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Enlightenment Rhetoric in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: The Ideological Implications of Worldviews in the Buffyverse



What the epic poem did for ancient cultures, the romance for feudalism, and the novel for bourgeois society, the media—and especially television—now do for the commodified, bureaucratized world that is our present environment.
Robert Scholes, "On Reading a Video Text"

[1] In addition to providing viewers entertainment and pleasure, which no doubt a text like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* does, another significant function of television, a function that has historically been fulfilled by literature and the arts, is cultural reinforcement. In this sense, cultural reinforcement consists of the complex processes whereby viewers are "confirmed in their ideological positions" (Scholes 550) as part of a larger, cultural collective. This process occurs when viewers rely on their cultural knowledge in order to construct a story from the narrative elements provided in the text (Scholes 551). As Scholes notes in the passage above, television shows act as various genres of literature have for centuries, as a medium by which cultural values get passed on, contested, and even recreated through various narrative structures. And to be pleased by such texts is also to be pleased by, and at least on some level to acquiesce to, the ideologies embedded within such narrative structures.

[2] An important observation about this process of cultural and ideological reinforcement is that it is decidedly rhetorical. That is, the means by which we are not only persuaded by, but also make meaning of visual texts include a variety of rhetorical strategies and appeals. Infinitely rhetorical, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* operates as a complex, ideologically-infused text. For purposes elaborated below, this reading performs a rhetorical analysis of the dialectic interplay of Enlightenment rhetoric and postmodernism in *BtVS*. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate what rhetorical analysis—as a theoretical framework—can contribute to *Buffy* studies.

[3] Of much interest to rhetorical theory and scholarship—an area of study that has yet to be significantly explored in *BtVS* scholarship—is *Buffy's* impact on the American public and its favored position in popular culture. If one of the purposes of rhetoric is to unveil and reveal the operations of ideology, as rhetorician Kenneth Burke suggests, continued study of such ideologically pleasing and popular texts as *Buffy* is a necessary part of this work. Because the show is so ideologically powerful, it is important to critique how and why we "surrender" to such texts (553), as Robert Scholes reminds us. Why exactly then, one might ask, is *Buffy* so pleasing to its audience? Certainly one reason for *Buffy's* popularity is its perception as a postmodern text.

[4] As Rhonda V. Wilcox and others have noted, the various vampires, demons, and other evils on the show stand in metaphorically for the real life horrors of teen years, that liminal stage between childhood and adulthood. When viewers read the text, they are able to make meaning of the program on multiple levels. It is at once a fantasy program, a *mélange* of cultural signifiers, and a social critique. By interpreting the multiple readings of the text—getting that the demon Mayor is a critique of

governmental authority and that Buffy's comment to Giles, "I cannot believe that you, of all people, are trying to Scully me," is an inter-textual reference to the popular television series *X-Files* ("The Pack" 1006)—viewers recognize not only the cultural tropes being employed (good vs. evil, faith vs. science), but also the postmodern spin that garbs them. As a result, viewers are confirmed in their ideological positions in postmodern America. The fact that this process also occurs aesthetically certainly enhances the pleasure of this ideological confirmation for many readers—even if it occurs on an unconscious level. Such postmodern play is one reason *Buffy* is appreciated by academics and others alike.

[5] Elements of cultural critique within such postmodern moments, both explicit and implied, are additional reasons for the popularity of *BtVS*. For example, the heroine's feminist qualities, emerging elements of Marxist critique inscribed in the text, and its denouncement of authority figures are read as transgressive moves within the text that comment on and challenge modernity's emphasis on such grand narratives as autonomous subjecthood, capitalism, and objective truth. Much *BtVS* scholarly discussion has focused on such moments. Less scholarly attention, however, has focused on how these celebrations of postmodernist resistance in the text are complicated by considerably substantial modernist undercurrents—in particular, common sense rhetorics of the Enlightenment. Consequently, I argue, these rhetorics construct a text that embodies as well as challenges modernity, shaping a discourse that is not quite as subversive as we might initially think.

