"How do you like my darkness now?": women, violence, and the good "bad girl" in 'Buffy, the Vampire Slayer

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Abstract	The representations of violent women in Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and the development of this trope compare intriguingly with Charlotte Dacre's early nineteenth-century protagonist in *Zofloya, or, The Moor* (1806). Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt and Jean Elshtain, the chapter argues that Whedon's exploration of the relationship between women and violence suggests ways in which to reconsider the consequences and responsibilities—as well as potentials—for women's use of violent means to oppose systemic oppression.		Q4

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CHAPTER 2

"How Do You Like My Darkness Now?": Women, Violence, and the Good "Bad Girl" in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Kaley Kramer

At a panel discussion for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 2003, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) offered the "very first mission statement of the show": "the joy of female power, having it, using it, sharing it."[1] As part of the DVD commentary on the first episode of the series, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," Whedon claimed that his intention behind the heroine was to invert the conventional horror narrative in which "a little blonde girl … goes into a dark alley and is killed."[2] Each claim can be understood in relation to the central dynamic tension between femininity and violence that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* explicitly explores. The "little blonde girl" that Whedon invokes is a "good girl," a necessary figure in Gothic fiction and horror film, whose body, "endangered, punishable, and silent," functions as an index of (masculine) violence.[3] Violent *women* have a place in Gothic narratives but only as "bad girls": as aberrant, unnatural, evil. Buffy's connection to violence challenges these associations by repositioning women's uses of violence as strategies for resistance to certain kinds of injustice and

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inequality. Individual tussles with vampires and demons in dark alleys give way to longer, more complex meditations on women's relationship with violence on political and social scales. Buffy's exceptionalism ("one girl in all the world," as the opening sequence reminds viewers) evolves into a locally shared responsibility throughout Seasons 1 through 6 and, finally, dissolves into a global sharing of "female power" in the series finale.

As Alice Rutkowski notes, Buffy is no longer alone. By the early twenty-first century, "powerful girls [were] everywhere … even in genres previously populated only by men."[4] But the subject of critical and cultural contention is not necessarily "female power," but female violence. This is an important distinction. Hannah Arendt's definitions of "power" and "violence" are useful here to understand the different reactions to women's "power" as opposed to women's "violence." While "nothing is more common than the combination of violence and power," they are not synonymous.[5] "Power," for Arendt, is "never the property of an individual" but "belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."[6] *On Violence* reflects specifically on the political and cultural context following World War II; the French Revolution offers a context equally open to the kinds of distinctions that she makes, particularly between violence and power. Violence, for Arendt, is instrumental; it is a *means* and "stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues."[7] Female characters in eighteenth-century Gothic narratives serve to indicate where power—manifested in patriarchal constructions from the family to the nation—has failed, where the "group" has broken down. Violent women, who traditionally act from the margins, are without "guidance and justification": they are erratic and unpredictable. If violence is, as Arendt understands it, a means to an end in the hands of the empowered, the chronic disempowerment of women means that they are, by default, unable to be "properly" violent, at least, their violence cannot be understood or sanctioned in a system that understands violence as such.

While Arendt's reflections deal with violence writ large in politics and culture, the dynamics that she explores are evident in individual actions and roles as well. Men have available to them the figure of the "just warrior," a role with an established historical precedent and considerable cultural power.[8] Eighteenth-century male Gothic characters, both villains and heroes, use violence (if not always successfully then at least with impunity). "Good" men can command violence as a means to the greater good; their deaths are sacred, sacrificial, and fit into noble patriarchal narratives. The corresponding role in this paradigm, as Frances Early

notes, is the "beautiful soul": the maternal war supporter whose vulnerability demands male protection (Helen of Troy, Guinevere, the "mother of the nation" in war propaganda). At the margin of this paradigm is the female fighter, "an identity in extremis, not an expectation"—the result of an extreme threat that has temporarily displaced the patriarchal protection offered through men.[9] Where women are violent in traditional narratives, it is frequently as a last resort or for reasons that serve to reinforce passive femininity: in defense of their virginity, their sexual purity, their children. Only very rarely are women permitted to use violence in defense of a man. Women's violence—whether in a singular event or as part of their personality—generally results in their social exclusion, either in relation to the event or because of their exceptionality. When required, women's violence to *themselves*—honorable suicide—is accepted as properly feminine, another defense of the *quality* of femininity that requires the destruction of the tainted example. Buffy's own suicide at the end of Season 5 (rarely considered such by either fans or scholars) repositions her as a redemptive sacrifice, whose gift of (love) herself defeats evil and saves the world. The sixth season reveals the inadequacy of this action, however, and the analogy falls apart. Buffy is forcibly resurrected into a world she considers "hell": even her sacrifice is denied—if the "hardest thing to do in this world is live in it" (Season 5, episode 22), then she cannot take the easy way out. If death is welcome, life will be her punishment.

