] -- an act which shows he still could indeed be dangerous, albeit in the most disastrously human of ways -- we find him having retreated to the underground of his crypt, asking himself back to back questions: "What have I done?" and "Why didn't I do it?" As with Raskolnikov, even in the face of a violent act he has not lost the ability to see the difference between good and evil.^[5] He is certain that someone who would do such a thing cannot be good, yet a truly evil being would have felt none of the remorse which torments him. At what the shooting script for the episode describes as an all time low for Spike's self-loathing (just as Raskolnikov was at a similar point in the narrative of *Crime and Punishment* "reduced ... to the level of the most humble and despised" (Madaule 45), he realizes he cannot be wholly a monster or a man.

(11) In his inability to align himself with one pole or the other or to simply accept the paradox that two opposite impulses might exist in the same space, he comes to embody the schism which often appears in the writing of Dostoevsky. This duality occurs even in the rare case in which the writer creates a good character, such as Prince Leo Myshkin from *The Idiot* whose name means "lion mouse". The symbolism of the name Raskolnikov as far more abrupt and violent, for a *raskol* in Russian literally means "split" or "schism" and is also a term used to refer to the sharp end of an ax or hatchet, which happens to be Raskolnikov's murder weapon of choice. Although Rhonda Wilcox is quite right in her assertion that Spike as a name is clearly phallic and functions as a reflection of the highly masculinized persona he has created for himself, I would argue that it can also be taken as a variation of the *raskol*. In the case of both

Raskolnikov and Spike, the name is derived from a standard work implement which has been transformed by the context of use into a horrific weapon. Although a railroad spike is not in itself quite so obviously conducive to the notion of splitting or being split in two as the cutting blade of an ax, the sharp end of the spike is flat like a chisel and could be used in a similar manner, as a means of widening and ultimately splitting an object along a fault line or point of weakness. To apply this symbolism to Spike, we could say that humanity has always been present in him in the form of a hairline crack which with time and events has grown in size until it could no longer be shrugged off with a flippant "Yeah, what of it?". The original point of weakness came from his very human love for Drusilla, something which Buffy capitalized on in "Lie to Me" (2007), threatening to kill her as a means of forcing Spike to call off a small massacre.[6] When his love later comes to be directed towards the Slayer herself, by definition a force for good, the hairline crack becomes a great rift.

(12) For the protagonist of *Notes from Underground*, love is ultimately impossible due to a failure of courage which leaves him unable to venture far enough out of his underground to properly engage life and form meaningful connections with others. This is appropriate for a novel which deals with themes of rejection and rebellion. For the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, love is not only possible but presented as a key means of redemption. This is not to say that the character arc of either Raskolnikov or Spike follows the cardinal rule of romance novels which states that love is the answer and never the problem, far from it, for love here at once brings great suffering and offers a chance for renewal and regeneration. Indeed, Anthony Khrapovitsky writes that "Regeneration is what Dostoevsky wrote about in all his novels: repentance and regeneration, falling into sin, and correction. . . ." Love is both an inspiration and a prize, but it is not without cost.[7]

(13) The idea that love involves the hero's inner struggle with the less positive aspects of his own nature and has the power "to elevate him to a higher moral plane" is not unique to Dostoevsky and should indeed be well-known to those familiar with the mythos of Courtly Love (Spah). It is still of interest to take note of Dostoevsky's version, though, for the Underground Man shares some of the darker and more destructive qualities which are a part of Spike's nature and which Courtly Love tradition cannot so easily subsume. Although both the courtly lover and the Underground Man exhibit similar symptoms of their emotionally disturbed state: the insomnia, the weeping, and the self-questioning, the Underground Man invariably takes his responses that much lower in terms of self-debasement and general depravity. The opening line of *Notes from Underground* reads: "I am a sick man. . . . I am an angry man." By the end of the first page, he has confessed to his great capacity for spite and the delight he takes in hurting peoples' feelings. Though the writer gives him flashes of perceptiveness which may make him appear momentarily heroic, the Underground Man is an antihero.[8] Observed through the filter of Courtly Love, the viewer may find some discomfort in watching the enamored lover quickly descend from rehearsing his declaration of love to symbolically assaulting his beloved by angrily beating his Buffy mannequin with the box of chocolates he intended to give to the real Buffy ("Triangle" 5011), or in the funny yet disturbing John Cleese-style yelling fit from "Crush" in which he blames his torment on his past and future loves whom he has tied up and decides that the rational thing to do would be to kill them both. The literal assault upon the beloved in "Seeing Red" struck many as deeply disturbing and led to a spate of internet forum postings in the spring of 2002 in which fans argued over whether or not there is any apology which could be made for his actions and thus whether or not it is socially acceptable to remain a fan of the character. While one would have to offer a great deal of explanation as to why a courtly lover would commit such an act, for the Underground Man it is par for the course.

(14) It could be said that Spike's attempted rape is born of the same instincts and serves the same narrative function as Raskolnikov's murder of the old pawnbroker. The simple destructive urge which acts as a foil for the Underground Man's impulse to do good is partly to blame. Another motivating factor is the desire for existential freedom. Raskolnikov murders to assert his individuality and to prove that he is a free agent who is not bound by the rules of society. It is implied in "Fool for Love" (5007) that Spike got any major quarrels he might have had with society's rules out of his system over the course of his first years as a vampire when, as he later tells Buffy, he decided to make a few rules of his own. The lack of freedom he experiences comes from his attachment to the woman he loves.

You think I like having you here?! Destroying everything that was me until all that's left is you in a dead shell. You say you hate it but you won't leave. ("Crush")

This is Spike's first real rebellion against the "invasive Buffy-force" which is slowly but surely undermining his once prized sense of evilness and turning him into a mirror for her goodness. While the Courtly Love model requires qualifiers to deal with such clear rebellion against the good influence of the lady, for the Underground Man rebellion for the sake of personal freedom (and indeed simply for the sake of rebellion) is a hallmark of the character.

Where did all the sages get the idea that a man's desires must be noble and virtuous? Why do they imagine that he must inevitably will what is reasonable and profitable? What a man needs is simply and solely *independent* volition, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead. *Notes from Underground*

In this light, Spike's base and violent act in "Seeing Red" is the ultimate rebellion against the ennobling force of the lady. It also functions as a means of asserting his right to existential choice regardless of how damaging that choice might be.[9] Through making bad choices, however, he may be brought to the realization that total freedom can only lead to chaos, something he has decided he does not desire.

(15) Nicholas Berdyaev writes of human freedom as an ordeal in that it obliges individuals to face and to question its moral limits. For him, the evil encountered in the writings of Dostoevsky can be viewed as "the path of man, his tragic path, the fate of one who is free, an experience which can also enrich man, raise him to a higher plane." [10] In *Crime and Punishment*, the committing of murder is a necessary step in the process of Raskolnikov's coming to recognize within himself the potential for goodness and to set himself on the path to salvation. In *Buffy*, Spike's action results in feelings of tremendous remorse which spur him on to taking a definite step towards redemption by having his soul returned to him.[11] Part of Dostoevsky's aim when he writes Raskolnikov is to take a young nihilist and man of action such as his contemporary Turgenev created in his novel *Fathers and Sons* and to break him. This functions both as an exercise in psychology and to create a low point from which the character will be given the opportunity to rebuild as something better than he was before. The parallel to Spike's treatment by *Buffy's* writers is obvious: the threatening villain we first meet in "School Hard" is rendered merely a "comic buffoon" by the episode "Pangs" (4008) in Season Four (Boyette). Again, this is done both because it is interesting to see what will happen and as a means of allowing the character to begin making a slow transition from Evil to Good.

(16) The redemption of Spike has proven a popular topic for internet discussion (the *Bloody Awful Poet Society* web-site actually takes this as its mission statement and has a section dedicated to essays on the topic).[12] Although at the time of writing it looks very much as though he will indeed be redeemed, the specific form this takes and whether it occurs onscreen or beyond the scope of the series is as of yet unclear. One thing that has already become clear, though, is that any eventual redemption of the character will be tied to love. Given that Spike has always been characterized as a "fool for love," how could it be any other way? Love for the Underground Man is a struggle between the warring parts of his nature: it is a struggle between the part of him which desires absolute freedom and the part which desires the moral goodness which the beloved represents, between the part which resents his alienation and the part which dares not leave the stronghold of the underground for the uncertainty of the world above. Guided by the positive influence of his lady (here not an actual Lady but a woman ennobled by her goodness), he begins a process of spiritual regeneration.[13] Love eventually forces him to realize that the steady stream of explanations he arrives at by way of critiquing his past behavior have not after all led him to a level of self-

understanding far superior to that of the poor, deluded souls around him.^[14]

And he had come back to life, and he knew it, and felt it with every fiber of his renewed being...