[6] Beneath its postmodern veneer, a fundamental core of the Buffyverse relies on Enlightenment ideals. Yes, there are transgressive and subversive postmodern moments in the text, but what happens when we look at the show across seasons? An analysis of the overarching philosophies represented in the series as a whole reveals inconsistencies in the singularly subversive message we perceive as viewers. In other words, as Patricia Pender notes in "I'm Buffy and You're...History," in examining the politics of *BtVS*, we are better positioned to appreciate the textual complexity of the program once we recognize and acknowledge its postmodern ambivalence (35). In this case, *BtVS* can be read as a text that relies on Enlightenment ideals concerning knowledge and nature as often as it subverts them, inscribing an inherently modernist worldview within a decidedly postmodern text. Before moving to this analysis, however, an overview of Enlightenment thought might be useful.

[7] The age of the Enlightenment, as we know, brought about an unparalleled emphasis on science and knowledge. In direct criticism of religious dogma concerning the law of God and the nature of man, scientists and philosophers speculated on where knowledge comes from and how we as human beings make use of it. Perhaps best demonstrated by Renee Descartes' often quoted line, "I think, therefore I am," rationalism became a standard for scientific inquiry. Such investigations led to the rise of the scientific paradigm in the search for objective truth and *a priori* knowledge.

[8] Postmodernism, on the other hand, often refers to a number of related movements that directly critique this modernist perspective. Characteristics of postmodernism include the stance that objective knowledge does not exist, thus calling into question the presumed objectivity of rationalism; that we come to know much through experience, rejecting the notion of *a priori* ideals and universal laws as upheld by many Enlightenment philosophers; that meaning is varied and context-dependent, thereby suggesting that previously assumed eternal truths are uncertain. In light of these postmodern perspectives, terms like *reason* and *civilization* have come to be read as cultural "god terms," words that function as "rhetorical absolutes" that are afforded "the greatest blessing in a culture" with "the capacity to demand sacrifice" in the 20th and even into the 21st century (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 172). That is, they function rhetorically as cultural myths in our society. As a result, one aspect of postmodern critiques of Enlightenment thought and modernity focus on how some Enlightenment ideals have evolved into a cultural common sense that operates hegemonically.

[9] In this paper, I suggest that such ideologies operate rhetorically, in dialect with the postmodern, through such cultural texts as *BtVS*. Rhetorical analysis is consequently necessary because, as Scholes suggests, to perform ideological criticism on popular culture texts is to take them seriously as cultural artifacts (553)—with all that such seriousness implies: acknowledging the role of cultural texts in furthering, critiquing, and reshaping cultural values. To illustrate how such a rhetorical reading might work, I analyze Enlightenment rhetorics of common sense in *BtVS*. In particular, I turn to two extended examples in which *BtVS*'s postmodern resistance to modernist discourse is read in light of the

text's simultaneous employment of Enlightenment doctrines concerning knowledge and nature. While there are many isolated examples to choose from, one of the most sustained in the series and heavily analyzed in *Buffy* scholarship is the season four arc concerning Adam and The Initiative. I turn to this example first.

[10] At the beginning of season four, Buffy and Willow start classes at UC Sunnydale while Xander opts out of the college track to become a working man. Looking for a normal relationship to off-set her abnormal calling as "the chosen one," Buffy becomes involved with a teaching assistant from her Introduction to Psychology class, Riley Finn. Shortly, however, it is revealed that Riley isn't quite the normal fellow Buffy had in mind: he is part of a secret military operation, The Initiative, which captures hostile subterrestrials (which they call HSTs) and contains them in a lab beneath the campus where government scientists classify the demons and perform experiments on them in their quest for empirical knowledge ("Doomed" 4011). In a plot twist that simultaneously pays tribute to and refashions Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Joss Whedon and the ME writers comment on the monstrosity of scientific rationality.

