

Zoe-Jane Playdon

“The Outsiders’ Society”: Religious Imagery in

Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Eve am I, great Adam’s wife,

Theoretically there would be no such thing as
woman. She would not exist.

I killed Jesus long ago . . .

Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*

Irish lament

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Paperbacks, 2001: 120-47).



For Molly and Emily

Invitation

(1) “As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.” The famous declaration is Virginia Woolf’s, championing in *Three Guineas*, women’s rights both to education and entry into the professions, in a seminal feminist manifesto, important aspects of which, I shall suggest, are reflected in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

(2) In this essay, I should like both to celebrate and to critique the *Buffy* series, by placing it in the larger contexts of Western feminist spirituality and political thought. Especially, I intend to argue that Buffy represents a particular combination of knowledge and power which places her outside the mainstream of super-heroes and leads to particular ideas of learning, of spirituality, and of citizenship. These ideas place Buffy and the Scoobies outside the dominant discourses of Western patriarchy and closer to Virginia Woolf’s idea of a group of women, which:

would have no honorary treasurer, for it would need no funds. It would have no office, no committee, no secretary; it would call no meetings; it would hold no conferences. If name it must have, it could be called the Outsiders’ Society. (*Three Guineas* 232)

(3) Over the years, the feminist project has been concerned to slay its own vampires, in the form of ideas that, hundreds of years old, have prowled and fed on society’s marginalized communities, especially women. My invitation, therefore, is to come on patrol with a select group of Slayers, to join Buffy, the Scoobies, and feminist thinkers, and to help in doing the dusting. [\[2\]](#)

Cemeteries and Sunlight

Cemeteries

(4) Let me map out the territory you will be working in. On the one hand is a monumental cemetery full of dead white males, the grand narrative of Western thought from Freud back to Plato, which, as Irigaray points out, consistently



excludes women, by denying them subjectivity, that is, an existence of their own, in language, thought and imagination. They provide the patriarchy, state-sanctioned patterns of thought and action, which consistently abject, or cast out from social identity, marginalized groups and individuals, who do not meet their economic or political definitions. Such works are not only the product of men, of course, so that, for example, the tradition may be typified by works such as Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* [4] and Germaine Greer's *The Whole Woman*. [5] Both of those female writers provide deterministic, dystopian accounts of woman as having an homogenous identity which is inescapably constructed by white, capitalist, male heterosexism. [6]

(5) Judged by standards such as Raymond's and Greer's, Buffy is another degrading sexploitation of the patriarchy, a woman who is objectified as a function –"the Slayer"—and controlled to serve ends which are not her own. She is a constructed woman, a kind of "cyborg," "a creature of social reality as well as science fiction": constructed within the terms of the series, as the means for a male elite, the Council, to get their dangerous work done; constructed by the entertainment industry as soft SM porn, disguised as adventure story to legitimize scenes of violence against women; and constructed within media capitalism to provide image-branding and related merchandising opportunities, whether as tie-in "Buff-Stuff" or generic halter-neck tops for eleven year old girls.

Sunlight

(6) Exposing these ideas to sunlight, though, is the job of a more recent literature. Feminist writing reclaims the agency of marginalized individuals, it valorizes subjectivity, and it resists the fixity of state-sanctioned patterns of thought and behavior. So, Virginia Woolf's declaration in 1938 provides a reference point for Rosa Braidotti's idea of a feminist "nomadic consciousness," sixty years later. For Braidotti, nomadism is "the subversion of set conventions . . . not the literal act of traveling." One expression of nomadism, therefore, is Luce Irigaray's devastating critique of Western thought, from Freud back to Plato, which argues that it is consistently structured to exclude women, by denying them subjectivity, that is, an existence of their own, in language, thought and imagination. Similarly, Monique Wittig points to the abjection, the casting-out from social identity, of lesbians: "Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically."

(7) Trans theory—the use of the lived experience of intersexed and transgendered people to critique contemporary notions of gender and sexuality—provides a further means of exploring liminality, that is, the "in-between" areas that constitute the physical and intellectual boundaries of society. Works such as Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors* demonstrate how women's oppression and trans oppression intersect, while *Boys Like Her* by Taste This, compounds the literal process of border-crossing with that of transgressive gender performativity. These ideas, and feminist thought in general, are accessible to everyone, not just women: male writers such as Deleuze and Foucault contribute to feminist thought, which is concerned with the circumstances of all people, just as Giles and Xander are part of the Scoobies, who protect all Sunnydale.

(8) The stakes are, these ideas against the body of knowledge that represents the patriarchy. This essay invites you to become involved in an argument that *Buffy* offers not degrading readings of woman in society, but emancipatory ones, and that the series is suggestive of a series of feminisms: feminist theory, feminist mythology, and lesbian feminist politics. The aim is not to track down every allusion in the series, but to provide a framework against which you can test your own views and understandings of *Buffy*. Finally, apart from an occasional excursion to Los Angeles, the territory ends at the boundaries of Sunnydale since, to work within the restrictions of length, the focus of this essay will be on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, with only tangential reference being made to *Angel*.