He could not think of anything long or continuously that evening or concentrate on anything. Besides, now he would hardly have been able to solve any of his problems consciously; he could only feel. Life had taken the place of dialectics, and something quite different had to work itself out in his mind.

Crime and Punishment

(17) Instead of always engaging in a futile effort to find a rational explanation to his own paradox and then concluding it is everyone else who is crazy -- "Nothing wrong with me, something's wrong with her." ("Smashed") -- the Underground Man who has "come back to life" also comes to accept that basic human (or perhaps more accurately in this case, "humanoid") nature is irresolvable and that he, like everyone else, must balance and navigate between the two polar extremes as best he can.

(18) The redeeming power of love is in its ability to inspire in the Underground Man a desire to strive to come out on the side of good. Dostoevsky does not require that this goodness take on saintly proportions, indeed in his estimation a person who is wholly and exclusively made of good impulses can only be an idiot. ^[15] As with the courtly lover, the Underground Man who allows himself to be redeemed by love "evolves, becomes something better [...] while staying true to character" (Spah). He will, no doubt, continue to falter, continue to on occasion say and do quite the wrong thing, for he is only just beginning to consider the possibility of a new life above and beyond the underground and still possesses (though he is learning to curb) the irrational and destructive parts of his nature. It is more important to Dostoevsky that the character decides to set out on the journey rather than it is to present conclusive proof of his arrival at the other end. In fact, in the closing passages of *Crime and Punishment* he tells us that Raskolnikov has much farther to go than he realizes, and that trials which he has undergone in the past are not the only ones which will be required of him before he can reach true expiation for his sins.

(19) And this is where, for the present, we leave Spike. In his effort to come as close to the light (where Buffy is) as his nature (both dualistic and vampiric) allows, ^[16] he has endured punishing and dangerous trials such as withstanding torture by a hellgod and surviving combat with demon opponents. Though the first won him Buffy's respect and the second his soul, Spike clearly has a long way to go before he can look forward to an existence filled with "hugs and puppies". The underground is not behind us just yet. As with Raskolnikov, we can expect any process of rebirth or regeneration to be a gradual one. Even at the end of it, Spike will never be "God's gift" ("Wrecked" 6010) in terms of virtue and perfect goodness, but then as he says himself, that "wouldn't be nearly as interesting, would it?"

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[1] See Wilcox. "'Every Night I Save You'" and Nurss. "Spike as Shadow."

[2] Though viewers were initially led to view Spike's encounter with the demon in "Villains" – "Grave" (6020-6022) as a third unsuccessful attempt at a chipectomy, the episodes "Beneath You" (7002) and "Never Leave Me" (7009) leave no doubt that he sought only his soul.

[3] Victoria Spah discusses at length the elevating and humanizing effects of love on Spike's character in her essay "'Ain't Love Grand?' Spike and Courtly Love."

[4] It has been pointed out in recent entries to a number of fan forums that referring to The Incident as an attempted rape is problematic given Buffy's past pattern of sparring with Spike and saying 'no' but not really meaning it. I am using the word rape here because it is the one Buffy herself uses in "Beneath You" and which Spike acknowledges as an appropriate description of his actions. As with Raskolnikov's actions in *Crime and Punishment*, in this context "crime will be understood only as the *awareness by the subject himself of some moral norm which he has violated*, quite apart from whether this violation has been recognized externally, morally, as a real crime."

Alfred L. Bem. "The Problem of Guilt" in Robert Louis Jackson ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of Crime and Punishment. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974, p. 77.

[5] Jacques Madaule. "Raskolnikov," p. 45. "Although he had committed a double murder ... Raskolnikov has not committed the absolute evil. The notion of the distinction between good and evil remains alive in

him even when he contemplated his crime." This is presented in contrast with the more absolute evil embodied by the character of Svidrigailov, who would think nothing of inflicting suffering on even the most innocent of people. A similar contrast might be seen with regards to Spike in the character of Angelus, whom the Judge deemed in "Innocence" as being utterly without humanity and who would likely have had no hesitation following through where Spike pulled back.

[6] It is peculiar that Buffy would think this a workable plan given her many later claims that Spike's lack of a soul means he is incapable of love. A likely explanation is that she senses the same thing that the Judge does later in the same season: that Drusilla matters to Spike rather more than is usual among vampires. This explanation is further supported by her later use of verbal attacks on the subject -- "What's the matter Spike? Dru dump you again?" ("Harsh Light of Day") -- as a conscious means of hurting him. As for Buffy's claim that any love a soulless Spike might profess cannot be real, it is clearly an out which allows her not to deal with his love... or the moral implications of the fact that the creatures she nightly kills may possess some very human traits.

[7] Khrapovitsky goes on to say that "The life of all his heroes revolves solely around those moods". This observation applies equally well to Spike's many missteps in his quest to win Buffy and the considerable energy he spends making up for them.

[8] Jackson. "Freedom in *Notes from Underground*" in Dostoevsky *Notes from Underground*. trans and ed. by Michael R. Katz 180. Similarly, even when he is presented as a largely malevolent force, it is Spike who is not fooled by Buffy and Angel's claims that they are "just friends" ("Lovers' Walk"), who alone can see how broken Willow is in the wake of Oz's departure ("Something Blue") and who predicts that Buffy will eventually succumb to a death wish ("Fool for Love").

[9] Jackson writes that "The Underground Man recognizes that in 'certain circumstances' man may insist on the 'right to desire even the very stupid.' He may, indeed, deliberately desire something that is harmful and stupid" (Jackson, "Freedom" 181).

[10] Though with the final season yet to reach its conclusion at the time of writing it cannot yet be said what will ultimately become of this first step, the comparison to the conclusion of Dostoevsky's novel is still illuminating for he leaves us at a similar point in the narrative, with Raskolnikov having taken a first step towards redemption but facing the prospect of many trials ahead of him yet before he might hope to reach this goal. Some critics of *Crime and Punishment* (Konstantin Mochulsky, for one) have suggested that Raskolnikov will not change after all, the uplifting ending being purely the result of censorship considerations. However, the theme of redemption and expiation through suffering was a favorite of Dostoevsky, and so it is in fact quite logical that he would wish to offer his hero the promise of spiritual regeneration.

[11] It could be argued that this is the point at which Spike has the strongest affinity with the protagonist of *Notes from Underground* in that like Dostoevsky's character, he is himself as serious as ever and yet is not seen by others as one to be taken very seriously (Lord 38-9).

[12] The statement reads as follows: "The Bloody Awful Poet Society continues to champion the redemption of the character 'Spike' on the television series 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'. We believe that Spike's humanity eventually will triumph" (<http://bloodyawfulpoet.com/index.html>).

[13] Raskolnikov's love, Sonia, is actually a prostitute, forced into the streets as a means of supporting her family because her dissipated father and terminally ill mother. Her spiritual goodness and sense of morality elevate her and she is intended to be read as a force for good who can inspire goodness in the hero. Though the relationship of leading to supporting character is reversed in *Buffy*, a similarity can still be drawn in that Buffy, whose demeaning Season Six Doublemeat Palace job places her in a position of low social status, still represents a force for good and can thus be an inspiration Spike.

[14] This, of course, only works if the character is able to accept such a realization; Raskolnikov was in the end able to do so, whereas the protagonist of *Notes from Underground* was not. Fortunately for the sake of happy endings (although 'happy' is as relative and as strange in the worlds created Russian literature as it is in the Buffyverse), Spike's affinity seems to lie more with the former in that he has demonstrated on a number of occasions an ability to love and accept love in return.

[15] Dostoevsky deals with the problems of a character who possesses a Christ-like goodness in his novel *The Idiot*.

[16] In her essay "'Every Night I Save You': Buffy, Spike, Sex and Redemption," Rhonda Wilcox further examines Spike's relationship to the light as a metaphor for his growing aspiration to be where Buffy is: in

the light, a force for good. In full sunlight "he is still unable to reach her, but he has tried -- and it seems that he is closer than he once would have been." As with Dostoevsky's model, there is an suggestion that the attempt is in itself a worthy thing.



