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'I run to Death': Renaissance sensibilities in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



I run to death and death meets me as fast
And all my pleasures are like yesterday
I dare not move my dim eyes any way
Despair behind and death before doth cast
Such terror . . .

John Donne, Holy Sonnet 1, lines 3-7 (C.A.Patrides., ed., 1994)

[1] This paper has grown from the experience I had teaching seventeenth century religious poetry to groups of first year undergraduates in a University in the north of England (UK). I found my students struggled to relate to poetry from a period they found alien and disconcerting, and in particular they perceived its emphasis on mortality to be strange and morbid. The students were young and white; most came straight from school with little life experience and few had any religious convictions. The devotional poetry of Donne, Herbert and Vaughan, on the other hand, takes death as an everyday topic. The poets dwell on the deaths of friends and public figures and contemplate their own mortality. Through such poems they remind us of the certainty of death and the ephemeral nature of this world and often seek to promote a disengagement with daily life, its pleasures and concerns.

[2] Through discussion with the students I came to realise that they found it almost impossible to imagine how it feels to live in a world in which death is an ever-present possibility. Life expectancy is high today in the West, and although some die young from disease or accident, such events are rare enough to ensure that many young people have no direct experience of them. When death does strike the young, it is often treated as an outrage, certainly as an aberration, a shocking anomaly. The poets' concentration on death can be justified as realistic and sensible in a world in which death often struck very suddenly and within a belief system in which an afterlife was a normal expectation. However, if you believe that this life is the only one you will get, as most of my students did, and believe you are entitled to expect it to be long, then a concentration on death seems like an unhealthy distraction from living the good life here and now.

[3] I was searching, therefore, for ways to help my students make the imaginative leap into the 17th century. I used, of course, material from the period itself to enrich the teaching, such as Loyola's spiritual exercises, but felt the need to make connections with contemporary life and culture to get the students' involvement. It struck me that one of the most prevalent sites where we do indeed retain a fascination with death in the late 20th and early 21st century is in popular culture. In horror, especially, we continue to face audiences with the shock of sudden death and the gruesome reality of bodily dissolution. The teen slasher movie, for example, deals with the serial deaths of healthy, young people in their ordinary day to day environments. It immerses us in the paranoid psychology of a world in

which the inhabitants believe death is stalking them daily.

[4] I want to show how *BtVS* takes and extends these characteristics of horror, thereby creating a powerful and dramatic imaginative space for experiencing the threat of death. As Fuchs (2003, p.3) says, 'while *Buffy* is about powerful girls and youthful agency, it has always retained its sombre, iconic and mythic interest in death, the experience of being mortal *and conscious of it*' (my italics). As I have indicated, my initial interest in points of similarity between *BtVS* and renaissance poetry was as a teacher. However, the process of reflecting on this for pedagogic purposes led me to believe the analysis offers insights into the continuities and discontinuities between *BtVS*, as a particularly literary and resonant exemplar of teen horror, and earlier literary forms that also focused on death and dissolution that are worth exploring more fully. In this article I attempt to do this, beginning with general observations on similarities between the two worlds. I then consider the impact of facing death on individual psychology through an exploration of 'Prophecy Girl' (1012), analyse the implications for society and morality of high mortality in 'The Wish' (3009) and discuss the treatment death as an art form. The discontinuities are as important as the continuities, as these highlight one of *BtVS*'s major contributions to the contemporary canon, its serious engagement with morality and fighting the good fight in the absence of a clear or agreed theology.

[5] *BtVS* takes young, healthy, materially secure people and inserts into their world the repeated threat of violent death. Its central characters, the Scoobies and their acolytes, have a heightened consciousness of the mortality that stalks all Sunnydale. Tonkin's (2003, p.38) quasi-religious language sums this up well, when he talks about the California of *BtVS*: 'the blessed landscape is a playground that doubles as a killing field'; it is precisely this juxtaposition of hedonism and destruction that makes *BtVS* relevant for my purposes. Buffy, even in the first season, when she is a mere sixteen years old and her main concerns are shopping and socialising, knows that slayers have short lives. She dies; she may kill several times a day. Moreover, in spite of her heroism, she fails to save many young, vital school-fellows. Throughout the series, the proximity of death and the way it is inextricably woven into her identity and her everyday life is not only obvious from plotlines and in action sequences, but is reflected upon constantly through dialogue that ranges from the blackly humorous

Buffy: Hi how have you been?

