



Michelle Callander

Bram Stoker's *Buffy*: Traditional Gothic and Contemporary Culture



[Editors' Note: Dr. Callander's essay was completed before the airing of "Buffy vs. Dracula" (5001)]

(1) In 1797, Horace Walpole, author of the first Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, died. In 1897, Bram Stoker published *Dracula*, the most popular of Gothic vampire narratives. In 1997, Warner Brothers screened the first episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These three chronological coincidences are the key to my approach in this essay: to consider both *Dracula* and *Buffy* as texts which reproduce the "intensely emotional moods, strange atmospheres and supernatural elements" of the Gothic (Waxman 79). This is the most conventional of genres, whose cast of stock heroes, heroines and villains, foreign settings, and dark, nightmarish scenarios has formed the backdrop for a variety of philosophical quests; for explorations of the psyche and allegories of the unconscious; for questions surrounding the status and locus of good and evil; for the contest between light and dark, present and past, modernity and barbarity. This essay will focus on three key figures and themes of Gothic fictions—the hero and heroine of sensibility, the contest between the ancient and the modern, particularly ancient and modern knowledge, and fear of the foreign—and will trace what those figures and themes signify in Stoker's and Whedon's respective narratives and cultures. A comparative analysis of *Dracula* and *Buffy* might promise to reinforce the differences between Stoker's Victorian sensibilities and *Buffy*'s reflection of and commentary on contemporary popular culture. However, reading *Buffy* and *Dracula* together reveals some surprising similarities, and offers a way to read Stoker's text as prefiguratively modern, and Whedon's narrative as more conservative, in some ways, than it might initially appear.

BUFFY: A NEW GOTHIC HEROINE?

Buffy: *I'll never have a normal life.*

Angel: *Right. You'll always be a Slayer.* ("The Prom," 3020)

(2) Gothic fictions have, since their inceptions, provided a vehicle for conceptualizing a variety cultural anxieties into imaginative forms:

We now realize that quandaries about class conflicts and economic changes, uneasiness over shifting family arrangements and sexual boundaries, and versions of the 'other' which establish racial and cultural distinctions when traditional economic divisions are being challenged, are projected (or *retrojected*) together into frightening 'Gothic' spectres and monsters, from Walpole's ancestral effigy-ghost to the vampire-Aristocrat from Transylvania. (Hogle 206)

While early Gothic projected its cultural anxieties into ghostly forms and imagined terrors, by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (who also migrates into *Buffy* as Professor Walsh's cyborg / demon Adam) and, later, *Dracula*, this threat had become physical, solid. While *Dracula*'s form is more mutable than *Frankenstein*'s monster, both are distinguishable for the actual, rather than imagined, harm that they can cause. Moreover, the monster and *Dracula* aren't just relics from the past, like *Otranto*'s ghosts: they live in the text's present tense, they threaten to live forever, and, in order for culture to regain the peace it enjoyed before the monster arrived, the monster must be destroyed by virtuous men and women^[1].

(3) At this point, I'd like to consider Gothic fictions' virtuous women: the heroines of sensibility. Born from the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility^[2] (the study of the correlation between emotional stimuli and physical responsiveness), these fictional heroines are fair-haired and virtuous, whose goodness illuminates the "forces of darkness"; they are hostages to villains, often in the guise of malevolent father figures; they rely on protection from 'paternal' figures, namely brothers and suitors; and their susceptibility to a dangerous world often leaves them physically incapable of movement or resistance. These heroines are doubly trapped—in castles or dungeons, and in their own bodies. The woman of sensibility featured in hundreds of Gothic novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She is reprised in *Dracula* as Lucy Westenra (before she becomes a lustful vamp); and is revised as Mina Harker. Like the traditional Gothic heroine, Mina is praised for her beauty, sensitivity, compassion (she even pities *Dracula*); she is surrounded by men who try to protect her from evil; she is saved in the end. However, Mina differs from these traditional heroines: she has what Van Helsing calls a "man's brain . . . and woman's heart" (*Dracula* 234)—she combines the traditional feminine attributes of emotional responsiveness with masculine logic. She is, within cultural limits imposed on women, active: she subverts, to an extent, ideas about female capability by hiding her typing—the work which leads the men to *Dracula*—within her embroidery workbasket, concealing her 'real' work within the bounds of conventional 'women's work.' Moreover, Stoker emphasizes her importance to the group by showing how, when the men try to 'protect' her by leaving her ignorant of their plans, she is attacked by *Dracula*: they can only follow his movements when Mina is included in the hunt. Like *Frankenstein*'s Elizabeth, most vulnerable when least informed, Mina's real status as the key to the men's success is contingent on her knowledge. Women of sensibility, both Shelley and Stoker tell us, are most useful when most informed: a somewhat radical position in nineteenth-century culture.

