

Horror and Fairy Tale Elements in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Episode “Hush”

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[1] Since its premiere in 1997, the American TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*) has garnered much critical acclaim and has been the subject of a variety of academic research. The basic premise of the show is that the eponymous Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) has been chosen to defend the world from supernatural evil. She comes from a long line of inhumanly strong female warriors who alone are strong enough to fight the forces of evil. Buffy gets help from her school friends Xander (Nicholas Brendon) and Willow (Alyson Hannigan), as well as their significant others, and the British Watcher Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head), whose job it is to prepare her for the upcoming fights.

[2] According to creator Joss Whedon, the show was inspired by the horror movie cliché of the blonde girl walking into an alley and being murdered (Bellafante 84). Whedon’s explicit wish to subvert this cliché clearly aligns the show with the horror genre, but the TV series also incorporates other genres in its seven-season run, such as adventure and romance. One of the genres that Whedon frequently and more or less explicitly draws on is the fairy tale genre. The folklorist Maria Tatar argues that horror and the fairy tale are often linked and interconnected in their older versions:

For many adults, reading through an unexpurgated edition of the Grimms' collection of tales can be an eye-opening experience. Even those who know that

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Snow White's stepmother arranges the murder of her stepdaughter, that doves peck out the eyes of Cinderella's stepsisters, that Briar Rose's suitors bleed to death on the hedge surrounding her castle, or that a mad rage drives Rumpelstiltskin to tear himself in two will find themselves hardly prepared for the graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of these bedtime stories for children. (Tatar 3)

It is possible to argue that *BtVS* draws more on the traditional versions of the fairy tale than on what Amy Goetzman calls their sanitized contemporary versions. *BtVS* does not shy from the depiction of violence and mature themes, as the series' fairy tale themed episodes indicate: In the world of *BtVS*, Hänsel and Gretel are the bad guys, a composite monster that has drawn on humanity's paranoia since the Middle Ages to create witch hunts and decimate whole towns ("Gingerbread" 3.11). Little Red Riding Hood is referenced in the Halloween episode "Fear Itself" (4.4), when Buffy dresses up as the heroine of this cautionary tale but carries weaponry instead of cake and wine around in her basket. And finally, true love's kiss lifts the curse on Willow that damns her to repeat the crimes of her lover's killer by shooting her new girlfriend Kennedy (Iyari Limon) in Season Seven's "The Killer in Me" (7.13). The scene even makes an explicit reference to the fairy tale parallel:

KENNEDY. This is just magic. And I think I'm figuring this whole magic thing out. It's just like fairy tales.

WILLOW. What are you doing?

KENNEDY. Bringing you back to life. ("The Killer in Me" 7.13: 00:39:16- 00:39:29)

[3] Fourth season's "Hush" (4.10) is one of the most interesting fairy tale-inspired episodes, since it incorporates elements from both the horror and the fairy tale genre. Instead of drawing on a classic fairy tale and rewriting it to fit his vision, Whedon writes his own fairy tale to fit within the

universe he has created. The episode's plot is rather straightforward: a demonic group, called the Gentlemen, comes to Sunnydale and steals everybody's voices in order to steal their hearts in peace. Buffy and her friends try to regain their voices because screaming is the only way of defeating these fairy tale monsters. The only *BtVS* episode to be nominated for an Emmy in the category "Outstanding Writing in a Drama Series" stands out due to Whedon's artistic choice of producing an episode without verbal communication for the majority of its runtime. As Bonnie Kneen, among others, points out, Whedon has a reputation for his fast-paced and witty dialogue, with the neologisms and dialogue structures of *BtVS* often being referred to as Buffy Speak (see also Adams). In contrast, "Hush" stands out for its almost complete lack of dialogue. For approximately 26 minutes of its 43-minute run-time, the episode works completely without verbal communication and can be seen as an homage to the silent movies of the early twentieth century ("Hush Featurette": 00:01:32-00:01:40).

[4] Aided by the lack of verbal communication and an inspired soundscape, the episode's narrative structure and the depiction of its villains clearly connect "Hush" to both the horror and fairy tale genre. This essay will argue that Joss Whedon employs tropes and clichés of these two rather traditional genres in order to create a feminist and modern narrative that fits within the larger narrative of the *BtVS* universe. In order to do so, it is necessary to analyze how the narrative structure embeds the Gentlemen within the fairy tale genre. The essay will also focus on the depiction, comportment and weakness of the episode's villains and insofar as they connect to tropes and clichés associated with the horror and fairy tale genres. The three major interpersonal relationships depicted in the episode and their connection to the fairy tale trope of the damsel in distress and her knight in shining armor, as well as gender roles in horror movies, will be the focus of the next section. The last part will focus on episode's soundscape and how it enhances and connects to the narrative.

