



**David Kociemba**

**“Actually, it explains a lot”:**

## **Reading the Opening Title Sequences of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***



**Willow** (giving a tour of the high school to Faith): “And over here, we have the cafeteria, where we were mauled by snakes.”

**Xander**: “And this is the spot where Angel tried to kill Willow.”

**Willow**: “Oh, and over there in the lounge is where Spike and his gang nearly massacred us all on Parent-Teacher night. Oh, and up those stairs, I was sucked into a muddy grave.”

— “Faith, Hope, and Trick” (B3003)

“Producers feel [show openers] are a signature. It’s part of the identity of the show.”

— Joanne Curley-Kerner, producer of *The Cosby Show* (Dupree, 34)

[1] When I tell people that I’m writing an article on the opening title sequence of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (20th Century Fox Television, 1997-2003), I usually get a hearty laugh. Sometimes it’s a blank stare or an appalled double take, but usually it’s a knee-slapper. After all, it’s the one chapter on DVDs that I’m consistently asked to skip. One friend even remarked that my project confirmed her faith that someone, somewhere in academia, was studying every conceivable topic. I tried to think of her comment as the intellectual’s version of the romantic belief that there is someone out there for everyone. Yet, studying the opening title sequences of media products need not be absurd.

[2] Such sequences present an unusually direct form of communication between the authors of the series and their audience. They explicitly serve to prepare particular viewing postures for the audience. The opening titles present a series of promises about what narrative forms, visual pleasures, formal approaches, and themes to expect. They indicate who the authors believe their audience is. In addition, they offer the most direct expression of the authors’ perception of what is most important about the work. Much can be deduced about the changing understanding of the audience and the series by its authors through closely investigating the evolution of the opening credits sequence.

[3] This article will investigate how the creators of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* used the opening title sequence. The opening montage evolves to update the narrative, note newly prominent creators, make new implicit promises, evoke different moods, and suggest new things to come. In addition, it serves as a tool to position new and returning viewers, to craft a sense of community among their fans, and to communicate the creators’ understanding of their evolving narrative.

[4] These sequences meet several needs for artists, executives, and viewers. As a signature, the credits within the opening title sequence have meaning. They establish the identity of the authors by declaring who is responsible for what work. Director Frank Capra considered the hierarchy implicit in credits so emblematic of his struggles for artistic control for himself and his peers that he named his autobiography The Name Above the

Title. They communicate the relative industry power of various parties involved in the creation and distribution of the film or series. Bruce Conner's first film, *A Movie* (Canyon Cinema, 1958), satirizes the ego displayed in mainstream film's opening title sequences. After the score has begun to play, its first credit shows his name in capital letters that fill the screen. Conner then holds on that shot for 32 seconds. His film, made entirely out of found footage, goes on to insistently inform its audience several times that they are watching "A" "MOVIE" made "BY" "BRUCE CONNER," spread out over four shots.

[5] The typography of the credits themselves can have expressive effects. The first opening title sequence to animate type in a subject-appropriate manner was *Gone with the Wind* (MGM, 1939), whose credits gust on and off the screen, seemingly made italic by the wind (Cadrington 8). In *Dr. Strangelove or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Columbia Pictures, 1964), title designer Pablo Ferro's iconic opening sequence makes a typographic game out of such contractual obligations. While the actors' names were drawn to the size required, unimportant connecting words like "and" were made very tall or wide, sometimes dwarfing the actors' names. Kyle Cooper and Imaginary Forces are often credited with revitalizing the art of opening title sequences and credits in 1990s film (*Counts*). Their best-known work is *Se7en* (New Line Cinema, 1995) whose "degraded typography, jittery jump-cutting and twitching, hand-hewn type ushered in a new era in film titles" (Boxer). Opening title sequences and their credits were made newly prominent in the industry just before *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* began broadcasting in 1997.

[6] Subservient to the film or series that contains them, the opening title sequence can do work that serves the needs of the narrative. Early functions of these openings were to indicate genre and establish setting and period. American silent films often did this literally. Andrea Cadrington writes that their credits "played against the backdrop of billowing sails in swashbuckler adventures, or on brown-edged parchment in historical dramas" (Cadrington 8). Opening title sequences provide concise reminders of plot points essential to understanding the current narrative. The opening of *The Prisoner* (ITV, 1967-68) provides a wordless depiction of how the character Number Six came to be a captive in the Village. Most episodes follow that with a recap of Number Six's reaction to his imprisonment in the first episode. This verbal exchange usually suggests the identity of his antagonist of the week, the new Number Two. In addition, the opening credits can foreshadow important events and themes as well. Stephen Frankfurt's opening sequence for *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Universal International Pictures, 1962) was the first to slowly pan "across details like scissors, crayons, dolls and pens—small, precious objects that grow in significance later in the film" (Boxer). Graphic designer David Peters and design writer Ken Coupland note that Saul Bass' opening to *Vertigo* (Paramount Pictures, 1958) connects to the film's important themes. Bass' close-up of a woman's face suggests the movie's voyeurism. The spinning spiral in the iris of her eye represents both the title and the vertigo of its central character (Boxer). Opening title sequences that work in these ways function as synecdoche, providing a "concise story about the story" (Heller, 1999; 92).

[7] The opening title sequences direct viewers. They establish a mood or foster a particular state of mind through editing rhythms, mise en scène, theme music, graphic design, and typography. *The Cosby Show* (1984-92) reinforces its tone of sweet quirkiness through dance, which features characters grooving to jazz music alone or with Bill Cosby. Scotty Dupree notes the importance of theme music for catching the attention of viewers, citing "the *Brady Bunch's* popping squares, *Hawaii Five-O's* raging waves and jolting music, to the snapping fingers of the *Addams Family*" (Dupree 34). The opening credits of *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-91) are unusual in that they provide neither background plot nor introduce characters. Instead, establishing mood and tone are the primary goals of its credits montage. The saturated primary colors of the images of the Pacific Northwest, the languorous rhythms of its montage, and Angelo Badalamenti's theme music create a tone teetering on the edge of intensity and dreamy, banality and fascination. It evokes the oneiric experience of watching this strange series to prepare the viewer for another episode. Ferro's title sequence for *Dr. Strangelove*, in which refueling B-52 airplanes bump and grind to "Try a Little Tenderness," sets the film's subversive tone of black satire. Design writer Ken Coupland suggests that "the first few minutes of a film can be compared to the curious stage of consciousness that marks the transition between wakefulness and sleep" (Boxer). The opening title sequence is when we begin to get some sense of what dreams may come.

[8] Sometimes films thrust the viewer right into the action by omitting the opening

titles all together. Eliminating the opening credits while retaining the title is becoming unremarkable in the American film industry. This practice extends back at least as far as *Citizen Kane* (RKO, 1941). [\[11\]](#) *Star Wars* (20th Century Fox, 1977) and *Return of the Jedi* (20th Century Fox, 1980) are typically credited with popularizing this technique, as George Lucas quit the Director's Guild as a result of the spat sparked by this decision. It's not uncommon in other national cinemas either.

[9] *The Prisoner* made fiction television history by also eliminating the opening title sequence in two episodes: its series finale and in "Living in Harmony." (P1013) This technique is essential to that latter episode. Viewers expecting an episode typical of this science fiction/spy thriller hybrid instead found its imprisoned star in a Wild West setting with no explanation. The audience directly experienced the protagonist's sense of bewildered displacement rather than simply empathized with him. That bewilderment builds as the narrative progresses further into the narrative without showing its title. Opening title sequences function as borders. As Matthew Pateman observes, serial television has many familiar signs that serve to place the viewer:

"*Buffy* is not just the five acts that offer us that episode's story. It is comprised of a 'previously on' segment (from about one-third of the way through season two this becomes an almost ever-present feature), a teaser, and the credits. This is as much a part of the experience of a *Buffy* episode on television as the story itself, and it is as much a part of its world too, in the sense of providing the aesthetic 'edges' of the text that separate it from what has been on the television before and what will come after. We are welcomed into the world through the familiar door of its open form, especially the opening [title] sequence". (Pateman 27)

The omission of the opening title sequence in this Wild West episode of *The Prisoner* helps the viewer experience the genre's frontier setting. The series itself becomes an artistic frontier, an undiscovered country.

[10] In addition, opening title sequences function quite differently in serial television than in films. The first alteration is the result of the different uses of the film and television media in the United States. The web site of Randy Balsmeyer's Big Film Design observes that,

"Broadcast design is the concentrated version of film design. Television title sequences must work on a smaller screen and in a shorter time frame. The audience is not captive. TV titles have to make people want to watch them, instead of reaching for the remote. Everything needs to happen bigger, faster, clearer." (Big Film Design)

In addition, creators take advantage of the serial nature of American television fiction programming. Creators can vary the opening to encourage active viewing positions. *Ellen* (ABC, 1994-98) uses this "variations on a theme" approach to subvert the season-long stasis of television credits. The series' 1996 premiere features Ellen DeGeneres as a rhythmic gymnast doing a routine for which John Tesh provides the commentary. Once finished, the judges held up signs that spelled out the series' title. Other opening sequences feature Wolfgang Puck, the Captain & Tennille, and clogging and flamenco dancing (Dupree 34). A different message is left on Rockford's answering machine in each episode of *The Rockford Files* (NBC, 1974-1980). And *The Simpsons* (20th Century Fox Television, 1989-present) varies Bart's chalkboard punishment and has the entire family sit on the couch with different results. In film, the opening credits are designed to declare ownership, state narrative details, make implicit promises, evoke moods, and suggest what's to come. One act of communication accomplishes many goals. In serial television, it can be much more complex than that one step process.

