



**Lorna Jowett**

## **The Summers House as Domestic Space in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***



[1] The first *Buffy* studies collection, *Reading the Vampire Slayer* (2001) included a piece by Karen Sayer on space and place in *Buffy* and its spin-off show *Angel* but little attention has been paid to this since. Taking up some of Sayer's ideas, this paper explores the presentation of the Summers house, its relation to the *Buffy* "family" and to key issues in the show such as gender, emotion and family. This presentation often exposes conflicting ideologies about gender and domestic space. The association of women with domestic space and domestic work stems from the history of "separate spheres" for men and women in the nineteenth century and from a renewed emphasis on domesticity and the home in the 1950s but this association has been challenged and/ or reinterpreted by the first and second waves of feminism. On the one hand domestic space can be a distinctively matriarchal arena; on the other it remains associated with limitation and traditional notions of femininity.

[2] *Buffy* has other significant spaces and places: the school library, Giles' apartment, the Magic Box. But I would argue that such spaces are meeting places for the Scoobies to convene, plan and research, that is, they are *workspaces*. Two – the library and the magic shop – are specifically designated as workplaces, rather than homes, domestic spaces. Giles' apartment occupies a conflicted position in a season (four) that shows growing apart as part of growing up. (Season 4 is also slightly unusual in that the male characters like Giles and Xander live at home/in domestic spaces, while the female characters like Buffy and Willow are living away from home in the U. C. Sunnydale dorms).

[3] Sayer argued that "public space is remade by the group, and though never truly secure, it is always more secure than any individual's 'real' home. Just as the biological family . . . is unstable and insufficient, so the biological family home is represented as a site of conflict and pain, rather than nostalgia and comfort" (111). Sayer's distinction reflects the binary oppositions that *Buffy* likes to play with, and the distinction I made between work and domestic space fits the idea of Buffy the character's double life (as the Slayer and as Buffy Summers). Thus both the character and the show work to integrate these two sides, and distinctions between work/home and family/friendship become blurred. I suggest that this is partly because of *Buffy's* "postfeminist" representation of women. Bonnie J. Dow notes that "a primary issue in media constructions of postfeminism has been the difficulty of reconciling women's expanded roles in the public sphere with their traditional responsibilities in the private sphere" (166). This adds another dimension to Buffy's dual identity. As Buffy Summers, "normal" girl, she arguably has traditional domestic responsibilities (and these become more apparent after Joyce's death) but as the Slayer her responsibilities take her outside the home into the traditionally masculine arenas of action and law enforcement. Partly because Buffy begins as a teen superhero, but also because she is female, the show combines the spheres of home and "work." *Buffy* is neither a workplace drama about Buffy's role in fighting evil and saving the world as the Slayer nor a domestic melodrama that traces the development of family and other close relationships. It is both, and it includes both the workplace family of the Scoobies, familiar from other dramas that focus on professions (medical or police/ detective shows, for example), and the biological Summers family.

[4] Buffy's family home, the Summers house, is consistently represented as *the* domestic space on *Buffy* and this designation is both gendered and integral to the show's representation of family and belonging. Despite its insecurity, through this designation as domestic space the Summers house functions as shelter to the "real" (Summers) family and the alternative Scooby family. While in other

areas the show seems to deconstruct gender binaries, the Summers house is consistently presented as the site of domestic and emotional labour, and as female space, fixing an association between the two.

### **The house and the family**

[5] The domestic space of the Summers house is the location for much of the show's representation of both the real and the alternative family. The house initially serves as a site for representation of the Summers family. Sayer makes a distinction between family and friendship but I suggest that the group of friends in *Buffy* is deliberately constructed as an alternative family. As in other television serials, the recurring characters of *Buffy's* ensemble cast form a group with a stable core that has been read (and self-consciously presented) as an alternative family (see Jes Battis' recent book *Blood Relations: Chosen Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel*, 2005, for a detailed discussion of this). A complex web of relationships is constructed and developed around this "family" group. Battis notes that "family life on *Buffy* tends to be either an invisible force in the background [. . .], or a site of chaos and disruption (. . .). The Summers family seems to occupy a middle ground between these poles" (77). I suggest that the house occupies a similar middle ground because it is a focus for both the biological and the alternative family in *Buffy*, and because it is often the site of clashes between the two parts of Buffy's life.

[6] In early seasons domestic space can be constricting for Buffy because it is inhabited by her mother Joyce. This is partly a generational conflict of the sort commonly found in teen drama and thus recognisable to the audience, but it is inflected by a larger generational conflict between women that might (rather simplistically) be ascribed to the shift from second to third wave feminism. In other words Joyce is of a generation for whom (middle class) women's traditional commitment to marriage, home-making and the family made it problematic for them to have a career outside the home. Buffy, in contrast, is of a generation for whom "equality" between women and men seems to have arrived, and (were it not for her position as the Slayer) she might expect as a matter of course to go to university or college and/or to have a career of her own, regardless of relationships, marriage, or children.