Amy: Rat. You?

Buffy: Dead.

Amy: Oh.

('Smashed', 6009)

to the introverted and metaphysical. The paradox of *BtVS* is that this heightened awareness of mortality develops in the characters an intense awareness of life. This constant engagement with death means that the passion for living so often demonstrated by the central characters has a painful consciousness that contrasts with the 'relentless, pointless desire to exist' ('When She Was Bad', 2001) that Snyder notes in the general run of students.

[6] It is these characters' sense that death actively seeks us all, including the young that provides a particular continuity with the seventeenth century. In 'The Grace', for example, George Herbert uses the striking image of death as a mole, digging away; every piece of earth the creature removes helps to dig the poet's grave. And in the elegy quoted below, Richard Crashaw urges young people to reflect on the dead features of a young man to remind them that death will get them too:

Come, then, youth, beauty and blood, all ye soft powers

Whose silken flatteries swell a few fond hours

Into a false eternity

(. . .)

These death sealed lips are they dare give the lie

To these proud hopes of poor mortality.

[7] This focus on the sensuality of youth ('beauty', 'blood', 'soft', 'lips') that characterises Crashaw's poem and much of the poetry of the period, can be exploited dramatically in *BtVS*, simply because television is a visual medium, and the camera can linger on the youthful flesh in ways that also highlight its vulnerability. Close-up shots of necks are the most obvious example, but it is noticeable that at moments of danger we get close-ups of eyes, throats, lips and exposed flesh generally.

[8] The episode 'Prophecy Girl' (1012) provides an early example of the connections between the approach to death found in the Renaissance and that found in the series. The Book of Revelations predicts the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world; Christians in the seventeenth century may not have expected this to happen any day in quite the way that the early church took the prophecy to refer to an imminent event, but it was still expected and *might* happen at any time. John Donne considers the possibility that the world might end suddenly, at the second coming and its associated judgement day, asking: 'What if this present were the world's last night?' (Holy Sonnet X111). He frequently meditates upon his own death imagining, for example, his 'black soul' 'summoned by sickness, death's herald and champion' in Holy Sonnet 1V. In 'Prophecy Girl' Buffy also has to face the idea that she has only one night left, when she overhears Giles say, 'Tomorrow night Buffy will face the Master and she will die.' She discovers that a seemingly infallible prophecy has decreed her death, *the next day*. Just as Donne, Herbert and Alabaster imagine the end of the world and judgement day in terms of what it will mean for them as individuals, and for their corrupted souls, the focus of this particular prophecy on Buffy herself gives it an intensely personal quality. The episode even domesticates apocalyptic signs, making them personal rather than general. Revelation, for example, in its descriptions of the apocalypse, says 'a third of the sea was turned to blood,' whereas Buffy washes her hands in the school washroom and blood spills into the basin, and we hear of strange events all over Sunnydale. It is because Buffy, in spite of being a superhero, has been presented to us as an ordinary schoolgirl, with a troubled past, and her mind on typical teenage concerns, that viewers are able to identify with her and feel what she feels when faced with the prospect of her own immediate death in a way that is difficult to do when reading the meditations of a seventeenth century poet. Buffy's response in 'Prophecy Girl' shows, not surprisingly, that once an individual is forced to realise that they will actually die, it is quite normal to become pre-occupied with death and to try to imagine what it might be like. There are three elements to this response, which all have parallels with the work of earlier writers.

[9] First Buffy is afraid, imagining the event, trying to experience it vicariously, even though she wants to avoid it: 'They say how he's gonna kill me? Do you think it'll hurt?' ('Prophecy Girl', 1012). The metaphysical poets rehearsed and imagined their own deaths as part of the process of coming to terms with it. Riess (2004) notes that meditating on death is standard practice for both Christian and Buddhist monks. Donne's picture of himself, painted wearing his burial shroud, before he died, is perhaps the most famous example of this kind of imaginative preparation for dying, but there are many others. In 'Church Monuments', for example, George Herbert 'intombes' his flesh amidst the tombs of the church, to reflect on his inevitable mortality.

