



Rhonda V. Wilcox

## In "The Demon Section of the Card Catalog": *Buffy* Studies and Television Studies



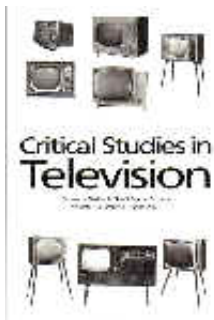
'May God have mercy on your souls.'

—email to *Slayage* coeditors David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox

'Once again, I'm banished to the demon section of the card catalog.'

—Willow, 'The Puppet Show,' 1.9

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[1] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), created by Joss Whedon and realized by writer/director Whedon and a remarkable crew and cast, has inspired vigorous critical discussion from the start, and now boasts one of the biggest shelves in the scholarly television library. In fact, one might say *Buffy* the series is helping to fight the forces that sometimes demonize television studies. It would hardly be possible to explain with certainty all the causes for the intellectual interest *Buffy* provokes, much less to do so in a short article. But it is clear that *Buffy* is an important series at an important moment in television studies. A brief survey of the history of *Buffy* scholarship to date may suggest some reasons for its significance and some

trends for the future of our work.

[2] The earliest writings about *Buffy* generally recognized as scholarly came in the summer of 1999: They are journal articles by Michael Adams, A. Susan Owen, and me<sup>[1]</sup>. These articles give some inkling of the variety of disciplinary angles from which the series has come to be viewed. Adams' two-part essay 'Slayer Slang' appeared in *Verbatim: The Language Quarterly* (24.3-4). His work analyzed examples of one of the elements for which the series is famed, its creative use of language. Owen's 'Vampires, Postmodernity, and Postfeminism: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,' in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (27.2), discussed the series from a sociological perspective, particularly regarding another of the series' noteworthy qualities, its contested claim to feminism. My essay "'There Will Never Be a 'Very Special' *Buffy*": *Buffy* and the Monsters of Teen Life,' in the same issue of *JPFT*, discussed both language use and yet another of the series' important elements, its use of symbolism in purposeful literary style (both language and symbol working together to represent generational conflict). From the start, then, *Buffy's* language, feminism, and purposeful symbolism (semiotic and narratological) have engaged critics. And not long after, Graceanne A. DeCandido's *American Libraries* article (September 1999) foregrounded the series' use of research and intellect as heroic: the library, as David Lavery later said, is the primal setting in *Buffy*. No wonder more scholars joined in the discussion.

[3] 2000-2001 brought many studies of *Buffy* and social issues. In 2000, Kent A. Ono's often-cited 'To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and ('Other') Socially Marginalizing Positions on Horror TV' questioned the series' representation of race;

in a television text often considered socially forward-thinking, the dearth of black and Latino characters was troubling. Ono invoked the show's well-known use of symbolism to suggest a troubling subtext as well, arguing that slain vampires equaled the racial Other. On the other hand, James South's 2001 essay "'All Trouble, Torment, Wonder, and Amazement Inhabits Here": The Vicissitudes of Technology in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*' identified vampires and other demons (especially in 'The Wish' and 'Anne') with capitalists controlling the assembly-line means of production, whereas Buffy wielded the hammer and sickle against them. The contrast in their approaches demonstrates the show's polysemy; *Buffy's* use of symbolism invites multiple readings. 2001 also brought Frances Early's 'Staking Her Claim: Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Feminist Woman Warrior.' Early, an award-winning peace studies scholar, discussed Buffy as a positive model not only from the perspective of feminism but also as a variation on the pattern of the Just Warrior. *Buffy's* position as a TV series subject to other pressures from networks was addressed by Kathleen McConnell in a less well-known *Gothic Studies* article, 'Chaos at the Mouth of Hell: Why the Columbine High School Massacre Had Repercussions for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*': *Buffy's* responsiveness to the zeitgeist was such that two of its episodes were delayed because of similarities between the fiction and real-life tragedy. The incident continues to be discussed by critics for a variety of reasons, including the series' creators' position in regard to the corporate world within which broadcast television operates. Dominic Alessio's 2001 essay "'Things Are Different Now?": A Postcolonial Analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*' discusses the politics implicit in Jane Espenson's controversial episode 'Pangs.' Like Ono, he argues that the series' subtext is somewhat unregenerate.