## **Reading Logos, Listening to Nerf Herder, and Considering the Legends of Vishnu**

[11] Who made the series' opening title sequences? There's one person ultimately

responsible, Joss Whedon, but many people played a part in creating them. If one broadly defines authorship as creating meaning in a work of art, then its authors include all the people responsible for producing the narrative from which the shots are drawn: the actors, the episode directors, the various members of the crew, the writers, etc. Under the guidance of Whedon, several individuals more directly created the opening title sequence. The main title design was by Montgomery/Cobb, while Mark Hornish edited the main titles and Neil Atkins provided un-credited digital effects and graphic design work.

[12] The title of the series itself, however, was Whedon's call. WB television network executives tried to get him to change the title to *Slayer* (Havens 33). But Whedon held firm on a title he's acknowledged made it difficult to take the series seriously:

"I believe that anyone who isn't open to a show with this title isn't invited to the party. I made the title very specifically to say 'This is what it is.' It wears itself on its sleeve. It's sophomoric, it's silly, it comedy-horror-action; it's all there in the title. Having the metaphor to work with makes the show better, and having the silly title makes the show cooler. At least to me". (Havens 33)

Later, the network would market the series as *Buffy*.

[13] Margo Chase designed the distinctive logo of the series. She designed logos for the WB network generally, including such shows as *Charmed* (The WB Television Network, 1998-2006) and *Angel* (The WB Television Network, 1999-2004). The *Buffy* font, so easily found as freeware on the net, was actually a custom-designed logotype. But that font wasn't actually used in the opening title sequence of the first two seasons. [\[2\]](#)

[14] During the first two seasons, the logo has Buffy's name above the name of her enemies, which itself is above the title of her job. "Buffy" and "the vampire slayer" are rendered in different fonts. The font used to represent her monstrous enemies and her calling is machine-made, uniform, and sharp-edged. The font for her name looks like it has been scrawled in chalk. Each letter remains separate from the others, printed rather than cursive. The font suggests the high school setting, but it also implies that even her signature has been written by another. (Teachers are the ones who most frequently use chalk to write on blackboards.) The font suggests that her social circumstances control her. After all, Buffy is The Chosen One, not the choosing one. She makes sacrifices to retain her identity as a high school student. During the first season, her death is preordained. During the second, duty demands that she kill her lover. The type suggests that Buffy has her life written for her more than she writes her own life.

[15] For the third season, the logo was changed. [\[3\]](#) Each word arrives separately. There's a flash of part of the word "slayer" first, although that title is the last to arrive. First to coalesce into coherence is her name, then her enemy, and then her duty. The logo's text slides in from the off-screen foreground, leaving duplicate after-images in transit. There are several Buffys, vampires, and slayers. The title character's name, Buffy, surmounts her title, vampire slayer, in the logo. Buffy's name looks as if it has been painted by hand. Stray drips mark the start and end of each brushstroke. The lines of each letter vary in width, seemingly due to varying pressure applied by the artist's hand. Even the same letter, "f," is rendered differently. Her title, "the vampire slayer," is a machine-made font. Those letters are uniform, with sharp edges, gothic influences, and clean straight lines. These two fonts do not easily coexist easily. The vertical line in the "B" of Buffy looks like a stake, tapering towards a point from top to bottom. The "f" characters in her name emphasize their verticals as well. Trace elements of Buffy's job have infiltrated even this most personal marker of identity. But the first "f" character stretches down between vampire and slayer, dividing them. This signifier of personal identity penetrates that of the social role, even as the public constructs the private. The web site of Chase's firm observes that, "Each logo communicates the character of the show it represents, informing the prospective viewer's perception even before they tune in" (Margo Chase). Individuality and conformity war in this signifier of the series, as do the human and the monstrous.

[16] Janet K. Halfyard provides a wonderfully evocative close reading of the meanings generated by the theme music in her article, "Love, Death, Curses and Reverses (in F minor): Music, Gender, and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*." I won't

repeat it at length here. Nerf Herder's theme song [\[4\]](#) begins with the sound of an organ, closely followed by a wolf's howl. Both sounds have strong associations with the horror film canon. As the music plays, the sun sets, illuminating drawings that suggest an angel's wing and a skull. As is well known, the words that begin each episode are not its title but rather a declaration: "who died". [\[5\]](#) That observation is followed by a negative image of a watching eye in extreme close-up. The moon in the night sky during the next shot is overlaid with upside down type. The ink is unevenly applied to the lines and curves of the letters, as if they'd faded. Superimposed on the setting sun center screen, two letters are struck out, suggesting a typewriter rather than a printer. Archaic script is matched to sounds from the horror tradition. When that audio track then smash cuts to frenetic and loud surf punk music, it evokes the clash between the canonical horror story and this new breed of television horror. The theme song underlined the series' affiliation with youth culture while distinguishing its fan base from *Felicity* (The WB Television Network, 1998-2002) and *Dawson's Creek* (The WB Television Network, 1998-2003). The theme song highlights this series' decision to make space for bands that didn't fit into established structures (Dechert 223-224). This sequence promises outsider audiences a new breed of storytelling, but one still aware of its roots.

[17] This new horror storytelling may have some roots in Hinduism, in fact. One brief shot in the rapid-fire transition to the credit sequence shows a hand holding a book titled Legends of Vishnu. [\[6\]](#) The image comes from "Out of Sight, Out of Mind" (1011). Light shines on the cover of the book, illuminating the letters in this black and white close-up. Giles' thumb rests beside the word "Vishnu," guiding the viewer's eye towards it. It remains in the opening title sequence for the entire series. Repetition enhances the possibility of catching the meaning of this flashed book title. And DVD playback systems permit frame-by-frame advancement.

[18] Why would a book entitled Legends of Vishnu be so important? The beliefs about Vishnu present several startling connections to the series and its mythology, which it's necessary to quote at length:

"Vishnu is regarded as a major god in Hinduism and Indian mythology. He is thought [of] as the preserver of the universe while two other major Hindu gods Brahma and Shiva, are regarded respectively, as the creator and destroyer of the universe...

...The concept of Vishnu being the preserver of the world came relatively late in Hinduism. Presumably, it sprang from two other beliefs: that men attain salvation by faithfully following predetermined paths of duty, and that powers of good and evil (gods and demons) are in contention for domination over the world. When these powers are upset, Vishnu, it is further believed, descends to earth, or his avatar, to equalize the powers. Further, it is thought that ten such incarnations or reincarnations of Vishnu will occur. Nine descents are said to have already occurred, the tenth is yet to come....

...Vishnu is portrayed as blue or black skinned and has four arms. He has a thousand names and their repetition is an act of devotion." ("Vishnu")

The most direct evidence to support the relevance of Vishnu to reading *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is contained within its first episode, "Welcome to the Hellmouth." (1001) Buffy's first prophetic dream contains two shots of a bronze Indian statue with four arms. Intended or not, it's almost certainly a reference to Vishnu. Every other image in that dream references events and characters to come. Her dream reveals important settings like The Master's Lair and the cemetery. It shows enemies ranging from The Master and the chthonic tentacle monster to vampires and the demon of "The Puppet Show." (1009) It shows symbolically rich narrative events like Giles slamming down the Vampyr book or Buffy giving Xander a cross. More general connections include the fact that the Slayer is a figure of a thousand names devoted to saving the world, not to changing it, (not until the series finale, at least.) There's one girl in all the world to fight vampires and protect humanity, not defeat and exterminate the demonic within the world. The tradition of elevating local heroes to become gods in the Hindu pantheon fits the series as well. And, after all, the final shot of the opening title sequences of the first two seasons shows Buffy,

blue from the stage lighting, staring down her enemies.

[19] Some might object that these connections are certainly esoteric to the vast majority of the audience watching this series in the U.S. Of course, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been broadcast in 21 countries and its DVDs have spread yet further. Several other natural objections present themselves. First, Joss Whedon has described himself as an “angry atheist fascinated by devotion” (Lavery 2). Yet he has also said that viewers can validly find God in his narratives (Stevenson 61). Second, some might argue that reading the series in light of Christian philosophy seems more fruitful, in light of episodes like “The Gift” (5022) and “Grave” (6022). There’s certainly room in the series pantheon for Vishnu. Consider this quite abbreviated list of divine beings referenced in the series: Hecate, Diana, Osiris, Jesus Christ, [171](#)the Powers That Be, a variety of Hells, Glory, The First Evil, and Willow’s exclamation in awe of “my Goddess” in the series finale. Another objection would be that the connections between Vishnu and Buffy might be simply the result of similarities in the underlying structures of all heroic narratives. Finally, there’s a lot of attention to detail in the tone set by the text and illustrations in the credits, from the gothic typewriter font to the engraving style of the drawings of angel wings and demons. It may simply be more supernatural window-dressing, despite the relevance of the other images in her first prophetic dream.

[20] While a fuller examination of this issue is the subject of another paper, one observation connected to the opening title sequence does present itself. If Vishnu has a thousand names, should we read the series as implicitly adding Buffy to that list? Does the fact that the series has used Buffy’s name far more than a thousand times in its 144 episodes make creating the series an act of devotion? How about the fact that Vishnu’s name was “said” in each broadcast? (And that’s without counting repetitions generated by DVDs.) Given the emphasis on finding Buddhism in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in texts like [What Would Buffy Do?](#), tracing the connections between the series and Hindu thought are an area for further scholarship.

### **Reading the Credits: An Expressive Use of Contractual Obligations**

**Cordelia:** “This is all about me! Me, me, me!” —“Out of Sight, Out of Mind” (1011)

[21] The credits in opening title sequences communicate the relative narrative and industry power of various parties. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s opening credits do provide an indirect measure of the fluid power relations in the series. A close reading of them also indicates how the series’ creators used them to express the ideals of the series and for artistic effect.

