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Apocalyptic Apocalypses: The Narrative Eschatology of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



This essay was originally given as a talk at Spectacle, Rhythm, and Eschatology at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia, July 2003.

Let's explore the world of our story, shall we?
Andrew in "Storyteller"

What can't we face if we're together?
What's in this place that we can't weather?
Apocalypse?
We've all been there.
The same old trips
Why should we care?

Buffy in "Once More with Feeling"

Stop! Stop telling stories. Life isn't a story.
Buffy in "Storyteller"

(1) As Frank Kermode shows in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, we "make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17). Our fictions record these investments, and in every ending these fictions offer us glimpses of *our* end and *the* end. We strive, always, to convert "chronos"—mere "'passing time' or 'waiting time'—into "kairos": "*the season*, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (my italics; 47). As I hope to show, that amazing fiction known as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* accomplished in its seven television *seasons* (surely Kermode did not imagine his narratology being applied to television), seasons now come to an end, this apocalyptic conversion with ingenious narratological proficiency.

(2) In the 144 episodes (5760 minutes, 96 hours) of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* now completed text, the word "apocalypse" (or some variant thereof) appears scores of times in no less than twenty six episodes. From its first appearance in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" (1005), in Buffy's classic Buffyspeak concession to Giles (who has just given her permission to go out with broody "Emily Dickens" fan Owen)—"Thank you, thank you, thank you! And look, I won't go far, okay? If the apocalypse comes, beep me"—to the Season Seven "apocalypse"-intensive dialogue of the meta-narratological "Storyteller" (7016), in which we find such wonderful exchanges as this one between would-be storyteller, non-masturbator, went-over-to-the-Dark Side-just-to-pick-up-a-few-things, and "Buffy, the Slayer of the Vampyres" chronicler Andrew and thousand-year-old former vengeance demon Anya:

ANDREW: The world's gonna want to know about Buffy. It's a story of ultimate triumph tainted with the bitterness for what's been lost in the struggle. It's a legacy for future

generations.

ANYA: If there are any. Buffy seems to think that this apocalypse is going to actually be, you know, apocalyptic. I think your—your story seems pretty pointless.

Our sympathy is with Riley Finn in "A New Man" (4012), as we find ourselves "needing to know the plural of "apocalypse." "This is how many apocalypses for us now?" Buffy asks Giles just before the final confrontation with Glory, just before she will, again, die, and he replies "Oh, uh, well . . . six, at least. Feels like a hundred" ("The Gift," 5022).

(3) The end of time, the end of things is not, of course, the only end *Buffy* offers us. As a television narrative, every episode of *Buffy* offers us a variety of "little deaths," mini-apocalypses as well: the distinctly televisual ends, allowing for commercial breaks, that come within the narrative itself; the ending of each episode (my primary concern here); the endings of narrative arcs; the ending of each season. And finally, we have the final narrative eschatology of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* itself. Television series had ended before. From *I Love Lucy* (1951-57) to *The Honeymooners* (1952-1957) to *Mash* (1972-1983) to *Seinfeld* (1990-1998), comedies offered their last laughs, finally sending characters home from a TV Korean War that lasted eleven years, sentencing Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer to prison for not being good Samaritans; and episodic series from *Dallas* (1978-1991) (did J. R. kill himself or not?) to *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) ("Where's Annie?" asks a toothpaste-extruding Agent Cooper as he stares at the face of the supernatural evil parasite BOB in the bathroom mirror) to *The X-Files* (1983-2002) (Mulder and Scully in bed together? The Cigarette Smoking Man dead again?) kinked their narrative skeins and disappointed their viewers for seemingly the last time. But no series ending had ever been so much about ending as the always apocalyptic *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). And by the end of *Buffy's* story, Buffy herself had already announced, in the story itself, the end of story. Why?