[4] Alessio had a new resource to cite: In January of 2001, *Buffy* gained its own journal, *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, founded and edited by David Lavery and me. Currently in its sixth year (having just published its twentieth issue), *Slayage* is a refereed quarterly which uses double blind review; the reviews are all done by members of the editorial board, an international collection of scholars who have published in a variety of fields including literature, linguistics, philosophy, film and television studies, religion, communications, gender studies, music, and sociology—all of which fields are represented by various essays in *Slayage*. *Slayage* authors range from renowned scholars such as Lawrence Rosenfeld to graduate students (and even one extraordinary high school student). *Slayage* provides a central clearinghouse for information about *Buffy Studies* in general and, as James South has said, is "a prime mover, I think, for ensuring that scholarship on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is up to high academic standards" (Stafford 43).

[5] One of the most important links on *Slayage* is to the *Academic Buffy Bibliography*. Provided by Temple University librarian Derik Badman, the ABB is an enormous asset to those who wish to research *Buffy* seriously. The interdisciplinary nature of television studies means that it has never had a single, central, predominant bibliography comparable to the Modern Language Association's annual bibliography for literature.<sup>[2]</sup> Each scholar brings to bear sources from her or his own discipline; however, *Buffy Studies* scholars have the added advantage of an extensive list of sources which focus on *Buffy* as a subject. David Lavery's bibliography of *Buffy* sources (on *Slayage*) builds on Badman's work and adds further value by arranging sources by subject.

[6] The first two issues of *Slayage* contained articles that had originally been submitted for a scholarly collection on *Buffy*. In the spring of 2000, David Lavery, already well-known for scholarly collections on *Twin Peaks* and *The X-Files*, invited me to coedit a *Buffy* volume. The number of submissions of high quality meant that not all could fit into our 2002 book, *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which was comprised of chapters representing a wide variety of subject areas—gender studies, music, language, audience studies, literary history, auteur studies and more. Lavery, inspired by *Whoosh*, the online *Xena* journal, suggested an online *Buffy Studies* journal; the title *Slayage* was suggested by video artist/art writer Richard Gess. During the production of *Fighting the Forces*, I was emailed by Roz Kaveney, who, learning that the collection was well along, decided to edit her own volume. Kaveney, well-known in the

world of science fiction and fantasy, brought out *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Guide to Buffy and Angel* in 2001. These two collections—the first British-produced, the second US-produced; the first of ten essays, the second of twenty-two—helped establish the breadth and depth of Buffy Studies. And, in the world of the internet, *Buffy* scholars were starting to get to know each other (as Buffy fans were already successfully doing).

[7] *Buffy* scholarship was furthered in 2002 with the first academic conference on *Buffy*, sponsored by the University of East Anglia at Norwich, England. Originally planned as a one-day event, the number of good proposals led the organizers—Carol O’Sullivan, Claire Thomson, Catherine Fuller, and Scott MacKenzie—to extend the event to two days (19-20 October). I gave the opening keynote address and Roz Kaveney led the closing summative discussion; and the speakers in between, once again, represented a broad array of disciplines. Many in attendance felt a sense of exhilaration at the realization that *Buffy* could be praised in good conscience. The praise was neither monolithic nor, for the most part, uninformed (I do recall having to point out the existence of previous scholarship—Kent Ono’s and Zoe-Jane Playdon’s-- to certain graduate student presenters). In the closing session, UEA film professor Peter Kramer called for further work in a variety of areas including, for example, production elements. His call for further work, in itself a reasonable monitory note, became further entangled (correctly or incorrectly) with an ongoing matter of debate in television studies in general and Buffy Studies in particular: Does enthusiasm preclude (or dilute) responsible scholarship? (See Burr; Wilcox *Why*, Ch. 11.)