[22] Before beginning this examination of the expressive use of the credits in the opening title sequence, perhaps it would be helpful for the reader to have a list of the major performers followed by their role in parenthesis: Sarah Michelle Gellar (Buffy), Anthony Stewart Head (Giles), Nicholas Brendan (Xander), Alyson Hannigan (Willow), Charisma Carpenter (Cordelia), David Boreanaz (Angel), James Marsters (Spike), Seth Green (Oz), Emma Caulfield (Anya), Marc Blucas (Riley), Michelle Trachtenberg (Dawn), Eliza Dushku (Faith), Kristine Sutherland (Joyce), and Amber Benson (Tara). [181](#)

[23] Placement of one’s credit at the beginning and end of the opening title sequence is valuable territory, as people tend to remember the first and last things in a sequence best. Playing the title character, Sarah Michelle Gellar is always the first actress listed. Anthony Stewart Head’s credit lists both his name and his role as Giles, indicating his importance to the series and stature in the industry.

[24] The number of shots in the character’s montage also indicates the evolving power of the various performers in the industry. The montage devoted to Gellar’s Buffy is typically the longest. It expanded over time as the series’ cult success grew. During the first two seasons, shots that showcase the setting, iconography, and monsters of the series interrupt her character study. Buffy’s character studies in those two seasons show her in no more than three consecutive shots. By the third season, her character study is uninterrupted for eight shots. This growth reflected Gellar’s increasing cultural prominence and industry influence. Gellar hosted NBC’s *Saturday Night Live* (1975-present) in the

middle of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* second season. She starred in *Cruel Intentions* (Columbia Pictures, 1999), which was released during the end of season three. It garnered a tidy profit, grossing an estimated \$38 million off an estimated \$11 million budget ["Business Data for *Cruel Intentions*"(1999)]. As a result, the title sequence in the final four seasons would not interrupt her character's study for 10, 12, 14, and nine shots, respectively. Just three to six shots are typically given to the other character studies, even for actors popular with the fans, such as Nicholas Brendan, James Marsters, and Head. The number of shots varies little over time in those sequences as well.

[25] The study of Willow, however, changes greatly. Her character study reflects more than the character's increasingly central role in the narrative. They indicate Alyson Hannigan's rising star in the industry. During the first two seasons, Willow's character study lasts uninterrupted over two shots. Then, Hannigan acted in *American Pie* (Universal Pictures, 1999), which was released the summer prior to the third season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. That ensemble comedy earned more than \$100 million off an estimated budget of \$11 million ["Business Data for *American Pie* (1999)"]. By the third season, her character study lasts through four shots without disruption. Her opening credits for the fourth season devote seven consecutive shots to Hannigan's performance of Willow. To this point, Hannigan's credits are still buried in the middle of the opening, however. Charisma Carpenter, David Boreanaz, and Seth Green separate her in various seasons from Head's sequence and the final crescendo of action and music. In the fifth season, Hannigan's sequence is the penultimate character study. It's also become the second longest montage next to Gellar's, at nine shots. Just prior to the sixth season, Universal Pictures released *American Pie 2* (2001), earning an estimated \$145 million off an estimated budget of \$30 million. ["Business Data for *American Pie 2* (2001)"] In the final two seasons, Hannigan takes over Head's position in the sequence, including both her name and her role in her credit title.

[26] The credits within the opening title sequence of *BtVS* provide an indirect measure of how the series' creators handled the fluid power relations in the series. By their nature, they emphasize the worth of an individual as being measured by their earning power. Yet, the opening credits of *BtVS* do have egalitarian qualities. Each performer's name holds over the same number of shots, even though the number of shots devoted to the character varies. No single individual's contribution was represented as being more important than that of the series that they collectively created. In film, it's become typical to have a host of corporations, producers, directors, and stars listed prior to the title of the film. In the American television industry's conventions, however, the show still comes first. [191](#) Finally, the first season's credits demonstrate an early refusal to engage in the kind of fake progressive politics that merely invert who is positioned as the blameworthy Other. Carpenter is included in the first season's opening title sequence, despite playing a villain in most of the early episodes, while Boreanaz and Mark Metcalf (The Master) are not.

[27] Whether or not the opening title sequence names the performer as the character in the credits functions as an expressive technique as well. During the first five seasons, every performer but Head in the opening credits has just their name superimposed over three shots of their character. "Anthony Stewart Head as Giles" foregrounds the performance, while running the actor's name over shots of Buffy, Xander, and Willow intentionally blurs the line between role and performer. That suggests that Gellar, Brendan, and Hannigan are their characters, on some level. Such an erasure enhances the effect of episodes like "Once More, with Feeling." (6007) The fact that the cast members are mostly not professional singers is part of its drama in an initial viewing. One important pleasure is watching the creative team successfully solve a seemingly intractable problem, just like their characters do. The creators strategically make the audience more aware of the separation between performer and role after using the credits to make viewers less aware of that same distinction.

[28] If not naming the actors "as" their character has this effect, inextricably linking the performer to the role has a different one. It begins with the "Anthony Stewart Head as Giles" credit. As with Buffy, names define Giles' responsibilities. Describing the role that Head plays as "Giles" places the viewer in the perspective of Buffy, Willow, and Xander in ways whose significance do not begin to become apparent until the second and third seasons. Anthony Stewart Head does play the role of Giles. But he also performs the parts of Rupert, Ripper, and Watcher. Several names are required to provide a fuller

representation of his identity.

[29] Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto argue that Giles serves as the interpreter, an analyst, putting all the pieces of the puzzle together. He is strangely uncomfortable using language, however, particularly around Buffy. They note that Buffy often impatiently interrupts his explanations because he's not cutting to the chase fast enough. And Xander is constantly "boiling [his] complex thoughts down to its simplest possible form" ("Passion," 2017). Giles is the translator of Old World into New, both for the viewers and the characters. The stutter indicates the difficulty of that task. The verbal tic suggests that he is not the masterful man that Watchers are supposed to be [\[10\]](#) (Overbey and Preston-Matto, 80-81). Head's credit firmly states that "Giles" is a performed role in a way that the series does not for Buffy, Cordelia, or Xander. It prepares the audience to watch it as a performance.

[30] In "The Dark Age" (2008), it's revealed that his past includes a time as a black magicks-using delinquent. Buffy's discovery of his humanity underneath his veil of performing the Watcher is ours too. Viewers haven't seen him outside of the presence of the Scoobies very frequently. The audience only sees what he's like when he's their adult supervisor. Yet, indications have always been there. His dry asides and bone dry wit frequently lack the stutter. His regression into Ripper in "Band Candy" (3006) shows for the first time that those comebacks have their roots in the taunts and gibes of his youth. Giles contained Ripper within him from the very first episodes. When Giles "leans towards blind panic" upon hearing of Angel's defection in "Innocence" (2014), Jenny reprimands him, "Rupert, don't talk like that. The kids." She's the only one who calls him by his first name to that point. [\[11\]](#) It's an indication of yet another hidden side to him. Giles is performing the role of both Giles and Watcher; it's not natural to his character.

[31] Having the opening credits read "and Anthony Stewart Head as Giles" sets this evolution up for maximum dramatic effect. Having the opening credits instead read "and Anthony Stewart Head as Rupert 'Ripper' Giles, the Watcher" would not. Even labeling Head's role as "Rupert Giles" or "Giles the Watcher" would undermine this effect of discovering hidden depths. His name fails to fully define him due to Head's performance and the screenwriting, but it's also partially an expressive effect of the credits.

[32] A similar technique is used in the guest starring credits superimposed on the scene following the opening title sequence. There, listing the role played by the actor indicates their greater importance in the ongoing narrative by increasing the size of their credit onscreen. The authors credit the following performers in this manner: Emma Caulfield ("as Anya" for part of season four), Kristine Sutherland ("as Joyce" during season five), [\[12\]](#) Amber Benson ("as Tara" for seasons five and six), and Eliza Dushku ("as Faith," but once "as Buffy.") For each of these characters, their credit functions as an expressive effect. [\[13\]](#) But while the credits take care to foreground the fact that Giles is a performed role, that technique does not always achieve a similar result.

[33] Caulfield's credit functions like Head's to a lesser degree. Anya's past as a vengeance demon and her endearingly quirky re-learning of what it means to be human mean that learning to play a new (or, rather, a forgotten) role centrally defines her character. As with Giles, her credits encourage viewers to understand Anya's identity as a performance. As the writing and performance both highlight the character's estrangement from humanity, however, the credit is less effective as a guide for the viewer. Audiences need little reminding of her character's efforts to successfully perform her new life. Unlike Head, however, the series removes the character name from Caulfield's credit when she's added to the fifth season's opening title sequence. The central difference seems to be that Giles is attempting to enact his identity by stitching together the performances and histories of several roles. Anya is attempting to unlearn what she has learned as a demon. Education, not performance, is what actually defines this character.

[34] Benson's credit functions like Head's, but only for a short period of time. Stripping away Tara's performer's mask was the subject of "Family" (5006). In that episode, Tara learns that her family has lied to her: her witchcraft is not a sign of her demonic nature. Fearing she was a demon, Tara had been performing "Tara" to everyone around her. So, for the first six episodes of season five, Benson's credit primes the audience to read her character as Benson performing Tara performing "Tara." In "Family," Tara's friends realize that her "Tara" mask was her true face all along. After that episode, however, Tara's identity is not particularly more performed than that of any other



character in the series. The "Amber Benson as Tara" credit recognizes her character's narrative importance. It also signified how tightly industry executives control the representation of what few lesbian characters there were on network television.