Vivien Burr

***Buffy* vs the BBC: Moral Questions and How to Avoid Them**

[1] *Buffy* viewers will not be surprised that the BBC has regularly edited the show for its 6.45pm transmission in the UK. Cuts have routinely been made to scary, gruesome, sexual or violent material, reflecting a variety of concerns about the potential impact of such material on the audience. This editing has been of understandable interest to regular viewers and fans, who have been vociferous in their complaints that editing disrupts the narrative, affects character development and generally does not respect the artistic intentions of the writers. On the positive side, as pointed out in their essay "Vampire Hunters: the scheduling and reception of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* in the UK" by Annette Hill and Ian Calcutt (2001), such complaints eventually led to a Friday late night unedited repeat broadcast of *Buffy*. Of course *Buffy* is not the only show to suffer in this way nor is the BBC the only culprit.. It may be argued that the potential popularity of *Angel* was limited by the cuts made by Channel 4 when this show was transmitted at 6pm, and both *Buffy* and *Angel* have been cut, although not as severely, by Sky.

[2] In this paper I will focus on the editing of sexual and violent material in Season 6, and in particular on the extensively edited "Dead Things" (6013). I am not going to discuss the reasons why such cuts are made; public opinion, censorship laws, and their interpretation all play a part. Cuts to different episodes are, in any case, often inconsistent, so that material that is allowed in one is excised from another. It would be difficult, therefore, to try to discern a consistent pattern that might suggest a clear position on what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable even in the eyes of the BBC. Instead, my concern will be with the implications of such editing for the moral agency of the viewer. The portrayal of sex and sexuality in *Buffy* has of course already received a great deal of attention from fans, particularly with respect to the handling of the lesbian relationship between Willow and Tara, and to the BBC's cuts to scenes between them or that refer to the sexual nature of their relationship. Although I will not directly address the portrayal of the Willow/Tara relationship here, the argument I will make can also be applied to this.

[3] From "Once More With Feeling" (6007) through to "As You Were" (6015) we see the development and decline of a sexual relationship between *Buffy* and *Spike*. From the outset, in the final scene of "Once More With Feeling", this is a relationship initiated by *Buffy* (though desired by *Spike* since early in season 5). In "Smashed" (6009) their relationship is unromantically consummated in a derelict building at the culmination of a vicious fight between them. Elsewhere (Burr, 2003) I have analysed the relationship between sexuality, love and hatred exemplified here, but for the purposes of this paper I want to focus on *Buffy*'s sexual agency. In the edited final scene of this episode, *Buffy* throws *Spike* against a wall and kisses him. As she lifts herself up onto his body, we fade to the credits. What we do not see is *Buffy* quite clearly initiating sex in a very direct way, unzipping *Spike*'s pants (this is heard rather than seen) and lowering herself onto him. The act of sex that follows is brief, almost brutally physical, and without joy. Viewers of the edited version, while they may guess that sex took place, are not faced with some potentially uncomfortable questions. *Buffy* is in our minds a "good" girl—do good girls take the lead in sexual encounters? How do we feel about her unashamedly direct approach? We cannot tell ourselves that things later "went a bit too far," that *Buffy* got carried away on a tide of passion. Sex with *Spike* appears more like a commodity she needs and takes. Is that ok? Do we have to love someone to have sex with them? These are questions that have no easy answers and have been given a good deal of airing on discussion lists by people fortunate

enough to have seen the unedited version.

[4] The sexual relationship between Buffy and Spike is developed in the next few episodes. At the beginning of "Wrecked" (6010) we find them waking, naked, the morning after their encounter in "Smashed." Although the fact of their sexual encounter will now be clear to even a young audience, the nature of this sexuality continues to be subtly concealed. Buffy, bewildered, asks "Wh-when did the building fall down?" Spike replies "I dunno—sometime between the first time and the...", but this is cut. It is not the fact of their having sex at all, which is quite evident from the beginning of the scene, that is concealed here; rather, it is the fact that they apparently did it several times. The sense of neediness and of sexual appetite that this brief dialogue represents is denied. Moments later, further evidence of the nature of this sexuality is cut. Buffy bristles at Spike's addressing her as "love." "Don't call me love," she says, to which Spike replies "You didn't seem to take issue with that last night" but the rest of his line is cut: "...or any of the other little nasties we whispered." His words endorse what has already been suggested in "Smashed": that their sexual relationship entails conflictual feelings, and that their attraction to each other is infused with a desire to hurt.

[5] In "Gone" (6011) we are again denied access to a brief moment of Buffy's sexual agency. Xander enters Spike's basement, to find him naked in bed and (the viewer realises) having sex with the invisible Buffy. This more explicit material is, not surprisingly, cut. But the final moments of this scene are also edited out. Buffy, reluctant to give up the power that her invisibility has lent her, attempts to arouse Spike once more as he looks down at her (out of frame) saying "Hey, that's cheating." The scene is played for laughs, a way of gently leading us to the conclusion that invisible Buffy is performing fellatio.

[6] The brute physicality and "wantonness" of their relationship, briefly featured in "Doublemeat Palace" (6012) and is of course cut, opens the next episode, "Dead Things." In the teaser, the camera pans across the downstairs of Spike's crypt. We hear the sounds of what could be a fight—furniture being smashed, gasps and groans. In the unedited version, the camera finds Buffy and Spike immediately post coitus. They appear exhausted from their activity, which seems to have left them lying on the floor among a disorderly pile of rugs. Buffy endorses our assumption: "We missed the bed again." "Lucky for the bed" Spike replies. Our imagination immediately conjures a vision of super-powered sex between Buffy and Spike in this love-hate relationship: animated, spontaneous, violent, lusty and enjoyed with abandon. However, the edited version takes us from the "noises off" directly to the next part of the scene. In a much more cosy, reflective moment, Buffy comments upon Spike's efforts to make his crypt more comfortable, and a comment now rather more inexplicably delivered from her position, naked, beneath the rugs. All but the youngest members of the audience must conclude that Buffy and Spike have been having sex again. But the nature of this sexuality is concealed, and this concealment continues through further extensive cuts to the dialogue:

[7] CUT

Spike: You were amazing...the things you do, the way you make it hurt in all the wrong places.

Buffy: You got the job done yourself.

Spike: I was just trying to keep up. I've never been with such an animal.

Buffy: I'm not an animal.

Spike: You wanna see the bite marks?

END CUT

And a few moments later:

Spike: Do you even like me?

Buffy: Sometimes

CUT

Spike: But you like what I do to you? HOLDS OUT A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS Do you trust me?

Buffy: Never.

END CUT

[8] This exchange tells us a lot: that Buffy is, sexually, giving Spike a run for his money, that she is open to and adept in the art of combining pleasure with pain, and that she regards his sexual attentions as a "service" to her. Again, this material poses difficult questions for the viewer. Is it ok, especially for a woman, to enjoy sex for its own sake, to avoid embedding it within a relationship with a broader compass? Is it ok for her to be sexually demanding, to be adventurous? Is it ok to enjoy hurting and being hurt during sex? The fact that it is Buffy doing these things, a character for whom we otherwise have immense respect and sympathy, makes our answer to these questions into a dilemma rather than a forgone conclusion. We

are forced to wrestle with questions that make us uneasy. "Dead Things" concludes with Buffy confessing to Tara: "Why do I let Spike do these things to me?" Tara responds with "Oh" then a second later, with some discomfort, "Oh, really" as she fully realises Buffy's meaning. This latter part of Tara's response is cut, lest the audience should realise too.

[9] The editing of violence in "Dead Things" is perhaps of even more concern. This applies to two scenes in particular, and the first of these is the death of Katrina. I say "death" and not "murder" since the cuts make the manner of her demise ambiguous. The editing begins at the point when Katrina, under the influence of Warren's "cerebral dampener," accompanies him into the bedroom, kissing him and professing her love for him. It is clear from the previous dialogue between Warren, Jonathan, and Andrew that their plan is to use Katrina as a sex toy, each taking his turn with her. As Warren says "On your knees, baby," Katrina luckily emerges from the influence and she lays into him, angrily pointing out to the trio, and the audience, that this is no game; it is attempted rape. Until this point in the season, the antics of the Troika can be regarded as rather lame but humour-worthy attempts to be the Big Bad. But Katrina's speech arrests our laughter. The routine and invisible violation of women's bodies and personal space by men who are only "having a bit of fun" becomes suddenly available for our consideration—and it appears abhorrent. However, Katrina's accusation of rape is cut, and the power of this scene to question our assumptions is lost. Katrina is simply cross that she has been duped by her ex-boyfriend into playing embarrassing games.