(4) I would like to offer a comprehensive examination of endings on *Buffy* (including the end of the final episode) and propose a classification scheme for understanding the narrative apocalypses, large and small, of individual episodes, story arcs, seasons, and the series as a whole. In her introduction to Michael Adams' recently published *Slayer Speak: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon*, *Buffy* writer (and resident linguist) Jane Espenson admits her temptation to cast her remarks "in fluent Buffinese," but "for your sake and my own, I resist" (Adams vii). I, however, have no such will power and have cast my category schemes in Buffyspeak.

BtVS Endings

Cliffhanger. Leaving some major, suspenseful narrative development to be continued at some indeterminate point in the future.

Closure (at the level of action). Resolution of major, multiple plot entanglements.

Closure (at the level of questions). Resolution of major, multiple thematic and or subtextual problems posed by the narrative.

Partial Closure. Resolution (or seeming resolution) of a single story arc at the level of expectations, though not necessarily at the level of questions.

Foreshadow. Suggesting or prefiguring a development before it takes place. See also **Set-Uppy**.

Ironicky. A scene in which humor is caused by a clash between appearance and reality, expectation and actualization.

Metaphory. Exhibiting/enhancing metaphoric narrative skeins.

Not-overly . . . Suggesting that the plot resolution brought about in the individual episode is only temporary; that there could be more to come.

Pay-Offy. Fulfilling/completing a set-uppy ending in an earlier episode.

Set-Uppy. Deliberately establishing a narrative development for major or minor pay-off in a subsequent episode.

Surprisey. Introducing a shocking, though not necessarily suspenseful, plot development.

Tear-Jerkery. Emotionally moving, romantic, cathartic.

(5) Commenting on the pronounced tendency of Buffyspeak to clip verb phrases (turning “wig out” into “wig,” “deal with” into “deal,” for example), Michael Adams has noted “something subtly different” in the psychology of users of such forms (39). In my own slangy categorizations of *Buffy* endings, I hope you, too, will detect fine distinctions: I mean none of these as absolutes, none as incompatible. My invention of new adjective forms is intended to suggest the tentativeness, the hypothetical nature, of my classification scheme.^[1]

(6) Let us begin with an ending contemporary television has made far too common: the cliffhanger. In the wake of the “Who shot JR?” bonanza of 1980, American TV has become so enraptured with the cliffhanger for the final episode of a season that it has now become common even in the sitcom, perhaps the last genre in which we would expect to find it put to use.

(7) Since Joss Whedon has stated his basic antipathy for the cliffhanger on several occasions, it should not surprise us that the basic pattern of a *Buffy* year—established in its first year, in part because Whedon and company were not certain they would be renewed and wanted to finish the story of Buffy’s battle with the Master “well within parameters,” in the twelve episodes available of a partial season—has been to tell the whole story of the Scooby Gang’s battle with and defeat of a new Big Bad. As we will see, in a moment, the cliffhanger nevertheless puts in an appearance.

Set-Uppy

(8) Many, many episodes, as many as thirty, though not quite cliffhanger, could certainly be described as set-uppy—a narratological cousin, deliberately establishing a story development for major or minor pay-off in a subsequent episode. (Though pay-offs themselves, by their very nature, do not generally appear at the close of episodes, *Buffy* does offer at least a couple of examples, as we shall later see, of the pay-off ending.)

(9) The end of the first episode of almost all two-parters, not surprisingly, is set-uppy, complete with a “To be continued” title. The ending of “Welcome to the Hellmouth” (1001), for example, as Luke prepares to bite a prone, encoffined Buffy, or of “What’s My Line,” Part 1 (2009), as Buffy asks of the woman who has attacked her in Angel’s apartment “Who the hell are you?” and receives the surprisey (and very proud) reply “I am Kendra! De Vampire Slayer!” are set-uppy. So, too, is the disconcerting finale of “Surprise” (2013), which sets up the coming of Angelus.