[8] *Buffy* scholars continued to meet and, in the process, seemed inevitably to continue to enjoy themselves. The next month, the University of Melbourne sponsored The Buffyverse: A Symposium. Organized by Angela Ndalianis, this meeting presented only fifteen speakers, but drew an audience of hundreds. In July 2003, Geraldine Bloustien of the University of South Australia at Adelaide presented *Staking a Claim: Exploring the Global Reach of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a one-day symposium with concurrent sessions and keynotes by Douglas Kellner, David Lavery, and me. And finally, in 2004, the US held an academic *Buffy* conference, organized by David and me, sponsored by Middle Tennessee State University, in Nashville, Tennessee, Memorial Day Weekend: The *Slayage* Conference on the Buffyverse (SC1). The four keynotes included two professors, one journalist, and one novelist with behind-the-scenes knowledge of the series. Just under 200 scholars from around the world presented; approximately 400 registered. Thus the number of those who attended simply to listen and participate in discussions was more or less equal to the number of scholars presenting.

[9] In a world where scholars often only listen to themselves, this open interaction was a rarity. At this conference, some scholars felt the need to defend their right to criticize the series. Patricia Pender, for instance, argued that it was a mark of the maturity of the field of study that one did not need to be so protective as to eschew negative comment when it seems called for. Perhaps the history of television studies as an often denigrated (one might say demonized) field of endeavour—and/or one in which negative criticism seems required of those who wish for academic credibility—colored the discussion surrounding her remarks (and similar discussions). But most important is the fact that people were engaged in these discussions. And the content of the discussions had implications not only for Buffy Studies but also for the wider, still growing field of television studies. Most of the conference was spent in straightforward (and pleasurable) analysis of the series—text and contexts, creators and audience. SC2, the *Slayage* Conference on the Whedonverse, was held on Memorial Day Weekend of 2006 (see the reports by Pender and Rogers in this issue). In the intervening year of 2005, Bring Your Own Subtext, a conference held at British university in July, considered the work of Joss Whedon from a sociological perspective. The title comes from a well-known, often quoted statement by Joss Whedon, inviting the audience to engage in a variety of interpretations of the text (Whedon is a Wesleyan University film studies graduate and admirer of the work of critic Robin Wood, well-known for his recognition of multivocality in film.) This conference was, like the others, a lively meeting of scholarly minds. (See Ewan Kirkland’s

conference review in *Slayage* 18 [5.2]). But the university which sponsored it would not allow the word "Buffy" in the title of the conference; administrators were reportedly concerned that the topic would be viewed as inappropriate for academic study, concerned that it would evoke "bad press"—and indeed, it did receive public chastisement in the press from government education experts. Little wonder that television scholars are sometimes defensive; material which they consider to be valuable (whether for aesthetic or sociological reasons) can still be denied standing, denied its name.

