

**"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 <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> (1997–2003) and the development of this trope compare intriguingly with Charlotte Dacre’s early nineteenth-century protagonist in <i>Zofloya, or, The Moor</i> (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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AU1 “How Do You Like My Darkness Now?”: 2  
 Women, Violence, and the Good “Bad Girl” 3  
AU2 in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* 4

AU3 *Kaley Kramer* 5

At a panel discussion for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 6  
 2003, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) offered the 7  
 “very first mission statement of the show”: “the joy of female power, hav- 8  
 ing it, using it, sharing it.”<sup>1</sup> As part of the DVD commentary on the 9  
 first episode of the series, “Welcome to the Hellmouth,” Whedon claimed 10  
 that his intention behind the heroine was to invert the conventional 11  
 horror narrative in which “a little blonde girl ... goes into a dark alley 12  
 and is killed.”<sup>2</sup> Each claim can be understood in relation to the central 13  
 dynamic tension between femininity and violence that *Buffy the Vampire* 14  
*Slayer* explicitly explores. The “little blonde girl” that Whedon invokes is 15  
 a “good girl,” a necessary figure in Gothic fiction and horror film, whose 16  
 body, “endangered, punishable, and silent,” functions as an index of 17  
 (masculine) violence.<sup>3</sup> Violent *women* have a place in Gothic narratives 18  
 but only as “bad girls”: as aberrant, unnatural, evil. Buffy’s connection 19  
 to violence challenges these associations by repositioning women’s uses 20  
 of violence as strategies for resistance to certain kinds of injustice and 21

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

28 As Alice Rutkowski notes, Buffy is no longer alone. By the early twenty-  
29 first century, "powerful girls [were] everywhere ... even in genres previ-  
30 ously populated only by men."<sup>4</sup> But the subject of critical and cultural  
31 contention is not necessarily "female power," but female violence. This  
32 is an important distinction. Hannah Arendt's definitions of "power" and  
33 "violence" are useful here to understand the different reactions to wom-  
34 en's "power" as opposed to women's "violence." While "nothing is more  
35 common than the combination of violence and power," they are not syn-  
36 onymous.<sup>5</sup> "Power," for Arendt, is "never the property of an individual"  
37 but "belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the  
38 group keeps together."<sup>6</sup> *On Violence* reflects specifically on the political  
39 and cultural context following World War II; the French Revolution offers  
40 a context equally open to the kinds of distinctions that she makes, particu-  
41 larly between violence and power. Violence, for Arendt, is instrumental; it  
42 is a *means* and "stands in need of guidance and justification through the  
43 end it pursues."<sup>7</sup> Female characters in eighteenth-century Gothic narra-  
44 tives serve to indicate where power—manifested in patriarchal construc-  
45 tions from the family to the nation—has failed, where the "group" has  
46 broken down. Violent women, who traditionally act from the margins, are  
47 without "guidance and justification": they are erratic and unpredictable. If  
48 violence is, as Arendt understands it, a means to an end in the hands of the  
49 empowered, the chronic disempowerment of women means that they are,  
50 by default, unable to be "properly" violent, at least, their violence cannot  
51 be understood or sanctioned in a system that understands violence as such.

52 While Arendt's reflections deal with violence writ large in politics and  
53 culture, the dynamics that she explores are evident in individual actions  
54 and roles as well. Men have available to them the figure of the "just war-  
55 rior," a role with an established historical precedent and considerable  
56 cultural power.<sup>8</sup> Eighteenth-century male Gothic characters, both vil-  
57 lains and heroes, use violence (if not always successfully then at least with  
58 impunity). "Good" men can command violence as a means to the greater  
59 good; their deaths are sacred, sacrificial, and fit into noble patriarchal  
60 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.<sup>9</sup> 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*—honorably 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.

100 Gothic literature, from Horace Walpole's inaugural *The Castle of*  
 101 *Otranto* (1764), privileges the "good girl": the virtuous, passive, and sub-  
 102 missively suffering woman. Indeed, Walpole's novel features *only* "good  
 103 girls" in the persecuted Isabella, the martyred Matilda, and the suffering  
 104 Hippolita. Demonstrating its debt to the eighteenth-century "culture of AU4  
 105 Sensibility," the Gothic made full use of the connection between feminin-  
 106 ity and passivity, placing virtuous heroines in scenes of increasingly extreme  
 107 distress. Regardless of the situation, Walpole's female characters adhere to  
 108 the cultural strictures forbidding women's violent action. Women who  
 109 responded in kind to violence or who manifested through their actions  
 110 the violence implicit in ideology are unredeemable. Matthew Lewis's  
 111 *The Monk* (1796) provides a dramatic example of this in the fabulously  
 112 corrupt and spectacularly violent Prioress, who takes sadistic pleasure in  
 113 condemning the pregnant Agnes to slow starvation and death in a cell.  
 114 Even in a text that takes pleasure in graphic violence, the Prioress faces a  
 115 "most summary and cruel vengeance" at the hands of an angry mob (*not*,  
 116 importantly, by the hand of the heroic Lorenzo), who, after stoning her to  
 117 death, "exercised their impotent rage on her lifeless body ... till it became  
 118 no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting."<sup>10</sup> Ann  
 119 Radcliffe's genre-defining novels of the 1790s include examples of violent  
 120 women as mad (Laurentini in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794]), and dan-  
 121 gerous (Marchesa Vivaldi in *The Italian* [1797]). It is not until Charlotte  
 122 Dacre's *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806) that a "bad girl" enters the scene in  
 123 the character of Victoria di Loredani.