(4) Buffy would seem to be light years away from the more typical Gothic heroine. However, there are aspects of Buffy which, on closer inspection, don't seem so different to her hysterical foremother. These similarities seem to congeal around Buffy's twin status as adolescent and Slayer, and cast shadows over Whedon's claims that, after watching "a lot of horror movies that starred pretty blonde girls who walk into alleys and get killed" he decided to write a movie "where [she] could walk through an alley and take care of herself."^[3] But on what terms *does* Buffy take care of herself—that is, just how independent *is* she? Physically, she easily outclasses the typical heroine of sensibility. But to what degree can this new heroine function without the aid of her traditional standby, the paternal protector?

(5) To gauge the power of this new, Buffy heroine, let's consider the episode in which both the typical and the new heroine appear—"Halloween" (2006). In this episode, the Scooby Gang hire cursed Halloween costumes; when worn, costume becomes character. Xander becomes a soldier; Willow becomes a ghost; and Buffy, dressing to impress Angel in an eighteenth-century ball gown, becomes a heroine of sensibility. Since we see Buffy in the guise of contemporary and traditional heroine, we can see clearly the differences—and the surprising similarities—between these two female types.

(6) Traditional heroines of sensibility rely on a paternal protector—brother, lover—to protect her from the villain. In *Dracula*, Mina has five men to protect her: father-figure, husband, and 'brothers'. In "Halloween," Buffy reiterates Mina's expectations of paternal protection: "it's not our place to fight. Uh, surely some men will protect us." This dependence, accompanied by fainting spells and inertia, is a form of entrapment within the body as real as imprisonment within a dungeon, castle or kitchen. We'd expect contemporary Buffy to be radically different—and, mostly, she is, staking vampires and protecting the community. Yet this same Buffy is, to some extent, as reliant on a paternal protector as her fore-Buffy was: Giles. Whedon takes pains to establish Buffy as willful, and Giles as a stammering, conservative figure: he presents us with a strong, capable, seemingly independent young woman who is still under the control of an older, paternal authority—moreover, one who at times seems less capable than she, and who keeps reminding her of her obligations as Slayer, and the limits those obligations place on her personal freedoms. Like her predecessor, trapped within a docile, inactive body, Buffy is trapped within the body, the obligations and responsibilities of a Slayer^[4]; an entrapment overseen by an older male authority figure. The twentieth century Gothic heroine, it seems, is still forced to rely on her paternal protector.

(7) One of the most interesting aspects of *Buffy* is Whedon's revision of the heroine of sensibility's relation to the hero. As if to highlight Buffy's status as 'new' Gothic heroine, Whedon has created Xander as her male counterpart: the Gothic hero in reverse. Where typically heroes protect the heroine, Buffy is always saving Xander; where heroines fall for their saviors, Xander has a crush on Buffy; and where heroines are the victims of violent, and often sexually aggressive, villains, Xander is serially seduced by dominating women. From Inca Mummy Girl, to Cordelia, to Faith, and now Anya, the man-hating demon who has now become the obsessive, possessive man-lover, Xander is consistently feminized in relation to strong women. In this, he resembles Stoker's Jonathon, who, trapped in *Dracula's* castle and 'seduced' by three vampire women, assumes the subject position of the typical Gothic heroine.