[10] Nevertheless, during the course of time when these conferences were being held, more and more written work on *Buffy* was published. In 2003 Candace Havens published her biography of Joss Whedon, and while we may hope for a longer work in the future, we are fortunate to have a biography so early in Buffy Studies. In 2003 a special issue of *Refractory: The Journal of Entertainment Media* was devoted to Buffy Studies; editor Ndalianis published fifteen essays (including several presented at the 2002 Melbourne gathering). 2003 brought another major collection, James South's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (volume 4 in the Popular Culture and Philosophy series). Though its declared primary purpose was to serve philosophy (that is, *Buffy* was the means rather than the end), nonetheless many of the authors also valued the series, and, as South says in his introduction, their chapters 'reflect what it means to turn to a television show for philosophical stimulation' (3). The volume contained analyses of the role of science and rationality in the series, Faith the Slayer and Nietzsche, the means vs. the end, and more. Like South, Frances Early continued her Buffy Studies in 2003. With Kathleen Kennedy, she edited *Athena's Daughters: Television's New Women Warriors*. With a foreword by me, it included four essays on *Buffy* discussing violence, the role of women, class and racial issues, male fans. Dawn Heinecken's *The Warrior Women of Television: A Feminist Cultural Analysis of the New Female Body in Popular Media* also devoted lengthy discussion to *Buffy*. And in 2003 Michael Adams published his Oxford University Press book *Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon*, which contained not only chapters on the formation of Buffyspeak and the value of ephemeral language, but also a detailed analytical dictionary of Buffy terms. *Slayer Slang* sported an introduction by *Buffy* writer Jane Espenson, a former 'student in the graduate linguistics program at U.C. Berkeley' (vii). Among its other qualities, *Slayer Slang* very carefully cited earlier Buffy Studies. At the 2004 Nashville *Slayage* conference, *Slayer Slang* was announced as the first book-category winner of the annual award for Buffy Studies, the Mr. Pointy. The article category was won by graduate student Jes Battis for "'She's Not All Grown Yet': Willow as Hybrid/Hero in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,' up against some impressive professorial competition.

[11] 2004 brought a dramatically revised version of Kaveney's collection, with many new contributions—perhaps most notably including interviews with *Buffy* writers Jane Espenson and Steven S. DeKnight. Also in 2004, two important books on religion in *Buffy* were published. Greg Stevenson's *Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* analyses *Buffy* from the perspective of the Christian values to be found in a show created by an avowed atheist and often criticized by right-wing Christians. It is a reasoned work which recognizes and applies earlier *Buffy* scholarship. It is significant, among other reasons, for its carefully argued defense of the long-term contextualization of morality to be found in the multi-episode arcs and seasons of *Buffy*—a type of analysis which, as he notes, should be applied to other series as well. Stevenson's thesis helps to demonstrate the role of *Buffy* as a groundbreaker in establishing the potential of television as a medium, and in establishing structural criteria by which other series should be judged. Its continuity of storyline (much more scrupulous than most series' before it) set an example and made such analysis possible. He explains the interconnection of structure and content available to long-term serial television. Jana Riess's *What Would Buffy Do? The Vampire Slayer as Spiritual Guide*, written by a Columbia University Ph.D. in religion, provides a broader scope of religious interpretations, from Buddhist to Catholic to Hindu; for example, Riess discusses *Buffy* (and *Angel*) as a bodhisattva, with footnotes rich with reference. Riess's book won the Mr. Pointy book award for 2004. The nominees for the Mr. Pointy for best article published in 2004 tell us something about the variety of work in Buffy Studies.

They included graduate student Yael Sherman's Bakhtinian study 'Tracing the Carnival Spirit in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Feminist Reworkings of the Grotesque*'; medieval literature professor Elizabeth Rambo's self-described traditional close reading "'Lessons" for Season Seven of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'; Patricia Pender's *Third Wave* feminist anthology contribution; James South's closely reasoned, emotionally resonant *Slayage* conference keynote—a defense of the much-maligned last season of the series, 'On the Philosophical Consistency of Season Seven';<sup>[3]</sup> and David Lavery's "'I Wrote My Thesis on You": *Buffy* Studies as an Academic Cult,' which managed to dress wide-ranging scholarly exploration in a mix of humor and intellectual indignation. Perhaps it should not have been surprising that, when *Buffy* scholars voted, they voted for this impressively able defense of our field as the Mr. Pointy winner for best article of 2004.