In Giles's Library: Philosophy

Education and training

(9) My starting point is, that Slayers are both born and made. As Giles tries to tell Buffy in the first episode of the series, "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001):

Giles Into each generation, a Slayer is born. One girl, in all the world, a Chosen One. One born with the . . .

Buffy . . . the strength and skill to hunt the vampires, to stop the spread of evil, blah, blah. I've heard it, okay?

Not only is Buffy born as the Chosen One, however, but also part of Giles's role as her Watcher is to teach her how to slay vampires, as a scene in "Angel" (1007) makes clear:



Buffy (looking at some crossbow bolts): Huh, check out these babies; goodbye, stakes, hello, flying fatality. What can I shoot?

Giles Nothing. The crossbow comes later. You must become proficient with the basic tools of combat. And let's begin with the quarterstaff. Which, incidentally, requires countless hours of rigorous training. I speak from experience.

Buffy Giles, twentieth century. I'm not gonna be fighting Friar Tuck.

Giles You never know with whom—or what—you may be fighting. And these traditions have been handed down through the ages. Now, show me good, steady progress with the quarterstaff and in due time we'll discuss the crossbow.

(*Buffy demolishes him with the quarterstaff*)

Giles (on the floor, breathing hard): Good. Let's move on to the crossbow.

(10) The undercutting of Giles's role in controlling Buffy's learning, provides part of the humor of the series and indicates that the means by which Buffy learns to *become* a Slayer, as well as being *born* the Slayer, is a particular one, negotiated between them. The introduction of another Slayer, Kendra, in "What's My Line?" Part 2 (2010) makes this point. Kendra has been trained in what is to be understood as the traditional way:

Kendra My parents—they sent me to my Watcher when I was very young.

Buffy How young?

Kendra I don't remember them actually . . . I've seen pictures. But that's how seriously the calling is taken by my people. My mother and father gave me to my Watcher because they believed they were doing the right thing for me—and for the world.

By contrast, Buffy's single-parent mother is unaware that she is the Slayer, while Giles has made specific decisions not to intervene in Buffy's learning in the usual way. So, in "What's My Line? Part 2," he has not objected to her having friends who know that she is the Slayer:

Giles Kendra. There are a few people—civilians if you like—who know Buffy's identity. Willow is one of them. And they also spend time together. Socially.

Kendra And you allow this, sir?

Giles Well . . .

Kendra But the Slayer must work in secret. For security . . .

Giles Of course. With Buffy, however, it's . . . some flexibility is required.

and he has not even bothered to introduce her to the Slayer handbook:

Kendra I study because it is required. The Slayer handbook insists on it.

Willow There's a Slayer handbook?

Buffy Handbook? What handbook? How come I don't have a handbook?

Giles After meeting you, Buffy, I was quite sure the handbook would be of no use in your case.



(11) The need for Giles to support Buffy's learning in a particular way is a continual theme, so that when, in the fifth series, Giles decides to leave for England, since he believes he is no longer needed by Buffy, she makes it clear that she still needs his support ("Buffy vs. Dracula" (5001)):

Buffy You haven't been my Watcher for a while. I haven't been training and I haven't really needed to come to you for help.

Giles I agree.

Buffy And then this whole thing with Dracula. It made me face up to some stuff. Ever since we did that spell where we called on the first Slayer, I've been going out a lot. Every night.

Giles Patrolling.

Buffy Hunting. That's what Dracula called it, and he was right. He understood my power better than I do. He saw darkness in it. I need to know more, about where I come from, about the other Slayers. Maybe, maybe if I learn to control this thing, I could be stronger and I could be better. But I'm scared. I know it's going to be hard and I can't do it without you. I need your help. I need you to be my Watcher again.

(12) This negotiated learning relationship between Buffy and Giles may be typified as education rather than training. As Peters points out, training is concerned with "some specifiable type of performance that has to be mastered," in which "practice is required for the mastery of it," and "little emphasis is placed on the underlying *rationale*." Its focus is on transmission of skills, from an authority to a passive recipient, where the authority knows why the work has to be performed and the recipient simply does it. Education, though, takes place through "conversation" rather than "courses," in which "lecturing to others is bad form; so is using the remarks of others as springboards for self-display. The point is to create a common world to which all bring their distinctive contributions." The goal of education is "transformation," since "education implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows," rather than "transmission" of a set of behaviors. It is clear from what has been said so far, that the relationship between Buffy and Giles is one of education: she doesn't need training in the quarterstaff, but she does need his distinctive contribution of esoteric knowledge and she needs the relationality of friendships to achieve personal growth and transformation.