(8) In "Halloween," this dynamic is reversed. The episode begins with Buffy and Xander in their usual roles of protectrix and protected: Xander, defending Buffy's honor (as a good hero of sensibility should) ends up being protected *by* Buffy. Embarrassed, Xander quips: "A black eye heals, Buffy, but cowardice has an unlimited shelf life." However, while under the influence of their costumes, Xander can take charge: confronted with a demon, Buffy screams and faints, while Xander hits it with the butt of his rifle. It seems that the only time Xander can behave like a hero is by returning to the gender roles of traditional Gothic. This 'righting' of gender types, however, is clearly ironic, and Whedon obviously intends us to read Xander as feminized in relation to Buffy's heroism: a position perhaps just as radical as Stoker's liberating of Mina.

(9) Although the Gothic was full of suffering heroines, contemporary women readers and later readers as well could also find ways of manipulating the stock Gothic dramas to "explore positive role models for active female behavior." (Fay 147). Ann Radcliffe's heroines of sensibility, for example, could temporarily discover psychological liberty from their literal / physical entrapment in the consolations of sublime landscape; in turn, female readers, taking solace from that liberty, might find similar consolations in their own lives^[5]. Buffy, too, despite those limits that I've pointed out, offers a positive model of female action: her ambivalent heroism, her sense of being enslaved to her role as Slayer, could be read as a fictionalization of some of the disempowerment many young women feel—and her resilience, her capacity to combine a degree of independence with the exigencies of male authority, could offer a model for young women to confront and combat the limitations that shape their lives. While Whedon claims he "invented Buffy not as someone I could relate to, but as the person I can never be—that's what a hero is for,"^[6] she potentially offers the same sort of vicarious empowerment that many early Gothic novels afforded their female readership.

THE CREW OF LIGHT, THE SCOOBY GANG, AND AMBIVALENT TECHNOLOGIES

(10) Given the hundred years between the two texts, it is interesting just how similar Stoker's and Whedon's 'slayers' are. Some of these similarities occur at the level of character. Stoker creates a self-appointed Crew of Light to track and destroy *Dracula*. Most of these characters represent a particular branch of modern, Victorian life: Jack Seward and Professor Van Helsing represent the sciences; Jonathon Harker signifies law and commerce; Quincey Morris, the adventurer, is a symbol of the New World; Holmwood represents the liberal aristocracy; and Mina the accomplished, compassionate, ideal wife. There are also other talents in this group; along with science, Van Helsing is also an expert on superstition and the occult; Seward and Mina are both adept at technology, he with phonograph recordings, she with typewriting and stenography. This Crew of modern and (mostly) professional men and women are Stoker's antidote to the ancient, aristocratic Count. Seward's and Van Helsing's knowledge of psychology helps them understand the vampire's mind; Jonathon and Mina use their clerical skills (particularly her typewriting) to compile and order the clues that lead them to *Dracula's* castle. Moreover, Mina develops a telepathic relationship with *Dracula* which enables the Crew to pinpoint and destroy the Count.

(11) In *Buffy's* Scooby Gang, there are similar roles. Van Helsing becomes Giles, learned in the occult and father figure of the group. As we've seen, Buffy shares some characteristics with Mina, particularly her insight and her telepathic link with the vampire^[7]; in other ways, Mina becomes Willow, a compiler of data who combines modern technology (the Internet) with supernatural power (wicca incantations). Xander, like Jonathon, is physically inept (a point I'll come back to later), but, along with Willow he is able to research and compile case histories of demons and vampires. Like Stoker whose Quincey Morris is arguable

Willow, he is able to research and compile case histories of demons and vampires. Like Stoker, whose Quincy Morris is arguably leagued with the vampire[8], Whedon allows the 'enemy' on board; Oz, the reluctant werewolf, and Angel, the vampire with a soul, help destroy evil forces.

(12) One of the most fascinating aspects of Stoker's text is its presentation of modern technology. The Crew use new information technologies—typewriters, phonography, stenography, telegraphy, and photography—to track and kill Dracula. The fascinating aspect of this reliance on the modern derives from Stoker's ambivalence about these technologies: trapped in Dracula's castle, Harker, expressing the anxieties of the 1890's, when "rapid innovation was accompanied by fears of a regression to the primitive" (Ellman ix), nervously notes that "the old centuries . . . have powers of their own that mere 'modernity' cannot kill" (*Dracula* 36). As Jennifer Wicke has demonstrated, while the Crew have faith in the power of technology to destroy the vampire, technology in fact mimics vampiric insubstantiality: phonographs, photographic film, typewritten documents all produce images or traces of the human (voice, image, handwriting) without reproducing the substance of humanity. Like vampires, merely the simulacrum of human forms, these technologies circulate and reproduce throughout the community. Because they mimic the vampire's form and movement, Wicke demonstrates that these 'weapons' against the vampire to some extent enable Dracula as much as they threaten him.

