

# READING BUFFY

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**MOVIE**  
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## Introduction: Making the Case

...it's time she had a chance to ... you know ... take back the night.

– Interview with Joss Whedon on the DVD for Season One

It is well known amongst fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that its creator, Joss Whedon, was motivated to rethink the horror genre by his desire to see its typical victimised blonde female fight back. In the first shot of the series, a prowling camera positions us outside Sunnydale High School at night as the image goes on to dissolve to the darkened interior of the school. The camera continues to explore and, by means of some further dissolves, we enter what is clearly a science classroom. From off-screen right a man's arm in a black leather sleeve violently enters the frame, the fist smashing the classroom window from outside, and we cut to a face-on view of a cocky young man on the make with a pretty blonde woman, Darla, looking nervous and uncertain just behind him. As he climbs through the window, the image is filled by the blackness of his jacket, followed by a cut to an interior corridor, the camera moving left as both figures emerge from the background shadows. The woman hesitates when she gets to the foreground and then gives a start in response to a noise, but the young man assures her that no one is there. She looks around, sees that he is right, and turns back to face him, abruptly revealing herself to be a vampire and biting his neck as she pulls him down out of frame. The credits begin.

Whedon himself, in the DVD commentary on the episode (1.1: 'Welcome to the Hellmouth'), makes clear his own awareness that, if Buffy is indisputably a blonde who fights back then so too is Darla, her vampire counterpart. Whedon goes on to state as a second component of his mission statement that nothing is what it appears, with surprise and genre-busting as key elements in his grand design. The gist of the series is thus apparent right from the start and will be complexly shaded throughout its length in its repeated doublings of good and

evil characters and in the shifting patterns amongst them, as well as in its ability to surprise us by undermining our previous too easy assumptions about the moral fabric of its world. A process of continual rethinking and regrouping is necessary to keep abreast of narrative events and their significance, the series inviting our alertness and rewarding our intelligent engagement with its project, as we shall see. Although Darla appears to be a minor character at this early stage, we will later discover that she is 'sire' to the vampire Angel, in other words the one responsible for having turned him into a vampire hundreds of years before by biting him and inducing him to drink her blood. Angel now has a soul, as the result of a gypsy curse which burdens him with remorse too deep-seated and entrenched ever to be expunged. However, his dark side is only suppressed, not destroyed, and, as a codicil to the curse, a single moment of complete happiness will be enough to remove his soul and let his *alter ego* Angelus resurface once again. When Buffy and Angel fall in love (providing a star-crossed and impossibly romantic mismatch of slayer and vampire), Buffy provides that moment of happiness and inadvertently becomes the instrument of his reversion to Angelus in Season Two. Thus, she walks in Darla's footsteps, effectively becoming Angel's second 'sire'. This thematic linking of Buffy and Darla, good blonde and bad, is imagined and extended in unexpected ways throughout the series while virtually every important character follows a path – or at least has striking moments – of devastating self-discovery and redemptive moral growth, even Darla (though, in her case, this occurs in the spin-off series, *Angel*, rather than in *Buffy* itself).

Thus, good and evil characters, as well as good and evil aspects of the same person, come to be progressively intermingled by such strategies so that no water-tight distinctions can be made between them. However, in addition to the unlikelihood of any straightforward triumph of goodness over evil, even the more modest hope that knowledge will still be able to triumph over the forces of unreason turns out to be over-optimistic. Season One begins, as we've seen, with a couple breaking into a science classroom at Sunnydale High School, and it ends with a vampire attack on the school library, workplace of Buffy's benevolent English 'Watcher' and high school librarian, Rupert Giles. Both places of learning – the science room and

the library – are thus open to invasion by vampires, their vulnerability to such creatures providing a frame for the season overall. Rather than presenting Giles' alliance with Buffy and her friends as a confident commitment to such hard facts as science provides which, in the fullness of time, will inevitably defeat their enemies, the series increasingly comes to question mere book-learning divorced from complicating issues of moral substance and weight (for example, Buffy's knowledge that Angel has gone bad and that she has to kill him, in Season Two, is obviously complicated by her love for him, or at least for what he was). Even the bookish Giles concedes at the end of Season One that 'I don't like the library very much anymore,' as the others head off to the local teenage club, the Bronze, a very different sort of place where they can relax and let off steam.

Concerns with knowledge and its value dominate the season, with relevant comments cropping up frequently throughout, though qualified to varying degrees by the intentions and intonations of their speakers. These range from Xander's deadpan remark, 'Everyone forgets, Willow, that knowledge is the ultimate weapon,' when he tries to get out of helping Giles by convincing Willow that Giles will be fine on his own (1.5: 'Never Kill a Boy on the First Date') to Buffy's breezy retort, 'What am I, knowledge-girl now? Explanations are your terrain,' in a gently sarcastic rejoinder to Giles (1.10: 'Nightmares'). Further, knowing and not knowing become ready sources of humour as the season progresses and more and more characters come to know – and casually accept – Buffy's supposedly secret identity as a slayer, while even more humour is milked from the fact that Buffy's mother Joyce, as well as Buffy's date Owen in Episode 5 (1.5: 'Never Kill a Boy on the First Date') fail to grasp what everyone else so evidently knows. A final facet of this recurring thematic concern is that, along with the characters, viewers too come to know the series' particular brand of vampire lore as the season unfolds (for example, the way vampires disintegrate into dust when stabbed through the heart, and the way their faces scrunch up into 'vamp face' when they become roused to violent acts). At the same time, we need to familiarise ourselves with a large number of important characters, though it is not always clear which ones are to be the most important. Darla, for example, is dusted by Angel in Episode 7 (1.7: 'Angel'), an apparently expendable bit-player, but she later re-emerges as a

key player after all, both in flashbacks and in the spin-off series, *Angel*, when she is reconstituted and returned to the world. Our accumulation of this store of knowledge is vital both to the full understanding of later episodes and to our imaginative investment in the on-screen world.

Nevertheless, any initial assumption that this is an Enlightenment text about the value and adequacy of much of this knowledge is largely broken down in the course of Season One. Episode 8 in particular (1.8: 'I Robot, You Jane') goes so far as to turn knowledge itself – or at least one particular version of it, an accumulation of facts alone – into the episode's monster. Giles and Jenny Calendar, a teacher of computing at Sunnydale High with whom Giles will eventually fall in love and who will be murdered by Angelus, now argue about the relative merits of books and information technology. What they fail to realise is that a recently arrived ancient text contains a demon who had been bound into its pages back in the fifteenth century, his body transmuted into arcane symbols. Willow unwittingly enters him onto the Internet when she scans the book into the computer, thus giving the demon – Moloch the Corrupter – enormous power and influence, not least over Willow herself when he hides behind a less sinister mask and chats seductively to her online. As Giles later puts it, 'The scanner read the book. It brought Moloch out as information to be absorbed,' or in Buffy's more succinct account, 'He's gone binary on us.' In his final defence of books over computers (despite Jenny's reminder that Moloch came to them in a book), Giles argues for their *tangible* qualities, their specificity (ironically echoing Moloch's pleasure in being able to affect the world through touch when he is embodied by his followers in robotic form). As Giles haltingly tries to express this, 'The knowledge gained from a computer is ... It has no ... no texture, no context.'

In many ways, this episode is the crux of Season One, not only in its questioning of the value of knowledge as mere information – the episode thus preparing the way for later, contrasting presentations of knowledge as the recognition of moral worth – but in its juxtaposition of the technological and the occult (or, in generic terms, the clash between the narrative worlds of science fiction and of horror). However, more intriguingly, the episode and the season as a whole give us an early taste of the series' concern with less epistemological, more

ontological themes and storylines. That is, the concentration on issues around knowledge begins to fall away and reveal a more enduring interest in issues around ways of being and alternative dimensions, providing dry-runs for some of the darkest episodes in later seasons. Thus, later stories about parallel universes are already prefigured in Moloch's entry into cyberspace, and the words which suddenly appear on the screen after he is scanned into the computer – a simultaneously chilling, yet unexpectedly poignant 'Where am I?' – will be echoed much more affectingly after Dawn and Buffy lose their mother to a ruptured aneurysm in Season Five (5.16: 'The Body') and Dawn asks in despair, 'Where'd she go?'

Explorations of what it is to be human, and the role of embodiment in making each of us one particular human being rather than another, will also dominate later episodes, where characters will switch bodies, become invisible, lose their sight, their memories, their ability to speak, even their most fundamental values, while some vampires, robots and other non-humans will appear to gain such things – and, alongside them, an affecting history and presence in the world – which endows them with a convincing humanity as well. Some of these themes get an early outing in Season One, often with minor characters in roles that will later be reprised by more central ones. For example, Marcie's invisibility in Season One (1.11: 'Out of Mind, Out of Sight') will be revisited in the form of Buffy's invisibility in Season Six (6.11: 'Gone') and then, with more edge, as Willow's invisibility to Buffy, Xander and Dawn – and theirs to her – in Season Seven (7.3: 'Same Time, Same Place'), reflecting their unreadiness to confront one another after Willow's destructiveness in Season Six and her off-screen rehabilitation in England. Similarly, the body-swap between Amy and her mother in Season One (1.3: 'The Witch') will be echoed by Buffy's body-swap with rogue slayer Faith in Season Four (4.16: 'Who Are You?'). Even Buffy's devastating death at the end of Season Five (5.22: 'The Gift') gets a preliminary more tentative try-out in the final episode of the first season (1.12: 'Prophecy Girl') when Xander revives Buffy from drowning.

For the moment, I merely want to lay the groundwork for the close analyses to come, making a case both for the seriousness of the series' concerns and the intelligence of their deployment, not least in visual terms. For it seems to me that

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is television aspiring to the condition of film. Joss Whedon's degree in Film Studies, his declared enthusiasms (for example, in the DVD commentary to 'Innocence' in Season Two) for using long sustained takes and for directors like Max Ophuls who 'use the frame cinematically', as well as his prior work in cinema, make such an aspiration unsurprising, though it was Whedon's confessed naïveté about television and its constraints which led him to put such preferences into practice where more experienced television hands might have faltered. His admiration for the medium of film is also evident in the series' widespread references to specific films. This does not so much take the form of explicit naming or parody and pastiche but rather, ideas from a range of films as varied as *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), *Kings Row* (Sam Wood, 1942), *The Stepford Wives* (Bryan Forbes, 1975), *Dark Victory* (Edmund Goulding, 1939), *The Touch* (Ingmar Bergman, 1971), *Meet Me in St Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944), *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1948), *The Exterminating Angel* (Luis Buñuel, 1962), *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1946), and others, are taken up as inspirational points of departure to be creatively reworked and elaborated with genuine freshness at numerous points throughout the series. In terms of the episodes we'll be looking at more closely later in this study, *The Stepford Wives* and *Dark Victory* will prove particularly relevant to 'I Was Made to Love You' in Season Five (5.15), and *A Matter of Life and Death* to 'Normal Again' in Season Six (6.17).

Such evidence as I have given so far for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as cinematic television is largely anecdotal (Whedon's background and comments and the references to other films). Much more compelling are the ways that aspects of the *mise-en-scène* of the series are laden with meaning. In other words, the narrative world on our screens is visually weighted, not just presenting us with a world but with a rich and extended semantic text. For example, following Buffy's death at the end of Season Five, she is resurrected by her friends at the start of Season Six, Willow assuming with smug satisfaction that, through her own abilities as a powerful witch, she has pulled her friend out of an unspeakable hell dimension. She now anticipates Buffy's gratitude with both the eager desire to please

that is her trademark in earlier episodes and some of the arrogance that will soon send her reeling off course in her growing addiction to dark magic. At the end of the third episode in the season (6.3: 'After Life'), in a scene examined more closely later, Buffy confides the bitter truth to the vampire Spike: 'I think I was in heaven.' However, we are actually shown this much earlier, shortly after the episode's midpoint, when Buffy walks through the cemetery past the statue of an angel. As she pauses for an instant in front of the stone figure whose head is blocked by Buffy's body but whose wings extend behind her as if they are her own, the image suddenly holds and displays her secret to us in an epiphany so delicately unstressed and fleeting that it barely registers until retrospectively confirmed by her later words to Spike. This delicacy and unpretentiousness – the after-the-fact quality of much of the film's rhetoric which may often elude us the first time through – makes *Buffy* a series which abundantly repays a second visit.



Another example of how the series provides us with visual signposts to its intentions can be found in an episode mentioned earlier (7.3: 'Same Time, Same Place') when Willow returns from her rehabilitation under Giles' tutelage in England near the beginning of Season Seven. Unable to hook up with her closest friends, who appear not to have turned up to meet her at the airport, she finally locates Anya, a more peripheral member of their group, outside the demolished Magic Box, a shop which Anya ran before Willow's bad magic destroyed it. As they talk and Anya expresses her anxieties about the extent and reliability of Willow's cure, her feelings – and those of Willow's

other more elusive off-screen friends – are expressed in the sign on the Magic Box wall behind Willow (which reads 'Unsafe'), just as Willow's fears that her circle of friends will not be emotionally receptive to her now that she is back in Sunnydale are reflected by the sign on the door behind Anya ('Closed'). Both signs are perfectly understandable merely as aspects of the narrative world: the Magic Box is closed for repairs, its structure is unsafe. However, the double-meanings to which they lend themselves make what is a *world*, on one level, simultaneously a *text* to be read, on another.



Indeed, throughout the series, such double-edged signs and posters proliferate. For example, the high school has a poster which we may notice in Season Two (2.5: 'Reptile Boy'), warning its students that 'Not all drunk drivers die,' underscoring the point with a picture of what appears at a distance to be a badly scarred teenage driver. So, the apparent meaning can be readily filled in: 'Not all drunk drivers die ... Some of them survive but are scarred for life.' However, given that this is Sunnydale, an alternative reading is equally to hand: 'Not all drunk drivers die ... Some of them return as vampires.' For the long-shot gives the image as much ambiguity as the words have, the scarred teenager easily reinterpretable from a distance as a vampire in characteristic 'vamp face'. Similarly, a sign inside the Magic Box which requires all shoppers to leave their bags and backpacks at the desk takes on new resonance when Tara's dreadful family turn up in Season Five (5.6: 'Family'), and we suddenly realise that Tara too needs to unburden herself of a considerable amount of unwelcome baggage from her past. There are



many more instances of such semantic layering – in terms of both themes and rhetorical devices – which have the effect of embedding a self-reflexive commentary on characters and events within the visual and verbal substance of their world. Sometimes elements from outside the narrative world, such as the titles of individual episodes, may exhibit a similar duality, or even multiplicity, of meaning. For example, an episode title in Season Four (4.12: 'A New Man') refers variously to Giles temporarily transformed into a Fyarl demon, to Adam as an android created from a combination of high-tech machinery and human parts, his presence retrospectively implied behind the door entered by Professor Maggie Walsh at the end of the episode, and to Riley both as the new man in Buffy's life and as a more sensitive version of masculinity, a new man for our times.

Many of the aspects discussed so far are particularly pointed and pervasive in an aptly titled episode from Season Six (6.12: 'Doublemeat Palace'). On one level the episode is about the (figuratively) soul-destroying and exploitative nature of casual work in the fast-food industry when Buffy – after her mother's death and her own death and resurrection – is forced to get a job to support herself and her sister Dawn, and it has the distinction of being, according to Whedon, the only episode which resulted in sponsors threatening to withdraw their patronage. The restaurant's specialty is the Double Meat Medley, which has patties of processed beef and chicken unapetisingly layered in the same double-decker bun. Significantly, the episode occurs in the midst of the graphically sexual relationship between Buffy and Spike which, in contrast to Buffy's earlier relationship with Angel or, indeed to Spike's with Drusilla, is based almost wholly on lust, not romance, and fills Buffy with intense self-loathing and disgust. In a brief scene during one of Buffy's breaks at work, Spike backs her up against a wall (next to a sign reading "Teamwork") as they form a double meat sandwich of their own. The Double Meat Medley with its red meat and white meat slapped up against each other in unsavoury juxtaposition turns out to be a perfect metaphor for Buffy and Spike - one a red-blooded human, the other a vampire - and their purely physical relationship, while a sign inside the restaurant which proclaims enthusiastically, 'You're Part of the Double Meat Experience!' is, yet again, relevant to

both aspects of Buffy's situation at once. Further, the episode's demon acts on Buffy by paralysing her, and this too reflects her sexually addictive relationship with Spike which deprives her of the will to resist him.



Finally, the episode occurs at a point when Buffy, having been brought back from the grave, is extremely worried that she may have come back 'wrong', with a bit of demon in her make-up. The episode's concern with the nature of the secret ingredient in the double meat patties – and Buffy's growing suspicion that it may be human flesh – is paralleled by her concern with what, if anything, is the new ingredient in her *own* constitution, and whether it is *non-human*. In both cases, Buffy's worries are unfounded, since she turns out to be fully human, and the scandalous secret ingredient in the meat patties, in a satiric twist, turns out to be vegetable. Nevertheless, despite this happy outcome, the episode is followed by another one (6.13: 'Dead Things') which is surely one of the darkest in this darkest of seasons, so any sense of reassurance we may feel is short-lived and readily undone.

The chapters that follow will concentrate on Seasons Five and Six for reasons which I hope will become clear. However, before we leave the early seasons behind us, I would like to take an extended look at an episode from Season Two (2.17: 'Passion') in illustration of the sorts of complexities of tone and point of view which are so characteristic of the series overall, but perhaps nowhere so disturbingly configured as here. If Season One introduces many of the central characters both to us and to each other, with most of the developing friendships

and romances still tentative and unresolved, Season Two is much more insistent on pushing these relationships – as well as other new ones – to centre-stage (for example, the relationships between Xander and Cordelia, Willow and Oz, Joyce and Ted, though they all come unstuck at some point). The quirky vampire couple, Spike and Drusilla, are introduced to the series as old friends of Angelus who turn up in town, and Spike is increasingly undermined in his oddly touching devotion to the loopy Dru by Angelus' taunting attempts to insinuate himself between them, while Buffy struggles with the loss of Angel as a result of the brief happiness between them which has taken his soul after their one night together. Meanwhile, Giles hesitantly moves on from the intellectual sparring with Jenny Calendar in Season One to the verge of a real relationship. However, as Jenny works on her computer translating a ritual which might be able to restore Angel's soul (Giles having invited her to come round to his house when she has finished), Angelus appears at the school and brutally murders her, destroying her computer and print-outs before snapping her neck.

It is an audacious and shocking decision to get rid of a character who has become increasingly entwined with central aspects of the narrative, Jenny by this stage revealed to be not merely a techno-pagan at the interface of science and the occult, but a descendant of the gypsies responsible for Angel's curse and sent to Sunnydale to keep him and Buffy apart. It is even more unexpected to get rid of her at the precise point when the romance with Giles is about to take off. We are thus *doubly* frustrated, as viewers, firstly in our loss of an attractive and feisty female character whose redemptive journey is not yet complete, as she works to win back Giles' and Buffy's trust. But, in addition, we are forced to relinquish the truly delicious prospect of seeing the fussy yet immensely sympathetic Giles simultaneously discombobulated and transported by love.

The pre-credits sequence of the episode opens with an overhead shot of young people dancing at the Bronze, and then cuts to ground level as we notice Buffy and Xander dancing amongst the crowd. At this point, Angel's voiceover kicks in: 'Passion. It lies in all of us ... sleeping, waiting. And though unwanted, unbidden ... it will stir, open its jaws ... and howl.' I say 'Angel', rather than 'Angelus', because it is not absolutely clear which one we hear, producing an ambiguity to which we

will need to return, though it is certainly Angelus whom we see, watching from the sidelines away from the dance floor as the camera cuts between him and Buffy and Xander. The two friends smile at each other as they dance, unaware of his presence, as Angelus continues to stare at them and then leaves. Soon after, Buffy, Willow, Xander and Cordelia themselves leave the building, walking left-to-right across the foreground of the screen, still oblivious to Angelus as he bites the neck of a woman in the background shadows as they pass him by. The camera stays on Angelus as his victim slumps to the ground dead, then it swivels to accompany him as he turns to watch Buffy and her friends walking off into the depths of the screen, with Angelus' head and back dominating the left foreground in near-silhouette. The pre-credits sequence draws to a close with stealthy camerawork in tune with Angelus' lurking presence outside Buffy's house, as she uneasily looks out the window to camera, then gets ready for bed and falls asleep, the sequence ending after we glimpse Angelus' shadowy face outside the window and then see him sitting by Buffy's side as she sleeps. Although I want to concentrate on the much later scenes after Jenny's murder, these opening moments are worth pausing over for several reasons.

First, we are given a great deal more information than Buffy and her friends, by our much closer alignment with Angel/Angelus, through the voiceover, the voyeuristic camera and the access to his actions that we get. This is a pattern that will be especially disturbing in the aftermath of Jenny's death. Second, and related to this, a strong impression is produced of people being out of each other's visual range, in their own separate spaces while events (for example, the killing of the woman outside the Bronze) go on around them unobserved. This will have a humorous reprisal a few scenes later in the high school library, where Buffy, Xander and Cordelia are meeting with Giles to discuss Angelus' behaviour, the library serving as an ongoing private space for the gang's meetings with Giles throughout the first few seasons until the high school itself is destroyed at the end of Season Three (3.22: 'Graduation Day', part 2). For now, in 'Passion', two students come into the library to get some books, interrupting the group's discussions and generating the following comic exchange:

*Xander* [annoyed]: Does this look like a Barnes & Noble?  
*Giles*: This is the school library, *Xander*.  
*Xander*: Since when?

The two bemused students go off to the stacks while Giles and the others leave to continue their meeting elsewhere. When one of the students, Jonathan (who will emerge as a central character later in the series), steps out of the stacks to ask for help ('Hello?'), he finds to his surprise that everyone is gone. Both *Xander's* and Jonathan's bewildered reactions in such rapid succession register and reinforce the way their fields of vision are tightly circumscribed, blinding them to what is happening in the wider world outside their own activities and concerns.

Indeed, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* more generally, flurries of narrative activity often appear to be carrying on beyond the main events and outside the spaces occupied by the lives of the main characters. This may take shape in humorous background business visible only to us, as when Spike is reluctantly living in *Xander's* basement and tries to hit him from behind with a wrench but is overcome with pain before the blow connects, in Season Four (4.11: 'Doomed'). A playful and more extended exploration of this idea of narrative marginalia becomes the focus of an episode in Season Three (3.13: 'The Zeppo'), where *Xander* single-handedly saves Giles, Buffy, Willow, Angel and Faith from a bomb in the boiler-room beneath them while they carry on their own business upstairs, without ever becoming aware of their danger. In that instance, we stay predominantly with *Xander*, his 'secondary' story edging the season's main storyline largely off-screen. Once the spin-off series, *Angel*, comes into being several seasons into *Buffy*, this sense of characters operating in disparate parts of the narrative world becomes even more acute, especially in crossover episodes when Buffy goes off to Los Angeles (cropping up in a simultaneous episode of *Angel*) or Angel himself comes back to town. However, it is a strong tendency simply from the perspective of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* itself, with various central characters (Spike and Drusilla, say, or Faith, Willow, Riley or Giles, or even Buffy herself) going off elsewhere for long stretches of narrative time and then returning in later episodes, their off-screen experiences often recapitulated for us at some later stage. The series structure with its breaks between seasons may also encourage

speculation as to what has happened in the interim. Of course, all film and television narratives must give some degree of acknowledgment to characters' off-screen moments, allowing, at the very least, that their lives carry on away from the camera, but *Buffy* goes further in looking at the interaction (or lack of interaction) between central and marginal storylines simultaneously unfolding in different parts of the on-screen world, as well as across the boundaries of the frame.