(10) The endings of “Becoming,” Part 1 (2021), as Whistler tells us in voice-over that “No one asks for their life to change, not really. But it does” as Buffy finds Kendra, slashed by Drusilla’s nails, and has a woman cop pull a gun on her; or “Graduation Day,” Part 1 (3021), with a gutted-by-Buffy Faith’s dive off her apartment balcony into a passing truck, or “This Year’s Girl’s” (4015) “five-by-five” Faith-in-Buffy/Buffy-in-Faith ending; or “The Yoko Factor’s” surprisey appearance of Riley Finn in Adam’s lair; or “Bargaining,” Part 1’s (6001) grim return from the grave; or “Two to Go’s” (6021) Giles-to-the-rescue against the seemingly all-powerful Dark Willow—all these endings are set-uppy. Sometimes, we might add, even the second part of a two-partner can be set-uppy, as we see in “What’s My Line,” Part 2 (2010), with Drusilla carrying a seriously injured Spike out of a burning church.

(11) In non-official two-parters, the set-uppy keeps us hangy as well. Consider the end of “I Was Made to Love You” (5015), in which Buffy talks to her “flower-getting lady” mother, which sets-up “The Body” (5016). “Tough Love” (5019) sets up “Spiral” (5020) as Glory realizes, thanks to Tara’s disclosure, who her precious Key is; “Spiral” in turn, leaves Buffy in the coma state in which she will remain throughout most of “The Weight of the World” (5021); and “The Weight of the World” establishes the ground tone for “The Gift” (5022). Similarly, in Season Six, the death of Tara, felled by Warren’s errant bullet in “Seeing Red” (6019), sets up “Villains” (6020), and “Villains,” with Willow’s flaying of Warren, sets up “Two to Go” (6021). At the end of Season Seven the showdown between Buffy and Caleb (with an assist from a crossover Angel) that ends “End of Days” (7021) sets-up the series finale, “Chosen” (7022).

(12) The versatile set-uppy can establish transitions for crossover episodes as well. The end of

"Pangs" (4008), for example, in which Xander spills the beans about Angel's Thanksgiving visit, is set-uppy of "I Will Remember You" on *Angel*; "Who Are You?" (4016) prepares the way for *AtS*'s "Sanctuary" as we watch a clearly lost Faith riding the rails.

(13) The set-uppy can be used as well to introduce us to a new character. "The 'I' in Team" (4013), for example, gives us a living, breathing, lethal Adam; In "Buffy vs. Dracula" (5001) we get our first glimpse of Dawn ("Mom!"); and in "Never Leave Me" (7009) we meet the *ü*bervamp.

(14) The set-uppy proliferates in other, more stand-alone episodes as well. In "Faith, Hope & Trick's" (3003) return of Angel from Hell; in "Band Candy's" (3006) reminder (paid off in "Earshot" (3018) twelve episodes later) that Giles and Joyce have had sex and are embarrassed by it; in "Hush's" (4010) establishment of a new stage in Buffy and Riley's relationship now that their secret identities are out.

(15) And on at least one occasion, in "Lessons" (7001), what is set-up is an entire season as The First morphs from Warren, to Glory, to Adam, to The Mayor, to Drusilla, to The Master, and then to Buffy, lecturing a cowering Spike on the nature of power.

Cliffhangery

(16) As I suggested earlier, the set-uppy sometimes comes to seem more like the classic cliffhangery. The end of "Becoming," Part 2 (2022), the finale of *Buffy's* second season, could justifiably be termed cliffhangery, though admittedly not suspenseful, as Buffy, destination unknown, leaves Sunnydale. "Grave" (6022), a season-ender as well, is even more cliffhangery, not to mention surprisey, as Spike's soul is returned. Certainly "Sleeper's" (7008) climax, with a Bringer's ax about to decapitate Giles, is cliffhangery—so much so that fan speculation that Giles was dead and possessed by The First would run rampant. The dream-vision that closes "Get It Done" (7015) is cliff-hangery, offering as it does, with its *Lord of the Rings*ish cgi of thousands of *ü*bervamps, a glimpse of the reality of the final battle in "Chosen" (7022). And could the end of "Touched" (7020) be any more cliff-hangery clichéd with its ticking time bomb finale?