[35] Dushku's credit as Faith functions much like Benson's credit prior to "Family." Faith does put on a false front of "little Miss Seen-It-All," as the Mayor observes in "Graduation Day, Part I." (3021) In "Who Are You?" (4016), however, the creators make direct use of her credit by altering it. At the end of the prior episode, Faith magically switched bodies with Buffy. Faith then proceeds to maliciously make a mess of Buffy's life while preparing to leave Sunnydale in style and in a new body. Gellar has to perform the role of Buffy plausibly enough to temporarily fool the other characters. She must slip in enough of Dushku's techniques to signal the presence of Faith's consciousness in Buffy's body. Gellar has to play a plausible Buffy using her own techniques, Faith's understanding of Buffy using Dushku's techniques, and the role of Faith all at the same time. Meanwhile, Dushku has to impersonate Gellar's performance of Buffy. And this role reversal is not mentioned verbally when the shift takes place. Yet, the creators do let the audience in on this intricate role playing with an economical device. While the guest starring credits roll at the bottom of the screen, Faith-in-Buffy makes her first role-playing mistake. Speculating that Faith's future may not be so bad after her arrest, Faith-in-Buffy says to Joyce, "Well, could be things are looking up. I mean, a little stint in the pokey, show [Faith] the error of her ways. I'm sure there's some big old Bertha just waiting to shower her ripe little self with affection." As Gellar delivers this line, the credit on screen reads: "and Eliza Dushku as Buffy."

[36] Finally, there's Willow. Hannigan's opening title sequence credit in the sixth season reads, "and Alyson Hannigan as Willow." This credit functions exactly like Head's and even takes his slot in the opening. It suggests how important performance is to understanding Willow. James B. South argues that Willow's "extravagant range of interests and roles is evidence of the fact that there appears to be no core identity to Willow—nothing that defines her" (South 134). She expresses her insecurity to Tara about her lack of "lesbo street cred" ("Tough Love," 5019) and to Buffy while rejecting her role as a sidekick ("Fear, Itself," 4004). She has two "actor's nightmare" dreams in "Nightmares" (1010) and "Restless" (4022). Still, it takes Hannigan's turn as a vampire in "The Wish" (3009) and "Doppelgangland" (3016) to see Hannigan as performing Willow performing little-girl Willow. [\[14\]](#) The bright and fuzzy clothing, the breathy stutter-step delivery of lines, the gawky walk, and the wide eyes all are part of a performance that emphasizes itself through its slightly excessive cuteness. Vamp Willow reveals Willow's character as performed rather than natural. It makes her excessive stage fright in "Puppet Show" (1009) and "Nightmares" (1010) revealing rather than merely amusing. South writes that fans claiming not to recognize the Willow of season six "is incomplete as a response, though, because it assumes that we could ever fully understand Willow, that there are no dark currents in her, that we could ever construct a coherent and consistent narrative for Willow" (145). Hannigan's season six credit prepares the audience for exactly that insight, just as it's about to fall apart. For Willow, all is performance.

[37] Indeed, even the actor's credits themselves are dynamic and in flux. The text slides in from the off-screen foreground, leaving several duplicate after-images in transit. Those traces then coalesce into a readily identifiable marker of identity: a name. The motion graphics make sure to indicate that people contain multitudes, as Walt Whitman observed (Whitman 77).

[38] Most complex is the last credit of all the opening title sequences. Whedon always uses the last shot of the montage to forge a connection between him and the title character; it is his "created by" credit that runs over this shot. He signs the shot of Buffy—the heroine standing alone against the forces of darkness—as explicitly his creation and his responsibility. Whedon does not stretch his credit across both the final shot and the one preceding, which always presents the four main characters marching off to battle. Nor does he place that shot of collective action last and have it bear his signature instead.

[39] Least charitably, one could argue that this decision declares ownership of the series and seeks to erode the communal nature of television production. His name does end the opening title sequences and his executive producer credit does begin the closing one. Advocates of this viewpoint would note that the last two images that Whedon signs in this manner are actually simulacra of heroism: the Buffybot and the shape-shifting First

Evil. While perhaps intended to raise uncertainty about Buffy after her resurrection, these two images similarly make Whedon's cultural heroism problematic from this point of view.

[40] Alternatively, one could read it as an assertion of primary artistic responsibility that leaves room for the productive efforts of others. After all, everyone else's credit is listed as well. And "owner" would be the wrong term to describe Whedon's position legally: 20th Century Fox holds the copyright on the series, its logo, and even the term "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." Here, too, which image of Buffy that he signs matters. Most overtly, the series gives a privileged position to a shot in "Anne" (3001) of Buffy wielding what looks like a sickle in an industrial setting. While it is actually a West African throwing knife called a hunga munga, the camera angle makes it look like the sickle from the flag of the USSR. Through repetition and placement, the series encourages its viewers to contemplate whether the exploitation of workers is inherent in global capitalism and whether the series profits by, condemns, or both profits by and condemns it. [\[15\]](#)

[41] But perhaps this series' first "created by" credit best explains his decision to place his credit on an image of Buffy alone. For the first two seasons, it is from her first climactic battle of the series. She's shown in a medium shot, bathed in blue stage light. The camera tracks in and tilts up. She raises her eyes to stare down her remaining enemies. This act saves Xander, who will always be her friend, not her lover or her husband. This is a heroine's moment of genuine righteousness, truly a "just female warrior re-imagined" (Early 55). The rarity of such moments in our culture suggests that Whedon's signature here does not suggest ownership or control. It's an expression of pride.

[42] The credits in the opening title sequence are more than simply an indirect record of industry power or a signature of responsibility. They are a form of creative expression. It is one way in which viewers are "gently but insistently asked not simply to be consumers, but to take an active part in a process closer to theatrical transactions of character and identity, to work with the players and characters as both the scope and the limitations of identity and role continue in dynamic flux" (Shuttleworth 261).

### Reading the First and Second Seasons' Character Studies

**Giles** (to Xander and Willow): "For as long as there have been vampires, there's been the Slayer. One girl in all the world, a Chosen One."

**Buffy**: "He loves doing this part."

**Giles**: "All right. The Slayer hunts vampires, Buffy is a Slayer, don't tell anyone. I think that's all the vampire information you need."

— "The Harvest" (1002)

[43] According to Umberto Eco, authors and audiences imagine and construct models of one another by means of the text. Even with the input of focus groups and test screenings, the actual authors of the film or series must imagine the entirety of their global audience and tailor their message to that model accordingly. Then, their audiences infer the intent of the authors, the meaning of their work, and who their intended audience is. The art work is built by interpretation but also provides limits for valid interpretation of it (Collini 64). Audiences make these judgments largely from their experience of the text while experiencing it. The opening title sequence is an important frame for that process, but not the only one. The marketing and advertising campaigns, interviews with the creators, and the direct observation of others in the audience play a role. These serve to help critical readers make initial judgments about the intended audience. Critical readers then confirm or reevaluate that hypothesis in light of later developments in the work itself (64).

[44] In serial narratives, the creators and the viewers can change their minds as the series progresses. The feedback creators get influences their writing in future episodes. That experience of others' interpretation of their work can be the result of ratings, reviews, fan responses at conventions or internet sites, personal letters written to them, etc. They write with a more informed notion of who their audience is. These encounters influence the creators' understanding of the meaning of their work. New episodes provide

additional evidence for the viewers that then changes their understanding of the creators' intent and the text's meanings. The result is an indirect dialogue between authors and interpreters. This conversation can be repetitive, requiring little alteration in either's model of the other. In such a case, the opening title sequence would remain largely the same from season to season. Or authors may create an innovative serial work like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that challenges critical readers of it to live up to their especially demanding model of their audience. Season by season, its opening title sequence reflects the nature of that evolving text and the shifting demands placed on its interpreters.

[45] The character studies of the first season of the series promise action, hint at the possibility of romance, and provide virtually no indication of melodrama or comedy. The opening promises action explicitly through shots of monsters bursting through barriers and Buffy wielding various weapons. The creators promise their audience visual stimulation as well. Their accelerated montage requires flat compositions to aid in the quick comprehension of each shot. For variety, shots with deep compositions periodically interrupt the onslaught of shallow focus or tightly framed shots. The opening sequence activates the off-screen foreground. The text of the title and the credits slide in from there. The black cat from "The Witch" (1003) leaps into the foreground. The opening montage strategically opens up the background. Buffy, Xander and Willow open a door blocking the composition in one shot from "I, Robot—You, Jane." (1008) Similarly, there are radical shifts in framing, smashing from a close-up of spiders crawling on a book in "Nightmares" (1010) to a long shot of Willow opening a door to a basement. The viewer's eyes frequently must move quickly within the frame as well. It's not uncommon for the sequence to shift from a shot whose dominant interest is on one side of the screen to another. For example, the opening title sequence matches one shot of Buffy, lying prone screen left. She levels a crossbow at someone off-screen right. ("Angel," 1007) That guides the viewer's eyescreen right. In the next shot, that's where Buffy does her kip up from a prone position in "The Harvest" (1002). Bright primary colors rather than softer pastels heighten the contrast. Reds, greens, yellows and blacks dominate the palette. The two most prominent uses of blues connect Buffy and Angel. They are to be found in the halo of light surrounding the silhouette of Angel and the stage light illuminating Buffy as she stares down her enemies in the sequence's final shot. On a formal level, clash is the dominant technique, with only brief respites for the shots promising other pleasures.

[46] Those other pleasures of the romance genre are largely restricted to the head shots of the characters. The credits of later seasons will make more overt overtures to audiences interested in this kind of television. Medium close shots prevail, featuring Buffy smiling charmingly, Willow smiling and raising her eyebrow over wide eyes, Xander gazing seriously off screen right, and Giles with glasses gleaming. The episodes in the first season make an effort to emphasize Gellar's bust, notably with the scoop neck tee shirt of the first two episodes and the prom dress of the season finale. The only shot in the sequence to emphasize the body of these actresses is the shot of Cordelia, dancing in the Bronze. The opening montage is much more restrained than the rest of the first season is.