Violence is a conventional feature of the Gothic mode and serves to distinguish "masculine" and "feminine" in its deployment and effects. While women most frequently serve as indicators of off-page or off-screen violence, they also function as a litmus-test of defensive or chivalric violence. Again, in keeping with the paradigm above, male violence ensures female preservation and through this, serves to hold up qualities to which masculinity requires access to but not association with: innocence, purity, submission. The masculine hero preserves and treasures these qualities but does not embody them. In this fashion, then, the thrust of a sword, the swing of a fist, or the crack of a gun can be justified as a means to an end, and the fundamental disregard for innocence/purity/submissiveness that is built into violence can be excused, and the perpetrator is paradoxically valorized for "protecting" precisely those qualities he ignores. Violent women upset not only the binary between "masculine" and "feminine" but threaten the foundation of patriarchal ideology, which requires ongoing violence in the service of an imagined (but never realized) future peace.

Gothic literature, from Horace Walpole's inaugural *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), privileges the "good girl": the virtuous, passive, and submissively suffering woman. Indeed, Walpole's novel features *only* "good girls" in the persecuted Isabella, the martyred Matilda, and the suffering Hippolita. Demonstrating its debt to the eighteenth-century "culture of Sensibility," the Gothic made full use of the connection between femininity and passivity, placing virtuous heroines in scenes of increasingly extreme distress. Regardless of the situation, Walpole's female characters adhere to the cultural strictures forbidding women's violent action. Women who responded in kind to violence or who manifested through their actions the violence implicit in ideology are unredeemable. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) provides a dramatic example of this in the fabulously corrupt and spectacularly violent Prioress, who takes sadistic pleasure in condemning the pregnant Agnes to slow starvation and death in a cell. Even in a text that takes pleasure in graphic violence, the Prioress faces a "most summary and cruel vengeance" at the hands of an angry mob (*not*, importantly, by the hand of the heroic Lorenzo), who, after stoning her to death, "exercised their impotent rage on her lifeless body … till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting."[10] Ann Radcliffe's genre-defining novels of the 1790s include examples of violent women as mad (Laurentini in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794]), and dangerous (Marchesa Vivaldi in *The Italian* [1797]). It is not until Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806) that a "bad girl" enters the scene in the character of Victoria di Loredani.

Splendidly unrepentant and "strikingly criminal," Victoria is violent by nature and violently nurtured. As Kim Michasiw notes, her crimes "are more ambitious and more extensive than those of her nearest parallel … Laurentini di Udolpho": while the latter "haunts" Radcliffe's novel, Victoria takes center stage and is, albeit temporarily, successful beyond the dreams of even Lewis's infernal Monk, Ambrosio[11]:

> She commits three premeditated murders, only one of which has any claim to having been provoked by a fit of passion. She is the direct cause of a suicide. She is untroubled by her illicit sexual liaisons—except by their not taking place. She leaves polite society to live among banditti with no male guardian save the Moorish servant for whom she entertains increasingly explicit sexual longings. She never ceases to blame her erring but pathetic mother for all her troubles … and watches over the final convulsions with a fixed smile of contempt.[12]

Yet, as Michasiw also recognizes, Victoria's circumstances are those of Radcliffe's heroines for the first half of *Zofloya*: abandoned, isolated, and incarcerated.[13] Where Radcliffe's heroines endure silently, Victoria rages and schemes. The evocative climax of the novel—and Victoria's career of violence—is the murder of Lilla, whose perfect feminine softness inspires Victoria's "immediate hatred" and jealousy.[14] Far from the "post-Radcliffean male Gothic writers [who reduced] the Gothic heroine to the status of quintessential 'defenseless victim, a weakling, a wimpering, trembling, cowering little piece of propriety'," Dacre allows her protagonist the full flush of violent impulse and action.[15] Demanding silence, Victoria rejects Lilla's protest that she "can never do [Victoria] any harm" by insisting that Lilla "hast already done … more ill than the sacrifice of thy worthless life can repay" (223). While in Victoria's twisted logic, Lilla's mere existence has blasted her hopes for Henriquez, Victoria's rage illustrates the limits of femininity represented in Lilla's perfect whiteness and innocence. Lilla's existence—the cultural hegemony of her particular femininity—marks the boundary of Victoria's options. In any other Gothic novel of the period, Lilla would inspire defensive violence; in Dacre's novel, Victoria, a woman, violently destroys precisely what would otherwise be protected.