Pay-offy

(17) On at least two occasions the endings of episodes are pay-offy, fulfilling/completing a set-uppy ending in an earlier episode. In "Enemies" (3017), with its repeated Angel/Buffy exchange ("You still my girl?" "Always."), we are paid off (in a tear-jerkery way) for the same lines in "Beauty and the Beasts" (3004). And when Buffy chastises Giles—"Sure. We can work out after school. You know, if you're not too busy having sex with my MOTHER!"—"Earshot" (3018) pays off, in an ending that could be classified as ironicky as well, "Band Candy" (3006).

Foreshadowy

(18) The endings of no less than eighteen episodes might be deemed foreshadowy. A close cousin of the set-uppy, the foreshadowy suggests or prefigures, in less palpable or overt ways, a development before it takes place. "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" (1005) ends on a foreshadowy note as the Master quotes scripture about The Anointed One leading the Slayer into Hell and greets his new disciple, as does the lame "Bad Eggs" (2012) with Angel and Buffy making with the smoochies. "Passion's" (2017) close is foreshadowy, ending as it does with Jenny Calendar's computer disc (containing the spell to restore Angel's soul) falling between a desk and a filing cabinet. So, too, is "I Only Have Eyes for You" (2019), foreshadowing Spike's return to the game and the end of his "Sit and Spin" status. Faith's journey to the Dark Side is foreshadowed by her indifference to the murder of Allen Finch at the end of both "Revelations" (3007) and "Bad Girls" (3014). In "Choices" (3019), the Mayor's harsh words in the library, even considering the source—the "big, stupid, evil guy" who runs Sunnydale—nevertheless foreshadow Buffy and Angel's breakup. The existence of The Initiative is foreshadowed in "The Freshman" (4001) as mysterious commandos capture a Sunday minion, and the existence of something secret within The Initiative is hinted at in the end of "A New Man" (4012) as Maggie Walsh enters the very "314" Ethan Rayne had spoken of earlier in the episode. And the mysterious final shot of the extraordinary "Restless" (4022)—Buffy looking into her bedroom with Tara's dream voiceover repetition of "You think you know . . . what's to come . . . what you are. You haven't even begun"—also the final

shot of Season Four, foreshadowed we knew not what. Now, three seasons later, and the series over, we can see now what was foreseen there: Seasons Five, Six, and Seven, nothing less than, nothing more than the rest of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

(19) "The Real Me" ends with a foreshadowing of revelations to come concerning an enigmatic brand new sister and invites us to be ready before Dawn. The end of "Out of My Mind" (5004) is likewise foreshadowy, hinting at Spuffy sex that will not be consummated for another year. And at the end of "Bargaining," Part 2 (6002) we see Buffy's Season Six post-extraction-from-heaven turmoil foreshadowed in her face.

Not-Overy

(20) Another half dozen endings might be designated as not-overy, suggesting as they do that the seeming plot resolution brought about in an individual episode is only temporary—that there could be more to come. The ending of "The Witch" (1003), for example, is not-overy in its suggestion that we may not have seen the last of Amy's mother, now trapped inside a cheerleading trophy in a display case at SHS. The ending of "Teacher's Pet" (1004) is likewise not-overy, showing us another She-Mantis egg hatching; as is the suggestion at the close of "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1011) that Marcie may have found her true calling in "assassination and infiltration." In "Halloween" (2006) a note from Ethan Rayne intended for the eyes of Giles ("Be seeing you") shouts not-overy. "Go Fish," too, hints of things to come as we watch three monsters swim out to sea. The not-overy will not appear again till Season Four, in the for-laugh ending of "Living Conditions" (4002) in which Buffy's obsession with demon roommate Kathy's irritating habits seems about to be transferred to Willow. Only one of these not-overies is actually paid-off—Ethan Rayne will indeed be back in "Band Candy" (3006) and "A New Man" (4012). Is it merely coincidence that, with the exception of "Halloween" and perhaps "Living Conditions," the not-overy episodes are *Buffy* bottom feeders? Ever since Brian DePalma's *Carrie* (1976), after all, the not-overy has become an anything but surprisey cliché.

