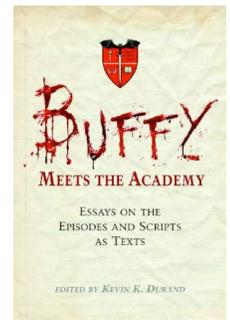




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"Are You Ready to Finish This?": The Battle against the Patriarchal Forces of Darkness

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(1) "Are you ready to finish this?" Not the most subtle of lines, to be sure. However, Caleb is not a subtle character. Caleb is obvious. Indeed, Caleb is almost too obvious. Fans of *Buffy* have come to expect a little more complexity, a bit more nuance in our Big Bads. Even the underlings or instruments of the Big Bads have more inflection to them. Caleb, on the other hand, is almost a caricature of the woman-hating, deeply patriarchal cleric. Indeed, upon his arrival in Sunnydale, viewers are given only the briefest moment to think of him in any way other than a loathsome, powermad, blasphemous creature; as the Turuk-Hon are to vampires, Caleb is to humanity. His message to the Slayer is similarly lacking in subtlety—a knife to the belly and a girl left to die.

(2) It might well strike the careful viewer of the Buffyverse as quite odd that in the final season of the show, in the culmination of a story arc that has rarely lacked for subtlety and twists and turns that we should get so obvious a character. However, I will argue here that Caleb, obvious though he may be in most ways, is actually a lens through which perhaps the most significant twist in the Buffyverse is made clear. Caleb, the Watchers Council, and the Shadow Men are not warriors in a cosmic and metaphysical battle of Good versus Evil. Rather, they are all essentially instantiations of the archetypal First and only through a radical reimagination of the nature of power is the conflict between Good and Evil to be truly understood.

(3) As season seven unfolds, we are given to believe that the battle lines are drawn. This seems obvious, too. Travers has uttered the obligatory Winston Churchill line, "We are still masters of our fate, we are still captain of our souls" ("Never Leave Me," 7.9) The good guys (The Council, the Scoobies, the potentials) are under siege; the bad guys (The First, the Bringers, and very soon, Caleb) are on the offensive. The apocalyptic battle is before us.

(4) Yet, the impotence of the invocation of Churchill is striking, as the Council is exploded within moments of the expression of the "stiff upper lip." This is more than just irony. This moment encapsulates the Council; its role, its place, its very being. The Council is not, nor has it ever been, what it appears to be, nor even what it perceives itself to be. Season Seven, particularly through the lens of Caleb, makes it impossible to see the Watchers Council as anything more than a self-deluded tool of the First. With this revelation, the obvious battlelines are not nearly so obvious anymore and that this is more than a story of two medieval fantasy armies arrayed against each other.

(5) To make this point, let us first look at the obvious archetype of Evil—the First and its tool, Caleb. "Archetype" may be too strong a word. Indeed, it may be too respectful. In many ways, Caleb is a caricature; or would be if that which he caricatures were not so given to some of his own rhetorical and symbolic excesses. In a way, he seems overdrawn. Yet, tragically, not. Simply put, the viewer is to be put in the mind of the Church and its clearly patriarchal hierarchical nature. This is not the forum nor does this paper have the scope to address the many ways in which denominational hierarchies structure themselves, from Episcopal through Congregationalist systems. However, in whatever ways denominations order themselves, the pervading model, whether Roman Catholic or evangelical protestant, is hierarchical and patriarchal. This is not controversial. It is also clear that Caleb represents that structure.

(6) In his Roman collar, the Catholic symbolism cannot be lost on the viewer. His Eucharistic language reinforces this connection. At the same time, his deeply southern drawl and riffs on evangelical themes aligns him symbolically with that wing of the church. In "Empty Places" (7.19), for example, Caleb employs a standard political mantra of the evangelical right. Pressing an encounter with Buffy at school, he says, "This here's a, uh... public school, ain't it? Kinda deserted. Only just, I suppose. Folks work so hard at keepin' the Lord out, and look what happens in return. É He abandons you." Here the caricature is not so remote from that represented. As Pat Robertson told the Dover School District, "I'd like to say to the good citizens of Dover: If there is a disaster in your area, don't turn to God. You just rejected him from your city." Indeed, Caleb elevates himself to the level of deity, opining in "Dirty Girls" (7.18) that, "I work in mysterious ways."

