

## Twenty Years into *Buffy*

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* premiered on March 10, 1997. The year 2017 thus marks the twentieth anniversary of the show, and *Buffy* is still alive in the consciousness of viewers old and new. We are chronologically twenty years into *Buffy*, and those of us associated with *Slayage* are also into—deeply engaged with—*Buffy*. We here offer the thoughts of some of the editorial board members and officers of the Whedon Studies Association as we contemplate the anniversary and the significance of Joss Whedon and company’s remarkable series.

—Rhonda V. Wilcox, Editor of *Slayage*

*“It hurts sometimes more than we can bear. If we could live without passion, maybe we’d know some kind of peace. But we would be hollow. Empty rooms, shuttered and dank, without passion, we’d be truly dead.”*

—Angelus, “*Passion*,” 2.17

In the twenty years since *Buffy* first aired, our television screens have been overrun with vampires, zombies and other horror monsters. The vampires *Buffy* staked all burst into dust, while vampires in *True Blood* burst into the most gruesome and graphic explosions of blood and gore. TV has fundamentally changed, and horror, while always present, has never been more visible. Looking back on *Buffy*, one wonders if its aesthetic restraint might seem quaint and innocent as compared to shows such as *Being Human*, *The Walking Dead*, *American Horror Story*, and even *Supernatural*. On reflection, however, *Buffy* remains an emotionally wrenching series, and one of the parent-texts (along with *Twin Peaks* and *The X-*

*Files* ) of this new Golden Age of horror, prepared to explore and experiment with the genre, offering revisionist approaches but also highlighting the genre's significance and layered meanings. This is a show that reminds us that horror should be taken seriously. I do not advocate restraint over gore, or gore over restraint (an echo of long-standing literary arguments about the differences between terror and horror). I would argue that they both have their place within an ever changing history of the genre. What *Buffy* brought to horror was a deep emotional underpinning to its use of generic conventions, emerging from the long running televisual format through which we emotionally invest in the characters both good or bad (but often somewhere in between). So while Jenny Calendar's death in "Passion" (to name just one example) is presented in an antiseptic manner in terms of its graphic detail—the snapping of her neck is swift and de-emphasised by the cut away from her dead body to a medium shot of Angelus – the horror of the moment is built upon our emotional ties to her and to Angel, now corrupted by his evil alter-ego. In fact the suddenness and speed of her death enhances the horror, highlighting the ephemeral nature of life, so easily snuffed out, and the emotional trauma of loss. This moment offers the audience a visceral and emotional kick in the stomach. This loss is made all the more unsettling as it is committed by a character with whom we have also invested. This scene uses the tropes of horror to explore the pain and loss of Jenny but also Angel. The horror is further punctuated by Angelus' brutal display of Jenny's body in Giles' bed, surrounded by the accoutrements of romance and passion. The corporality of her body may be downplayed when he kills her, but it is laid out for all to see on Giles' bed. Horror in *Buffy* was a site of pain and suffering, but also complex emotional entanglements with characters and actions. In this manner, *Buffy*, through Angel and later Spike, provided a model for the morally ambiguous monster/hero who populates contemporary TV horror, struggling to define or identify a fine line

of moral action within a confusing and increasingly uncertain world. They challenged traditional conceptions of masculinity and morality and highlighted the manner in which these concepts were constructed and constantly in flux. These characters continue to haunt our television screens in the form of Mitchell in *Being Human*, Rick in *The Walking Dead*, Sam and Dean in *Supernatural*, Klaus in *The Originals*, and Roman and Peter in *Hemlock Grove*. They are heroes *and* villains, human *and* monster, good *and* evil. TV horror in the wake of *Buffy* refutes absolutes and confronts audiences with uncertainty, destabilizing conceptions of normality and morality, and inviting us to question all that we believe to be true. Therein lies the true power of horror.

—Stacey Abbott

“*Déjà vu much?*” —*Bronze: Beta (July 26, 2002)*

In “Yes,” the first-season final episode of ABC’s series *Quantico*, Alex Parrish and her fellow FBI aspirants congregate at a local bar to celebrate their imminent graduation from the training academy. She walks up to Special Agent Ryan Booth, her colleague and romantic interest, who had graduated from the academy years before and doubtless attended such a party then, and says, “*Déjà vu much?*” For fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, though, it was *déjà vu* much all over again. *Buffy* fandom has only grown over the last twenty years, and the series has influenced popular culture worldwide in various ways, but especially the English language. Some is subcultural, but no less significant for that — Mark Peters tracked uniquely *Buffy* words like *bitca* and *wiggins* in years of activity on *Television without Pity*, for instance—but some items have a surer, nearly ubiquitous foothold in English vocabulary now, and the *Buffy much* is one of them. Doesn’t it appear at least once in every show since *Buffy*, to certify televisual hipness? It’s all over