[7] Arguably what made "having it all" possible for Joyce and Buffy is the privilege of class and race. Buffy, Joyce, and most major female characters in the show are constructed as middle class white women to whom choices are available that might allow a satisfactory work/ home balance, or, on a more basic level, who can afford to choose between career and family if necessary.<sup>1</sup> Obviously these choices are not available to all women equally and the glimpse viewers have of "single mother" Buffy struggling with low-paid employment in a fast-food outlet during Season 6 undermines (if only briefly) her middle class privilege (see Battis 72). The Summers house itself reinforces Joyce, Buffy, and Dawn's identity as white and middle-class, as Battis observes: "Just as the Summers house comes to represent a safe and historically significant locus for the Scoobies, it also comes to pre-eminently signify the capital that Buffy and her family possess as middle-class white Californians living in a predominantly color-blind suburb" (69-70). Despite this restricted perspective, notions of domesticity as a limitation for women and the identification of the home and perhaps especially the middle class suburban home as a trap or female ghetto still have strong cultural resonances (as seen in *Edward Scissorhands* 1990, or the *Angel* episode "Underneath" 5017).

[8] As the Slayer, Buffy generally acts outside the private, domestic sphere and she often has to "escape" the house to do so. Thus her life as the Slayer questions the nature of domestic space especially in the early "teen" seasons (one to three). In the very first episode we see Buffy Summers settling into her new home (she unpacks boxes in her bedroom) and then see the Chosen One clashing with her Watcher Giles in the library ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1001). The aftermath of a confrontation with Joyce in the next episode shows how Buffy's two roles position her uncomfortably in domestic space: she hides her weapons in the bottom of a chest in her closet and has to leave by the window to "stop the spread of evil" ("The Harvest" 1002). Buffy uses the window so often that in a subsequent episode ("What's My Line Part 1" 2009) Angel asks her why, since Joyce is out of town, she doesn't just come in by the door and Buffy's sense of restriction is underlined. In another Season 2 episode, Buffy is "confined to [her] room" by Joyce. The final shot here is of Buffy and Angel kissing, apparently outside; the camera pulls away and we see that Buffy is inside and Angel outside the window ("Bad Eggs" 2012), reinforcing the typical gendering of domestic versus public space.

[9] Teen drama also inflects the ways audiences might read such scenes. Viewers very rarely see any of Xander or Willow's homes except "their" rooms while they are still living at home (we do see the Rosenberg living room in "Gingerbread" 3011). A teenager's room is a haven within the family home, a private space within a private space (though again this is dependent upon privilege – only teens from wealthy enough families have their own room). In Buffy's case, this haven is also a gendered space equipped with recognisably "girly" items such as soft throw pillows, decorative butterflies, and the fluffy pig Mr. Gordo.<sup>2</sup> This sense of personal space within the larger family home becomes complicated for Xander after high school when he is relegated to the basement by his "loving parents" ("and I have to pay rent," he tells Buffy in "The Freshman" 4001). Xander later gets his own apartment, though it is Anya viewers see performing domestic tasks within it, as in her parody of the 50s sitcom wife during "Selfless" (7005). Willow never actually has her own place, since she moves from her family home to the U. C. Sunnydale dorm rooms, and then into another family home, the Summers house.

[10] Significant interactions between Buffy and Joyce almost always take place in the Summers house, and often in the kitchen, recognisably the heart of the home for many viewers. In "Surprise" (2013), Buffy's prophetic dream about vampire villain Drusilla takes place at local nightclub The Bronze (a public space designed for young people to socialise in), but the important exchange between Joyce and Buffy actually takes place in the Summers' kitchen (a private, family space) and involves Joyce breaking a plate. This positioning of Joyce in the family house carrying out domestic tasks is integral to her presentation. I have argued elsewhere (2005) that Joyce is always and only Buffy's mother; she is neither an individual nor a member of the team. Thus as J. P. Williams notes, "Joyce's relegation to the private space of the home" is underlined frequently (64). Although Joyce works outside the home, for Buffy (and the audience) she is primarily located within it; this is especially noticeable in comparison with Giles who is initially seen mainly in public spaces and associated with work. Williams further observes that Joyce and Buffy "rarely inhabit the same frame, they are often separated by objects such as the dinner table, and they are placed at different ends of the same room" (65). Certainly in the kitchen scene just mentioned the two are separated physically by the kitchen layout, though this visual separation is not consistent.