The Gentlemen

[5] The villains of “Hush” easily set themselves apart from other monsters of the *BtVS*, as this section will illustrate by first analyzing how the narrative surrounding the Gentlemen embeds them in the fairy tale genre and then focusing on their appearance, comportment, and weaknesses in relation to the horror genre. The Gentlemen are explicitly connected to fairy tale and children’s literature from the moment they first appear during the episode’s cold open. According to Kelly Kromer, the narrative surrounding them works to remove them from reality and to move them into the realm of the fantastic. A young girl singing a lullaby first introduces the Gentlemen in a dream sequence of Buffy’s:

Can't even shout
Can't even cry
The Gentlemen are coming by
Looking in windows
Knocking on doors
They need to take seven
And they might take yours
Can't call to Mum
Can't say a word
You're gonna die screaming
But you won't be heard (“Hush”4.10: 00:02:00-
00:02:30)

According to Elizabeth Bridges, classic nursery rhymes deal with subjects like death and disease (102), with the often cheery tune distracting the audience from the occasionally violent lyrics (Burton- Hill). As Clemency Burton-Hill states, child development experts argue that the rhymes can help children with their mental development and spatial reasoning. According to Karra Shimabukuro, nursery rhymes and lullabies also fulfill an important function in folklore: “The lullaby here serves the same purpose as in folklore: it is meant as a warning about the bogeyman and reinforces the oral element of folklore” (57).

Similarly, the lullaby performed in this episode already gives the audience a taste of what is to come. Retaining the traditional lullaby quality, the short rhyme has a haunting quality to it, connecting the Gentlemen to children's literature and folklore. This helps to give them a nightmarish quality which they never quite lose throughout the episode. In the "Hush" audio commentary, Whedon explicitly states that this was in fact his goal: "We get to make with the creepy...and nothing's creepier than a little girl singing a nursery rhyme about the bad guys" (Whedon 00:01:47-00:01:56). In fact, Whedon here draws on a variety of horror movies doing the same, such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* (which is explicitly referenced in the "Hush" audio commentary), *The Horror Show*, and *The Stay Awake* (Muir). Desson Thomson argues that the trope of the creepy child singing a lullaby invokes two specific reactions: first, a sense of familiarity with the song and then the sudden realization that the audience's childhood associations with the familiar tune have been corrupted. When the audience hears Whedon's version of the traditional lullaby, a similar reaction is invoked not only because of the familiar tune, but also because of what Thomson calls an at this time almost Pavlovian response to lullabies in horror movies. The episode's title already makes the connection to the popular lullaby "Hush, Little Baby," whose lyrics are corrupted and subverted by the episode's plot of Sunnydale's population involuntarily being hushed.

[6] But more than invoking a Pavlovian response in the audience, it is possible to argue that introducing the Gentlemen via a lullaby is a way of establishing them from the start as a breed apart. In the world of *BtVS*, monsters are real; their existence is unquestionably a part of the characters' reality. The show's seven-season run depends on the existence of the supernatural because the preternaturally strong Buffy can only be successful as a hero when she has something or someone to fight. In the series' universe, demons have a reason to exist. They, just like the human characters, have aims and goals and

often a specific reason for haunting Sunnydale: the aforementioned Hänsel and Gretel from “Gingerbread” (3.11) start a witch hunt in Sunnydale because they feed on human strife; the fear demon in “Fear Itself” (4.4) is accidentally summoned by a group of college students and then simply does what comes naturally. The Gentlemen, on the other hand, do not get ascribed a reason for coming to Sunnydale specifically, and at no point in the episode is it explained why they need the seven hearts already mentioned in the lullaby.

[7] Explicitly connecting them to the fairy tale genre after the characters have lost their voices further establishes the Gentlemen as different from the average *BtVS* monsters. Giles fails to find information on the newest threat in his usual sources on the supernatural and finally turns to a book on fairy tales for answers (“Hush”4.10: 00:26:35-00:26:40). In the episode’s exposition scene, starting at 00:26:41, Giles explains the Gentlemen’s story using a self-made picture book whose childlike drawings further embed these villains in children’s literature. The pictures are not only crude but also rather gory, thereby drawing parallels to the aforementioned brutality of the Brothers Grimms’ versions of traditional fairy tales. “They are fairy tale monsters” (“Hush”4.10: 00:27:20) is Giles’ simple answer to the question what the Gentlemen are exactly. Interestingly, when explaining their modus operandi, Giles puts “They come to a town” (“Hush”4.10: 00:27:42) on the slide implying that the Gentlemen have no specific reason for coming to Sunnydale, they just come to “a” town which, according to Rhonda V. Wilcox, perfectly aligns with the tradition of fairy tales not taking place in a specific but a general location such as a forest or a castle (152). By phrasing their tale this way, Giles further embeds the Gentlemen in a traditional fairy tale narrative, setting them apart from what the characters of *BtVS* would consider the norm. This is further underlined by the Gentlemen’s hideout in a town: a phallic clock tower, a contrast to the Gothic mansion, which as Wilcox points out, is the traditional hideout of the monstrous female (150)—a tower that

appears in Sunnydale for this episode only. This is an interesting parallel to the Season Five premiere “Buffy vs. Dracula” (5.1) when a castle appears just in time for Dracula to take up residence. Just like Dracula, the Gentlemen have no place in late twentieth-century Sunnydale. Instead, a space has to be created specifically for them to take over and make their own. This not only sets them apart from the other demons of *BtVS* that adapt to modern society, but also draws clear parallels to what Carol J. Clover calls horror movies’ “Terrible Place” (30), the villain’s hideout where the ultimate showdown will inevitably take place.