Jonathan, whom I mentioned earlier for his transient appearance in the library, is the main example of a character who continually appears in the margins of the Buffy world. He is first introduced in Season Two (2.4: 'Inca Mummy Girl'), when about to be kissed by a revived mummy princess who stays alive by sucking the life from her victims, though she is interrupted in time for Jonathan to walk off safely, unaware of his lucky escape. In the following episode (2.5: 'Reptile Boy'), we may notice him bringing coffee and a muffin to Cordelia at the Bronze, and he is briefly taken hostage at a school Career Day five episodes after that (2.10: 'What's My Line?', part 2), though he assumes that it is only a demonstration and is once again amusingly unaware of his peril. Although he begins as little more than an extra, the humour and unpredictability of his reappearances eventually give them the feel of cameos, as regular viewers come to know him and find him sympathetic, while the play on his narrative marginality underlines his social exclusion from the circles of vampire hunters and normal teenage friends alike. Fittingly, he finally takes on a more prominent narrative role at the point when his social isolation pushes him to a thwarted attempt at suicide (3.18: 'Earshot'), an attempt misinterpreted by Buffy as an intention to shoot other students from the tower where he has gone to shoot himself. At the prom two episodes later (3.20: 'The Prom'), we catch a gratifying glimpse of him with a pretty woman on his arm as his story continues to play out on the periphery of the main narrative events, his short-lived background appearances reminding us that there are other stories unfolding somewhere else. Jonathan does eventually achieve an episode whose story revolves completely around himself (4.17: 'Superstar'), even transforming the credits sequence of the episode to feature himself and his exploits, though its narrative world turns out to be an alternative universe he has conjured up precisely in

order to re-invent himself as a star. Finally, he becomes a reluctant villain in Season Six, and ends up murdered by Andrew, one of his co-conspirators, in the final season of the series (7.7: 'Conversations with Dead People').

We will return to some of this much later. For the moment, it is enough to note the way Jonathan weaves in and out of the narrative from its margins to centre-stage, embodying a range of roles from sympathetic loser to illusory superstar to villain to victim. This is typical of the way the series presents the centrality of its onscreen events as provisional, subject to the gaze and interest of its camera, reminding us from time to time that, if it were to swerve and poke amongst the shadows, it might find all sorts of alternative narratives to pursue. Joss Whedon's previously cited enthusiasm for long takes is well suited to the display of such shifting spatial relationships between the camera and the nooks and crannies it explores, allowing characters and the spaces they occupy to move in and out of the spotlight in a single shot. So, along with the series' thematic interest in multiple dimensions which co-exist with the narrative world we see on-screen, and which are regularly evoked, are a dizzying number of alternative characters and their stories, all located within the world of Sunnydale itself, whom the series silently acknowledges (and occasionally moves to on-screen prominence), even though its central characters remain largely ignorant of their presence in the margins around them.

It is time to return to Giles' discovery of Jenny's death. Our terrible knowledge of what Giles has yet to discover produces a deeply felt and unbridgeable gap between us and him as he arrives home with his face in shadow and finds a rose on the weather-beaten wooden door, the strains of *La Bohème* faintly audible through the door. What he takes to be Jenny's creation of an inviting setting for romance appears to us with sickening clarity as Angelus' work. The lush music, candles and blood-red roses strewn on the stairs leading up to the bedroom, where we anticipate Jenny's dead body on the bed, contribute to an atmosphere of Gothic excess in the overly stage-managed theatricality of the scene. Poor Giles appears thoroughly out of his depth in his tweeds and spectacles, inappropriately dressed for a night of romantic passion and hopelessly unprepared for the revelations signalled so clearly to us by the cloying morbidity of the *mise-en-scène*.



The air is thick with double-edged promise when we first find ourselves inside, ahead of Giles. However, after this cut to the interior of his house, with the camera moving slowly left, all of a sudden we are reminded of the much earlier scene in the library which now seems a world away, as Giles pokes his head around the door and repeats Jonathan's bewildered 'Hello?' to the empty room. Trying to get his bearings as he hesitates politely on the threshold of what is, after all, his own domain, his discretion makes him seem all the more vulnerable as he steps into Angelus' grim set-up, blind to its meaning, despite some uncertainty on his part at its overblown tone. Frowning slightly as he finds a note on what we recognize as Angelus' cream-coloured paper (but which Giles does not), he reads its single word ('Upstairs') and gives a tentative smile. In a touching series of gestures, he removes his glasses, tidies his hair, and briefly covers his mouth with his outspread left hand, smoothing his face rapidly downward, as if he can't quite believe his luck yet feels inadequate to his allotted role in the romance, though eagerly determined to have a go. His hesitations are at odds with the swelling romantic certainties of the music and the stately camera movements throughout the scene, and our hearts surely sink as he begins to climb the stairs.

The culmination of the sequence – the revelation of Jenny's dead body maliciously laid out on the bed – is accomplished in a series of cuts between Jenny and Giles: from the first

shot of Jenny as the sweeping camera leads us in, we cut to a close-up of Giles, his smile slipping away as he takes in what he sees and prisms it apart from what he's been led to expect, dropping a bottle of wine and two glasses which shatter on the floor in a quick inserted shot, then back to her, then him, then to a closer shot of her, then, finally, back to Giles, staring off-screen. 'O soave fanciulla,' from *La Bohème*, continues to be heard throughout, though the aria has been slightly rearranged to allow its culmination to coincide more ironically with the culmination of the scene. Thus, a later section of the music, where Mimì and Rodolfo sing in alternating succession, had accompanied Giles' entry into the house. Now, Rodolfo sings alone as Giles climbs upstairs, ending with 'In te ravviso il sogno ch'io vorrei sempre sognar' ('In you I see the dream I'd like to dream forever'), but then leading into a melodious mingling of the voices of both Mimì and Rodolfo in mocking counterpoint to his loss as Giles drops the bottle and glasses and takes in the fact of Jenny's death, with its ruthless dashing of all his hopes. The uneasy combination of romantic lyrics with the onset of Giles' grief makes explicit the links between love and death implicit in Angelus' scenario throughout (and, indeed, implicit in Buffy's love for Angel which unleashed Angelus in the first place: the present *mise-en-scène* is much more appropriate to *that* relationship than to Jenny and Giles).

With the final shot of Giles facing the camera and staring fixedly off-screen, the camera pulls back to reveal that he is, in fact, no longer upstairs, and we now notice police and ambulance men removing Jenny's body through the front door to Giles' left (on the right of the screen, that is, as he faces in our direction), some time having evidently passed since the final shot of Jenny. So, having been placed in a position of privileged knowledge throughout the previous bits of the sequence, we abruptly find ourselves misled and momentarily disorientated, at the precise moment when Giles regains his orientation, as the painful realization of how Angelus set him up is sinking in. When Giles is invited to the police station to answer some questions, he asks to make a phone call first, and, with a short decisive nod to himself as he shores up his resolve, he walks off-screen.

At this point the troubling voiceover returns – 'Passion is the source of our finest moments...' – over a cut to a shot of

Buffy's dining room, seen from outside through net curtains, as Buffy and Willow enter in the background on the right, the camera tracking left to keep them in shot, while Angel continues: '...the joy of love ... the clarity of hatred...' (Here we cut to a close-up of Angelus, facing right, then turning towards us as the telephone rings in Buffy's house) '...and the ecstasy of grief.' We cut to Willow and Buffy in the far background of the shot, facing the camera as Buffy hurries towards it to answer the telephone. The camera remains outside with Angelus, and slowly moves left around the house, past walls and windows which alternately make the screen go black and then provide us with another view inside, so we can intermittently follow Buffy's progress as she reaches and answers the telephone. We again cut to Angelus, then to a shot of Buffy half hidden by blackness on the right of the screen (giving the effect of a hand-held camera looking in) as we hear her say 'Giles', though her voice is indistinct. From an extreme close-up of Buffy as she listens, we return to Angelus watching intently, then back to Buffy reacting without words and handing on the telephone to Willow, with both of them in medium long shot, Buffy sliding down the wall to a sitting position on the floor. Willow, now in extreme close-up, can only manage a few words ('Hello? Really? No ... no...') before she starts to sob, and we cut back to Angelus smiling. Finally, we see Joyce hugging Willow, Buffy lowering



her head to her knees, and Angelus smiling more broadly and walking away.

The combined effect of the muffled interior sounds, intervening curtains and blacked-out portions of the screen, the initial long shots of Willow and Buffy, and our lack of access to what Giles is saying on the other end of the telephone, is to distance us from them all despite our intense emotional involvement in their reactions, both seen and (in the case of Giles off-screen) merely imagined. In this way, we simultaneously care deeply about what is happening while being encouraged to understand it from a multitude of perspectives at once, without being swamped by a sentimental over-indulgence in any one. We can remember the cold resolve of Giles' final stares in the earlier scene, as well as his grief, and we understand the way Buffy's compassion is complicated by her guilt at having unleashed Angelus on her friends, while the voiceover in its intimate address makes more sense than we might wish in our efforts to cut ourselves loose from Angelus' perspective at a point when he could hardly be less sympathetic. Not only does much of the voiceover commentary ring true, but the sentiments and the tone of voice alike seem at least as characteristic of Angel as of Angelus. Thus, for example, the assertion in the voiceover of 'the joy of love' is met two episodes later (2.19: 'I Only Have Eyes for You') by Angelus' disgust when he is taken over by a ghost whose love story he is forced to act out and experiences such love for himself, reacting by washing himself over and over to dispel his feelings of violation by the love that was in him, rather than experiencing any joy. Even though the two competing aspects of Angel/Angelus have been temporarily split apart through the loss of Angel's soul, the voiceover provides a reminder of a side of Angelus which is not completely destroyed, but still remains suspended out there in the ether somewhere, just as voiceovers themselves are often uneasily located in an undefined off-screen space when their address is to the viewer, as is the case here, rather than to a character within the narrative world.

As Giles returns home from the police station to collect his weapons, the camera sweeps quickly round the room, independent of his movements, which are mainly outside its field of view, and ending up on a drawing of Jenny, as Giles leaves unseen. After a cut to darkness, we fade in on the door opening

inward, as Buffy, Willow, Xander and Cordelia arrive and Xander repeats Giles' earlier 'Hello?' in the same doorway and from the same viewpoint as in the earlier scene, though Buffy knows exactly what to make of Giles' absence and has none of his earlier bewilderment (or, indeed, of Jonathan's before him): 'He'll go to wherever Angel is.' Her confidence is not the result of any factual evidence alone (though the missing weapons are noted), but of a deeper and more intuitive recognition of Giles' character and an understanding of his state of mind. I will not dwell on the action scene that follows, except to remark on the bickering between Spike and Angelus that precedes Giles' arrival and Buffy's subsequent rescue of him, and the fact that Spike keeps Dru from intervening to help Angelus, thus consolidating our growing sympathetic allegiance to Spike which will be so crucial to the episodes we will be looking at in the following chapters. After Spike, Dru and Angelus slip away, Buffy angrily punches Giles ('Are you trying to get yourself killed?'), and then tearfully embraces him ('You can't leave me! I can't do this alone'), and it now looks as though *their* relationship – the relationship between the Slayer and her Watcher – is at the emotional heart of the episode, rather than hers with Angel or his with Jenny.

When Buffy first cost Angel his soul a few episodes back, the series distinguished itself from run-of-the-mill teenage horror films by refusing to turn this into a punishment-for-sex scenario, even when Buffy herself insisted it was all her fault. Its words of exculpation are, crucially, given to Giles, in one of the most morally and psychologically satisfying moments of the entire series, as they sit side by side in his car and talk (2.14: 'Innocence'). At this point, we hear Giles tell her firmly: 'The coming months are going to be hard ... I suspect, on all of us. But if it's guilt you're looking for, Buffy, I'm not your man.' He furrows his brow and slowly shakes his head repeatedly as he speaks, looking straight ahead and then turning to face her, his gaze steady as he concludes with the following words: 'All you will get from me is my support ... and my respect.' His steadfastness here is all the more impressive in its contrast to his earlier stammering perplexity when he failed to grasp that Buffy had slept with Angel: 'Bu.. but how ... how do you know you were responsible for...?' Giles breaks off as Buffy turns her head and stares at him wordlessly and the truth finally sinks in

(‘Oh...’), with Giles unable to sustain the look between them as he removes his glasses and averts his eyes.

With Giles’ subsequent offer of unwavering support and respect, the series furnishes additional proof, if any were needed, that it weighs its characters less by the facts that they know than by the moral choices they make in light of whatever they happen to know at the time. ‘Innocence’ ends with Buffy and her mother watching a film on television together, in which we catch a glimpse of Robert Young. On the heels of his earlier film work, Young became well known to American television audiences in the 1950s for his role as the eponymous father in *Father Knows Best*, a popular series with a cosy view of middle-class family life. His appearance here brings to an appropriate conclusion an episode in which Giles offers Buffy his unconditional backing, not in any endorsement of the claim that father-figures *do* know best, but as an *antidote* to such claims, acknowledging her right to make her own mistakes and standing by her all the same.

These moments from ‘Innocence’ hang over the events that we have been examining in ‘Passion’ three episodes later, when he is far more personally affected by the results of her earlier behaviour, which makes their continuing relationship, now tangled up with Buffy’s guilt and Giles’ grief, even more moving. As Giles returns home once more, Angel resumes his voiceover commentary: ‘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.’ Earlier in the episode, Giles warned Buffy that ‘as the Slayer, you don’t have the luxury of being a slave to your passions’, and now he learns that he too must relinquish his desires, producing a further bond between them – an enforced stoicism to underpin their common moral purpose – at a point when they could so easily have been driven apart. Together they visit Jenny’s grave, and Buffy tells him she is now ready to kill Angelus.

In a coda to the episode, we cut from Buffy’s conversation with Giles to the computing class that Willow is temporarily teaching in Jenny’s place, Buffy’s words bridging the cut. After Willow greets the class, Buffy continues to speak about Angel off-screen: ‘Nothing’s ever gonna bring him back.’ We then cut to Jenny’s bright yellow back-up disk (containing the spell to

restore Angel’s soul), as it falls to the floor between desk and filing cabinet when Willow sets down her books. That the disk – and, by extension, the task of returning Angel to what he was – is destined for *Willow* is suggested by the fact that she wore bright yellow in one of the episode’s early scenes, which both literally matches her to the disk and yet also captures something of the misplaced optimism she – and Jenny before her – place in technological solutions, rather than face-to-face encounters. So ‘Passion’ leaves us with two alternative future scenarios: either Willow will give Angel back his soul or Buffy will end up killing him. What we don’t yet know is that they will both happen at once, in the final episode of Season Two (2.22: ‘Becoming’, part 2).

My reason for examining ‘Passion’ at such length is to further my case for *Buffy*’s seriousness of intent and intelligence of execution. I wanted to bolster the earlier examples offered of thematic complexity and semantic layerings of words and visual imagery throughout the series with a more concentrated look at aspects of point of view, narrative structure, off-screen narration, tone, performance, and so forth in a single episode, though I found myself needing to make reference to the earlier episode, ‘Innocence’, as well. In the course of the discussion, the undertakings of the episode were found to be ambitious and wide-ranging: (i) to explore the limitations of its characters’ abilities to see beyond their own activities and desires, (ii) to play with narrative marginality and the relationship of the camera to the narrative world it explores, (iii) to raise questions about romance by fortifying its links with darker passions and exploring its blind spots, (iv) to relate Angelus to his narrating off-screen self and the contrasting spaces they occupy, (v) to complicate our responses to various characters (for example, Spike), while making unexpected links between others (Jonathan and Giles), (vi) to reinforce the bonds between Buffy and Giles through their deepening appreciation of each other’s moral worth and steadfastness, and, finally, (vii) to balance viewers’ simultaneous awareness of a multiplicity of points of view with experiences of intense emotional involvement.

There is no doubt that the series makes heavy demands upon its viewers, our reactions to characters and events continually in need of revision and development in a parallel process to the experiences of the characters themselves as they change

and develop. For example, Giles' declaration of unwavering support to Buffy – the firmness of his commitment, come what may – gives him a moral heft which makes it impossible to see him merely as a befuddled figure of fun, despite frequent gentle humour at his expense. Any such moments will always be tempered with respect and affection, his essential dignity a given, from the end of 'Innocence' onward, though future developments may add further inflections to the mix. This continual weathering of the characters as they try to find their way through a complicated ethical and aesthetic landscape is essential to the 'adult' tone of the series which offers viewers of all ages the same respect that Giles offers Buffy. This is undoubtedly a key factor in the loyalty of *Buffy's* fans. It is difficult to come into the series midway or to dip in and out of it without a proper sense of overall storylines and relationships. It is even more difficult to write about it coherently in a study of this length without feeling overwhelmed by the richness of the material, the sheer quantity of significant detail. I will take two different tacks in the next two chapters: first, to concentrate on some of the details, with close readings of very specific moments from three episodes in Seasons Five and Six; second, to make a much broader sweep across these seasons in order to look at some key narrative strategies, in particular by considering what happens when we *re-read* Season Five in the light of Season Six. Naturally, it will be impossible to keep these two approaches completely distinct. In the final chapter I will confront the fact of academic fandom head-on, since it is so central an aspect of academic writing on the series, not least my own.



## On Being Human

...the development of a healthy, secure, coherent structure of personality depends in the first instance upon the child's repeated experience of being recognised and sustained...

— Anthony Storr, *Solitude* (1997)

The scenes I have chosen to look at in this chapter involve Buffy in three quiet encounters, first with the robot April, as she runs down and 'dies' (5.15: 'I Was Made to Love You'), then, in the remaining two scenes, with Spike (5.18: 'Intervention' and 6.3: 'After Life'), as she respectively discovers he can be trusted and then comes to confide in him when she cannot share her thoughts with anyone else. There is no action to speak of in any of the scenes, and no other characters appear, but the three moments taken together provide a modest progression in the series' meditations on what it is to be human, as well as in Buffy's relationship with Spike. Despite his physical absence from the scene with April, his activities elsewhere in the episode are closely related to the issues being raised in that scene, just as our sympathy for him more generally, despite his lack of full humanity, relates to our capacity to be touched by April's 'death'.

We saw in our discussion of 'Passion' in the previous chapter that the nature of the connection between Angel and Angelus (the vampire with and without his soul) is difficult to pin down, though the ambiguous voiceover suggested that Angelus' better self was somehow hovering outside him rather than destroyed. (This separability of the soul is confirmed in Season Four of *Angel* – A4.11: 'Soulless' – when Angel's soul is removed and we see it as a wispy bright light in a jar.) Other episodes make clear that, conversely, when Angel has his soul, Angelus continues to persist *within* him: thus, earlier in Season Two before Angel goes bad, when Willow figures out that the demon Eyghon will try to escape danger by hiding in the nearest dead or unconscious person, Eyghon is tricked into entering Angel's body, where Angel's own 'inner demon' fights and defeats him, his

body providing the battleground for this internal struggle (2.8: 'The Dark Age'). So souls appear to be more easily detachable than demonic alter egos which, however powerfully they may be subdued, remain very much in residence.

Yet possession of a soul is no guarantee of absolute and abiding goodness, as Dawn at least believes when she points out that 'Xander had a soul when he stood Anya up at the altar' (7.6: 'Him'). Further, it is not the case that all signs of humanity are destroyed in its absence, as we will see with April. For more hard-headed evidence than that offered by Dawn to support the claim that those with souls may be morally flawed, one has merely to look at flashbacks of the human version of Angelus before he lost his soul in the first place and became a vampire (2.21: 'Becoming', part 1). A hedonistic womaniser ready to steal from his father and proud of his aversion to 'an honest day's work', he is more than willing to have Darla sire him, and he speaks in tones nearer to the honeyed sarcasm of Angelus than to Angel's intonations. Indeed, when Willow meets her vampire self (3.16: 'Doppelgangland') and Buffy reassures her – 'Willow, just remember, a vampire's personality has nothing to do with the person that was' – Angel interrupts to correct her: 'Well, actually...', until they stare him down and he decides not to contest the point. Of course, at least one of Willow's observations of herself as a vampire in this episode – 'I think I'm kinda gay' – *will* turn out to be true of her non-vampire self as well, and to be very clearly in evidence as a positive development from her meeting with Tara in Season Four onward. Finally, Cordelia's friend Harmony who is killed at the end of Season Three (though we do not discover she is a vampire until Season Four), remains completely and humorously unchanged after her transformation into a vampire, an incongruous mall girl wandering the world of the undead (4.3: 'The Harsh Light of Day').

Spike appears to be the odd one out in this pattern of continuities between vampires and the people they once were. His present bad boy image as a vampire is wildly at variance with his previous human identity as a devoted mama's boy and figure of fun within his upper-class circle of acquaintances: ironically, his nickname of 'William the Bloody' turns out to refer not to his evil deeds as a vampire, but to the 'bloody awful' poetry he wrote while alive. But even in Spike's case, the

discrepancy can be resolved by seeing his post-mortem identity as an aspirational pose. Drew Z. Greenberg develops this idea in his DVD commentary on one of the episodes he wrote in Season Six (6.9: 'Smashed'). Spike has just discovered that, despite the government chip in his head which normally causes him excruciating neurological pain whenever he strikes out at humans, he is now somehow able to hit Buffy without doing himself any harm, so he rushes off to try it out on someone else. Greenberg describes the next scene as the most controversial in 'Smashed', presumably even more controversial than the rawness of Buffy and Spike's first sexual encounter later in the episode (when a building comes crashing down around them in symbolic collusion): 'I guess it goes to the nature of Spike and what's happened to him since his chip was implanted. Is he evil? Is he good?' Greenberg goes on to note that 'if you pay attention you can see that he has to psych himself up to do the biting. So the question becomes, does he *want* to bite the girl or does he *want* to want to bite the girl? He has to do a lot of convincing of himself.' Thus we hear Spike telling himself, 'So here goes', to fire up his resolve before he attacks.

In fact, we see the full process of his change from sentimental poet to punk vampire in incremental stages, and not only the end result, beginning with a flashback to 1880 (5.7: 'Fool For Love') when he is still human and foppish, with an upper-class English accent, spectacles and floppy hair, besotted with the inaccessible Cecily, who finds him beneath her. This sentiment will be echoed later by Buffy, which I presume evokes viewers' pity for Spike and puts us firmly on his side in wanting their relationship to develop. The version of his past that he narrates to Buffy is not quite so humiliating as the one we see: thus, in the flashback, Drusilla discovers William shedding 'unmanly' tears before she sires him, and when he then tells Buffy, in the present, how he had to get himself a gang, what we actually see is Angelus throttling him. Nevertheless, when Angelus calls him William, he insists 'It's Spike now' (in revenge for others' earlier mockery of his poetry, when he overheard someone boasting that he would 'rather have a railroad spike through my head than listen to that awful stuff'). Spike is talking tougher now, and large helpings of swagger, sarcastic humour, peroxide and black leather eventually complete his change. The instability of this version of himself is underlined

by the ease with which it appears to drop away. This may be seen when he puts on other clothes, for example Xander's Hawaiian shirt and Bermuda shorts when Spike has accidentally shrunk his own clothes in the wash (4.11: 'Doomed'), or when he loses his memory and thinks he is Giles' son, only to then take on the details of Angel's identity instead when he finds out he is a vampire inexplicably fighting on Buffy's side (6.8: 'Tabula Rasa') and improvises an explanation: 'I must be a noble vampire, a good guy, on a mission of redemption. I help the helpless. I'm a vampire with a soul.' Of course, this description will later turn out to apply to himself as much as to Angel, though we do not know it yet.

The point is that Spike's particular identity as a vampire is a deliberately constructed image, and we know it, so that we remain aware of the vulnerable third-rate poet beneath the unexpectedly moving tough-guy act, and, even without a soul, Spike remains a sympathetic character throughout, never again quite so foolish as when he was a living human, but never fully evil either, unlike Angelus. In fact, after Spike seeks and regains his soul, any moral improvement in him beyond what he has already achieved without one is barely perceptible, though the retrieval of his soul certainly causes him torment and pushes him to the edge of madness. Buffy's reply when Dawn asks her what it means that Spike now has a soul is a simple 'I don't know' (7.6: 'Him').