[11] A pivotal point in the mother-teen daughter relationship is when Joyce is forced to recognise that Buffy is the Slayer ("Becoming," Part 2, 2022). Buffy exclaims, "Open your eyes, Mom. What do you think has been going on for the past two years? The fights, the weird occurrences. How many times have you washed blood out of my clothing and you still haven't figured it out?" Here, Buffy clearly positions her mother in the domestic sphere (washing the family's clothes) while Joyce's ultimatum, "You leave this house, don't even think about coming back," points to the conflict Buffy's role as the Slayer brings to her family relationships (the 2002 *Spiderman* movie presents Peter Parker as a teen superhero faced with similar conflicts). Buffy must resist confinement to the domestic space of the house because she is the Slayer as well as a troubled teenage daughter and therefore she has a larger public duty to save the world. Yet there is also a connection here between Joyce's domestic labour, and Buffy's own labour of Slaying. Society benefits from both but acknowledges neither: domestic work/ mothering and Slaying are both generally unpaid and "invisible" and are both traditionally carried out by women.

[12] During this argument Buffy takes Joyce's ultimatum literally and runs away from home. Unlike other heroes who get to travel to new places and construct new identities for themselves (as Buffy does briefly in the next episode "Anne," 3001), in general Buffy has to stay at home because of her family ties and her position as a minor.

[13] Although Buffy returns home early in Season 3, she leaves for college in Season 4, a season I have already identified as dealing with growing up and moving apart. Buffy is uncomfortable on the historically male turf of the university campus in "The Freshman" (4001) while Willow is not, perhaps implying that Buffy is more closely tied to "home" and the domestic sphere than she would like to think. In Buffy's segment of "Restless" (4022) she walks down a corridor at U. C. Sunnydale and finds Joyce "living in the walls." Williams suggests that Buffy still assumes "identifying with her mother means entering this smaller domestic space, leaving her freedom behind" (66). Joyce's words, "Well, *it seems that way to you* [my emphasis]," imply that Buffy's insistence on seeing her mother as domestic and therefore restricted is not the only or defining perspective (even as the show persists in presenting Joyce in this way). Later a shift in priorities changes the way Buffy relates to domestic space and her

place in it; she returns to live at home when Joyce is diagnosed with a brain tumour and eventually has to give up university because of her family responsibilities.

[14] Developing this further, it is interesting that the sense of Buffy's power presented in "Checkpoint" (5012) is mediated through interactions in public and domestic spaces. The clashes between Buffy and patriarchal institutions like the academy (personified by the male professor who publicly comments on her attitude to his teaching) and the Watcher's Council are located in public spaces (the campus and the Magic Box) and these are shown to demoralise Buffy. Her sense of empowerment comes after a confrontation with Glory who enters Buffy's house and threatens to break up both her families (Glory says she will kill Buffy's mother and sister, and Buffy's friends, the Scooby family). That Buffy's recognition of her own power comes not from clashing with male authority but from facing a female power in her own family home demonstrates the importance of family/ home to her perception of what she does and who she is.

### **Not a safe house?**

[15] Partly because Buffy is also the Slayer, the domestic space of the Summers house can be penetrated by evil and is, on a regular basis. This is part of the larger contrast within the show between the "normal" lives of the characters and the monsters or supernatural foes dealt with in the fantasy narratives. Darla, Spike, Ted, women under a love spell, the bug man, zombies, "evil" Faith, Vamp Harmony, the Quellor demon, Glory, a hitchhiker demon, a demon in a sword, the bullets from Warren's gun, and a *Poltergeist* visitation from Joyce herself have all invaded the Summers house as Buffy's two worlds collide. In the Season 1 episode "Angel" (1007) Buffy takes Angel back to the Summers house after he is wounded helping her fight. Since Buffy does not know that Angel is a vampire, she unwittingly invites him into the house (notably the first time this piece of vampire mythology is raised on the show). Angel's wound is dressed in the Summers' kitchen, heart of the domestic space and he meets Joyce, main figure of domesticity and signifier of Buffy's other life. Later Buffy and Angel kiss, his vampire nature is revealed, and he leaves by the window.<sup>3</sup> Joyce then repeats this unwitting invitation to a vampire when Darla knocks at the front door, pretending to be a schoolmate of Buffy's. Both Buffy and Joyce offer shelter and nurturing within the centre of the domestic space, the kitchen.

[16] When Joyce steps out of (her) place and enters the action of the show she moves into the other half of Buffy's identity, but these incidents are often confused, forgotten, or reinterpreted. This is exemplified by Joyce's attack on Spike in "School Hard" (2003) which she inexplicably fails to recall when he enters the home with Buffy later in Season 1 ("Becoming," Part 2, 2022). The reverse, the intrusion of Buffy's "work" into the home, is similarly misinterpreted on Joyce's part, as with Darla's entrance in "Angel" (1007) or the "scavenger hunt" in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (2016). At this stage, Joyce is unaware of Buffy's other life and thus, like other inhabitants of Sunnydale, she persists in finding "normal" explanations for such events. In "Angel" the two vampire threats are ultimately dealt with by Buffy, who defends her home and asserts it as a safe space at the end of the episode when she comes through the back door saying, "Hey, I'm home."