[8] After establishing the Gentlemen as fairy tale monsters and reiterating their desire for hearts, Giles’ presentation also introduces the character of the fairy tale princess who has to scream—which, according to Rhona J. Berenstein, is a classic sign of a damsel in distress in horror movies (16)—in order to defeat the monsters (“Hush” 4.10: 28:40). That the Gentlemen can only be defeated by a woman’s scream is especially significant when taking their appearance into account: “[. . .] they look for all the world like dead white males” (Wilcox 150). The Gentlemen are accompanied by their footmen, ape-like beings in straight jackets, that do their dirty work because the Gentlemen “would not sully themselves” (Whedon 00:24:04-00:24:10), which reveals a hierarchical structure within this villainous group. According to Wilcox, their silence only underlines the Gentlemen’s position of power and reinforces the monstrosity of their villainy (160). When creating the Gentlemen and their associates, Whedon went for a very specific look:

What I was going for with the Gentlemen was very specifically a Victorian kind of feel, because that to me is very creepy and fairytale-like. The politeness, the suits, the crazies who are like the crazies in the asylum in *Dracula*. The metal teeth sort of representing ‘Science Defeats Cavities!’ Everything is very in a Victorian era. To me that bespeaks total creepiness, and it is very classical [...] And what I

wanted from these guys was very specifically, and again I say it here, fairy tales. I wanted guys that would remind people of what scared them when they were children. I believe the thing that scares us most when we are children is old people. (Whedon 00:25:38-00:27:02)

By deliberately invoking the Victorian era, Whedon invites the audience to draw a connection from the Gentlemen to the hierarchical and patriarchal power structures commonly associated with this point in British history (Wilcox 151). Furthermore, Whedon was inspired by cultural icons like the vampire Nosferatu and the greedy capitalist Mr. Burns (Whedon), with which the audience would have strong associations, considering that the first is one of the first horror movie monsters and the second a character from the popular contemporary TV show *The Simpsons* (1989-present). The Gentlemen not only resemble these characters in their sharp, angular features, but also in their position of power over their respective towns. These associations of the Gentlemen with patriarchy and power of course put them in direct opposition to *BtVS*'s narrative of a female heroine not needing a man. Interestingly, it also sets them apart from the traditional fairy tale narrative, which, according to Maria Da Conceição Tomé and Gloria Bastos, tends to uphold the patriarchal status quo at the cost of the silenced female characters (5). In contrast to the monstrous patriarchy depicted in "Hush," the traditional fairy tale, as Silima Nanda argues, often villainizes its powerful female characters and idealizes the dependent, innocent female heroine that relies on the heroic male characters for her rescue (246-47). By replacing the powerful female with the traditional male as the villain, "Hush" adapts the traditional fairy tale narrative to modern society where the patriarchal status quo is no longer the only and best option.

[9] But, as Wilcox argues, only reading the Gentlemen as a metaphor for a patriarchal system that ultimately gets overthrown when the suppressed regain their voices, is an

oversimplification of the episode's plot (151). More than representing patriarchy trying to take over Sunnydale, the Gentlemen also symbolize "something about sex" (Wilcox 151). According to Bridges, the Gentlemen are tall, elegant, polite, old-fashioned and, most importantly, very grown-up (202). The characters of Buffy, on the other hand, are somewhere between child- and adulthood, as indicated by their status as college students (Bridges 203). While sex has played a role in *BtVS* in previous seasons, the college setting allows for a more mature exploration of the topic (Wilcox 152). The romantic relationships will be focused on in an upcoming section, but it is important to note at this point that the Gentlemen's modus operandi carries obvious sexual connotations, not uncommon for fairy tales, which, according to Karen E. Rowe, often deal with sexual fears (240). Sexual undertones are also common in horror movies with the killer often being "propelled by psychosexual fury" (Clover 27), which in "Hush" is realized by Gentlemen's frequent crossing of literal and metaphorical thresholds (Wilcox 156). If "house and body can often be read as symbolically equivalent" (Wilcox 156), then the Gentlemen's invasion of the private space by forcing their way into their victim's living quarters and their subsequent invasion of their victim's body by essentially performing cardiac surgery without prior consent ("Hush" 4.10: 00:24:25-00:25:29) can be read as a metaphor for rape (Wilcox 156-57). The Gentlemen's use of the scalpel as weapon of choice is reminiscent of slasher movies. According to Clover, killers from this genre frequently choose "pretechnological" (33) weapons such as knives and hammers over less personal and less hands-on weapons such as guns. This interpretation fits the stylistic choice of depicting the Gentlemen as belonging to the Victorian era and being part of the patriarchy. The fact that a knife can, according to Clover, be interpreted as a phallic symbol (32), supports the reading of the Gentlemen's surgical removal of their victims' hearts as a rape metaphor. What is interesting to note is that the Gentlemen's victims are not exclusively female, but seem to be divided evenly

between the sexes, contrary to the majority of victims in horror movies being sexually active females (Clover 33). The only heart we see removed in the episode is that of a male student, which can be interpreted as a conscious step away from using a traditionally female victim.