"The castle is *mine*," says Victoria, in a defiant rejection of Zofloya's command (227). She has committed an act of violence and is unrepentant. Victoria's violence threatens not only patriarchal systems of control and oppression but rejects the foundations that justify that violence by removing the "helpless" woman. Victoria's final murderous act is represented as a loss of reason: she is otherwise calculating, scheming, and careful—guided by Zofloya, she poisons, sows discontent, and watches her actions unfold. "Nerved with hellish strength" after killing Henriquez, Victoria "shrieks" throughout her final encounter with Lilla, who supplicates, sobs, and cries (222–225). That Victoria is enraged is obvious, but while Michasiw allows that this murder might be committed in a "fit of passion," Arendt's discussion of emotion and violence offers another reading: "Rage and violence turn irrational only when they are directed against substitutes."[16] Lilla might stand in for that which Victoria *lacks*—namely, "that fairy delicacy [and] baby face" (213–214). But Lilla is also *exactly* the proper source of Victoria's rage: Lilla's presence in the text, her physical manifestation of privileged femininity, stifles Victoria's ability to name and access her desires. Lilla is the embodiment of the gendered construction that underwrites women's need for protection and mobilizes and maintains patriarchal forces. With the elimination of "weak" femininity,

the virtuous goal of masculine violence is removed from the patriarchal order, thus ending the need for violence in defense of that system. This is a theoretically non-violent state. Arendt argues that "power and violence are not opposite; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent."[17] If the object of male violence is to protect "helpless" women from other violent men and we remove the weak woman from that system (as Victoria does Lilla), we can start to see the ends of female violence as different from male violence. The clearest contemporary example of this in the Gothic mode is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Buffy is not only a violent woman, she is a defender—a "just warrior" who moonlights as a "beautiful soul": she embodies the qualities that she defends. Buffy's ability to use violence is an important development of Gothic femininity and is a welcome contribution to discourses of gender and violence. Her relationship with violence is further complicated (as it is with Victoria di Loredani) because of her *enjoyment* of violence—an ambiguity that Buffy is aware of and struggles with throughout the series. The pleasure she takes in her body's abilities, her strength, speed, and agility, can only be indulged in hunting and killing vampires. Violence for Buffy is both physically rewarding and morally sanctioned—it partakes of the same logic as masculine violence and, crucially, it demonstrates that women as well as men "can find something attractive about violence."[18] Gothic literature since Walpole draws attention to "the variability and murkiness of boundaries, or 'edges' and 'fine lines' between seduction and domination, pleasure and danger, responsibility and exploitation, agency and objectification, consent and coercion."[19] Boundaries are places of violent encounters, dark alleys that trap and kill "little blonde girls" who belong firmly within protective circles of ideology. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* exists almost entirely on these "fine lines" but reimagines the boundaries as spaces of potential and power through the perspective of a young woman who never firmly positions herself on either side of these binaries.

The incongruity of her knowledge and skills with what is expected of "little blonde girls" frequently drives the narrative. Violent women are, of course, "bad," but *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* interrogates the moral power that judges and classifies women as "good" and "bad" and repositions these qualifiers in relation to violence. Buffy is often "good" when she is most violent (killing a threat); "bad" when her behavior does not align with the expectations her physical appearance elicits. Of course, "bad girl" can be used in a resistant discourse of gender: given the misogynist construction of "good" as a woman who embodies patriarchal expectations

of a passive, demure, disempowered femininity, being a "bad girl" can be understood as laudable, courageous, and dangerous. But Buffy is not *that* kind of "bad girl"—a point made repeatedly when the show contrasts Buffy with visually coded "bad girls" (as in "School Hard" in which she is partnered with the class "bad girl," Sheila Martini, who smokes, dyes her hair, and refers to her boyfriend as "Meatball" [Season 2, episode 5]) and, of course, the lascivious, promiscuous rogue, Faith ("Faith, Hope, and Trick," Season 3, episode 3). Within the show, Buffy is often interpreted as "bad" (Principal Snyder consistently and unjustly proclaims on Buffy's degenerate nature, going so far as to catch a "whiff of jail" as he considers her future ["When She Was Bad," Season 2, episode 1]). For at least three seasons, Buffy struggles to overcome her guilt at being the reason for her parents' divorce and her mother's relocation from Los Angeles to Sunnydale by performing (almost always unsuccessfully) as a "good girl." After years of misunderstandings and unjust punishment, Buffy's mother is finally witness to her daughter's Slayer abilities when Spike and his cadre of vampires attack Buffy in "School Hard." At precisely this point, there is a moment of reconciliation between mother and child when Joyce acknowledges that her daughter "can take care of herself; she's brave, resourceful, and thinks of others in a crisis" (Season 2, episode 5). Ironically, in the pivotal encounter between Buffy and Spike, it is Joyce who violently attacks the vampire, saving her prostrate daughter from almost certain death. Joyce's recourse to violent defense of her child fits traditional models of acceptable violence, but it is also a moment of bonding between Buffy and her mother—violence is a shared experience between these women. From personal experience, Joyce understands that "bad" girls are sometimes "good" and that, in a violent world, non-violence is not an option.