Ironicky

(21) Given the centrality of tongue-in-cheek, mordant, and sardonic humor to the series as a whole, many *Buffy* endings—perhaps forty—can be characterized as ironicky, as finishing with humor caused by a clash between appearance and reality, expectation and actualization.

(22) When, at the end of "The Harvest" (1002), Giles concludes, based on the ironic banter of his new charges, that "the earth is doomed"—a scene evoked 142 episodes later in the series finale—we are experiencing the ironicky. When in "I Robot, You Jane" (1008), the Scoobies grasp for the first time that (in Buffy's words) "none of us are ever gonna have a happy, normal relationship"; or in "The Puppet Show" (1009) we are offered a doubly ironicky finale (a confused Principal Snyder wondering if the aftermath of the battle with the demon Marc—Willow holding a hatchet, Buffy carrying the ventriloquist dummy Sid—is "avant-garde" and, as an epilogue, the hilariously awful performance of *Oedipus* by the Scooby Gang in the talent show), or in "Nightmares" (1010) Willow answers Xander's "I'm sick, I need help" with "Don't I know it"; or "Prophecy Girl" (1012) comes down from the final battle with The Master with talk of partying and formalwear; or "When She Was Bad" (2001) gives the last words—"I hate that girl"—to "The Annoying One," we are doing the ironicky. When the close of "School Hard" (2003)—in which Spike kills The Master's protégé and then tells Drusilla "Let's see what's on TV," simultaneously endearing Spike to us and reminding us of the true primal scene of the narrative in which we are immersed—are we not at the ironicky's epicenter?

(23) The exchange between Buffy and Giles which ends "Lie to Me" (2007)—

Giles: The good guys are always stalwart and true, the bad guys are easily distinguished by their pointy horns or black hats, and, uh, we always defeat them and save the day. No one ever dies, and everybody lives happily ever after.

Buffy: Liar.

--is wonderfully ironicky, as is Giles' "Bay City Rollers" admission in "The Dark Age's" (2008) final moment, and the Gang's gross-out (at seeing Giles and Jenny Calendar kissing) at the end of "Ted"

(2011). The ironicky is used to encourage us to continue to fall for “werewolf in love” Oz in “Phases” (2015), to feel Cordelia’s pain in sticking up for Xander in “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered” (2016), to glimpse Joyce’s soon-to-be-altered cluelessness to her daughter’s secret calling in “Killed by Death” (2018)—her response to a picture, done by one of the children Buffy saved in the hospital, of Der Kindestod lying with its neck ripped open and blood pouring out is “How . . . nice.”

(24) In “Dead Man’s Party” (3002) the ironicky offers a delightful glimpse of Willow and Buffy’s capable-of-sarcasm ironicky friendship as they hurl mock insults (“quitter,” “whiner,” “bailer,” “harpy,” “delinquent,” “tramp,” “witch”) at each other. In “Homecoming” (3005) Cordelia and Buffy finally agree on something—they’ve been gypped out of a title. In “Lovers Walk” (3008), Spike is a very punk, very ironicky, vampire-in-love, doing it his way, covering Oldman/covering Sid Vicious/covering the Chairman of the Board. After the supreme darkness of “The Wish” (3009), we are returned to the Sunnydale we know and love as Cordelia continues to make wishes Anyanka—now forever Anya—cannot fulfill, and Buffy, Willow, and Xander, each killed only moments before in an alternate universe, chat amiably. In “Helpless” (3012) we are reminded of Xander’s *schleimelness* as he attempts to demonstrate his strength before a still powerless Buffy and cannot even open a stubborn jar. In “The Zeppo” (3013), however, we grasp his indispensableness as the man who saved Sunnydale High irritates a caustic Cordelia with an enigmatic, knowing smile. At the end of “Gingerbread” (3011) Buffy and Willow contemplate getting the rat Amy “one of those wheel thingies.” “Doppelgängland” ends as Willow appreciates her new, post-Vamp Willow status, with Percy now her slave (ready to report on both Roosevelts). At the end of “Graduation Day,” Part 2 (3022), Oz’s coolness brings an entire season, and high school itself, to an end. In the delightful end of “Fear Itself” (4004) the Scooby Gang realizes its stupidity as Giles notices the “actual size” inscription in Gaelic under the illustration of Gachnar, the miniscule Fear Demon. In “Doomed” (4011), a chip-neutered Spike can’t wait to make use of his newly rediscovered power to kill demons.