[10] Instead of interpreting the scalpel as a sexually charged symbol, the scalpel can also be read as a symbol for sterility and detachment (Wilcox 153), considering that the Gentlemen, as already established, “would not sully themselves” (Whedon 24:04-24:10). The scalpel can be read in the context of what Gina Wisker and Pete Boss call the horror movie trope of body horror (Wisker 8) and monstrous medicine (Boss 15), which are both concerned with a violent invasion and alteration of the human body. The forcible removal of organs has been the subject of a variety of movies and, according to O’Neill, often is associated with a state of helplessness in the victim (O’Neill 225). This is also true for “Hush” where the male victim is forcibly held down, unable to scream, and the involuntary witness to his own destruction. On a medical level, it might be interesting to compare this scene to the phenomenon of anesthesia awareness, described in detail by Beverly A. Orser et al. While the majority of patients experiencing this phenomenon do not experience pain, some do, and their recollections, which Anna Hodgekiss collected for an article on anesthesia awareness, bear a striking resemblance to the heart removal scene in “Hush” in that the patients were terrified and screaming without making a sound. The medical dimension certainly adds to the nightmarish quality of the Gentlemen and enhances the villains’ association to the horror genre by drawing on what Kromer calls childhood fears of doctors and surgery. Still, it is also possible to argue that the sexual angle is at the forefront of the narrative when taking the overarching themes of the episode into account, which are clearly revealed in the depiction of the episode’s interpersonal relationships.

Romantic Relationships in “Hush”

[11] As already mentioned, the narrative of “Hush” not only offers fairy tale monsters but also a fairy tale princess. As Nanda (among others) notes, the traditional fairy tale narrative often couples the helpless damsel in distress in the form of the princess with her fearless knight in shining armor, her heroic prince who ultimately saves the day (246-47). Alice Neikirk argues that the “good” female characters of fairy tales are consistently portrayed as beautiful (with beauty often being their defining feature), meek, submissive, and ultimately powerless (38-9). Female characters that attempt to take their lives into their own hands in fairy tales are generally considered evil because they go against the feminine ideal of the silent, obedient damsel (Neikirk 39). The fairy tale hero is often barely defined and only enters the scene at the end of the story but he still is the one that saves the day (Neikirk 39). The wedding, which often marks the climax of the fairy tale, rewards the prince for his heroics and the princess for conforming to what Rowe calls the “socially dictated role of wife and mother” (Rowe 1979: 250).

[12] In “Hush,” gender roles are not as clearly defined as in the traditional fairy tale. The episode depicts the development of three major romantic relationships of the series’ universe. While the three relationships are at very different points of their respective developments—Buffy and Riley (Marc Blucas) are at the verge of getting together, Willow and Tara (Amber Benson) meet for the first time, and Xander and Anya (Emma Caulfield) are already in an established relationship—they all rely on the trope of the damsel in distress and her knight in shining armor. How far the trope is subverted or played straight for these three couples will be the subject of the following subsections.

Buffy and Riley

[13] The budding romantic relationship of Buffy and Riley is arguably the romantic focal point of the episode. This section

will focus on Riley in relation to the Gentlemen before analyzing Buffy and Riley's shared scenes during the silent part of the episode to answer the question of how far these scenes subvert the abovementioned fairy tale trope. The last part will deal with horror movie tropes and how they connect to the character of Buffy.

[14] Just like the Gentlemen, Riley appears in Buffy's dream sequence at the start of the episode, and it is possible to argue that the narrative allows the audience to draw several parallels between the Gentlemen and Buffy's new love interest. Before the previously discussed lullaby introduces the Gentlemen, Buffy is asked by her professor Maggie Walsh (who unknown to Buffy is the leader of a paramilitary operation that hunts demons and of which Riley also is a member) to share a kiss with Riley in front of the class ("Hush" 4.10: 00:00:20-00:01:58). Interestingly, Maggie calls Riley a "good boy," which, according to Wilcox, not only sets him apart from Buffy's previous romantic partners (152), but also sets him up as a potential knight in shining armor for the upcoming fairy tale narrative. This status is undermined just minutes later: "[I]n Buffy's dream the single Gentleman is made equivalent to Riley: we see first Riley's hand on Buffy's shoulder, then a cut to the Gentleman with his hand on her shoulder" (Wilcox 153). By associating the Gentlemen with Riley in Buffy's mind, the episode calls his proclaimed goodness into question and establishes Buffy's doubts and hesitations concerning a relationship with him. Wilcox argues that while the Gentlemen represent the worst possible form of patriarchy, Riley embodies its very best incarnation (160). At this point of the season, Riley has already been established as gallant and kind, and he has been seen as a member of the military. Two episodes after "Hush," the episode "The I in Team" (4.13) very clearly shows that Riley, just like the Gentlemen, is part of a patriarchal and hierarchal society: he obeys, he does not question, and he and his fellow soldiers are uniformed, a parallel to the "almost identical" (Wilcox 151) Gentlemen.

While Riley might see himself as one of the good guys, the season ends with the destruction of the military operation he was part of, thereby indicating that even the best incarnation of patriarchy cannot coexist with the feminist universe *BtVS* has created (“Primeval” 4.21).