(13) This ambivalence about technology is not something we *Dracula* expect from late-twentieth century culture—but it clearly features in *Buffy*. The Scooby Gang frequently use the Net to identify, track, and destroy demonic forces; yet Whedon, like Stoker, seems equivocal towards modern technology. We see this most insistently in "I Robot, You Jane" (1008), in which Moloch the Corrupter, an ancient demon trapped for centuries in a book, is unleashed into cyberspace. This episode draws on *Dracula*'s twin methodologies of text and tech, and displays, perhaps surprisingly, a similar ambivalence towards both technology and textuality. Moloch the Corrupter, a demon who preys on the vulnerable, offering them power, knowledge, and love if they will do his bidding, is bound in a book by a monks' spell. Five centuries later, the book turns up in Sunnydale High, where Willow scans the text into a computer, freeing Moloch from the binding curse and unleashing him into cyberspace. Calling himself 'Malcolm,' he begins an e-mail seduction of Willow while sending messages to other vulnerable Sunnydale computer science students, offering them power in return for destroying the Slayer. Buffy, Giles and Xander discover that Moloch has been released into cyberspace; Jenny—a technopagan—and Giles recreate the spell, trapping Moloch into a metallic shell; and Buffy tricks Moloch into punching a circuit box and electrocuting himself.

(14) At the heart of the episode are questions about knowledge and power, the forms that these take, and their relationships to demonic, dangerous forces. These questions are bound up with the form that information takes—text or tech—and the way in which those forms either defeat or enable the spread of evil. The lines between text and tech are drawn at the level of character: Giles prefers text, Jenny supports tech. The presentation of Giles as older, book-bound, conservative, and Jenny as young, hip and 'jacked-in,' signifies that Whedon wants his audience to find technology more attractive, because more modern. What is most interesting is the way in which the script makes associations between these different forms of knowledge, and substance: textual information is seen as material, weighty; electronic data is insubstantial, ephemeral. Textual information is bound; electronic information is diffuse, pervasive.

(15) The episode initially seems to celebrate the Internet as the liberation of knowledge: "The printed page is obsolete," says Fritz, "information isn't bound up any more. It's an entity." However, the Internet and computer technology are ambivalent powers: while technology liberates information, technology also liberates Moloch: once he is scanned into cyberspace, his power is as unbounded as the media he inhabits. We now see different values attached to text and tech: the liberation of information seems dangerous, while information bound, as Moloch was in the book, seems safer. Here, we see *Buffy* mimic Stoker's ambivalence towards modern technology; those mass cultural forms which disseminate insubstantial, disembodied information can aid in the spread of insubstantial, disembodied evil.

(16) Just as in Stoker, however, those same forms which mimic the vampire can also destroy it. Giles and Jenny are able to use the Internet to bind Moloch into a material form, which Buffy can then destroy. But technology, it seems, at the end of the episode hasn't regained the legitimacy and authority that it enjoyed at the beginning. Despite Jenny's insistence that "it was your book that started all the trouble, not a computer," in the light of the relationship that's been forged between technology and the dissemination of evil there still seems something much more convincing in Giles's defense of the book: "The knowledge gained from a computer, is, uh, it . . . has no texture, no context. It's there and then it's gone. If it's to last, then the getting of knowledge should be tangible." Giles's mistrust of cyberspace isn't just technophobia, but an anxiety which, like Stoker's, seems to derive from the possibility that technology mimics vampirism and the demonic. Moloch, we must remember, is the demon who lures his victims with promises of "love, power, knowledge": in this episode, we see Moloch's victims—Willow, Fritz, Dave—as lured by the unbounded, readily accessible information and power (and, in Willow's case, chat-room love) made possible by the Internet. "I Robot, You Jane" offers us a moral lesson in the potential dangers of the Internet, of unbounded, uncensored information, which, Janus-faced, can both empower and destroy[9]. Cyberspace, like vampires, is pervasive, intangible, insubstantial, atemporal, uncontainable, and the information it contains is easily reproduced and circulated. Like the mass culture it 'inhabits,' the mass culture Wicke sees burgeoning in *Dracula*, contemporary media and computer technology are the "social force[s] most analogous to Dracula" and vampirism (469). Moreover, technology doesn't just mimic vampirism, but can be a conduit for the demonic into the community.