[10] As Katrina tries to leave, Warren pulls her back. She scratches him in the face, and in his determination to restrain her he reaches for an empty bottle and brings it down on her head, killing her. But Warren's murder of Katrina is cut, creating the appearance that she has somehow accidentally died during the struggle. However, this is not just the editing of a scene the violence of which, it could be argued, might be too visually shocking. Later in the episode, after Jonathan has successfully convinced Buffy that she is the one who has killed Katrina, he rejoins Warren and Andrew. They talk about what to do with the rest of the evening and Jonathan, who is visibly disturbed by what they have jointly done, says with irony unnoticed by the others "The night is young—there must be some more girls we can kill." These words are cut. When Warren discovers that Katrina's death has been recorded as a suicide, Andrew says "We really got away with murder—that's kinda cool." His words are cut too. The murder itself is therefore effectively excised from the script. Season 6 presents a complex moral picture with plenty of grey areas. We are posed some difficult questions. If a human being with a soul is a better person than a vampire without one, what if the vampire commits good acts and the human evil ones? Is being evil about what you are or what you do? If vampires and demons deserve to die because of their evil deeds, does this apply to humans who commit equally evil acts? Are the acts of Warren and Willow comparable? Once again, the erasing of Katrina's murder leaves us a little more cosy, without the need to seriously address these questions.

[11] The second scene of violence is Buffy's merciless beating of Spike as he tries to stop her from turning herself in to the police. In the full version of this scene, Buffy becomes incensed by Spike's defence of her and she fights him off, determined to "do the right thing." But as the powerful dream sequence in the middle of the episode (also cut) testifies, Buffy cannot distinguish herself from other "dead things"—Katrina's body and the undead Spike. As Spike shows up the moral grey areas even further, by arguing that "one dead girl doesn't tip the balance," Buffy tears into him, relentlessly beating him and crying "You don't have a soul. There is nothing good or clean in you. You can't feel anything real." We see that she is really expressing her own self-loathing and that her torrent of blows upon Spike is a punishment she feels she deserves (for an extended discussion of Buffy's self-loathing, see Rhonda V. Wilcox "'Every Night I Save You': Buffy, Spike, Sex and Redemption"). This is a disturbing scene which in no way glorifies violence; rather, we are repulsed by its savagery. But the cuts to this scene (all but the final blow of Spike's beating, and its accompanying dialogue) take away the possibility of drawing this meaning. We see only that Buffy will not listen to Spike's pleas, and that she puts a stop to them by apparently hitting him so hard that he cannot get up. We see only one physically powerful person silencing another through the use of force.

[12] My argument is not simply that this editing is wrong because it fails, for example, to positively represent the diversity of common sexual practices (and of course it does), or denies women's sexual agency (it does this too) but that it robs us of a precious opportunity to engage in a dialogue with ourselves about what we think is right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable. It is part of our moral education. TV is as important as real experience in this respect; perhaps more so since many of us will never experience at first hand some of the life events that raise ethical and moral issues upon which a person should take a view. Contemporary soaps (for example *Eastenders* in the UK) have recognised this, and have perhaps done more than any advertising campaign to raise awareness and encourage discussion of a range of issues such as HIV, alcoholism and domestic violence (and they have also drawn fire from moral crusaders for this). One of the things that is of great value in *Buffy's* storylines is that they engage people in debate, and this is especially so where those

storylines can be seen as controversial. If we are presented with sexual and violent material in a manner that allows us to respond to it with our habitual assumptions, if we are given no dilemmas or hard questions with which to wrestle, we cannot develop our own values. More importantly, we cannot question them.

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Jes Battis

"She's Not All Grown Yet": Willow As Hybrid/Hero in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

[1] Buffy, ultimately, is a program that teases, explores, and sometimes violates the liminal space between social ideals that are themselves themselves constructions. It needs to be addressed as a complex and ambiguous work of fiction that explores the decay of 'normal' as it intersects with the fantastic and the grotesque—specifically the Bakhtinian grotesque, representing a form “not separated from the rest of the world...[but rather] unfinished...transgressing its own limits” (Bakhtin 26). For monstrous bodies in Buffy are those which hold the most ambiguity, the most danger; and when the principle characters (some of whom are 'monsters') collide with this erratic and subversive positionality, the veracity of 'normal' becomes as untenable as that of 'monstrous.' I employ Bakhtin here not to align Buffy's characters with his much-remediated notion of the grotesque body—which can be read as anything from a performance meant to resignify cultural norms and release social tension, to a display of anarchic physicality that disrupts fields of safe, conventional viewing—but to reveal these characters' status as incomplete, becoming, and through their physical incommensurability, subjects capable of wild transgression.

[2] To interrogate the show's ambivalence, this article aims not at deconstructing Buffy herself—the archetypal figure who embodies every televisual feminine caricature from Bridget Jones (cinematic, admittedly) to Xena—but rather Willow, who has been overshadowed by Buffy, but who has also *shadowed* her, and at times, eclipsed her. Throughout the course of seven seasons, Willow has occupied many personas: shy academic; computer expert; budding witch ('budding' being a signifier commonly ascribed to Willow's magical studies, which holds all kinds of double-voiced meaning when connected to her name)[1]; ingénue; agent of the apocalypse; and, finally, a guilt-stricken 'reformed' addict, whose self-imposed embargo on magic is all that prevents her from reverting to primal destruction once again. Unlike Buffy, who is the satellite around which her surrogate family of 'Scoobies' revolve, Willow has lingered on the outer edges, and proven herself to be a chaotic force more powerful than the Slayer, the Watchers, or any other instrument of authority within the show's diegesis. The title of this article was taken from the episode *Restless*, wherein Willow describes the nameless kitten (referred to only as 'miss kitty,' or 'kitty fantastico') that she and Tara have adopted as being “not all grown yet” (*Buffy* 4022). Willow, like all of *Buffy's* characters, is still very much in a state of evolution. But her growing pains are of particular importance, for they identify her as a hybrid site upon which several of the show's most resounding ambivalences converge, overlap and shadow each other.

[3] Let us begin at the end: or rather, the end of season 6, as Willow is about to invoke apocalypse. “On the first day of kindergarten,” Xander reminds her in *Grave*, the season finale, “you cried because you broke the yellow crayon, and you were too afraid to tell anyone” (*Buffy* 6022). This childhood Willow (further described by Xander, the ironic communicator, as “crayon-breaky Willow”) bears little resemblance to the black-eyed figure of violent energy that he is addressing. Their confrontation ends not with an epic battle, but with a speech act—a declaration of love—that forces Willow to re-access her own humanity, and sees her crumpled against Xander's uncertain body, weeping, as her black hair reverts to its previous shade of orange. This is not, as it may seem, the safe containment of the Gothic, or the triumph of normativity over the abject 'other.' Willow must still learn how “not to be evil,” as Anya calls it, and her insecurities, like those of Xander and

Buffy, remain very much in the foreground of the show's narrative (*Buffy* 7003). Like Season 4, which ended with a dream rather than a battle (as well as a battle within a dream), and Season 5, wherein the defeat of Glory was overshadowed by Buffy's death, Season 6 ends with a question: who is Willow, and what shall become of her? How can she reconcile the oppositional binaries of her character, which Xander so aptly terms as "crayon-breaky Willow" and "scary-veiny Willow?" Is there any space left for her between these poles, and if so, is it a space that she wants to occupy?