[11] As we come to find out, Maggie Walsh, Buffy's psychology professor, is one of The Initiative's scientists. Professor Walsh's work with The Initiative culminates in a technological monster, Adam, which she has pieced together with various human, demon, and machine parts. In the second half of the season, Adam awakens and kills his creator, then moves on to attempt to understand and rationally interpret the world ("Goodbye, Iowa" 4014). Rob Breton and Lindsey McMaster note the blatant irony of Adam's character in "Dissing the Age of Moo: Initiatives, Alternatives, and Rationality":

Not unexpectedly, Adam wants to learn about people, categorize them and himself, and learn how things "work." Once he comprehends and classifies, he kills or disregards, not caring one way or the other: the product of laboratory testing and inhumane experimentation, Adam is equally driven by a will to knowledge devoid of conscience. (par 13)

Like Victor Frankenstein's monster, Adam thirsts for the knowledge that created him. Consequently, a common reading of this arc in *BtVS* scholarship interprets the show as commenting on the presumed objectivity of a scientific paradigm that eschews ethics in the name of scientific observation and experimentation. The arc is read as a critique of Enlightenment rhetorics of science and reason, commenting in particular on the cultural trope that science necessarily represents progress. Such a reading is validated by Buffy's consistent undermining of The Initiative throughout the latter half of the season, as well as by the use of magic to defeat Adam and The Initiative in the final resolution of the narrative arc.

[12] Later analyses of *Buffy*, however, complicate such readings. Though Jeffery L. Pasley begins his reading of *Buffy* as a potential Marxist revolutionary text, his analysis reveals that Buffy is, instead, just another liberal reformer superhero—not unlike the Superman of the 1930's—dressed up in postmodern fragmentation. In "Old Familiar Vampires: The Politics of the Buffyverse," he suggests that even though Buffy and her collection of "social bandits" fight against both metaphorical and real institutional corruption such as The Initiative, their struggle never moves beyond individual battles. As Pasley remarks, "the heroes have never developed any strong sense that the larger social order is unjust enough, or unchangeable enough, to overturn" (264). Thus they never change the system or its modernist discourse, but rather choose to do their work from within it.

[13] In a more explicitly resistant reading, "Buffy the Vampire Disciplinarian: Institutional Excess and the New Economy of Power," Martin Buinicki and Anthony Enns also suggest that Buffy's struggle is not revolutionary. In fact, they argue that instead of subverting and critiquing institutional power, Buffy's work as slayer provides an alternative and more efficient power system. In this reading, *BtVS* does not illustrate a liberatory break from modern Enlightenment notions of order and reason. Instead, it reinforces the current modernist system:

a closer look at the show's representation of power relations reveals that the figure of the young woman is merely being employed to signal the fact that modern structures of

discipline and punishment are so thorough and diffuse that they can be embodied in even the most unlikely agents. (par 16)

[14] In this light, Buffy's defeat of Adam and the subsequent demise of The Initiative can be read as a moment where *BtVS*'s postmodern ambivalence is evident. On the one hand, Buffy and her gang defy the kind of Enlightenment rationalism that posits scientific reason as objective and the individual thinker as autonomous. As noted throughout *BtVS* scholarship, a particularly postmodern critique occurs at the end of the season when Buffy uses magic—not science—to join with Xander, Willow, and Giles to create a Super-Buffy in order to defeat Adam. In this second-to-last episode of the season, the Buffyverse undermines a number of Enlightenment beliefs: the joining of identities can be read as a critique of the autonomous subjecthood ideal and the subsequent emphasis on individuality so celebrated during the Enlightenment; the use of magic comments on modernity's unwavering faith in scientific and technological progress; and the defeat of Adam offers a challenge to reason and the will to knowledge. Indeed, the penultimate episode of the season in which this act occurs is titled "Primeval" (4021), certainly a blatant comment on technological advancement and the will to science.