(17) Technology's potential as a conduit for the vampiric / demonic is made even more frightening by the fact that technology is the province of women—in *Dracula*, Mina, and in *Buffy*, Jenny and Willow. This presents a problem because both *Dracula* and *Buffy* show women as the most vulnerable to vampiric seduction or attack. If technology can be the conduit for the demonic, and women control technology, then not only are women at risk from tech-aided evil, but they expose the whole community. By compiling information about Dracula into a form that he can trace, Mina "is the one who most consistently and devotedly facilitates the circulation of texts that produces the knowledge so helpful in fighting the vampire"(Pope 211); conversely however, as Wicke argues, Mina's "very prowess with the typewriter . . . brings down Dracula on unsuspecting British necks, even including her very own"(Wicke 467); Jenny's computer files, designed to restore Angel's soul, incite Angelus to kill her ("Passion"); Willow scans Moloch into cyberspace, and is seduced by his almost fatal charm. The very proficiencies which make these women good 'evil hunters' are those which make them targets, and victims, of evil.

"YOUR GIRLS THAT YOU ALL LOVE ARE MINE": WOMEN'S SEXUALITY AND MONSTROUS ANXIETY

(18) *Dracula* is frequently read as a thinly-veiled account of male sexual anxiety and the dangers of sexually liberating women[10]

(18) *Dracula* is frequently read as a thinly veiled account of male sexual anxiety, and the dangers of sexually liberating women.^[10] The Count chooses young women as his victims; he 'seduces' them, and, in the case of Lucy (and almost Mina) vamps them. This vamping turns ordinarily chaste women into sexually voracious predators: Lucy's "purity" is turned to "voluptuous wantonness," while the quasi-vamped Mina wakes next to Jonathan who, swooning and breathing heavily, has either just been bitten, or sexually exhausted, by his ordinarily pure wife (*Dracula* 211). Yet, as Gail Griffin points out, Dracula is a shadowy figure in Stoker's text; the real threat of "active vampirism, with its dimension of sexuality, is dissociated from Dracula and associated instead" with the women he's vamped (138). Vampire reality, she says, "explodes upon the other characters not in [Dracula's] own person but in Lucy's" (139). Stoker establishes a relationship between vampirism and sexually voracious women: Lucy's unconventional attitudes to sex—" [W]hy can't they let a girl marry three men?"—seems to predispose her to vampirism, more so than newly-married Mina (*Dracula* 59). In *Buffy*, too, sexual women are associated with the demonic: dark girl Faith is promiscuous; Drusilla is sensual and erotic; and in "Doppelgangland" (3016) when Anya unwittingly invokes Willow's vampire double, Vamp Willow embodies the 'unseen,' erotic aspect of virginal Willow's personality. Twentieth-century women, then, are vulnerable to vampiric seduction; they are the conduits through which vampirism will invade England; and, since vampirism is associated with liberated female sexuality, women's sexuality becomes a veiled threat of vampirism.

(19) The source of this anxiety about vampirism making women sexual is not just a moral concern (although, as a Victorian novel, this is present). John Allen Stevenson has taken an anthropological approach to the question of vampirism and female sexuality, and finds an answer in fears of the foreign. Stevenson argues that "the novel insistently—indeed, obsessively—defines the vampire as a foreigner, as someone who threatens and terrifies precisely because he is an outsider"(139). In *Dracula*, the foreign is obsessively identified with the monstrous, and just as obsessively separated from the "good" men who track Dracula. "As Mina puts it, "[T]he world seems full of good men—even if there are monsters in it" (*Dracula* 230). The familiar is the image of the good, while foreignness merges with monstrosity" (142). Dracula's foreignness is literal, geographical—he comes from Transylvania—but he is also made foreign by his vampirism: he is 'strange' and foreign because he eats differently, sleeps at different times, looks different, talks differently. It is this definition of the foreign as strange and monstrous that *Buffy* adopts. The Sunnydale vampires aren't all geographically foreign (although Spike, Drusilla and Angelus^[11] clearly are), as they tend to be vamped Sunnydale locals: they are foreign because they aren't human. In both *Dracula* and *Buffy*, vampires seek to conceal this foreignness behind a mask of the local, the familiar. Dracula seeks out Jonathon's services in part because he wants to learn how to speak English, and to act English, so that he can move through London undetected. In Sunnydale, vampirism is masked by local identity, disguised as Sunnydale students, workers, family members. Dracula and the Sunnydale vampires and demons infiltrate the community; they become the foreign within the familiar, the domestic, the homely; they are, in Freud's terms, uncanny^[12].