[12] Lavery's work moves us into the realm of the metacritical, as does another major article of 2004: Sue Turnbull's "'Not Just Another *Buffy* Paper": Towards an Aesthetics of Television.' "'Not Just Another *Buffy* Paper,'" another SC1 keynote, proposes categories of aesthetic analysis for television using *Buffy* as an exemplary text. It was voted a Mr. Pointy for the best paper presented at the conference. Turnbull, a media studies scholar, authored (in 2003, with Vyvyan Stranieri) *Bite Me: Narrative Structures and Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a guide to teaching *Buffy*, and a *Continuum* article on 'Teaching *Buffy*' (among other *Buffy* essays). Another noteworthy *Buffy* publication of 2004 comes in the area of pedagogy: Issue 35 of the *Media Education Journal*, edited by Des Murphy, gives us five essays on *Buffy* by scholars such as Michele Paule, Laura Davies, and Laura Hills. Barbara Maio's 2004 introduction to *Buffy*, part of the Fiction TV series, has the distinction of being the first book-length study in Italian, with discussions of *Buffy*'s feminism; the ethics and aesthetics of the undead; family, religion, and authority; fanfiction, etc. While Maio's is the first book-length work, other Italian scholars, such as Massimo Introvigne and Giada da Ros, had already published—Introvigne from the larger perspective of vampire studies and religion, and da Ros in analyzing *Buffy*'s soap opera elements. And Maio now has a contract to produce a collection of essays in Italian on *Buffy*.

[13] 2005 has already seen major publications. In August, the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* published a special issue (edited by Dee Amy Chin and Milly Williamson) devoted to the *Buffy* character of Spike, a locus of discussion for gender, class, performance, and other subjects. The issue included seven articles. Three important books have appeared. The *Reading Angel* collection, edited by Stacey Abbott (with an afterword by me and David Lavery), expands *Buffyverse* scholarship to include the series' darker spinoff. (Abbott and others had already published articles on the series.) Lorna Jowett's *Sex and the Slayer*, titled to sell, is really a very careful analysis of gender issues in *Buffy* (the subtitle is 'A Gender Studies Primer for the *Buffy* Fan'). Its conclusion (to oversimplify) is that, as far as popular television gender presentation is concerned, *Buffy* is one-eyed among the blind. The journey to that conclusion moves through much lively observation on individual episodes. Battis's *Blood Relations* is a mixture of theoretical evaluations of the cultural implications of familial relations with engaging personal commentary on the author's response to the television text. Like *Sex and the Slayer*, it is often sharply observant. While Jowett's work is in the central tradition of *Buffy* Studies in terms of its topic, Battis's demonstrates that the series easily sustains book-length analysis of other subjects.

[14] Among those subjects is aesthetic analysis. My own *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has now been released in the UK and should have appeared in the US by the time this article is published. It proposes *Buffy* as a test case for the aesthetic value of television. Two sections of six chapters each—*Panorama* and *Tight Focus*—develop the idea that good television supports analysis of both long-term patterns and of individual episodes. The book contemplates narratology, visuals, sounds, music—among other things. And Matthew Pateman's just released *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* discusses aesthetics and ethics, aesthetics and ethnicity, and more—including four chapters focusing on the four dreams which constitute four acts of

the episode 'Restless' (4.22); like me, he covers the big picture and the close-up. Already under contract is Lynne Edwards' *The Other Sunnydale: Representations of Blackness in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. (Edwards authored the *Fighting the Forces* chapter 'Slaying in Black and White: Kendra as Tragic Mulatta in *Buffy*.) These very recent books represent both social and aesthetic interests, which *Buffy* still strongly sustains.

[15] Sustained interest from students expanded the journal territory for *Buffy* as well. In 2005 Lynne Edwards and Katy Stevens, in association with *Slayage*, launched *Watcher Junior*, a refereed online journal for undergraduate work in *Buffy* Studies. It has just published its first issue.