### **'I Was Made to Love You'**

April is a construction too, though not of her own making. Carefully programmed by the nerdish Warren with no other purpose than to love him unconditionally and serve his needs, April now proves a liability as he tires of her devotion and single-minded pursuit of him, abandoning her for a living woman, Katrina, with a will of her own (though he will eventually tire of that as well, especially when she opposes her will to his, setting Warren on a course of attempted rape and then murder). The sequence where April's batteries run down is two minutes and forty seconds long, consisting of twenty shots, as Buffy and April sit on adjoining swings in a deserted playground and talk. It begins with a high-angle shot of the empty playground as the camera moves slowly downward to include the swings and the

two figures in long shot, their shadows extending towards us on the ground in front of them, and it ends in a reversal of this shot with the camera now rising above them, but this time keeping them both in the final framing. In between these two long shots which enclose the sequence as a whole are alternating medium shots of Buffy, April, and Buffy (Shots 2-4), then a close-up shot of April and a matching one of Buffy (Shots 5-6), a two-shot (Shot 7), a series of alternating medium shots, beginning with April and ending with Buffy (Shots 8-15), another close-up of April (Shot 16), followed by alternating close-ups of Buffy, April, and Buffy again (Shots 17-19), before we end with the final long shot rising above them both (Shot 20).

There is a strong sense of symmetry between Buffy and April in the editing of the sequence, which parallels and reinforces their equal weighting within the shot when they appear together in the frame, all of this underpinning Buffy's

recognition of aspects of herself in April (in particular, the way April's identity is over-invested in her need to please Warren, which leads to Buffy's decision that she herself should try to manage without a man in her life for a change). The episode relates April to other female characters as well. For example, Buffy's mother Joyce is in the early stages of dating a new man and nervously chooses an outfit she thinks will make a good impression, while Anya amusingly says of April that 'She speaks with a strange evenness and selects her words a shade too precisely', failing to appreciate that this description applies to her own idiosyncratic use of language too. Another aspect of the scene is that both of the two runs of alternating close-ups (Shots 5-6 and 16-19) are initiated by shots of April, in moments which intensify our emotional involvement with her. In the first case, she notes that 'It's getting dark. It's early to be dark', and we realise she is about to 'die', and in the second



instance, she tries to put on a brave face while having been programmed only to fall back on clichés: ‘When things are sad ... you just have to be patient. Because ... because every cloud has a silver lining’, adding cheerfully, ‘And ... when life ... gives you lemons ... make ... lemonade.’

April is thus clearly shown to be Warren’s creation – a mechanical girlfriend with no mind of her own – and yet, simultaneously, she seems to transcend this, both in her links with other characters and in the effects on us of witnessing Buffy’s attempts to comfort and reassure her throughout their conversation (clearly treating her as if she were human, and even defending her to Xander in the following scene: ‘She wasn’t crazed’). Even more telling are April’s own expressions of existential doubt which exceed her programming and imply a limited degree of self-consciousness: ‘I’m only supposed to love him. If I can’t do that, what am I for? What do I exist for?’ Further, as we have seen, the visual style of the sequence gives April considerable dignity and moral weight by balancing her with Buffy through the shot/reverse-shot symmetries and maintaining an equivalent camera distance from both April and Buffy within each run of shots. And finally, the privileging of April’s thoughts and perceptions by allowing them to generate each set of close-ups, makes her the subjective centre of her own demise, and not just a mindless *thing* for Buffy to react to and deal with before moving on.

However, April’s vulnerability – her capacity to evoke our sympathy – is also partly to do with her difference from normal humans. Thus, whereas Buffy leans back against one of the chains of the swing so she can remain turned towards April and face her directly, April’s posture is more chaotic and less purposeful, her legs splayed at the knees and her arms dangling. Her skimpy dress with its bright floral print contrasts not only with Buffy’s dark trousers and leather jacket but with everyone else’s more weatherproof clothing elsewhere in the episode, April’s outfit making no concessions to practicality or ease. Although her serenity suggests she is insensitive to cold and discomfort, an earlier conversation between Buffy and Warren as they try to track down April makes clear the robot’s ability to feel something like pain (and in a manner that has obvious parallels with Spike’s implanted chip):

*Warren*: ... I made it so that if she heard me and she didn’t answer, it causes this kind of feedback.

*Buffy* [incredulous]: Wait ... If you call her and she doesn’t answer, it *hurts* her?

So Buffy at the same time recognises that April is a mechanical object and yet also responds to those aspects of her speech and behaviour that make her seem much more than this. Buffy’s response to April’s reliance on clichés, mentioned earlier, is to echo April’s words – ‘Clouds and lemonade, huh?’ – in even tones, without making any judgements. Through the non-committal repetition of April’s words, without either openly challenging the triteness of her outlook or hypocritically pretending to endorse it, Buffy offers her a sort of validation, or at least acceptance. It is an act of kindness towards an innocent in a wicked world beyond her understanding.

This is very different from the attitude to its robots taken by Bryan Forbes’ 1975 film, *The Stepford Wives*, where the men in the small town of Stepford have replaced their wives with robots every bit as complaisant as April, but without her vulnerability and her puzzlement at the bad behaviour of her man. The horror of *The Stepford Wives* lies in the husbands’ treatment of their *human* wives, whereas *April* is the focus of our sympathy in ‘I Was Made to Love You.’ Thus, the comparable playground scene, filmed in a single shot, where Joanna (Katharine Ross) and her friend Bobby (Paula Prentiss) approach and then sit down on adjoining swings while deciding to investigate the strange goings-on in Stepford, takes place before either one is murdered and replaced by her robotic twin. The robots in the film are completely lacking in the sorts of human qualities that April possesses in the *Buffy* episode, with all warmth and personality belonging to the women of flesh and blood.

The other film that feeds into the *Buffy* episode is Edmund Goulding’s 1939 melodramatic woman’s film, *Dark Victory*, which has no robots, but does feature Bette Davis’s character, Judith, dying in similar circumstances to those in which April finds herself, at least up to a point, though with no precise equivalent to Warren. Judith’s husband, Dr Frederick Steele (played with hang-dog sincerity by George Brent), with whom she falls in love after she thinks his surgery has saved her life rather than merely prolonging it a little, is a well-meaning idealist, but his

behaviour in keeping the truth of her condition from her is patronising nonetheless. He tells her best friend Ann (Geraldine Fitzgerald) that Judith will, at some point, experience ‘a dimming of vision’, then, after a few hours at most, she will die. Judith discovers the truth but has a chance to keep a secret from him in return, when the onset of blindness arrives and she packs him off to an important board meeting in New York, her husband unaware of her deterioration, while she remains behind to die resolutely alone.

Her words to Ann when her vision starts to fade – ‘Look how it’s clouding up. It’s getting darker every second. It’s funny, I can still feel the sun on my hands’ – provide an obvious reference point for April’s words to Buffy quoted earlier: ‘It’s getting dark. It’s early to be dark.’ However, unlike Judith, April has no idea what her loss of vision signifies, and she ‘dies’ abruptly in mid-sentence, a smile on her face, from a very unglamorous running down of her batteries, with Buffy by her side in quiet fellowship. There is none of the drawn-out sentimental overkill of Judith’s staging of her solitary death as an ennobling spiritual triumph while the film joins its purpose to hers by providing inspirational music on the soundtrack in a facile attempt to stir up our emotions. Judith’s words to her husband before he leaves – ‘Have I been a good wife?’ – and his reassuring hug, in response, again are paralleled when April insists to Buffy in some bewilderment, ‘I was a good girlfriend’, and Buffy reassures her, ‘I’m sure you were.’ However, in contrast to the uncompromising condemnation of Warren’s behaviour that the *Buffy* episode offers, *Dark Victory* never questions the idyllic marriage Judith and Frederick appear to have achieved. Her post-operative claim that, as his obedient patient, ‘I’ve practically been your slave’ is never taken as seriously by the film as perhaps it needs to be. In both cases, another woman acts as mediator for the couple (Buffy for April and Warren, Ann for Judith and Frederick) when they are no longer able or willing to communicate directly, each relationship based on a suppression of the truth, though for very different reasons.

So *Dark Victory*’s transfiguration of Judith through her embracing of the role of perfect wife meets *The Stepford Wives*’ icy vision of wifely perfection as monstrous. Out of this incompatible mixture comes April, a manufactured ‘ideal’ girlfriend who is grotesquely programmed to do Warren’s bidding and

whom he unfeelingly throws away, yet who remains more than the sum of her material parts and very touching in her efforts to fulfil her designated role. In contrast, Buffy, who has also been dealt a hand she has not chosen for herself, will finally be given a chance to change her destiny and free herself from her special role as Slayer, though it will take until the final episode in the final season (7.22: ‘Chosen’) for this to emerge. It has been clear all along, in any case, that the series rejects essentialism. People are to be understood as what they do and experience, not as what they are in any permanent and pre-determined sense. Whedon’s comment about Tara in the DVD overview to Season Five – that ‘family are the people who treat you like family [...] and not necessarily the people that you’re related to by blood’ – is relevant to April too: to be human is to think and behave as human, not necessarily to be made of living flesh and bone. Equally, by being compelled by the implanted chip in his head to stop behaving badly, Spike eventually becomes as good as he is forced to act: to behave like a good man is no longer distinguishable from being one.

The most concentrated and explicit example of this scenario is when Faith switches bodies with Buffy to escape the police after killing a man in Season Three (3.14: ‘Bad Girls’), then being stabbed by Buffy and falling into a coma (3.21: ‘Graduation Day’, part 1), and eventually reviving and escaping from the hospital in Season Four (4.15: ‘This Year’s Girl’). In order to pass as Buffy in the episode immediately after the body switch, which follows its consequences (4.16: ‘Who Are You?’), she has to learn to behave like her, practicing in front of a mirror and self-consciously repeating to herself what she sees as Buffy’s mantra: ‘You can’t do that, because it’s wrong.’ She later makes a play for Spike at the Bronze, confusing him by the unfamiliar sexual explicitness of her offers, but laughingly adding, as she walks away, that she will not be following through: ‘And you know why I don’t? Because it’s wrong.’ However, when she kills a vampire in order to maintain the ruse of being Buffy, she herself is thrown into confusion when she is thanked by the woman she has saved. Ironically, Tara is able to sense the body swap (just as Faith picks up earlier on Tara’s relationship with Willow), where Willow (Buffy’s best friend after all) fails to do so, but Faith herself continues to grow into Buffy’s values through playing her part. Eventually she stops a killing spree by

a group of vampires not just to convince others that she thinks it is wrong, repeating the mantra once again, but because she means it this time. When she heads out of town in her own body again, at the end of the episode, her expression is serious as the implications of this – and perhaps the stirrings of guilt they provoke – sink in.

In Season Six (6.9: ‘Smashed’), Buffy will tell Spike ‘You’re not a man. You’re a thing,’ immediately before he discovers, to his puzzlement, that he can hit her without pain, and later in the episode it seems that the reason may lie with *her* being not quite human since her return from beyond the grave. The evident hurtfulness of her remark makes it easier to sympathise with Spike than with Buffy, and, given Buffy’s kindness to April in ‘I Was Made to Love You,’ it suggests that she has suppressed her earlier generosity out of some sort of defensive denial of her growing feelings for Spike (indeed, as we have seen, the walls of her resistance to him come tumbling down – literally, as the building collapses around them – by the episode’s finale). The series is consistent in its criticism of those who treat people – and robots and vampires who take on human vulnerabilities – merely as things.

A scene in ‘I Was Made to Love You,’ just over halfway through the episode, provides a small reminder that Spike is more than this. In several shots, we see a restroom sign on the wall behind him in the Magic Box. Above the word ‘Men’ is the usual symbol for disabled access (a figure in a wheelchair), next to the usual male icon (depicting the standing figure of a man). Together these figures unobtrusively insist on Spike’s



humanity – the fact that he is a man as much as a vampire, or at least that he deserves to be treated as one – while, at the same time, recalling one of the most sympathetic shots of him, from Season Two (2.14: ‘Innocence’), when he is confined to a wheelchair after his injuries in an earlier episode (2.10: ‘What’s My Line?’; part 2). In ‘Innocence,’ as Angel, Dru and the Judge go out without him, walking off-screen in the foreground of the shot, Spike is suddenly revealed in long shot in his wheelchair, a small figure isolated and still in the middle of the frame. We see the restroom sign in the Magic Box, in ‘I Was Made to Love You,’ just as Spike finds out that April (who had earlier thrown him through a window) is a robot. This eases the humiliation he had felt at her hands, though he now faces the combined hostility of Giles, Willow, Xander, Anya, Dawn and Tara, all of whom know about his feelings for Buffy and uniformly reject him in response, one after the other. Giles is the most adamant, shoving Spike roughly against a cabinet and speaking with cold deliberation, his words measured and full of menace:

*Giles:* We are not your friends. We are not your way to Buffy. There is no way to Buffy. Clear out of here. And, Spike, this thing ... get over it.

Narrowing his eyes, Spike challenges him with a tight smile:

*Spike:* I don’t know what you mean.

*Giles:* Yes, you do. Move the hell on.

Following Spike’s enforced departure, hunched under a blanket to shield him from the sunlight, we cut from a close shot of Giles’ grim face and from the dull colours of the Magic Box scene to April in her pink floral-patterned dress against the brightly coloured pink and orange mise-en-scène of the coffee shop where she is looking for Warren, the editing emphasising the links between Spike and April in their unreciprocated attachments to Buffy and Warren respectively. So the restroom sign, with its reminder of Spike’s bad treatment at the hands of Angelus and Dru in Season Two (now echoed in the unfeeling coldness with which he is treated by Giles and the others), and the present links between Spike and April in their thwarted searches for love, are mutually reinforcing. Similarly, the

remembered sight of Spike in the wheelchair and the current one of him hunched under the blanket work together to present him as an exposed and beleaguered figure, undeserving of his fate.

Given all of this, our sympathy for Spike – already very strong – is buttressed even further in ‘I Was Made to Love You,’ but then uncomfortably complicated near the end of the episode, when he turns up at Warren’s house with a carton of Buffy memorabilia that he’s accumulated (photographs, bits of clothing, a blonde wig, and so on) and insists that Warren make him a robot of his own in Buffy’s image (the Buffybot). If Spike was previously linked to April in their shared ambiguity (their emotional expressiveness appearing to give each of them an effective human identity despite their biologically non-human bodies), it is a shock to see him suddenly step into Warren’s shoes and put a twinned version of Buffy in April’s. However, it is not quite so straightforward: whereas Warren constructed April because he preferred a girlfriend he could treat as a thing, it is very clear that a robotic version of Buffy falls far short of what Spike really desires and that it is Buffy’s rejection of him (her refusal to treat *him* as more than a thing) that pushes him to go for second-best. His resorting to a robot seems sad, rather than villainous, and in its undoing of the earlier links between Buffy and Warren in their respective objectifications of Spike and April, it can be taken with some sympathy as an understandable retaliation. In any case, our memory of Giles’ recent advice to Spike to ‘Move the hell on,’ which Spike has now done, lingers over Spike’s actions and may encourage us to push some of the responsibility in Giles’ direction.

The relationship between persons and things which is explored through our shifting perceptions of characters like April and Spike leads us to the conclusion that they and the more fully human characters throughout the series are never purely one or the other. This realisation hits us with a visceral punch in the final moments of the episode, when Buffy returns home and finds her mother dead, an event whose painful effects will run their course and be studied with almost clinical precision in the subsequent episode (5.16: ‘The Body’). The ‘thingness’ of Joyce’s unanimated body is palpable, with its legs bent outward below the knees in a recumbent mirroring of April’s dying pose. However, Buffy’s grief-stricken reaction



shows how impossible it is for her – for all of us – to separate the person that was from the body that remains. Her regression to childish desperation as she starts to take in her mother’s death with rising panic (‘Mom? ... Mom? ... Mommy?’) may well evoke the earlier childhood setting of the playground where April expired, but the low-key register of Buffy’s sympathy for April has now been replaced by gut-wrenching and irrecoverable loss.

### ‘Intervention’

Many of the events in ‘I Was Made to Love You’ continue to reverberate in subsequent episodes, especially the death of Buffy’s mother and Spike’s requisition of the Buffybot. The completed robot in Buffy’s image first appears three episodes later (5.18: ‘Intervention’) in one of the most narratively complicated episodes of the series, the one we will be considering next. This complexity is reflected in the unusual length of the pre-credits sequence, which is almost seven minutes long overall and brings together several important plot developments in thirteen extracts from previous scenes in less than the first minute-and-a-half alone. We are reminded, first, that the season’s crazy villain Glory, a glamorous and utterly self-centred god-in-exile trying to get back to her own dimension by finding the mystical Key to unlock the portal, now knows that the Key is in human form, though she does not yet know that it is embodied in Buffy’s sister Dawn, who was created for that purpose. Second, we revisit Spike’s dream in which he is kissing Buffy, and witness his horror when he wakes up and takes

this in ('Oh, God, no'), followed by his declaration to Buffy of his feelings for her and her rejection, and then the appearance of April which inspires him to order a robot of his own. And, third, we again see Buffy finding her mother dead, followed by Joyce's funeral and Buffy talking with Angel as he helps her get through the night after the burial.

The episode continues to interlace and develop these strands, with a couple of significant themes emerging across them all, especially those relating to vision and its impairment, and, connected to this, the ways emotional vulnerabilities may be hidden behind misleading and defensive surfaces. The first pre-credits scene to follow the edited bits from previous episodes takes place in Buffy's kitchen, where she, Dawn and Giles are doing the washing-up and making weak jokes as they put on brave faces for one another in the wake of Joyce's death and funeral. Buffy tells Dawn that 'if there are any plates in your room, let's have them before they get furry and we have to name them,' and her sister replies in a manner that cannot help but pull us up: 'Hey, I was, like, five then.' The poignancy implicit in her reply derives from our knowledge that Dawn has only existed since the start of Season Five, and her memories of being five years old, as well as the others' memories of her past existence, are implanted and illusory, and they all know it. So right away we are given a clear impression of an unspoken agreement amongst these characters – at least at this particularly difficult time – to pretend to accept surface realities as the whole story. Despite Dawn's earlier desperation when she discovered the truth about her origins (5.13: 'Blood Ties'), Joyce's death two episodes later and Glory's ongoing menace have shelved her existential crisis, and the scene conveys both a protective armour being put in place and its fragility. The theme of defenses going up continues as Dawn leaves the room and Buffy and Giles move into the living room and begin to talk more openly. Giles takes on the role of a kind confessor, and the fact that his white T-shirt is visible above the top of his gray sweater, encircling his neck, gives him a priestly appearance to match. When Buffy expresses her worry that she is getting hardened by her slaying – 'I'm starting to feel like being the Slayer is turning me into stone' – Giles counters her feelings of emotional shutdown by offering to take her on a quest to a sacred place nearby in the desert for a day or two.

After Buffy tries to make up for her emotional containment by telling a bemused Dawn how much she loves her (Dawn responding that Buffy's 'Gettin' weird'), we then move into the next pre-credits scene by means of Buffy's reply to Dawn that 'weird love's better than no love'. Unerringly, this leads us to Spike collecting the Buffybot from Warren, and it is difficult not to smile at the segue. Indeed, the shifts of tone throughout the episode are so frequent as to keep us constantly on our toes, as we move from serious issues of grief and emotional debilitation to affectionate humour at the expense of characters we care about (like Spike and Giles) and those to whom our allegiance is much weaker (like Glory's hapless minions), and back again. Yet far from being mere comic relief, even the humour produced by the excessive fawning of the minions is instructive in the staggering insincerity they display – another example of how the episode foregrounds such defensive façades – as the minions address Glory in ever escalating hyperboles in the misplaced hope of escaping her displeasure.

The humour derived from the enthusiastic grovelling of Glory's minions is partly an accumulated effect from their appearances earlier in the season, drawing on a continuing vein of humour that will be mined in later episodes as well. For example, in the episode immediately after 'Intervention' (5.19: 'Tough Love'), as Glory luxuriates in a bubble bath, three of her obedient minions kneel blindfolded by the side of the bath, waiting on her with loofah, chocolates and a drink in hand, and her accusation that they never bathe is met by one of them rhapsodising eagerly: 'Oh, but we do, Your Scrumptiousness. We bathe in your splendiferous radiance..' until Glory interrupts





to insult them. It is not just the outrageous excess of their words that may make us smile, nor the way the minions occasionally run out of steam through constantly having to excel themselves with ever more flattering praise. Equally telling is the fact that Glory is perfectly aware of their insincerity, referring to it as 'lame toadying' in the episode which precedes 'Intervention' (5.17: 'Forever'), and yet she requires their tributes to continue all the same. Appearances matter to Glory (which is why Spike will find it easy to arouse her anger by insulting her physical appearance – her hair, figure and clothes – when she is torturing him near the end of 'Intervention'). Glory's superficiality, as well as the zealous toadying of her shameless minions which joins them to her in an openly acknowledged masquerade of willing servitude, is an extreme version of the episode's thematic interests. Even Willow will be depicted as being amusingly and excessively obsessed with the outward look of things when we overhear her lending a set of notes to a fellow student later in 'Intervention', advising him anxiously: 'And, uh, don't write in it, or ... or ... uh ... put a coffee mug down on it or anything. And ... and don't spill. OK. Oh, and don't fold the page corners down. Bye!'

Spike's relationship with the Buffybot might seem like more of the same: an interest in perfected surfaces regardless of the emptiness or disorder that may lie beneath (the emptiness in the robot, that is, and the disordered emotions in himself). Just as Glory is not bothered by whether her minions mean what they say, as long as they throw themselves into their roles with a convincing display of vigorous devotion, so too might Spike's acquisition of the Buffybot appear to imply that all he needs is an illusion of Buffy, as long as the robot plays her part with relish. Thus, although he initially complains to Warren that 'She looks a little shiny to me' (that is, the surface she presents to the world is too obviously artificial, the illusion too openly declared), he changes his mind when the robot opens her eyes, greets him and kisses him forcefully as if she really means it: 'She'll do.'

However, in contrast to the self-conscious joking noted earlier amongst Buffy, Giles and Dawn, or the openly inauthentic relationship between Glory and her 'boys', Spike's need to believe it is Buffy herself he is with begins to take him over. Thus, after the robot holds a stake to Spike's heart in what is

clearly a pre-programmed mock fight in his crypt, and he kisses her, the throaty intensity with which he says her name and the intimacy of the camerawork produce the effect of Spike succumbing to his fantasy. So too do his words in a later scene as they lie naked on the floor – 'You're mine, Buffy' – until the robot abruptly breaks the illusion with her reply, asking if she should start the program over again. Spike quickly replies (as we cut from a shot of them together to a close-up of Spike alone in the frame, his brow furrowed): 'Shh. No programs. Don't use that word. Just be Buffy.' However, even as she smiles back at him, it is with far too big and bright a smile. Her hoop earrings – and, elsewhere, her high heels and pleated skirt – are not quite right (indeed, Buffy will later call the robot 'Skirt Girl' to emphasise how unlike Buffy's clothes the outfit is). The make-up too is over-polished, the illusion unsustainable.

The episode veers into a broad comedy of errors as Buffy's friends prove unable to distinguish the Buffybot from the real thing, despite the facility with which, in 'I Was Made to Love You', they had recognised April to be a robot at first sight. The Buffybot's oddities, far from alerting them all to her being a robot, produce either mild bewilderment or, in Anya's case, immense delight. As an ex-demon, she has not quite mastered the art of being human herself and does not recognise such quirks as being in the least bit odd. Thus, when the Buffybot, having been programmed to know that Anya is a committed capitalist, asks her how her money is, Anya replies – 'Fine. Thank you for asking' – and turns pointedly to Xander with a smile on her face, nodding with pleasure, as if to suggest to him that he might well take more interest in such things himself. At the same time as Buffy's friends fail to realise they are dealing with a robot, Glory's minions lurk around the periphery of various scenes (suddenly revealed peering through windows, around corners, and so on) as they follow Glory's instructions to watch Buffy and her friends: 'Find out who's new in her life, who's ... special, who's different.' In a double dose of mistaken identity, they see the Buffybot protecting Spike while out on patrol and conclude that, as *she* is the Slayer, then *he* must be the Key, triumphantly capturing him and bringing him to Glory. The two minions who are holding Spike between them, each by one of his arms, spread their free arms wide and present him to Glory with a flourish, their faces beaming, though

she is quick to sniff him out as a vampire, realising at once that he has insufficient purity to be the Key.

