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Regressive Sex-and-Gender Tropes in Stoker's *Dracula* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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[1] As a television series that primarily deals with monsters, magic, and potentially hysterical mayhem, it is easy to regard *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a contemporary Gothic text. Despite its origins in the late twentieth century, *Buffy* regularly borrows ostensible themes and tropes from some original nineteenth-century Gothic literature, such as creational anxiety, natural purity, and female penetration. These tropes are both sexually progressive and problematic in *Buffy*. The presence and development of an innately strong female hero who appropriates the phallic wooden stake is independently radical. Likewise, the inclusion of female vampires who sire men into vampires is a complex departure from the vampiric transformations that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* largely presents. But the use of these tropes is problematic, because in *Buffy* female characters are still objectified, and their heroism or villainy is still dependent upon their femaleness. Although the *Buffy* series was never one to take itself too seriously, it is apparent that these tropes are incorporated as more than basic examples of monster mythology. The social values of the nineteenth century, particularly in regard to representation of femininity and sexuality, bleed through into *Buffy* more than 100 years later, as the series still frames the vampire as a threat to normative sexuality and rigid binaries of gender performance.

[2] Because *Dracula* has influenced every proceeding vampire story, and *Buffy* is keenly aware of its own references, comparing Stoker's 1897 novel and the television series is the most obvious Victorian Gothic comparison to draw.[1] *Dracula* is the quintessential vampire story, and by handing the wooden stake to the female Buffy Summers, the series subverts the idea that only men can be vampire slayers. Stoker suggests that the task is masculine when he assigns it to Professor Abraham Van Helsing, the character in *Dracula* who is most knowledgeable on how to kill vampires. The audience who grew up with *Buffy* on their television sets has been conditioned to think differently, because *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon requires his vampire slayers to be female. It is tempting to evaluate *Buffy* and *Dracula* (Stoker's novel, not the Season Five episode of *Buffy*, "Buffy vs. Dracula") in one-to-one correspondences, such as suggesting that Buffy herself is the transgressive surrogate for Stoker's Van Helsing. Admittedly, such archetypal changes are presented in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but this study does not aim to highlight the superficial areas in which *Buffy* subverts Stoker's patriarchal characterizations. Rather, this study explores the notion that in spite of its many progressive points, such as the heroic female protagonist and recognition of feminine sexuality, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* serves as a reminder that audiences are still apprehensive about creational anxiety, natural purity, and the penetrative woman. The question is no longer how the character of Buffy Summers is a feminist icon, as the earliest scholarship on *Buffy* has covered her strengths critically and

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[1] The vampire characters have no reflection and are repelled by crosses, holy water, and sunlight, which Whedon borrows from Stoker; Spike claims Count Dracula was too consumed with himself after Stoker published the novel at the end of the nineteenth century; under hypnosis, Xander shares direct-from-the-novel quotes with Stoker's Renfield.

beautifully.[2] Instead, the question is why, in a series that routinely touts itself as socially and sexually progressive, *Buffy* intrinsically readdresses the fears of creational anxiety, gendered purity, and the penetrative female from Stoker's *Dracula*.

[3] If Gothic literature gives us nightmares in prose, then those nightmares signify more than creaking floorboards and chilling stares from strangers. Societal threats take the shape of monsters, and in Victorian England, many readers found female sexuality terrifying—even monstrous. Stoker uses *Dracula* to exemplify fears of female creational power and sexuality by associating female blood with demonic behavior, which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* repeats when those female characters who oppose sexual binaries by siring as well as birthing are also written as vampires. Blood in the female body has the connotation of menstrual blood, and a menstruating woman is one who can create life.[3] For *Dracula*'s Jonathan Harker, whom three vampire women with bleeding lips attack near the beginning of the novel, this blood poses a danger. The female vampires are dripping of evidence that they can birth while he is anatomically incapable. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* communicates the same threat by making many of its sexual-binary-challenging female characters into demons. In *Dracula*, one of the greatest threats to the male characters is that as vampires, women will gain the ability to penetrate. A female penetrator is a threat to traditional heterosexuality. Because the male possesses the penetrative penis, and social cues suggest that the male is dominant, penetration and dominance are linked. The traditionally proper woman, then, could only be penetrated by a more powerful man. When *Dracula*'s female vampires can penetrate male flesh with their fangs, the men panic because they understand penetration in relationship to masculine power. *Buffy* repeats this sexual anxiety in congruence with its greatest allegorical subversion of *Dracula*. Whedon and Co. cast the female Buffy as the vampire slayer, and the longer she wields the stake, the more she loses her traditional femininity, exemplified by her change in wardrobe and attitude toward potentially apocalyptic events. Simultaneously, Whedon continually upholds Victorian ideals for womanhood because Buffy's slayer status elevates her morality to a superhuman level, which limits her female moral complexity. Despite its inclusion of dynamic female characters, such as the vampire Darla and Buffy herself, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shares similar conservative opinions on female creation, penetration, and gendered morality that are found in Stoker's *Dracula*.