[16] As the boundaries of the television text have become more and more difficult to define (previews? commercials? fanfiction?), so too have the boundaries of scholarship. *Watcher Junior* editor and doctoral candidate Katy Stevens is, among other things, the editor of the *All Slay* zine, three issues of scholarly essays on *Buffy*—and, in my view, a good source for a *Buffy* researcher, though not a traditional journal. There are thoughtful essays in the popular press, such as Stephanie Zacharek's *Salon.com* essays on *Buffy*. There is also a large group of supplementary publications. There are books of scripts published by Pocket Books. Keith Topping's *The Complete Slayer* provides significant background information—for instance, that '*Buffy* actually received its first airing in New Zealand, where it began on 2 February 1997, a full six weeks ahead of the series' US debut' (12 n.3). Of this type of publication, probably the best-known volumes are *The Watcher's Guides* by Nancy Holder and Christopher Golden. These contain not just episode summaries but valuable interviews with cast and crew members such as Director of Photography Michael Gershman and Production Designer Carey Meyer. The *Buffy* and *Angel* DVDs provide similarly useful interviews and commentaries, as Lavery points out in his article "'Emotional Resonance and Rocket Launchers.'" Nikki Stafford's *Once Bitten* provides a chapter surveying *Buffy* academia and providing advice about web sites such as the *Buffy* Dialogue Database, which allows users to search for particular phrases of dialogue. What does it tell us when people wish to call to mind a certain phrase from a text—in its exact form? What does it tell us when people are fascinated by the method of creation of a text to the point that they read interviews with production designers and costumers? That there is enough interest to sustain these publications demonstrates the powerful continuing appeal of the *Buffy* text.

[17] *Seven Seasons of Buffy* presents essays by science fiction/fantasy authors such as Holder and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro; they provide insight from a fiction-writer's perspective (as does the similar *Angel* book). Another kind of boundary-crossing can be seen in the work of Jane Espenson, the admired *Buffy/Angel/Firefly* writer who, as noted, has written the introduction to Adams' book and provided an interview for Kaveney: Espenson has now edited a collection of essays on Whedon's *Firefly*, part of the same SmartPop series of science fiction/fantasy-writer essay collections. Espenson also attended WriterCon, the conference for fanfic writers. There is genuinely dreadful fanfic, but there is also material of high quality, and fanfic on the *Buffy*verse (like *The X-Files* before it) tends to have a higher-than-usual proportion of good work. Fanfic, by its nature, is an interpretation of the television text. It is no more scholarship than any other fiction, but its writers, like the writers in the *Seven Seasons* book, sometimes have valuable insights. Scholars are willing to use fanfic authors as objects of study; one wonders whether or not they will be given status as subjects in the more and more complex conversation on the *Buffy*verse in general and television in particular. Scholars who already sometimes feel professionally defensive about their status (see Burr) may hesitate to wander these intellectual woods. There is certainly no dearth of traditional scholarship on *Buffy*, and it grows year by year. But why would one choose not to learn from whatever source can provide knowledge or understanding?

[18] Another element of the liminality of *Buffy* Studies is yet to be addressed. At the closing session of the UEA Blood, Text, and Fears conference, film scholar Scott MacKenzie questioned the term *Buffy* Studies, asking whether one would refer to

Shakespeare studies. Several literature professors in the audience called out "Yes!" He may have been thinking of *Hamlet* studies—although that term is used as well. The term *Buffy Studies* may be taken to refer to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and all its related materials, and the term *Buffyverse* to the diegesis of that series (and productions, such as fanfic, which take place in the same or a related fictional world); the terms may include reference to the spinoff series *Angel*, though some fans and scholars of that series prefer to distinguish between the two fictional worlds. Others use the term *Whedonverse* and *Whedon Studies*; the second *Slayage* conference, SC2, is the *Slayage* Conference on the *Whedonverses*. With the addition of Whedon's Western/science fiction series *Firefly*, television scholarship on Whedon is expanding into material which is not located in the fiction of the *Buffyverse*.