Twitter and flickr and other such platforms. Why? Because sentences like *Pathetic much?* and *TMI much?* and *Wasted much?* pack a lot of attitude and even judgment into as few characters as possible, perfect for tweets, texts, and captions. But you'll find *Oedipus much?* in Will Frears' review of some of Elmore Leonard's novels in *Harper's*, in April, 2012—even if Leonard is pop culture, *Harper's* is not. *Buffy's much* has come a long way. Indeed, after twenty years, it's crossed generations. It's not ephemeral language—at least, not on the scale of human lifetimes. It's in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as well as *Green's Dictionary of Slang*, *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, and Tony Thorne's *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*. Look up *much* in *Urban Dictionary* and you'll find entries like these: “Used on the end of adjectives to make retarded sentences. If you want to sound like you're a conformist then go ahead. OR you could sound like you're from a modern age with advanced people [...] gangster much”; and “Used at the end of a sentence, as if to confirm something that you already know. Often used in a playfully disrespectful way [...] Example 1: A: (says insult) B: (overreacts) A: Wow, over reaction much (?) ----- Example2: A: What's 1 + 1? B: Haha, Genius much (?)” Both entries were posted in 2009; neither mentions *Buffy*. Nowadays, people use *Buffy's much* without knowing it's *Buffy's much*. Or, it was *Buffy's much*, but now it's everybody's *much*. A television show can't get much more influential than that.

—Michael Adams

“So, *why do you always write these strong women characters?*”

“*Because you're still asking me that question.*” —Joss Whedon

I have never left *Buffy* behind. My car licence plate is Buffy8. My *Buffy* DVDs sit in pride of place and protected behind a glass-fronted cabinet in my study.

I began my interest in *Buffy* because my teenage children were enthusing about it and then I started watching compulsively when one of my university students told me how *REAL* it was. A TV series about vampires and monsters was *real*? I had to know more. And then I realised it wasn't /isn't *JUST* about vampires, monsters, and slayers (*oh my*) but about learning to grow up however old you are; it's about difference and acceptance of gender, ethnicity, sexuality; it's about dying and death; it's about living through and overcoming adversity and trauma and fighting back. It's about topical issues: politics, ethics, philosophy. It is always fun for its wit, humour, and snappy come backs; it is enticing for its clever literary and popular cultural allusions; for its creation of what became part of a new lexicon and argot that spread through fan groups and beyond; above all, perhaps, it's about providing that immense sense of satisfaction when one experiences a well-crafted script and performance. I no longer offer many lectures on *Buffy*; the syllabus seems to have moved on, although I have offered some public ones on request. I no longer sit in a public social setting with an eclectic group of fans—*Buffy* nights at my local pub seem to be a thing of the past—but I am frequently asked to hold a private *Buffy* night, a *Buffy* marathon for my close friends in our own home. Some of these requests come from people who have been long-time fans and want to reminisce. Others, as super-keen initiates to the series in late middle age or older, have just discovered the fun and depth of a teenage Buffy Summers and her world. These friends want to devour a season's episodes in just a few sittings ("we have finished season 2 . Please can we borrow season 3 tonight?"). Together we discuss the still apt and topical layers of meanings under the wit, music and drama; we relate to the major events (falling in love? losing a parent? Abusive relationships? Fear of the unknown?) as well as the minutiae of our everyday lives in relation to Buffy Summers and her friends and their lives. Recently a friend noted how the series portrayed the ways in which a narcissistic, sinister

leader can gain control and support of a populace and how, with relative ease (and against all common sense) rapid abuse of power, misogyny, divisiveness follow. Our greatest dangers can come from unstable and malignant mortals, it seems, rather than from our imagined fictional monsters. Sound familiar? All a bit too real to me for me these days. Where is Buffy when we need her?