[15] In “Hush” it is already indicated that what Riley stands for is not enough for Buffy: “Riley can help Buffy defeat the worst side of patriarchy, but is he, its best incarnation, enough for Buffy? They can kiss and kill together, but they cannot dance and talk together” (Wilcox 160-61). The scenes they share in this episode illustrate the fundamental misunderstandings between the characters. “Hush” marks the couple’s relationship milestone of sharing their first kiss to the sound of swelling music (“Hush” 4.10: 00:20:54-00:21:28). Contrary to the traditional fairy tale kiss in Disney—according to Nanda (246), a sign of the damsel in distress and Prince Charming’s happily ever after—Buffy and Riley kiss during the episode’s middle part and the plot moves on; their happily ever after has to wait (Wilcox 156) and arguably never happens. Wilcox argues that the kiss only occurs because the characters have lost their voices and when they regain their voices, their doubts about their relationship and their inability to communicate reappear (Wilcox 161). In the very next episode, “Doomed” (4.11), the couple’s doubts and their communication problems are addressed, but not really resolved. Interestingly, it is Riley who is more optimistic and hopeful concerning a potential relationship than Buffy who is afraid of getting hurt and the relationship ending badly. It is possible to interpret Riley’s optimism in the light of his role as the knight in shining armor in “Hush”: in contrast to the battle-worn Buffy, he still believes that the good guys will win and that there will be a happily ever after. While “Doomed” ends with Buffy giving in to Riley, her doubts concerning a potential relationship with him have not completely disappeared, and his inability to accept her in her role as the Slayer, as well as her inability to effectively

communicate with him, ultimately leads to the relationship's downfall in Season Five.

[16] Even before the Gentlemen are defeated and the characters regain their voices, Riley and Buffy's romance plot comes to a sudden arrest with the revelation of their respective fighting skills ("Hush" 4.10: 00:33:30-00:33:49). Buffy and Riley, as the slayer and a soldier tasked with hunting the supernatural, cannot conform to the fairy tale trope of the damsel in distress and her knight in shining armor, which traditionally marks the romance plot of the fairy tale. Instead of the prince climbing the tower à la Phillip in *Sleeping Beauty*, it is Buffy that comes crashing into the clock tower where the Gentlemen are hiding out (Wilcox 149). In the subsequent fight sequence ("Hush" 4.10: 00:33:30-00:34:24), Buffy is the more active and dynamic character, with shots of Riley often showing him looking on. This could be interpreted as a subversion of the traditional fairy tale narrative of the passive princess being saved by the active and heroic prince. Interestingly, Buffy and Riley fight on opposite sides of the room instead of joining forces, which, according to Wilcox, could indicate a rift and a lack of understanding between the characters (Wilcox 2005: 158). This is illustrated by the failed communication attempt of Buffy gesturing to Riley to smash the box containing everybody's voices and his destroying the wrong box ("Hush" 4.10: 00:38:10-00:38:35). In line with fairy tales' heroic prince winning the damsel's hand in marriage, Riley clearly expects gratitude for aiding Buffy, but only receives an eye roll in return (Wilcox 158). Interestingly, Riley's initial failure to destroy the right box can be seen in the tradition of the comically inept would-be hero of slasher films, the origin of what Clover calls the capable Final Girl (38).

[17] Buffy shares several characteristics with the horror movie's popular Final Girl (Editor's note: See also Barbaccia's "Buffy in the 'Terrible House.'") According to Clover, the Final Girl actively looks for the killer and either kills him herself or manages to hold out long enough to be rescued (35). The

character of Buffy obviously falls under the first category, being endowed with supernatural strength and being the unrivaled hero of the *BtVS* narrative. Buffy's already mentioned take charge attitude during the fight scene can be seen as a parallel to the Final Girl's trademark ferocity, which allows her "to survive what has come to seem unsurvivable" (Clover 39). More than that, Buffy and the Final Girl are characterized by their extreme watchfulness and resourcefulness (Clover 39). For example, Buffy immediately contacts Giles after her dream at the start of the episode ("Hush" 4.10: 00:05:50-00:06:15) because she realizes that the Gentlemen could pose a real threat, but her concerns are somewhat dismissed, with Giles only taking the threat seriously after he has lost his voice. But Buffy also sets herself apart from the horror movie trope considering the normally non-sexual and unfeminine nature of the Final Girl, as described by Clover (48). In contrast, Buffy is involved in a budding sexual relationship and her appearance is decidedly gendered. Even though Buffy does possess superhuman strength, which could potentially code her as masculine, her feminine appearance (Pender 38) is in direct contrast to the Final Girl's boyishness (Clover 40).