While Buffy's friends and Glory's minions alike wander through the narrative in happy ignorance, providing numerous examples of faulty vision in the face of the misleading appearances of the objects in their world, Buffy continues her quest in the desert – what Xander will refer to as her 'vision quest experience' – and selected scenes from this are intercut with events back home. The desert scenes begin by poking fun at Giles after he drives Buffy to the sacred location in his red convertible (bought earlier in Season Five), another shiny surface in this episode of false displays. In an episode from Season Six mentioned earlier in this chapter (6.8: 'Tabula Rasa'), when Spike loses his memory and thinks he is Giles' son, he comments sarcastically that 'Dad' probably has 'some classic midlife-crisis transport', correctly imagining it as red, shiny and phallic. This interpretation of the car is certainly open to us as we see it edge into view around a bend in the desert road in 'Intervention': a false presentation of self which may well have stemmed from Giles' need to divert his attention from such midlife turmoil within himself, as Spike will later imply.

The gourd-shaking jumping-in-and-out ritual Giles has to enact in aid of Buffy's quest is gently ridiculed by Buffy as a kind of hokey-pokey (Buffy adding quietly in mock-serious tones as he finishes, 'And that's what it's all about'). It is performed with self-conscious embarrassment by Giles himself, well aware of how preposterous it looks. However, Buffy's comments throughout the more serious stages of the quest itself – 'I know this place', then, later, to the figure who appears to her, 'I know you. You're the first Slayer' – suggest a clarity of vision lacking elsewhere in the episode so far, which gives a validity to the first Slayer's enigmatic words: 'Love is pain [...] Love will bring you to your gift [...] Death is your gift, even though Buffy herself is at a loss to understand them at this point. Though we may not know it yet, the way is being prepared, in the midst of significant amounts of humour in the episode, to Buffy's death in the season finale (5.22: 'The Gift').

If 'Intervention' is thus a crucial stage in Buffy's journey, it is no less important for Spike, and his self-sacrifice at the end of Season Seven is also being more distantly prepared. In fact, even as early as the end of 'Intervention' itself, Spike is ready to

die rather than betray Buffy. The scene we will be examining in detail – the final scene in 'Intervention' – is where she comes to know this. It is the only time in the episode we see Buffy and Spike interact (after the opening visual 'quotes' from previous episodes, that is), though Spike does lie bruised and battered on the sidelines after his escape from Glory while Buffy fights the minions in the lobby of Glory's building (along with Giles, Xander and the Buffybot). However, Spike and Buffy only briefly share the frame throughout the fight, with Spike a small unmoving figure in the background of the action whom Buffy never appears to notice (though the Buffybot does). In other words, until the episode's final scene, Buffy's and Spike's journeys are almost completely separate, though the fact that almost all of Spike's scenes contain Buffy's robotic double makes it *seem* as though they're barely ever apart. The most important narrative strand of the episode, winding its way through and around its other concerns, is the bringing together of Buffy and Spike, with Spike forfeiting his fantasy version of Buffy, while Buffy in turn is forced to relinquish some of her earlier prejudices about *him*, leading them both to a more authentic relationship with each other based on mutual trust.

The theme of trust which is so crucial to Buffy's developing relationship with Spike, like so much else in 'Intervention' – and indeed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* more generally – is reflected to varying degrees of prominence in other plotlines. I mentioned above that almost all of Spike's appearances prior to the final scene show him interacting with the Buffybot: the only exceptions are his scenes with Glory. However, there are striking parallels between his treatment at Glory's hands and at the robot's. Thus, in the first scene of Spike alone with the Buffybot in his crypt, she throws him onto the bed on his back, straddling him and ripping his black T-shirt before pretending to stab him in the heart. Similarly, in the first scene of Spike with Glory, she throws him onto her bed and straddles him as well, before torturing him by sticking her finger in his gut to 'read' him and see what is inside. Although his black T-shirt is intact when he is brought to her (Spike evidently having a good supply of such clothes), it is shown to have been torn across the chest by the time we reach a later scene, when he is still in Glory's custody, his appearance deteriorating from scene to scene as he becomes more beaten up and bruised.

What may thus appear as a link between the Buffybot and Glory, and may even be taken to imply a masochistic wish on Spike's part to be punished by them both (since he is, after all, the one who instructed Warren on the 'special skills' he wanted him to include in the robot's programming) can more usefully be read as a contrast. As we will see in more detail in the following chapter, the series distinguishes between situations where characters are unwillingly tied up or chained and at the mercy of their enemies, on one hand, and those where willing partners play at relinquishing power in safe and trusting collusion, on the other. Spike's programming of the Buffybot is a prelude to his relationship with Buffy in Season Six, where many of the same playful features will prevail, and it sets in relief the one-sided and unacceptable torture which Glory inflicts on him against his will, where trust is absent.

At the present stage, of course, the fact that the Buffybot has been programmed according to his own instructions makes it impossible for them to interact playfully in this way in any authentic sense, since that would require two free agents willingly ceding their power on a basis of trust, so the best he can hope for is a simulation of such a relationship. Its inadequacy is forcefully conveyed just before Spike is captured and delivered to Glory, when we cut to a medium close-up of Spike alone in the frame in the wake of his various sexual encounters with the robot in earlier scenes. Indeed, it seems more than likely that another such encounter has taken place off-screen immediately prior to *this* scene as well, as Spike's dishevelled hair and the cigarette hanging from his mouth would seem to suggest. Wearing one of his customary black T-shirts, he leans back against the wall, a picture of emotional detachment and alienation. The door handle rattles, Spike hurriedly buckles his unfastened belt, telling the Buffybot to hide, and Xander enters.

Xander tells Spike he saw him with Buffy (or so he thinks), and Spike begins to realise the game is up, though he appears unsure how to respond. Making a small show of sullen defiance, he tries to brazen it out, but the fact that this comes so soon after the close-up conveying Spike's disillusionment with the Buffybot makes him seem defenceless and wary, rather than genuinely spoiling for a fight. The relationship with the Buffybot is already played out, and Spike seems to be walking through his part in the confrontation with Xander, sparring



more out of habit than anything else, as he follows Xander's lead and prolongs his mistaken assumption – and Spike's own fantasy – that it *was* Buffy whom Spike was 'comforting' in the cemetery when Xander saw him. Shortly after Xander accuses Spike of being a monster, Glory's minions arrive and take him to be the Key. Spike is thus having to defend himself in all directions – denying that he is a monster to Xander, denying that he is the Key to Glory's minions – while not quite knowing who he is or should become, nor how to put the robot behind him without being caught out by Xander and the others. His perplexity persists throughout this scene, and his attempted bravado now appears as the thinnest of covers. There is a notable echo of the progression that we saw in Giles in our consideration of 'Innocence' above, where he stammered in confusion when trying to grasp precisely what it was that made Angel go bad, yet went on to achieve genuine moral stature in his unconditional commitment to Buffy, despite the consequences of what she had done. Spike too will rise above his own confusions to discover his moral centre when he refuses to betray Buffy to save himself.

The final scene in 'Intervention' is comparable in length and number of shots to the scene examined from 'I Was Made to Love You': approximately two minutes and thirty seconds long and made up of twenty-five shots. The sequence of shots is structured around a run of five shots more or less in the middle which have no dialogue at all (Shots 12-16). This wordless segment is framed by two bits of dialogue, first the more extensive conversation between Spike and Buffy when he takes her to be the Buffybot (Shots 3-11), and, afterward, by further

dialogue between them when Spike is fully aware that it is Buffy he is talking to and not the robot, though Spike speaks only twice (Shots 17-18), while Buffy speaks at greater length (Shots 18, 20 and 22), interspersed with wordless close-ups of Spike (Shots 19, 21 and 23). Finally, these two conversations either side of the silent centre of the sequence are themselves further framed by Buffy's wordless arrival at Spike's crypt at the beginning (Shots 1-2) and her wordless departure at the end (Shots 24-25). So silence plays an important part in the scene, whether on its own or in its interplay with dialogue, an interplay between talking and taking in the presence of another person, both by listening in the dialogue segments and by silent observation throughout the scene.

Of all the characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Spike is probably the one whose relationship with Buffy is most movingly defined by their moments of stillness together, often involving silence as well (as we will see in the scene to be

examined later, from 'After Life'). Although Spike is frequently a man of many words, especially when cornered or under threat, and is in command of a range of intonations from sarcasm to indignation, swagger, seductiveness and beyond, he can also show himself to be a man of *few* words when he forgets his defensiveness and puts someone else's needs before his own: this 'someone else' tends to be Buffy (or, occasionally, Dawn). For example, eleven episodes earlier in Season Five (5.7: 'Fool For Love'), Buffy finds out her mother has to go into hospital overnight for a CAT scan, and she goes out on the back porch alone and cries. Spike arrives with a gun, determined to kill her after she had expressed her disgust for him earlier and cruelly told him he was beneath her, though, as usual with Spike, his dramatic gesture undoubtedly has more bark than bite. Now he becomes aware of her distress, and the sinister point-of-view shot as he first approaches her is quickly replaced by more open and sympathetic shots which balance what he sees with



how he reacts. He lowers the gun and asks if there is anything he can do. Receiving no reply, he tilts his head to study Buffy quizzically, then sits down on the porch steps beside her and hesitantly pats her on the back. Buffy never seems to notice the gun nor to feel at all threatened by his presence, perhaps sensing more clearly than he does that he could never do her serious harm. The camera moves slowly to the right as they continue to sit together quietly in the evening stillness, no longer speaking or touching or looking at each other anymore, just remaining side by side and sharing the shadows. Such moments represent Spike at his best.

In the final scene of ‘Intervention’, its organisation around its silences and their interplay with the two conversations inserted within the sequence draws on our memories of such earlier moments, and, once again, shows how much better Spike is than Buffy’s friends at sensing her presence and picking up on subtle changes in her moods and behaviour. In line with this, there is much more emphasis on his silent reactions than on anything he has to say once he realises that this is Buffy and not the robot. The focus on Spike and his experiences throughout the scene, rather than on what Buffy is going through, is accomplished through a number of strategies. First, Buffy has come along with a very specific purpose in mind: to find out whether Spike has put Dawn in danger by revealing her identity to Glory (though we may not be aware of this at first nor appreciate that it is really Buffy arriving at Spike’s crypt and not the robot). The immediately preceding scene both makes clear that Buffy is appalled at the prospect that the broken robot might be fixed and also lets us know that Willow could easily repair it if Buffy wanted her to, with even Xander expressing some sympathy for Spike after his beating and the loss of his ‘toy’: ‘...the guy was so thrashed.’ Thus, we are simultaneously prepared for two possible outcomes – the robot either abandoned in its present state of disrepair or restored to Spike in full working order – without finding out for sure which one takes place off-screen after the end of the scene.

However, regardless of whether we immediately realise that it is Buffy impersonating the Buffybot’s speech and movements and wearing her clothes, any uncertainties disappear with the first close-up of Buffy (Shot 10) and her response, after Spike insists she can never tell Glory who the Key is: ‘Why?’ The

close-up underlines the importance of this question to Buffy, imposing a sincerity on her delivery of the line which is wholly lacking in her imitation of the robot’s programmed chatter up to that point. Yet despite our being in on Buffy’s purpose, at least from the close-up onward, our sympathies appear to be directed more strongly towards Spike, partly because, unlike Buffy, we already know he stood up to Glory. We can thus afford to be critical of Buffy’s deception and the lack of trust in him that it reveals (especially given the evidence of his battered body): for us, if not for her, Spike’s trustworthiness is already beyond dispute.

Further, the camera places us inside the crypt with Spike before Buffy arrives, and we remain there with him after she leaves. Her comings and goings as she moves into and out of the scene take place in the background, whereas Spike is consistently located in or near the foreground of the image in every shot in which he appears. Thus, there are a greater number of close-ups of Spike, whereas Buffy’s more variable distance from the camera makes our intimacy with her more patchy. The close-up shots of Spike have little depth of field, with plain, dull-coloured walls and windows out of focus behind him, which encourages us to concentrate more fully on him. In contrast, in the close-up of Buffy when she asks Spike why Glory must not find out about Dawn, we see various details and objects in the background. For example, a statue of a woman just behind her may remind us of Buffy’s confession to Giles earlier in the episode that ‘being the Slayer is turning me into stone’.

Thus, Spike’s emotions are much more ‘visible’ throughout the scene than Buffy’s, with a number of reaction shots of his face as he tries to make sense of what is going on. Though Buffy and Spike ask three questions each, Buffy’s are either a rhetorical performance to convince him she is the Buffybot (‘Do you wanna ravage me now?’), or a straightforward trawl for information (‘Why did you let that Glory hurt you?’), or, finally, in the close-up mentioned earlier, a final need to reassure herself of Spike’s continuing reliability when he tells her Glory can never find out who the Key is (‘Why?’). In other words, they are all part of her calculated plan to gain information vital to her and Dawn and are intellectually motivated rather than emotionally revealing. Spike’s questions, on the other hand, are spontaneous reactions to a series of perplexing events: the unexpected

arrival of what he takes to be the Buffybot ('Where've you been?'), the fact that she hasn't been destroyed ('Will fixed you?'), and the realisation that the robot is Buffy after all, which Spike makes clear when he asks about the Buffybot's fate. They increase our sense of his emotional vulnerability as he falls for Buffy's ruse and as his struggle to understand what is going on puts him at so clear a disadvantage. The third and final question ('And my robot?') is an acknowledgment of the success of her deception – with, perhaps, a quiet note of token defiance to cover his humiliation at her knowing about the Buffybot – rather than exposing a genuine desire to reclaim it. Indeed, he lowers his head when Buffy reprimands him, and, after a few broken words ('It wasn't supposed to..'), he says nothing further, unable or unwilling to mount any sort of self-defence or justification.

Our emotional involvement with Spike is thus assured by all these elements: (i) Buffy's deceptiveness and lack of trust in him (and the fact that we know better), (ii) her accurate impersonation of the robot's superficiality, as well as the visual links between her and the stone statue, both of which block our access to her feelings and suggest a certain 'hardening' and emotional inaccessibility in Buffy, (iii) our physical affiliation with Spike as Buffy arrives and leaves, (iv) Spike's greater intimacy with the camera through his consistent placement in the foreground of the image, (v) the emphasis, through choice of camera distance and shot duration, on Spike's reactions, as he tries to puzzle out what's going on, rather than on what he says, (vi) the emotional and physical pain he's in and the touching hints of defiance with which he endures them both. Buffy's kiss, when she comes to know that Spike has been true to her and Dawn in the face of Glory's torture, generates the scene's single close-up view of them together in the frame, cut around an inserted reaction shot of her from somewhat further away (though, in the close-up shots that surround it, we get much more access to his face than to hers). At the same time, the kiss motivates the wordless sequence of shots at the heart of the scene.

The five shots that comprise this sequence (Shots 12-16 in the scene as a whole) follow Spike's admission that he would die for Buffy, and they unfold as follows:

12. Cut to Buffy over Spike's shoulder in medium close-up as she moves in towards him. [4 seconds]

13. Cut to Spike over Buffy's shoulder in close-up as she kisses him. He looks puzzled and pulls back slightly, frowning, as he figures out what's going on. This is the middle shot of the scene as a whole, though in terms of expired time, the mid-point occurs in Shot 11. So there are two competing centres to the scene: Buffy's recognition of Spike's trustworthiness (Shot 11) and Spike's recognition of Buffy (Shot 13). [9 seconds]



14. Cut to Buffy over Spike's shoulder in medium close-up as she holds his gaze and silently confirms her identity by the steady intensity of her look. As the central shot in the five-shot sequence, the sustained look between them is another crucial pivot around which the scene's multiple symmetries revolve (a third mid-point to add to those mentioned above). [4 seconds]

15. Cut back to Spike over Buffy's shoulder in close-up again, with Spike characteristically tilting his head to study her, as we saw before in 'Fool For Love'. [4 seconds]  
 16. Cut to Buffy in medium close-up over Spike's shoulder (though he is nearly out of frame on the left), as Buffy turns to go. [1 second]

Spike's reaction to Buffy's kiss as being recognisably different from the Buffybot's is further evidence of the robot's

inadequacies as object of his desire, and, for a brief moment, his fantasy comes true, as what he takes to be the Buffybot is ‘magically’ transformed into Buffy herself. However, Buffy’s choice of a kiss as his reward for standing up to Glory for her and Dawn is double-edged: it both expresses her knowledge of his yearning for her and, at the same time, encompasses the fact that the kiss means something different to him than to her. Thus, the kiss, though freely given, can only ever fall short of what he wants, since Buffy acts out of gratitude, and not reciprocating desire. In this way, she is kind to him while simultaneously remaining uninvolved, as with her quiet sympathy for April in ‘I Was Made to Love You,’ and nothing much is at stake for her in terms of commitment or emotional risk.

Earlier in the scene, Spike contrasts the Buffybot with Buffy, describing the latter as ‘the other, not-so-pleasant Buffy,’ thus pinpointing his essential difference from Warren in Spike’s preference for a woman with a will of her own, even if it makes her unpleasant. The downside of this is that her affection cannot be forced, and Spike is left more lonely than ever as she leaves. Following Shots 13 to 15, with their intense shared looks into each other’s faces – their mutual recognition of each other’s fundamental human qualities – Buffy tells him what she thinks of the Buffybot in response to his final question about its fate (‘The robot was gross and obscene [...] it wasn’t even real’). Spike lowers his head in apparent shame or defeat, and Buffy too averts her gaze as she walks away. Turning her head slightly, but still facing away, she tells him that what he did for her and Dawn ‘was real’ (Shot 20). Spike lifts his head in close-up (Shot 21) and, in an answering close-up, Buffy turns her head fully to meet his look (Shot 22): ‘I won’t forget it.’ Another close-up of Spike (Shot 23) is followed by another of Buffy (Shot 24), still looking at Spike and then turning away and walking off, with the camera remaining stationary as she closes the door behind her in the background. The scene finishes with a close-up of Spike looking at the door in silence and stillness (Shot 25), then the end credits start to appear.

The sequence as a whole represents a further step in the exploration of what it is to be human which is so central to the series as a whole. However, unlike the treatment of April in ‘I Was Made to Love You,’ the humanising of Spike has ramifications for Buffy herself which will prove more difficult for her to

put aside. At this point, although she recognises Spike’s basic goodness, she lacks the attraction to him which the camera already displays (and the audience presumably share). There are two self-conscious camera movements in the scene which exemplify the way Spike seems to fascinate the camera: first, after Buffy enters Spike’s crypt near the beginning of the scene and walks briskly forward, her arms swinging by her side as she imitates the Buffybot, and we then cut to Spike lying still with his eyes closed, the camera rapidly closing in on him, independent of Buffy’s movements (Shot 3); second, when the camera circles around him in close-up as he asks about the fate of the robot (Shot 17). These examples of how the camera gravitates to Spike and is unable to tear itself away provide a contrast to the ease with which Buffy detaches herself and walks away at the end of the scene. Although she has certainly come to recognise him in some deeper and more accurate way – granting him moral qualities which make it impossible to treat him with a clear conscience as no more than a monstrous *thing* – she has yet to recognise *herself* in Spike. That will come later. So too will her own enthrallment as she enters into a sexually addictive relationship with him in Season Six where she appears to forfeit her will to resist him, despite the self-loathing she experiences as a result. However, before that can happen she has to die, although her death at the end of Season Five will not be examined until the following chapter. For now, we need to skip forward to the third of Buffy’s brief encounters to be looked at here.

### ‘After Life’

This episode takes place shortly after Buffy’s friends have brought her back from beyond the grave, and its final scene shows her escaping from their eager interest in her to spend some time on her own, only to discover Spike in the shadows behind the magic shop. The relationship between Spike and Buffy builds on the trust established at the end of ‘Intervention,’ but now Buffy is the one who is emotionally raw and vulnerable and taken to the edge. Another difference from ‘Intervention’ is that, as noted earlier, Spike and Buffy only come together there in the final scene, having followed separate narrative paths until then. ‘After Life,’ in contrast, is punctuated by a series of

quiet scenes between them interspersed with chattier scenes of Willow, Tara, Xander and Anya, sometimes with Buffy present and sometimes without her, with little overlap between the two. Spike tends to keep his distance whenever the others turn up, and Xander is particularly quick to speed him on his way. Besides Buffy herself, only Dawn seems caught in the middle, initially appearing alone with Buffy, but welcoming Spike without hostility when he turns up and joins them, and sharing scenes with the others as well. So the battlelines are drawn.

Willow, Tara, Xander and Anya are intimately bound together by having conspired to bring Buffy back without telling either Dawn or Spike of their intentions, and they now appear to experience little guilt – at least not consciously – about the dangers they were courting nor the damage they may have done, though they keep reassuring one another that everything is all right. Willow in particular is far too self-satisfied at her own achievement, with far too much riding on a successful outcome, to show much interest in Buffy's feelings or to confront her own moral failings openly. Further, their pact to resurrect Buffy seems to have bound and isolated them within the episode's narrative structures as well as its plot, just as Buffy's growing trust in Spike opens up narrative spaces and journeys for the two of them to share away from the others, where they can confide in each other and be understood. One way of formulating the difference amongst the characters is that Spike and Dawn devote themselves to reassuring Buffy, while the others are much more concerned with reassuring themselves. In fact, even Dawn ultimately reveals her own neediness when she tells Buffy wistfully, 'Don't worry about me', in the course of Buffy leaving to patrol on her own without a thought for Dawn whose words may be seen as a direct response to Buffy's blatant lack of worry over her. Nevertheless, the touching indirectness with which her vulnerability is exposed testifies to her brave attempt to put Buffy's needs before her own, thus confirming her deeper links with Spike, rather than with the smug egocentricity of the others.

The episode as a whole feels less complicated than 'Intervention' in its narrative structure and concerns. First of all, the pre-credits sequence which edits together bits from previous episodes is more focused on a single plot strand: Buffy's death and resurrection (with a reminder of Spike's unrequited

love for Buffy and the intensity of his grief when she dies, his legs giving way beneath him as he sinks to the ground in despair). Secondly, each scene follows on the heels of its predecessor with a much firmer sense of temporal continuity, at least at first: events are followed across a couple of nights and days, with the first post-credits scene displaying its tight sequentiality with particular force.

The scene begins with a fade-in on Dawn and Buffy entering their darkened house at night. Soon Spike arrives and is effortlessly eased into the scene, followed by the arrival of Willow, Tara, Xander and Anya as Spike talks with Buffy downstairs. This interruption causes Spike to leave, while Buffy goes upstairs to bed, pleading tiredness. A little later, when Xander and Anya leave the house, Xander notices Spike still hanging around outside. Following their confrontation, Spike drives off on his motorcycle, and we cut to Buffy upstairs in her room, still dressed as before, which emphasises that little time has passed across the cut. She turns her head with a start when she hears Willow in the hallway outside her room as Willow returns to her own room after phoning Giles, and we then listen in on a conversation between Willow and Tara, once Willow is back in their room, in which Willow decides to telephone Xander. This, in turn, motivates a cut to Anya and Xander together in bed, and their telephone ringing a short time afterwards. Thus we see the characters grouped together in various combinations and locations, reinforcing our sense of the separation of each person or couple or group from all the others, but with the strong temporal continuity of the whole thing fixing and sealing all these separate encounters and conversations into a seamless and unified sequence of events. By the time we cut to Xander in bright sunlight the following day, we are nearly halfway through the episode, yet it seems as if we have only watched a single scene in an approximation of real time which feels only minimally compressed.