—Gerry Bloustien

*“Into every generation a Slayer is born. One girl in all the world. She alone will have the strength and skill to... There’s that word again. What you are. How you’ll die. Alone.” —The First, “Chosen,” 7.22*

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* premiered in 1997, yet she has never been more important as an icon for female agency. Although it is twenty years later, the rights of women over their own bodies are being challenged through the election of a misogynist president who asserts his right to control female bodies and challenges women’s reproductive rights and healthcare. Politically, a woman who claims her own humanity and asserts her rights over her body has never been more important. Artistically, Buffy continues to challenge as well. When Rhonda V. Wilcox wrote about *Buffy* in *Why Buffy Matters* in 2005, she talked about Joss Whedon as similar to Dickens or Shakespeare in his reception, mass popularity, and quality of writing; just as the texts and contexts of these authors continue to spark intellectual study, so, too, do Whedon’s worlds. As a scholar, I continue to find elements within the construction of Buffy that make her and what she represented not just requirements for the political present but aesthetically and socially necessary as well. For someone like me, interested in the representation of history and trauma within Whedon’s worlds, Buffy stands as an exemplar of the necessity of seeing ourselves not just in the present but also in the past and connecting with that past. In that way, she also connects to

such women as Alice Walker, who proclaimed the necessity for women to find ourselves in the past, to walk through our mother's gardens. Buffy acts as a role model not just for female power and connection but for confronting trauma and overcoming it by working through the past and present and connecting with community. At the end of the televised *Buffy*, she realizes that the key to defeating the worst enemy she has faced is to empower other women; twenty years later, she continues to do just that.

—Alyson R. Buckman

*"Strong is fighting. It's hard and it's painful and it's every day."* —*Buffy*,  
*"Amends,"* 3.10

"In every generation there is a chosen one," and in the generation of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, there was at least one forty-year-old woman rolling her eyes each time her adolescent daughter mentioned the petite blonde television character with mad Slayer skills. That woman was me, until I was introduced to the Slayer in a graduate course on Joss Whedon. Like many humanities scholars of my age, I was comfortable with my more canonical literary studies and my second wav(ish) brand of feminism. What my daughter recognized from the moment *Buffy* premiered in 1997, and what I came to realize in that 2004 classroom, is that quality storytelling could happen on the small screen, and that there was a new generation of feminists who held onto this program as a guide to persistence, a manual for enduring the hard and painful that comes with strength. Today, twenty years after Buffy staked her first vampire in Sunnydale, a new generation embraces the slayer example and finds courage in her courage. This is legacy.

—Cynthia Burkhead

*“Yes, it’s terribly simple. 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.” —Giles, “Lie to Me,” 2.7*

My involvement with *Buffy*, first as an audience member and then as a scholar, began “acutely,” like the sudden onset of an illness. It was intense, and marked one of the most productive writing periods of my academic career, resulting in the publication of more than a dozen single- and co-authored outputs. These spanned a period of eight years and covered such issues as the family, sexuality, and moral questions, issues of concern to me as a social psychologist. Joss Whedon said in an interview that there would never be a “very special” episode of *Buffy*, an episode where some particular issue of social concern was explored in the narrative, because of course the entire series was an exploration of important psycho-social matters—rich pickings for a psychologist!

So it would be almost impossible for *Buffy*’s significance for me to be diminished. However, as my academic base is social science and not popular culture, media studies or English studies, it is perhaps inevitable that I have left *Buffy* behind as a scholarly focus. Nevertheless, the show has remained a reference point for me in terms of what I regard as ‘quality TV’ and the success of this in allowing us to explore what it is to be human, contradictory, complex and imperfect. *Buffy* presented us with uneasy combinations that required us to reflect—“good” people who sometimes did bad things, and “bad” people who could be redeemed (or not) and even help to save the world. When I now watch a new TV show, the implicit question I ask is “Does it match up to *Buffy*?,” and whether my answer is “yes” or “no,” I am always aware of making that judgement. There was also much debate on the question of whether *Buffy* could be considered a “feminist” text. My own small research study in which I interviewed fans about



their engagement with the show suggested that, for many young women, the character of Buffy was an important role model, convincing them that they too could be strong and effective. That has to be a Good Thing. I can't think of any other TV show where the female lead is just that- a leader- and where the male characters are not diminished by following her.

Buffy and the Scoobies were like familiar and valued friends, and I miss them. Yes, I can watch them on DVD whenever I choose, but their development as interesting and complex people ceased with the end of the show, and I always feel a little sad at that.

—Viv Burr

*"I used to be a highly respected Watcher, and now I'm a wounded dwarf with the mystical strength of a doily."* —Giles, "Chosen," 7.22

How things change. At a time in my life when I often look back at things that have happened, calculate how long ago they happened, and recoil in horror at the answer, I can't believe we're talking about twenty years of *Buffy*. I probably found *Buffy* eighteen years ago, in my tiny house in Norwich, watching the BBC's 'cult' slot on weekday evenings—long before I'd heard of such a thing as television studies. I do still think about *Buffy*, partly the show itself, and partly all the other things I've discovered because of the show. *Buffy* led me to *Angel*, *Firefly* and *Dollhouse*, and to *Misfits*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Fringe*, *Humans*, *Jessica Jones* and *Orphan Black*. *Buffy* introduced me to genre hybridity so that I now expect a science fiction/fantasy/action-adventure show to look good and sound clever, ideally at the same time (wordplay and comedy are bonuses). I enjoy those moments when my sense of what is happening in a drama changes completely, those head-turning, whiplash moments that *Buffy* was so good at (I like the surprises). And I watch *Buffy* over again; certain episodes are favourites ("Prophecy Girl,"