(20) One can, however, recognize the changed face of a vampire about to feed. Whedon explains that these different features signify "that a vampire is not a person. It's a monster that looks like a person."^[13] This distinction is significant, for it maintains taxonomical boundaries between the human and the vampiric. To cross these boundaries is to endanger the integrity of the human race, to commit what Stevenson calls "excessive exogamy," the sexual theft of members of one group by another (140). Excessive exogamy, the mingling of different 'blood' to create another 'race' is a threat at the heart of *Dracula*: the Count tells the Crew that his plan to vamp Britain is already underway: "your girls that you love are mine already, and through them you and others shall yet be mine" (*Dracula* 306). *Buffy* expresses the same threat: in "The Harvest" (1002) Giles explains the danger of demonic miscegenation:

"[t]he books tell the last demon to leave this reality fed off a human, mixed their blood. He was a human form possessed, infected by the demon's soul. He bit another, and another, and so they walk the Earth, feeding . . . Killing some, mixing their blood with others to make more of their kind."

The Crew and the Gang need to protect their community from the threat of foreign invasion, a threat of the corruption of their race, their kind. That threat, whether it be to nineteenth-century London, or a twentieth-century middle-class suburb, signifies fears which are both anthropological, cultural and national: and, while these fears may not be as explicitly expressed in *Buffy* and they are in *Dracula*, there is evidence that they still pertain.

(21) In *Buffy*, we see a modified version of *Dracula*'s suggestive link between women's sexual desire and the invasion of evil; there is still a sense that women must be protected from the threat of demonic influence. The real difference between Whedon and Stoker's accounts of relationships between human women and demon men is the way men approach these relationships. In *Dracula*, the Crew see it as a duty to protect their women from Dracula: in *Buffy*, the anxiety that demonic forces will corrupt women belongs to the vampire and the werewolf.

(22) Perhaps Whedon's most radical reversal of traditional Gothic conventions is his choice of turning these two traditional Gothic/horror monsters into moral characters and romantic leads. In the tradition of Gothic novelists, Whedon is clearly targeting a female audience: like Anne Rice, his vampire story "share[s] a number of characteristics usually associated with women's romance—notably, the tracing out of the vampire's search for fulfillment, for a 'complete' love relationship" (Gelder 109). Buffy's and Willow's relationships with Angel and Oz are intensely romantic—Whedon says "all of the relationships on Buffy are kind of romantic."^[14] Angel, arguably more of a romantic focus than Oz, is clearly a combination of Coppola's Dracula—the seductive, dangerous, but monogamous romantic hero—and Anne Rice's Louis (*Interview with the Vampire*), the existentialist tormented by his residual human morality. The publicity tag of Coppola's film, 'Love Never Dies', emphasized the love story between Mina and Dracula (an invention of Coppola's), and transformed Dracula from a sexually dangerous villain into a sympathetic, romantic figure. Angel is plagued by the philosophical questions that trouble Rice's vampires—particularly Louis. Rice's vampires are existentialists, seeking the answers to the meaning of life—and death. As Linda Badley has argued, Louis's existential crisis mimics our own: "Louis finds himself 'made' a vampire with all the abruptness as we all, according to Sartre, find ourselves 'condemned' to life, freedom, and choice" (108). Like Louis, Angel too is tormented by his vampness: the gypsy curse that reinstated his soul makes him despise his condition, and feel remorse for his victims. Oz is similarly tormented; bitten by his nephew, a werewolf, he is plagued by his own power, and begs Willow to lock him up when he "wolfs out."