[17] Later, when Joyce becomes aware of Buffy's Slayer status, she is more likely to perceive invasions of the home accurately, though neither she nor Buffy herself is ever comfortable with them. As the show continues, it becomes more difficult to decide which threats *should* be kept outside and which are threats that actually *belong* in the home because of their relation to the Scooby family. Even early episodes like "Angel" focus on Buffy's confusion about this: is Angel a potential (boy)friend and therefore welcome in the home, or should he, as a vampire, be excluded? Clearly this is part of the blurring of moral boundaries that the show explores – blurring one set of boundaries inevitably erodes others.

[18] Season 2 continues the theme of invasion. A prime example full of family anxieties is "Ted" (2011). This episode has been discussed at more length elsewhere but I will briefly mention its ending here. Joyce's new "boyfriend," Ted enters the all-female Summers house and seriously disrupts the relationship between mother and daughter. When he is unveiled as a serial killer robot stuck in the domestic values of the 1950s (the visual presentation of his own house reinforces this) Buffy defeats him by using his own cast iron skillet as her weapon. She responds to his patriarchal assertion, "I don't

stand for that kind of malarkey in my house,” by reclaiming Summers’ space – “Teddy, this house is mine” – in a way that conflates defeating an internal domestic threat (as a potential new partner for Joyce, Ted threatens the status quo of the Summers family) with the expulsion of an external threat (he is a serial killer robot).

[19] A slightly later episode revisits Angel’s invasion of the family home (“Passion,” 2017). Having had sex with Buffy, Angel has lost his soul and reverted to Angelus and “Passion” shows Angelus stalking Buffy in both public and private venues. The Slayer asks Giles for a spell to effectively reverse the invitation she gave Angel previously and Buffy’s operation in public and private roles/spaces (a typical clash of roles for a superhero) is highlighted through contrast when later at the family dinner table she tries to explain to Joyce that Angel is “hanging around.” Danger threatens when Joyce arrives home by car and Angelus is waiting. Notably Joyce expresses a desire for the safety of home, “I just want to get inside,” while Angelus is intent on revealing to her what he and Buffy have done (“I haven’t slept since the night we made love”) and therefore on disrupting domestic and family harmony. Angelus’ immediate threat is defused when he is un-invited by the reversing spell and Joyce and Buffy have “the talk” in Buffy’s bedroom, with several two-shots of both close together.<sup>4</sup>

[20] In “Dead Man’s Party” (3002), having returned home after running away, Buffy and Joyce once again share the family home. Joyce suggests inviting the Scoobies round for dinner and asks Buffy to get the “company plates.” Buffy’s complaint, “Mom, Willow and everybody aren’t company plate people, they’re normal plate people,” suggests that the Scoobies are “part of the family.” However, the “family” dinner is overtaken by the younger Scoobies’ plans for a welcome home party for Buffy, with a band and crowds of young people. Feeling isolated, Buffy goes to her room and starts packing. This culminates in a row between Buffy, Joyce and the Scoobies, situated in the private domestic space of the family home but witnessed and made public by the partygoers. The argument is “resolved” by the team effort of fighting off a zombie attack and in this way not only is the threat of invasion defeated, but the threat of family disintegration (for both the real and the alternative family) is deflected by co-operation. Here, for the first time, Joyce is consciously part of the work/ action aspect of Buffy’s life but she is also defending her own domestic space against attack from outside, as Buffy frequently does.

[21] Thus early seasons show the Summers house as a site of contingent safety, often alternating between safety and threat. These invasions of Buffy’s home can be read as micro-versions of her larger struggle as the Slayer: she is fighting to save the world, and that “normal” world is represented by her own home and family. The examples here have been chosen because I also maintain that the most significant threats to and invasions of domestic space are those related to private, emotional interactions, something I develop below.

### **The centrality of domestic space**

[22] Christine Jarvis has suggested that in *Buffy* the action frequently takes place in “marginal” or “liminal” spaces (258). Clearly, domestic space is not “liminal”; it is a fixed and therefore notionally safe part of the “normal” life of the characters. When Buffy returns from hospital at the end of “Killed by Death” (2018) she, Willow and Xander relax in the domestic environment, brought food and drink by Joyce, its key representative. Similarly, in “Restless” (4022) the core Scoobies retire to the Summers house after defeating Adam for a cosy evening of video watching and nibbles. After the invasion of the First Slayer the Scoobies are shown talking over events at the dining table. When Joyce comes downstairs she is told what has happened and her blasé, “Oh,” is followed by an enthusiastically welcomed, “You want some hot chocolate?” Joyce thus comes to nurture the larger Scooby family, as well as her own.