[15] Yet on the other hand, another kind of Enlightenment rationalism is reinforced when Buffy's reason is characterized as innate and therefore superior, a predominant theme of Enlightenment rhetoric. Enlightenment rhetorics of reason and nature are therefore also authorized in the Buffyverse during this narrative arc through the character of the slayer. It is not, then, that the Buffyverse rejects reason and rationality. Rather, it identifies the reason as represented in The Initiative and Adam as irrational. Buffy's reason is presented as both superior and more reliable because it is forged from her nature as the slayer and thus founded on *a priori* knowledge. In short, the reliance by the Buffyverse on Buffy's innate slayer reasoning powers suggests a modernist worldview.

[16] The valuing of her slayer knowledge as superior is evidenced in the Buffyverse when Buffy reprimands The Initiative Colonel after a heated argument between the two, where Buffy is shown to outwit him with regard to both knowledge of Adam as well as a plan of attack for taking the prototype down: "you're all in way over your heads. Messing with primeval forces you have no absolutely no comprehension of. ...I'm the only one who can stop him now" ("Primeval," 4021). In this exchange, the Colonel is called on to accept her innate slayer knowledge as superior to that of The Initiative's. The appeal to slayer logos and ethos in this passage is reminiscent of Cartesian logic in that both rely on an appeal to *a priori* knowledge. Buffy reasons that she will be able to defeat Adam not based on her past experiences with him—experiences where she has actually failed to stop him up until this point—but based on her intuited slayer knowledge, the knowledge that a slayer's power is premised on a universal law of nature. As such, the "modern structures" (Buinicki and Enns par. 16) of Enlightenment thought are not so much rejected in *BtVS* as revealed to be implicated within its postmodern context.

[17] Interestingly, much scholarship that interprets Buffy as a transgressive character cites her refusal to simplistically classify all demons as evil. As Buinicki and Enns remark, "her ability to judge each individual creature according to his/her own personal history repeatedly puts her at odds with the institutions she encounters" (par. 10). In these instances, Buffy does not rely solely on her innate slayer knowledge, but instead relies on experience as a source of knowledge. As such, she is often read as a challenge to the status quo. This distinction is illustrated in her season four conversation with Riley, just after she reveals to him that Willow's previous boyfriend, Oz, is a werewolf:

BUFFY: You sounded like Mr. Initiative. Demons bad, people good.

RILEY: Something wrong with that theorem?

BUFFY: There's different degrees of . . .

RILEY: Evil?

BUFFY: It's just . . . different with different demons. There are creatures--vampires, for example--that aren't evil at all. ("New Moon Rising," 4019)

As this passage demonstrates, on one level for Buffy, we make history and create our own truths as we struggle through life. Therefore, status as a demon does not automatically classify one as evil. It is, rather, a creature's actions that identify it as evil; evil is not always predetermined for Buffy. This belief by Buffy is, certainly, strikingly progressive and postmodern in its social constructionist philosophy.

[18] At the same time, though, the Buffyverse epistemology embraces universal knowledge that is not created through experience, but rather consists of capital "T" truths that exist outside of experience in an *a priori* state, such as Buffy's reliance on her slayer reasoning as discussed above. And it is within these *a priori* truths that Buffyverse characters must navigate as they live out their lives. These truths often concern human potential and acceptable behavior. As such, the Buffyverse affords a worldview steeped in modernist tenets—even during its most postmodern moments. Consequently, the text illustrates how, as Buinicki and Enns note, Buffy can be perceived as progressive at the same time that her character becomes an "unlikely agent" (Buinicki and Enns par. 16) that supports a universal epistemology which naturalizes common sense notions concerning reason and natural ability.

[19] This idealized worldview is privileged throughout the Buffyverse, as demonstrated not only in moments like the above in *BtVS*, but also in *Angel*, the *BtVS* spinoff series. *Angel*'s lecture to Connor, in the fourth season premiere of *Angel*, succinctly illustrates this Platonic vision recuperated by many Enlightenment scholars and captured in the Buffyverse:

Nothing in the world is the way it ought to be—it's harsh, and cruel—but that's why there's us. Champions. It doesn't matter where we come from, what we've done or suffered, or even if we make a difference. We live as though the world was what it should be, to show it what it can be. ("Deep Down," 4001)

Buffy, like *Angel* and Connor, is a champion in the Buffyverse. Consequently, the Buffyverse demands that she live her life as if "the world was as it should be" ("Deep Down," 4001). The presumption that the world "ought" to be something, presupposes self-evident knowledge, again a hallmark of Enlightenment Rhetoric. Thus while Buffy the character performs significant acts of postmodern resistance at times throughout the series, the transgressive nature of these acts is complicated by the sometimes less progressive philosophical foundation that makes up the Buffyverse worldview.