But Buffy is also bad at *being* a girl: she is unable to be either passive or helpless. Buffy is in many ways a typical teenager: she can be overwhelmed emotionally, she is frequently jealous, and occasionally naïve and petty. She is a cheerleader, hyper-aware of fashion and popular culture, concerned about her appearance and boys. Buffy's keenest anxieties surface around her persistent desire to be "normal." Simply put, her ongoing battle against evil interferes with her social life. Her inability to be a girl is directly related to her exposure to and awareness of violence; Buffy exemplifies Arendt's and Bat-Ami Bar On's cautions that "violence habituates the agent" and that readiness to fight increases the likelihood of a violent reaction where none is needed.[20] Buffy trains. Buffy trains regularly, intensely, incessantly. She trains this way—and is trained this way—because she and her Watcher

know more than anyone that violence might be required to counter violence at any point. A frat party, a birthday celebration, walking home at night, the banal cruelties of high school peer groups: high school is Hell. Literally. Buffy's awareness, however, provides a model that is followed by her female peers. The awkward, shy, and bookish Willow turns those attributes into a force to be reckoned with. Cordelia enacts a mini-revolution in rejecting her "queen-bee" friends, dating Xander in spite of the "social suicide" that entails. Buffy's strength, which she takes for granted in both slaying and non-slaying situations, frequently draws attention to her lack of appropriate "girlishness" and extends to her social circle. In fact Buffy's attitudes, drawn in her case from her abilities as a Slayer, open up alternatives for everyone. Men, in Buffy's area of influence, also fail to fulfil their expected gender roles: they cease to be "good" students, boyfriends, teachers, fathers, and instead become complex subjectivities. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, no one performs the expected role. This is the long end of female violence. Far from the assailant in a dark alley, the real target of both Buffy and *Buffy* is the ideology that underwrites gender binaries and enforces the existence of the "good" girl.

Good girls are very often dead girls. Buffy's knowledge and experience demand a level of ethical awareness that is not apparent in her pre-Slayer self (briefly glimpsed in "Becoming, Part I" (Season 2, episode 21). It is also what prevents her, even when it becomes a possibility, from truly desiring to give up her abilities and accompanying violent activities. Knowing, Buffy cannot *unknow* or forget. Furthermore, violence is not solely the destiny of "hot chicks with super powers" ("End of Days," Season 7, episode 21). In "Helpless," a weakened Buffy walks home alone (her red coat evoking Little Red Riding Hood) and encounters everyday sexism. The perpetrators are human, but Buffy is shaken, not by her inability to *kill* them, but by her awareness of her vulnerability in the face of potential male violence (Season 3, episode 12). Implicitly, the question that begins to emerge is how *other women* deal with this entirely real and human violence—not only demons prey on Sunnydale's women. And not only women are the victims of violence. In many ways, the series exploits its supernatural credentials to side-step the visceral results of the kind of slaying that Buffy engages in nightly. Vampires and most other demons either turn to dust or melt away once slain, leaving no evidence of their passing.[21] The corporeality of human bodies marks them as different *after the fact*: the bodies of Kendra, Jenny Calendar, Joyce, the Mayor's hapless assistant, Katrina, and Buffy herself testify to the real consequences of violence that are only ever a step away

from the explicit focus of the show. Mimi Marinucci notes that "feminist discussions of violence usually focus on men's violence against women"; given that the primary form of violence in Gothic narratives is "symbolic of rape, which is symbolic of women's oppression," this is not unexpected.[22] Yet, Buffy's primary concern is not the fight against women's oppression but the ongoing struggle against Evil, which is finally revealed as ideology itself. Her use of violence is not primarily directed against men (nor are monsters understood reductively as metaphors for men in all cases), but against threats to humanity. Buffy "valorises physical violence on both a practical level (how to survive in a dangerous world) and a religious level (how to save the world from evil)."[23] She is both a provocative icon for women's use of violence and an important figure for repositioning women as equal participants in the struggle against injustice.