“Surprise/Innocence,” “The Wish,” “Something Blue,” “Tabula Rasa”), but others are, at times, the right episode at the right moment (“The Body,” “Becoming,” “Graduation Day, Part 2,” “Chosen”). *Buffy* led me to academic discoveries, too: books and articles I’ve read, conference papers I’ve heard and presented, my own publications, and great scholarly friendships. Looking back, I find so many threads that return to *Buffy*, but I also see future prospects. For me, *Buffy* does stand as one of those pivotal moments in television history, but it isn’t ‘finished’; the text is still full of possibility. Its cookie-dough nature persists, even after twenty years.

—Bronwen Calvert

*“Life isn’t bliss. Life is just this. It’s living.”* —Spike, “Once More, with Feeling,” 6.7

A few weeks before *Buffy* turned 20, I was sharing with a colleague-friend some of the personal struggles I’ve faced in the last year and a half, great losses of loved ones and innocence. During much of this time, I’ve felt like *Buffy*: “I touch the fire and it freezes me.” For months and months, I’ve wanted the fire back but didn’t (and perhaps still don’t) know exactly how to find it, how to ignite a flame in my soul.

Along this path, I’ve read enough self-help books and books on spirituality to stock a high school library. I’ve begun practicing mindfulness and meditation. I’ve journaled. I’ve dug in the dirt to center and ground myself. I’ve prayed. I’ve communed with nature. I’ve said my daily affirmations. I’ve exercised. I’ve taken supplements. I’ve shown up for therapy. I know enough pop psychology lingo to offer my own seminars—seminars that no one should ever pay me or anyone else for! And I’ve been told by friends as well as professionals, “Sounds like you’re trying too

hard.” How else should one try when it feels like staying in this world hinges on healing?

My colleague-friend asked, “Do you think you’re attracted to *Buffy* because of your past?” Well, yes, of course I am, though only recently have I become more explicitly aware of that. Buffy, the girl and woman, is my avatar, slaying darkness and protecting light. I needed her 20 years ago before I even understand why or how much. Twenty years later, I need her still. We all do, I think. And when she needed a reason to stay in this world (again), someone was present to remind her: “Life isn’t bliss. Life is just this. It’s living.” Thanks a little bit to *Buffy* and Buffy, I’ve finally begun to feel once more the ember always present in my soul and to remember why life is just this. It’s living. And, even though Spike says otherwise, I still believe living can sometimes be bliss. And that’s enough for now.

—Tanya R. Cochran

*“I am Kendra, the Vampire Slayer.” —“What’s My Line,” Part 1, 2.9*

Dear Buffy,

I miss you terribly.

You were a friend to me when I was on my own in my first job, hundreds of miles away from family and friends. Not gonna lie, I was living on my own Hellmouth and your weekly battles were my only escape. You didn’t know it, but you and the Scoobies were my family.

And then, one day, you let me into *your* family and my world changed FOREVER. Her name was Kendra and she was me. An outsider with insider cred, a loner who didn’t know what friendship

was until she met you; you and Kendra went on to become the bedrock of my research and an inspiration to students in all of my classes for the next decade. You taught us ALL that women can share power and thrive; we are all sisters.

And we all miss you.

You saved us all. A lot.

—Lynne Edwards

*“And are there not moods which need heaven, hell, purgatory, and faeryland for their expression, no less than this dilapidated earth?”*

—*W.B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight*

I can say, without any exaggeration, that an episode of *Buffy* changed the trajectory of my professional and intellectual life. On May 19, 1998, I was in the early years of a Ph.D. program, and my days were spent reading James Joyce, Wallace Stevens, and Samuel Beckett, as well as grading freshman writing papers. The date, of course, was the Season Two finale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (“Becoming” Part Two), and somewhere in those seconds between Angel recovering his soul and Buffy realizing she still had to kill him, I was hooked. Somewhere in those few seconds, my intellectual interests changed, and the following years found me—at first somewhat ironically—writing an abstract and presenting on *Buffy* at a popular culture conference and then—now taking it much more seriously—writing an essay for the *Fighting the Forces* volume edited by Rhonda and David. The next decade—the years where I finished my Ph.D. and was lucky enough to secure a university position—found me watching, teaching, and publishing on *Buffy*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, and finally, *Dollhouse*, as well as other non-Whedon television like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Doctor Who*. In each case, I

first found elements in speculative television that I could use to help me think through the ideas I was working on in my more traditional scholarly work in religion and literature, and then, often enough, the television shows became my main focus.