[4] Willow's transition from the show's passive 'information system[iii][2],' to an instrument of chaos who seeks to vitiate the bonds that join her own family together, can be traced from the end of Season 2. In *Becoming Pt II*, the audience sees a weak, bedridden Willow suddenly snap into a trance, and begin chanting a powerful spell in ancient Romanian (*Buffy* 2022). Injured after an attack which was supposed to kill her, Willow instead experiences a moment of naked and frightening power, during which a voice—not her own, but one that the audience will come to know much better as the story progresses—intones Angel's curse with the ease and facility of an expert linguist. It is she who reunites Angel with his soul, thereby making Buffy's task of killing him all the more difficult, and shadowing her apparent victory—the world, after all is saved—with the clear expression of betrayal on Angel's face as he disappears into the void. The enormity of this destructive act is never fully articulated until an episode five seasons later, when Buffy is forced to remind Xander of the impossible choice that, more than anything, propelled her from childhood to adolescence (*Buffy* 7006).[iii][3]

[5] It is valid to observe that a character's shift from good to evil (usually rounded out by a return to good) on the show is sometimes clearly marked. As Krzywinska notes, "'bad' Willow's black lipstick and leather, or Angel's smoking and cruel laughter, indicate their changed personas" (181). This of course refers to Willow's transformation in the episode *Dopplegangland*, when the 'good' Willow meets her other-dimensional shadow, an emboldened, violent and pan-sexual vampire (*Buffy* 3016). The 'bad' Willow, as Krzywinska suggests, is negatively coded by her sultry appearance. She is nothing like the impish Darla, whose vampirism is subverted by her blonde hair, wispy voice and hyper-feminine clothes (one outfit, that of a preparatory schoolgirl, being probably the most disturbing when aligned with Buffy's own age and status as a high-school student). When Willow is at the height of her destructive powers, she is similarly re-coded, given black hair, black eyes and a kind of dark power-suit that makes her appear strangely business-like.

[6] But the audience does not have to look too deeply in order to see the gaps in this binaristic transformation, for Willow's outer 'darkness,' like Angel's vampire-face, still contains remnants of the physical beauty that preceded it. Angel is still very much attractive as a vampire—not a loathsome creature like the Count Orlock of Murnau's film *Nosferatu*—and Willow is simply Willow with black hair and different clothes. Xander recognizes this easily, and thus addresses not the black-eyed Willow, but the old Willow whose face is still visible underneath. It must also be remembered that both of these characters perpetrated significant cruelties while still appearing very human. Angel's speech to Buffy after they have sex for the first time—a callous dismissal of her as a lover—is made more disturbing because he retains his human face, just as Willow's multiple betrayals and violations of her relationship with Tara happen long before her physical metamorphosis. The shift between good and evil is not so smooth, and for Willow, finding normalcy after her brush with apocalypse merely re-emphasizes the exile status that she has struggled with since the show's first episode.

[7] Like all serial shows, *Buffy* relies upon the concept of sameness. Unlike most serials, it constantly calls this sameness into question, challenging its own programmed structure as a media vehicle that must obey certain popular themes—it may obey them, but not transparently, and not without visual and narrative resistance. Umberto Eco's description of the serial as a constant narrative that gives the illusion of change, and 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" (Eco, *Limits* 86), is both applicable to and resisted by *Buffy*. Repetition gives a show emotional currency with its audience, for by rehashing the same scenarios, it "consoles us (the consumer), because it rewards our ability to foresee: we are happy because we discover our own ability to guess what will happen" (86). And in this sense *Buffy* conforms to Eco's model, for every season presents us with the same core group of characters (Buffy, Willow and Xander) who are visited by alternating supporters (Anya, Oz, Riley) detractors (Adam, Glory, and most recently the First Evil) and ambivalent characters like Spike, who straddle the line between protagonist/antagonist in ways that continually disrupt the audience's perceptions.

[8] Every season culminates in a new disaster, which is averted by some means, thereby saving the world (or the universe). The core group changes, both mentally and physically, but the characteristics that they first brought to the show—Willow's childlike and insecure grasp of the world, Buffy's protectiveness and defiance of authority, and Xander's wisecracking which masks his powerful sense of loyalty and optimism—all remain untouched. The audience loves these characters because

they are the same, they are predictable, they are 'their' people. Like the safe spaces within *Buffy's* diagesis—the Bronze, the Magic Shop (before its destruction), and above all, Buffy's massive three-story house with its warm decor and bright, cheery kitchen—the characters themselves represent security to the audience. Their static lives seem superior to the reversals and exigencies of the 'real' world.

[9] However, *Buffy's* narrative also demonstrates marked changes that derail story arcs and surprise audiences—changes that are not overwhelmingly positive. When Angel talks about leaving Sunnydale (and thus, the show) he really does *leave*. The formative, heterosexual romance upon which the show was originally built is suddenly absent, and Angel's replacement—Riley—is coded as a failed love-choice almost from the beginning of his courtship with Buffy. Similarly, the death of Tara is cruel and permanent—Willow can never see her again, never contact her through some mystical proxy, and Amber Benson (the actor who plays Tara) will not make another appearance on the show. In lieu of these events, Eco's claim that all serials depend upon this principle of monotony, and that "the era of electronics . . . [has produced] a return to the continuum . . . the Regular" (Eco, *Apocalypse* 96), does not address *Buffy's* willingness to sever relationships, eliminate characters, and frustrate its viewing audience with new story arcs that they may not be so easy to digest.

[10] *Buffy's* characters do change, evolve, and most often, flow between varying identities. The audience sees, for example, Xander's retreat into the useful, effective 'handyman' persona after leaving Anya; they see Willow's struggle to negotiate a life without reckless magic, and without Tara; they see these transformations, like wrinkled skin, waning beauty, and are sometimes horrified, sometimes pleased, by the mutability of their beloved characters. And this suggests that there is no clear distinction between Eco's "critical spectator," his *experienced* reader, and his naive or semantic reader (93-94). An academic, despite her ability to locate and articulate this phenomenon, is no better equipped to subvert or avoid it than the casual viewer. Every audience member, regardless of their critical interest in a given program, desires the unchangeable, and is simultaneously repulsed by it. That is the paradox of the viewer. They cannot be happy unless a program is both static and dynamic.

[11] And if *Buffy's* characters are looking back, returning the gaze of the audience with a frustrating gaze of their own, then it is Willow's black eyes that disarm onlookers the most. For, as Giles admonishes her after she capriciously describes Buffy's resurrection, "of everyone here . . . you were the one I trusted most to respect the forces of nature" (*Buffy* 6004). Shy Willow, outsider Willow—even sexualized Willow—is the character that the audience finds most easily recognizable, for she is the character most clearly 'named' and positioned by her friends and family. Unlike Buffy's tryst with Spike, which is but one more perverse development in her ongoing flirtation with the dark powers that she allegedly subverts, Willow's abuse of magic challenges the audience to renegotiate their perceptions of "Willow...she of the level head," as Buffy calls her (*Buffy* 6009). Her awkwardness, paired with her great erudition and technological efficiency, makes her a delightfully stable character whose subsequent slide into deviancy (that is, a deviation from viewing expectations) thus becomes all the more pronounced.

[12] Because she serves as both an information system, and as a repository of mystical power, her transition from ally to adversary is all the more threatening. It is Willow's magic that enables Buffy to fight cybernetic Adam via the enjoining spell; and the result of this spell, most fittingly, is a hybrid—Buffy united with the spirit of every Slayer, as well as the spirit of her family—whose power comes from a "source" that Adam "cannot grasp" because he is a cybernetic (metal/flesh) rather than a *psychic* (body/mind) hybrid.[iv][4] That same magic is the only weapon capable of weakening Glory, and the only power against which Buffy's own strength cannot contend. Willow has proven herself to be Buffy's surrogate sister, the twin to Xander's "big brother" identity that Buffy herself hints at in *Restless* (*Buffy* 4022). Yet she is also the sole force capable of defeating the Slayer—capable, as well, of annihilating her family, and with them the world.

[13] To find the 'real' Willow, which may or may not be "like a tragedy," as Anya suggests, is to collide with a hybrid identity that deforms the text of *Buffy* itself. For Willow is still growing, and waiting for her redemptive moment. Buffy has her dive; Xander can say proudly that "I saved the world with my mouth" (*Buffy* 7003); even Spike chose to be ensouled, although recent episodes have deconstructed this act as one of profound ambiguity and negative consequences. But Willow has yet to make a sacrifice. She has lost a great deal, but not yet *given* anything away—save for choosing to stay in Sunnydale for 'Buffy's sake' rather than attending a major university, although this may very well be to fulfill her need for definition through the Slayer. Willow, unlike Buffy and Xander—who, despite their occasionally rash choices, still remain legible as 'the Slayer' and 'the Loyal' to the audience—is involved in a more complex negotiation of identity. She is the middle-child of the Scoobies, vacillating between Xander's immaturity and Buffy's hyper-responsibility.