[20] For *Buffy* scholar Matthew Pateman, the use of these sometimes competing and conflicting ideologically-infused historical moments as represented in the show is a mark of the text's cultural aesthetics. Commenting on what he identifies as "historical attitudes" in *BtVS*, Pateman argues that the negotiation of pre-modern, modern, and postmodern thought in the Buffyverse is complicated not only through history as represented through the character of Buffy (as a pre-modern slayer and a postmodern teenager), but also through the historical attitudes represented by various other characters, such as Giles' perspective as a modernist watcher (72), as well as the "fraught" modernist narrative structure of the text (75). He assesses the effects of such aesthetic maneuvering, noting that *BtVS* "looks at the culture that has helped to produce it and reflects critically on it" (209).

[21] I agree with Pateman's keen assessment of the ideological contradictions embedded in *BtVS*, yet would further it by observing that rhetorical analysis, with its emphasis on the interplay between form and content, between text and subtext, provides a framework for investigating the ways in which *BtVS* is also spoken by culture at the same time that it speaks on culture. This is an important point because a purely aesthetic reading of *BtVS* runs the risk of not adequately accounting for the former. Thus a rhetorical reading of *BtVS* is useful because it moves *BtVS* scholarship beyond the ongoing debate that posits ideological and aesthetic analyses of the show in opposition to one another. An ideological reading, the debate goes, ignores the aesthetic value of the show, while an aesthetic reading minimizes the cultural politics of the text. A rhetorical reading of the text, however, complicates this dichotomy through a recognition of the aesthetic as necessarily ideological and of the ideological as aesthetically infused. Rather than an either/or reading, a rhetorical reading suggests a more nuanced approach to this debate. This approach attempts to approximate what Pender argues for when she suggests that we recognize *BtVS* "as a site of intense cultural negotiation" rather than just a transgressive text (one that comments on popular culture) or just a containment text (one that revels in popular culture) ("I'm Buffy" 43).

[22] Turning to seasons six and seven, the simultaneous character development and redemption of Spike, Buffy's one time archenemy, seems a fitting avenue for further investigating the interplay of Enlightenment rhetoric and postmodernism in *BtVS*. A vampire who has killed two slayers and countless others in his (un)life, Spike is debilitated with a chip implant that keeps him from feeding on humans, courtesy of The Initiative, in season four. He is also burdened with the return of his soul, this latter by his own doing, in the last episode of season six. Here, I examine how Buffy's treatment of Spike, along with his own actions, actions that prompt him to retrieve his soul, illustrate how common sense rhetoric concerning nature and civilization are used as foundational truths within the Buffyverse.

[23] Almost as popular as the character of Buffy, Spike is another hot topic in Buffyverse scholarship. He, too, is often read as a transgressive character. In "'Love's Bitch but Man Enough to Admit It': Spike's Hybridized Gender," Arwen Spicer argues that after his implant, Spike is often "coded as feminine" (par. 15). Consequently, this gender inversion affords his character the empowerment to negotiate and adapt to the postmodern feminism that emerges throughout the Buffyverse. While this empowerment within the Buffyverse may be evident, I am more interested in how the ideological system itself, Buffy's supposed feminist world, in actuality is framed by more traditional Enlightenment doctrines, doctrines which at times constrain any gender subversion that Spike's hybridized character might enact.