[18] The most obvious parallel to the Final Girl is Buffy's role in the villains' destruction. Buffy's killing the Gentlemen not only draws a parallel to the Final Girl's killing the psychopath that has stalked and killed her friends, but also sets her apart from the traditional fairy tale narrative of the princess being saved. In the fairy tale constructed in "Hush," Buffy voluntarily takes on the role of the screaming fairy tale princess, but only because in the context of "Hush"—and to some extent traditional fairy tales (Da Conceição Tomé and Bastos 5)—using her voice equals taking charge. Screaming—which, as Berenstein argues, is often portrayed as a sign of weakness and helplessness in the face of danger and certain death in horror movies (8)—is, as Wilcox argues, weaponized by Buffy in this episode (150). Instead of screaming out of terror or in the hopes of getting saved, Buffy screams with the intent of defeating the Gentlemen,

thereby reinterpreting a sign of what is often considered a sign of female weakness as a sign of female empowerment in the face of what Kromer calls a patriarchal society aiming to silence her. The episode's dénouement of Buffy's being the hero and Riley's merely being her sidekick thereby illustrates the episode's feminist slant when compared to traditional horror movie and fairy tale tropes.

Willow and Tara

[19] "Hush" marks the first appearance of the character Tara, a young witch. In addition to being Willow's new love interest, she is also taking over for Willow as the vulnerable and helpless member of the group (Whedon 00:09:30-00:10:08). Introducing Tara in this episode helps to make the situation more frightening and the stakes higher. After all, the more established characters of *BtVS* are already used to demons trying to kill them; Tara, as Patrick Shade points out, is not. Her first appearance marks her as shy, meek, and somewhat submissive ("Hush" 4.10: 00:08:50-00:09:45). She is immediately silenced by the more forceful characters of the Wicca group Willow is meeting. This characterization arguably puts her in the role of the damsel in distress for the fairy tale narrative of "Hush," which makes Willow the knight in shining armor by default.

[20] Even though Willow and Tara are both women, the fairy tale gender roles are initially more clearly defined here than for Buffy and Riley. When Tara is next seen, she is on her way to see Willow in a scene very reminiscent of the classical fairy tale: "But the important thing was we got to have the little girl wandering through the woods. [. . .] She can even fall down. The classic, which drives me crazy when girls do that in stories. But it's so perfect for this kind of fairy tale, classic old-movie nightmare, all those things wrapped up in one moment" (Whedon 00:30:38-00:31:05). Just like Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood, Tara has to make her way through woods and has to encounter its horrors. Just like the female characters from horror movies, she has to be terrorized by the male

monster (Berenstein 2). While being chased by the Gentlemen, Tara's first instinct is not to fight back, but to flee and to seek help ("Hush" 4.10: 00:33:00-00:33:20), marking her not as a Final Girl but as the classic victim. Willow, hearing Tara knock on doors, is the only one to react because everyone else is too frightened (Shade). Instead of immediately taking on the role of the hero, Willow stumbles, falls, and ultimately has to flee with Tara. Her moment to take charge comes in the couple's next scene when, after being cornered, Willow attempts to keep the Gentlemen out of their hiding spot by first using physical force and then, more successfully, magic ("Hush" 4.10: 00:35:35-00:36:45). What is interesting here is that while Tara has consequently been coded as the damsel in distress during "Hush," only her cooperation and power ensure Willow's success. The scene illustrates an understanding between the two characters which, as Wilcox argues, does not exist between Riley and Buffy (Wilcox 158). Facial expressions and body language are enough for Tara to decipher what Willow is trying to do and their mutual support of each other ensures a sense of intimacy that grows throughout the series (Shade). By making mutual understanding the key to the two women's defense against the Gentlemen, "Hush" subverts the traditional fairy tale trope of the silenced female having to rely on her more proactive male counterpart. Casting a woman in the role of the potential knight in shining armor already subverts the audience's expectations of the male savior, but by additionally having the more submissive and traditionally female character contribute to her own rescue, "Hush" clearly sets itself apart from the fairy tale trope of the damsel in distress and her valiant savior.

Xander and Anya

[21] The last couple to be analyzed, Xander and Anya, relies heavily on the trope of the damsel in distress and the knight shining armor described in the introduction to this chapter. Xander and Anya's relationship problems are established at the beginning of the episode with Anya being

afraid of Xander's not caring enough and Xander being unable to express his feelings ("Hush" 4.10: 06:50-07:20). By casting Xander as the knight in shining armor at the end of the episode, the episode allows him to express his love for Anya in an exaggerated but ultimately very traditional way: the strong male hero saving his ladylove.

[22] However, Xander's heroic scene ("Hush" 4.10: 00:34:30-00:35:36) is ultimately played for laughs. Anya taking a nap on the couch is staged as Sleeping Beauty or Snow White, helpless and unaware, with the monstrous vampire (Spike, harmless at this point in the series) bent over her. Xander's intervention, while reminiscent of the fairy tale prince coming to the rescue of the helpless princess, is ultimately unnecessary. But even though there was no real danger to Anya, with Spike (James Marsters) being unable to actually harm her, Xander rescuing his girlfriend is rewarded in a similar fashion to the fairy tale prince being rewarded for rescuing the princess: Xander gains the approval of his friends and the love of his girlfriend (Wilcox 157) just as the prince gains the approval of the royal court and the hand of the princess (Rowe 250). By playing the scene for laughs and exaggerating Xander's reward for aggressive male behavior, Xander's heroics partially undermine the traditional fairy tale narrative because the reward is essentially undeserved.