[47] The theme music's relentless energy prevents much representation of the series' use of comedy and melodrama. The lone suggestion of the kind of romantic relationship found in melodrama is a pair of shots of Buffy and Angel intensely gazing, linked by an eye-line match cut. There's no way to segue from Nerf Herder into the kind of music vital to the success of melodrama, such as the Buffy-Angel theme during the second season. The industry requirement for theme music generally makes it difficult to represent the comic qualities of a series in its opening title sequence. Creators either use shots featuring slapstick and other purely visual comic moments or they can demonstrate a sense of humor. The opening to *Men Behaving Badly* (1996) sets a montage of women slapping men in various classic films to the tune of a cover of the Beatles song, "Bad Boy." Due to industry convention, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* cannot tempt viewers with one of its chief virtues: its literate word play.

[48] The first season's opening title sequence demonstrates a concern for helping new viewers to adjust to the genre of the series. To provide the bare essentials of the background narrative, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* depends on its intoned voice over opening and later its "previously, on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*..." segment. That's likely the result of having to explain any use of the fantasy and horror elements during the teaser. [\[16\]](#) Instead, the opening title sequence establishes the iconography of the fantasy horror genre. The opening montage regularly intercuts shots of the characters in action with shots

that feature: ancient texts, a setting sun, the full moon, an illustration of the last demon leaving the world, both a silver and a wooden cross, sharp teeth coming towards screen, candles, white energy engulfing a woman, graveyards, a gate with demon face, a black cat, spiders, the morgue, a guillotine, and a crossbow. Later seasons would progressively cut these shots to devote more time to establishing the characters.

[49] The next important effect of the first season's opening title sequence is to reward attentive viewing on the part of the audience. Every episode from the first season is referenced several times. A number of shots foreshadow climactic moments in important episodes. The creators show Catherine Madison caught in the backlash of her own spell, the climactic shot from the final battle of "The Witch" (1003). As previously mentioned, the opening includes a shot from the final fight in "Angel" (1007). They use important moments that hint at the romance in that episode as well. Buffy looks into the eyes of Angel in the final scene from that episode. Angel returns that gaze. Both shots are from just before they kiss. The opening title sequence shows Buffy about to be bitten by The Master in the season finale as well. The ability to draw from the entire season was the result of being a mid-season replacement. All the episodes had been shot before the series first aired. The first season presented the only time the series would be able to do such extensive foreshadowing.

[50] The first season's opening title sequence provides a pleasing sense of underlying order. The episodes themselves fill in the gaps, reassuring viewers of the importance of the characters' free will in getting to those points. Buffy's dreams and the prophecy of her death in the season finale are both broadly prophetic, predictive yet vague enough to permit the exercise of human agency. The opening title sequence functions in much the same manner for the viewer. These moments we witness here come true, but divorcing these images from their context allows the viewer the same agency in interpretation. [17] Giles observes that the prophecies are dodgy and mutable, yet some accurately predict future events. The same might be said of the first season's opening title sequence.

[51] The opening uses future episodes to tease fans about the season's developments. The opening title sequence aired during the first episode of later seasons drew a particular focus for that very reason. In re-runs, those same sequences then serve to bind together the fandom by reminding such viewers of their shared history with the program. Fans know what these moments signify emotionally and in the narrative's ongoing development. You are in the know, so to speak. As a fan or as a new viewer, it pays to be attentive to the opening title sequences of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[52] The opening title sequence for the first season starts with a forward tilt in its use of foreshadowing. As the season wears on, however, it gradually becomes a history. That history continues into the second season's opening, which changes little from the first's montage. It features just seven shots from the upcoming season. Only two foreshadow important events. One shows Willow and Giles hanging limply upside down, evidently captured. The other has Buffy seductively dancing in front of Xander, her arms held above her head and framing her head. This shot misleads viewers, but only for part of the first episode. (That's when both these shots were aired, in fact). The only new sequence is the result of featuring David Boreanaz in the opening montage. Angel's character study conveys the essentials quickly. During his first shot, he emerges from the shadows in the background. He's sultry. The next shot begins with Angel, bent over, his face hidden. He rises. Over Buffy's shoulder, we see his face, distorted into a vampire's. Venetian blinds cast bars of shadow over his moonlit face, suggesting that this dangerous identity is caged. Under a black suit jacket, he wears a white tee shirt, which scoops low to reveal the nape of his neck and Boreanaz's smooth hairless chest. If the first season appealed to lust in its representation of its actresses, the second season's opening title sequence advertises that there's a male body that a desiring gaze can linger on. [18] If the first season's opening was geared to entice new fans by hinting at future developments, the second season's montage seems geared to deepen that audience's commitment by emphasizing their shared history. Of course, such encouragement of these fantasies and emotions sets up the shocking turn of events beginning in "Innocence" (B2014) quite nicely.

## Reading the Third Season's Character Studies

**Buffy:** "Same as all the others. Slayer called... blah, blah... great protector... blah, blah... scary battles... blah, blah... oops! She's dead. Where are the details?"

— "Fool for Love" (B5007)

[53] In the third season, the opening title sequence begins to tease out the complexity of that shared history. Close-ups of Buffy's sunny smile promise erotic and romantic pleasures in ways that are understood by both new and returning viewers. Other shots promote divergent understandings of the series. A shot of a tall man quickly snapping the neck of a woman in the shadows before a window promises villains, violence, and thrills to the new viewer. To a fan, this shot of the death of Jenny Calendar references an experience far from exhilarating. ("Passion", 2017) A shot of Buffy running in slow motion through school hallways might be read as a heroic race to the rescue. Returning viewers know that this shot references a moment before Buffy hits her absolute nadir, discovering that the cost of her obsession with Angel has been the death of Kendra, severe injuries to Xander and Willow, and the capture of Giles. ("Becoming, Part One", 2021) Alternatively, a shot of a woman engulfing someone in orange magical energy might be interpreted as a reference to a very serious battle. Instead, it sparks warm memories of Xander's love spell gone awry, which resulted in a jealous Amy turning Buffy into a rat. ("Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" [2016]) The extreme close-up a woman's hand caressing the skin of a man's muscular back is certainly a sensual image. The results of the passion depicted in "Innocence" (2014) complicate its eroticism for fans. In this season's opening title sequence, nothing is quite what it seems. Tragedy masquerades as thrilling action. A magical battle is actually comic. And its most erotic image evokes more complex emotions than simply sexual desire.

[54] In addition, the third season's opening title sequence encourages a viewing posture of anticipation on the part of its fans. Angel seemingly died at the end of the prior season. The featured presence of Boreanaz in the opening has an especial impact on those viewers committed to the series, but who avoid spoilers. The kind of fans called "spoiler whores" already knows that Boreanaz will be back for a new season. The question of how the series creators will justify bringing his character back might still tempt them. The series' narrative does not touch on Angel's return from a hell dimension until the end of the third episode. Yet, the means of his return is hinted at late in the montage. The shot of Angel snapping Jenny's neck ends with her body sliding limply to the ground. That downward movement allows for a match cut on action with a tight close-up of a silver ring dropping to the ground in a pool of white light. Especially intrigued viewers might play the shot in slow motion and confirm their suspicions: it's the Claddagh ring that Angel gave Buffy to seal their relationship. Why this icon of fidelity brings him back is the subject of several years' worth of narrative. The opening title sequence whets the appetite for an answer to Angel's return, even as the narrative itself leaves interested viewers suspended in anticipation. [\[19\]](#)

[55] Within the boundaries of what shots would work within a 50 second montage set to Nerf Herder's theme music, the opening title sequence also highlights the authors' understanding of the essential moments of the series and its characters. This season is the first time the opening montage has had the opportunity to delve back two seasons. Yet, the creators of this sequence choose not to use a single image from the first season. Later seasons would draw from more than just the prior season. Despite the merits of episodes like "Prophecy Girl" (1012) and "Angel" (1007) the creators decided that they were not essential to understanding the past and immediate future of the narrative. The economic imperatives of the industry similarly determine some choices. Re-runs provide a financial incentive for the creators to avoid being overly specific about the finale of prior seasons. This is yet another incentive to have the opening title sequence focus on character studies at the expense of an exhaustive narrative update.

[56] How do these character studies function? Matthew Pateman writes that the character studies in the credits "... assert certain sorts of attributes to each of the characters by choosing images from sections of seasons that best fit what we consider those characters to be. They are a moment of structural and formal stability that help ... to render known and safe the narrative space that we shall soon enter" (Pateman 123). These studies do guide viewers in this manner. But they are not objective descriptions of the

audience's subjective impressions of each character's essence. The creators' depiction must correspond to the audience's understanding of the characters to some degree. But that depiction must be imperfect given the authors' necessarily incomplete understanding of their audience. These character studies also suggest to the audience something of the series creators' changing perception of what moments define the characters' past. They are the creators' attempt to forge a common ground where the interpretations of the audience and the creators meet.

[57] Nor are these character studies unmotivated. The creators' choices set up future changes in the characters by evoking qualities that the narrative has left latent to a greater or lesser degree. It's a common ground chosen to meet the creators' future narrative interests. Yet those interests are only imperfectly known at the time of creating the sequence. While the overall arc of the season has been decided upon, much of it has not been shot yet. For example, the Faith storyline had not been decided upon. Whedon revised the narrative in light of the lack of chemistry between the actors playing the season's two intended villains, the Mayor and Mr. Trick. He's also cited how important Dushku's skill at performing Faith's darkness and vulnerability was in spurring the creators' alteration of the intended narrative (Tjardes 70). In addition, fan response to episodes planned but not yet made can spark new episodes. Fan response to the alternative world version of Willow in "The Wish" (3009) played some part in motivating an episode designed to give Hannigan a chance to reprise that performance in "Doppelgangland" (3016) (Golden, Bisette, and Sniegowski 137).