I say we go out there and kick a little demon ass! . . . Come on! Vampires! Grrr! Nasty! Let’s annihilate them. For justice - and for - the safety of puppies - and Christmas, right? Let’s fight that evil! - Let’s kill something! Oh, come on!”

All are ironicky endings.

(25) The dark, apocalyptic irony of the final scene of “Dirty Girls” (7018) final scene, with Caleb’s voice-over, spoken to The First, accompanying a montage of Buffy’s despair after a disastrous first encounter with the sinister, seemingly all-powerful preacher, offers us a final, very, very dark *BtVS* ironicky ending—an ending, recursively, about endings:

Now, it's a simple story. Stop me if you've heard it. I have found and truly believe that there is nothing so bad it cannot be made better with a story. And this one's got a happy ending. There once was a woman, and she was foul, like all women, for Adam's rib was dirty—just like Adam himself—for what was he, but human. But this woman, she was filled with darkness, despair, and why? Because she did not know. She could not see. She didn't know the good news, the glory that was coming. That'd be you. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. You show up, they'll get in line. Cause they followed her. And all they have to do is take one more step, and I'll kill them all. See? I told you it had a happy ending.

Surprisey

(26) Closely related to the previously discussed set-uppy is a type of ending, occurring on at least eight occasions, we might call surprisey, in which the close of an episode introduces a shocking, though not necessarily suspenseful, plot development.

(27) The close of “Consequences” (3015) is certainly surprisey, as Faith, fresh from killing his henchman Mr. Trick, offers her services to the Mayor. We witness the surprisey in play as well at the end of “Crush” (5014) as a crushed Spike poignantly realizes his entrance privileges at 1630 Revello

Drive have been cancelled. And, of course, we are deeply surprised at the end of "Smashed" (6009) as Slayer/vampire sex brings down the house. Riley's revelation to Xander—that he knows Buffy does not love him—at the end of "The Replacement" (5003), Quentin Travers' blockbuster news—that Glory is a god—in "Checkpoint" (5012) are clearly surprisey, and "After Life's" (6003) conversation between Buffy and Spike outside The Magic Box, in which Buffy reveals that her friends have rescued her from heaven, not a hell dimension, couldn't be more so. And the final scene of "Normal Again" (6017) was so surprisey it caused many to wonder (wrongly as it turned out) if Buffy the Schizophrenic was not merely the result of a demon's poison—if Whedon and company were about to subvert the origin myth and foundation of the entire series.

Tear-Jerkery

(28) One need not be a Shipper to experience the great appeal of *Buffy's* over two dozen tear-jerkery finales (the estimate is admittedly conservative). These emotionally moving, romantic, cathartic endings are absolutely essential to the series' tremendous emotional appeal.