[19] It may seem at first thought that an appropriate Venn diagram would show the *Whedonverse* containing the *Buffyverse*, but that is not precisely the case, since there is work on *Buffy's* other creators—writer Jane Espenson, musician Christophe Beck, actor James Marsters, even stunt coordinator Jeff Pruitt—though every *Buffy* episode is touched by the hand of Joss Whedon. It is the nature of the multiplicity of television's creation that results in their being both *Buffy Studies* and *Whedon Studies*. There are those who are fascinated by, for instance, the gender positions invoked in *Buffy* who will not follow *Firefly*; there are those who are fascinated by Whedon's writing and direction who will. I believe both areas of study (the auteur centered and the text centered—not to mention the audience studies) will continue and flourish. The term *Buffy Studies* may win out simply because of the irresistible draw of assonance.

[20] And that comment on the power of language leads me to another point. (Wait for it—it will take a while to get there.) At some point, sociological elements of *Buffy* will have become a document of history, a sign of a moment in this world's time. But I have no doubt that we will continue to read *Buffy* and to write about *Buffy*. As Janet McCabe says, "No other single text attracts so much attention." There are some who do not consider it to be a completely respectable topic of study (well, hurray for that). Some still dismiss the idea of a good-looking young woman (who *wants* to look good) as a hero; many of us still have a Puritanical flavour to the virtue of our analyses. As I have noted, *Buffy's* status as feminist (or postfeminist) is contested, despite Joss Whedon's assertions that he wrote with feminist purpose, and despite the defenses of various critics (myself among them). Presumably the series would be more acceptable to some if its protagonist disdained her good looks and did not take pleasure in the physical goods of this world. There are even, dismayingly, some viewers who have the sense that *Buffy* the series is somehow genuinely aligned with demonic forces operating in this world (see, e.g., the opening email epigraph). While I hope that few if any scholars share this view, I suspect that its presence among the mothers and dads who pay tuition for college students is one reason that some administrators do not happily embrace *Buffy Studies*. In fact, the two views mentioned in this paragraph suggest that administrators might see positive dislike from both the left and the right.

[21] Television itself, of course, is new as an artistic medium; and in any given age, the most popular medium is suspect. When Shakespeare wrote, plays were not high art (that would have been nondramatic poetry); nor, when Dickens wrote, were novels. *Buffy* would also probably be given more respect if it came from a different genre than fantasy—if it satisfied the Puritanical lust for artistic virtue through "Realism." (Hence, for example, *The Sopranos* gets widespread respect.) But instead of being a mirror held up to nature, it is an undeniably human creation—the play of mind laid bare in its symbolism—a matter of rejoicing for some and disdain for others. Some otherwise intelligent people are simply mind-blind when it comes to the value of fantasy—an odd mental position in my view, given that "Realism" is just as much a fiction. (And many of these folks feel no qualms about enjoying *The Odyssey*, for example, because it has the seal of approval of ancient canon.) Some intellectuals react to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with a dismissal that is not far from the mental place in which we find book burners who have never read the books. And of course, something of that same dismissal can be seen in the reaction to television

in general by many who consider themselves intellectuals, but who actually have simply warmed themselves at the tribal fires of canonical power.

[22] All right, that was a bit harsh (not to mention metaphorically pompous), but one does get tired of that reflex attitude towards television. It is remarkable that *Buffy*—in spite of the mocking and denigratory response by so many in positions of educational and cultural power—continues to interest more and more people, now three years after its last broadcast. Right now it is still sociopolitically alive, and I think people will continue, for many years, to write analyses of it in those terms. *Buffy* can be seen as mythic not just in that the pattern of the hero, the monomyth, can be seen there (as several of us have pointed out), but also because it has framed a truth for its own time. (Must not every myth have started in the mind of one person?) The social satisfaction of its story is of unquestionable appeal to many of us. And yet it is also true that *Buffy* spoke to many people by representing the complexity of social reality rather than giving polemical argument in fictional form. Perhaps social analysis of *Buffy* will never completely go away, but I believe that slowly, over the years, it will dim. I hope for the day when it will be less necessary.