[14] Her vast power allows her to act out the Slayer's darkest fantasies of violence and immolation—rather than saving the world, she can literally destroy it—and her childlike petulance allows her to become totally infatuated with a love object (Tara), while at the same time manipulating and controlling her in order to sustain the most pleasurable and anxiety-free scenario. She can, in effect, do what Xander and Buffy long to do, knowing that their affection for her will remain unchanged. Even when she is poised to extinguish all life on earth, Xander simply tells her that “I know you're about to do something apocalyptically evil and stupid, and hey—I still want to hang. You're Willow” (*Buffy* 6022).

[15] She is ‘Willow’ not because she, or the audience, knows precisely who Willow *is*, but because Xander and Buffy have *told* her who she is. They have constructed a ‘Willow’ who is always available, always ready with an innovative solution: the same Willow that Xander addresses, in *Becoming Pt I*, when he asks “how am I gonna pass trig, you know? And who am I gonna call every night . . . and talk about everything we did all day? You're my best friend” (*Buffy* 2021). She is Xander's best friend, and Buffy's best friend, and “she of the level head.” But beneath that amicable façade lies an ambivalent, dangerous character, given form and em(bodied) purely by the perceptions of others, whose pain, confusion and psychic turmoil allow her to access what Giles calls “a place of rage and power” (*Buffy* 6022).

[16] Her body—metamorphosing from healthy, to addicted, to destructive, and then back again—becomes a living signifier for the anguish that she feels. She is the archive of *Buffy's* doubt, of Xander's foolishness, and she can hold all of this because she lacks corporeality. Or rather, she is inscribed with it to the point of excess—given a sexy doppelganger who actually licks her (thus, Willow licks ‘herself’)—but fails to maintain her own body without making the radical foreclosures needed to satisfy her friends' expectations. Nearly every significant event in the show involving Willow suggests this, making her body less and less clear, until all that's left is the “costume” that Buffy summarily rips away.^{[v][vi]5} And, as this paper is bent upon the interrogation of Willow as an incomplete—and, therefore, potentially transgressive—subject, I will now address more specific scenes which illustrate Willow's lack of em(bodiment). I will further discuss her positioning (or de/positioning) as an exile, and her ability to destabilize not just the familial unit of the Scoobies, but the discursive fabric of the program itself.

[17] Let us return, for a moment, to Eco, who suggests that “there are serial works that establish an explicit agreement with the critical reader and thus . . . challenge him to acknowledge the innovative aspects of the text” (Eco, *Apocalypse* 92). In accordance with this theory, *Buffy* ‘double-codes’ many of its scenes, using a combination of foreshadowing and subtextual references that the more discerning reader can access. Such is the case with Willow, whose conflicts are explored as early as Season 3, when she comes face to face with her doppelganger. Upon meeting this simulation of herself, Willow is horrified to observe that “I'm so evil and . . . skanky! And I think I'm kinda gay” (*Buffy* 3016). When Buffy assures her that one's ‘vampire self’ has nothing to do with one's ‘real’ identity, Angel interrupts her containment of this evil with a highly ambiguous: “Well, actually . . .” It is thus made clear that ‘bad’ Willow is shaped and informed by ‘good’ Willow, and vice versa. Fittingly, then, Willow is not a static body, but rather a system of good and evil, capable of being dominated by either force. Like the double-voiced “death is your gift,” which the first Slayer pronounces to Buffy, Willow's engagement with her dark self is neither helpful nor oppositional, but needs to be decoded.

[18] This decoding occurs most prominently in dreams, which are powerful and didactic within *Buffy*. The two Slayers who exist in a kind of intimate opposition with each other—Buffy and Faith—can communicate peacefully, and meaningfully, only through dreams. *Buffy's* dreams are often prophetic, and in the episode *Restless*, any demarcation that may have previously existed between the ‘real’ world and the dream world is smudged away. If, as McLuhan says, “the movie camera is a means of rolling up the daylight world on a spool . . . [and] the movie projector unrolls the spool and recreates the daylight world as a dark dream world” (290), then dreaming in *Buffy's* televisual universe is a deepening of shadow, a more subterranean layer beneath the already simulated “real.” The dream is the equivalent of the dark cinema for these characters, where their fears move and whisper just outside the light, and all that they considered stable suddenly takes on a new reflection.

[19] *Restless* begins with Willow's dream, and the audience is at first not sure why. But it soon becomes clear that the disorienting imagery, tinged with violence, in Willow's dream world will influence and inform the content that follows. Unlike Xander, Buffy and Giles' dreams, which begin weirdly or comically, Willow's dream begins with a scene of physical intimacy—Willow is painting Greek characters on Tara's naked back, as she lies with her head down, looking pensive. The Greek is an invocation to Aphrodite, translated in part as “I beg you, don't overcome my spirit with pain and care, mistress” (Bowman

2; Lattimore, trans. 515). This is an oracular statement, since Willow's love for Tara, juxtaposed against her love for magic, will drive the conflict that precipitates her addiction and subsequent flight from reality. Tara expresses worry over not having found "her name," and Willow's interruption—"miss kitty?"—provides only one possible subject. It is still unclear just whose "name" Tara is talking about, but as the episode progresses, it becomes more evident that the character who fears being seen—being *named*—the most is Willow herself.

[20] And Willow's answer to Tara's fear, "she's not all grown yet," only further emphasizes her lack of positioning. Willow, unlike Tara, is not all grown yet. Her corporeality is as fluid as her dream world, and thus, the only talismanic character traits that she brings to her own dream—asking questions, doing homework, and transmitting information (via the Greek characters)—are the ones with which she has been most keenly inscribed by her friends. Buffy, Xander and Giles each have moments, however slight, during which they recognize that they are in a dream, but Willow tries to enforce order upon each scene—"this drama class is just . . . I think they're really not doing things in the proper way, and now I'm in a play and my whole family's out there" (*Buffy* 4022)—even after Tara observes that "you don't understand yet, do you?"

[21] What Willow does not understand is that she is not simply hiding from the first Slayer, but from the fear that her constructed identity may have no substance beneath it. With the kind of disorienting meta-criticism that *Buffy* is famous for, Willow, a character in a TV show, fears that she may be nothing more than a character in a play, and that her costume will not protect her from the scrying gaze of her friends. And, although she tries to contain this fear, pressing on with a sense of normalcy by delivering a book report on that staple of high-school curricula—*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—the phantasmal figure of the first Slayer still attacks her.

[22] Willow's death at the hands of the First Slayer is far more visually exotic, and symbolically charged, than the other Scoobies. Xander's heart is ripped out, and Giles is scalped—both grisly demises—but the attack itself is a clear act of violence and organic invasion, since both characters have body parts forcibly removed. Willow, as she is mauled by the Slayer, actually transforms. Her skin becomes yellowish, almost reptilian, and her eyes change. She becomes not herself, and not the first Slayer, but a strange hybrid of the two—a demonic entity whose birth leaves the 'real' Willow gasping on the couch, as if being strangled. Buffy—now a character in Xander's dream—upon seeing this, calls her a "big faker" (*Buffy* 4022), but it's unclear exactly what she's faking, or rather, which 'Willow' is the fake.

[23] What the audience expects from Willow is the slightly awkward, hyper-intelligent and intrinsically loyal friend that they have come to know. But her choices—and they *are* distinct choices, not the maneuverings of fate—within the last three seasons of the show have seriously displaced and disrupted these expectations. Her relationship with Tara, and consequent abandonment of Oz as a romantic interest, is probably the most dramatic character shift experienced by any of the Scoobies. Surprisingly, this relationship has received a great deal of popular discussion and criticism among fansites and magazines, but little academic attention. The most prevalent critical reading of the Willow/Tara relationship is one wherein magic and lesbian sexuality are conflated. 'Lesbian' may just as easily stand in for 'witch,' since both are socially othered identities, and Willow's sexual experiences are closely linked, and at times synonymous, with her magical ones (Winslade).

[24] But, despite the fact that magic is coded as feminine within the show, Willow is not intentionally accessing a grand, feminine *spiritus mundi*. On the contrary, her scathing description of UC Sunnydale's Wiccan Group—"Blah blah Gaia. Blah blah moon...menstrual life force power thingy" (*Buffy* 4010)—leads the audience to believe that she has no particular desire for feminine empowerment through Wicca. Unlike Tara, who holds intricate and reverent knowledge of the variegated mythologies which underpin the show's pseudo-Gardnerian type of magic, Willow's relationship with her power is visceral and emotional. Magic brings her closer to Tara, and closer to what she believes is an authentic identity. It becomes for her not, as Krzywinska suggests, a "witchcraft [that] is practical and not linked to any environmental issues or spiritual matters" (Krzywinska 188), but rather a unity of sexual and elemental power that is every bit as primal as the Slayer's strength. And just as Buffy uses this preternatural strength to engage in a mutually masochistic relationship with Spike, so does Willow use magic to experience heightened forms of physical intimacy with Tara. Magic is not merely conflated with sexuality in the show, but contiguous with it, emerging from the same organic drives.