(7) Connected to both structural wings of the church, Caleb is also representative of the institutionalized misogyny that has been a marker of the established church for much of its existence. A great deal has been made in recent popular fiction and reflective scholarship of the systemic repression of women's voices within the patriarchal hierarchy of the church. From Pope Gregory I's character of assassination of Mary Magdalene to the systematic restriction of women from the majority of leadership roles within local churches and larger church structures, the stain-glassed ceiling is a clear and present reality. While not nearly so explicitly oppressive and denigrating of women, one need look no further than some of the ancient Doctors of the Church—St. Thomas of Aquinas, St. Augustine, Tertullian—to name a few, to find Caleb's sentiments expressed in perhaps more subtle ways. The patriarchal oppression and, further, dehumanization of women is clearly borne by Caleb; obviously so. Even the most novice literary critic cannot miss the phallic and deeply Freudian use of the Caleb's knife into the potential's belly. In short, Caleb is obvious.

(8) As such an obvious character, with the symbolism so blatant, one might be given to wonder why Whedon would take such an obvious tack; it lacks subtlety, it lacks finesse, and it lacks the punch of Whedonesque creations. If Caleb is merely taken as an obvious token of some metaphysical evil Type, that is. However, if we suppose that Caleb is a lens, a lens through which our understandings of the entire power structure of the Buffyverse can be seen and re-imagined, then Caleb is a subtle and nuanced epistemological catalyst.

(9) Intriguingly enough, the first of the twin scenes that unites Caleb and the Watchers as functional tools of the same power of darkness happens prior to Caleb's debut. While out of order, let us examine first the scene in which Caleb's power is restored by the First. Caleb and the First have suffered a series of small setbacks, culminating in Buffy's reclamation of the scythe. In rage, Caleb flings a barrel of fine, full-bodied merlot against the wall. In the guise of Buffy, The First says, "Face it. Your strength is waning. It has been quite some time since we've... (looks at him seductively) merged." Lured from anger toward violence of a different sort, Caleb responds (and sniffs), "Maybe you're right. OK, let's do it." The obvious sexual innuendo is lost neither on The First or Caleb, and Caleb's stereotypically male response to the proffered "merger" is not lost on the viewer. On the off chance that it was, The First's response leaves nothing to chance. It says, "Boy, you sure know how to romance a girl. No flowers, no dinner, no tour of the rectory. Just, "OK,

I'm ready. Let's do it." Help me. My knees are weak. (rolls her eyes)." Caleb is taken a bit aback by the sarcasm and asserts both his perceived status and his masculinity, admonishing the one who clearly has the power in the relationship by say, "Watch what you say now. You're starting to sound like her. This is a sacred experience for me." The First is unimpressed by the show of machismo and replies with sighing exasperation, "And for me as well."

(10) The First then briefly transforms from its Buffy guise into the demon and enters Caleb in what is clearly a sexual experience for him. He is infused with power and his eyes glow black. So willingly has he embraced the darkness that he utters reverently, with good King James inflections, "I am thy humble servant and I am ready to serve thee." While the infusion of power is clearly sexual, it is also clearly a power transfer. Caleb is much stronger, physically, following the "merger." He is much more connected to that patriarchal power structure and at the same time, subservient to it.

(11) Caleb is the anti-Buffy, and she is the anti-Caleb; at least that is how the powers want it to be. Good and Evil are in eternal conflict; Buffy and Caleb are the instruments by which they fight. The encounter with the Shadow Men rearranges our understanding, however. Good and Evil may be in an eternal conflict, but who belongs to the side of Evil is understood differently. While Caleb is an instrument of the First and the Watchers Council is the descendent of the Shadow Men, they are fighting an internecine war amongst themselves; or simply put, they are like two rival mob families locked in combat to be the most powerful representative of the block called Evil. Caleb and the Council, the Shadow Men and the First—they are all functionally equivalent. To make this more clear, we should turn from Caleb and his infusion by the first to the scene from earlier in Season Seven that is its twin.