For Buffy, her role as Slayer is fundamental to her being, as Kendra recognizes ("What's My Line?" Part 2):

Kendra: You talk about slaying like it's a job. It's not. It's who you are.

Buffy: Did you get that from your handbook?

Kendra: From you.

Knowing and Being

(13) The philosophical concept lying behind the distinctions between education and training, is a division between "knowing" and "being," epistemology and ontology, which has been fundamental to Western civilization since Plato. Feminist thinking has taken these two philosophical categories into new areas. Now, a distinction may be made between "praxis," feminist epistemology which focuses on socially situated knowledge, to develop theory from the lived experience of marginalized groups, and "the Academy," knowledge hallowed by the patriarchy, which foregrounds objectivity and the unquestionable truths of scientism. Similarly, ontology, or being, is typified by patriarchal thought as comprising hierarchical organizational systems and entities—the Ideological State Apparatus of Louis Althusser—in a Copernican, regulated universe. Feminist terms, though, foreground the importance of relationality and community in matters of being, with organizational form typified by Virginia Woolf's *Outsiders' Society*.

(14) To contextualise this, most super-heroes are *either born or made*. Into the first category falls figures such as Superman, whose powers result from the accident that has placed him on earth, and those, such as Spiderman and the Flash, whose powers come about as a result of a physical accident. Their superiority is ontological, it arises from their simple physical being. Into the second category fall figures such as Batman, who teaches himself physical skills and scientific knowledge, and Xena Warrior Princess, who has learned special skills in combat, healing, and esoteric knowledge. Their superiority is epistemological, their strength comes through knowledge. Where it might appear that ontology is supported by epistemology in the creation of masculinist super-heroes, it is clear that the



knowledge that is being invoked is of a particular kind, one that claims its being outside and beyond the subjectivity of feminist epistemologies. So, the knowledge which sets up the 'scientific experiment gone wrong,' by which Flash, the Atom, and Elastic Lad are created, is some mysterious, unrepeatable, unknowable science, as dark, fathomless and forbidding as patriarchy's Academy. Further, where the learning is human-scale and benign, as in the origin of Aquaman, it is firmly transmitted through the male line, as part of the fraternal social contract through which the patriarchy replicates its power. Similarly, in the cases of Batman and Xena, the ontological events which accompany their epistemological origins, the murder of Batman's parents and Xena's overpowering by Hercules, fall outside the realms of feminist ontologies and into that of male violence.

(15) For Slayers, though, there is no division between being and knowing: they are born Slayers and simultaneously they learn to slay, they have inherent physical gifts of strength, stamina and recovery from injury, and they have to learn to fight effectively so as not to be killed. Their actions reflect both their being in the world and their approach to learning about the world: Kendra is trained: Kendra is killed. Buffy is educated: Buffy survives. By reconciling epistemology and ontology, knowing and being, Buffy falls outside the mainstream of super-heroes, therefore, a position which is underlined in the series by a constant stream of references to popular culture, with the implication that those icons are less real than the [fictional] characters who are referring to them: Power Girl ("Killed by Death," 2018); Clark Kent ("Never Kill a Boy on a First Date," 2005); Human Torch ("The Witch," 2003); Xena Warrior Princess ("Halloween," 2006); Pink Ranger ("What's My Line?" Part 2); and, of course, "the Scoobies" ("What's My Line?" Part 1, 2009).

Plato's world

(16) The distinction between knowing and being, reconciled by Buffy, is fundamental to reading the series' religious symbolism and political significance. It finds its origins in Greek thought. In Plato's world view, that which is best in human life is just a shadow of "Ideal Forms" which exist out of this world, and are only accessible to those with spiritual intuition. Thus, the numinous is transcendent, or, in other words, that which is awe-inspiring, that which appeals to the sense of mystery in human beings, is located in some sort of heaven, beyond the reach of ordinary people. So, with one stroke, knowing is separated from being. Now, it is possible for people to live, to be, but not to know that which they hold most important, since it has been made transcendent and placed beyond their grasp.

(17) The consequence of this separation between being and knowing is that it is not sufficient for people simply to be, in order to know. Knowledge has been annexed and access to it is now restricted to certain kinds of people, who use it as a means of gaining power. Plato makes it clear, in *The Republic*, that these were his purposes, since its rulers will be given different knowledge to everyone else. "Those who are now called kings and potentates must learn to seek wisdom like true and genuine philosophers, and so political power and intellectual wisdom will be joined in one [. . .] it is the proper nature of these to keep hold of true wisdom and to lead in the city," he says, whereas the others must "leave philosophy alone and follow their leader." Philosopher-Kings will be given "the most complete education or honor or rule" (*The Republic* 302). They will force everyone else to take a subordinate role, by limiting their knowledge, so that they learn only their specified trade, by telling "one genuine lie":

"so you are all brothers in the city," we shall tell them in our fable, "but while God molded you, he mingled gold in the generation of some, and those are the ones fit to rule, who are therefore the most precious; he mingled silver in the assistants; and iron and brass in farmers and the other craftsmen." (*The Republic* 214)

Knowledge and Power

(18) For Plato, knowledge is power, "most mighty of all powers" (*The Republic* 278) and he reserves power by restricting knowledge. Herein lies the political distinction between "training" and "education": training is an act of subjugation, education an act of empowerment. When Buffy refuses to acknowledge the power of the Council—"the council is not welcome here. I have no time for orders" (*Graduation, Part 2*) she is challenging a political philosophy which is more than two thousand years old, and championing a feminism which has existed for less than a century. It is the same challenge provided by Virginia Woolf's requirement for education *and* entry into the professions—equal knowledge *and* equal being.