[25] Willow's relationship with Tara, like her relationship with Oz, only further demonstrates her dis(embodiment) as a subject whose mentality and materiality is fragmented. She begins by desiring Xander, whose physical and emotional proximity to her—as a primary member of her support system—combined with his romantic disinterest for her, makes him

an object charged with true *eros*, or lack. In calling *eros* a "verb," Anne Carson states that "the symbol of *eros* . . . [is] in the space across which desire reaches"—that space being what necessarily separates lovers (Carson 25). Absence itself, then, is what creates specifically *erotic* love in the classical sense—and, given the Greek characters being gently inscribed upon Tara's back in *Restless*, it is clear that certain classical conceptions of love and sexuality are important to this story arc.

[26] As with Buffy's later intense attachment to Riley, which Xander describes as being "right in front of my Xander face," Willow's desirability swoops beneath his cognitive radar, never made apparent until the possibility of reciprocating it becomes hopelessly complex (*Buffy* 5010). After their brief physical liaison, Willow forcefully tells Xander that she must choose Oz over him—just as, in the future, she will have to choose Tara over Oz. In her words: "If I want to make things right with Oz, my hands, my—all my stuff—has to be for him only" (*Buffy* 3009).

[27] Love is verbalized and actualized by these characters in unique, specific ways. Spike name's himself "love's bitch"; Anya's love makes Xander "feel like a man"; and for Buffy, love and pain are perversely conflated, twined and warped together in a symbiotic embrace from which neither can be separated. But Willow is the only character who describes love as deficit, as lack. It is disembodiment for her—she must become not abject, like Spike, but *object*. She must belong to Tara, to Oz, to Xander, in order to be inscribed by meaning, by the validity that others place in her. But what, then, to make of Tara's enigmatic comment? "I am, you know—yours" (*Buffy* 4019). Mendlesohn describes Willow's role in the relationship as a dominant one, stating that "Willow takes [her] gained confidence and employs it in the attraction of the painfully shy Tara, in which she repeats, in reverse, the primary dynamic of her relationship with Buffy" (Mendlesohn 59)—that is, the dynamic of submission/control that several critics have identified between Buffy and Willow, leading to a queer reading of their relationship. That aside, in regards to Tara's sentiment, it does seem as if Willow is doing most of the taking, not Tara. It is she who *already* belongs, and Tara who is looking for belonging.

[28] Yet, it is Tara who confronts Willow about her addiction to magic, and Tara who effectively ends their relationship.[6] Long after Tara has readjusted herself to life without Willow—helping Buffy research the particulars of her resurrection, and offering her emotional support—Willow herself continues to fall deeper into a state of emotional wreckage and sensory oblivion (*Buffy* 6009). Magic becomes not merely a form of sublimation for Willow, but a radical embodiment, as demonstrated when she mystically imbues one of Tara's old dresses with corporeality (6009). The dress physically embraces her, a shadow figure—born of cloth, air and intent—and for the first time Willow is 'real,' while Tara is just a magical construct; a memory.

[29] Magic is not a power that Willow manipulates here in order to invoke Tara, like a flicked switch or a pushed button. The power itself is what makes her real. By allowing it to embody her, she positions herself within a core of physical and social interstices—erotic desire, comfort, authority, selfhood—and is thus part of a Foucauldian system of interplay and difference where "power is immanent. . .to [all] other types of relationships" (Foucault 94). And, as further episodes illustrate, she cannot separate herself from the simultaneity of magic/body. Willow herself observes that "I *am* the magic"—a statement then reaffirmed by the image of a hundred magical books pouring their printed knowledge into her body, bringing her role as 'information system' to a new level by making her the living intersection of flesh and text (*Buffy* 6022). Willow's body, and Willow's magic, intersect upon a field of power that makes both subjects radically interchangeable. They are caught up in a power that, as defined by Judith Butler (who revises and recasts Foucauldian conceptions of power dispersal), "forms, maintains, sustains, and regulates bodies at once, so that, strictly speaking, power is not a subject who acts on bodies as its distinct objects" (Butler 34). Willow is thus no longer "distinct" from her power, her magic, because she has allowed it to embody her.

[30] It is Tara's subsequent death, abrupt and shocking, that pushes this Willow/magic relationship into crisis. Hit by a stray bullet meant for Buffy, Tara has time merely to look at Willow in confusion, and ask "your shirt?"—it is covered in a fine spray of her own blood—before collapsing (*Buffy* 6019). This radical and almost perfunctory silencing of Tara, who is denied a glorious swan-dive like Buffy, or a long, protracted moment of pain like Angel, has been the source of much audience outcry and criticism. Tara's death is further complicated by the fact the she and Willow begin the episode in bed together, after a night during which "there was plenty of magic," as Tara herself states wryly (6019). This violent juxtaposition—from sex to death in one episode—has invited criticism that "whether viewers are aware of [it] or not, murdering a lesbian just minutes after she has sex suggests a causality between lesbian sex and death" (Mangels 1).

[31] In all fairness, it does not happen *minutes* after the two have sex. But the observation is still valid, and it cannot simply

be sidestepped that, by removing the Tara/Willow relationship, Joss Whedon has removed one of the few positive and 'graphic' (perhaps a better term is 'visualized') lesbian relationships on a television. And, although this 'gap' has allegedly been filled by the arrival of Kennedy—Willow's new love interest, who attempts to inject a bit of ease and frivolity into her sex life—the shadow of Tara remains. When Willow temporarily 'becomes' Warren—a spell of atonement engineered by Amy to punish Willow for her efficacy, her specialness—she blames the transformation on Kennedy's kiss. For, in that brief moment of physical satisfaction, Willow admits that "I killed her. I let her be dead," speaking of Tara (7013). This moment of loss, of foreclosure, results in Willow pointing a gun at Kennedy's head: case in point that Tara's death still haunts her, and will continue to delimit what she allows herself to feel, and who she lets into her life. Also, of course, her death precipitates what at first seems to be a clichéd narrative convention (scorned lover becomes grief-fueled killing machine) which repositions the Tara/Willow relationship (formerly unique and layered) within a realm of televisual kitsch. Perhaps.

[32] But it must also be remembered that the happiness and well-being of these characters is constantly being frustrated by powers seemingly beyond their control. Angel and Buffy are held in romantic abeyance due to a magical curse; Xander cannot marry Anya for fear of repeating the scenario of mindless conflict that his parents have presented him with; Giles finds romantic satisfaction with Jenny Calender, only to learn that she has been killed (in an equally swift and appalling manner) by 'evil' Angel (*Buffy* 2018; 2022; 6017). These characters gain verisimilitude—and thus audience appeal—through their suffering, reversals, mistakes, and attempts to negotiate a thoroughly obscured ideal of humanity. Willow and Tara are no different, and thus should not be treated differently by the show's narrative.

[33] Extra-textual ramifications aside, it is Tara's death that fragments Willow's already-compromised identity beyond repair, causing her to become wholly subsumed and embodied by magic. At first her goal is simple—kill Warren, who is directly responsible for the shooting, and also his friends Jonathan and Andrew, who are guilty by association. But after her first kill—a gruesome act of *disembodiment*, in which Warren is actually played—Willow's plans grow more abstract. While supposedly pursuing Andrew and Jonathan, she spends most of her time challenging and subverting her surrogate family—the Scoobies—by excavating their fears and undermining their accomplishments. (6019; 21; 22). Willow does not need magic to do this. Magic gives her the voice, the confidence, but it is through ordinary speech acts that she violates and tears down her friends. This psychic battle culminates in a physical one with Giles—whom she accuses of being "under the delusion that you [are] still relevant here"—wherein she brings him close to death, and extracts the magical power that he has 'borrowed' from a Coven; the power allegedly meant to contain her (*Buffy* 6022). This confrontation will ironically be recast as a teacher/student relationship in *Lessons* (7001), as Giles attempts to teach Willow focus and control over her power. The rhetoric that he employs, however, is merely a positive, slightly Gaian spin on what Willow has already enunciated: "I am the magic." Giles can never truly teach her what this ambivalent relationship means, how it must be maintained, or how it will transform her.