[4] In both *Dracula* and *Buffy*, several male characters are horrified by female blood and penetration, as these concepts challenge sexual binaries and pose a threat to traditional codes of masculinity. Rhonda Wilcox notes in *Why* Buffy *Matters,* that because Buffy and the Scooby Gang do not need a patriarchal Van Helsing to slay vampires, Whedon subverts the androcentric heroism that Stoker promotes in his novel (212). In contrast, this study focuses on the sex-and-gender anxiety found in the pair of texts rather than on character archetypes. These sex-and-gender anxieties begin with the images of blood in *Dracula* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

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[2] "The Buffy Effect" by Rachel Fudge, "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Postfeminist Television" by Rosie White, *Why Buffy Matters* by Rhonda Wilcox, "'Killing Us Softly?': A Feminist Search for the 'Real' Buffy" by Sherryl Vint.

[3] In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the conflict of creational authority between the "metaphor of literary paternity" expressed by male authors of the nineteenth century and the "birth process" of the nineteenth-century woman writer (12, 14).

[5] Blood, especially in the female body, rules the plot of Stoker's novel. Most of his male characters are terrified of female blood. For instance, when the men in the novel slay the vampire Lucy Westenra, Dr. John Seward (Lucy's former suitor) remarks that her "lips… crimson with fresh blood" caused the men to "shudder with horror" (211). There is a simplistic explanation for this fear. Blood can represent destruction, bodily decay, and death. With female blood, however, there is an additional dimension to be considered. Julia Kristeva suggests that menstrual blood has the ability to endanger "the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (71). In the female body, blood is the physical manifestation of the male "fear of [the female's] generative power" (77). It is a reminder that, for women, blood does not always suggest death. It can suggest the creation of life, and men are incapable of this phenomenon. Stoker's *Dracula* offers commentary on creation anxiety in the late-nineteenth century through the character of Jonathan Harker.

[6] In the third chapter of *Dracula*, when Harker encounters three vampire women in Count Dracula's castle, he is deeply concerned with their blood and the sexualization of their bodies, which implies that he may also be fearful of the female ability to birth. Specifically, he is fixated on "the ruby of [the women's]… lips" (38). He continues to loathe the "bitter offensiveness" of one woman's breath because her lips remind him of what "one smells in blood" (39). If Harker is emphatically and repeatedly offended by the sight and smell of a woman's bleeding lips, then his fear must be crucial to the social themes at work in the novel. Through a psychoanalytic lens, the reader may approach Harker's situation as a dream. The emphasis on the lips suggests that the relationship between this scene's manifest and latent content is sexual. This relationship is first revealed in the various sensual descriptions that Harker employs to describe the women, particularly their lips. Specifically, he writes that when one of the women's lips touches his neck to bite him, he "closed [his] eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited" (39). The operative word in Harker's comment is *ecstasy*, which suggests "the state of being 'beside oneself' with… passion" (s.v. "ecstasy"). This word not only implies sexual passion, but also, it indicates that Harker has no control over the situation. The scene is sensual and dominated by the three women instead of the one man, and historically, Harker would have been taught that this position is improper. His position is potentially inappropriate for a number of historical reasons. First, the fact that there are four people involved in this sexual encounter is a sin in the Christian religion, which the reader assumes Harker practices because he marries Mina Murray in a church later in the novel. Also, at this point in the narrative, Harker is an unmarried man, and the Christian church considered fornication a sin (Covert 306). The sensually fervent words that Harker uses to describe this encounter also defy the Victorian model that sex was meant to be "passionless" and used for procreation rather than pleasure (Cott 219). But because Harker reflects on his submissive participation in a sexually charged scenario with terror, his anxiety is likely a product of male-dominated sexuality. Similarly, his emphasis on the women's lips insinuates fear of creationism in heterosexual intercourse.