(19) This challenge is particularly important because the idea of democracy, in Western civilization, consistently refers itself to the processes enacted in ancient Greek society, particularly that of Athens, and the principles propounded by philosophers of that period, especially those of Plato. The challenge to it which Buffy provides is significant, therefore, both because she combines knowing and being and because she is a woman. In Athenian society, the model for modern Western democracy, women had no status as citizens: the "brothers in the city," whether Philosopher-Kings or farmers or shoemakers, were all brothers: spiritual power and political authority were purely patriarchal, with women, at best, having a handmaiden role in religion as a servant of a god—such as the Pythoness who spoke for Apollo at Delphi—in a pantheon which was understood as a patriarchal structure with Zeus as



its head. Other superheroes consult and take guidance from the male head of society who knows best how to use their special powers of being—Superman talks to the President and Batman to Commissioner Gordon, for instance. Buffy herself knows best how to use her being, and also knows what assistance she needs to learn more, to live and be more effectively. This is demonstrated conclusively in the *Checkpoint* episode, where Buffy tells the Council that their claims to have power over her are false, and where she reverses the balance of power by giving them orders, which they must take, including the re-employment of Giles. Unlike other pop-culture heroes, therefore, the character of Buffy the Vampire Slayer is highly suggestive of alternative spiritual values and political relationships. It is to these two areas that I now wish to turn.

On Patrol, First Shift: Religious Symbolism

Beastly women

(20) In the Occidental mythic tradition, as Campbell points out, the division between knowing and being is represented by the Judaeo-Christian Creation myth, of a paradise, the Garden of Eden, containing two trees. One tree is the tree of life (and thus has ontological status) and the other tree bears the fruit of knowledge of good and evil (and thus has epistemological status). The Fall, and the expulsion from paradise, arose from eating one fruit and not the other, an action which was used by the orthodox Christian church to create the doctrine of Original Sin, and to erect a power system to provide salvation, through the divine agency of Christ. Such salvation was available to all those with souls, which, to the medieval Church, did not necessarily include women: Eve had been created out of Adam's spare rib, in the creation story they preferred, and while she shared his body, did not necessarily share his soul. Rather, like the vampires slayed by Buffy, women had more in common with animals: *habet mulier animum?*—has woman a soul?—was the perplexing debate of the European Middle Ages.

The numinous female

(21) The *Buffy* series, however, reaches through this traditional Christian interpretation, to alternative viewpoints. Buffy herself dies and is resurrected, and thus becomes a kind of woman-Christ, an idea of the divine feminine which follows the mystical Christian tradition exemplified by Juliana of Norwich, who follows St Anselm and St Bernard in referring to "our heavenly Mother Jesus." So, she exemplifies the redemptive potential which is an important theme of the series, and which, arguably, operates for all of its central characters, on different levels. It is a particular idea of redemption, however, and one which, as Buffy's status as "woman-Christ" hints, belongs to earlier theologies than that of contemporary state-endorsed Christianities. As Elaine Pagels points out, the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ is a political one, which "legitimizes the authority of certain men who claim to exercise exclusive leadership over the churches as the successors of the apostle Peter." A letter written by Clement, Bishop of Rome, circa 90-100, makes this clear:

God, he says, delegates his "authority of reign" to "rulers and leaders on earth." Who are these designated rulers? Clement answers that they are bishops, priests, and deacons. Whoever refuses to "bow the neck" and obey the church leaders is guilty of insubordination against the divine master himself . . . whoever disobeys the divinely ordained authorities "receives the death penalty!" (Pagels 60)

(22) Plato's Philosopher-King, with special spiritual intuition, is translated into a Bishop of Rome, divinely ordained by God and legitimized by the apostolic succession instituted by a resurrected Christ. This position reflects a struggle for power in the early Christian church, led by Irenaeus on behalf of the "orthodox"—literally, 'straight thinking'—Christians, which was won by that group when they gained the military support from the converted Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. It eradicated a different theological and intellectual tradition, that of the Gnostics, who believed that divinity was not transcendent but was immanent, that God was not in heaven but was present in everyone on earth. So, as Pagels explains, in the Gnostic tradition, 'self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical'; "when the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master: the two have become equal—even identical"; and, rather than remaining distinct from the rest of humanity whom he came to save, both Jesus and his followers "have received their being from the same source" (Pagels 19). Gnosis, literally "knowledge," is a particular kind of knowledge: not the 'straight thinking' of mathematics or logic, but self-knowledge and intuitive understanding of others, a discipline of reflection and compassion.