The episode quickly begins to map out its thematic territory throughout this extended opening sequence, most importantly in the contrast it sets up between the tact and gentleness that Dawn and Spike offer Buffy and the insensitivity of the others, above all Willow and Xander. When Spike first arrives at the house to check on Dawn, unaware that Buffy has been



restored, Dawn reassures Buffy at the sound of the door opening downstairs:

*Dawn* [to Buffy]: It's OK. It's OK.

*Spike* [shouting off-screen]: Dawn! Dawn! Are you there?

*Dawn* [to Buffy]: It's ... it's just Spike. [Turning in Spike's direction] I'm here!

As he scolds her for worrying him, she interrupts with quiet embarrassment as she attempts to adopt a convincingly cheerful tone: 'Spike ... Look.' Buffy walks slowly down the stairs, her shadow accompanying her on the wall beside her, but Spike remains unperturbed: 'Yeah? I've seen the bloody bot before. Didn't think she'd patch up so...' Suddenly, he stops, and the camera moves in to a medium close-up of him, followed by a cut to Buffy returning his look and moving towards the camera into close-up as well. It is another powerful moment of mutual recognition, as in 'Intervention', but now all the more extraordinary both because Spike has no reason to believe Buffy to be anything but dead and buried, and because not so much as a touch has passed between them to tip him off this time, much less a kiss as before.

In an unexpectedly moving gesture, Buffy lowers her eyes, notices her shirt (which was unbuttoned earlier when Dawn was cleaning the graveyard dirt off Buffy's neck) and starts to button it up, continuing her reluctant attempt to think herself back into the world and its proprieties. (Another example of Buffy's difficulty remembering how the world works, and of the touching innocence and vulnerability this seems to confer on her, occurs when Dawn tells her earlier that someone will telephone Giles, and Buffy wonders, 'What, um ... will you say to him?') Buffy's awkwardness continues when the gesture of buttoning up her shirt causes Spike to notice her bloodied knuckles and she quickly hides them. The close-ups between them carry on, and Spike immediately understands – as Dawn did not – that Buffy has had to claw her way out of her coffin. Spike gently tries to counter her shame and emotional disconnectedness by telling her that he once had to do the same thing himself. Although Dawn lacks Spike's insight into Buffy's experiences, she is equally alert to her needs, and Spike's promise

to Buffy – 'We'll take care of you' – acknowledges his common purpose with Dawn.

While Dawn goes off for bandages, Spike and Buffy sit facing each other in the foreground in the first of their three meetings alone with each other in the episode as he holds her hands and they talk. His body language when he leans in slightly to hear her and nods in affirmation is of a kind with Dawn's earlier tenderness as she had guided Buffy in and washed her. Suddenly, Willow rushes in with the others, asking, 'Is she here?' The disorderly intrusion of all four of them arriving at once abruptly shatters the peaceful haven created by Dawn's and Spike's more sensitive approaches to Buffy, and both Willow and Xander (whose idea of consolation is to offer to get Buffy a pizza) have never seemed more crass. Meanwhile, Spike walks off in the foreground, his departure unremarked. Xander's comment to Spike when he spots him outside as he and Anya leave – 'I hope you're not gonna start your little obsession now that she's around again' – reveals a streak of vulgar mean-mindedness all the more shocking in its contrast with Spike's own generous behaviour to Buffy, where all traces of his own desires were subsumed to her needs.

Spike grabs Xander by the collar and slams him against a tree, furious that the others brought Buffy back and did not tell him, reminding Xander pointedly: 'I worked beside you all summer.' The way the light shines on Spike's face in close-up, just under his eye, suggests the appearance of tears without their actual presence, so Spike can be both vulnerable and strong at once. His moral censure of Xander and the others for accepting his help while excluding him from their trust is extended to a condemnation of their irresponsible use of black magic in his final comment as he drives away: 'That's the thing about magic. There's always consequences. Always!' It is an observation worthy of Giles. Indeed, in Giles' absence, Spike unexpectedly fills the moral vacuum left by his departure, and the act of slamming Xander against the tree may recall the moment in 'I Was Made to Love You' examined earlier when Giles shoves Spike himself against a cabinet to make a point about his leaving Buffy alone.

The following morning, Willow, Tara, Xander and Anya discuss the demon that seems to have accompanied Buffy back from hell, not yet realizing that he is their creation: one of the

consequences of meddling in black magic that Spike warned Xander about. When Buffy arrives wearing a black shirt that makes her stand out from the others and the bright daylight around them, they try to tell her what her resurrection means to them. However, their words are empty and bland (the best Xander can do is to tell her that having her back is ‘so important’), and the absence of soundtrack music adds to the sense of a lack of emotional connection between them and Buffy that permeates the scene. As they continue their researching indoors, Buffy remarks that she misses Giles, which provokes Willow’s equivocal response that she knows she is ‘a kind of poor substitute’, thus clearly expressing her resentment at being so under-appreciated and her wish to be assured that she is not a poor substitute for Giles after all. This implicit arrogance will become explicit when Giles returns in the following episode (6.4: ‘Flooded’) and Willow coldly directs her anger towards Giles himself when he criticises her for bringing Buffy back at such risk and calls her a ‘rank, arrogant amateur’, rather than congratulating her as she expects.

The awkwardness of the scene – the emotional coldness of its tone – pushes Buffy to go off on her own to patrol, without a backward glance at Dawn and the others, leading straight to Dawn’s possession by the demon, who has no solid body of his own. It is all too easy to see the demon as a vehicle for Dawn’s suppressed anger at Buffy for her apparent indifference. After all, the demon’s earlier manifestations (first, disguised as Buffy verbally abusing Willow and Tara, then as Anya taunting Xander) and its later one (in the body of Xander as they discover together that killing Buffy will keep the demon from dissipating) can readily be taken to reflect the brew of ill-feeling amongst them that cannot be owned up to and dealt with in the open. As Xander reassures Dawn that the demon is gone, Anya qualifies his optimism: ‘Yes, but where did it go? I mean, evil things have plans. They have things to do.’

We cut from this to Spike pacing in his crypt, punching the wall until his knuckles bleed. Presumably the point of the cut from Anya’s words to Spike is less to suggest that Spike actually *is* an evil thing than to highlight the discrepancy between the gang’s condescension towards him and the more sympathetic view we are being encouraged to adopt. On hearing the door opening, Spike goes upstairs to find Buffy there, the two of them immediately linked together in the dialogue between

them, providing a further basis for resisting the superficial implications of the cut to Spike from Anya’s words.

*Buffy:* Your hand is hurt.

*Spike:* Hm. Same to you.

So Buffy’s wish to patrol by herself is a flimsy concealment of a deeper wish to return to Spike for the second of their three encounters in the episode, in preference to remaining with her ‘friends’. Both she and Spike are wearing black tops, and both blend in with the darkness of the surrounding mise-en-scène. This growing affinity for the concealing cloak of darkness which Buffy displays is seen earlier too in the way she enters rooms without turning on the lights, leaving others to do so on her behalf (for example, Dawn is the one to turn the lights on both upstairs and down when she first brings Buffy home), and in the way her shadow accompanies her downstairs in the first meeting with Spike.

Spike and Buffy sit facing each other as he does all the talking, essentially apologising for failing to prevent her death, though he did save her later: ‘Not when it counted, of course, but ... after that. Every night after that.’ The camera cuts from close-ups of her to medium close-ups of him, with a couple of long shots of them sharing the frame. His open acknowledgment of his failure to save her contrasts with Willow’s more covert desire for praise and thanks (though Tara does get Willow to admit her disappointment in Buffy, at least to her, by prompting Willow gently in an earlier scene, after Willow’s telephone call to Giles: ‘You thought she’d say thanks. Be more grateful.’). Further, the way Spike and Buffy face each other and look directly into each other’s faces is very different from the conversation between Willow and Tara which begins, at least briefly, with Tara looking off-screen right towards Willow, who is only seen on-screen in the mirror behind Tara, her face turned away in the depths of the frame, behind the reflection of the back of Tara’s head. So we have an over-determined image of non-communication, with Tara looking away from the mirror, and both women seen from behind in the mirror itself, until Willow turns around. Shortly after, in bed with Tara, Willow owns up to her vanity in wanting Buffy’s gratitude (as Tara had suggested): ‘Would I be a terrible person if I said ‘Yes’?’

Such veerings between honesty and miscommunication are obliquely represented early in the episode by a word game Anya tries to get the sleeping Xander to play with her when she cannot fall asleep (and before he is awakened by Willow's telephone call): 'OK, I'm gonna describe an adjective with accurate but misleading clues, and then you have to guess what it is.' Unfortunately, we never get to hear her do this, though the prospect is intriguing, both because her usual literal-mindedness makes it hard to imagine her being any good at wordplay, but equally because her quirky use of language is insensitive to shadings of tone and meaning so that, despite its literal accuracy, it often inadvertently leads its listeners down the garden path. Anya's tendency to miss the point in her single-minded quest for literal accuracy is shown at the start of the second day (after Buffy's solitary patrol and nighttime visit to Spike's crypt) when Willow discovers the demon is a side-effect of Buffy's resurrection, 'Like a price.' Anya quickly corrects her: 'Well, technically, that's not a price. That's a gift with purchase,' thus combining her literalness with her capitalist zeal.

In the end, it is Buffy who does what Anya suggests, after the demon is defeated and Dawn tells Buffy that the only thing the others want is to see her happy. Turning up at the Magic Box, Buffy chooses her words with care as she finally thanks Willow and the others for having brought her back. She begins by lying that she was in hell, as they have all assumed, but then continues more truthfully: 'I, um ... I can't think too much about what it was like. But it felt like the world abandoned me there. And then suddenly ... you guys did what you did.' (Here Tara insists it was all Willow's doing, and Buffy continues.) 'OK. So you did that. And the world came rushing back. Thank you. You guys gave me the world. I can't tell you what it means to me. And I should have said it before.' A cut to Willow in close-up makes her gratification evident, as she completely misses the 'accurate but misleading' phrasings that Buffy uses, especially the ambivalence that hangs so heavily in the air around Buffy's penultimate sentence: 'I can't tell you what it means to me.' Further, Buffy's comment on how 'the world came rushing back' is reminiscent of the way that Willow and the rest of the gang came rushing in so intrusively during Buffy's initial conversation with Spike. It may also recall the way the camera rushed in on Willow as she threw her head back, surrounded by light,

and cast the spell that turned the demon from an insubstantial figure to a solid one that Buffy could defeat, thus associating the camera rush with Willow's power. So this image of the world rushing back is likely to be a negative and disturbing one for the audience, but one whose implications are completely lost on Willow, prepared as she is to have her actions vindicated and affirmed, but not seen critically.

From this we cut to the third encounter between Buffy and Spike, and the final scene in the episode, a scene that lasts three minutes and 48 seconds and is made up of 28 shots, as Buffy emerges from the back door of the Magic Box to find Spike waiting for her in the shade, having heard her inside 'exchanging a special moment' with her friends and, once again, preferring to remain outside their circle. When he asks her sarcastically whether she is not 'leaving a hole in the middle of some soggy group hug,' she tells him she just wanted some time alone and walks over to sit down beside him. The scene is deceptively simple: all that happens is that Buffy tells Spike she thinks she was in heaven, not hell. Buffy's admission becomes a virtual monologue, with Spike saying nothing after Shot 12 in the sequence, when Buffy cuts off his offer of help and his attempt to empathise ('...I do know a thing or two about torment') by suddenly undermining his assumptions and confessing: 'I was happy.' Spike's function in the long series of intercut close-ups between them (Shots 8-11 and then Shots 13-27) is to be the one person she can confide in, and they take up well over half the scene. As Buffy says, 'I can be alone with you here,' making him not so much a nobody as an intimate part of herself, a quiet sounding-board for her own thoughts. The close-up reaction shots of him that bind him to her throughout her extended confession give the scene an intimacy more fully reciprocal than in the final scene in 'Intervention,' when Spike was the emotionally fragile one and Buffy remained emotionally detached. Here, Buffy is the fragile one, but Spike hangs on her every word.

At the start of the sequence, everything seems back to normal (that is, to the way things were before Buffy's death). Wearing neither her funeral dress nor the plain white or black blouses of earlier scenes, her hair no longer wild after the climb from her grave nor carelessly tied back as before, Buffy is dressed with much more care and attention to detail. Her outfit is beige and stylish, she wears a locket and bracelet, and her hair

is loose and clean. Spike too seems back to his usual attempts at sarcastic banter, after their earlier more authentic moments together. Nevertheless, Buffy's appearance, juxtaposed with the immediately preceding scenes where she sends Dawn off to school and then thanks her friends in the Magic Box, seems part of an attempt to put on a brave face for them all which is betrayed by details of her performance and facial expressions throughout those scenes. Similarly, Spike's sarcastic manner is quickly dropped when he notices her present unease, studying her closely in Shot 5 as she fiddles with her hair, folds her hands in her lap, and lowers her eyes, Spike responding by asking gently: 'Are you OK?' Buffy's choice of solitude and shadows is matched by Spike's willingness, as a vampire vulnerable to sunlight, to wait for Buffy outside during the day (though he reassures her, 'Sun's low enough. It's shady enough here'), as they take tentative steps towards each other's worlds, meeting up in a gray place in between them.

The imagery of the episode as a whole finds its culmination here. For example, Willow and the rest of the gang can be seen to be on the side of solidity and light, while Buffy herself feels insubstantial and prefers the dark. Thus, Willow performs a spell to make the demon solid in order for Buffy to be able to defeat it, and, although the demon is able to possess the actual bodies of Anya, Dawn and Xander in turn, it can only take on the *appearance* of Buffy while Buffy herself lies asleep in bed. When they fight each other, the demon confirms Buffy's experience of physical insubstantiality by telling her: 'You're the one who's barely here, set on this earth like a bubble.' Similarly, we have noted how Buffy prefers to stand in darkened rooms, while others (like Dawn and Tara) are seen turning on lights. Now, in the final scene with Spike, Buffy explains distastefully how 'hard, and bright, and violent' she finds the world. This violence is reflected in her description in the Magic Box scene of how 'the world came rushing back', as well as in her present words to Spike of being 'torn' out of heaven by her friends, descriptions which contrast with the quiet stillness Spike offers her here and elsewhere, as they talk.

Her choice of clothing in the episode's final scenes may now be taken not just as an indication that she is getting back to normal (or at least pretending to do so for the sake of her sister and friends), but as a reflection of her attraction to the

amorphous gray areas that Spike inhabits and their shared suspension between life and death, both in the flimsiness of the fabric and in its pale beige shades (as opposed to the heavily textured fluffy red top that Willow wears in the scene where Buffy thanks her, as well as in contrast to Buffy's own blouses earlier in the episode, one all white, the other completely black). Buffy's growing closeness to Spike and her estrangement from Willow provide moral markers of the very different trajectories Spike and Willow are now embarked upon: where Willow is starting down a path of arrogant abuse of her magical powers, Spike (who momentarily takes on Giles' role by pointing out that magic always has consequences) is on a path to redemption, ultimately regaining his soul at the end of Season Six and closing the Hellmouth in Season Seven. Even at this earlier stage, Spike seeks forgiveness for having failed to keep Buffy alive, while Willow seeks gratitude and praise for having saved her from hell, though she has actually done no such thing. Buffy's first close-up in the final scene (Shot 9) is generated by Spike's genuine concern (offering his help if she is in any pain), the word 'pain' providing a bridge across the cut to Buffy's close-up, where she briefly returns his look before lowering her eyes.

The structural oppositions of the season's storyline are thus laid out with extreme clarity, and it is equally obvious where we are encouraged to direct our sympathies. The grayer, less physically substantial terrain on which Buffy and Spike come together in trust and mutual understanding at the end of the episode is reflected in the more uncertain sense of space and time we are given as viewers, compared to the tight continuity we noted earlier in the opening scene. Buffy's confrontation with the demon takes place around daybreak after a sleepless night during which the gang research the demon, and Buffy visits Spike in his crypt. From Buffy's beheading of the demon in the early hours between night and day, we cut to a shot of Sunnydale in bright sunlight, followed by Dawn heading off to school, Buffy turning up at the Magic Box, and the final scene with Spike. However, whether this day is the same one as when the demon is killed (and thus a mere couple of hours later) or whether there has been an intervening day of rest and recovery, there is no way of knowing. The location behind the Magic Box is also disorientating: only Spike's comment about overhearing

Buffy 'exchanging a special moment with her friends' lets us know where we are, since the space just outside the back exit from the shop is not a familiar series location.

The final scene of 'After Life' is thus appropriate to Spike's and Buffy's developing relationship as equals occupying a shadowy middle-ground between their two contrasting worlds. Unlike 'Intervention', where Buffy arrives and leaves in the background and Spike is the focus of our emotional involvement in the scene, the final shot in 'After Life' (of Buffy in the foreground and Spike a smaller figure behind her as she leaves) reverses the scene's opening shot where a smaller Buffy in long shot comes out of the Magic Box to discover Spike entering the foreground in medium close-up. The long series of alternating close-ups between them which forms the bulk of the scene reinforces the balancing of our sympathies between the two. Such things as Buffy's diaphanous blouse, whose fabric moves delicately in the breeze as she and Spike share a patch of shade, the lack of firm anchoring of the scene in a familiar space and determinate time, and the overlap of the words of Buffy's extended confession across alternating close-ups of them both, produce a sense of boundaries being dissolved and of the hard, violent imagery of Willow's world giving way to something more tentative and with softer edges. Buffy's longing for such a space is apparent when she tells Spike that 'Time didn't mean anything. Nothing had form, after her death, and that she was '...happy. At peace.' Although Buffy keeps her eyes lowered or averted for virtually all of her monologue (despite Spike's intense looks at *her*), there is no longer any need for the moments of recognition which punctuated earlier scenes and episodes. By now, each of them knows and trusts the other. In 'After Life' they have moved on from this to recognise *themselves* in each other, as this boundary too, between self and other, begins to fall away. Of course, the series is by no means over at this point, with just over forty more episodes to go, and their relationship will continue to evolve in unexpected ways.

An account of any aspect of such a long and complex series as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can only be partial and provisional, given the way its characters both drive the narrative and continually change and develop in response to its events and to their interactions with other characters who are themselves following equally complicated paths. My choice of scenes has

depended heavily on a sense of the moral weight and integrity of the series and the way this plays out in a range of thoughtful explorations of the distinction between persons and things. Rejecting essentialism, the series gives many examples of characters who achieve a convincing humanity simply by behaving like humans, and thus acquire a certain right to be treated as human by others, despite their robotic or vampiric forms. April's final moments in 'I Was Made to Love You', and Spike's requisition of the robot in Buffy's image later in the same episode, were used to set the scene for various encounters between Buffy and Spike in 'Intervention' and 'After Life' either side of Buffy's own death at the end of Season Five. These Buffy/Spike encounters provide a delayed payoff for Season One's exposure of the inadequacies of mere information on its own – surely an over-rated commodity in the present age of information technology – by presenting us with moments of recognition between Buffy and Spike which have profound moral qualities and implications which far transcend the characters' generic roles as vampire and slayer and the acquisition of factual knowledge alone. The final scenes of these two episodes are meditative codas to all that has gone before.

## Re-reading *Buffy*: ‘Normal Again’

*Dawn*: ‘Everything about me is made up.’  
— 5.13: ‘Blood Ties’

In examining some of *Buffy*’s thematic preoccupations in the previous chapter, we looked at a diverse range of decisions, some deliberate and others no doubt more intuitive on the part of the creators of the series, their happy confluence generating a wealth of meanings around these issues. Details of script, performance, costume, set decoration, lighting, camerawork, editing strategies, visual imagery and motifs and thematic structures have all shown themselves to be rich and productive sources of such meanings, mutually reinforcing one another or pulling against each other in dynamic interaction. Further, the semantic plenitude of the *Buffy* text (the way that everything in it seems so full of meaning) becomes, itself, an object of self-examination for the series. In other words, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not only about the characters and events within its narrative world, but about its own origins as a collective product of the imagination, about its processes of making meaning, about its identity as a text. This will be the subject of the present chapter.

We have seen that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* plays with narrative by means of strategies such as allowing us glimpses of characters and events in the margins of the on-screen world or weaving in and out of more central storylines, or by orchestrating coordinated crossovers between contemporaneous episodes of *Buffy* and *Angel*. For example, one of the characters in Season Four of *Angel* rings up Willow for help, and Willow receives the telephone call on *Buffy* (7.17: ‘Lies My Parents Told Me’), afterwards telling Buffy she has to go away for a day or two and subsequently turning up in Los Angeles on *Angel* (A4.15: ‘Orpheus’), leaving Los Angeles at the end of the same episode and arriving back in Sunnydale on *Buffy* once again, with Faith in tow (7.18: ‘Dirty Girls’). Angel himself turns up in Sunnydale a few episodes later (7.21: ‘End of Days’ and 7.22:

‘Chosen’) with a mystical amulet for Buffy which he acquired in the final episode of Season Four of *Angel* (A4.22: ‘Home’). These crossovers go beyond mere guest appearances by characters from one series on another where all significant action is contained within the series they visit (for instance, when Woody from *Cheers* turned up on its spin-off series, *Frasier*). Rather, they imply that important narrative events of each series intersect with those of the other one, generating a larger space encompassing them both. Thus, although parts of the narrative of *Buffy* play out in the margins of the frame or are explicitly indicated as happening off-screen by on-screen references, other events related to those in *Buffy* take place wholly outside the visible portions of its narrative world and without being acknowledged in any detail by the series itself, though they are clearly visible as part of the on-screen world of *Angel*. To understand these events fully, both series need to be seen, so there is no longer just a *Buffy* text and an *Angel* text, but a *Buffy/Angel* text as well.

Another less frequently used strategy which binds the two series together is when the same events are presented in both, but with the experiences of different characters being emphasized in each. Thus, in a *Buffy* flashback to 1880, we see Spike before his transformation into a vampire, being rejected by the woman he loves, then sired by Drusilla a short while later (5.7: ‘Fool For Love’). In the corresponding flashback in *Angel*, we see Spike just after Cecily rejects him and before Drusilla sires him, but with both these framing scenes missing from the episode, as Spike bumps into Angelus when passing him, Darla and Drusilla in the street (A2.7: ‘Darla’). This street scene occurs in ‘Fool For Love’ as well, but without our seeing the faces of Angelus, Darla and Drusilla, since the episode concentrates on the experiences of Spike, who barely notices them, whereas in ‘Darla’, which concentrates on the shared perspectives of Angelus and Darla, we remain with them and Drusilla as Spike walks off. Each series fills in details missing from the other, and a more rounded understanding is only possible through watching them both. This strategy continues later in both ‘Fool For Love’ and ‘Darla’ with their respective flashbacks to the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900 as well: once again, the two episodes have a scene in common when Drusilla tells Darla and Angel (whose soul is now restored) that Spike has

'killed himself a Slayer', though the scene of the actual killing is only included in *Buffy*, not *Angel*. In both series we see all four of them – Angel, Darla, Spike and Dru – approach the camera side by side as a fire burns behind them, but 'Darla' gives us a slow-motion shot of Angel singled out in the frame, while 'Fool For Love' gives us one of Spike on his own instead.

Beyond *Buffy's* narrative playfulness and experimentation at the level of characters and events, we have also noted how the series is consistently concerned with presenting its narrative world as a densely packed and meaningful text whose rhetoric is no less important than the events it depicts, and not just as a complex but believable universe in its own terms. At times, even the characters themselves present their experiences as if fancifully picturing themselves to be embedded in carefully constructed scenarios that need critical interpretation, as when Giles tells Buffy, 'I believe the subtext here is rapidly becoming a ... a text' (2.11: 'Ted'), or when Buffy herself says, 'I'm still needing backstory here' (2.13: 'Surprise'), or Oz responds to Willow mistaking something he says to mean he finds her boring, by countering, 'I'd call that a radical interpretation of the text' (3.16: 'Doppelgangland'). Indeed, when Andrew makes a video in Season Seven (7.16: 'Storyteller') it becomes precisely this sort of construction, placing an extra layer of representation between us and the episode's narrative world as we see it through the eyes of Andrew's camera and with his voiceover commentary.