Buffy's introduction to violence via the Watchers' Council initially connects her to a patriarchal institution, for which she is an instrument of violence. The Watchers' Council (with the significant exception of Giles) demands the kind of submission and obedience expected of "good girls"—albeit for very different ends. After Dracula in Season 5, Buffy battles the only female "Big Bad" in the series, the unrepentantly violent and spectacular "Glory." In the fractured world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy is both the moral center and the marginal threat. It is this careful maintenance of the liminal space between threat and that which is threatened that allows Buffy to act as the violent agent and, ultimately, as her own "guidance and judgement" on when and how violence will be used. This prevents, in Buffy's case as it could not in Victoria's, violence from running amok—Buffy is no anarchist and will not allow the "means of destruction [to] determine the end": Arendt warns, "where violence is no longer backed and restrained by power … the end will be the destruction of all power."[24] As the Slayer, Buffy is the "just warrior" whose justification for violence is in the act itself and needs no explanation. As Buffy Summers, however, she occupies the role of "bad girl" from the perspective of conventional authorities: her mother, her principal, the police, and her peers and classmates (outside of the selected few who are aware of her Slayer status). From the collective perspective of social and cultural authorities, Buffy is "bad": she sneaks out (of her bedroom, of class, off school grounds); she hangs out in graveyards; she dates older men; she burns down buildings and has little regard for property; and, of course, she has a criminal record. Her secret identity *is* a "bad girl"—one that makes her as visible as her Slayer role requires her to be invisible.

The tension resulting from Buffy's daytime performance of daughter, girlfriend, and all-American girl leaves her unsatisfied, however. In "Buffy V. Dracula" (Season 5, episode 1), the link between violence and desire materializes in the form of Dracula. Dracula reminds Buffy of her responsibilities and, paradoxically, the pleasure of the kill, the joy in violence. Following from the finale of Season 4, "Restless," in which Buffy confronts the "first Slayer" who hints that the Slayer's power is rooted in darkness, the opening of Season 5 offers a new glimpse of Buffy's relationship to violence. Opening on a post-coital scene with her boyfriend clearly sated and asleep, the episode focuses on Buffy, awake and frustrated. She slips out of bed for a spot of slaying, returning contentedly to bed only after staking a vampire after a gruelling chase and fight. Conflating the domestic scene with Gothic violence, this moment destabilizes generic conventions. Furthermore, it is Buffy taking on the traditionally male act of slipping away. Unfulfilled by domestic pleasures, Buffy leaves the warm embrace of her lover for the illicit thrill of a graveyard staking. Precisely at this moment, Dracula appears to expose the inadequacy of her conventional relationship with Riley. Compared to Buffy's previous antagonists, Dracula is hardly an obvious threat. Dressed like a reject from a Lestat look-alike contest and sporting an indeterminate European accent, Dracula nonetheless brings skills to the fray that are either not present or implicit in other opponents. More than any other vampire, except perhaps Spike, Dracula returns the particularly sexualized threat of vampires to the forefront. Dracula is no different from vampires in the end, but his *modus operandi* makes him particularly dangerous: he makes his victims want the violence that he brings. As Mimi Marinucci argues, human blood for vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is "resistable": there are several examples of alternatives to human blood that work over the course of the show and other examples whereby the extraction of blood does not need accompanying violence or death.[25] Dracula, on the other hand, makes explicit the buried violence of patriarchy and gender expectations. Not that these are ever far from the surface—Faith finally points out the elephant in the room when she declares in her first appearance that slaying makes her "hungry and horny" (Season 3, episode 3), later demonstrated in her sexual encounter with Xander ("The Zeppo," Season 3, episode 13). For Dracula, however, violence and desire order the world as evidenced in his assumption of the power to name and classify. His attraction for Buffy is his knowledge of her gifts, her ability, her body. Echoing the first Slayer, he tells her that she as yet does not know

the extent of her power or the power of her darkness. Buffy's darkness is positioned beyond her own ability to access and explore: it requires a male teacher and her own chosen passivity. As is implicit in the mandates and control of the Watchers' Council, female violence is only appropriate under male direction: like Victoria in *Zofloya*, Buffy has the option to abdicate responsibility for her actions and desires. The visual cues in this episode are explicit: Buffy initially fights Dracula in red leather trousers completing the "Faith"-inspired outfit and clearly recalling the "bad girl" attitude (and implying her fate—Faith is dispatched by Buffy at the end of Season 3). After her first seduction by Dracula, Buffy changes into *pink* leather trousers and a black top with a much lower neckline. But *pink* leather is the symbol of the good "bad" girl, and it is in this garb that she defeats Dracula, refusing the dichotomy between "good" feminine/passive and "bad girl"/aggressive.