[7] Anatomically, the female body has two sets of lips—the lips of her mouth and of her vagina. Psychoanalytic theory claims that in dreams and pieces of fiction, the reader must be aware of the "male and female symbols," and in that case, these women's bleeding lips can

represent bleeding labia (Tyson 21). Then, the female symbol suggests menstruation, which a man could find horrifying. In her essay, "Dracula and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo, and the New Woman," Marie Mulvey-Roberts argues that the metaphor of menstruation in *Dracula* is horrifying for its male characters and readers because female blood is framed as disease—a way of reinforcing the idea that men should be doctors, and women should be patients (7). Mulvey-Roberts accurately describes that blood is gendered in *Dracula*, but female blood is also threatening to the male because of creation anxiety. Female blood challenges the notion that the penis alone creates both life and art. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that in Victorian England, male writers believed that "The poet's pen is… a penis" (4). Since *Dracula* is a Victorian novel, one can apply the period's ideas of fictional creationism to the fear of childbirth that Stoker presents. The male Victorian author "'fathers' his text, [so] his literary creations… are his possession, his property" (Gilbert and Gubar 12). Here, the reader sees that fiction writing is, in itself, a metaphor for biological conception, and men were thought to be in control of both processes. As both a Victorian male and author, Stoker would likely have been aware of this belief, and his literary offspring (male and female characters in *Dracula*) are byproducts of supposed father-dominated creation. The idea is embedded in the characters, especially Jonathan Harker, who becomes a father on the last page of the novel without any narrative attention paid to his wife's pregnancy. From novels to children, the belief is that men are the fathers and primary creators.

[8] Female blood suggests otherwise. It is a reminder that the female body is capable of a process impossible for the male body, and in this way, nature might have made women superior. The contemporary reader might find Harker's creation envy and anxiety easy to comprehend and might also believe that generally, the modern world holds the female body in higher esteem. But the female creator is still framed as monstrous in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which premiered exactly 100 years after the initial publication of *Dracula*, and the repetition of this thematic element challenges the idea that present society is postfeminist.

[9] *Buffy* communicates the threat of female creational power and non-normative sexuality in the Season Two episode, "Becoming," in which the audience watches the female vampire Darla turn the male Angel into a vampire. This scene suggests that Darla is both Angel's vampiric mother and father, but her characterization on the *Buffy* series links her non-binary parentage to demonic activity. Angel asks Darla to "show [him] [her] world," and ultimately, he learns that Darla's world is one grounded in blood ("Becoming" B2021). After she bites him, she slices her breasts open with her fingernails, drawing blood that Angel immediately begins to drink.

[10] Although this scene does not occur as a dream, it is a piece of fiction, and psychoanalytic theory applies. In that case, the relationship between the latent and manifest content is still sexual and creational, as it is in the scene with Harker and the vampire brides in Stoker's *Dracula*. Not only are Darla's lips covered in blood, but her breasts are dripping as well. In the series' pilot episode, Buffy explains that in order to turn a person into a vampire, "they have to suck your blood and then you have to suck their blood." This "whole big sucking thing" is an exchange of bodily fluids, which also occurs during sex ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" B1001). Furthermore, the creation of a new vampire—a birth—is the result of Darla and Angel's exchange, and frequently, birth is also the product of heterosexual intercourse. But