[34] Still—returning to *Grave*—it is the Coven's stolen power that taps into Willow's "spark of humanity," allowing Xander's own speech act to penetrate her. What might seem terribly hackneyed (good triumphs over the corrupted soul) is made interesting by the profound ambivalence of the situation. For Willow attempts to destroy the world not out of villainous, moustache-twisting ire—or because she feels betrayed by a world that falsely imagines her and renders her an outcast—but because she wants to annihilate human suffering. Her connection to the source of all magic allows her to experience a terrifying collectivity of earthly pain, anger and despair, the depth of which she cannot withstand. And she could not experience this without Giles's 'gift' of the Coven's power. Thus, the emotional event that drives her to extinguish all human life is the same event that allows Xander to reach her, and foster her dying "spark" of individuality. And that notion of the "spark" is made entirely more ambiguous by Spike's later speech to Buffy ("they put the spark back in me, and now all it does is burn" [7002]), leading the audience to question just how this soul-concept truly influences *Buffy's* characters (7002).

[35] This syncretism of interdependent forces—not the binary life/death, but rather life *in* death, monstrosity *in* humanity, informed and embodied by each other—creates a wildly subversive and critically fascinating vision of the 'real' social architecture that exists outside of the show, not just that which drives conflict *within* the show. If, as Baudrillard suggests, "it is the TV that renders true," then the exigencies of these characters are shared and simulated by their audience (Baudrillard 29). The fact that the world must be brought to the brink of apocalypse in order to save one human life—Willow's—is not lost upon the consciousness of the viewer. What is being said here may not be a master-narrative that guides *Buffy's* moral universe, but it *is* still a suggestion that these characters are not separate from the monsters that they fight—just as the prototypical construction of 'evil' within the show lingers on the borders of good, and is given form within that liminal space. Willow *is* the magic, and as Xander observes, there is no real demarcation between "crayon-breaky Willow" and "scary-veiny Willow," because both are reflections of a continually evolving source.

[36] This investigation, then, must begin and end with the same question: who is Willow? And, perhaps more accurately, why does she matter? As has been discussed, it is Willow's ambiguity that makes her interesting as a character—her lack of positioning that makes her the object of theoretical debate. She is Buffy's twilight sister and confidante, yet has the mystical power to destroy the Slayer. She is dismissive of Xander's friendship and foibles, yet all of her rage, grief and desire for vengeance cannot withstand his brilliant, calm declaration of unconditional love. She is the academic equal—and mystical superior—to Giles, yet it is Giles who 'teaches' her to reaccess her lost humanity by reminding her that she is part of a vast, organic system. In short, Willow resents her surrogate family, yet is informed by them, and desperately needs to anchor her free-floating subject to what she assumes are their 'solid' identities.

[37] Willow reflects all that her friends imagine her to be. She is Xander's kindergarten playmate, and the awkward, foolishly dressed 'nerd' who gives a boring report on C. S. Lewis in the episode *Restless*. She is the "rank, arrogant amateur" that Giles supposes her to be when she naively brings Buffy back from the dead, and also the computer-whiz who can effortlessly control what he terms "that infernal machine." She is Buffy's font of relationship advice, and also the black-eyed witch whose magically-induced strength allows her to match the Slayer blow-for blow, and summarily defeat her.

[38] Willow inhabits all of these subjectivities, and none of them make her as legible as the other characters in the show, because she can move so quickly and seamlessly between them. Willow—alone among the Scoobies—has the power to choose between redemptive and destructive behavior. She is not bound by prophecy (like Buffy), or mediocrity (like Xander) or logic and propriety (like Giles). She is free, and thus, completely dislocated, bewildered and confused. For no identity satisfies her, no power can ever truly embody her, and after losing herself in 'dark' magic, no amount of atonement can erase the memory of what she inflicted on others through word and deed. Her hybridity, her ability to choose, comes with the loss of any meaningful sense of belonging, intimacy or certainty. Like Buffy, she is faced with the knowledge that she doesn't know "how to live in this world if these are the choices. If everything just gets stripped away. I just don't see the point" (*Buffy* 5022). But, also like Buffy, she knows that the illusion of safety, of a morally-governed universe, of a destiny not eclipsed by suffering and most likely death, is her only comfort. And it is, after all, the maintenance and defense of any human certainty, however small, that drives these characters to avert apocalypse season after season: not the assumption that there is any one suitable 'way' to live in the world, but rather the continual realization that the world itself is worth saving, that causes them to fight, even against themselves.

[39] Willow's role within the program is as ambiguous as the program itself. She is not a model heroine, nor is Buffy, since neither can ever fully juxtapose themselves against negative powers—whose meaning is forever deterred by signifiers like "darkness," "the First," or Spike's "big bad"—without violating the gossamer-thin line that separates them from those powers. Willow, more than anyone, knows how easily these lines can be transgressed. Again, like the program itself—which the viewer expects to be what Jacques Derrida might call a text with an "edge," but is instead an open-ended system—Willow's negotiation with the monstrous is a journey through dark, open terrain rather than a carefully defined block of cells (Derrida 256). She is engaged in a process of becoming, and is, in her own words, "not all grown yet."

[40] As the program nears its conclusion (there are, as I write this, only six much-hyped episodes left), it becomes increasingly clear that Willow's power and influence will be one of the strongest determinants of the final narrative. But she has driven that narrative from the beginning, and it is the rich history of her character—all of the awkward moments, turned phrases, and bursts of emotional intensity—which in itself composes the material of that narrative. The genealogy of these characters is the genealogy of the narrative itself, for *Buffy* is read by the audience not as a plot-driven system—an endless recession of soporific story-echoes, returns and repetitions), but as an evolving dialogue between its characters. Willow does not, then, have to arrive at a final transformation or defining moment, because—like the other Scoobies—she *is* the story. And she will continue to tell, (un)tell, and retell herself, pushing against the very limits of what can be said, of what might be embodied, in her search for existence without foreclosure. She must be crayon-breaky Willow/scary-veiny Willow at the same time, and find both loveable, both inhabitable—because it is not, as Buffy suggests, being "finished" (6003) that is most important, but rather the dark and seductive expanse of the story itself, with its critical gaps, eager to be reimagined.

[1] Names and naming are significant within the serie. "Buffy" with its immature and "Californian" associations; "Xander" as a diminutive of the more appropriate "Alexander," further shortened to "Xan"; and of course "Willow," with its ties to the natural world. The materiality of Willow's name is interesting: Willows are supple, bending but seldom breaking.

[2] She is the only character capable of using a computer, which, in Sunnydale, can effortlessly decrypt all manner of civic and governmental databases.

[3] "I *killed* Angel," she tells Xander. "Do you even remember that?" And, indeed, this reality is rarely touched upon after the third season.

[4] It is also worth noting that *Buffy's* transformation into the hybrid-Slayer is similarly coded to (but visually the opposite of) Willow's transformation into dark or "Uber-Willow." *Buffy's* eyes become golden and radiant, whereas Willow's become black and devouring. *Buffy* transforms bullets into doves, whereas Willow freezes them—both actions most keenly representing the containment and displacement of technology by mystical power.

[5] The notion of the "costume" is further explored in the *The Body* (5016), when Willow interrogates her own dependence on childish dress: "Why can't I just dress like a grown-up? Can't I *be* a grownup?" At this point her language dissolves, and she must turn to Tara, whose kiss—both comforting and traced with erotic power—serves here as a silencing technique (Willow stops talking) and as a force of embodiment (she is then strengthened, and supported, by Tara's presence). Interestingly enough, this entire scene is touched off by Willow's search for "the blue," a sweater that Joyce (who is now herself "the body") always liked. Willow's vacillations regarding what to wear to the hospital (an uncertainty usually reserved for social events) underscores her slippage between identities: purple is too "royal," yellow too "happy, lala, look at me," and every article of clothing thus becomes unsatisfactory.

[6] Willow's attempt to magically alter Tara's memory—the "tabula rasa" spell—is the ultimate repositioning of identity. In order to maintain her lover's (and her family's) expectations, Willow feels that she must eradicate any hint of transgression and start anew. As illustrated in the episode itself (6008), this "new" position is entirely illegible.

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