(23) Where Whedon's modern 'monsters' differ most radically from their Gothic predecessors is their guilt towards their monstrosity, and their subsequent determination to protect the women they love from the demons inside them. This narrative thread seems to have its origins in contemporary philosophy: while Gothic novels prefigured such philosophical movements as existentialism

seems to have its origins in contemporary philosophy. While some novels prefigured such philosophical movements as existentialism, recent Gothic like *Buffy* seems to draw on recent philosophical meditations on "entrapment, escape and individual moral agency" (Waxman 81). To some extent, too, sympathy for monsters was prefigured in *Dracula*: Mina, clearly Stoker's most admirable character, takes pity on Dracula, seeing him as more hunted than hunter: indeed, at times, Dracula becomes more sympathetic than his aggressive, violent pursuers. In *Buffy*, both Angel and Oz are marked (despite their romances) as lone figures, struggling to "embrace ethical behavior" in the face of their monstrous instincts (Waxman 84). Angel seems akin to early nineteenth century vampires (he is 'born' as a vampire around this time) who, "stories suggest . . . are lonesome rather than predacious creatures, suffering from an excess of love," but unable to express that love fully, and without risk to *Buffy* (Ellman, xvi). Both Oz and Angel adopt the alienation, guilt and self-loathing that, as Barbara Frey Waxman points out, is part of the human condition; Whedon has his 'monsters' experience those emotions and crises that culture teaches humans to repress "in order to perform higher intellectual and ethical tasks" (89). To a large extent, Angel and Oz are marked as more human than human, for their angst isn't concealed or repressed, but exquisitely conscious. Consequently, we are able to see very clearly just how their moral crises direct their behavior; in this, Whedon presents Angel and Oz as, in many ways, more admirable than most of his human characters.

(24) Despite its sympathy towards its monster heroes, the anxiety about exogamy which haunted *Dracula* returns in *Buffy*: there, it's Buffy and Willow who risk being 'polluted' by demons, and producing a new generation of 'human form[s] possessed.' However, while Giles and Xander initially have reservations about both Buffy and Willow dating monsters (Xander, of course, has ulterior motives in both cases), it's not the 'paternal protectors' but the monsters themselves who end the relationships (and, Stevenson might add, end the risk of exogamy). Angel and Oz's anxieties about corrupting their human lovers are explicit in the 'break-up' scenes: Angel tells Buffy she will want someone who can "make love to [her]," with whom she can have "children" ("The Prom," 3020). Oz and Willow separate after Willow discovers Oz has been mating with a she-werewolf: "You wanted her . . . Like in an animal way?" Veruca reminds Oz of the dangers of exogamy, and the necessity of intra-species romance: "You'll see that we belong together." Oz, leaving town, tells Willow that he can't be with her because "[t]he wolf is inside me all the time, and I don't know where that line is any more between me and it" ("Wild at Heart," 4006).

(25) However, while Whedon places the anxiety of miscegenation or exogamy on the shoulders of his 'monsters,' Buffy seems to promote a broader culture of mistrust of relationships between monstrous men and human women. While Buffy / Angel and Willow / Oz romances are presented sympathetically, there remains a sense that their separations are not only inevitable, but endorsed. The danger of vampire seduction, and the impossibility of vampire-human relationships, is clear in "Innocence" (2014) when, at the moment of orgasm, Angel loses his soul and becomes a vampire again. This transformation, however, is outside Angel's control: as such, it doesn't signify Angel's concern about corrupting / destroying Buffy, but presents this corruption from a different, implicitly authorial, perspective. Therefore it's not just Angel and Oz who see the risk to Buffy and Willow: the audience is asked to recognize the dangers of these foreign 'men'—no matter how sympathetic they might be—to our heroines.