[23] The traditional, conservative narrative cannot simply be implemented into the *BtVS* universe; it has to be changed, adapted, and modernized: Buffy cannot be the damsel in distress without compromising the show's narrative; therefore, Riley has to share the role of the knight in shining armor. Tara may start off as the victim, but she is not helpless: only after joining forces are Willow and Tara strong enough to save themselves. Xander can prove his love for Anya by saving his girlfriend from a monster in a traditionally male display of aggression, but only if the monster was never a threat.

The Soundscape of “Hush”

[24] Whereas the previous sections have focused on the characters of “Hush,” this one will deal with the episode’s soundscape, considering its importance to the narrative. In creating a score for “Hush,” the composer Christoph Beck clearly draws on what a contemporary audience would consider the normal horror film soundtrack which is characterized by “dissonances and narrative telegraphing” (Lerner 55). According to Lerner, horror became popular as a genre at the same time as the sound film was developed (55), which hints at the importance of the musical score to the success of the genre. Movies like *Jaws* (1976) and *Psycho* (1960), for example, are not only remembered for the stories they tell but also for their iconic music, which is still used and reinterpreted today. Arwa Haider argues that, when done successfully, the score not only sets the scene and establishes a mood, but is also just as gripping and scary as the horrors unfolding on screen.

[25] In “Hush” the soundscape is arguably even more important than in the average horror movie because large parts of the story have to be carried by the music: “It was not the most he had ever written for an episode, but it was more important than it had ever been in terms of defining the Gentlemen and getting their feel. Riley’s love theme, everything had to be very specific, musically, because it was doing most of the talking” (“*Buffy*, Inside the Music”: 00:03:19-00:03:30). During the episode, on-screen appearances of the Gentlemen are announced by a unique musical score that is only used in this episode. By musically announcing the monsters before they even appear on screen, the theme helps to create suspense and a sense of anticipation in the audience. Kristen Romanelli explains that the Gentlemen’s theme is characterized by string instruments, which are used to create tension, and female vocals combined with a glockenspiel (9). The combination adds to the eerie, fairy tale atmosphere that surrounds the Gentlemen and, according to Christopher Wiley, shares several characteristics with theme scores for other

supernatural creatures (55). By creating parallels between the Gentlemen's theme and the score from other horror movies, the episode's soundscape pushes the audience into a certain direction and asks them to associate the Gentlemen with the atmosphere created in horror movies.

[26] Their theme is not the only musical cue that connects the Gentlemen to the horror movies. During the exposition scene, Giles creates his own soundscape by underlying his explanations with a recording of Camille Saint-Saën's *The Danse Macabre*: "[. . .] Saint-Saën's pictorial composition has become a standard piece with which to represent the diabolical and otherworldly, and its appearance in "Hush" clearly functions intertextually" (Wiley 43). While the recording is not as a musically rich as the score made specifically for the episode, it successfully creates an atmosphere appropriate for the fairy tale narrative of "Hush". The song itself is already associated with the horror genre, but, according to Wilcox, the outdated technology and the nineteenth-century song again connects the Gentlemen to the fairy tale (Wilcox 148). By drawing on a song already connected to the horror genre, and horror movies in particular, "Hush" not only forces the audience to make the connection between this *BtVS* episode and the horror genre, but also adds to the Gentlemen's characterization. As previously established the Gentlemen are already different from the "normal" monster populating the characters' universe. Explaining their presence in Sunnydale while *The Danse Macabre* plays in the background helps to further remove the Gentlemen from reality and to establish them as a breed apart.

[27] The soundtrack not only helps to define the Gentlemen, but also sets the scene and thereby adds to the narrative. Two very interesting scenes in this context are set shortly after the characters have lost their voices. Ironically, the scene starting at 00:14:02 works due to its complete lack of music. Instead of using sound to create horror, the director uses the complete lack of it to create an atmosphere of sneaking horror: Buffy and Willow do not know yet that they have lost

their voices, instead they have to slowly realize it. By foregoing sound, the audience is allowed to experience the moment of realization alongside the characters. Only when Buffy realizes her inability to speak at 00:14:53 does the music set in again. String instruments are again employed to create tension and the music gets more frantic the more worked up the characters get. This scene is an example of the soundscape taking over the function of verbal communication: since the characters cannot communicate their feelings, the soundtrack has to do it for them. The scene starting at 00:17:34 is another example of this function of the musical score. Slow, solemn string music follows Willow and Buffy down Main Street on their way to Giles' house. Some people are sitting in the middle of the street; others are silently crying in each other's arms or desolately walking the streets. According to Shade, the score captures the feeling of helplessness and vulnerability of the general population and shows how the Gentlemen's presence in town has disrupted and impoverished society. Apart from creating a certain mood, this scene is also essential to establish the stakes of the episode. While the first scene described in this paragraph shows the ramifications of losing their voices on a personal level, the second scene shows the ramifications on a larger scale and works to establish the Gentlemen as a real threat not only to the people they murder but to society as a whole.