[10] She then becomes angry and seeks avoidance; she wants to quit her job as Slayer to avoid the tragedy. 'I quit! I resign! I - I'm fired, you can find someone else to stop the Master from taking over!' ('Prophecy Girl', 1012). In general, the metaphysical poets, surrounded as they are by the presence of death, do not see the point in resisting. They do occasionally rage against God and the restrictive life and mental torment created by a worldview framed by sin, death and redemption, however. The petulant tone in Herbert's 'The Collar' shows that same kind of impotent fury against a life determined by a higher cause that Buffy shows from time to time:

I struck the board, and cried, "No more!
I will abroad.
What! shall I ever sigh and pine?
...
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?

. . .

Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load.

Herbert, *The Collar*, lines 1-32. (Patrides, C.A., ed. 1974).

They share a resistance to doing what they know is right, because it is hard, and share a resentment at losing the world and all its pleasures. In Buffy's case the loss comes simply because she will die, whereas Herbert has to renounce them before that, in the expectation of judgment at death.

[11] Finally, once the futility of resistance is clear, Buffy turns away from an interest in material things: food, dancing, the prom dress her mother has bought her. Suddenly they all seem irrelevant and like the devotional poets she contemplates the inevitable. This withdrawal from the world is found again in season six, after Buffy is resurrected, when her deep consciousness of death makes it hard for her to engage with the everyday concerns of life.

[12] All the devotional poets in differing degrees, similarly seek to focus their thoughts away from the preoccupations of the world. In 'The World', for example, Vaughan describes the frenetic obsessions of those who are 'hurled' around by their addiction to worldly pleasures while he keeps his sights on death and eternity. In 'Vertue', Herbert turns away from all the beauties of the world, because they 'all must die.' Roston (2005) discusses the debates about the influence of Catholicism and Protestantism on Donne's religious thought, and argues that Donne's particularly strong rejection of worldly pleasures comes from his Catholic upbringing and reflects a fear of damnation and desire for redemption, rather than a protestant conviction of election and salvation. This turning away from the world can, nevertheless be seen in all the poets to different degrees.

[13] In 'Prophecy Girl' (1012) the shift of perspective in Buffy, away from the careless worldliness of youth, is reluctant. She does not have the consolation of faith that gives Vaughan and Herbert something positive to turn towards when they reject the world. Instead, she comes to face her death with courage, after the increase in vampiric activity brought on by the impending rise of the Master leads to the mass killing of a group of young men. When Willow, observing this, says, 'It wasn't our world any more—they made it theirs', we know she is referring to the way the vampires have taken power, but it also reflects a takeover at a more metaphysical level. Willow is tipped from a world in which youth and health keep death at bay, to one in which death is dominant. Buffy is driven by a desire to reclaim that world for people—her strength comes from defending the world, even as she turns away from it at a personal level, which is quite distinct from the perspective taken in earlier times, of rejecting this world because it is only temporary.

[14] An ever present fear of death affects the psychology and behaviour of individuals but also of communities. In the episode 'The Wish' (3009) we see what would have happened in Sunnydale had Buffy never arrived. Without the Slayer, vampires control the town after dark and the death rate is high. There are interesting parallels with earlier societies with respect to social and moral attitudes and practices. The world Cordelia encounters once her wish (that Buffy Summers had never come to Sunnydale) is granted, is muted and spare by comparison with the vibrant, busy world she left behind. It is a world reminiscent of puritanical, god-fearing societies, including those of the 17th century. Places of entertainment (The Bronze, for example) have been closed, just as Puritans succeeded in closing the theatres. Clothing is sombre and modest. When Harmony accuses Cordelia of wearing a 'Come Bite Me,' outfit, the implication is that Cordy will have invited her own destruction, just as women have been and still are accused of causing sin and inviting rape in patriarchal religions throughout the ages, simply by appearing attractive. The association was particularly marked in puritan societies of course, with their emphasis on modest dress, which combined these anxieties about sexual sin with aversion to displays of wealth in clothing and similar attitudes can be found today on some Christian web-sites (christianvoice.org.uk is a relatively moderate example). Harmony and her friends wear their hair up in modest, restrained styles offering echoes of religious pre-occupation with women's hair as a signal of sin and temptation. The reason for avoiding bright clothing and free flowing hair may be pragmatic in Sunnydale, in that vampires are known to be drawn to these, but of course the persistent association between vampirism, sex and death makes the connection with other, more biblical prohibitions on

attractive clothing unavoidable.