(29) Think of "Beauty & the Beasts" (3004) reconciliation scene—"You still my girl?" "Always."—between Buffy and the just-returned-from-Hell-via-a-Claddagh ring-Angel. That's tearjerkery, as are the reunion of Buffy and her mother at the end of "Anne" (3001), the hanky-demanding, wordless close of "Amends" (3010) and the equally satisfying close of "The Prom" (3020). "New Moon Rising" (4019) offers us perhaps the first tearjerkery, "extra-flamey," lesbian moment in television history as Willow turns to Tara in order to be with the one she loves after Oz's exit. The poignancy of "Goodbye Iowa's" (4014) goodbye—Riley holding on for dear life to a piece of Buffy—is tearjerkery for all but the most fierce Riley-haters. And endings don't come much more tear-jerkery than the close of the rich and suggestive "Fool for Love" (5007) in which Spike, who has come to kill Buffy with a shotgun, instead joins her on the back porch of the Summers home, comforting her, tentatively patting her shoulder, as she deals with her mother's unsettling health news. Although most people remember "Into the Woods" (5010) as ending with Riley's tear-jerkery departure in a helicopter, the episode offers us as well Xander movingly professing his man-making love to Anya.

(30) Spikeaholics were certain to be moved by the ending of "Intervention" (5018) when Buffy comes to Spike's crypt to find out how much he told Glory about the real identity of The Key. And it goes without saying that an episode like "Dead Things" (6013)—"Empty Places" (7019) would be another example"—ending on a crying Buffy (as she confesses her affair with Spike to Tara) would be counted among the tear-jerkery.

(31) "Entropy" (6018) provides the best Willow/Tara tear-jerkery since "New Moon Rising" (4019). Tara's "Can you just be kissing me now?" is all the more poignant in retrospect since she will be dead by the end of the subsequent episode. And "Showtime" (7011) opens the tear ducts by having Buffy rescue Spike from the First Evil's lair. In Season Seven's "Potential" (7012), Xander again gets to have a tear-jerkery ending as he realizes in his dialogue with Dawn that he is not just the guy who repairs the windows, but the one who sees and knows, powers perhaps worthy of a cape.

Metaphory

(32) Some **tear-jerkery** endings might also be deemed metaphory, offering as they do some kind of (usually visual, sometimes verbal) metaphor or trope, which exhibits and/or enhances new or in-progress metaphoric narrative skeins. Needless to say, no series in television history has been more consciously metaphoric than *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, so it should not surprise us that its endings are sometimes metaphory. Allow me to isolate only four.

(33) The ending of "Angel" (1007), with Buffy's crucifix searing its mark into Angel's flesh after an embrace, is certainly metaphory, as is the touching denouement of "Innocence" (2014), in which, after Buffy has defeated The Judge with a rocket launcher and been unable to kill Angelus in their first battle, she and her mother celebrate her birthday and watch an old movie together. And we find the metaphory, of course, in the gravity-defying final scene of "Family" (5006), Willow and Tara dancing in the air, and in the memorable last shot of "The Body" (5016) as Dawn reaches out toward her mother's cold corpse but does not connect . . .

Closurey

(34) Before we consider closurey *Buffy* endings, first allow me to offer a caution. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbott defines closure as a narrative which "ends in such a way as to satisfy the expectations and answer the questions that it has raised." "Expectations" and "answers," Abbott warns, must not be confused. We expect Lear to die by the end of the play—an ending assumed as soon as we recognize the play as tragedy, and we are not disappointed. "But," Abbott notes, "major questions are raised over the course of the play that for many viewers are not answered by the conclusion" (188). Hence, *King Lear* offers closure at the level of expectation but does not offer us closure at the level of questions.

Partial Closurey

(35) The endings of numerous *Buffy* episodes might be thought of as partial-closurey in intent, as resolving (or seemingly resolving) a single story arc at the level of expectation, though not necessarily at the level of questions. With one exception, each season-ending episode offers partial closurey by putting an end to that year's Big Bad (The Master, Angelus, The Mayor, Adam, Glory, Dark Willow, The First Evil). The exception is, of course, "Primeval" (4021) which closes down—"Burn it down, and salt the Earth"—not only The Initiative but The Initiative story arc of Season Four in the penultimate episode. Other episodes offering partial closurey include "Wild at Heart" (4006), which seems to say goodbye to Oz and to the Oz/Willow relationship, "As You Were" (6015), which puts an end to Buffy and Spike's sexual relationship, and "Lies My Parents Told Me" (7017), which shuts the door (literally) on seven years of mentoring The Slayer by Giles.