[23] Joyce’s consistent association with domestic tasks (however small) creates a sense of the house as the key site of domestic ritual. Ann Romines describes domestic ritual as “rituals performed in a house, a constructed shelter, which derive meaning from the protection and confinement a house can provide” (12) and notes that “ritual” involves “regular recurrence, symbolic value, emotional meaning and (usually) a ‘dramatic’ group-making quality” (Orrin E. Klapp in Romines, 12). Joyce and the domestic work she carries out have symbolic value since she comes to represent the “normal” life that the Scoobies often yearn for. The emotional nature of her domestic work is discussed below, and, while

perhaps less than dramatic, her nurturing through domestic tasks fosters a sense of family (group-making). Romines concludes that “a woman who is committed to domestic ritual is participating in an enterprise connected with the continuity of a common culture and the triumph of human values over natural process” (12), which in the very specific context of *Buffy* again links the “work” that Joyce and Buffy do: both seek the continuity of “normal life” and human values in the face of external threats, be they supernatural or more mundane.

[24] Joyce and Buffy are often seen together at the end of threatening or emotional episodes. Thus in “Innocence” (2014) after Buffy’s discussion with Giles in his car about her part in Angelus’ return, the final shot of Buffy fades to a shot of a television screen showing a black and white movie and a romantic song. Buffy is at home. Joyce enters with cupcakes and a candle to celebrate Buffy’s birthday and the final shot is of a needy Buffy accepting the physical and emotional comfort of her mother. “Ted” (2011) is a similar example: Buffy and Joyce recover from their experience and we see them talking on the porch about renting a movie (Buffy concludes, “I guess we’re *Thelma and Louise*-ing it again”). This further overturns Williams’ assertion that Joyce and Buffy are generally not framed together; such scenes show the family bond between them, reinforced by the domestic setting. I would argue that this representation asserts the Summers house as a site of conflict and pain *and* of nostalgia, comfort and nurturing; indeed the former inevitably *leads to* the latter. Furthermore, it is women who do the emotional work of nurturing and maintaining relationships. Battis notes that one the realisations following Joyce’s death is that “that she performed a vast spectrum of emotional labor – for Buffy, Dawn and the Scoobies” (78). This nexus of emotion/ home/ female is what I read as potentially problematic for the show’s representation of gender in that it reinforces and naturalises the (domestic) work that women have traditionally done. Joyce’s death leads to some acknowledgement of this, but her “work” is then taken over by Buffy, Tara and other female characters so that the Summers house, and the emotional work associated with it, is still gendered female.

[25] Several episodes demonstrate the centrality of the house and its relation to a sense of belonging by using an external viewpoint. Thus in “Passion” (2017) after being barred, Angelus watches Buffy and Willow from outside the Summers house to see their reaction to the news of Jenny Calendar’s death. Shots are framed by the window and curtains partially obscure the view as the phone rings and Buffy and then Willow show their grief and are comforted by Joyce.

[26] Later in “Pangs” (4008) both Angel and Spike are excluded from the “family” and the domestic space it inhabits. Here the teens’ growing up is underlined by Buffy’s plan to celebrate Thanksgiving outside her real family. Buffy moved away from home to live on campus while she attends U. C. Sunnydale and Sayer argues, “her home is abruptly taken from her as her mom converts her old room for storage” (110). This is matched by Xander’s relegation to the basement – but both are temporary situations. “Pangs” presents not Buffy and Joyce in the Summers’ kitchen but Buffy and Giles in his kitchen and is an interesting example of the show reinforcing Buffy in the domestic arena, while demonstrating her distance from the actual family home at this stage. Domestic implements such as a turkey pan and potato ricer feature in the conversation and while Buffy tells Giles, “You’re the patriarch, you have to host the festivities or it’s all meaningless,” she is the instigator of this domestic ritual, the matriarch working to draw the Scooby family together. Meanwhile, the visiting Angel is no longer part of the Scooby family and he bemoans the necessity “[t]o be on the outside looking in at what I can’t –”. This shot immediately cuts to the newly chipped vampire Spike looking in at what he can’t have (in this case vampires feeding), though Spike is reluctantly incorporated into the alternative “family” celebration at the end of the episode. This may be evidence that Spike is always more domesticated than Angel in *Buffy* and certainly Spike, like Xander, is presented as a “comfortador,” one who enjoys the comforts of a domestic environment.

### **A safe house after all**

[27] Although Sayer states that “[t]hrough materially [Buffy’s] home withstands these incursions, it never works as a safe haven, a place to which she can run and hide” (110), I have already argued that the house *is* a haven. The penetrability of the Summers house reinforces its gendering as female and it becomes a “safe” arena for expressing emotion. Battis observes that “what happens to these characters *outside* of the graveyard is what fascinates the audience” (78) and (the inside of) the Summers house is

strongly linked to the “real” lives of the characters in a way that privileges emotion and character development. Most notably, when a main character dies this is figured in unambiguously domestic space: Jenny’s body is discovered at Giles’ home; Joyce and Tara’s deaths are at the Summers house.<sup>5</sup> This situates the deaths as real rather than fantasy events and Joyce’s death in particular, since it is from natural causes, is presented as entirely “real” and is most strongly located in her own domestic space (now made *unheimlich* by the situation).