(12) When Principal Wood encounters the Slayers in Training, the full gravity of the situation compels him to pass along to Buffy the bag of mystical heirlooms he has preserved from his mother. Within those heirlooms is a box that only the Slayer can open, a box that transports Buffy to the original Shadow Men and to the beginning of the Slayer line. Buffy's ensuing encounter with the Shadow Men, an encounter prefigured by the encounter of the First Slayer with these same Men, throws into stark relief the stakes involved in the coming battle with the First and its minion, Caleb. More interestingly, though, it readjusts the moral and ethical terrain of the entire Buffyverse, reconfiguring the perceptions of the true meaning of the timeless battle that Buffy has always thought she was fighting. Buffy responding to the cryptic responses of the Shadow Men, says, "Look—I got a First to fight. You three have clearly had some time on your hands. Tell me what I need to know. I came to learn." One of the Shadow Men responds in a way that seeks to reject Buffy's reconfiguration, "We cannot give you knowledge. Only power."

(13) They knock her out and drag her to a cave. Meanwhile, back in Sunnydale, Willow is enraged; eyes go dark, Dawn and Kennedy blown across the room like they touched a live electrical outlet, Willow roars.

(14) When Buffy awakes, chained to the wall, she gets the story of the violent beginning of her line. The Shadow Men, in time immemorial, psychically and spiritually raped the first slayer. They are dismissive of Buffy—when she says that she doesn't need power, but knowledge, they respond that "The first SlayerÉ did not talk so much." Buffy's "Bastards!" only begins to cover the character of those who sought to protect themselves from the powers of darkness by utterly and phallically subjugating another. Buffy fights back. Even after the mist enter her, she fights. The Shadow Men say of the first slayer, "She begged for us to stop. We did not then. We will not now." And, then prefiguring words of the Watchers Council who descend from them, they say, "We only want to help you."

(15) Willow, with one of the most long awaited lines in all of spellcasting says, "Screw it. Mighty forces, I suck at Latin, okay?" and while the lines that followed might be obscured by a chuckle or two, they are crucial. She goes on, "I am in charge here and I am telling you, open this portal *now!*"

(16) Not only does Buffy fight off the Shadow Men and their attempt at physical and metaphysical rape, Willow demonstrates that Buffy's later claim is right. When the final plan is given to the gang, Buffy recalls a line from the encounter with the Shadow Men, "You are just men." They are just men and this woman, Willow, is stronger than all of them combined. While the Shadow Men try to reinstitute the hierarchical system of patriarchy that is now revealed as no better than the "evil" it seeks to fight, Buffy has gained not brute power but knowledge. So, what does she know?

(17) She knows that the First Evil and its representative tool, Caleb, are just like the Shadow Men, their descendents, the Council, and its representative tool, the Slayer (at least through Buffy). The Shadow Men are right, just not in the way they think. Buffy is the last of her line; and the first of a radically new line, a line that breaks with all of the incarnations of evil—Caleb and the Council.

(18) The destruction of the Watchers Council is prefigured in Buffy's rejection of the Shadow Men and their doom is sealed by their own inability to imagine a world in which the hierarchical worldview that supports their claim to elevated status is overthrown. Rather than join the Slayer in a united front against the First, they hold on to their own self-importance and secretive machinations. After Buffy calls and asks them for help in finding Giles, Travers says, "The girl knows nothing." Not only does he continue to denigrate the young girl who he still views as an instrument of the Council and creation of the Shadow Men, he assumes that she knows nothing of value. Indeed, Buffy does not even recognize yet what she knows, and does not even really know until taunted by the First in *Chosen*. However, what Buffy knows and Travers cannot fathom is that the tables have actually turned, that she has power they know not of, and, more importantly, she has knowledge. Only after the Shadow Men showed her the vastness of the army arrayed against her, could Buffy have the epiphanic moment that reveals that the entire power structure is flawed; that the Shadow Men and the First are essentially of a piece, and that only through radical shared power (and knowledge), can a system that is built on the patriarchal oppression of women be overthrown. No, Travers is right in one sense—"The *girl* knows nothing." Buffy does not know where to locate Giles nor the secret and self-important machinations of the Council. Where he is wrong is that she knows far more than he does, and indeed, far more than he could. Trapped as he is in the internecine battle for power, not between good and evil, but *for* power, Travers cannot see the power of shared power. This lack of foresight and ignorance of his own impotence has immediate repercussions for him and for the line of the Shadow Men as the Watchers Council building explodes before his grandiose speech about taking the fight to the First can even reach its first phase. For Travers, for the First, for the Shadow Men, for the Council, for Caleb, power is something that is accumulated and wielded like a hammer. For Buffy, power, she is coming to see, is something that is shared and thereby multiplied.