Such self-reflexive aspects achieve their most extreme formulation in Season Six (6.17: 'Normal Again'), when they threaten to undermine the narrative world built up so painstakingly throughout the entire series and to make it come tumbling down around us. Suddenly the possibility is raised that everything we have seen so far is a mere figment of Buffy's imagination, a literal and thorough-going construction from outside the imagined world, rather than the fanciful conceit of a character from *within* a world otherwise intended to be taken as 'real'. That is, the 'textness' of Sunnydale (its imaginary made-up aspect) may become so salient that Buffy herself is forced to take notice, its constructedness no longer merely an obvious fact for viewers of the series who necessarily balance their involvement with characters and events with the realisation that they are watching them on the television screen.

The plot of 'Normal Again' appears deceptively uncomplicated at first: Buffy is infected by a demon she kills, which causes her to hallucinate that she is in a mental hospital where her parents and a well-meaning psychiatrist try to convince her that her life as a slayer is the product of an over-active imagination, her friends, vocation and adventures all illusory. However, from the perspective of what we may call the 'Buffy universe', the assertion of its own illusoriness – what we have been calling its textness – is itself an illusion. Both worlds – the one where Buffy is a deluded young woman imagining herself into an extraordinary role, and the one where she really *is* the Slayer, hallucinating that she is *not* – are filmed with the same verisimilitude and visual clarity. The cuts back and forth between them slice what we see into narrative segments with equally compelling claims on our belief and demands for our allegiance. However, by the end of the episode, our belief seems to lead us one way and our allegiance the other. Thus, the final shot is in the mental hospital, not in the Buffy universe, as the psychiatrist regretfully tells Buffy's parents, 'I'm afraid we lost her.' In the end Buffy rejects the psychiatrist's advice to free herself from her delusions and regain her sanity by temporarily entering the world she has imagined and killing off her friends. The camera pulls back from a now catatonic Buffy who has refused to return to 'normal' at her friends' expense. Instead she commits herself to the Buffy universe forever. Surely we share this commitment, despite the devastating evidence of the final shot.



The episode's strategies are reminiscent of those used in *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946), whose alternative spaces represent heaven and earth. In this film, Peter Carter (David Niven), a British pilot during World War II, is forced to bail out of his burning plane without a parachute, after explaining his situation over the two-way radio to an American servicewoman, June (Kim Hunter), and promising to come and visit her as a ghost. The opening title of the film proclaims that 'This is a story of two Worlds ... the one we know and another which exists only in the mind of a young airman whose life & imagination have been violently shaped by war.' Heaven is at first presented in black and white, and one of its inhabitants – 'Conductor 71' (Marius Goring), who lost Peter in the fog when he jumped from his plane and has now been sent back to earth to retrieve him – comments, after his arrival in the 'real' world: 'One is starved for Technicolor up there.' The everyday world is thus shown as a cinematic space, as much a product of the imagination as is heaven, and the film moves back and forth between the two worlds as the authorities in heaven hold a trial to determine Peter's fate, though he has by now met up with June, after washing up on the beach (having apparently fallen safely into the sea). The trial in heaven takes place at the same time as surgery on Peter's brain to try to save him back on earth, the two worlds appearing to merge when Peter and June are themselves called as witnesses by the heavenly court who descend on a celestial staircase to the operating theatre to interview them (with all the characters filmed in colour at that point).

Despite some ambiguity in how we are to take the film's alternative worlds, since both are explicitly shown throughout and several characters travel between them with ease, the film is careful to let only Peter see Conductor 71 during his various visits to earth, when everyone else around him is frozen in time for their duration. Further, the trial scenes occur when Peter is either asleep or under anaesthesia. In this way, we are offered the strong implication that all the supernatural scenes are the product of Peter's unconscious mind. Accepting that this is the case in the Powell/Pressburger film, however, is far less disturbing than accepting the possibility that the Buffy universe is all in Buffy's mind. In *A Matter of Life and Death* our emotions are on the side of Peter's and June's burgeoning romance on earth.

We stand to lose very little if we accept that Peter has merely imagined the scenes in heaven and those with Conductor 71 on earth, since they have no great hold on us. In contrast, the possibility of losing the world Buffy may have imagined from her hospital bed in 'Normal Again' is much more traumatic.

If we assume that those of us who have made it as far as the final stretches of Season Six are likely to be devoted viewers of the series, we have an obvious stake in the 'worldness' of the Buffy universe even as we are made aware in 'Normal Again' of its textuality (not only as a television series, which we've known all along, but within the terms of its own narrative world, at least that version of it seen from the perspective of the mental hospital). Thus, our commitment to the illusion of Buffy-as-Slayer (and all that goes with it) rests upon an extremely knowing and self-conscious decision on the part of viewers at the end of the episode. Buffy's own decision (as mental patient) to return to her friends while knowing they are figments of her imagination is also presented as a deliberate choice, a celebration of generosity and creative abundance over ordinariness and disempowerment. By the time Andrew makes his video in 'Storyteller', Buffy's words to him ('Stop telling stories. Life isn't a story') confirm her commitment to the reality of the narrative world in which she chooses to remain at the end of 'Normal Again', even as its final shot implies the illusoriness of her choice. Thus, one consequence of Buffy choosing the imaginary world of Sunnydale over the real one of the mental hospital is that she has to suppress her knowledge of its imaginarity and to take it as real, while dismissing the hospital as a mere hallucination.

The effect of ending the episode in this way is to let its implications cast their net over the rest of the series. The possibility that a mentally ill Buffy is generating all the remaining episodes meshes with the series' preoccupations both with parallel universes and with the provisionality of the on-screen world – its concern, that is, both with relationships which stretch across narrative worlds and those that extend beyond the boundaries of the frame – and it is hard to completely suppress our knowledge that a catatonic Buffy may continue to exist unseen and unacknowledged in a discontinuous off-screen space outside the Buffy universe. One specific instance where a later event makes sense as the product of Buffy's continuing authorship



of the series relates to the psychiatrist's comment that Warren, Jonathan and Andrew – Season Six's so-called villains – are unworthy monsters, mere kids playing with toys. This unkind implication that Buffy's imaginative powers are running out of steam may well be what is behind Warren shooting Buffy and accidentally killing Tara in the process two episodes later (6.19: 'Seeing Red'), Buffy thereby vindicating her continuing creative vitality to the psychiatrist and proving him wrong. In an even more ingenious twist, the demon that infects Buffy in 'Normal Again' turns out to have been set on her by Warren, Jonathan and Andrew as part of their plan to undermine her. If Buffy has conjured up the trio in her head, as the psychiatrist insists, it is a fitting revenge on the psychiatrist that she has imagined the trio as the cause of her hallucinations. Buffy doesn't just show the psychiatrist to be wrong about the depth of the trio's villainy (and, thus, about the extent of her own creative powers), as has already been suggested. She reduces the psychiatrist himself to no more than an illusory product of their evil deeds.

Two details in 'Normal Again' are particularly relevant to re-reading the series in its terms. The first is when the psychiatrist tells Buffy to be wary of the things she wants in the Buffy universe that keep attracting her, because the previous summer, *when she had a momentary awakening*, 'it was them that pulled you back in'. The second detail for us to keep in mind occurs during the camera's final retreat from a close-up of Buffy, withdrawn and unresponsive, in the corner of her hospital room: as the camera pulls further and further back through the window in the door to Buffy's room, it keeps the empty bed with its leather wrist and ankle restraints in view, as Buffy herself is edged off-screen. We will return to this later. Turning our attention to Buffy's momentary awakening the previous summer, we see, from what the psychiatrist says, that this was a time when she was able to put her supposed delusions out of her mind, abandoning the Buffy universe for several months, perhaps even to the extent of being well enough to leave the hospital and enjoy some time at home with her parents. The corresponding period, from the perspective of the Buffy universe, is, of course, the time between her death at the end of Season Five (5.22: 'The Gift') and her resurrection near the start of Season Six (6.2: 'Bargaining', part 2), the time she will later describe to Spike as like being in heaven.

In light of the psychiatrist's remarks in 'Normal Again', Buffy's leap to her death can now be reinterpreted as a leap out of the fictional landscape of Sunnydale into her hospital bed, and thence into the embrace of her parents – her mother still alive and her parents' marriage still intact – for a short spell of ordinariness and sanity. It is a leap away from being the star of her heroic adventures to being their admitted author, an identity that must be disavowed once she commits herself to the reality of the Buffy universe at the end of the episode, and to her slayer role within it. Indeed, Buffy's death is presented visually not as a simple suicide but as a leap out of the Buffy universe into another dimension somewhere else – a chasm seeming to open up in mid-air and swallow her into itself long before she would have hit the ground – so that it is a real shock to find her dead body lying on the rubble at the end of the scene, so thoroughly does she seem to disappear into thin air as she falls.

Buffy's initial abandonment of her Sunnydale friends when she jumps from the tower, and her forced re-entry when her friends pull her back (events occurring either side of the interface of Seasons Five and Six) are reiterated, in 'Normal Again', by less dramatic back-and-forth crossings between its two incompatible worlds. These alternating sequences end in a moment of deliberate and decisive commitment based on Buffy's fleeting ability to hold both worlds in her mind at once and square up to the consequences of her choice, only to then forget where she has returned from for the rest of the series. Her stay in the hospital is dismissed from then on as no more than a passing hallucination of demonic origin, a one-off event rather than the underpinning (and at the same time the *unpinning*) of the entire series. If Buffy now suppresses her knowledge of her point of origin as she returns to the Buffy universe for good, then, conversely, in her earlier leap from the tower, she knows nothing of her *destination*, and her decision to jump is intended solely as a means to save the world she's leaving, not to deny its reality.

It is certainly notable that what endangers that world is that all the portals between it and other dimensions have begun to open, letting all manner of monsters spill into it from elsewhere. This interdimensional breakdown which Buffy sacrifices herself to undo – the threatened instability of parallel universes merging into one unholy mess – reflects the confusions between

worlds (the 'Buffy world' of vampires and slayers, and the more prosaic world of the hospital) and the unstable traffic between them that 'Normal Again' retrospectively projects back onto Season Five. 'Normal Again' allows us to read the climax of Season Five not just as a seepage between 'real' dimensions of equal status, but just as much as a seepage between all such dimensions (now explicitly coded as fictional), taken as a whole, and the contrasting world where Buffy is in the mental hospital. In other words, the various dimensions opening up at the end of Season Five all exist to the same degree, though normally compartmentalised and inaccessible to one another except by travelling through portals by extraordinary means. In contrast, the supposed reality of all these dimensions together may now be seen as completely subsumed within the world of the hospital, these dimensions proliferating as imaginary products within the primary reality that generates them.

The opening of portals between alternative dimensions *within* the Buffy universe may be seen as punching holes in the fictional world itself (or at least what counts as the fictional world from the perspective of the real world of the hospital), threatening to leave it in tatters. Indeed, even in its own terms, Season Five produces a strong impression of alternative fictional worlds in collision, from the appearance of Dracula – most famous of fictional vampires whose visit to Sunnydale is as unlikely as it is brief – in the first episode of the season (5.1: 'Buffy vs. Dracula') through to the arrival of the Knights of Byzantium, who equally seem to come from an altogether different fictional world to Buffy's, particularly in the scene where we see them in chain-mail and on horseback chasing the caravan in which Buffy and her gang are making their escape (5.20: 'Spiral').

An explicit fiction of another sort is introduced into the Buffy universe at the end of the Dracula episode in the form of Buffy's 'sister' Dawn. Suddenly she is there as if she were always present, Joyce telling Buffy to take her sister with her to the movies, and both girls protesting in unison: 'Mom!' Although we are given no explanation for her extraordinary introduction to the series, we find out later that she is 'the Key', a concentration of mystical energy able to open up the portals between dimensions and sought by the season's powerful villain, Glory, to allow her to return to her home dimension, though Glory

has no idea at first that the Key is disguised in human form. It turns out that some monks embodied the Key in the form of Buffy's sister to ensure it a powerful protector, implanting false memories of Dawn's past in an innocent Dawn herself and in everyone around her. This is the truth about Dawn in the terms provided by Season Five's story arc. Buffy kills herself in her sister's place so that the portals between dimensions, which Dawn's blood-letting has opened, can close again before Dawn dies, the substitution of Buffy for Dawn made possible by their having the same blood in their veins, as sisters. So, in the terms of Season Five, Dawn really is human at the same time as she really is a mystical key.

However, once again our reading of all this gets a further gloss with the help of Season Six. For if Dawn is the key to unlocking dimensional portals, she is also the key to Season Five in another sense: her fictionality – her constructedness in the guise of Buffy's sister – brings dangerously close to the surface the possibility for the characters that they and their world are fictions as well. It is almost as if she has been placed in the fictional world as a retrospective reminder – or a prospective forewarning – of the lessons held in suspension in the final devastating shot of 'Normal Again'. The psychiatrist in 'Normal Again' himself comments on the oddity of Dawn's introduction to the Buffy universe with an alternative explanation: 'Buffy inserted Dawn into her delusion, actually rewriting the entire history of it to accommodate a need for a familial bond.' From the perspective of the hospital world, the monks embodying the Key in human form as Buffy's sister Dawn are representatives within the Buffy universe of Buffy's catatonic self outside it, the means by which Buffy creates Dawn as a fictional sister in an imaginary world.

Nonetheless, despite the serious undertones of Dawn's brief introduction to the series at the end of 'Buffy vs. Dracula', her first extended appearance in the following episode (5.2: 'Real Me') is lighthearted and affectionate in tone. The use of her voiceover as the camera moves around her room and ends up on her writing in her diary gives us direct access to her private thoughts, endowing her with a substance and interiority that belie her origins: 'Nobody knows who I am. Not the real me.' Her words appear to reverse Buffy's own concerns, expressed in a pre-credits conversation with Giles ('I need to know more.

About where I come from'), in Dawn's confident assertion of knowing herself better than anyone else. Despite her complaint that 'It's like nobody cares enough to find out,' her comment that, if she had superpowers like her sister, she would 'wear a mask to protect my loved ones,' suggests she takes some pride in hiding herself from others. The irony, of course, is that her implicit claims to self-knowledge and self-possession – to a 'real me' within her grasp – are built on an illusion of selfhood. In a later episode, when she visits her mother in hospital, a madman will point at her and proclaim: 'There's no one in there' (5.9: 'Listening to Fear'). However, when we first get to know her in 'Real Me,' we do not yet realise the extent to which her real self is utterly absent as a product of any genuine memories or experiences of her own. Thus, although we certainly don't yet know who she is and are aware that some sort of explanation for her sudden arrival is required, we are still likely to assume that there is a self 'inside' her to be known. That is, we mistake what is a profound ontological deficiency in Dawn for an epistemological deficiency in ourselves.

Still, she has been fitted out with an illusory self that does service for the real thing, and it gives her a workable version of a teenage girl's sensibility. Both her innocence about sex (in missing the implications of Tara's and Willow's relationship, for example) and her schoolgirl crush on Xander are presented with considerable charm and sweetness. Thus, when Dawn tells us in voiceover that she feels Xander sees her 'as I am. As a woman,' we cut to Dawn smiling goofily in his direction, oblivious to the chocolate ice-cream all over her mouth. Additional humour derives from the use of Harmony and her disgruntled minions in the episode (a sort of incompetent equivalent to Glory and *her* minions), as we see the fruits of Harmony's search for self-esteem since her break-up from Spike in Season Four. Having now got herself a gang of sorts, she tells Spike unconvincingly: 'You just can't stand the fact that I'm my own person now [...] I've found the real me and I like her.' Although humorous music is used from time to time in order to underline the gentle satire at her expense, she is often touching in her inept attempts at self-assertion and, like Dawn, is a kind of innocent bolstering up her uncertain sense of who she is with brave words. Despite being a vampire, Harmony is not very good at being bad, and she is often caught out unawares,

like Dawn with the chocolate ice-cream on her face. Thus, the vacuousness at Harmony's centre, coupled with her lack of self-awareness, reinforce the season's more serious concerns with Dawn's illusory selfhood and resultant misplaced confidence in her knowledge of herself.



Such issues around Dawn and her place in the Buffy universe are reflected and given their own particular spin not only in Buffy's curiosity about her own origins ('where I come from'), but in Harmony's attempt to re-make herself in a braver image, and even in Giles trying on a couple of new versions of himself (as illustrated by the red car he has just acquired and is eager to show off to Willow and Tara, and by the interest he takes in the profit margins of the Magic Box, whose owner has been killed by Harmony's minions, and which Giles takes over by the end of the episode: 'It'll give me focus'). Tara, too, worried about being an outsider, gives hints of harbouring a darker version of herself from the world when Willow hugs her from behind, calling her 'one of the good guys,' and Tara's smile abruptly drops away. This will be explained and developed later in the season (5.6: 'Family'). Thus, in spite of the lighthearted tone of much of the episode, a darker thread winds its way through and implies that more serious issues are yet to come, most notably when Dawn is approached by a madman outside the Magic Box (while the others examine the dead body inside) and he warns her ominously: 'I know what you are. You don't belong here.'

The implications of Dawn's final voiceover go well beyond her intended meaning in ways she cannot begin to imagine,



as she manages a last dig at Buffy: ‘She still thinks I’m Little Miss Nobody, just her dumb little sister. Boy, is she in for a surprise!’ As we see her write these words in her diary and hear her speak them in voiceover, the camera pulls back from a medium close-up to a somewhat longer shot, peeling us away from too intimate an alignment with her perspective and implying a vantage-point outside the narrative world from which to observe it. Elsewhere, Dawn’s voiceover itself is occasionally allowed to persist across cuts between shots of her writing in the diary and shots of what she is describing, often with Dawn as a character immersed within the scenes she describes. So she too alternates between being an active participant embedded in the Buffy universe and a disembodied voice commenting upon it from the ambiguous space outside its boundaries where voiceovers seem to originate. In other words, although her commentary is anchored in the narrative world by the shots of her busily writing, the persistence of her voice across other shots as well

makes her seem to have one foot inside the narrative world before us and another outside it.

In a series so full of various texts to explain the workings of the world (from Giles’ ancient tomes and the websites accessed by Willow to Andrew’s home video in Season Seven), it is significant that Dawn uses diaries to create a coherent version of herself. However, some of the diaries which purport to chronicle her earlier life (before she came into existence as the embodied Key a mere six months previously) turn out not to be her own work after all: her life has thus been authored from elsewhere, though she does not know it yet. Significant, too, is the fact that she discovers her identity as the Key from Giles’ notes in the Magic Box, provoking Buffy’s anger at Spike when she discovers he accompanied her there: ‘How could you let her find out like that? From books and papers? You hate me that much?’ (5.13: ‘Blood Ties’). Along the same lines, near the beginning of this episode, when Dawn correctly senses that the

others are talking about her behind her back, she storms off in a huff before sneaking out of her room to go to the Magic Box, telling them, 'Fine. I'm just gonna go to bed. That way, I won't accidentally get exposed to ... like, words.' Finally, once she learns what she is, her response is to tear up her diaries and burn them in a bin, eliciting a poignant reaction from the others when they find out.

*Buffy:* She burned all of her diaries.

*Xander:* The Dawnmeister Chronicles?

*Willow:* She's been keeping those since ... I mean...

*Buffy:* Since she was seven. I remember too, Will.

The concentration on writing and words – the alternative versions of Dawn authored by Giles, by the monks who installed her in her present life (complete with diaries from the past), and by Dawn herself – feed into our revisionist account of her from the perspective of 'Normal Again' in Season Six, when Buffy herself will be retrospectively exposed (if we take the hospital scenes as the ultimate reality within the series overall) as the overarching author of Dawn and all the others.

Many of Dawn's responses, while they may be taken simply in the terms posed by Season Five, are equally resonant in light of Season Six, and Dawn thus becomes emblematic of *all* the characters who are taken to be products of Buffy's imagination. Her desperate plea – 'What *am* I? Am I real? Am I *anything*?' – applies to everyone in the Buffy universe. Similarly, when she talks with Joyce and Buffy, after the others have gone home, and says, 'I'm just a key, right? Everything about me is made up', Buffy's response makes *her* emblematic, in turn, of all of *us*, caught up in a fictional universe whose characters move us despite the fact that we know they are not real: 'Dawn, Mom and I know what we feel. I know I care about you, I know that I worry about you.' Dawn's story not only relates to the issues around personhood raised in the previous chapter, but to the series' self-reflexive concern with what makes it possible for acknowledged fictions to touch us so deeply.

Three-quarters of the way through 'Blood Ties', Dawn turns up in the mental ward at the hospital, having earlier remembered the way a couple of crazy people had seemed to know who she was. Her appearance in the ward disturbs the patients,

all bound to their beds by wrist constraints, and one of them – Orlando, a Knight of Byzantium driven mad by Glory – recognizes Dawn as the Key, calling forth from her a torrent of questions about her origins: 'Where did I come from? Who made me?' and so on. If we now consider the final shot in 'Normal Again', mentioned earlier, a startling link with the present scene leaps out at us. Then, as now, we are in a psychiatric ward, and then, as now, leather restraining cuffs are prominent features in the scene. If our re-reading of Season Five depends on the assumption that Buffy has authored it from her hospital bed outside the normal narrative world of the series, it is perfectly plausible that the madness and physical constraint she has occasion to experience in the hospital would be salient features of the world she conjures up.

The claim attributed to Giles in his notes – 'Only those outside reality can see the Key's true nature' – is an equally understandable scenario for her to invent, and the lunatics who recognize Dawn provide an equivalent within the Buffy universe for a catatonic Buffy outside it. They are the representatives of her disempowered self, just as the monks who created Dawn in the first place were seen earlier to provide an equivalent for her creative side in inventing Dawn. Further, if Buffy as the Slayer represents her fantasised compensation within the Buffy universe for the less heroic reality of her position outside it, then the text that Buffy authors allows her to express her disempowerment, her creativity and her fantasies of power all at once, through the madmen and the monks in Season Five and the Slayer herself throughout the series. As the psychiatrist explains to Buffy's parents, 'Buffy's delusion is multi-layered. She believes she's some type of hero [...] but that's only one level.'

More broadly, madness and physical constraint – especially in the form of bondage – are themes which cut a broad swathe through the series as a whole and implicate most of the major characters in one way or another and to various degrees of seriousness, though Season Five is probably where they get their most extended and explicit treatment. After all, the season is centred on a crazy villain, Glory, who gets her energy by draining the minds of ordinary people, who go mad as a result, a scenario which is causing a notable increase in the number of mentally unstable people in Sunnydale and filling its mental

wards to overflowing. Thus, there is a lot of literal madness in the season: Glory, of course, and those she drives mad (including Tara), Joyce, who begins to say crazy things due to a tumour pressing on her brain, and even Buffy, after Glory takes Dawn away and Buffy withdraws into a catatonic state until Willow enters her mind through a spell and brings her out again.

Beyond this rampant literal craziness, the season is characterized by metaphors of madness that colour virtually all of the relationships and characters' perceptions of themselves and each other. For example, Riley confides to Xander how lucky he feels with Buffy: 'Half of me is on fire, going crazy if I'm not touching her...' (5.3: 'The Replacement'), and Willow reassures Tara that families always make one crazy, with Buffy reiterating this later in the same episode when she talks to Riley about how Dawn drives her mad (5.6: 'Family'). Four episodes later, Xander warns Buffy she is 'actin' like a crazy person' after Riley tells her he is going away (5.10: 'Into the Woods'), while Warren tells Buffy that April was too perfect: 'I thought I was going crazy' (5.15: 'I Was Made to Love You'). In addition, when Spike hits Buffy to rouse her to action from her catatonic state, Xander asks him: 'Are you insane?' (5.21: 'The Weight of the World'). In the end, it is Glory herself who is given the most extended statement on the proliferating madness around them, both literal and more metaphoric. Having earlier told her minion Jinx that Ben, with whom she shares a body, is driving her insane (5.12: 'Checkpoint'), she later asks the captive Dawn how people cope with their feelings: 'Call me crazy, but as hard-core drugs go, human emotion is just useless!' Glory looks at the world 'and all I see is six billion lunatics looking for the fastest ride out. Who's not crazy? Look around' (5.21: 'The Weight of the World').