(23) It is this sensibility which informs the spiritual dimension of *Buffy* and of *Angel*. Redemption—not a salvation from a transcendent god, but a here-and-now personal wholeness - is always possible and available, here on earth. This is exemplified by Buffy herself, who, as the Slayer, must face and deal with vampires and demons—powerful symbols for the darkness encountered on any private inward journey. It is true, too, for those that she saves physically, for they are her friends and neighbors, rather than people from whom she is emotionally distant. These people, though, are not reliant on Buffy for anything other than their physical safety: their spiritual journey is their own work, and a personal redemptive experience equal to that of Buffy's is accessible to them, as the principal characters



demonstrate, through their own particular sensibilities. So, Angel explicitly, continually seeks atonement and redemption; Giles leaves the orthodoxy of the Council; Oz seeks control of his were-wolf side through yogic meditation; Willow develops spiritually through Wicca; Buffy's mother learns financial and emotional independence; Cordelia develops responsible autonomy; Xander finds self-respect through craftsmanship; Tara realizes her complete humanity; Spike's evil becomes ambiguous and then turns to compassion for Buffy ("Fool For Love," 5007); and Faith embarks on a journey of self-discovery and ethical reconstruction. To underline the point that Buffy's death and resurrection are not reserved for her alone, Angel, too, dies and is resurrected, becoming a further "Christ-analogue," an identity emphasized by the scene in "City of Angels," evocative of Christ's temptation, when, in the high place represented by the top floor of corporate offices, he refuses worldly authority with his question to Russell Winters, "can you fly?"

(24) The Gnostic writings that remain, known as the Nag Hammadi Library, point to earlier traditions, in which Eve gave life to Adam, at the bidding of a female godhead. The tractate *On the Origin of the World* tells that:

After the day of rest, Sophia sent Zoë, her daughter, being called Eve, as an instructor in order that she might make Adam, who had no soul, arise . . . she said, "Adam, become alive! Arise up upon the earth!" Immediately her word became accomplished fact.

Female subjectivity is writ large here, in a Christian account of the creation myth which transsexualizes the orthodox tradition, and challenges patriarchal political authority, just as other secret texts—the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, the *Gospel of Mary*—replace the apostle Peter's delegated authority with a primary relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene. So, the *Buffy* series provides an interplay between the redemptive and the creationary aspects of the sacred female. The re-creation of Angel, naked like Adam, is brought about by Buffy-Zoë's silent invocation of him, symbolized by the placing of her Claddagh ring at the place where she killed him ("Faith, Hope and Trick," 3003). Angel-Adam, returned from hell, is also Angel-Christ, on an equal footing to Buffy-Christ, whose death and return to life is emphasized in the same episode by her mother being told of it. As in the Gnostic sensibility, therefore, the relationship between Buffy and Angel is not only primary, but also equal, so that Angel's redemption is of his own willing as well as of Buffy's action—as Giles points out, "there are two kinds of monster. The first can be redeemed, or more importantly, wants to be redeemed" ("Beauty and the Beasts," 3004).

The Moon

(25) Baring and Cashford point out that the Gnostic tradition draws on earlier theologies which valorize the numinous female, the earliest written account of which, in Western civilization, is the collection of myths, verse and hymns from Sumeria in 2,000 BC, concerning Inanna. The relationship between Faith, Buffy and Angel seems to find resonances with the longest of those hymns, *The Descent of Inanna*. In the Sumerian account, the goddess Inanna turns her attention to her "dark side," to her sister-goddess, Ereshkigal:

From the Great Above she opened her ear to the Great Below.

From the Great Above the goddess opened her ear to the Great Below.

From the Great Above Inanna opened her ear to the Great Below.

My Lady abandoned heaven and earth to descend to the underworld.

Her entry into the underworld is a process of progressive stripping of authority and power, and Ereshkigal fiercely kills Inanna, and hangs her corpse on a hook, to rot:

Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death.

She spoke against her the word of wrath.

She uttered against her the cry of guilt.

She struck her.

Inanna was turned into a corpse,



A piece of rotting meat,

And was hung from a hook on the wall. ("The Descent of Inanna" 60)

(26) At the pleading of her faithful woman-servant, Ninshubur, the gods allow Inanna to be rescued by tiny, cross-gendered creatures, the *kurgarra* and *galator*, who bring Inanna back to the world above. But Ereshkigal must have a sacrifice of some sort, and Inanna is pursued by the *galla*, demons of the underworld. In her place, therefore, Inanna first gives Ereshkigal her husband, Dumuzi, and then, on the lamentations of his sister, Geshtinanna, agrees that for half the year, Dumuzi will dwell in the underworld, and that for the other half of the year, Geshtinanna will take his place.