In recently completed projects, I often left *Buffy* behind, although not the ways of thinking that came out of my engagement with the show. I have lately, however, found myself very literally returning to *Buffy* episodes and my writings on them. I am currently finishing a book on speculative television and religion (1997-2017: *Buffy to Westworld*), which involves revising and updating material I wrote years ago and incorporating it into my last ten years of TV watching. Just this week I found myself writing, again, about the competing sources of power in *Buffy*'s first fight with Luke in "Welcome to the Hellmouth." I am surprised and pleased at how well the themes and ideas that I first explored in writing about *Buffy* in the early years of the twenty-first century still matter and still speak to the art of television, to the aesthetics of popular culture, and to modern negotiations of religion and radical theology. Ideas of embodied knowledge, of divine absence, of narrative experimentation, and of the power of texts feel just as important, just as complicated, and just as fresh as they did back then. For me, watching, thinking and writing about *Buffy* is once again, not just—as popular culture is often used—a way of *demonstrating* theoretical ideas, but a way of *doing* them. *Buffy* has as much to say to the post-Trump world as to the post 9/11 world. It is, indeed, still all about power.

—Gregory Erickson

"One of those *Buffy* people"

I still think of *Buffy*. I still think *Buffy* is important as a TV drama series. I probably think of it every day. I maybe mention it in

conversation with students or colleagues at least once a week. It may mean something different now than when it aired in the late 1990s: after all the television landscape is very different now. Yet I find that *Buffy* the series is not just a reference point for me as a scholar and a teacher, it's a reference point for others, even students who weren't born when it first aired. I still quote lines from *Buffy*, and even better I sometimes exchange lines from *Buffy* with someone else. It, and its spin-off *Angel*, have been the basis of instant bonding with complete strangers from the start (Bronwen Calvert and Stacey Abbott, I'm looking at you). A colleague from my university—a professor in the psychology department—told me that when she was looking at the university as a potential employer, one of the things that caught her eye was my work on *Buffy*. When I first started watching *Buffy* and then publishing on it, I had no idea there would ever be such a thing as the Whedon Studies Association, nor that one day I would be its Vice President. *Buffy* has brought me what many people in the WSA refer to as another family. Stacey, Bronwen, and I refer to ourselves as the Trio, an in-joke only *Buffy* fans will get. So when I meet other academics and they say, as they sometimes do, “Oh, you're one of those *Buffy* people...” depending on the tone of voice they use I may challenge their assumptions about television drama, television studies, horror, and the value of all of these. But, twenty years on, I am still proud to be one of those *Buffy* people.

—Lorna Jowett

*“The hardest thing in this world is to live in it. Be brave. Live.” —Buffy,  
“The Gift,” 5.22*

We were all charged in the finale of the series to become our own heroes. Whedon's invitation to his audience refused the usual bridging technique for a new series by instead breaking the fantasy

(in the psychological sense) fourth wall to empower the show's audience. This heartfelt and inclusive ending emblemizes what I regard as core to the show's intention *and* legacy: we each fight our own daily battles with the Big Bad, particularly now when the political has become so intently personal. What we can take from Buffy, in this bleak time, is a fuller heart. We must find a way to live between the desire to exercise agency and being subject to the Powers That Be; choice and agency all too often reduced to the level of the consumer. Being a hero is not therefore as cut and dry as it might seem in the superheroes model. This model is regularly employed as a popular panacea by many films and videogames and it is also easily adopted by other forms of communication. We must navigate and acknowledge complexity and be sufficiently open to personal self-reflection and change. The thing is that hero narratives devoid of complexity or difficult choices, where power operates as *deus ex machina*, are just not good for us...what I love about Whedon is that he knows that.