[24] During the fifth season, Spike falls in love with Buffy. In an effort to make a positive impression on her, he regularly assists her on patrols and responds consistently to her requests for his help in protecting her family. Buffy refrains from killing Spike at this time because, as Giles puts it, she has no reason to harm an "impotent" creature ("Something Blue," 4009). Furthermore, Buffy utilizes Spike in her missions because his vampire strength makes him a useful weapon. The chip that The Initiative implanted in his brain only prevents him from harming humans. He is able to kill demons, he discovers in a moment of self-defense and elation, without the slightest bit of pain.

[25] When Spike sees the opportunity to profess his love to Buffy, however, she quickly stops his admission. The exchange is worth noting in length for what it reveals about both Buffy's worldview and the worldview of the Buffyverse:

SPIKE: You can't deny it. There's something between us.

BUFFY: Loathing. Disgust.

SPIKE: Heat. Desire.

BUFFY: Please! Spike, you're a vampire.

SPIKE: Angel was a vampire.

BUFFY: Angel was good!

SPIKE: And I can be too. I've changed, Buffy.

BUFFY: What, that chip in your head? That's not change. Tha-that's just holding you back. You're like a serial killer in prison!

SPIKE: Women marry 'em all the time!

BUFFY: Uhh!

SPIKE: (realizing that's not what he meant) But I'm not like that. Something's happening to me. I can't stop thinking about you.

BUFFY: Uhh. (turns away)

SPIKE: And if that means turning my back on the whole evil thing....

BUFFY: (turns back) You don't know what you mean! You don't know what feelings are!

SPIKE: (offended) I damn well do! I lie awake every night!

BUFFY: You sleep during the day!

SPIKE: Yeah, but.... (through his teeth) You are missing the point. This is real here. I love....

BUFFY: Don't! ("Crush," 5014)

Even though Buffy is willing to judge vampires by their personal histories when it comes down to deciding who to slay or not, she is unwilling to believe that such creatures can completely alter their true nature. Spike's experience with the chip might keep him from feeding on humans, but Buffy does not recognize it as having the ability to change him or his understanding of the world. Spike, in other words, cannot alter pre-existing principles concerning human nature. According to Buffy, Spike can only truly be good—be civilized—if he possesses what Angel possesses: a soul. Without a soul, Spike is outside the realm of human potential. As she remarks, in Spike's natural condition he doesn't even possess feelings, let alone the faculties of reason and judgment. In fact, from Buffy's perspective, Spike's feelings aren't even real.

[26] In the above scene, Buffy's words and actions echo Enlightenment philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's premise of spirit. "The Idea of spirit," he writes, "displays itself in reality as a series of external forms" ("Geographical Basis" 110). Hegel's spirit is reminiscent of the higher, perfect forms Plato theorizes in *The Republic*, forms that exist as "eternal and unchangeable" truths outside of sense experience (Plato 368). For Buffy, as the above passage illustrates, spirit takes its external form in the self-consciousness of the soul. Buffy's assessment of Spike as naturally inferior is validated by the Buffyverse in this same episode when Drusilla returns to woo Spike back to his evil nature. The two vampires trap Buffy, who is able to escape, but not before she has learned her lesson: never trust a soulless vampire. Buffy reverts to this same common sense rhetoric in the season seven episode "Selfless" (7005) when she lectures Xander and Willow on Anya's demon nature.

[27] Buffy's return from the dead in season six finds her having difficulty re-adjusting to her life in Sunnydale. In a desperate attempt to "feel," ("Once More, With Feeling" 6007) Buffy sleeps with Spike ("Smashed," 6009). Then she does it again, and again, and again. Eventually, she breaks it off. Throughout their affair, Buffy nonetheless holds to her Enlightenment principles. On numerous occasions she reminds Spike that he is "an evil, disgusting, thing" that is unworthy and incapable of love ("Smashed," 6009). During one particularly brutal argument, she beats Spike while yelling at him, "You don't have a soul! There is nothing good or clean in you. You are dead inside! You can't feel anything real! I could never be your girl!" ("Dead Things," 6013).