The final showdown in Dracula's castle—a sudden addition to the Sunnydale skyline, the appearance of which does not go unremarked—brings to televised technicolor the familiar elements of Stoker's text. There is a box of earth, a wolf prowls the rooftops, bats swoop, Xander falls easily under the "thrall" of Dracula and becomes a twitchy and entirely ineffective Renfield. Giles falls unwittingly to the Three Sisters, who, rather than stalk into Jonathan's bedroom, wait in what seems to be an oubliette for passing men. Buffy seems destined for the role of Lucy Westenra, a character defined as much by her sexual desire ("Why can't they let a girl marry as many men as will have her?"[26]) as by her passive helplessness. Hovering between "good girl" submission and "bad girl" aggression, "a man's brain and a woman's heart," Buffy is Mina Harker all along.[27]

Buffy's final rejection of Dracula's seduction crucially involves her ownership of that "darkness" that Dracula has attempted to use against her. Assuming that her darkness is a source of fear, Dracula makes it a source of erotic power—but only if she commits to his tutelage of her powers. Thus, as a representation of patriarchal order, Dracula demonstrates that the "moral stricture against violence serves the interests of the dominant state."[28] That *Dracula* represents the "dominant state" foreshadows the extent of Whedon's ambitions for his "little blonde girl" in Season 7, but at this point, the allusion remains ambiguous. Buffy's empowerment through violence should place her firmly outside of society. But Buffy can do far more than Mina Harker, who is finally contained by Van Helsing before Dracula is killed in the novel. She takes the offer of knowledge, having learned that knowledge can come from unlikely places, but her

reaction to the taste is triumphant and unexpected: "Wow," she says, after a vision of her true powers is granted through Dracula's blood, "that was gross" (Season 5, episode 1). Dracula's astonished "you are resisting!" expresses surprise in Buffy's ability to be both acquiescent and strong. Buffy has reserved the right to change her mind and to use opportunities to her own advantage. Her final quip to the dusted (if not destroyed) Dracula, "How do you like my darkness now?" is a triumphant, but not unproblematic, claiming for herself of her powers and abilities, their potential uses and potential consequences. In this image of the good "bad" girl, Whedon extends the problematics of sanctioned "masculine" violence and explores how women might use violence to counter the injustices of patriarchy itself—a theme that begins in the supernatural world of Sunnydale but finds its most empowering expression in the real world.

Following her encounter with Dracula, which provokes her curiosity about the roots of her relationship with violence, Buffy enters into a new contract with Giles, formerly her official "Watcher" and connection to the Watchers' Council. Rather than focusing on the refinement of her violent skills, Buffy now wishes to understand the origins of those abilities, signalling a transition away from a preoccupation with the act of violence and a move toward an understanding of the ideological bases of violence. At the end of Season 4, Buffy and her friends invoke the power of the "first Slayer" to enable their defeat of Maggie Walsh's Frankenstein-creature, Adam. Once called, however, the first Slayer proves remarkably resistant to returning safely to the past.[29] She appears with appropriately enigmatic advice in Season 5 (when Buffy's "gift" shifts from "love" to "death," Season 5, episode 18) and again in Season 7 when Buffy seeks the original Watchers' Council, the "Shadow Men" (Season 7, episode 15). Significantly, the first Slayer is not present during this final encounter and Buffy takes her place in a re-enactment of the original ritual that created the Slayer line. The ritual gestures toward the "revolutionary act of lawmaking violence": "the necessary lawlessness involved in the act that founds or makes law … justified retrospectively through its law-preserving iteration—even as the latter, law-preserving violence … inevitably bears the traces of the original lawless imposition of the law."[30] The gender dynamics of the scene also allow a connection to Carole Pateman's "Sexual Contract" that underwrites the social contract. Pateman argues that the sexual subjugation of women precedes and supports the foundation of patriarchal systems that require but erase all trace of that deliberate subjugation.[31] Buffy finds herself at the genesis of the Slayers, face to face with

the origins of her superhuman abilities, and crucially, as they attempt to imbue her with the "original" Slayer power, it takes the visual form of a black, noxious cloud that winds its way around her shackled leg and threatens a symbolic rape. What is done cannot be undone, and it is not for Buffy to redress this historic wrong. What she can do, however, is break the cycle by refusing any further additional power from this (rapacious) source. Her rejection completes the destruction of the institutional force of the Watchers' Council (whose headquarters—and most of the Watchers—are destroyed in Season 7, episode 9). From this point, Buffy's actions—her violence—take on the quality of divine violence: "interrupting the systemic violence of things as they are and initiat[ing] a new historical epoch."[32]