[15] In 'The Wish' (3009) relationships between the sexes have become more decorous than they were in the world in which Buffy protected them all. In the 'real' world, fellow student John Lee makes lascivious suggestions to Cordelia about 'going some place private', but in the Buffy-less alternative universe he invites her anxiously to the 'Winter Brunch' saying he would be 'honoured' by her acceptance and they would have 'fun'. This is not only about Cordy's enhanced status in a world in which she has not been diminished by her association with Xander; it is an example of changed behaviours across the board with respect to sexual relationships. It seems to me that the world of 'The Wish' works as a metaphor for religious societies in which a focus on sin, death and one's immortal soul leads to a dualism that rejects the flesh and worldly pleasures. This modest and joyless behaviour may be driven overtly by a pragmatic fear of attracting the attention of vampires, but it is no coincidence that the things that attract them are all designated sinful in traditional religious societies, such as going out at night and dancing and wearing sexually alluring clothing. Sin and death are conflated in the religious consciousness and the vampire, as a soulless, dead creature who is associated throughout literary history with sexual transgression, is the perfect embodiment of the death and damnation that stalks pleasure lovers according to puritanical religious perspectives.

[16] *BtVS* is always profoundly concerned with morality, and it is a morality that is contingent and developing. The development reflects the maturation of the characters, who understand the world differently as they grow up, face difficult moral choices and find the distinction between right and wrong shifting beneath them. Central to this is the conflicted and flawed character of Buffy herself, refusing to settle for the easy answers, dealing with situations that require difficult choices, accepting consequences and living with guilt. Stroud (2003), for example, shows how Buffy's behaviour is generally consistent with Kantian ethics, focusing on others as agents and as ends in themselves, rather than a means to an objective, however worthy or desirable. This inevitably means that Buffy faces challenging decisions, where respect for human agency takes precedence over any absolutist beliefs about right and wrong. It is appropriate, therefore, that a Sunnydale that has never known Buffy echoes a previous era in which sin was more clearly defined and was a greater determinant of social behaviours. This is not to say that the 17th century was without debate regarding sin—far from it, but it offered conflict between defined and competing belief systems, rather than the relativistic morality of the late 20th, early 21st centuries. This absolutism returns to the present day in 'The Wish' (3009) where if you let your hair down and stop out late the punishment is death.

[17] The prevalence of death in 'The Wish' (3009) leads to another feature that is characteristic of religious societies—the investiture of power, especially over the young, in traditional authorities. Not only is The Bronze closed, there is actually a curfew on being in the streets. Movement is restricted, and the car, so much a symbol of youthful freedom and independence, is forbidden to students. (Editors' note: Cf. Rogers and Scheidel on cars and sexuality in *BtVS*.) It is hard to imagine how this will protect them from vampires, as they will have to walk unprotected in the streets, but it does make them more dependent on their parents, and therefore more controllable. The usually air-headed and pleasure-loving Harmony hurries home from school because her parents worry and the young in general comply with external restrictions and concerns.