(27) The secular explanation for the myth is that it reflects the universal concern with the cycle of the moon—which goes into darkness each month for three days, as Inanna lies dead in the underworld—and the cycle of the seasons, with the earth lying fallow during Autumn and Winter. Its analogues with orthodox Christian belief are obvious—the three days spent in hell by Christ, the theme of resurrection—and indeed, the same preoccupations with new life, death and resurrection form a central motif in Western theologies from Inanna onwards, with some of the same language: Inanna, like the Virgin Mary, was Queen of Heaven and Star of the Morning, and Dumuzi, like Christ, was the shepherd. The *Buffy* series, too, echoes the same themes. Buffy must visit her "dark sister," not once but time and again. Ereshkigal is represented most obviously by Faith, the Slayer-gone-bad, who figuratively kills Buffy by taking her body from her ("This Year's Girl," 4015), but that darkness is also represented by the First Slayer ("Restless," 4022) who haunts Buffy's dreams; by her negative reaction to Willow coming out as a lesbian, so that her "sister" becomes sexually threatening ("New Moon Rising," 4019); and by Glory, whose giant snake Sobek stands in place of the *galla*, pursuing Buffy's sister, Dawn ("Shadow," 5008); and most explicitly by the "death-wish" which, Spike tells Buffy, led to the death of previous Slayers ("Fool For Love," 5007). A similar journey towards understanding the hidden aspects of the self, as part of a necessary movement towards spiritual growth and wholeness, affects other key characters in the series: Willow first becomes aware of her lesbian identity when her "dark-side" enters the world as Vampire Willow ("Doppelgangland," 3016), while in his past, Giles was known as "Ripper" and was a member of the dark cult of Eyghon ("The Dark Age," 2008). Angel perpetually holds in balance his dual identity as vampire and human, literally lives in hell for an unspecified period of time, and on his return, finds it necessary to leave Sunnydale for Los Angeles, where he is joined by Buffy's sister-slayer, Faith, for whom he provides a release from her darkness, as Dumuzi does for Geshtinanna.

(28) To move to a more generally familiar mythology, Buffy is like that Greek aspect of the moon-goddess which was personified as Artemis. Like Artemis, Buffy is a hunter, with the "scoobies"—named for the cartoon Great Dane—acting as the dogs which traditionally accompany Artemis. Like Artemis, too, she is (for much of the series) chaste—her primary relationship, with Angel, precludes sexual intercourse. As Artemis's slaying of animals represents the natural apotheosis of life, so Buffy's slaying of vampires restores them to the natural order of life and death. Artemis has other aspects, as goddess of childbirth and as Hecate, death-hag of the crossroads, because she is a moon-goddess, representing, like Inanna, the transformation of the moon from new, to full, to waning, darkness and re-birth. It is this transformative potential, this cycling through dark and light—enacted literally by Buffy's daytime school and college, and her night-time slaying—that is the theologically and philosophically important aspect of Buffy. Spiritually, it is what keeps her alive, where other Slayers die, since she is "tied in" to the world of loving relationality, as Spike tells her: "The only reason you've lasted as long as you have is you've got ties to the world... your mum, your brat kid sister, the Scoobies. They all tie you here but you're just putting off the inevitable" ("Fool for Love"). Philosophically, it keeps her alive since it represents education, rather than training, the potential for transformation by shared inquiry and personal reflection, rather than instruction in skills to be performed under direction. Kendra has neither relationality nor education: she was taken from her parents and trained according to the handbook. Where Buffy has subjectivity and is encouraged to develop autonomy by Giles, Kendra is only an object, a token in the "exchange of women" which forms the patriarchy of the Council and her Watcher, and her willing acceptance of this abjection means that, in every political sense, she is dead already.

Archetypes

(29) It is not that there are exact correspondences between the spiritual universe of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and either Gnostic Christianity or goddess theologies. Rather, it is that the sensibilities of *Buffy* resonate far more convincingly with those earlier spiritual traditions than they do with orthodox Christianity. Indeed, it might be argued that the artifacts of orthodox Christianity—the Cross, Holy Water—belong more forcefully to the world of the vampires and demons, since they have an obvious effect on them, which is not extended to the Scoobies: Buffy and her team use these icons but they do not worship them, or attend a place where they are worshipped, any more than they worship the other esoteric artifacts which appear in the series, such as the Glove of Myhnegon, or the Orb of Thesulah. Rather, recognition of the virtuous nature of Christian artifacts and use of them means that they take on an archetypal nature, and are given universal significance. The orthodox Christian cross and crucifix become translucent to the



universal Tree of Life, the erica-tree of Osiris, the pine-tree of Attis, Odin's world-ash, the Shaman's journey, the Maypole of country ritual. Similarly, Holy Water becomes translucent to the tears of Christ, the Flood from which the world was reborn, the blood of the Grail, the Water of Life which has represented the generative power of the natural world from the European Upper Palaeolithic period onwards.