in particular, it is the visual of Angel at Darla's bleeding breasts that frames creation as a threat in this twentieth-century episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[11] Another example of Darla possessing the mother's body is that Angel uses the blood from her breasts to nourish himself, but because she is a vampire mother, her relationship to creation is demonized. Mothers often use their breasts to nourish their children. Angel is Darla's immortal young, and her blood acts as life-giving nourishment for him. As Stoker's Renfield, and later, Whedon's Xander Harris, remarks, "The blood is the life" (Stoker 142; "Buffy vs. Dracula" B5001). The vampire Angel is Darla's creation whom she feeds and sires; the latter being the verb Whedon employs to reference the creation of new vampires. Not only does Darla harness the typically male power to sire, and penetrate, as to sire a vampire is to pierce flesh, she also has the ability to keep her creation alive from her breasts like the mother of a human baby. As a female, the Darla character is simultaneously Angel's mother and father. She can feed him like a mother and she penetrates to create him like a biological father. And yet, Whedon takes this character with extraordinary non-binary characteristics and writes her, in the *Buffy* series, as a demon. Darla's arc as a mother character concludes in the season-three episode of *Angel*, "Lullaby," in which she sacrifices her life to save her unborn human son (A3009). This "redemptive motherhood" is important to Darla's characterization, but it does not detract from the fact that her character is often "position[ed] as a force of evil throughout the majority of the series" (Potvin 10-11). While Jacqueline Potvin is discussing the *Angel* series in her article on pregnancy and reproductive rights, Darla is forced into a position of evil even more frequently on the *Buffy* series. As a living character, she is featured three times (not including flashbacks in "Becoming" and Season Five's "Fool for Love"). At no point in those appearances is she illustrated as redeemable. During *Buffy*'s first season, Darla exists as a purely antagonistic character, killing Sunnydale High School students and implying that she and Angel share a destructive past. Darla also makes the first kill of the series, and it is her actions that jumpstart Buffy's commitment to eradicate evil in Sunnydale. Turning Darla into a villain undermines the feminist progress that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* claims to make because it hands its protagonist a fatal weapon. In fact, Darla's villainy only more closely links her to Stoker's Count Dracula, who is also presented as a decidedly evil character.

[12] Stoker's Count Dracula poses the greatest threat to the Englishmen because he behaves in heteronormatively feminine ways. For example, he reproves Harker's three women because "this man belongs to him" and relies on sexuality to attain his desires (40). Count Dracula challenges the sexual binary by expressing queer desire and birthing new vampire offspring in the vain of a human mother. Similarly, over 100 years later, the Darla character challenges the sexual binary by penetrating and nursing Angel. Both are framed as threats to the "heroes" in their respective fictions. Not coincidentally, both characters reject the same sexual binary. When authors and readers demonize the non-binary character, they imply that real non-binary individuals are threatening and must be eliminated. Of course, this implication is generalized, but real-world stereotypes originate in the fiction. Count Dracula, who continuously penetrates individuals and births new vampires, is framed as the story's true monster because the novel's plot arcs toward his ultimate destruction. Darla, who sires and births almost exactly as Count Dracula does, exists on *Buffy*'s first season to be destroyed. Compare Darla's vampiric

activity to that of Angel and Spike. Both male vampires penetrate women to kill them[4] and assert their dominance, but neither character births a new vampire in spite of their species' non-binary ability to do so.[5] Yet these two male characters, who have performed likely as many destructive deeds as has Darla, are well-developed, nuanced, and written as sympathetic characters. Yet Darla, the female character who takes advantage of her power to sire and birth, is written in *Buffy* as a villain who must be killed. Whedon created *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a supposedly feminist response to the archetypal "blonde girl who goes into a dark alley and gets killed" from horror stories of the past (Whedon quoted in Billson, 24-5). But Darla's characterization as a non-binary villain suggests that Whedon and company's feminism has its limitations—limitations that the men in Stoker's *Dracula* also possess when they strive to kill the titular monster for his sexual-binary defiance.

[13] Although blood and its gendered implications are crucial in understanding the sexual politics in both *Dracula* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it is not the sole threat to typical masculine codes. The theme of penetration in both texts additionally terrifies a number of male characters because it challenges the prescribed feminine code that a proper woman should be unable to penetrate, as the male penis is supposed to perform sexual penetration. Some female characters in *Dracula* and *Buffy* contest that idea, particularly Stoker's Lucy Westenra and Whedon's Buffy Summers.