[28] I have already noted that other “real” events affecting the characters’ personal and emotional lives take place in the Summers house. For instance, although Angel and Buffy make love at Angel’s apartment (“Surprise,” 2013), Angelus reveals the fact that he and Buffy have had sex to Joyce outside the Summers house and Joyce than has “the talk” with Buffy in Buffy’s bedroom (“Passion,” 2017). “You had sex with a boy you never even saw fit to tell me you were dating,” Joyce berates her daughter, before telling her, typically, “Buffy, you can shut me out of your life, I am pretty much used to that, but don’t expect me to ever stop caring about you because it’s never going to happen.” Williams notes that Joyce may be seen as a neglectful parent, and suggests that “[t]o counter the charge of neglectfulness, the series has Joyce continually stating just how much she loves Buffy” (64). But Williams does not make the connection between domestic space and the security to articulate such emotion. Later in “Lover’s Walk” (3008), even Spike sees the Summers house as a safe haven to discuss his feelings when he returns to Sunnydale after breaking up with Drusilla. He arrives at the back door, saying, “Hello, Joyce,” invoking the memorable scene from “Becoming,” Part 2 (2022) when Joyce and Spike, juxtaposing the fantasy and “real” elements of the show, met in the Summers house for the first time. At that point, Joyce seemed confused about her previous meeting with Spike outside the home (in “School Hard,” 2003); now she not only recognises him but offers a sympathetic ear and a drink, and he asks wistfully, “You got any of those little marshmallows?” Again this reinforces Spike as willing to avail himself of domestic comforts, though Joyce’s later comment on his crypt home in “Checkpoint” (5012)–“I really love what you haven’t done with the place”–suggests that perhaps he is willing for domestic comfort, physical and emotional, to be provided for him (by women?) rather than spending time on it himself.

[29] Another significant episode must be “Older and Far Away” (6014). Here the Scoobies are trapped in the house at Buffy’s birthday get-together after Dawn makes a wish to vengeance demon Halfrek. As the episode plays out several important emotional and family issues are raised, and domestic secrets are uncovered. The evidence of Dawn’s shoplifting is revealed. Willow and Tara’s wary interaction after Tara walked out is dealt with, and works alongside the discovery that Willow kept magic supplies “just in case” (Tara later stands up for Willow against Anya<sup>6</sup>). Alternatively, Buffy’s relationship with Spike is kept a secret from everyone but Tara. Thus when Spike complains, “Hey, I don’t want to keep you all from the touchy feelies but maybe the encounter group can meet later,” it is precisely *here and now* that the group can get “touchy feely” because here is their domestic space and now they are all together as a “family.”

[30] Similarly, in Season 7 Xander, Willow, and Buffy sit in the Summers’ living room discussing whether Buffy needs to kill Anya, lately returned to vengeance and having just engineered a mass murder (“Selfless,” 7005). The identical venue underlines that this is a rerun of similar discussions among the Scoobies about Dark Willow in Season 6. Clearly emotion is often aired in the Summers house, and in particular emotional situations are related to how the group functions as a “family.” This is demonstrated again by Spike’s later invasions of the Summers house, framed as emotionally motivated and tied to relationship issues. These invasions affect the larger interactions of the group, since they struggle to reconcile themselves with a threatening outsider becoming part of the “family,” another key example of the ongoing confusion about what should be kept outside and what is legitimately part of the family/ home. This is then overturned again by Spike’s attempted rape of Buffy, an act that causes him to split from the family until he returns with a soul.

### **The gendering of domestic space**

[31] In terms of gendering the domestic space, it is notable that for six out of seven seasons only women live at the Summers house (Buffy’s father, the only male biological family member, was always absent). Joyce is the head of an all-female household and various characters use the phrase “the

Summers women" to describe the family. In a larger sense Joyce's position is, of course, not entirely realistic and Battis notes the "televisual fantasy" that allows Joyce "to pay for a massive three-story house in suburban California, as well as support two children, on the salary she makes working at an unspecified art gallery" (69). Yet viewers may be willing to suspend this kind of disbelief because Joyce's status as a single working mother is a fairly typical liberal presentation showcasing female "strength" and independence within the race and class boundaries already mentioned and within the limitations of popular feminism in the media. She is meant to be read as a "strong woman" and we accept her as such.