(30) Equally, the spiritual vision of *Buffy* is an immanent one, one which exists on earth, not a transcendent one in an unattainable heaven. The demons and monsters exist in the present, on earth, and although other dimensions are acknowledged, their existence is parallel with, not separate from, the lived, daily one of Sunnydale. Sunnydale is, literally, the site of the hell-mouth, the point at which earth and other dimensions meet, and the regular fighting of monsters takes place on its streets. Spiritual pain and spiritual loss are perpetually present, just as spiritual grace is perpetually accessible, in the here and now. Transformation is achieved at an individual level, by the use of personal agency, and by the extension of that agency to others, through compassion.

(31) A universal dimension of this is the resonance which the series sets up with earlier theologies than that of orthodox Christianity. Gnosticism was only one of the religious beliefs that the orthodox Church outlawed: its monotheism and its vigorous creation of a politically dominant, patriarchal structure, meant that all other beliefs were equally outlawed and ruthlessly suppressed. So, for example, another set of beliefs, at one time a dominant theology of the Western world, were the Eleusinian Mysteries, sacred to Demeter and Persephone, enacting, like the *Descent of Inanna*, the lawfulness of the natural world and its cycles, and supporting adherents in the human necessity of making friends with death. The little we know about them comes, in the main, from the attacks made on them by early Christian writers, before their final destruction. Similarly, Mithraism, which challenged Christianity as the mass-religion of the Roman empire, and which celebrated the birth of the divine male, (with Mithras standing in place, in Persian culture, of Sumerian Dumuzi, Egyptian Osiris, Greek Attis, and other transliterations of the new life brought forth by the earth) was suppressed and destroyed, with insuppressible remnants being absorbed into Christian myth. So, Mithras's title, *Sol Invictus* - "Unvanquished Sun," light eternal - was adopted for Christ, and the celebration of his birth, at the winter solstice, was fixed as 25 December, just as, replacing another tradition, the summer solstice became St John's Day. These mysteries were, therefore, part of the enduring consciousness of western civilization, reappearing in many different forms, but always with the same principle of the numinous female at their centre, as Apuleius points out in the wonderful Eleusinian invocation he gives in *The Golden Ass*:

I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, Queen of the Dead, first also among the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world below. Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole earth venerates me. The primeval Phrygians call me the Goddess of Pessinus, Mother of the Gods: the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call the Minerva of Cecrops' citadel; for the islanders of Cyprus I am Paphian Venus; for the archers of Crete I am Diana Dictynna; for the trilingual Sicilians, Stygian Prosperine; and for the Eleusinians, their ancient Goddess Ceres. Some know me as Juno, some as Bellona, others as Hecate, others again as the Goddess of Rhamnus, but [. . .] the Egyptians, who excel in ancient learning and worship me with their appropriate ceremonies, call me by my true name, Queen Isis.

(32) The point is, that *Buffy* represents a feminist spirituality which locates the sacred in the personal, and which accepts personal responsibility, within a subjective, relational framework, for individual actions—for the sense of "goodness" she has. By contrast, at the point at which Angel leaves *Buffy*, and moves to Los Angeles, he leaves his point of access to the immanent. His reason for leaving signals this: he does it because he is persuaded that it is for *Buffy*'s own good, that is, he removes from her the reasonable right to speak to for herself, to identify her own desires, and instead invokes some transcendent ideal of right behavior—a paternalistic, "daddy knows best" ideal of women as obedient to men—by which to guide his actions. *Angel*, sadly beyond the scope of this essay, demonstrates the limitations of the orthodox Christian ideas by which he then measures his conduct. He actively seeks atonement of what he now understands to have been his sins, hovering on despair, and constantly thwarted in his attempts to "earn" some mechanistic redemption, by one good act or another. Instead of the dark, inward journey *Buffy* takes, to meet her inner guide in the form of the first Slayer, her most fundamental self, when she believes herself unable to love ("Intervention," 5018), *Angel* is deluded into objectifying his inner dilemma as 'sin' and projecting it onto externalized others, whom he tries to save in the same way that he tried to 'save' *Buffy* - by his agency, not theirs. If the series runs true to the myth, then it will be only when *Angel* returns to the simple, human scale of values, that he will be redeemed.

(33) The religious symbolism used in *Buffy* draws on a tradition of a numinous female, therefore, who exists in a nurturing and powerful relationship with natural order, and this valorization of woman thus provides a political standpoint as well as a theological one. I now wish to turn to that political significance.