—Tanya Krzywinska

*“Only a Real Human Voice” — “Hush,” 4.10*

There are few cultural products that have as directly and clearly influenced my life over the last 20 years as *Buffy*. None, in fact. On the wall above the computer on which I am writing this is a large poster frame with a picture of my daughter photo-shopped into a graveyard, Buffy's pink leather jacket on, stake in hand, and the title “Ellie the Vampire Slayer” emblazoned in that brilliant font. In my office at work there are two life-size cardboard cutouts – one of Angel; one of Buffy. My first job move was directly because of my book on aesthetics in *Buffy*. That book (along with some other stuff) encouraged a conference organiser to invite me to speak at her conference in Canada – we now live together. I have

friends around the globe because of our shared love for the show. And that is all trivial, or only personally relevant, except that my response is repeated with myriad variations, thousand upon thousands of times. This show took its audience to places few artworks can hope to. It galvanised, encouraged, questioned, demanded and, in return, we loved: we loved with ferocity, with delight and desire. As lovers are, we were besotted and critical. The love, as love is, was complex, polysemous: sometimes directed at a character, sometimes at an episode, sometimes at a writer but nearly always at its executive producer. There are so many books and articles written on *Buffy* that try to explain why. A trite answer, but one I am very happy to stand by, is that in a show about monsters, and vampires, what we always got - whether in its grief, its love, its horror, its fear, its bravery, its modesty, its care, its callousness - was a voice: a “real human voice”. And 20 years on, that voice, that plangent and sonorous voice; that hushed and optimistic voice speaks to a culture that needs the Slayer more than ever.

—Matthew Pateman

*“There is only one thing on this earth more powerful than evil. And that’s us.”—Buffy, “Show Time,” 7.11*

*Buffy* today is probably more important to me than ever, because I have just published my book, *“I’m Buffy and You’re History”*: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Contemporary Feminism!* (There – that’s my homework from the “Shameless Self-Promotion” workshop done! No lie.) Over the 20 years that I’ve been writing about *Buffy*, first for undergraduate classes and now for I.B. Tauris, people have often asked me “Why *Buffy*?” For some reason therapists, in particular, are very interested in this question. The die-hard *Buffy* fan will know immediately that the answer is “duh!” but I know that not everyone comes from that category (yet) so I want to share why I think *Buffy* has something to give us, especially



at this time, in a post-Brexit era, with a lunatic narcissist in the White House. It's going to sound irretrievably corny, and there's no getting away from that. But, for me, Buffy is about fighting the forces of darkness, day in, day out, and trying to be human at the same time. It's a lot of other things—it's hilarious, progressive, irreverent, and moving—but ultimately it comes down to this: "Strong is fighting. It's hard and it's painful, and it's every day. It's what we have to do. And we can do it together." Buffy's words resonate in our current political climate with disarming and horrible relevance: "There is only one thing on this earth more powerful than evil. And that's us."

—Patricia Pender

*"Slayers . . . every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?"* —Buffy, "Chosen," 7.22

The truth is, I've been following *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for twenty-five years—since the flawed but hilarious 1992 movie made from Joss Whedon's script (starring Kristy Swanson and Rutger Hauer) lampooned both the southern California mythos and the horror movie genre. For me, recently transplanted from North Carolina to the Los Angeles suburbs, it was just what I wanted. Therefore, when a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV show was announced in 1997, my interest was based on memories of the campy movie. But "Welcome to the Hellmouth" / "The Harvest," while retaining a satiric edge, was both darker and deeper than the movie, starting with the opening sequence in which a timid blonde girl turns vampire on her would-be teen seducer—a twisted reflection of Buffy, the ever-unexpected "just a girl" hero. I knew *Buffy* was special, but it wasn't until season five (2000-01) that I discovered other scholar-fans and fan-scholars through PCA and the Internet, and then witnessed a surge in *Buffy* fandom as season six

premiered, just a month after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Many found, and continue to find, inspiration in a hero and her friends who endured suffering, fought against both inner demons and manifest monsters, and “saved the world. A lot,” without taking themselves too seriously. *Buffy* remains a uniquely innovative series in both structure and style, foundational among examples of what Jason Mittell, in *Complex TV*, describes as “narratively complex television.” In 2017, both viewers who are discovering the show for the first time through reruns, streaming services, or DVDs, and the expanding Whedon Studies community find that *Buffy* remains fresh because its stories, as Whedon says, “come from violence, they come from sex. They come from death...[S]o that when we’re confronted by the genuine horror that is day-to-day life we don’t go insane” (“Joss Whedon, Feminist,” James Longworth, in *Joss Whedon: Conversations*). But never underestimate the power of a good quip.

—Elizabeth Rambo

*“Oh, I’m beginning to understand this now. It’s all about the journey, isn’t it?” —Giles, “Restless,” 4.22*

In spirituality circles it has become fashionable to say that there are certain journeys we shouldn’t undertake unless we have a teacher. Without an experienced guide, the terrain is too perilous to navigate, the inner landscape too difficult to understand. *Buffy* intuited this twenty years ago, exploding the paradigm of the go-it-alone action figure and making the so-called ancillary characters a vital part of the whole.