[32] In "The Body" (5016), the impact of Joyce's death is clearly related to her role as matriarch of the domestic space and as signifier of the Scoobies' "normal" lives. The scene right after the teaser shows Joyce, Buffy, and Giles busy with domestic tasks at a Christmas celebration involving the Scooby family and situated at the Summers house (the real and alternative family have merged). Joyce kisses Buffy after some by-play in the kitchen; they drop a pie, and a jump cut moves to Buffy with Joyce's dead body. In the early part of this episode Buffy moves through the domestic space of her home as if it were an alien landscape (not Buffy's house, or even the Summers house, but "1630 Revello"), an estrangement assisted by the framing and lighting of shots (see Wilcox). The whole "family" mourn Joyce's death, and when Tara tells Willow, "We can be strong," the reply, "Strong like an Amazon?" underlines its female nature. The subsequent episode, "Forever" (5017) continues the insistence on the "real" and the domestic as the discussion of funeral arrangements takes place around the dinner table among the core Scoobies.<sup>2</sup> Even outsider Spike and awkward Anya show their grief; indeed their position as marginal vitally enhances the emotional effect of their respective speeches about Joyce (Anya's in "The Body" and Spike's in "Forever").

[33] Buffy and Dawn have to deal with the absence of their mother and Buffy in particular has to become head of the household. "I can stick wood in vampires but mom was the strong one in real life," she tells Angel after the funeral ("Forever," 5017). Dawn's effort to resurrect Joyce exposes how much both daughters wish to recover the stability and "normality" that Joyce represented, though Dawn finally breaks the spell in the face of Buffy's emotional vulnerability. The final shot from outside shows Buffy and Dawn framed by the open door, a signal that they will mother each other in Joyce's place/space. While this may be "yet another televisual staple, exploited to the fullest by past shows like *Party of Five*" (Battis 74), it also signals that the house is now theirs, not hers. Dawn realises that she does not want "Joyce" to return in this way at the point that "Joyce" reaches the door and knocks and Buffy is about to let "her" into the space that Joyce once inhabited and they have inherited.

[34] Joyce's illness and death<sup>8</sup> in Season 5 shift the priorities of Buffy's double life. Now family is more important than Slaying. The Summers house remains the "family" centre and Tara takes over Joyce's role (see Jowett, 52-53 for more on this). Following Buffy's death at the end of Season 5, the opening of Season 6 establishes Tara and Willow in the Summers house, sharing what was Joyce's bedroom and acting as parents to Dawn. This demonstrates that the Summers and Scooby families have merged but continues the all-female inhabitation of the house. Tara's emotional support of the female members of the Scooby family recalls Joyce's declarations of love for her own family and Tara maintains her relationships with the other "family" members despite her split with Willow. Like Joyce, she does a considerable amount of emotional labour within the Scooby family and she also offers physical comfort to Dawn, Buffy and Willow within the Summers house. A key instance is when Buffy accepts physical comfort from Tara after her revelations about Spike ("Dead Things" 6013), as in previous episodes she was comforted by Joyce.

[35] Following her resurrection in Season 6, Buffy has to deal with the responsibilities of being an adult, and these include looking after the house (leaky basement pipes and all) as well as taking over as Dawn's guardian. In response to the mundane problems she has to face, Giles offers Joyce as a role model, telling Buffy that she "dealt with this kind of thing all the time . . . without the aid of any superpower and got through it all. So can you" ("Flooded," 6004). In a development from the previous reinterpretation of invasions of the home, now there are even tongue-in-cheek references to the way the house is constantly being smashed up in fights ("Flooded", "Never Leave Me" 7009), highlighting their consequences for the domestic budget. Buffy's changing position on domestic responsibilities is clearly seen. When former Sunnydale High student and witch Amy is turned back into human form by Willow in the Summers house after spending several years as a rat, Buffy tells her, "You should stay



here, everybody does" ("Smashed," 6009), echoing Joyce's hospitality.

[36] "Older and Far Away" (6014) shows family time as restful and necessary in an adult life of work and responsibility. Buffy promises Dawn at the beginning of the episode, "we're going to sit down and have a real dinner someday" but Dawn clearly feels neglected by the Scooby family. As head of the house, Buffy reprimands Spike about his behaviour ("We do not joke about eating people in this house"), while Spike's presence asserts his right both to his relationship with Buffy and to his place in the "family" (indeed Tara's merciless teasing about the former merely reinforces the latter, coming over as a recognisable family interaction). However the fact that everyone becomes trapped in the house exposes lingering anxieties about the restrictive nature of domestic space. Anya starts "freaking out" and says that they are "trapped like animals" while all the older Scoobies admit that they have "better things to do" (mostly work oriented, so that work is reinforced as "outside" the house). Thus in the next episode, when Buffy's ex-boyfriend Riley reappears and his wife Sam asks, "Got a safe house?" Buffy can only respond ambivalently, "I have a house. I think it's safe. Sometimes you can't even leave" ("As You Were" 6015). This episode demonstrates how the teens have grown up and taken on domestic responsibility as well as employment: Buffy is head of the household, Riley is a married man. Gendering is still an issue here, however; Buffy is restricted to her home town, and her "home" because of her domestic responsibilities; Riley is mobile (Sayer notes the greater mobility of male characters, 112 and in comparison Faith is free to move around the country because she has no "family" ties).