If the re-reading offered here of Buffy's death from the vantage-point of 'Normal Again' is plausible, then it is not surprising that at the end of Season Five Buffy prefers to leap out of such a world gone mad on all fronts in order to return to the comparatively restrained insanity of her hospital room, though her emotional needs draw her back to Sunnydale in Season Six. Willow's efforts to pull Buffy out of her short-lived catatonic state in 'The Weight of the World' provide a preview of Buffy's later returns to her friends in Season Six (both when they resurrect her at the start of the season and when she willingly opts

to commit herself to their world for good in 'Normal Again'). Their conversation inside Buffy's head, after Willow does a spell to enter her psyche in order to convince her to emerge and retrieve Dawn from Glory, is instructive:

*Buffy:* I killed Dawn.

*Willow:* Is that what you think?

*Buffy:* My thinking it made it happen.

Even though Willow tells her to get past her guilt and snap out of it, for an instant Buffy seems to be aware – at least in the depths of her unconscious – of the instrumental power of her thoughts. So even within the Buffy universe itself, Buffy has moments of 'madness' which allow her to half-acknowledge her position outside it.

Going even further, there is a suggestion, in 'Normal Again', that the mental hospital where Buffy finds herself is itself ambiguously located, and not so clearly placed outside the Buffy universe as we may have assumed. Buffy confides in Willow that she was in a mental institution for a couple of weeks after she saw her first vampires six years earlier, adding in despair, her eyes filling with tears: 'What if I'm still there?' So the world which we have taken her to have created as a fantasised escape from her incarceration in a mental hospital outside the Buffy universe turns out to have a mental hospital within it in which she has been a patient in the past, and it is a part of the fantasy - at least for a moment - that she is a slayer who may herself have generated Sunnydale and all her friends not from outside the world of slayers and vampires but from within it. This complex layering of fantasies within fantasies is difficult to grasp, for viewers and characters alike. Indeed, only Spike seems perfectly happy with the possibility that he is a product of Buffy's imagination, telling Xander that it explains a lot if they are all in Buffy's brain: 'Yeah. Fix up some chip in my head. Make me soft, fall in love with her, then turn me into her sodding sex slave...' As the last bit of this is news to Xander ('What?!'), Spike adds dismissively: 'Nothing. Alternative realities', leaving it at that.

The episode in Season Five with perhaps the most obvious possibilities for a re-reading in terms of 'Normal Again' (5.12: 'Checkpoint') has the Council of Watchers coming to town to



submit Buffy to a barrage of tests of her physical and mental fitness, providing an apt displaced representation of the tests she is undoubtedly subjected to in the hospital (indeed, we see the psychiatrist peering into her eyes with a small flashlight at one point, as if to underline the way she's an object of scrutiny there). Quentin Travers himself, the unsympathetic head of the Council, has a trim graying beard similar to the one sported by the psychiatrist, though the psychiatrist bears an even stronger physical resemblance to Principal Wood in Season Seven: both he and Wood are African-American, both bald, both wear an earring in the left ear, and, once again, both have small, neatly trimmed beards, though Wood's is black, not gray. By Season Seven, when most of the issues raised in 'Normal Again' have long since been resolved, it makes sense that the psychiatrist can be represented by a more likable authority figure (Principal Wood) than in Season Five (Quentin Travers), since in 'Checkpoint' Buffy is less than half a season shy of leaping back to the psychiatrist's world, rather than free of it forever, so he remains a potent off-screen threat, despite his good intentions.

Even Giles, the most fatherly and benevolent authority figure in the series, betrays Buffy briefly back in Season Three (3.12: 'Helpless'). On the instructions of Travers, he injects her with a drug to weaken her and test her resourcefulness, as part of a time-honoured 18th-birthday rite of passage for slayers (a rite which Giles describes as cruel even though he carries it out). Although he ultimately confesses all this to Buffy – and Travers fires him as Buffy's Watcher, as a result – she continues to feel the betrayal keenly (in an episode where her *actual* father lets her down as well). Accepting that Buffy is in



a psychiatric hospital thus allows us to re-read earlier episodes with a new understanding of their ramifications, though we may also choose to continue to read them in their own terms without such retrospective layerings.

Like madness, bondage is a recurrent theme across the series, taking both a menacing form and a more playful one. Almost all the major characters are shown in chains or manacles or with ropes around their wrists at one point or another: Angel, Spike, Drusilla, Willow, Xander, Giles, Dawn, Faith, Oz, Amy, and Buffy herself, as well as the various anonymous mental patients who are kept under restraint. In addition, most of the heterosexual relationships take a lively interest in such things. This latter aspect of the series is regularly seen as the



contribution of co-executive producer and writer Marti Noxon (for example in her own DVD commentary to 2.10: ‘What’s My Line?’, part 2 or in Joss Whedon’s DVD commentary on 2.14: ‘Innocence’), though her concern with the relationship between love and pain – and their thematic links with issues around trust and power – is so integral to the series as a whole that it is extremely unlikely that this is simply a maverick interest of her own with no substantial connection to the concerns of other series collaborators, in particular Joss Whedon himself.

In her commentary to ‘What’s My Line?’, part 2, Noxon points out: ‘This may be one of the first episodes that I wrote where we started to go to the scary place of S and M with these two. It became one of the things that at least Joss likes to say is my hallmark. It’s one of the things that I’m proud to say I have contributed to on the show greatly, which is a really perverse sense of sexuality.’ (She laughs.) ‘Can you blame us? Really. Look at that guy. Look at her.’ Although Spike and Drusilla are on-screen for much of this, Noxon seems to be referring to Dru and *Angel*, who is bound, gagged, and bare-chested nearby and whom Dru will go on to torture. In any case, all three are implicated by Noxon’s ‘hallmark contribution’, just as Noxon implicates her collaborators by her use of words like ‘us’ and ‘we’. In Whedon’s commentary to ‘Innocence’, he, in turn, refers to Noxon’s contribution: ‘the idea of love and torture and pain and power – and bondage – and all of these things working together in the minds of these people. Marti really brought a lot of cool, twisted sexuality to the characters *that fit really well*, Whedon once again stressing the consonance between Noxon’s intentions and the requirements of the series, as Whedon sees them.

The more playful instances of bondage generate humour as much as they raise serious issues like those just mentioned. For example, when Buffy’s mother and Giles regress to the condition of amorous teenagers after eating some candy whose manufacture is overseen by Ethan Rayne, a former friend of Giles from the darker days of his youth, and Buffy later asks them to find something with which to tie Ethan up, Joyce gives an apologetic smirk and pulls out a pair of handcuffs from inside her coat (3.6: ‘Band Candy’). Buffy convinces herself at the end of the episode that, ‘At least I got to the two of you before you actually did something.’ However, when she

temporarily gains the ability to hear other people’s thoughts, twelve episodes later, Buffy discovers that her mother and Giles did ‘do something’ after all. Buffy suddenly sits upright in bed, as Joyce unsuccessfully tries to keep her distance so Buffy will not read her thoughts, and asks her mother with escalating disbelief: ‘You had sex with Giles? *You had sex with Giles?! ...* On the hood of a police car? ... Twice?’ (3.18: ‘Earshot’).

In Season Four, when Buffy and Eddie, a fellow student at the University of Sunnydale, chat about how difficult their college courses have turned out to be, she again seems to find out more than she really wants to know, after confiding to him that she sometimes feels like carrying a security blanket around with her. Eddie concurs, citing his favourite book as his example of one: ‘*Of Human Bondage*. Have you ever read it?’ Taken aback, Buffy replies politely, ‘Oh, I’m not really into porn. I mean I’m



just ... I’m trying to cut right back’, until Eddie explains that it is not about actual bondage at all (4.1: ‘The Freshman’). In the following episode, Xander comments, ‘Why couldn’t Giles have shackles like any self-respecting bachelor?’ (4.2: ‘Living Conditions’), and he goes on to give a memorable speech about the uses of rope well into the final season (7.14: ‘First Date’).

By Season Six, when Buffy’s relationship with Spike has itself taken a rough and masochistic turn for her, we see them



naked together under a rug on the floor as Spike asks her if she even likes him (6.13: 'Dead Things'):

*Buffy*: Sometimes.

*Spike*: But you like what I do to you. [He pulls out a pair of handcuffs and lets them dangle in the air as if to illustrate his words, in a shot of the two of them together, following a run of close-ups of each of them alone in the frame in turn, which comprise the immediately preceding ten shots of the scene.] Do you trust me?

*Buffy* [looking at him steadily]: Never.



The scene occurs in one of the bleakest episodes in the series, where Warren murders his ex-girlfriend Katrina after putting her under a spell and trying to rape her, later convincing Buffy that *she* killed Katrina instead. Buffy takes out her growing despair on Spike, beating him up viciously as he refuses to fight back, his face swollen as he tells her, 'You always hurt ... the one you love, pet,' a line she more or less repeats after she finds out that Katrina was killed by Warren, not herself. Horrified at the nature of her relationship with Spike, Buffy confides in Tara, asking her, 'Why do I let Spike do those things to me?' and begging Tara not to forgive her.

So, in Buffy's own experience of bondage and sado-masochistic sex, any sense of fun has long since given way to much darker currents by the time of the episodes leading up to 'Normal Again'. As viewers, we may smile at the double entendres around Buffy's relationship with Spike, but she herself remains more troubled. For example, when Buffy apologises

for not having been around more, Willow tells her innocently, 'It's OK. We know you've been all tied up' (6.13: 'Dead Things'). Similarly, in a later episode, Willow points out a grass stain on Buffy's jacket when she joins Buffy and Dawn in the kitchen (6.15: 'As You Were'):

*Dawn*: Some vampire get rough with you?

*Buffy*: He's not getting any gentler.

*Willow*: He?

*Buffy*: They. Them.

Buffy herself is not able to take such things as lightly as we do, and her desire to free herself from what she experiences as an addictive and degrading relationship is surely at odds with the enormous sympathy for Spike that the series has engendered in its audience, and thus the likelihood that most viewers will want the relationship to work out. Our greater access to an ongoing strain of playful humour around bondage throughout the series contributes to the split between Buffy's viewpoint and our own.

What has been argued throughout this chapter is that the implications of 'Normal Again' extend both forward and back across the series as a whole, layering additional significance upon it which goes beyond the meanings of narrative events in terms of the Buffy universe alone. The worries and concerns experienced in the mental hospital by the version of Buffy located outside the world of Sunnydale may be seen to be reflected in events and characters inside it through scenarios which work and re-work a central core of preoccupations around such things as personhood, madness, power and trust. Further, the proliferating worlds and dimensions within the Buffy universe, as well as the breakdown of barriers between them, allows the series to reflect upon its own creative processes and the ways we come to care so deeply about a fictional world we know to be unreal. In the course of this, two episodes have emerged as crucial anchors for our reading: 'The Gift' in Season Five and 'Normal Again' in Season Six. Each one provides a resolution to the series up to that point, and each is equally devastating in its way, with one a mirror-image of the other: thus, the leap out of the Buffy world in the former is reversed by Buffy's definitive return to it by the end of the latter.

It is well known that the creators of the series were often in a kind of limbo over whether the series would be renewed from one season to the next, which is a problem for any long-running series whose ambitions are unconventional enough to be seen to threaten the creation of a commercially successful product. Another difficulty in mapping storylines coherently across future seasons is the question of how long key actors and other creative personnel would want to carry on. For example, when Kristine Sutherland, who plays Buffy's mother, told the show's producers that she would be out of the country for Season Four, Whedon replied, as Sutherland recounts it, that she would have to be back for Season Five, since he was planning to kill her then (DVD overview to Season Five). Finding ways to draw each season to a satisfying conclusion without foreclosing the possibility of a longer storyline and more permanent closure at a later stage must have posed a considerable challenge whenever such uncertainties arose. With 'The Gift,' for instance (the 100th episode in the series), Whedon comments in the DVD overview to Season Five: 'I think originally I had thought about the idea of ending the series then.' Buffy's leap out of the fictional world, separating herself from Dawn and the entire Buffy universe – from her imaginative creations, if we accept the psychiatrist's premise in 'Normal Again' – was thus paralleled by the very real possibility for Whedon himself of ending the series and abandoning the products of *his* imagination at the very same point. Instead, the series goes on to surpass and reinvent itself in Season Six.

Following Joyce's death from a ruptured aneurysm at the end of 'I Was Made to Love You,' one of the doctors tells Buffy in the following episode (5.16: 'The Body'): 'Joyce was aware of the possibility of a rupture, and the effects.' This is a particularly suggestive and intriguing remark in view of all the ways we have been examining in which the narrative fabric of Season Five either is or might have been ruptured: by clashing fictional worlds (Dracula, the Knights of Byzantium, Sunnydale), by the Key opening up portals between dimensions, by Joyce's death, by Buffy's leap from the tower, understandable both as a leap to her death and a leap out of the fictional world, and, finally, by the unrealised possibility of the series coming to an end at the conclusion of the season, as originally planned. In the same episode as the doctor's apt formulation of Joyce's awareness

of what might happen to her, which is so resonant across the season as a whole, is Dawn's question about her dead mother – 'Where'd she go?' – mentioned in the first chapter and which may also be given a broader application now. Dawn's question is evocative in terms of her incomprehension of any domain beyond the boundaries of the narrative world in which she finds herself, and her question has obvious relevance to Buffy's post-mortem destination as well.

The series continues to examine itself and its textual strategies in Season Six. For example, relevant issues are raised and discussed in one of Buffy's classes at the University of Sunnydale. The lecturer poses questions about the nature of reality and whether it may best be seen as an individual construction lacking an objective existence of its own, rather than as a given (6.5: 'Life Serial'), such speculations finding their logical culmination in the devastating implications of 'Normal Again.' However, the classroom scene is treated more humorously than the later scenes in the hospital, with Buffy unable to follow the discussion that Willow and the other students are entering into with such enthusiasm. It is instructive to quote the dialogue at some length to demonstrate how such apparently insignificant and casual background details prove to be thematically central.

*Lecturer:* Social construction of reality. Who can tell me what that is? Rachel.

*Rachel:* A concept involving a couple of opposing theories: one stressing the externality and independence of social reality from individuals.

*Lecturer:* And the flip side? Steve.

*Steve:* That each individual participates fully in the construction of his or her own life.

*Lecturer:* Good. And who can expand on that? Chuck.

*Chuck:* Well...

[As Chuck's voice gradually fades into the background, Buffy expresses her bewilderment to Willow, who reassures her while continuing to pay attention to the classroom discussion. The camera stays on the two of them for the rest of the scene in a pattern of shot/reverse-shots which keep them both in the frame as the class carries on around them.

Willow raises her hand to respond even as she continues to talk to Buffy.]

*Lecturer:* Willow.

*Willow:* Because social phenomena don't have unproblematic objective existences, they have to be interpreted and given meanings by those who encounter them.

*Lecturer:* Nicely put. So, Ruby, does that mean there are countless realities?

The humour stops well short of parody, the discussion simultaneously making perfect sense as an authentic representation of the sorts of issues that might well be covered in a university class and yet using an academic register which, from Buffy's point of view, is unfamiliar and experienced as excessively obscure. Nevertheless, the topic being debated has direct relevance to themes of central importance to the series. The editing brings the classroom scene to an end on a question which is left unanswered – 'does that mean there are countless realities?' – thus encouraging us to apply it to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and to think through its implications for ourselves. The intensely academic tenor of the debate is not held up to ridicule – there is no cheap anti-intellectualism at work here – while, at the same time, it is difficult not to sympathise with Buffy's frustrated incomprehension. Further, what is taken by the eager participating students to be a sort of abstract academic game is given a literalness by the series itself, with very real choices and consequences for Buffy, as we have seen.

Overall, and on many levels, Seasons Five and Six provide immensely rich material bound together in an intimate and complex unity of rhetoric, performance, and thematic concerns, and many of the most prominent issues raised throughout this extended stretch of narrative appear to resolve themselves by the end of Season Six. By Season Seven, not only has Buffy committed herself to the Buffy universe for good, but she has freed herself from the sexually addictive and self-loathing relationship with Spike, while Willow is rehabilitated from the abuse of black magic which took her to the dark side in Season Six. Spike himself has a soul in place of the government chip in his head, Faith is no longer a rogue slayer but a reformed and heroic one, and Andrew eventually liberates himself from Warren's bad influence to join up with Buffy and the others.

We are back to a much more conventional battle between all of these characters who have redeemed or reformed themselves, on one hand, and an externalised incorporeal manifestation of evil called the First, on the other.

The fact that the First can only appear in the guise of people who have died (including vampires like Drusilla who are still extant) gives the final season a nostalgic quality knowingly produced by the creators of the series and offered to their audience. Thus, many actors who played characters who died in previous seasons get to return to take a curtain call as the series draws to an end, and their reappearances are like a gift from the series to its fans which both acknowledges their loyalty and anticipates the renewed pleasure to be felt as each of these actors turns up. The return of Faith (who did not die earlier but has been absent from the series for a couple of seasons) is a particularly pleasurable bonus for regular viewers. The storylines of some of the characters who now reappear, whether as manifestations of the First or as themselves, have carried on in intervening episodes of *Angel*. Therefore our ability to fill in the gaps is partially dependent on our familiarity with the composite *Buffy/Angel* text mentioned at the start of this chapter, and not just with *Buffy* itself. This playfulness around the boundaries of the series further contributes to the lighter feel of Season Seven, in contrast with the two very dark seasons which precede it, where the erosion of boundaries has much more serious consequences.

In place of the earlier tension which pulled us towards an emotional commitment to the Buffy universe as a world while, at the same time, impelling us to unravel it intellectually as a text, Season Seven's conflicts are less disturbing, its issues more readily resolved. The earlier concerns persist to a limited extent, but without their previous intensity. Thus, when Andrew makes a video of Buffy and the other characters preparing to go into battle against the First (7.16: 'Storyteller'), there is certainly a lot of play around whether what we see is really happening in the narrative world of Sunnydale precisely in the way it appears, or whether it has been staged for or manipulated by Andrew's camera. For example, we see Spike warning Andrew to stop filming and leave him alone – an apparently genuine moment of disruption to his video-making project – only to then hear Andrew's voice off camera telling Spike that the light

was behind him and asking him to do it again. Spike drops the angry manner and agrees at once, looking to either side and adjusting his position: ‘Oh, right. Is this better then?’

More openly signalled, rather than being sprung on us as a surprise like the falseness of Spike’s enacted anger, are the mediations of Andrew’s ongoing commentary and editorial decisions as he films. These include the way he moves his camera away from Buffy during one of her rallying talks to the potential slayers, in order to avoid the boring bits, with Andrew explaining his decision straight to camera in close-up: ‘Honestly, gentle viewers, these motivating speeches of hers tend to get a little long.’ The introductory scene immediately before the credits is particularly full of such self-conscious rhetoric on Andrew’s part as we fade in on a shelf of leather-bound books, with Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 on the soundtrack. After a dissolve and pan right across various atmospheric artefacts (a skull, some bottles, an hourglass, but also what appears to be a comic book), there is another dissolve to a *Star Wars* poster on the wall, the camera moving down to a roaring fire in the fireplace and to Andrew in a leather chair, looking up from an open book. Wearing a dressing gown and scarf and holding a pipe, Andrew looks furtively up at the camera to check that it is on him, then lowers his eyes and looks up again, as if for the first time, chuckling slightly: ‘Oh, hello there, gentle viewers.’

The scene goes on to be a take-off of programmes like *Masterpiece Theatre*, where a narrator gives an intellectual gloss to the story that is to follow, here Andrew’s account of Buffy and her world (a version of the series encapsulated within the series itself). Although the set-up seems to be Andrew’s, so that we presume he is emulating *Masterpiece Theatre* rather than parodying it, there are details within it that seem to be a parody at Andrew’s expense on the part of the series overall. For example, his attempt to convey culture and sophistication is betrayed by details like the comic book, the *Star Wars* poster, and the coughing fit that follows his pipe-smoking efforts. The most damaging affront to the image he is trying to convey is when he is interrupted by a knock on the door. We cut from a close-up of Andrew surrounded by the rich maroon colours of the chairback and dressing gown to a very different close-up of him in a dark blue shirt against the pale background wall

of the bathroom in Buffy’s house, where he has sought refuge to record the opening of his film. A reverse-shot makes the video camera visible as Anya opens the bathroom door and enters, followed by a longer high-angle shot of Andrew which reveals him sitting on the lowered lid of the toilet: ‘For God’s sakes, Andrew, you’ve been in here for 30 minutes. What are you doing?’ The credits begin, and the tone is set, though it is clearly not a tone of Andrew’s choosing or even one of which he is aware.



It is actually rather difficult to describe exactly what it is that we are seeing when Andrew sits in the high-backed leather chair and addresses us. It is not the ‘real world’ of the Buffy universe or a ‘real’ film set within it that Andrew inhabits, since he is *actually* sitting in the bathroom as he films, with none of the higher production values of the first part of the scene. However, neither is it a direct representation of Andrew’s fantasy version of his film (as he imagines it in his mind), for why would he spoil the effect of his pipe-smoking with the burst of coughing? Or, at least, if it is his fantasy, it is ultimately a fantasy being undermined by details such as this, as well as by its obviously parodic tone. That is, Andrew’s fantasised rhetoric of cultured sophistication is itself subject to the parodying rhetoric of the series as a whole, which humorously un masks the naïveté of the claims to sophistication that he offers us with such apparent sincerity and self-belief.

This strategy of layering the series rhetoric on top of the rhetoric of Andrew’s fantasised version of his film extends across a number of scenes in the episode, such as the impossibly

glamorous slow-motion shots of Buffy, Spike and Anya in the kitchen (starting with Buffy pouring cereal into a bowl as she tosses her hair and winks provocatively at the camera). Once again, we are presented with Andrew's romantic fantasies and, at the same time, the series' amiable parody of their excess and naïve pretensions. In this case, it is immediately evident to viewers of the episode that this is not a straightforward image of the narrative world, or even such an image distorted by the slow-motion of the mediating camera, since Buffy is unlikely either to toss her hair or to wink in such a way in the midst of her preparations to do battle with the First.

Much more disorientating for the audience, because it initially seems less mediated, is the scene when Anya and Xander are having a serious discussion about their relationship in continuation of one we saw Andrew filming earlier. However, when we then see Andrew watching on his monitor, it seems as if he is still filming them as before. In a further twist, when Andrew goes on to mouth their words along with them, we have to reorientate ourselves a second time. All at once, it looks as if the whole thing has been scripted all along – as was the case with Spike – until the events that we have been watching as if they were unfolding there and then are seen to be rewinding on the monitor. It now finally becomes clear that the entire conversation was filmed earlier, and that Anya and Xander are no longer present in the room. Andrew is able to speak their words along with them not because he scripted them, but because he has watched the tape before. In this case, it is not Andrew who manipulates our responses, as we may have assumed, but rather the producers of *Buffy* who withhold the knowledge that we are watching an opaque image on Andrew's monitor, rather than looking *through* the monitor as if it were a transparent window onto the actual people being filmed in the spaces of the narrative world that they inhabit. Our access to that world is suddenly blocked as it collapses momentarily into no more than a flat image on a screen.