[58] The meanings generated by opening title sequences must remain profitably loose to accommodate the different understandings of authors and audiences, provide space to shift the narrative in light of on-set developments, and allow for responses to any intense reaction on the part of the audience. It is ultimately more useful for the third season's opening montage to suggest rather than assert.

[59] For example, Xander's third season character study overtly emphasizes the sexual and martial aspects of his character. Xander fights for the first time in the series' title sequences. Previously, his character had been defined by the social. He moves through crowds of high school students or acts in concert with Willow and Buffy. Now, he virtually spears a vampire with a wooden sign stand, a weapon whose length emphasizes the act's violence. Where the prior two character studies emphasize his face, the third season's emphasizes his body. The medium shot framing of Xander's "Speedo moment" in "Go Fish" (2020) emphasizes his wet bare chest. It's followed by a shot of him reclining on a couch. His character study's final shot has him raise himself up from a kneeling position bedside. That suggests his devotion for the first time. They do not emphasize his capacity for murderous anger (such as at the prospect of giving Angel back his soul in "Becoming, Part One" [2021]). Nor do they feature his buffoonery, as when he clutches a boogie board to hide his genitals from the amused and admiring gazes of Willow, Buffy, and Cordelia. The authors deem that Xander's physicality, muscular attractiveness, and fidelity will define him. Those suggestions will serve their narrative purposes later when Xander be a battle commander, have sex, and save his friends from zombie jocks.

## Reading the Fourth and Fifth Season's Character Studies

**Giles:** "But that's the thrill of living on the Hellmouth! There's a veritable cornucopia of, of fiends and devils and, and ghouls to engage. Pardon me for finding the glass half full."

— "The Witch" (1003)

[60] In these two seasons, the series goes through radical changes. There's a new setting, new lovers, new siblings, new forms of artistic experimentation, a spin-off, and the death of an important character prior to joining a new network. The series shifted its focus away from vampires, a decision signaled in the opening montage. Because seasons four and five make change an essential theme, what isn't changed in their opening title sequences reveals what the series creators felt were signature moments. In addition, the series creators made use of a new technique in the opening montage. They highlighted these narrative shifts by changing the opening sequence seven times during these two seasons. Finally, the increased number of opening sequences makes a consistent decision

to omit particular images all the more deliberate.

[61] The second season's opening title sequence emphasized continuity, which served to deepen its audience's existing connection to the narrative. With so few changes, it is impossible to determine what moments the series creators favored at the time. With shots used in the opening montage for seasons three, four, and five, we can now infer which moments the creators favor for their artistry rather than for their ability to position the audience for the upcoming narrative. One of the creators' favorite images of the series seems to be the shot of Buffy running in slow motion at the end of "Becoming, Part One" (2021). The clash between the clichés of cinematic heroism, the narrative's tragic context, the setting of a high school hallway, and the fashionable femininity of Buffy's teal coat and purple slacks seems to define Buffy for them. [\[20\]](#) The shot of Xander staking a vampire with a sign stand is similarly repeated, perhaps due to its usefulness. (The other shot to be repeated in three opening title sequences is the heroic shot of Buffy from "Anne" [3001]).

[62] The low level, low angle full shot of Spike head-banging while driving a car with blacked out windows seems to be considered one of his character's iconic moments. Spike is shown to have a cultural affinity with Oz, who also is connected to the theme song, strumming his guitar in time. Similarly, Spike's head bobs in time to the opening's theme music now. (In the original scene, he's listening to the Sex Pistols' cover of "My Way.") [\[21\]](#) Spike also replaces Angel in the opening credits. The dropping of the Claddagh ring in a pool of white light against a black background serves as the single reference to Angel in either season's opening. It evokes his lingering influence without undoing the hard-earned visual separation between the two series.

[63] The creators give the full shot of Buffy and Faith dancing together at the Bronze during "Bad Girls" (3014) more attention than they did during the actual episode. Faith—eyes closed and wearing a black tank top with black leather pants—waves one arm around head, as if she's in the throes of ecstasy. Buffy shakes her head back and forth, blonde hair whipping through air, and both hands behind her. Both women have their bodies arched towards each other, as their hips flare from side to side in time to each other's movements. [\[22\]](#) This shot's homoeroticism hints that sexual jealousy is one underlying motive for Faith's hostility towards Buffy. But what it doesn't do is establish her rivalry with Buffy to set up Faith's four episodes in this series and in *Angel* during this season. Their handcuffed knife fight in "Graduation Day, Part One" (3021) would have provided a visually interesting, but nonsexual motive for Faith's actions in "Who Are You?" (4016). Instead, their dance is the only shot in which Faith is recognizable during the opening title sequence. Needless to say, the use of this image again during the fifth season's opening serves no narrative purpose. It simply promises visual pleasure.

[64] In these two seasons, the series shifted its focus away from vampires, a decision signaled in the opening montage. During the first three seasons, the opening of the box containing the silver crucifix necklace serves as the transition from the title montage to the character studies. The silver cross breaks up the words of the series title, sending the letters hurling towards the screen. As they do so, the sequence uses two extremely fast zooms into extreme close-ups of a vampire's mouth and eye, then another zoom into the close-up of Buffy's hand passing the wooden cross to Xander's hand in "The Harvest" (1002). These three images convey brief suggestions of the demonic. In each of the first three seasons, it's a close shot of Darla biting the first victim of the series that provides a transition into the action shots of Buffy's character study. In the fourth and fifth seasons, the first change in each opening is to the shot in that slot. In the fourth season, Buffy's action is sparked by a close-up of a hellhound raising its head then biting at the screen. With the Initiative and the move of Angel to L.A., the series is more concerned with human responses to the demonic, rather than vampires specifically. In the fifth season, this slot is now taken by a full shot of the First Slayer from an extreme low angle as she dangles in chains from the ceiling, turning and baring her teeth at the camera. ("Restless", 4022) Her white face-paint with black heavy stripes across her eye sockets, lower jaw, and mouth makes for a very high contrast color scheme. The series now declares the catalyst for Buffy this season is the nature of Slaying, not vampires or demons. Placing this shot in this slot also suggests the connections between the demonic and slaying, which were hinted at through Adam's enigmatic line, "Aggression is a natural human tendency. Though you and I come by it another way." ("Restless")

[65] In addition, the series creators made use of a new technique in the opening title sequence. They changed it mid-season. They highlighted narrative shifts by changing the opening sequence seven times during these two seasons. The most obvious shifts are in the fourth season. The opening title sequence features Spike beginning in the fourth season, with "The Initiative" (4007). As with Cordelia in the first season, a character opposing Buffy is embraced long before their transition away from being an enemy was complete. Indeed, given Spike's actions during "The Yoko Factor" (4020), he's the first villain to be so elevated. The creators add Riley to the opening montage in "Doomed" (4011). This indicator of the likely long-term nature of his relationship with Buffy was premature, as that episode's teaser featured the first serious argument between them. The majority of his character study shows him in combat wielding (electrical stun) guns, rather than in sexual or emotional terms. The shaky nature of his relationship with Buffy is reflected in the opening title sequence. [\[23\]](#) The character study of Dawn in the second episode of the fifth season similarly reveals the weaknesses of that character. They show her shrugging gawkily, writing in her diary, and peering through blinds in the three shots meant to define her to fans skeptical of the series' ability to pull off such an ambitious "retconning" of the series. [\[24\]](#) She's got nothing to do, which bodes ill for her ability to become an interesting character rather than just a narrative device.

[66] "Superstar" (4017) is the most explicit example of how the series creators use the opening title sequences for more than just promotion or character description. During this episode, Jonathan casts a spell that enables him to rewrite the narrative world in a manner more to his liking. A sort of nebbishy Sunnydale everyman, Jonathan had last been seen in the final battle of the third season. There, he was seen hurling himself with a barbaric yawp towards The Mayor's minions and shielding Cordelia from the debris of the explosion. The first shot of him in the fourth season shows him swiveling his desk chair around to face the camera—suave, smiling, and smug—to observe to Buffy, "It sounds like you can use my help." The score quotes the James Bond theme, then segues into Nerf Herder's series theme for the opening title sequence... into which Jonathan has inserted himself.

[67] These appropriations are few in number, but strategically chosen for maximum comic impact. He's first seen in the midst of Buffy's character study in a medium shot wielding a crossbow. Later, he's shown doing Buffy's kip up from the opening montage of the first two seasons. There's a shot of him in a basement, bent over to disarm a bomb. He's shown in a medium shot cocking his head and smiling, as so many of the characters do in their sequences. The final crescendo of action in the opening montage has him three shots of him walking down the street into the wind wearing all black with a long black trench coat, which references but does not duplicate the final shot of the opening title sequence in *Angel*. (If Jonathan makes himself *Angel*, eventually one wonders how much of *Angel*'s history he inserted himself into, especially when it comes to Buffy's romantic past.)

[68] When Jonathan's magic spell allows him to alter the opening montage in "Superstar" (4017), Whedon acknowledges explicitly his implicit presence in the narrative as narrator of the series. Whedon is a part of the series, his creative efforts are just as subject to rewrite as the heroic efforts of his characters. Jonathan usurps Buffy's role in the narrative, Xander's signature episode, *Angel*'s position as champion and chief male romantic figure, and Whedon's status as virtuoso storyteller.