[18] Although fear of death persists, respect for life appears to have diminished in 'The Wish' (3009). There is a monthly memorial for the students who have died, but they do not get individual burials anymore, but are taken to the incinerator. Even the vampires feel that the significance of individual deaths has been diminished; when Xander and Willow kill Cordelia they toss her body aside without a glance. Willow sums this up, 'it was too easy; I felt cheap.' It is almost as though individualism is reduced, as the struggle for general survival increases. In this respect, 'The Wish' reflects some aspects of the more traditional society of the 17th century. Plague and disease could wipe out whole towns and villages, and belief in a second coming and the end of the world was much more central to popular religious consciousness than it is today. The whole of humankind might suddenly be called on to face judgement and people knew of the biblical punishment inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah and other civilisations that departed from approved codes of behaviour. In these circumstances individual freedom can seem secondary to securing the moral well-being of the whole society. Individual freedom is generally a luxury enjoyed by relatively safe rich societies but it is hard for our students to recognise this and understand how people put up with restraint. This loss of concern for

individuals is something that has great contemporary resonance, too, as the West debates the levels of freedoms it is prepared to sacrifice in order to challenge threats to its safety. In 'The Wish' Buffy has certainly lost her usual interest in and care for others. When Buffy finally comes to Sunnydale, she has nothing of the joy in living we usually associate with her and has lost her usual witty approach to the fight. She is callous and friendless. In a well choreographed finale, her movements mirror those of the Master, as they move towards each other. The moral distinctions between Buffy and the Master are beginning to blur, as the good become hardened and oppressive themselves in their fight against evil.

[19] 'The Wish' (3009) is full of images of imprisonment that suggest youth is in thrall to death. This is done by eliding images of youthful pleasures with images of imprisonment and torture. When we see the streets after dark, young people are trapped in suspended cages, in a strange parody of the kinds of cages used for dancers in clubs, and one man is tied spread-eagled to a pool table. When Willow locks Giles into the security cupboard in the library, she tells him: 'You're in a big cage.' Angel is kept behind bars in a prison. In the final showdown, we see most of the youth of Sunnydale captured in an overcrowded jail, pressing against the doors as they await their death via the Master's new system of mass production for draining them all of their blood. This combination of images (entertainment, prisons and the mass production system) acts as a very effective, multi-faceted metaphor for mortality. They suggest, in effect, that all human beings are trapped, awaiting an inevitable conveyor belt to destruction, fuelled by their own desires. When the master collects an espresso cup full of blood from his new machine, the commodification of life is complete; the vampires consume life as shoppers consume coffee. Life is short and cheap, but death is powerful and all consuming.

[20] Indeed, when death is so prominent, it takes on new kinds of significance, that also have parallels with its role in earlier centuries. The vampires are often creative in their approach to killing and admire their own handiwork. Angel, in particular, develops ingenious ways of inflicting pain and suffering and enjoys the mental as well as physical torture he inflicts when he destroys his victims. In 'The Wish' (3009) the Master says, 'They claim that Death is our Art,' and champions his new machinery as an advanced form of this art. The series also explores the idea that Slayers have a fascination both with dying and killing, in terms that stress its artistry. Spike famously tells Buffy:

'Death is your art. You make it with your hands, day after day. That final gasp. That look of peace. Part of you is desperate to know: What's it like? Where does it lead you? And now you see, that's the secret. Not the punch you didn't throw or the kicks you didn't land. Every Slayer has a death wish.' ('Fool for Love', 5007)

Lorna Jowett (2005), in her chapter 'Dead Boys', convincingly links the sexualisation and display of the (dead/undead) bodies of Angel and Spike to Dyer's comments about the reverence for the dead, white body shown in Western art. Dyer (2007) goes on to recognise the relationship between religious feeling and veneration for the dead, white body and his comments underline the disconnect between the sensibilities of earlier times and those of many in the West today that prompted my initial interest in this topic. He says that the:

'bright beauty of the deathbed seems very remote from us now All depend on a deep conviction of the reality of transcendence, heaven or grace. Such religious belief has declined in the West. . .' (209)

BtVS shows us aesthetically pleasing images of the dead body (Spike and Angel are always dead, but we also see them dying), that are in fact transformed by sacrifice and given a kind of transcendence. Buffy herself is beautifully framed in death in 'Prophecy Girl' (1012), in a shot that emphasises her fragility and uses images of sacrifice (the white dress, the pool of water). All these shots resonate with iconography from earlier periods and Burr (2008) notes how the bodies of Spike and Angel under torture have a kinship to paintings that eroticise religious experiences, including death and martyrdom. The idea and exploitation of death as art permeates *BtVS* and provides a significant continuity with renaissance sensibilities and the work of earlier writers and visual artists.