## Conclusion

[37] As the show continued locations expanded so that instead of moving simply between high school/home/ The Bronze, audiences were introduced to U.C. Sunnydale, the Magic Box, the Initiative's underground bunker, the coffee shop, Spike's crypt, Xander's basement, and so on. That is, as the teen characters grow older they take their place in a larger world. Of course, locations were also added as budget allowed, reflecting the success of the show and allowing audiences to take pleasure in seeing the imaginary location of Sunnydale expand and cohere. A dream episode like "Restless" (4022) showed the way these spaces do not necessarily connect in logical, spatial fashion (they are just sets, after all) but taking the show into new spaces like Faith's apartment, Tara's dorm room, or Joyce's bedroom enabled further layers of characterisation. Yet despite the expanding number of locations, the Summers house remains the centre of the emotional and "normal" lives of the characters.

[38] Season 7 begins to reverse the polarity of Buffy's life again, as work becomes more important than family. The Summers house is "Command Central" for the final fight against evil on the Hellmouth and is positioned again as a site of both safety and threat for the Summers, the Scoobies and the potential Slayers. The private space of the domestic sphere is now conclusively invaded by Buffy's other life as she becomes a "general" in the last battle and the troops, including male characters, are housed in her home. Private interactions become increasingly difficult as the Summers house turns into a crowded communal space. After the group reject her claim to leadership Buffy even leaves home again, echoing her previous running away. Significantly Dawn asserts her identity as a Summers woman and steps into the matriarchal role at this point: "this is my house too" ("Empty Places," 7019). Later Dawn refuses to be sent away and returns to the home and the collective struggle.

[39] Effectively by the end of the show, Buffy and the Scooby family are working from and living in the Summers house. Perhaps the interpenetration of work/ home spaces indicates the increasing difficulty in keeping these separate. Joyce is no longer there to anchor "home" and the distinction between home/ outside becomes more blurred. It has been noted that serial drama has become concerned to both valorise interpersonal problems and to integrate men as well as women into the emotional (affective) space of the domestic (Torres 287-8). We still see domestic ritual regularly taking place in the Summers house (usually cooking or washing up) and the majority of those who inhabit the house are female, yet the fact that male characters now live there too does change its atmosphere and draws the male characters into the emotional and domestic labour of everyday life.

[40] The increasing seriality of *Buffy* led to more emphasis on character development and continuing story arcs, hence inevitably to more airing of emotion. I see the Summers house as gendered by its inhabitants and through the linkage of emotion and family interactions, a presentation that runs

counter to the show's apparent desire to present more hybrid constructions of gender in its characters. Xander may be explicitly designated the "heart" of the Scooby family ("Primeval" 4021) while Buffy is nominally the action hero, yet much maintenance of relationships is carried out in the Summers house by female characters and domestic responsibilities continue to restrict Buffy. Notably while the domestic space of the Summers house (and the "home" town of Sunnydale itself) is destroyed at the end of the final episode, the Scooby family survives more or less intact ("Chosen," 7022). Buffy stands on the edge of a crater representing the destruction of her domestic space but paradoxically she is on the brink of being able to live the "normal" life she always longed for. Buffy's "freedom" is not only contingent on her being able to mitigate her exceptionalism as the Chosen One but also, apparently, on her being able to irrevocably leave the domestic space that so often confined her. This sense is reinforced in later seasons of *Angel* when viewers are told that Buffy is taking full advantage of her freedom to travel, and later that she has settled in Rome, Italy ("The Girl in Question," 5020).

### Notes

1 There is no clear indication whether Joyce worked outside the home before she separated from Buffy's father. In any case, Joyce does not succeed in "having it all" since her marriage breaks down.

2 Mr. Gordo makes his debut in "What's My Line," Part 1 (2009) when Angel is shown looking rather ridiculous holding onto him, perhaps an indication that Angel is out of place in this "feminine" domestic environment. In contrast, Spike has a more relaxed attitude to domestic comforts.

3 This episode is the first time we see Angel's home, and the fact that he has a domestic space of his own is associated with his "humanity" (as Darla says, "You're living above ground, like one of them"). Yet although Angel has an apartment and Spike a crypt, Spike still seems more domesticated.

4 The most striking two-shot has Buffy fore and Joyce back in profile.

5 I would argue that Anya's death outside the home reinforces the fact that she does not really belong to the inner "family" group.

6 Significantly Tara repeats the words Buffy used when Tara was adopted into the Scooby family ("Family" 5006) – "you have to come through me."

7 The fact that Buffy's father has not even telephoned indicates which family is more important.

8 Williams observes that "[i]n many television series, characters who leave are simply stricken from the memories of those who remain" and specifically mentions that Jenny Calendar "continues to be a presence" after her death (70). This is even more so for Joyce and ongoing reactions to her death underline the shows' increasing seriality and emphasis on emotion.

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