[69] Essentially, the series does to itself the kind of "poaching" Henry Jenkins ascribes to all fan fiction authors. Of this episode, Justine Larbalestier wrote, "Jonathan's desires to be a Buffylike superhero and to be publicly recognized as such (an acknowledgment that Buffy, with the exception of 'The Prom' (3020) does not receive) are embarrassing and come dangerously close to caricaturing the relationship of fans to the show" (234). Instead, this episode is an especially direct instance of the series giving its most devoted viewers an opportunity to engage in a searching and fearless moral inventory to evaluate whether they share Jonathan's addiction to fantasy and media. The seriousness with which fans should take this concept is signaled by the fact that sweet Jonathan's fantasy of control and power leads him to twice use mind control to facilitate rape: once in this episode with the angry twins from his mansion and later in helping Warren make his ex-girlfriend a "willing sex slave" in "Dead Things." (6013) With "Superstar" (4017), Jonathan's already succumbed to The Trio's desire to create a more perfect union with his fantasies. That's what makes his experiences next season with The Trio seem like such a disappointing relapse. [\[25\]](#) All of the pleasures and many of the warnings provided by the



Trio's behavior in the sixth season are contained in "Superstar" and implied in this revamped opening title sequence.

[70] In the first seasons of the series, Buffy used her media literacy to forge a more equal relationship with Giles. Both use their cultural knowledge to communicate and deepen an existing relationship. As amusing as Jonathan can be, this episode is not an unqualified endorsement of all forms of fan fiction, making Larbalestier's concern justified. The problem is not that Jonathan writes a new narrative, nor that he creates one within another's framework. The problem is in the use of his talents to create hierarchies. When Xander wrote himself a new life in "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" (2016), his sexual fantasies were just as masturbatory and controlling as Jonathan's. Xander also changed the narrative rules of the series, taking Buffy's position in resolving the "A" storyline. Unlike Jonathan, however, Xander does not act on those desires once the fantasies are made real. Jonathan's failure as an author indicates Whedon's own understanding of a successful author's responsibilities to his creations and the audience for them.

[71] Finally, the increased number of changes in the opening title sequences makes a consistent decision to omit particular images all the more deliberate. It is only suggested that Willow and Tara are lovers. They hold hands, but their hands are below the frame. Another shot of them holding hands is the action shot of them whipping their heads around in unison in "Hush" (4010). Their pairing as witches is obvious, but the sensual nature of spell casting is muted. The profile shot of Willow's reaction to the Nether Realms spell has her fall back on the pillow, but it eliminates the orgasmic arching of her back that was so central to making it explicitly sexual. Another notable omission is the shot of Willow painting Sappho's poem on Tara's back in "Restless." The fifth season's opening title sequence references every character's dream in that episode except Willow's. The series could write an emotional relationship for Willow and Tara. They could even suggest its physical side. They could even satirize network fears about possible reactions to its representation through Xander's dream in "Restless". While the actors playing Dawn, Spike, Riley, and even Jonathan infiltrated the opening title sequence, Benson remained a guest star. The difficulties the series had in promoting this relationship in its opening title sequences spoke eloquently to the difficulties involved in getting it on the air at all.

## **Reading the Sixth and Seventh Season's Character Studies**

**Anya:** "And then you get all excited with the tingly anticipation, but wait! Not so fast! There's the apocalypse, and the back from the grave, and the blah blah blah blah blah..."

— "Seeing Red" (6019)

[72] The opening title sequences of the first two seasons are about the contexts relevant to the series. Characters are firmly placed in the Sunnydale high school setting. Each moment references a part of an underlying artistic structure emphasized through the use of extensive foreshadowing. The theme music evokes the cultural context of the horror canon to rewrite it. Through repetition in the second season opening title sequence, viewers recognize their shared history with the program. The third season's opening makes the complexity of that connection clear.

[73] The opening title sequences to the final two seasons, however, seem hermetically sealed. Virtually every shot centers on the characters. The opening emphasizes battle scars. Buffy's shown with cuts on her face and a swollen eye. Spike has a huge scorch mark on his chest. Willow's shown with a split lip. Another shows her during her resurrection ritual, head held high and neck straining with effort. Blood decorates her face. In the seventh season montage, her face is distorted by grief, her cheeks wet, wailing. The painful history of the narrative is inscribed on their bodies and faces.

[74] There's little sense of place in their title sequences. Each season features one shot of Anya in The Magic Box, either roller skating in a zany manner or happily counting money at its register. (Anya's character study promises laughs, unlike the ones designed for Xander and Cordelia in the first two seasons.) Dawn's montage is the only character study that defines someone completely through their interaction with spaces. She sits on

the couch or stands in the sunny kitchen at home. She hides under Giles's desk, quoting a moment in the first two character studies of Willow. She walks into an art class. The character studies minimize places like the Bronze, a hospital room, or the college dorms through tight framing, shallow focus, and shot duration. These characters could be anywhere. And when they are somewhere in particular, such as a NYC subway car, the setting reveals character: Spike's past history as a glam punk. From the title sequences of these two seasons, a new viewer would think that its caverns, sewers, and cemeteries define Sunnydale. Most shots are now dimly lit, with color schemes that tend towards greens, browns, and blacks. One would have a hard time believing that the series is set in sunny California.

[75] The focus on character leads to a decreased amount of time devoted to referencing previous narrative events. In the third season, such references revealed a hard-earned understanding of the series' meanings. Now, such a knowledge base is understood. The shot of the First Slayer that opens the character studies has been reduced to a few frames in length, fully visible only in stop motion play. The crescendo of action before the final shots of communal action and Buffy's individual heroism has never been faster. They cram nine shots into a single second of screen time, ending with a flash of Buffy's sacrifice to end the fifth season. These moments, once significant and shared, have been reduced to mere impressions and sensations. Certainly, a reference to Glory, the history of Warren and Jonathan, and the absence of Joyce must wait. The use of such blindingly fast montage indicates a particular understanding of the audience. Viewers either have superb mastery of the series' formal and narrative histories, the dedication to record every second of the ongoing series, or someone to explain the references to them at the commercial break.

[76] There are two notable uses of the opening title sequence for artistic effect. The first occurs in the musical episode, "Once More, with Feeling" (6007). The credits themselves are an affectionate retro pastiche, referencing the music of a 1950s musical and the opening credits of *The Honeymooners* (CBS Television Network, 1955-56). Richard S. Albright, in his article on the episode, notes that, "The sharply different look of the opening credits signals an abrupt shift in genre, accentuating its hybridity. Uniquely, this generic shift is actually experienced by the inhabitants of the Buffyverse as well as by the audience" (Albright 3). In "Superstar", Jonathan shifts the series towards the fan fiction genre, a move that is difficult for the characters to uncover. Realizing that the conventions have changed provides the solution to the narrative problem. Once Buffy discovers the narrative alteration, it requires merely a little research and some combat to erase it. Here, once the shift towards the musical form has taken place, the characters are all aware of it. In "Once More, with Feeling," the solution is to master the rules of this new genre.

[77] Finally, the series added Benson to the opening title sequence in "Seeing Red" (6019), only to have her character be killed by a stray bullet at the end of that episode. (For a fine overview of the issues surrounding the end of the sixth season, see Julie Tabron's article in *Slayage* 4.1-2). What is of interest here is that angered fans seized on this use of the opening title sequence as an especially egregious twist of the knife:

**A:** There's been a lot of speculation about the opening credits in Seeing Red. Some think Amber Benson was added as a stunt to fool viewers into thinking she wouldn't die, others think it was to give props to Amber, still others think it was part of a vast conspiracy to fuck her over (I dunno, perhaps she has pics of you and Joss in a compromising position). Why was Ms. Benson in the credits for Seeing Red, and no other episode?

**Fury:** There was no major ulterior motive for putting Amber in the credits. It was thought to be a fitting (albeit, ironic) tribute to the actress and character that she should share the screen with the regular cast for the credits on her last show. And as company policy dictates, if it increases the pain quotient, all the better. The idea that it was an "f\*\*\* you" to Amber is insane. We loved her, and Tara. ("DavidFury.net—Q&A2003")

A technique that was delightful when used to maximize the pleasures provided by the fantasy and musical genres backfired when the writers were not prepared to deal with the

consequences of enhancing the bittersweet pleasures of melodrama. The lingering effect of the network's rigid control over the promotion of lesbian sexual relationships plays a causal role in this furor as well. In the end, Fury's response to the fan critique of Tara's character study is very similar to the one posted by Joss Whedon in the heat of the moment, on May 22nd, 2002:

"I killed Tara. Some of you may have been hurt by that. It is very unlikely it was more painful to you than it was to me. I couldn't even discuss it in story meetings without getting upset, physically. Which is why I knew it was the right thing to do. Because stories, as I have so often said, are not about what we WANT. And I knew some people would be angry with me for destroying the only gay couple on the show; but the idea that I COULDN'T kill Tara because she was gay is as offensive to me as the idea that I DID kill her because she was gay." (Murphy 149)

Even though the series teaches its viewers to ask hard questions to those with power, both authors deny the validity of even asking such a question here. Tabron has pointed out the obvious weaknesses this kind of response has from a public relations perspective. It can sound like: "Silly people, wanting to see more happy lesbians on television. Can't they see that Whedon is telling a *story*?" (Tabron 8). Both Fury and Whedon emphasize their trauma at the expense of their fans' in these passages. Both writers got defensive in the face of exactly the same kind of rage-filled grief from their fans that they had just written about with Willow. How could they not recognize this dynamic? When tested, the writers didn't rise to the level of empathy, love, and understanding that Buffy, Anya, Xander, and Giles demonstrated. Under much less provocation than the characters they wrote, they couldn't say to these fans, "I'm not joking. I know you're in pain. I can't imagine the pain you're in" ("Grave" 6022). To be fair, Jane Espenson, Fury, and Whedon did give something closer to that kind of response on other occasions (Tabron 17). This controversy demonstrates how difficult it is to express this kind of empathy and unconditional love in the real world with any kind of consistency.