[23] I may be naïve to think that history will cool these issues. I have also always thought (as, I know, do many others) that *Buffy* is a profoundly moral series. Perhaps it is inevitable that its morality is grounded in social elements. Perhaps we should acknowledge as well the morality of artistic authenticity, in which resolution is earned. Indeed, the mistaken impression that fantasy shortcuts the morally earned resolution may explain the dislike many feel for fantasy. (Both bad fantasy and bad realism employ such shortcuts.) Having said all that, I hope for a better world; indeed, works like *Buffy* may help us get there (and Whedon has said that is one of his goals). So I hope for the day when social analysis will be less necessary.

[24] But when and if that day comes, we will still be discussing *Buffy*. Four paragraphs back, I noted the power of language in the very sound of the phrase “*Buffy Studies*.” People quote lines of *Buffy* (often Whedon) the way they quote Shakespeare, making the text a part of the way to see life. *Buffy* has at its command not only the power of language but of image and of music—woven in story over long years, with living characters who grow through time. Its complexity and use of symbolism allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. Nowadays, people sometimes learn history in order to better enjoy Shakespeare’s plays—not the other way around. We love the language, we love the characters, we love the struggle of the characters—or their comedic play. The same is true for *Buffy*. *Buffy* lives in the memory of its viewers, many of whom invoke that memory by many re-viewings. Joss Whedon worked with a company of artistic collaborators (and I discuss this in the introduction *Why Buffy Matters*, among other places). A necessary part of the work of a television artist is the ability to generate such collaboration. That said, I will also assert that Whedon is probably the closest thing to Shakespeare that we have around these days. If we in television studies have a Shakespeare, it is no wonder that we have more and more scholarship and criticism engaged in praise of the medium. Whedon is helping to free television scholars to write about the inherent worth of television as art.

[25] Our work may, in the view of some educators and arbiters of culture, be “banished to the demon section of the card catalog.” In fact one writer has suggested that *Buffy* scholars enjoy the sense of being the outsider who works for the good unrecognized by the majority—identifying with the role the *Buffy* characters play. That may be true—but there’s more to *Buffy Studies* than role-playing. I’m not sure I can explain the miracle of incarnation that constitutes art. But recognizing it is a compelling reason, for some of us, to put up with quite a bit of mockery.

[26] Early in September, a woman who looked to be in her thirties, the student of another professor at our college here in middle Georgia, came to my office to tell me she had just learned of my work in *Buffy Studies*. She tried to express her happiness at the realization that she was not alone in her love for the series (her only obsession, as she put it). This woman was not excited about clothing styles or gorgeous stars or even a



younger role model; she was excited about a work of art. That is what most of *Buffy's* fan scholars and the scholar fans have in common.

[27] This essay has been only the briefest of surveys; much excellent work in various fields (social and aesthetic) has gone unmentioned. *Buffy Studies* reveals many of the major questions about television studies—the nature of the text, the nature of authorship, the liminality of scholarly undertakings. It invites us to continue our studies, and to study our studies. Both its social implications and its aesthetic success compel response. Most significantly, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is one of the major television texts, and it will not only continue to provoke scholarship on itself but will also, more and more, help justify scholarship on other television series. A century from now, heaven help us, it may even be respectable. In fact, it is one of those necessary creations which establish the value of certain kinds of art. In this case, the art is television.

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[1] In summer 1998, the *Transylvanian Journal* published an article by Michael Betancourt on "Education in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." The journal was short-lived and copies are not generally accessible. I am indebted to Elizabeth Miller for providing me with the bibliographic information and a copy of the article, which focuses its examination on the first episode of *Buffy*.

[2] Some work on television is now cited in the MLA bibliography, including some articles and a few books on *Buffy*. In March 2006 Alysa Hornick took over Derik Badman's role as bibliographer.

[3] Both fans and scholars are divided in their evaluation of season seven as successful or not, for reasons too various to detail here.