(19) To complete this series of connections we must show that the Watchers Council is functionally equivalent to their ancestors and essentially instantiations of the archetype of Evil that is the First must be made. It is no small thing to lump the "good guys" with the evil ones. Yet, from Season Three, grave suspicions about the Council arise. That the Council would not help Buffy save Angel's life might be dismissed as the act of a hidebound and shortsighted bureaucracy, convinced in its conceptions of the world—Vampires bad, tree pretty. However, pairing that with the Council's intentional poisoning and testing of Buffy in *Helpless*, one cannot help but be left with the view that the Watchers Council, like the Shadow Men, view the Slayer as not only something of their own creation, but as a tool to be used in their own power struggles. Travers' claim of "fighting a war," is met with Giles's retort of "You are *waging* a war. She's fighting it." The incredibly important distinction is immaterial to Travers who, prefiguring the Shadow Men's interaction with Buffy, says essentially, "this is the way it has always been done." More precisely, he says, by way of justification of the physical invasion of Buffy's body without her consent, "It's been done with way for a dozen centuries. It's a time-honored rite of passage."

(20) The sexual connotations are clear. The Shadow Men psychically and

metaphysically raped the Primitive to create the first Slayer. In an effort to continue the dominance of Council to Slayer, the Council infuses each Slayer privileged enough to reach 18 years of age. The phallic needle takes back from the current Slayer that which the primordial rape imbued her; yet her plight is the same—still she must face a vampire, still she must fight. The Primitive was chained to the ground; Buffy was drugged by a crystal. The patriarchal and explicitly phallic hierarchical domination of the "chosen" girl makes explicit the moral equivalence of the Shadow Men and their Watcher descendents.

(21) Travers should have seen the Watchers Council full descent into impotence and final destruction coming long before it happened. In season five, Buffy finally puts the Council in its place, at least verbally. Just two years previously, he came face to face with the reconstructed power structure in the Shadow line. Faced with a runaway god in Glory, the Council is faced with an inversion of almost everything they have assumed. However, their blind spot is ultimately their own devastation. Glory is a female, to be sure, but she is a female patriarch. She deals in a form of power with which the Council is familiar—top down, wielded with no concern for underlings. Glory would have understood Quentin's chastisement of Giles in *Helpless*, "You have a father's love for the child and that is useless to the cause." No one can charge Glory with love of anything or sympathies for underlings. This is a power that is familiar, that is obvious. In the line of the Big Bads, Glory fits perfectly. The structure and implementation of power is exactly the same, only the names have changed—The Master, the Mayor, Adam, Glory—every one of them a patriarch in a highly ordered power structure. And all of them with exactly the same blind spot. Each is overcome, not with a David and Goliath battle to the finish; each is overcome through a sharing, through a joint empowering of others beyond the one with "obvious" power.

(22) Quentin and the Council minions blow into town to "test" Buffy and through threats, coercions, and superciliousness. Just to make sure she understands "her place," he asserts what he thinks is still his hierarchical authority over her (odd, since the Slayer has not been under the "direction" of the Council in a couple of years). Quentin, sensing the opportunity to right what he thinks is wrong, namely the understanding of place and who is actually in charge, tells her, "The Council fights evil. The Slayer is the instrument with which we fight. The Council remains. The Slayers... change. It's been that way from the beginning." This is the system and you must know your place and we are in charge.

(23) In one of the most popular scenes in the Buffyverse, Quentin is shown the blind spot he and all of the patriarchal instantiations of the archetype of evil have. They are fundamentally impotent. Their power is illusory. He does not truly see the impotence because at this point it is still in the language that he understands—power, with a bit of violence. But knowledge is dawning on Buffy. It is nascent at this point, an epistemological kernel that still needs time to fully germinate, but the Council (with an assist from the Knights of Byzantium and Glory) give Buffy the beginnings of true knowledge of power (a knowledge that the Shadow Men, with an assist from the First provide her again at the Finish).