On Patrol, Second shift: Political Significance

Citizenship

(34) Politics may be understood, on the one hand, as the politics of public life, the state, and political parties, with Sunnydale as a microcosm of Western democracy. On the other hand, though, politics may be understood as relationship, located less narrowly in the public sphere, and, in feminist interpretations, focusing on gendered systems, the distribution of resources, and the location of power. These two ideas are conjoined in the notion of citizenship, which represents the relationship between public and private life. The issues of frontiers and boundaries, raised at the start of this essay, are important in all three ideas, both in physical terms of crossing borders, and in moral terms. At the heart of the relationship between politics and citizenship, too, lies the question as to “whether the citizen is conceptualized as merely a subject of an absolute authority or as an active political agent.” The thrust of Platonic democracy, I have argued, is towards citizens as political subject, while the thrust of the Scoobies—especially Buffy and Willow - I shall argue, is towards citizen as active political agent. This agency, I wish to show, is demonstrated by their transgression of boundaries, their rejection of authoritarian systems of control, their exclusion from socially accepted norms, and their creation of alternative ways of living.

Participation

(35) Buffy herself is implicitly transgressive, because of her unique, embodied reconciliation of epistemology and ontology, and thus she provides an immediate political challenge to the order of life in Sunnydale. This political challenge is extended by the community formed by herself and her friends, which, like Gnostic communities, is based on a participative model rather than a hierarchical one. Leadership shifts, from Buffy to Giles to Willow to Angel to Oz to Xander to Riley, depending on who is functionally appropriate at any one time. They form an “Outsiders’ Society,” which, like that envisioned by Virginia Woolf, has no funds, no office, no committee and no secretary. Rather, each person is valued for different qualities, as the collaborative spell used to destroy Adam—the monster created by the Army and thus the personification of a male, hierarchical, authoritarian viewpoint—demonstrates, to which Willow contributes “spiritus” [spirit], Xander contributes “Animus” [heart], Giles contributes “sophus” [mind] and Buffy contributes “Manus” [hand] (“Restless”). This integrated, equal, participation provides a deliberate contrast to the political order represented by Adam: Buffy says “You could never hope to grasp the source of our power,” as she pulls out Adam’s mechanical power supply (“Restless”).

(36) The Scoobies’ contingent, conceptualized, functional, form of participative management is in strong contrast to the enforced, patriarchal, hierarchical structures which typifies the series’ evil leaders—The Master, Principal Snyder, The Mayor—and which is embodied in the terms of vampirism: vampires “sire” other vampires, in a linguistic association of rape, insemination, and kingship. The Master kills retainers who under-perform, as the Three did (“Angel”). Principal Snyder rejoices in using his public position to violate the personal rights of individuals—“This is a glorious day for principals everywhere. No pathetic whining about students’ rights. Just a long row of lockers and a man with a key” (“Gingerbread,” 3011) and the Mayor continues to seek power and control from beyond the grave, leaving a video-tape of instructions for Faith (“This Year’s Girl”).

Surveillance

(37) As Foucault points out, surveillance is a principal agency by which hierarchies enact power. Such surveillance is contingent on separating the tasks to be performed in the workplace or community, from the knowledge and craft needed to perform them—a deliberate division of ontology from epistemology. From this, as Braverman demonstrates, arises “the degradation of labor,” a system of production and social control in which a hierarchical management pre-specifies the tasks to be performed by labor and supervises their work. It is a surveillance arrangement such as this that Buffy explicitly refuses at the start of her relationship with Giles (“Welcome to the Hellmouth”):

Buffy First of all, I’m a Vampire Slayer. And secondly, I’m retired. Hey, I know! Why don’t you kill ‘em?

Giles I-I-I’m a Watcher, I-I haven’t the skill...

Buffy Oh, come on, stake through the heart, a little sunlight... It’s like falling off a log.

Giles A, a Slayer slays, a Watcher..



Buffy Watches?

Giles Yes. No! (sets down the books) He, he trains her, he, he, he prepares her...

Buffy Prepares me for what? For getting kicked out of school? For losing all of my friends? For having to spend all of my time fighting for my life and never getting to tell anyone because I might endanger them? Go ahead! Prepare me.

They just look at each other for a moment. Buffy exhales, turns and leaves the library in disgust.

(38) Even when Buffy does quit, and retires to Los Angeles, her return is sparked off by a demon which enslaves humans into absolutely degraded labour—"You work, and you live. That is all"—in a dark, brutalizing iron works, lit by vats of molten metal and flying sparks (*Anne*), an image of industrialized hell used from Charles Dickens onwards. That it is Buffy's agency which creates a different relationship from the usual surveillance one, rather than a quality implicit in *Slayers*, is made clear by the way in which Kendra accepts the surveillance and control of her Watcher, just as Faith does with the Mayor. Supporting ontological subordination is, of course, a denied epistemological agency, the control-model of Kendra's training and Faith's relationship with the Mayor, as opposed to the negotiation of Buffy's educational contract with Giles.