In the final season, Buffy comes face to face with the limits of her abilities as "the one girl in all the world." In an early confrontation with her Slayer-daughter, Joyce asks the obvious question: what good does Buffy's violence do? ("Gingerbread," Season 3, episode 11). By Season 3, let alone Season 7, it is patently obvious that Buffy's attention to individual demons and vampires does little to stem the flood of violence that happens nightly in Sunnydale, and is certainly happening elsewhere (Cleveland is posited as the location of another Hellmouth in "The Wish," Season 3, episode 9). The manifestations of evil in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* generally progress from singular, embodied threats into increasingly abstract demons. Buffy's death at the hands of the Master (she is drowned and resuscitated by Xander in the Season 1 finale) sets the Slayer machine in motion, resulting in Faith whose arc is worthy of more discussion than this chapter allows. In subsequent seasons, Buffy fends off her own boyfriend, a demonic Mayor, a Frankensteinian cyborg, a displaced hell goddess, a "trio" of disaffected nerds who wish to play out a comic book trope of "domination," culminating in a finale where Buffy is conspicuously absent from the final "fight" (in which Xander saves the world by not fighting Willow). In Season 7, while viewers fumble for the plural of "apocalypse" one more time, Buffy and her stalwart friends, with a slowly growing band of "potential" Slayers, must face the disembodied root of all evil: the First. The "Big Bad" of Season 7 is no thing, no demon or vampire, no goddess from another dimension, no malevolent men intent on world domination. The First manifests everywhere and nowhere; it appears in the form and voice of the dead and has no desire but destruction. It cannot interact with the world, enlisting the Harbingers ("the Bringers") to advance before it, having proven their allegiance through self-mutilation: blinding and cutting out their tongues, lest they see or say what is not permitted.

The First exists primarily as a voice, insidiously undermining the heroines and heroes, often appearing as a trusted (and departed) loved one. In certain crucial moments, like the evening before the final battle for Sunnydale, the First appears to Buffy *as* herself—and the visual effect of this encounter is to see Buffy deny *herself*. In this sense, the First is not an external enemy but is representative of the machinations of ideology itself—it is the force that weakens the subject from within, and it is this threat that Buffy (and her small "army" of potential Slayers) must now engage and defeat, if the world is to survive.

These are the stakes, so to speak. Buffy must defeat an overwhelming force embodied in the "ubervamps" that rush toward her in the final scenes of the series finale, but they are secondary—the battle turns on Willow's actions, executed in a room far from the battlefield. Again, the center of the battle is not precisely where Buffy is—it is displaced a little. Willow's contribution to the battle is to further displace and decenter matters. Entrusted with the Scythe given to Buffy by The Guardians, a group of women who forge the weapon for the Slayer away from the knowledge of the Shadow Men or the Watchers' Council, Willow casts a spell that gives every potential slayer an equal share in the power that Buffy has borne alone for seven years. In the wake of Willow's incantations, the potential slayers are realized as "full" Slayers, each as strong and agile as Faith or Buffy, each able to meet the forces of evil on their own forceful terms. Kennedy (a potential Slayer and Willow's girlfriend) visibly feels the rush of power and, as the hordes descend, Vi, previously a shy potential, remarks that she will enjoy this moment with a relish that Faith or Dracula would applaud ("Chosen," Season 7, episode 22). But even this distribution of the Slayer-force is only a gesture at the real project. The army of Slayers in Sunnydale, no matter the odds, will inevitably make their enemies "dust" (with some help from a sacrificial Spike, who channels a burst of sunlight into the Hellmouth, disintegrating their foes wholesale). The most important ramification of Buffy's plan and Willow's spell lies in the sharing of Slayer-force with *all* women. In a retrospective montage, given to the viewer at the climax of the battle at the Hellmouth, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offers the power, awareness, and abilities of the Slayer as a universal awakening. Buffy defies Slayer tradition (and the patriarchy that created it) and makes a provocative offer: "So here's the part where you make a choice. What if you could have that [her] power? … I say my power should be *our* power" (Season 7, episode 22). What follows her offer is a series of images of anonymous

women of various ages, cultures, and circumstances, each feeling the same "rush" that Vi and the Slayers experience so pleasurably. These women are *not* at the Hellmouth, they are not fighting supernatural demons or staking vampires. The apocalypses they face are everyday ones: the anxiety of organized sport, the alienation of high school, or the banality of domestic abuse. In each case, they (in the Buffy's words) "stand up" against the forces (internal or external) that oppress them. And it is this equivalency—that the women in this montage are mobilizing the same strength, the same ability to meet violence with equal (or superior) force as the Slayers at the Hellmouth—that is the ultimate point of Whedon's series. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is about the joy of female power: having it, enjoying it, and *sharing* it. Buffy, Faith, and the warriors at the Hellmouth are righteous warriors. The global community's empowered women are no less than Buffy: they are all good "bad" girls.