(24) Buffy sums her conclusions and puts the Council in their place, "There isn't going to be a review. No review. No interrogation, no questions you know I can't answer, no hoops, no jumps ... and no interruptions. See I've had a lot of people talking at me, last few days. People just lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I finally figured out why. Power. I have it. They don't. This bothers them." She tells them that Glory, the other dimensional god, had come to her house; not to thrash her or to kill her, but to talk. In the talk, Glory told Buffy that she was inconsequential, unimportant. In this way, the Council and Glory were similar—both whistling through the cemetery because they lacked power and hoped that their "slayer" and their adversary, respectively, didn't recognize her own. Buffy sums it up for the Council, "You didn't come all the way from England to determine whether I'm good enough to be "let back in." You came to beg me to let *you* back in. To give your jobs, your lives, some semblance of meaning again." Nigel, of course, is indignant and interrupts, Oh, this is beyond insolence!" In response, Buffy throws a sword and embeds it inches from his head. As it quivers in the pillar, Buffy

reminds them all, "I'm fairly certain I said no interruptions." Then, putting them in the place they know is theirs, she refines for them their world. "You're Watchers. And without a Slayer you're pretty much just watching Masterpiece Theatre." So here's how it's going to work. You're gonna tell me everything you know. Then you're gonna go away. You'll contact me if and when you have more information."

(25) The Watchers attempt to reassert control, to reassert the power of their ancestors over the Slayer is thwarted and their impotence clear to all. Hidden in this interchange is the kernel of shared power that ultimately overturns the patriarchal archetype. After thwarting the Council, she meets their questions about the qualifications of the Scoobies to meet the Glory challenge by running down the strengths of the *team*. Individual strengths, to be sure, but strengths that are magnified into something far beyond the sum of their parts when in concert. Buffy still views power as power *over*, at least in her assertions to the Council. However, for nearly five seasons, the views of the show have seen the debate over the following sorts of power—power *over* and power *with*. Again, in the fight against Glory, it is power *with* that triumphs. It is this power that the Watchers, the Shadow Men, the First, and Caleb cannot see.

(26) So, let's finish this.

(27) Sides have been drawn in the timeless conflict between Good and Evil and while there have been some defections from one side to the other that have altered our perceptions at the margins of the conflict (Angel, a vampire with a soul; Spike, a vampire with a chip; Faith, a rogue Slayer), the core has remained unchanged. Following the encounter with the Shadow Men, it becomes clear that obvious enemies (Caleb, for example) and the Watcher's Council are all of a piece—instances of a patriarchal archetype, particular incarnations of The First, the power of darkness that seeks to oppress and destroy. It takes a while for Buffy to realize that the battle is fundamentally different than she thought. Buffy, at first, assumes the same role—the General, the Commander, the Master, the "Chosen." Consumed with her own power, she tells the potentials and the Scoobies, "I'm the Slayer. The one with power. And The First has me using that power to dig our graves. I've been carrying you. All of you, too far, too long. Ride's over." When Xander says that they've been waiting on her only because she told them to, that "You're our leader, Buffy. As in 'follow the leader'" she responds, "Well from now on, I'm your leader as in 'do what I say.'" However, in this role, Buffy would lose. Only by participating in a sharing of power that radically turns the hierarchical patriarchal power on its head, does Buffy, the Scoobies, and the newly minted Slayers thwart the First.

(28) Caleb is obvious. He is also a subtle and decisive lens. On the one hand, he is an obvious and overt patriarchal actor. From the beginning, he is symbolical representative of a patriarchy, the phallic perversion of which is manifested almost immediately in the "message" he sends to the Slayer, a young girl with a knife in her stomach. He is initially presented as an apparent perversion of sacred symbols and the forces of good, clearly one of the "bad guys." On the other hand, and lest the viewer become comfortable in simply assigning Caleb to the "evil" camp, Whedon uses the very obvious Caleb to unmask that which is less obvious on first viewing but nigh inescapable as Caleb takes the stage and the frightening similarities between "evil" and "good" in this cosmic battle. It is not that Caleb is one of the "bad guys;" rather it is that through Caleb we see that the "good guys"—the Watchers Council, the Shadow Men—are also the "bad guys," perhaps deluded by their own self-importance, but all of a piece nonetheless. They are all part of a patriarchal power that is fundamentally corrupt at its core. While Caleb is a willing, nay joyful servant of the First, the Watchers are perhaps unwitting servants. In Caleb, and the connections between him and the Shadow Men and their descendents, the Watchers, Whedon presents a masterful critique of "the forces of good," even more damning than the critique of the forces of Evil. The kernel of this critique is that patriarchal, hierarchical structure and exercise of power, whoever wields it and to whatever purpose to which they lay claim, is itself merely an expression of the power of darkness, the First Evil.