(26) Whedon's 'new' Gothic, then, emphasizes that aspect of the old which sees its heroes and heroines as victims of larger forces which they cannot control—a condition that is both timeless and modern. We've seen how Buffy feels trapped within the duties of a Slayer: Angel and Oz, too, are trapped within their 'monstrosity.' The heroes of 'new' Gothic seem just as vulnerable to the exigencies of a cruel world: with one difference. Whedon allows Angel and Oz an agency within their relationships that he denies to Buffy and Willow: he gives Angel and Oz the power of choice. Buffy, telling Angel she "didn't know [she had] a choice" to love him or not, tearfully says "I can't believe you're breaking up with me" ("The Prom"). When Willow, begging Oz to stay, asks "Don't I get any say in this?", he replies "No" ("Wild at Heart"). Buffy and Willow are at a double remove from making choices concerning their lovers; they, perhaps more so than Angel and Oz, become victims of forces that they can't control. The sexual politics of the Gothic, in which heroines remain at a remove from power granted to heroes, seems to pertain in the late twentieth century.

(27) The Gothic, a genre born in the eighteenth century and most popular in the shadows of the French Revolution, has proven a highly adaptable vehicle for expressing the anxieties and concerns of generations. *Dracula's* reflection of Victorian sensibilities, and *Buffy's* engagement with twentieth-century culture, share more than just Gothic conventions. While we might expect the concerns of Victorian England and twentieth-century USA to be radically different cultures, my reading of *Dracula* and *Buffy* has highlighted a surprising number of similarities. Both texts recognize the limits of choices and freedoms placed on women; both express an ambivalence towards modern technologies; both seem to, at one and the same time, fear yet sympathize with the foreign and the monstrous, seeing their angst as deeply human, and their persecution as one of the more violent aspects of human nature. In the light of comparisons, Stoker seems to prefigure of Whedon's promotion of a strong but limited heroine, mistrust of dehumanizing technology and compassion for the 'Other' in a way that makes *Dracula* seem less a Victorian, than a modern, text: In turn, *Buffy*, a show which on one level promotes female independence and modernity, can now be read as taking a more conservative view of technology and women's freedoms than might be expected from our own, contemporary culture. The Gothic, it seems, remains infinitely adaptable as a genre for reflecting, or revealing, the questions and anxieties confronted by each generation.

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[1] See Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear," in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Form*, (London: Verso, 1988), 85.

[2] See, among others, G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986).

[3] Interview, at <http://www.ms88.com/student/mwwwebpage1.html#bottom>

[4] Ken Gelder, discussing the 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, sees Buffy's obligations in a more positive light: because slaying offers a degree of authority that her girlfriends don't enjoy, "for Buffy . . . to believe in vampires is to believe in the possibility of her own empowerment as a woman" (143).

[5] One example of this argument is in Norton Richter, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999).

[6] Interview, at <http://www.ms88.com/student/mwwwebpage1.html#bottom>

[7] In "Amends," for example, Buffy is able to enter into and experience Angel's dreams.

[8] See Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear" in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literature* (London: Verso, 1988), for a convincing reading of Quincey as a vampire.

[9] Maud Ellman notes that the Dracula story has "been read as a prefigurement of . . . the dissemination of the Internet"(viii).

[10] See, among others, Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Anne Cranny-Francis, "Sexual Politics and Political Repression in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in *Nineteenth Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, ed. Clive Bloom et al. (London: Macmillan, 1988); Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Gail B. Griffin, "Your Girls That You All Love Are Mine": *Dracula* and the Victorian Male Sexual Imagination," in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, ed. Margaret L. Carter (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988); Phyllis A. Roth, "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in *Dracula: The Vampire and its Critics*, ed. Margaret L. Carter (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988) Judith Weissman, "Women and Vampires: *Dracula* as a Victorian Novel," in *Dracula: The Vampire and its Critics*, ed. Margaret L. Carter (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).

[11] Spike and Dru have British accents; Angelus is Irish, although Angel, his 'good' incarnation, has a localised American accent.

[12] Freud writes that the uncanny is experienced when the familiar becomes strange—he notes that *heimlich* ('homely') has two possible meanings: "on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight." "The Uncanny," in *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1958), 129.

[13] Interview, at <http://www.ms88.com/mwwwebpage1.html#bottom>

[14] Whedon, Joss, interview with *TV Guide Online*, May 8 2000. Whedon's emphasis on romance over sex is clear in series four, with the introduction of Willow's girlfriend Tara; their relationship has evolved less as a lesbian sexual relationship than as an intense romantic friendship.