Notes

1. Whedon, qtd. in Gwyn Symonds, *The Aesthetics of Violence in Contemporary Media* (New York and London: Continuum, 2008), p. 127.
2. Joss Whedon, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," DVD commentary, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Collector's Edition* (Sony Entertainment, 2004).
3. Kelsie Hahn, "Lady Killer: Death of the Feminized Body in the Whedonverse," *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* 10.1, 35 (Winter, 2013), para. 2, www.whedonstudies.tv [accessed 18 December 2014].
4. Alice Rutkowski, "Why Chicks Dig Vampires: Sex, Blood, and *Buffy*," *Iris: A Journal about Women* (Fall, 2002), p. 12 [12–24].
5. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York and London: Harvest/Harcourt Inc., 1970), p. 47.
6. Arendt, p. 44.
7. Arendt, p. 51.
8. Frances Early, "Staking Her Claim: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as Transgressive Woman Warrior," *Journal of Popular Culture* 35.3 (Winter 2001), p. 17 [11–27].
9. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p. 173.
10. Matthew Lewis (1796), *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson, Notes and Intro by Emma McEvoy (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1995), p. 356.
11. Kim Ian Michasiw, "Introduction," *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806), ed. Kim Ian Michasiw (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2000), p. ix [vii–xxx].
12. Michasiw, pp. ix–x.
13. Michasiw, p. xvi.

14. Charlotte Dacre (1806), *Zofloya; or, The Moor*, ed. Kim Ian Michasiw (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2000), p. 132. All further references are to this edition and will be given in parentheses in-text.
15. Ellen Moers, qtd. in Carol Margaret Davison, "Getting Their Knickers in a Twist: Contesting the Female Gothic in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*," *Gothic Studies* 11.1, p. 40 [32–45].
16. Arendt, p. xxx.
17. Arendt, p. 56.
18. Bat-Ami Bar On, "Violent Bodies," in *Feminists Doing Ethics*, ed. Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh (New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 71 [63–77].
19. Lyn Phillips, *Flirting with Danger: Young Women's Reflections on Sexuality and Domination* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 3.
20. Mimi Marinucci, "Feminism and the Ethics of Violence: Why Buffy Kicks Ass," in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*, ed. James B. South (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2003), pp. 71–72 [pp. 61–75].
21. Stoker does provide some "legitimacy" to the phenomenon of vampires "dusting" upon being staked. "It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight." (Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal [New York: W.W. Norton, 1997], p. 325). There are a few demons who do not disappear after death, including the Master in Season 1. The long-term plans of the Initiative in Season 4 require that demons leave useable bodies behind. Except in specific cases, however, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not concerned with these particular consequences of violence. Beaten, violated, dead bodies feature very rarely in the first four seasons as objects that demand consideration—Jenny Calendar's body is one of the few to be formally buried.
22. Marinucci, p. 71.
23. Sharon Craigo-Snell, "What Would Buffy Do?: Feminist Ethics and Epistemic Violence," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 48 (Winter, 2006), para. 10, www.ejumpcut.org [accessed 16 December 2014].
24. Arendt, p. 54.
25. Marinucci, p. 70.
26. Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 295.
27. Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 60.
28. Marinucci, p. 68.
29. As most critics have noted, the positive and empowering potential of the Buffyverse collapses when confronted by the issues of race. The portrayal of the first Slayer is no exception. Blackness is associated with primitivism and crude violence: the first Slayer cannot speak or communicate effec-

tively in her first appearance beyond insisting, "No … friends … just … kill" ("Restless," Season 4, episode 22). During the meeting, she is spoken *for* by Tara, dressed in a sari, another layer of cultural appropriation. In "Intervention" (Season 5, episode 18), she appears again as a spirit guide when Buffy seeks to uncover more about the origins of her abilities. In this episode, the spirit guide speaks, while the first Slayer stalks the perimeter of the fire, silent again.

30. Deborah Elise White, "Burning the Library: Benjamin, Hugo, and the Critique of Violence," *European Romantic Review* 20.2 (April 2009), p. 248 [247–260].
31. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
32. White, p. 248.

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