[28] After covering how the soundtrack defines the Gentlemen and helps the characters to emote even without being able to express themselves verbally, it is now necessary to take a look at Buffy and Riley's love theme which is introduced in this episode and used until the end of their relationship in season five. As already mentioned the theme first plays during Buffy and Riley's first kiss and creates a romantic fairy tale atmosphere. That Riley's theme is introduced in "Hush" could be read in context of the already established parallels between Riley and the Gentlemen. As Wiley explains, the romantic theme is played thrice throughout the episode: during the kiss, while Riley and Buffy are looking

for the Gentlemen, and shortly after the fight sequence (Wiley 2011: 47). While the first and the last instance can easily be read as symbols for the budding romantic relationship between the two characters and their ability to fight and defeat monsters alongside each other, the second time the theme is played can be seen in a much more ambiguous light (“Hush” 4.10: 00:29:34-00:30:20). Wiley explains that this presentation of the theme is in a different key and enriched by associations with the Gentlemen’s theme (Wiley 47). Wiley argues that using the theme in this way indicates the episode’s outcome of Buffy and Riley defeating the Gentlemen together (Wiley 48), but it would also be possible to read this variation of the theme as an additional parallel between Riley and the Gentlemen, considering that the scene cut from Buffy to Riley is accompanied by a variation of the Gentlemen’s theme. Drawing a musical parallel between the Gentlemen and Riley might be an indication of Buffy’s doubts regarding a relationship with him, but could also be read as symbolical of his membership in the patriarchal system of the Initiative.

[29] In general, the soundscape of “Hush” is very expressive and fulfills similar functions to the music from traditional horror movies. The Gentlemen’s theme invites the audience to draw parallels between the Gentlemen and horror movies which sets the mood and creates the tension necessary for a horror episode. More than that, the episode’s soundscape also allows the characters to emote non-verbally and conveys not only the emotions of the main characters but also of Sunnydale’s population. It is important to note that the music does not introduce elements that are not already in the narrative, but only serves to enhance what is already there, which is arguably the main function of a successful horror movie soundscape.

Conclusion

[30] “Hush” is arguably one of the most stylistically interesting episodes of *BtVS*’ seven-season run. While the TV

show often interweaves horror with other genres and frequently draws on the fairy tale genre for inspiration, this is the only time that Whedon creates his own fairy tale. Doing so allows Whedon to subvert traditional fairy tale and horror tropes and to adapt them to the modern and feminist narrative of the *BtVS* universe.

[31] The episode's villains especially are explicitly and implicitly connected to both genres. By introducing the Gentlemen via lullaby in a dream sequence, they immediately gain a nightmarish feel, only underlined by their nocturnal and horrifically silent nature. Giving exposition about the Gentlemen via a self-made picture book and claiming them to be fairy tale monsters sets the monsters of "Hush" apart from the other demons introduced throughout the series: they are not only monstrous and straight from a fairy tale in the eyes of the audience, but are also strange and foreign to the characters of the universe they inhabit. While the Gentlemen are clearly embedded in the fairy tale narrative and are similarly connected to it via their musical theme, the very fact that they are male and represent a monstrous version of patriarchy clearly sets them apart from the fairy tale which generally aims to uphold the patriarchal status quo. This can be seen as a modernization of the traditional fairy tale plot, but is also in part owed to the horror movie narrative that often casts the male as the aggressor and the female as the victim.

[32] "Hush" does not really allow for a female victim though. The only character we see violated by the Gentlemen is male and the villains are of course defeated by the female Buffy. This is due to the fact that *BtVS* is a feminist narrative centering on a female hero who does not need a man to fight her battles. Buffy defeating the Gentlemen by regaining her voice can therefore be read as a metaphor of the patriarchy being destroyed by women getting a say in society. The romantic plots of the episode similarly show how the traditional fairy tale narrative of the prince saving the damsel no longer has a place in a modern narrative. Buffy, while unquestionably feminine,

does not need Riley, a member of the patriarchal military, to save her. Tara, while frightened and depicted as a classical horror movie victim, ultimately helps in her own rescue by joining forces with her would-be-savior Willow. Xander gets to play the part of the traditional storybook hero, but only in a harmless situation where a hero was not needed anyway. Interestingly, the plot thread of Riley and Buffy also draws on the slasher movies' iconic Final Girl. The episode does more than just to imitate the trope by modernizing the Final Girl: Buffy retains the strong, take charge attitude of the Final Girl, but combines it with a femininity and interest in sexuality that is usually lacking in the horror movie trope.

[33] Not only the character constellations and characterizations connect "Hush" to the fairy tale and horror genre, but also the episode's soundscape. With verbal communication impossible, it is the score's responsibility to communicate the characters' emotions. More than creating a tense and upsetting atmosphere, the score is also responsible for defining the episode's villains. The Gentlemen get their own musical score that underlines their nightmarish quality and ensures their association with other supernatural creatures from horror movies. Using this score only in this episode again sets the Gentlemen apart from other demons introduced throughout the series. The episode's possibly most important musical addition is that of Riley and Buffy's musical score, which is used until Season Five. Introducing the theme in this scene arguably creates an ambiguity surrounding the character of Riley who is musically and narratively connected to the Gentlemen.

[34] In summary, the episode invokes tropes and clichés from two traditionally very conservative genres: the horror and the fairy tale. By subverting these tropes, "Hush" manages to create a modern and feminist narrative in which not the monstrous female but the monstrous male is the enemy; women are not the helpless victims, but the proactive agents in their own lives.

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