### The Overall Impact of the Opening Title Sequences

**Xander:** Yep. Vampires are real. A lot of them live in Sunnydale. Willow will fill you in.

**Willow:** I know it's hard to accept at first.

**Oz:** Actually, it explains a *lot*.

—"Surprise" (2013)

[78] Much can be deduced about the changing understanding of the audience, the series, and the narrative by its authors through closely investigating the evolution of the opening title sequence of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[79] The wacky title of the series itself forces audiences to actively choose to watch it. The logo evolved along with the series. During the first two seasons, the font for Buffy's name suggests that her very identity has been written for her. It expresses her battle for autonomy. During the final five seasons, the logo changes to emphasize a new theme: finding a balance between public and personal identities. Buffy's name includes visual references to the stakes that define her social role. The letters of her name, however, visually separate her enemy from her duty. Personal identity rewrites her social role, even as the public constructs the private.

[80] The credits for the performers express the series' understanding of identity. The words themselves are dynamic and in flux, suggesting that people contain multitudes. At times, the credits for Head, Benson, Dushku, and Hannigan inextricably link these performers to their roles. This technique prepares the audience to understand identity not as a natural essence, and thus permanent, but rather as a performance. A person is a complex role performed with great difficulty in this series.

[81] These sequences present an unusually direct form of communication between

the authors of the series and their audience. They present a series of promises to the viewers about the experience to come. The creators promise stories that feature action, monsters, and romance to viewers using a media-literate and artistically innovative approach for viewers with an affinity to the kind of youth culture excluded from *Dawson's Creek*. The tone set by the theme music obscures its literate word play.

[82] Each season's opening title sequence functions differently. The first two seasons' montage helps viewers adjust to the genre of the series by establishing the iconography of fantasy horror. Later seasons cut these shots to devote more time to establishing increasingly complex characters. The first season's opening rewarded attentive viewing through extensive use of foreshadowing. The opening sequence draws on the entire season for its imagery, including references to important moments to come. As the season continues, its montage moves from predictive to descriptive. The opening title sequence from the second season changes few shots from the first. It emphasizes a shared history to deepen an already existing commitment on the part of the viewer. In the third season's opening, the creators tease out the complexity of that shared history. A number of images lend themselves to multiple readings, depending on the extent of one's knowledge of the narrative. While the opening title sequence of the first season presents images that are only gradually revealed as foreshadowing, the third season's credits foster anticipation by featuring an actor whose character is supposedly dead. The fourth and fifth seasons' opening title sequences emphasize the radical changes made in the series, from new enemies to the addition of Dawn. The rapid pace and layering of the images required great attention, and often a pause button, to unpack its meanings. The difficulties the series had in promoting Willow and Tara's relationship suggested the difficulty in getting it on the air at all. The focus on the characters' battle scars in the opening title sequences for the sixth and seventh seasons decreases the amount of time devoted to the setting and the narrative history of the series. In the third season, such references revealed a hard-earned understanding of the series' meanings. By the end, such a knowledge base is understood.

[83] Finally, "Superstar" (4017), "Once More, with Feeling" (6007), and "Seeing Red" (6019) demonstrate explicitly that the series creators always used the opening title sequences for their expressive effect. When Jonathan's magic spell allows him to alter the opening montage in "Superstar," Whedon acknowledges explicitly his implicit presence in the narrative as narrator of the series. The opening title sequences are not exterior to the narrative world. With "Once More, with Feeling," the creators take advantage of the way that running the actor's name over shots of the characters intentionally blurs the line between role and performer. That suggests that Gellar, Brennan, and Marsters are their characters, on some level. Shattering that illusion enhances the effect of episodes like "Once More, with Feeling." The fact that the cast members are mostly not professional singers is part of its drama in an initial viewing. One important pleasure is watching the creative team successfully solve a seemingly intractable problem, just like their characters do. With "Seeing Red," the creators include Benson's Tara in the character studies for that episode to maximize the impact of her character's murder and the bittersweet pleasures of the melodrama in its aftermath. It is here that the series overtly recognizes the cultural impact of promoting certain characters and not others in the opening title sequence.

[84] The opening title sequences of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* function as a microcosm of the series itself. They reveal the influence of the creators' perception of their audience and their own work, the medium's narrative and artistic conventions, and the media industry's own practices. They construct the series' past, shape the viewer's present experience of the episode, and prepare the way for future narratives.

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[1] The opening title sequence, while brief, does include the following credit "A Mercury Production/By Orson Welles". *Citizen Kane* typically gets credit for starting this trend in Hollywood. ("Title Sequence", "Citizen Kane (1941)")

[2] The web site for Margo Chase shows the design for the distinctive logo of the series from the third season onwards. It was not known at the time of this writing whether they designed the logo used in the opening title sequence during the first two seasons.

[3] While the brand on the packaging, the DVD menus, and the physical disks themselves of the first two seasons contain the logo of later in the series, the episodes themselves are different.

[4] According to the band's web site, Whedon had been dissatisfied with the theme created by the network's theme music writer. One member of the cast had been playing the band's debut album on the set. Whedon asked the band to write a theme song. (Nerf Herder

Facts)

[5] There is no question mark on screen. Put that text together with the title and you get a sequence that reads "who died... Buffy... the vampire... slayer".

[6] This insight came about as a result of my discussions with a former student, Tricia Beland.

[7] c.f. Stevenson, pages 65-68, on the existence of a Christian god in the Buffyverse.

[8] Those readers interested in a list of each shot in a season's opening title sequence should turn to "The Dragon's Slayer Lair (Main Page)" at <<http://home.carolina.rr.com/smaug69/>> . While there are a few errors in its attribution of shots to particular episodes, it's an invaluable base of operations for those similarly interested in these details.

[9] Likely, this convention has something to do with differences in the medium. Television's audiences, due to the remote control and the resultant channel surfing, do not necessarily know the name of the series that they are watching when the opening credits begin. Film audiences know what movie they will see once they step in the theater, having had to request a particular title to get a ticket.

[10] I suppose they must be thinking of Quentin Travers or Gwendolyn Post here, as such a description does not fit Wesley or any of the others on the Watcher's Council seen in season five.

[11] It seems to be only used by his lovers. Olivia also calls him Rupert. By the time Willow uses his first name in "Restless" (4022), it's acquired a history that demands re-reading the line. As it is his dream, it is not Willow who calls him by his first name, even though Hannigan delivers the line. It is his perception of Willow that does so. Perhaps it suggests that Giles has noticed how Willow emulates Jenny Calendar after her death, whether it is in fashion, paganism, or unconventional sexuality (Wilcox and Lavery, 71).

[12] Sutherland's credit does not significantly function to highlight the character as a performance. Early in the series, Joyce repeatedly references being guided by parenting tapes and books in her dealings with Buffy. Such direction implies a life of performance. By the time the series explicitly labels it as such, it's irrelevant. Joyce no longer consults self-help products to understand her daughter in season five.

[13] For characters like Armin Schirmerman's Principal Snyder or characters returning for a single episode, like Seth Green's Oz, it's simply a record of industry influence.

[14] Much thanks to my former student, Allie Goolrick, for her notion of little-girl Willow.

[15] Providing a definitive reading of this shot sort of defeats its purpose as a catalyst for further discussion. Doing so would also require an extended analysis of the issue, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Interested readers are encouraged to examine: "Anne," "Doublemeat Palace" (6012), Xander's employment history, the representation of The Magic Box, Anya's capitalist understanding of why super-villainy is wrong, Wolfram and Hart in the spin-off series *Angel*, and the critique of the series' own products through The Trio in the sixth season. For those interested on doing further reading on this issue, consult Wilcox, South (2001), and Wall and Zryd.

[16] The teaser is the short scene prior to the opening title sequence and the first commercial break.

[17] The sense of predestination is further loosened by the fact that a significant number of shots in the opening title sequences reference particular scenes but are not the actual shots used. In fact, that's true of every season's opening title sequence.

[18] Yes, the series represents Giles and Xander as being attractive, even sexy. But both of them are seen in medium close shots in neutral locations. The opening sequence

encourages a more erotic view of Angel.

[19] The fifth season's opening title sequence will generate a similar anticipation for those fans that remembered "Passion" (2017) exceptionally well. Finally, they will get to witness what Willow observed every Christmas season: Xander's imitation of the Snoopy Dance.

[20] In fact, given the shot's repetition, perhaps the creators return to this shot over and over in part because of the voice-over that accompanied it: "Bottom line is, even if you see 'em coming, you're not ready for the big moments."

[21] Strengthening Spike's past association with this song at this moment in his character's arc establishes just how far he must go before he can become a champion. Consider Rich Cohen's apt observation about contextual meanings of this song: "It's no coincidence that the singers who define 'My Way' (Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Sid Vicious) almost never wrote their own material. All these men were actors, investing someone else's words less with authenticity than with attitude, a pose, a way of dressing, a way of living, a way of dying. 'My Way' is just a script—it comes to life only when inhabited by someone like Frank, the guy who follows you outside, threatens you, or asks his bodyguard, the Crusher, to crack you because you made Frankie feel bad. 'My Way' plugged into Sinatra's boundless sense of self-satisfaction and self-pity" (Cohen 8).

[22] In the episode itself, this shot's homoeroticism is quickly contained by a shot that shows them surrounded by men, with whom they turn to dance.

[23] Just three shots in these two opening title sequences show him in that light.

[24] "Retroactive continuity—commonly contracted to the portmanteau retcon—is the adding of new information to "historical" material, or deliberately changing previously established facts in a work of serial fiction. The change itself is referred to as a "retcon", and the act of writing and publishing a retcon is called "retconning". Retcons are common in comic books, especially those of large publishing houses such as Marvel Comics and DC Comics, because of the lengthy history of many series and the number of independent authors contributing to their development; this is the context in which the term was coined..." ("Retcon").

[25] A fuller discussion of this series' use of the Trio to communicate with its fandom on the politics of their use of its narratives can be found in my unpublished *Slayage* Conference on the Whedonverses conference paper, "'Fake It 'till You Make It': Media Addiction in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*."