[21] The concept of Death as Art, and as an 'art' is found in the *Ars Moriendi* generally, religious literature and illustrations, well used in the renaissance era, that continued a Christian tradition of preparation for death (Atkinson, 1992). Andrea Brady (2006) discusses death in the 17th century as a highly sophisticated rite of passage. Her chapter on executions, for example, details the theatricality of these public performances, preceded by periods of seclusion to prepare to make a good end, the careful

preparation of final speeches, the ritual and the role of the crowd (audience). There are elements of ritual in Buffy's slaying—the moves, the wisecracks, the ritual weaponry— but in general the Scoobies do not execute their enemies, but are absolved from the moral responsibility of that by killing in a situation in which they are engaged in a fight in which they need to defend themselves and others. A glaring exception is Willow's execution of Warren. He does not make a good end, but his execution is carefully designed to mirror his crime, as he is slowly killed by magical penetration from one of the bullets he used. The fitting and symbolic nature of executions is also outlined by Brady, drawing on the significance of Stafford's execution, dividing his head and his body as a remedy for the political division he caused. Warren's final brutal flaying has decided overtones of martyrdom and torture from even earlier periods, however.

[22] The metaphysical poets focus on preparing themselves to make a 'good death' almost as though death itself were a cultural product, something the dying person designs and creates. As Targoff (2006) notes 'John Donne spent much of his life anticipating his death' (p.217). The parallel with art is inherent in Donne's well known words in *Hymne to God my God in my Sicknesse* in which he compares himself with music and a musical instrument:

Since I am coming to that Holy room,
Where, with Thy choir of saints forevermore,
I shall be made Thy music; as I come

I tune the instrument here at the door

John Donne, *Hymne to God my God in my Sicknesse*, lines, 1-4 (Patrides, C.A., ed. 1994)

and also in Vaughan's metaphor comparing death to a jewel, something polished and crafted by man: 'dear beauteous death, the jewel of the just' (line 17) in his untitled poem beginning 'They are all gone into the world of light' (Rudrum, A., ed. 1986). The visual arts, too, from this period, centre on the process of dying; crucifixions, martyrdoms, death bed scenes are common. This serves a religious purpose by reminding viewers of the sacrifice of saints and the inevitability of death, but it also reinforces the idea of death as a work of art.

[23] Although my main interest was in using *BtVS* to increase students' understanding of the way that the prevalence of death can lead to an intense focus on mortality and morality, it is worth noting that in contemporary horror and renaissance literature it can generate the exact opposite. Some *BtVS* episodes illustrate a 'carpe diem' approach, in which the threat of death promotes rather than inhibits hedonism. In 'Surprise' (2013), for example, Buffy and Willow urge each other to take this approach, even use the phrase itself. There is also the repeated use of deadly situations as a driver for desire. As Krimmer and Raval (2002) point out, 'Buffy and Angel's desire for each other originates in and is intensified by the imminence of death' (p.154). Faith puts it less elegantly when she says 'slaying always makes you hungry and horny' ('Faith, Hope and Trick', 3003). There is a distinction between this desire to seize the day and a casual and carefree approach to pleasure that derives from a belief that there is nothing to do except enjoy life. The subtleties of this distinction might well enable some students to overcome their tendency to see Marvell's seduction techniques in 'To his coy mistress' as creepy and morbid and to recognise it as an appropriate exhortation to seizing life given its undeniable transience and uncertainty.

Then worms shall try thy long preserved virginity
And your quaint honour turn to dust
And into ashes all my lust.

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.

Andrew Marvell, *To his coy mistress*, lines 27-32. (Smith, N., ed. 2006).

(It occurs to me that there is a fair bit of embracing in crypts in *BtVS* but that is probably beside the point).

[24] I feel I need to make a comment on 'The Body' (5016). It may seem strange not to draw on this, perhaps the most lauded treatment of death in the series. Unlike most of *BtVS* however, it does

not treat death as an ever present threat. Instead it focuses on the shock we experience when we encounter death in a wealthy, healthy society, where most of us lose people to death rarely. Rhonda Wilcox (2005) celebrates its 'extraordinarily realistic depiction of characters confronting death' (p.187), and it is a realism that is rooted in the shock, denial and incredulity that occurs in a world that enables many of us to ignore our own mortality for a long time. As such, in spite of its brilliance, it is less relevant to the parallels I am drawing here than much of the rest of the series.