[28] As one might imagine, Buffy's abuse of Spike during this narrative arc is a controversial topic within *Buffy* scholarship. An in-depth study of Buffy's treatment of Spike throughout this period of time is beyond the scope of this article, yet it is important to point out that in this instance Buffy the character enacts the same kind of common sense reasoning that Hegel illustrates in the racial hierarchy he sets up concerning soul and nature ("Geography" 111). While Hegel rationalizes that non-Europeans are lacking in spirit because their nature is innately tied to their climate, which is harsh and too powerful for spiritual freedom (that is, he argues that a savage climate equals a savage people), Buffy rationalizes that Spike is innately without feeling and "evil" because he lacks a soul. Buffy employs this common sense rhetoric as she beats Spike, the beating justified in the Buffyverse because Spike is not human.

[29] Buffy's treatment of Spike as a soulless and therefore less valuable creature is further endorsed in the Buffyverse when he almost rapes her near the end of season six ("Seeing Red," 6019). Spicer reads this move by Spike as an example of how his hybrid identity can bring out both his "worse characteristics" and "the ability to surpass them" (par. 23) since the experience prompts him to seek

out his soul. My reading suggests, however, that this scene also, and perhaps more importantly, works to reinforce the Enlightenment virtues that make up the Buffyverse epistemology. Spike's actions illustrate that his potential for human civility and culture can only be fulfilled with an innate soulful nature. Without a soul, Spike is less than human, acting upon is implied irrational and uncivilized vampiric traits. Spike's soul-less vampiric state keeps him oppressed by nature where he is unable to know "spiritual freedom" ("Geographical Basis" 112). This arc in particular echoes Enlightenment tropes concerning rationality and civilization. During the rape scene, for example, Spike is represented as a wild savage, knocking Buffy to the ground and forcing himself on her. Consumed by his desire, he acts without reason, unable to control his evil nature.

[30] The combination of Buffy's abuse of Spike, Spike's attempted rape of Buffy, and the recovery of Spike's soul in the final scene of season six suggests that the Buffyverse worldview sanctions these Enlightenment ideals on nature. Spike's innate soulless nature marks him as both spiritually and culturally inferior. Spike has no rights in this rationale because his absence of a soul identifies him as incapable of knowing the universal essence of culture through spirit ("Anthropology" 39). Consequently, he is circumscribed as belonging to a different and inferior race without it. This hierarchy resembles the Great Chain of Being theory subscribed to by Enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes. While this theory most commonly functioned as a rationale for the existence of God as perfect spirit, its inherent hierarchy has serious implications for any beings considered to be lacking in spirit (read soul), as evidenced in *BtVS*, a point I will return to shortly.

[31] When Spike returns ensouled to Sunnydale in season seven, he struggles with the memories of what he did as an evil, soul-less vampire. In anguish, he asks Buffy why she can't kill him. She responds, "you're alive because I saw you change. Because I saw your penance. ... You faced the monster inside of you and you fought back. You risked everything to be a better man. ... I believe in you, Spike" ("Never Leave Me," 7009). Melodrama aside, Buffy demonstrates here that she is able to accept and believe in Spike now because he is spirit-worthy. Even though he is still the same body that performed countless murders as a vampire, he is a different man, a monster-less man, because of his newly acquired soul. This soul, she reminds him, makes him a "better" and—we might infer—more valuable man. In this resistant reading of Spike's transformation, his demonization and consequent redemption affords somber consequences for how nature, "otherness," and—by implication—race are read and controlled within the Buffyverse.

[32] In "To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and ("Other") Socially Marginalized Positions on Horror TV," Ono argues that the perceived feminist politics in *Buffy* are undermined by the consistent "racial hierarchicalization of people of color" in the series (179). In celebrating and uncritically reading Buffy's character as a feminist icon, the other cultural messages and lessons the text sends, such as the devaluing of people of color, are either ignored or downplayed considerably. This process, he suggests, is an example of how liberatory struggle can be co-opted by institutions and used for their own purposes—in this case, molding a feminist white image into a commodity to be consumed that results in an over-valuing of white culture as the norm in society. White culture is thus naturalized and the very real oppression that people of color experience in the show and in the real world, in part *because* of such ideological processes, is negated.