'Storyteller' is one of the most playfully inventive episodes in the series, though much graver events continue to take place within it, just as was noted in the discussion of 'Real Me' earlier in this chapter, where its predominant tone was also seen to be at odds with some of the themes and events in the episode. These events, in the case of 'Storyteller', centrally concern

Andrew himself, and they culminate in Buffy deliberately pushing him to admit his guilty complicity in Jonathan's murder, as Andrew's tears fall upon the mystical seal to the Hellmouth in the high school basement and thereby close it. Thus, serious plot developments unfold in and around the humorous film-making plot, with appropriate tonal shifts from one strand to the other, and the two aspects of Andrew which we see – as a figure of fun and as a figure of redemption – exist in reasonably close proximity. So, even in a relatively light episode like this one, the series is able to express both its darker concerns within the narrative world and its purposeful attention to the nature of narrative itself.

Nonetheless, where the 'worldness' and 'textness' of the series were intimately intertwined in Seasons Five and Six, so that our belief in the narrative world was in constant danger of unravelling, now, by Season Seven, the prospect of such a demolition from within has been definitively suppressed. Andrew's filmmaking falls far short of unmaking the Buffy universe in the act of filming it. The sight of Andrew in the bathroom addressing his video camera, while he imagines the scenario in much richer, more accomplished terms, has none of the devastating implications of the final shot of Buffy in her hospital room at the end of 'Normal Again', withdrawn and catatonic as she retreats inside her head. Andrew's fantasies provide an amusing commentary on the Buffy universe, with an affectionate parody of Andrew himself layered on top. Buffy's fantasies, in contrast, may be seen to constitute the Buffy universe itself and to hold the seeds of its undoing.

## Specialness and *Buffy* Fandom: A Personal Footnote

*Buffy*: In every generation, one slayer is born...because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule...I say *my* power should be *our* power...From now on, every girl in the world who might be a slayer, *will* be a slayer.

— 7.22: ‘Chosen’

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is often interested in characters who suffer from their ordinariness or need reassurance that they matter. For example, Marcie, a student at Sunnydale High, becomes invisible as a result of being persistently ignored by everyone else (1.11: ‘Out of Mind, Out of Sight’), and Jonathan, having failed at suicide in an earlier episode, conjures up an alternative universe where he is everyone’s hero (4.17: ‘Superstar’), while even Dawn and Xander experience a shared sense of being on the sidelines in Season Seven (7.12: ‘Potential’). As Xander tells her gently, ‘They’ll never know how tough it is, Dawnie. To be the one who *isn’t* chosen. To live so near to the spot-light and never step in it. But *I* know.’

In fact, there are a significant number of characters who, at some point or other, experience the insecurity of their not being special enough for the circles in which they move. Giles, for example, finds it hard to come to terms with the loss of his special status after the Watchers’ Council fire him in Season Three (3.12: ‘Helpless’). Riley Finn, the boy from Iowa who is the nearest Buffy gets to a ‘normal’ long-term boyfriend – and who is described by Doug Petrie in the commentary to an episode in Season Four (4.7: ‘The Initiative’) as ‘the Jimmy Stewart of the Buffy universe’ – feels hopelessly inadequate to Buffy’s needs. Spike drives the point home when he tells Riley he is not the long-haul guy (5.10: ‘Into the Woods’): ‘The girl needs some monster in her man, and that’s not in your nature.’ In Season Six, Willow confides to Buffy that she requires the magic she performs as a powerful witch so that she can be special: ‘Don’t



I? I mean, Buffy, *who was I?* Just ... some girl’ (6.10: ‘Wrecked’). Even Anya, a former vengeance demon, muses to Xander, ‘What if I’m really nobody?’ (7.5: ‘Selfless’), further reinforcing just how central these concerns turn out to be.

In contrast, Buffy seems to have her specialness confirmed from the start. During her first meeting with Giles (1.1: ‘Welcome to the Hellmouth’), when she wanders into the school library for some books, he recognizes her as the Slayer and dramatically slams a weighty ancient volume on the counter in front of her, grinning with obvious self-satisfaction at having anticipated her needs, though she hurriedly runs off, insisting it is not what she wants. Later in the same episode, after a student is killed by a vampire, Buffy returns to the library to ask Giles why she cannot just be left alone, and he replies, ‘Because you are the Slayer,’ invoking the fundamental principle of slayer lore, which will be repeated at intervals throughout the series, that ‘Into each generation a slayer is born. One girl, in all the world, a Chosen One...’, to Buffy’s evident annoyance. However, when she drowns and is almost immediately revived at the end of Season One (1.12: ‘Prophecy Girl’), the brief interval when she is dead is enough to call up the next slayer, Kendra, to take her place (2.9: ‘What’s My Line?’, part 1), though Kendra herself is later killed to more lasting effect than was Buffy (2.21: ‘Becoming’, part 1), which results in Faith turning up in town four episodes later as replacement slayer for Kendra (3.3: ‘Faith, Hope and Trick’). Buffy’s uniqueness is blurred by her position as one of a long line of slayers at least two of whom co-exist with her for extended periods. Similarly, her specialness as an

only child is unexpectedly cancelled by Dawn's sudden arrival in Season Five (5.1: 'Buffy vs. Dracula') as her teenaged sister.

However, unlike Marcie, Jonathan, Dawn, Xander, Giles and the others, Buffy frequently longs to be unremarkable, experiencing her specialness as more curse than blessing. When Kendra arrives in town, which causes Willow to assume Buffy is feeling undermined and leads her to reassure Buffy that she will always remain Giles' favourite, Buffy wonders wistfully whether Kendra might, in fact, take over altogether so that she herself could lead a normal life. A version of this hope is eventually fulfilled in the final episode of the series, when all the potential slayers in the world are empowered, making Buffy's continuing devotion to her avocation much less critical in future.

The implication that, beyond the final frames, Buffy will finally be free to live the life she seems to want is confirmed in an episode of *Angel* after *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has come to an end. Spike, who has crossed over to the spin-off series, asks where *Buffy* is, and *Angel* tells him that she is off travelling in Europe (A5.2: 'Just Rewards'). This snippet of information is an undeniable encouragement to fans of *Buffy* still recovering from the series having drawn to a close, and now permitted to imagine that the story continues to unfold beyond the edges of *Angel's* on-screen world. Indeed, the story develops further when Spike and *Angel* later attempt to look Buffy up in Rome, each vying for her affections yet neither of them managing to catch up with her face to face. Along with the two of them, we catch a tantalising glimpse of Buffy from behind and at a distance (though presumably with Sarah Michelle Gellar no longer in the role) as she dances with her new boyfriend in a Roman club (A5.20: 'The Girl in Question'). The irony of all this, given the ambiguities of 'Normal Again' discussed in the previous chapter, is that the ordinariness she fled from then has now been positively reclaimed, though this time without her being required to sacrifice her friends in the process. She finally seem to have it all: extraordinary powers *and* a normal life (or at least a *normalish* sort of life, since her boyfriend is an extraordinary and ambiguous being known as 'the Immortal', rather than an ordinary man her own age: however she *is* free of the burdens of being the one and only Slayer).

Thus, the longest story arc of the series, extending from the first episode of Season One all the way to the final episode in Season Seven, involves a movement from Buffy's uniqueness as the Slayer through to a democratising of her power and special status amongst all the girls and women in the world who have the potential to be slayers like her. The series ends with Faith addressing Buffy: 'Yeah, you're not the one-and-only chosen any more. Just gotta live like a person. How's that feel?' Dawn adds a question of her own: 'Yeah, Buffy. What *are* we gonna do now?' No answers are given, leaving us with a lack of any definitive resolution. However, in the very last shot of the series – a long take lasting a minute and thirteen seconds – we get an inkling of good things to come. The camera begins by including Dawn, Buffy, Giles, Willow, Xander, Faith, Andrew and some of the potential slayers in the frame. It then closes in on the first six of these figures in the foreground, their bodies blocking out the others as they hang back by the bus in which they have made their escape. Finally, the camera moves into a close-up of Buffy breaking into a smile, with only Faith visible behind her.

What is intriguing in Season Seven is not just the resultant extension of the film's feminist project from presenting Buffy as an exceptional blonde who fights back to showing a huge range of women as powerful forces for good. For, in addition, and giving an added credibility to the series' values as expressed within the fiction, a similar democratising process is at work in the relationship between the series' creators and their fans.

In a special featurette on the Season Seven DVD entitled '*Buffy*: it's always been about the fans', Janice Pope (identified as the co-host of an internet radio show) points out that '*Buffy* was one of the few shows that we felt never treated their audience like they were idiots.' Joss Whedon later goes on to say, 'We have a connection with the internet fan base [...] We sort of worship at the same altar. Me and my staff are the biggest *Buffy* nerds alive. It's kind of a home to us, too,' adding shortly afterwards, 'When we could, we would get together and watch it together as a bunch, as fans...' James Marsters (who plays Spike) comments appreciatively, 'In the beginning it was the small and loyal audience that kept it afloat and gave it time to get the critical attention that it needed to reach a wider audience. So we owe a lot to these people.' Alex Jurkat, a *Buffy* fan in

the same featurette, next confirms that ‘This fan base is so loyal and so intense that I can’t imagine that it’ll go anywhere soon.’ So, even after the end of the series, the community of fans looks set to carry on. Not only are the show’s creators aware of and, at the same time, grateful for this loyalty, but distinctions between themselves and the fans may even occasionally become a little smudged around the edges, as Whedon suggests. Another thing worth noting is that the fans of the series have always appreciated not just its stars, but the writers and other creative personnel. Jane Espenson (co-executive producer and writer) points out that ‘Every year our fans come out and they throw us this amazing party. And the writers and producers and cast mates all get to come out here, and even the writers are treated like the Beatles for a night.’

Despite the occasional star status given to the writers, however, the relationship of fans to actors is clearly special and needs to be looked at more closely. Once again, the fictional world of *Buffy* dramatizes some of these issues. Thus, as we have seen with Jonathan, the fantasised compensation for a character’s ordinariness within the narrative world may take the form of an exaggerated achievement of superstardom. Dracula too functions as a star of such dimensions (though he is the real thing, as opposed to Jonathan’s false appropriation of this status) in his one-episode appearance at the start of Season Five, and his fame is so great as to reduce even Buffy to the position of a starstruck admirer, thrilled to discover that he has heard of her. So, the relationship between being special and being ordinary takes one particular shape in the complementary opposition between being a star and a starstruck fan. This thematic preoccupation as it manifests itself amongst characters within the narrative world may prove relevant to understanding the equivalent relationship that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* maintains with its devoted fan base outside its world, including its numerous academic admirers.

Unlike movie stars who are household names even for many people who never go to their films or who may not particularly like or admire them, the lead actors of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (at least those who have not become well known through appearances in mainstream films and television shows as well) are famous in a much more limited context. Their fame is much more dependent on the fan base for the series, such fans being

familiar with the names and faces of a formidable number of actors (a sampling of whom are listed in appendix two at the end of this study). The series actors thus fall short of genuine film stardom, despite some degree of fulfilment of the criterion set forth by John Ellis in *Visible Fictions*, for whom a star is ‘a performer in a particular medium whose figure enters into subsidiary forms of circulation, and then feeds back into future performances’ (1992: 91). While the images of many of the *Buffy* actors certainly do circulate outside the shows themselves – on posters, T-shirts, mugs, jigsaw puzzles and other merchandise, in the pages of magazines and in the shape of poseable figures, to list only a few examples – such visibility tends to be limited to specialist shops, websites and publications, rather than more general venues and media outlets. Such circulation undoubtedly occurs, as we have seen, but it very much caters for a minority interest, rather than being aimed at the culture at large.

Put most simply, the majority of *Buffy* actors function as *niche stars* whose fame evaporates away from the very specific circle of *Buffy* fans, though within this context, such star status is democratically accorded to a very large number of actors in the series. While their personal appearances at *Buffy* conventions draw large numbers of interested and appreciative fans, many of the same actors could probably walk down the street unrecognised (again, unless they had a significant body of work in mainstream film or television to generate such recognition independently, or unless there happened to be *Buffy* fans nearby). The result is an openly acknowledged two-way appreciation between actors and fans which is much less apparent in the more lopsided relationship of fans with mainstream film stars. This less extreme sense of differentiation between stars and fans is evident at conventions centred on the series and aimed at giving fans the opportunity to meet and mingle with a selection of series actors.

At one such event (‘Homecoming’, which took place from 31 May to 3 June 2002, in Glasgow), actors and fans intermingled in just such an atmosphere of good-humoured mutual appreciation. At the opening cocktail party, for example, Harry Groener (who plays Sunnydale’s Mayor Richard Wilkins), George Hertzberg (Adam) and Robin Sachs (Ethan Rayne) were immediately recognised and applauded when they each



slipped into the room unannounced, despite their being what, in the cinema, would be known as character actors, rather than stars. They then circulated casually around the various clusters of fans for friendly chats, rather than being formally presented to everyone at once and from a distance. Such intermingling continued at various social events throughout the convention. Even in the more formal question-and-answer sessions, where the actors sat together at the front, the interchanges were enlivened by humour on both sides. Most questions from the audience were intelligent and well informed, and the actors were consistently addressed and referred to by their own names, rather than those of their characters, with questions being asked about their work outside of *Buffy* as well as within the series. It should be noted that this pulls somewhat against John Ellis's claim that, on television, 'the performer's image is equated with that of the fictional role' (1992: 106), even though that might have been expected in a long-running series like *Buffy*.

The actors themselves, who at various sessions included Charisma Carpenter (Cordelia), Tony Head (Giles) and Danny Strong (Jonathan), as well as Groener, Hertzberg and Sachs, responded to this with what certainly felt like genuine and well-intentioned camaraderie, apparently enjoying themselves rather than merely experiencing themselves as being on show. Danny Strong introduced his sister in the audience, at one point, and her lack of special status as an ordinary member of the audience sitting amongst the fans (and, by extension, the ordinariness of Strong's background) was further confirmation of the democratic mutuality of the occasion (or at least its democratic 'feel'). A shared sense of community seemed to replace any deeply felt schism between 'us' and 'them'. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the *Buffy* stars who attend such events unavoidably retain a specialness and individuality in that context that the mass of fans clearly lack: it is the whole *raison d'être* of the occasion, the reason fans pay to be able to attend while the actors are presumably paid to be there (it was certainly made explicit that they would be paid for signing photographs). The actors, in other words, are recognisable magnets for the fans' attention in ways that the fans can never be for them (short of fans becoming stalkers, for example, or achieving stardom in a niche of their own where the actors would be part of their body

of fans, the relative positions of stars and fans flipping over to their opposite poles, as when Buffy becomes starstruck in the presence of Dracula, despite her own status and fame).

Admiring those for whom one can never be more than a face in the crowd, however friendly and down-to-earth they may be, is an uncomfortable position in which to find oneself, since it is hard to imagine how an authentic relationship of equals might develop. However, it could help us understand whatever academic writing may emerge from such fandom as a sort of compensation for pronounced feelings of ordinariness which offer no basis to put oneself forward for a genuine interchange with any of the actors and other creators of the work in question. The relationship with them, which would normally remain too skewed, could to some extent be modified if academic fans were able to stand out from the crowd and be noticed in this way. Perhaps more academic writing than we care to imagine is motivated by their authors' desires to carve out niches of their own where they can be recognised and respected not only by their academic peers but by the admired objects of their investigation as well. This is a delicate area which may require a certain amount of self-disclosure in order to pursue it any further.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is remarkably acute about such issues, and it treats them with the same good-natured acknowledgment within the narrative world as in the broader context of the series' relationship with its fans outside it. Thus, when Spike is interviewed by a woman from the Watchers' Council as part of their investigation into Buffy's competence (5.12: 'Checkpoint'), the following exchange takes place:

*Watcher:* But we understand that you help the Slayer.

*Spike:* I pitch in when she pays me.

*Watcher:* She pays you? She gives you money?

*Spike:* Money, a little nip of blood outta some stray victim, whatever.

*Watcher:* Blood?

*Spike:* Well, if they're gonna die anyway. Come to think of it, though, that's a bit scandalous, innit? Personally, I'm shocked. The girl's slipping.

In this early part of the conversation, Spike appears to be on the defensive as the Watcher repeatedly challenges what he says.

Although Spike begins this exchange with caution, in the context of a sequence of scenes where Willow, Xander and the others are trying to help Buffy out by showing her in a positive light, his tactlessness, sense of mischief and self-justifying bravado increasingly kick in and threaten to sabotage any similar good intentions on his part. Being Spike, he just cannot seem to help himself, to the undoubted delight of most viewers. The Watcher, for her part, is conscientious in her cross-examination, her manner initially prim and self-confident, even aggressive, as she interrogates Spike, her clipboard at the ready. However, she becomes more and more flustered by Spike's flirty enjoyment of her discomfort as he becomes aware of her vulnerabilities and increasingly takes control. At the same time, Spike manages a bit of personal revenge on Buffy for (at this point) continuing to resist him, suggesting that she 'can't keep a man'. It is worth including some of the performance details to convey the way in which Spike now takes charge:

*Spike:* A few more disappointments, she'll be crying on my shoulder, mark my words. [He takes a drag on his cigarette.]

*Watcher:* Is that what you want? I'd think you'd want to kill her. You've killed slayers before. [She frowns, then raises her eyebrows quizzically.]

*Spike:* Heard of me, have you? [Spike slowly and deliberately approaches her, ignoring the men in suits just in front of her on either side who attempt to keep him at a distance with crossbow and wooden cross.]

*Watcher:* I ... wrote my thesis on you. [The Watcher smiles in embarrassment and lowers her eyes for an instant.]

*Spike:* Well, well. Ain't that neat? [Here Spike smiles slyly, eliciting a flustered smile from her in return.]

By the time she admits to having written her thesis on him, their mutual dependency is clear: she is in the invigorating presence of a bad-boy 'star', while he is basking in the admiration of a fan. Although each is responsive to the other's attentions, which provide a kind of two-way affirmation, neither is able to admit unequivocally to such heady pleasures, since to do so would be unseemly for her as a professional Watcher and far too needy



for him, given the insolent coolness that is so integral a part of his adopted image as Spike.

The result is her embarrassed confusion and his teasing irony in response. The smirking tones of his 'Well, well. Ain't that neat?' reveal his delight in having found her out even more than any tickling of his vanity. The way Spike reacts to the fact that the Watcher has heard of him contrasts vividly with the complete absence of mischief in Buffy's 'Nah. Really?' when Dracula tells her of her fame, just as Dracula's cool collectedness has none of the flustered star-struckness of Spike's Watcher fan, perhaps because he is a famous 'star' for Buffy even more than she is for him. Thus, the series is consistently character-driven, rather than driven by situations alone, and each new evocation of a familiar theme is given a fresh and memorable treatment. The brief interrogation scene in 'Checkpoint', with its rapid slide from professional detachment and efficiency to guilty pleasures is an indication of just how aware the series is of its symbiotic relationship not only with its fans in general, but its academic fan base in particular. The Watcher's admission that she did her thesis on Spike is a fact she bashfully offers for Spike's gratification and in the hope of a reciprocating nod in her direction. I suppose that I too, as a film studies academic (and thus a 'professional watcher' of sorts), must admit to a similar unseemly fantasy of my own: that if Joss Whedon, say, were to come upon this study, he might not find it excessively wide of the mark.

## Appendix one: the episodes

### Season One

1. Welcome to the Hellmouth
2. The Harvest
3. The Witch
4. Teacher's Pet
5. Never Kill a Boy on the First Date
6. The Pack
7. Angel
8. I Robot, You Jane
9. The Puppet Show
10. Nightmares
11. Out of Mind, Out of Sight
12. Prophecy Girl

### Season Two

1. When She Was Bad
2. Some Assembly Required
3. School Hard
4. Inca Mummy Girl
5. Reptile Boy
6. Halloween
7. Lie to Me
8. The Dark Age
9. What's My Line? (part 1)
10. What's My Line? (part 2)
11. Ted
12. Bad Eggs
13. Surprise
14. Innocence
15. Phases
16. Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered
17. Passion
18. Killed By Death
19. I Only have Eyes For You
20. Go Fish
21. Becoming (part 1)
22. Becoming (part 2)

### Season Three

1. Anne
2. Dead Man's Party
3. Faith, Hope and Trick
4. Beauty and the Beasts
5. Homecoming
6. Band Candy
7. Revelations
8. Lover's Walk
9. The Wish
10. Amends
11. Gingerbread
12. Helpless
13. The Zeppo
14. Bad Girls
15. Consequences
16. Doppelgangland
17. Enemies
18. Earshot
19. Choices
20. The Prom
21. Graduation Day (part 1)
22. Graduation Day (part 2)

### Season Four

1. The Freshman
2. Living Conditions
3. The Harsh Light of Day
4. Fear Itself
5. Beer Bad
6. Wild at Heart
7. The Initiative
8. Pangs
9. Something Blue
10. Hush
11. Doomed
12. A New Man
13. The I in Team
14. Goodbye Iowa
15. This Year's Girl
16. Who Are You?

17. Superstar
18. Where the Wild Things Are
19. New Moon Rising
20. The Yoko Factor
21. Primeval
22. Restless

#### Season Five

1. Buffy vs. Dracula
2. Real Me
3. The Replacement
4. Out of My Mind
5. No Place Like Home
6. Family
7. Fool For Love
8. Shadow
9. Listening to Fear
10. Into the Woods
11. Triangle
12. Checkpoint
13. Blood Ties
14. Crush
15. I Was Made to Love You
16. The Body
17. Forever
18. Intervention
19. Tough Love
20. Spiral
21. The Weight of the World
22. The Gift

#### Season Six

1. Bargaining (part 1)
2. Bargaining (part 2)
3. After Life
4. Flooded
5. Life Serial
6. All the Way
7. Once More With Feeling
8. Tabula Rasa
9. Smashed

10. Wrecked
11. Gone
12. Doublemeat Palace
13. Dead Things
14. Older and Far Away
15. As You Were
16. Hell's Bells
17. Normal Again
18. Entropy
19. Seeing Red
20. Villains
21. Two to Go
22. Grave

#### Season Seven

1. Lessons
2. Beneath You
3. Same Time, Same Place
4. Help
5. Selfless
6. Him
7. Conversations with Dead People
8. Sleeper
9. Never Leave Me
10. Bring on the Night
11. Showtime
12. Potential
13. Killer in Me
14. First Date
15. Get It Done
16. Storyteller
17. Lies My Parents Told Me
18. Dirty Girls
19. Empty Places
20. Touched
21. End of Days
22. Chosen

## Appendix two: the characters

These are the major characters who are referred to in this study, along with the actors who play them. They are listed in the order in which the characters are first mentioned.

Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar)  
Darla (Julie Benz)  
Angel/Angelus (David Boreanaz)  
Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head)  
Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendon)  
Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan)  
Joyce Summers (Kristine Sutherland)  
Jenny Calendar (Robia LaMorte)  
Dawn Summers (Michelle Trachtenberg)  
Amy (Elizabeth Anne Allen)  
Spike (James Marsters)  
Anya (Emma Caulfield)  
Tara (Amber Benson)  
Adam (George Hertzberg)  
Professor Maggie Walsh (Lindsay Crouse)  
Riley Finn (Marc Blucas)  
Cordelia Chase (Charisma Carpenter)  
Oz (Seth Green)  
Drusilla (Juliet Landau)  
Jonathan (Danny Strong)  
Faith (Eliza Dushku)  
Andrew (Tom Lenk)  
April (Shonda Farr)  
Harmony (Mercedes McNab)  
Warren (Adam Busch)  
Glory (Clare Kramer)  
Ben (Charlie Weber)  
Quentin Travers (Harris Yulin)  
Principal Robin Wood (DB Woodside)  
Ethan Rayne (Robin Sachs)  
Kendra (Bianca Lawson)  
Mayor Richard Wilkins III (Harry Groener)

Other more minor characters referred to in the book: Owen, Marcie, Cecily, Katrina, the First Slayer, a psychiatrist, Dracula, and assorted villains, minions, Knights of Byzantium, Watchers, and students at the University of Sunnydale.