[14] Unlike *Buffy's* relatively large female cast, Stoker presents his readers with only two main female characters: Mina Murray and Lucy Westenra. Count Dracula turns the latter woman into a vampire, and as Mulvey-Roberts notes in her essay, the men medicalize her vampirism. As they attempt to cure her, they make constant note that she will die if not given a blood transfusion. Dr. Seward and Professor Van Helsing conclude, "It is a man [they] want" for blood (123). They choose Arthur Holmwood, Lucy's fiancé, to donate his blood because the two are romantically connected. The transfusion process is superficially concerned with saving Lucy's life. When read through a feminist lens, this process becomes an exercise in patriarchy.

[15] Firstly, Seward and Van Helsing demand male blood for Lucy's body, which indicates that they believe male blood is superior to that of the female. Further, blood is one of the world's most natural substances. Because these men insist on a male donor, they imply that men are naturally stronger than women. Beyond the patriarchal insinuations of the transfusion, one must also consider the process's penetrative medical technology. Blood transfusions were reportedly complicated and uncommon in the nineteenth century. The needles used in the procedure were much larger than those used in modern medicine (Learoyd). A needle is already phallic, but medical history informs the reader that its size would have been exaggerated. This needle is a phallic symbol filled with blood, like an erect penis. A representative erection is what Lucy needs to be saved, so the transfusion into her body is a metaphor for male-dominated heterosexuality. The procedure suggests that this woman will die without the male's

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[4] Angel bites Jenny Calendar to kill her in Season Two's "Passion;" Spike kills slayer Xin Rong during the Boxer Rebellion by biting her in Season Five's "Fool for Love."

[5] This claim recognizes that in Season Two's "School Hard," Spike says that Angel was his sire, but it accepts the revision of Drusilla as Spike's sire in "Fool for Love," as the latter fact has not been contested since episode aired in 2000.

penetration—without his sexual influence. Transfusion is only one way in which penetration is used to reinforce patriarchal sexuality in *Dracula*. The male characters' anxieties about female penetration come to the fore when they determine they must kill the vampire Lucy.

[16] According to Stoker, vampires have fangs, which they use to penetrate their prey's flesh and transform them into new vampires, and this penetration suggests that the penis possesses sexual authority. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to penetrate means "to get into or through," and although the verb did not refer to the insertion of a penis into a vagina until the mid-twentieth century, people were certainly engaging in heterosexual sex in 1897 (s.v. "penetrate"). Thus, it is conceivable that Stoker's use of fangs in the novel represent the penis's penetrative capability. For instance, the "two punctures" on Lucy's throat are the evidence that Count Dracula penetrated her flesh to sire her as a newborn vampire, as a biological father would penetrate to create a human offspring (125). There are still more female vampires in *Dracula*, which means that more women have the supposedly penile power. Eventually, Lucy becomes one of these women, and the men believe this quality marks her for death. Moments before Lucy's vampiric death, Dr. Seward remarks that he was particularly horrified by her "carnal and unspiritual appearance," listing her "pointed teeth" as the first of her now terrible attributes (214). Her penetrative parts are nightmarish to Seward and his companions, even more nightmarish than her lips, which he mentions after the fangs, and thus, she must be killed. To slay Lucy, the men use another phallic extension in addition to the needle—the wooden stake.

[17] The descriptions of the wooden stake and Lucy's tomb in the chapter of *Dracula* in which Lucy is killed reflect the men's belief that the penis should dominate the vagina. Dr. Seward narrates this chapter, and as the suitor Lucy did not choose to marry, his bitterness toward her is evident throughout the novel. In addition to his belief that Lucy will die without a man's blood inside of her, the detail he uses to describe the stake is extreme. He records that the stake is "about three feet long" (214). Like the transfusion needle, the stake is phallic. The male wields it, and it is an exaggerated reminder of his penis's alleged power. He will use it to penetrate and murder a woman, and it is implied that ultimately, he will have penetrative authority. If the penetrative female is dead, then the man also kills the threat she presents. When the men approach Lucy's tomb, Van Helsing seals it shut "so that the Un-Dead may not enter" (210). The crucial word in his observation is *enter.* As a female vampire, Lucy's fangs give her the ability to enter into a man's body. Van Helsing, who is the patriarch in this group of male vampire hunters, would be horrified by her ability to challenge that sexual binary. Finally, it is Arthur who stakes Lucy. The reader knows that Arthur and Lucy were once engaged. Had Dracula not bitten Lucy, she and Arthur would have been married, and they would have partaken in heterosexual intercourse. Arthur would have penetrated Lucy with his penis, but because she becomes a demon before they can have a full marriage, driving a stake through her heart is his only alternative.