[33] Since Ono's article, little discussion of race in *Buffy* studies has surfaced until recently. In "A Sweet Vamp: Critiquing the Treatment of Race in *Buffy* and the American Musical Once More (With Feeling)," Jeffrey Middents argues that the latter seasons of *BtVS* offer a "subtle critique" of "racial inequities" (par. 3). Calling attention to the sixth season musical episode, "Once More, with Feeling," Middents reads the character "Sweet"—a demon played by an African-American actor who prompts characters to sing and reveal their secret thoughts and worries to one another—as an example of how *Buffy* "deals with the race issue by not making it an issue at all by slowly adding significant characters of color to the cast without explicit fanfare" (par. 14). Middents suggests that Sweets serves as a "powerful" character whose presence affects the regular characters after he leaves, distinguishing him from previous characters of color who end up dead, either immediately or over the course of a few episodes.

[34] In contrast, Ewan Kirkland seeks to "make whiteness visible" in the Buffyverse in "The

Caucasian Persuasion of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" (par 26). "In foregrounding its progressive gender politics," Kirkland writes, "other identity formations, namely race and class, have been compromised" (par. 27). One way in which this compromise happens continually with respect to race in *BtVS*, I argue, is in the postmodern aesthetics that sometimes obscure common sense rhetorics on reason and nature. *Buffy's* postmodern politics need to be read in light of this underlying modernist epistemology on human nature. This compromise is perhaps most obviously exemplified in the recurring use of the ignoble savage trope used to represent the first slayer, introduced in season four, and the shadow men, introduced in season seven.

[35] Another predominant theme in Enlightenment rhetoric, a theme that is premised on Enlightenment ideals concerning knowledge and nature, is the common sense notion that tribal Africans were innately inferior to White Europeans, lacking both reason and culture which accounted for their uncivilized state of being. Not unlike these *a priori* notions, *BtVS* represents African characters through this African savage trope. In contrast to Buffy, the first slayer is depicted as primitive and untamed, driven only by her desire to kill ("Restless," 4022). The shadow men are depicted as uncivilized and unsophisticated. They lack the cultural sensibility afforded Buffy and her crew in 20th-century California. Their use of magic—imbuing demon essence into the first slayer and then Buffy—is portrayed as particularly barbaric ("Get it Done," 7015). During these moments the Buffyverse unwittingly employs the kind of racialized tropes used during the Enlightenment to justify white supremacy.

[36] As Pender keenly observes in her review of the 2006 *Slayage* Conference, critiques of the less liberatory aspects of *BtVS* are an important part of furthering *Buffy* studies ("Where" par 13). This reading of *BtVS* attempts to take up this task. By allowing for and encouraging multiple levels of meaning-making in the text, I argue, the ME writers resolve such seeming contradictory epistemological philosophies as modern and postmodern thought. As I have suggested, this can occur at an aesthetic level whereby the pleasure of the text overpowers the sometimes incongruous epistemological positions embedded within it. To demonstrate, I have shown that while *Buffy* maintains subversive and transgressive moments within the text and across seasons, the overarching philosophy of the Buffyverse remains a powerful testimony to the pervasiveness of Enlightenment rhetoric in contemporary culture.

[37] As a cultural text, *Buffy* serves a pedagogical function of contesting—but also, as this analysis suggests, of confirming and affirming—ideologically constructed and rhetorically sanctioned myths. When *Buffy* is read only as a transgressive text, the ideology that frames our meaning-making is made invisible and thus disempowers us as both consumers and creators of culture. The agency we perceive in these instances is quickly negated, revealed for what it is: a shifting of power within the system, while dominant ideologies remain intact. In reading *Buffy*, then, I suggest we practice more of what Scholes calls "ideological criticism" (553), what I am arguing is founded on rhetorical criticism. In doing so, he suggests, we are better positioned to interrogate the cultural and rhetorical "gaps" between universal myths and our own lived experiences.

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