Closurey (at the level of expectation)

(36) Only two episodes can justifiably be called closurey (at the level of expectation), resolving major, multiple plot entanglements. The first, of course, is "The Gift" (5022), putting an end simultaneously to Buffy herself, Season Five, and *BtVS*'s tenure on the WB. And the other, of course, is "Chosen" (7022), closurey (at the level of expectations) of the war with The First, of Buffy's vocation as "the one girl in all the world," of Sunnydale, California, and of seven years of narrative.

Closurey (at the level of questions)

(37) No single episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be characterized as closurey (at the level of questions). Indeed, not surprisingly, the final line of the show, spoken by Dawn, is in fact a question.

Conclusion

(38) In *The Sense of an Ending* Kermode observes that there are really only two sorts of fictions: those "which seal off the long perspectives" and those which "move through time to an end, an end," Kermode explains, that "we must sense, even if we cannot know it." Now the "sense" with which we come to experience such ends, as Kermode makes clear, is nothing else but the generation of fictions. The fate of the former is to end up, "When the drug wears off," in "the dump with the other empty bottles" (170).

(39) Most fictions, including, of course, most television programs, are, regrettably, frequently just such empty bottles. But those fictions which continue to interest us, which through their very subject matter and form give to us a "sense of an ending" and facilitate our imaginative deconstruction and construction of our world, include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a fiction which will "continue to interest us" because it "move[d] through time to an end, an end which we must sense even if we cannot know it."

(40) "Stop. Stop telling stories," Buffy screams at Andrew at the end of "Storyteller," as part of her scheme to elicit his tears, which are needed to close the seal of Danzalthar. "Life isn't a story." Andrew seems to take her admonition to heart, for at the end of "Storyteller" he abruptly turns off his video camera, pointing his remote at the camera and at us.

(41) Now "Life isn't a story" would be a startling, self-referential assertion in any serial narrative, but coming as it does in a series created by an "angry atheist" who nevertheless espouses his continued belief in "a religion in narrative" (see Lavery), it seems especially problematic.[2]

(42) As Rhonda Wilcox argued in her talk at "Staking a Claim" the question that ends the series —Dawn's "Yeah, Buffy. What are we gonna do now."—"means that we get to answer the question." Offering no closure at the level of questions, forever "[b]oth complete and incomplete," the text of *Buffy* "invokes the imagination of the reader . . . to finish the story in their own fashions, . . . to write, and live, our own stories." For life isn't stories, though it cannot be lived without them.

(43) Is it possible to imagine a happier ending? Contemplating the end of *Buffy* in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* back in May, Carl Wilson would observe that "Once *Buffy* was invented, it couldn't be unsaid. The endlessly generative Buffyverse lives in our heads, a high-kicking new voice in the chorus of imaginative possibility. . . ." Willow's spell in "Chosen" universalizes Buffy's power. Joss Whedon's spell, 1997-2003, transferred *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* narrative power to us all.

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Notes

[1] I have considered only the very end of episodes in this initial investigation. Future examinations of *Buffy* endings will need to take into account not only the final final moments of episodes but the entire final act.

[2] We should note that the realization that "Life isn't a story" put in an appearance over a year earlier, in "Once More with Feeling" (6007), in the slightly different metaphor of the song Spike sings to Buffy after he stops her spontaneously combusting dance. "Life's not a song," Whedon's lyrics insist,

Life isn't bliss
Life is just this
It's living
You'll get along
The pain that you feel
You only can heal
By living
You have to go on living
So one of us is living.