[18] Self-proclaimed feminist Joss Whedon appears to take issue with the demonic opinion of female penetration. In a perhaps unconscious response to Stoker's themes, he mandates that vampire slayers be female. The woman has control of the phallic symbol in the wooden stake. Like Rachel Fudge writes in her *Bitch Magazine* article, "The Buffy Effect," it is not coincidental that most of *Buffy*'s demons are male. In Whedon's imaginary universe, the woman is not only allowed to penetrate, but also, she is expected to do so. At first glance, this

inversion appears progressive. Buffy, and the subsequent slayers, are the stake-holding heroes and the replacements for Van Helsing. There are still instances in which Whedon and Co. seem to overcorrect Stoker, problematically inverting the patriarchal opinions on gendered blood and female penetration found in *Dracula*.

[19] For example, by requiring vampire slayers to be women, *Buffy* asserts that some women are inherently stronger than men. While this inverse initially seems revolutionary, it limits female complexity as much as *Dracula*'s themes do. *Buffy* only tips the scale in the opposite direction. Regarding gendered blood and its purity levels, one can examine the episode "Graduation Day" from Season Three. In this episode, Angel is hit with a deadly poison, and as Buffy discovers, only "the blood of a slayer" can cure him ("Graduation Day" B3021). As his lover, Buffy the Vampire Slayer volunteers her blood. Through this exchange, Whedon, the writer for this episode, seems to completely reverse Stoker's suggestion that male blood is naturally superior to female blood. Buffy is a slayer, which is something that Angel not only as a vampire, but also, as a man, can never be. On the surface, this reversal appears refreshing. Finally, a woman is granted superior status over her male counterpart. The idea that Buffy's female blood must be greater than Angel's male blood is still as equally damaging as what Stoker presents in *Dracula*. The thought that Buffy's blood is the strongest suggests that, like the ideal nineteenth-century woman, Buffy is inherently pure.

[20] The inherent purity that Buffy exhibits is reminiscent of the Cult of True Womanhood, an ideology that emerged for middle class women in the 1830s that taught them how to be the most proper women possible. This belief system persisted throughout the Victorian era for women in the Western world, and it was the foundation for the separate spheres paradigm, or the belief that women were meant to work within the home and make it a welcoming respite for men who worked in, and dominated, the public sphere. As part of this ideology, several personality characteristics defined "good" women. One of those virtues was purity (Welter, 1). A proper woman was considered naturally purer than a man. By suggesting that Buffy's blood has enough purity to cure a dying male vampire, Whedon concurrently rejects and accepts nineteenth-century ideas about "true" womanhood. In *Dracula*, the allegedly strong Arthur tries to save the allegedly weak Lucy. Whedon presents a partially radical departure from Stoker when Buffy saves Angel. Admittedly, the situation is a change from fiction's typically androcentric narrative. Nonetheless, giving Buffy this supreme blood connotes that at her core, she must be pure. Since slayer blood is natural for Buffy, she is not granted much room for moral complexity. Her purportedly biological purity carries through the series, as Whedon and Co. forbid their female protagonist from taking human life, though not every female character on *Buffy* is barred from killing humans. In Season Three, Faith stakes Deputy Mayor Allan Finch and Willow flays antagonist Warren Mears alive to avenge her lover's death in Season Six. The characters are condemned for their actions and written into paths toward redemption, but they are still granted permission to renounce the feminine expectation for moral purity. What is crucial is that according to the logic of the narrative, Buffy, the central character, is never allowed to kill a human being. Although Buffy, who is presumed naturally purer than anyone else because she was born to slay, cannot take human life, there are male characters in the series who can. Expressly, this allowance applies to Buffy's male Watcher, Rupert Giles.