If I’ve learned anything in the last two decades, it’s that life is, indeed, “all about the journey” and the people who walk the road with you. There are teachers, if you look for them; there are friends who would lay down their lives for you. Sometimes—most of the

time—the battle’s done and you only kind of won (6.8), but you and your loved ones sound the victory cheer anyway, because what else can you do? If everything’s all about the journey, that means any such partial victory is celebrated and then you get up the next day and fight the battle all over again. It is wearisome and hard (and did we mention wearisome?), but you do this work because it’s yours to do.

But not yours alone. No, never yours alone. Because your friends are your teachers, and they will stand with you through an apocalypse now and again.

—Jana Riess

*“I need something to sing about.”* —*Buffy*, “*Once More, with Feeling*,”  
6.7

Having watched *Buffy* during its original run, I was struck repeatedly by its realism. This may seem a strange thing to say about a show that featured, vampires, monsters, witches, and zombies, but underneath it all, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was about this life and the horrors and pleasures that accompany it. Of course, in retrospect, it is the pleasures that recur in my mind—The Scooby Gang’s willingness to stand with Tara against her family, the recognition that forgiveness for unspeakable acts is possible, that love, that most sought-after of human relationships, is possible, but often fleeting. The horror, it seems to me, was always in the idea of being Chosen. Adam Phillips brings this out nicely: “Once the promise of immortality, of being chosen, was displaced by the promise of more life—the promise, as we say, of getting more out of life—the un-lived life became a haunting presence in a life legitimated by nothing more than the desire to live it.” In other words, the hardest thing in this world is to live in it; and it’s harder, if more rewarding, to live

without the “burden of Slayerhood.” By the end of the series, Buffy gets to share her power, her chosenness, with those who want it. This makes the series end, for me, on an optimistic notion, indeed, a secular notion, of shared power freely taken up, not a power chosen to be a burden. *Buffy*’s continuing relevance and resonance is in showing us, through seven seasons of television, that points like that can be made in a TV series and that they can be made through art and craft. *Buffy* wasn’t the first show I found myself passionately watching, but it was the first one I wrote about (and continue to write about and to teach). For its bringing that ability out in me, I will be forever startled and appreciative, and for its pulling me into the circle of “Buffy Studies,” I will be forever grateful. That latter occurred in great part through the intentional hard work of the late David Lavery, and on this twentieth anniversary of the airing of *Buffy* and the recent passing of David, all I can do is hope to see him as a model of a path-breaking scholar—I hear him even now saying, as Angel says at the end of his series, “Let’s go to work.” There’s so much more still to be explored in *Buffy*’s seven seasons.

—James B. South

“Give me something to sing about.” —*Buffy*, “Once More, with Feeling,”  
6. 7

As *La La Land* broke the records for the most awarded film at the 2017 Golden Globe Awards, including a gong for best original score and another for Best Director, there was only one question I wanted to ask winner Damien Chazelle: “Were you, or have you ever been, a *Buffy* Fan?” From that very first moment when the cast of *La La Land* breaks into song on the freeway ramp where L.A.’s Interstate 105 connects to Interstate 110, I was thinking *Buffy*. In particular, episode seven from season six, “Once More with Feeling,” which is framed and staged as a musical. Two numbers

immediately came to mind: the brief “They Got the Mustard Out,” featuring screenwriter David Fury exultantly brandishing his dry-cleaning in the street, and the one where Marti Noxon pleads with the Parking Ticket Officer as the camera tracks right along the street following Giles, Xander, and Anya in conversation while three cleaners dance with their brooms in the background. So far, Chazelle the movie buff has cited only a number of classic films as his inspiration, including Jean Luc Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) and Jacques Demy’s *Les Demoiselles De Rochefort* (1967), and has been acclaimed for his “quotation” of earlier film musicals including a Busby Berkeley water fountain moment. But, as I keep insisting when anyone asks me what I thought of *La La Land* and this glorious revival of the Hollywood musical for a contemporary audience, Joss Whedon got there first, on television, with *Buffy*.

—Sue Turnbull

*“The dead rose. We should’ve at least had an assembly.” —Xander, “The Harvest,” 1.2*

Well, we did. We have assembled many times, in many places, in many ways. It started in living rooms, and on phones, and online; it moved on to conversations after papers presented at conferences for broader subject areas; it grew to conferences specifically on *Buffy*, starting in 2002 and continuing to this day. (The last biennial *Slayage* conference was in the UK in summer 2016; the next will be in the USA, Alabama to be specific, in 2018.) We started talking about *Buffy*, and we haven’t stopped.