[25] *BtVS* and *Angel* show us a world stalked by death and also foreground the prospect of apocalypse, the end of days, indicative perhaps, of the 'fin de siècle' apocalyptic anxieties that Siemann (2002) discusses in her analysis of Buffy as California girl for the end of the millennium. The preoccupation is still with us though in 2008, suggesting it may also be indicative of a more persistent concern that human hubris will bring doom on us all. The differences between the focus on death and destruction found in *BtVS* and in renaissance poetry are as revealing in their way as the similarities. The contemporary imagined apocalypses, unlike those of the 17th century, do not involve notions of judgement or the plans of an all powerful deity, who may descend without warning ('when shall that cry, the bridegroom's coming, fill the sky?' Vaughan, *The Dawning*, lines 1-2, Rudrum, A., ed. 1986). The differing responses of the two ages to the apocalypse are significant. The devotional poets seek to shun worldly pleasures in order to focus on sin, redemption, an afterlife and a relationship with a sacrificial deity, so that they can benefit from the end of the world; the Scoobies seek to avert it. Their preoccupations reflect those of characters in most contemporary apocalyptic fiction, in which protagonists seek either the survival of the race, or of themselves as individuals. We can imagine annihilation, but don't see it as part of the great plan of an omnipotent and benevolent deity.

[26] At the same time, there is an interesting pre-occupation with some sort of afterlife in contemporary popular cinema and television with its growing interest in ghosts and angels. This usually lacks any serious engagement with theology, however. It can be seen in *BtVS* and *Angel* with their resurrections, hell dimensions, Powers that Be and even an (ill-defined) heaven. It may be that the longer we live, the less we feel able to accept the inevitability of death and need to create modern fantasies about afterlives, even though many have rejected or neglected mainstream belief systems about this. Buffy's resurrections are of course, into this life. The metaphysical poets' belief in the resurrection was just as literal. They anticipated the resurrection of the body too, but they would not be restored to life on earth. Buffy's resurrections are especially challenging precisely because she is not resurrected in an afterlife, but has to continue to operate in this imperfect world.

[27] In conclusion, the world of the renaissance poets, particularly the devotional poets feels very distant from the contemporary, largely secular society of the UK and many other parts of the West. Not only do we tend not to focus much on death; when we do, we see it as an outrage, a failure, evidence that something has gone wrong, something, even, for which someone should be blamed and for which we deserve compensation. Horror and fantasy, rather than realism, have become the main outlets for our fears about death and decay. Teen horror in particular reminds us everyone is mortal, however young, beautiful and healthy they may be. And within that genre, *BTVS* is particularly relevant. Unlike the characters of the typical Slasher movie, Buffy and her friends are not running from some extraordinary occurrence—a crazed serial killer or killers. They see death as part of everyday life; something to be managed and battled on a regular basis. Death is Buffy's business; she has to embrace it and engage with it, rather than escape it and get back to 'normal' life. Indeed, when she has the chance to do so in 'Normal Again' (6017), she refuses. It is because of this focus on the everyday nature of death that *BtVS* can be seen to continue the traditions of the devotional poets and their classical predecessors. Buffy continues the tradition of meditation on one's own death, of viewing the world differently because of a heightened awareness of morality and of seeking personal change and growth because of this. At the same time the tradition has been adapted to reflect a world in which there is no generally agreed theology, judgement or afterlife. Its characters, especially Buffy, have in many ways a much more painful and anguished reality to face—one in which they cannot turn their faces from death and dissolution, but have not the consolation of grace and salvation that sustains the poets. They manage this bleakness through sardonic humour—exemplified in Buffy's comment:

Wow, I wasn't sure where the party was and then I saw the flashing lights and the ambulance and I was like, right, of course! Death, carnage—it's a Buffy party! ('Doomed,' 4011)

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