[21] In the Season Five finale, "The Gift," Buffy and the Scooby Gang realize that in order to kill the hell god, Glory (Clare Kramer), they must kill her human host, the mostly benevolent Ben (Charlie Weber). Buffy agrees to let Ben go free on the condition that he keeps Glory away from her family. She, the female slayer with superior blood status, grants a killer's host mercy. Giles, who is male and can therefore never be a vampire slayer in Whedon's world, does not follow Buffy's lead. He pins Ben to the ground and says of Buffy, "She's a hero, you see. She's not like us," referring to Buffy's inability to kill humans ("The Gift" B5022). Giles proceeds to kill Ben and therefore, Glory. In terms of gendered blood, perhaps the most revealing word in Giles's speech, it is even Ben's confused last word before Giles suffocates him, is *us*. He separates himself and Ben from Buffy, the female slayer. The female Buffy is inherently a hero, but the two men cannot be called to slay because they were born male. The duty is not in their blood. What Giles implies by calling Buffy a hero and not calling himself one is that Buffy is bound for moral purity. He realigns her with the Cult of True Womanhood because being born with slayer potential makes her something morally superior to human. Since men can never be slayers, they will never be held to the same standard of moral purity. Whedon's characterizations of women and men are allegorical departures from *Dracula*, but ultimately, the inverse is congruently damaging to Buffy's personal complexity as a woman. Singularly, Buffy's requirement to penetrate vampires is an oppositional difference from Stoker's men with stakes, but since Whedon and Co. still eliminates Buffy's complete freedom to rebel against Victorian female purity, the departure is correspondingly problematic to what is written in *Dracula*.

[22] Modern entertainment publications often give *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* praise for its subversions of sex-and-gender tropes. In October 2016, James Hibberd of *Entertainment Weekly* named Buffy Summers the eleventh-most powerful superhero character of all time, writing that she became "a brave new pop culture icon" because she was a "young, complicated, butt-kicking heroine who influenced countless imitators." Largely, Hibberd's statement appears true. After Whedon created and developed Buffy Summers, he paved the way for crime-fighting, self-assured protagonists such as Abbie Mills (Fox's *Sleepy Hollow*) and Olivia Pope (ABC's *Scandal*). But while the series' cultural influence is impressive, the influence only seems to recognize Whedon's original concept of Buffy as a fashionable superhero.

[23] For over a decade, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been widely researched in academia, but despite its breadth, much of the scholarship is allegorical when compared to the traditional Gothic literature from which *Buffy* is derived. Overall, this scholarship is fair because it was the first to examine *Buffy*, and questions of feminist praise and allegorical similarity needed to be answered. But it is necessary to research beyond these initial questions to examine the social and sexual politics in the series. While *Buffy* is contemporarily progressive about sex and gender, its progression is primarily superficial. There is a large cast of female heroes with superpowers, but a simple role reversal is not enough to make a series sexually progressive. The implicit social and sexual politics are reminiscent of those found in Victorian Gothic literature, particularly *Dracula*. Because these Victorian anxieties and values of female creation, penetration, and inborn purity are still embedded within *Buffy*'s subtext through Darla's non-binary body and Buffy's superhuman blood status, it is clear that society has not overcome these nearly 200-year-old sex-and-gender disquiets.

[24] While contemporary readers may assume that most people value the female body more than they did in the nineteenth century, *Buffy*'s thematic similarities to *Dracula* suggest that the world is still afraid of female bodily authority and complexity. These modern characters are threatened by female creational authority, just as the three vampire women and their bleeding lips threaten Jonathan Harker. Whedon's characters dread Buffy's stake and Darla's fangs because these appendages give the female masculinized power. Similarly, Whedon tries to remedy Stoker's patriarchal ideas about gendered blood and purity, but by making Buffy the ultimate penetrative hero, he consequently sacrifices her moral and emotional complexity. As Stoker's Van Helsing believes that "a brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble," Whedon overcorrects this androcentric belief by realigning Buffy with the female purity upheld by the Victorian Era's Cult of True Womanhood (150). Despite the fact that in the *Buffy* series, the bravest character is now a woman, her moral complexity is pulled into ideal feminine purity because she possesses morally righteous slayer blood. In trying to "defeat" *Dracula*'s patriarchy, Whedon enforces a new form of the same concept.

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