If you had told me, when I was in grad school studying the works of Charles Dickens, that I would spend much of my career writing about a teenage girl who pokes sticks into vampires, I would have said you’d lost your frilly little mind. But somewhere along the line it occurred to me that Dickens was, in fact, an artist of

popular culture—and, by golly, Shakespeare had been, too. Then I started writing about the good work that I was seeing on television—*Moonlighting*, *Twin Peaks*, *Northern Exposure*, *The X-Files*. And when *Buffy* arrived, I realized I'd found something that I didn't even know I wanted. *Buffy* doesn't just have interesting and complex women characters; it has a woman as the hero. And she is the hero of a world as dangerous as our own. She is the hero of a world with friends as real as our own. The show's narrative length and depth develop meaning—the long-term hero's journey and the depth of levels of symbolism that expand the significance for each episode. Engaging with the symbolism activates the audience; we don't just respond to the surface, though the surface (with its shiny dialogue and brilliant images) is worth responding to: *Buffy's* language is, when you think about it, heroic. But when we recognize that the second episode's witch is a mother trying to live through her daughter, or that the Jekyll / Hyde monster is an abusive boyfriend, we are taking part in creating the meaning; we are part of *Buffy*. And we share that experience when we have our assemblies to talk about the risen dead, the vampires and all the other monsters of *Buffy*. *Buffy* is good, and it does good. Among much other good that it does, it helps us recognize in others a desire for a certain kind of good work in the world; it helps us know that we are not alone. Thank you, Joss Whedon and company.

Strange as it may sound, *Buffy* serves as a kind of book of wisdom. We recall its words and images and situations and characters to help us make sense of our world. (*Don't you think he's kind of a Riley?* “To read makes our speaking English good.” *You know when Willow can't pick out the right sweater for the funeral.... “You made a bear!”*) *Buffy* is worthy work in terms of its aesthetic and social value, but for many of us, it has become more than that. We have immersed ourselves in its characters and qualities long enough to make it a touchstone for life. Whether it will continue to

serve that function, we cannot now know; but I expect to see it re-seen for many years to come.

—Rhonda V. Wilcox  
(with enduring inspiration from David Lavery)

*“In the end, we are all who we are—no matter how much we may appear to have changed.”—Giles, “Lessons,” 7.1*

My first exposure to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was a bit of a “failure to launch.” On 8 December, 1997, upon recommendation of my friend Lynn, I tuned in to the show’s season two episode, “Ted” (2.11). I liked the riff on earlier horror films that played upon familial dread, like the tense and disturbing *The Stepfather* (Joseph Ruben, 1987). But without the context of the rest of the series, I found the episode’s combination of kitsch and comedy, shock and melancholy, disconcerting. A few years later, upon recommendation from another friend, Jenna, I gave the series another shot, starting from the beginning. Season one was a powerful meditation on the terrifying implications of responsibility, the dread that comes with both freedom to choose, and the suspicion that choice is an illusion. The season finale, “Prophecy Girl” (1.12; 2 June 1997), was one of the most complex episodes of television I’d ever seen. Alienated from all around her, Buffy was contemplating an adult burden of responsibility in a teen milieu, but she was also struggling with an awareness of emotional and bodily vulnerability—and of her own mortality. I devoured the series from then on. (The moral here is borne out by my experience with the series and by the series itself: trust your friends.)

As a teacher and a scholar of horror media, I have found that the best texts tackle big questions through an embodied experience that does not detach the brain from the viscera. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is as unabashedly moving as it is sharply critical, and it isn’t

afraid to draw its inspirations from genres that have perpetually fallen under the hard and heavy scrutiny of those whose estimation of worth is limited to the highbrow. *Buffy*'s writers and directors never pitched their material as above the horror traditions that inspired the show. Classic horror tropes from *Frankenstein* (1818), *Dracula* (1897), and the penny dreadfuls; to the female gothic of Radcliffe, the Brontës, and Austen; to the Weird tradition and cosmic horror of Poe, Lovecraft and others—these were all there, woven into the show's stories of people, younger and older, trying to get along and to survive another day. The show brought me to Whedon studies more widely; it was the source of my first publication; and it has introduced many of my students to studies in popular culture that go beyond critically-detached fandom. As I move forward in the coming months on a major scholarly project, of which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has turned out to be perhaps the primary text, I see its relevance and endurance to fans and scholars for many more than just another twenty years.

—Kristopher Karl Woofter

Readers are invited to submit their own responses to the twentieth anniversary of *Buffy* (no more than 500 words, epigraph recommended but not required) to [slayage.journal@gmail.com](mailto:slayage.journal@gmail.com) with subject heading Buffy 20, by July 31, 2017, for possible publication in *Slayage*.