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

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

Yet, as Michasiw also recognizes, Victoria's circumstances are those of Radcliffe's heroines for the first half of *Zofloya*: abandoned, isolated, and incarcerated.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> Far from the "post-Radcliffian male Gothic writers [who reduced] the Gothic heroine to the status of quintessential 'defenseless victim, a weakling, a whimpering, trembling, cowering little piece of propriety,'" Dacre allows her protagonist the full flush of violent impulse and action.<sup>15</sup> Demanding silence, Victoria rejects Lilla's protest that she "can never do [Victoria] any harm" by insisting that Lilla "has 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."<sup>16</sup> 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,

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

186 Buffy is not only a violent woman, she is a defender—a “just warrior”  
187 who moonlights as a “beautiful soul”: she embodies the qualities that she  
188 defends. Buffy’s ability to use violence is an important development of  
189 Gothic femininity and is a welcome contribution to discourses of gender  
190 and violence. Her relationship with violence is further complicated (as it is  
191 with Victoria di Loredani) because of her *enjoyment* of violence—an ambi-  
192 guity that Buffy is aware of and struggles with throughout the series. The  
193 pleasure she takes in her body’s abilities, her strength, speed, and agility,  
194 can only be indulged in hunting and killing vampires. Violence for Buffy is  
195 both physically rewarding and morally sanctioned—it partakes of the same  
196 logic as masculine violence and, crucially, it demonstrates that women as  
197 well as men “can find something attractive about violence.”<sup>18</sup> Gothic lit-  
198 erature since Walpole draws attention to “the variability and murkiness of  
199 boundaries, or ‘edges’ and ‘fine lines’ between seduction and domination,  
200 pleasure and danger, responsibility and exploitation, agency and objectifi-  
201 cation, consent and coercion.”<sup>19</sup> Boundaries are places of violent encoun-  
202 ters, dark alleys that trap and kill “little blonde girls” who belong firmly  
203 within protective circles of ideology. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* exists almost  
204 entirely on these “fine lines” but reimagines the boundaries as spaces of  
205 potential and power through the perspective of a young woman who never  
206 firmly positions herself on either side of these binaries.

207 The incongruity of her knowledge and skills with what is expected of  
208 “little blonde girls” frequently drives the narrative. Violent women are, of  
209 course, “bad,” but *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* interrogates the moral power  
210 that judges and classifies women as “good” and “bad” and repositions  
211 these qualifiers in relation to violence. Buffy is often “good” when she is  
212 most violent (killing a threat); “bad” when her behavior does not align  
213 with the expectations her physical appearance elicits. Of course, “bad girl”  
214 can be used in a resistant discourse of gender: given the misogynist con-  
215 struction 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.<sup>20</sup> Buffy trains. Buffy trains regularly, intensely, incessantly. She trains this way—and is trained this way—because she and her Watcher

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

273 Good girls are very often dead girls. Buffy's knowledge and experience  
274 demand a level of ethical awareness that is not apparent in her pre-Slayer self  
275 (briefly glimpsed in "Becoming, Part I" (Season 2, episode 21)). It is also  
276 what prevents her, even when it becomes a possibility, from truly desiring  
277 to give up her abilities and accompanying violent activities. Knowing, Buffy  
278 cannot *unknow* or forget. Furthermore, violence is not solely the destiny  
279 of "hot chicks with super powers" ("End of Days," Season 7, episode 21).  
280 In "Helpless," a weakened Buffy walks home alone (her red coat evoking  
281 Little Red Riding Hood) and encounters everyday sexism. The perpetra-  
282 tors are human, but Buffy is shaken, not by her inability to *kill* them, but  
283 by her awareness of her vulnerability in the face of potential male violence  
284 (Season 3, episode 12). Implicitly, the question that begins to emerge is  
285 how *other women* deal with this entirely real and human violence—not only  
286 demons prey on Sunnydale's women. And not only women are the victims  
287 of violence. In many ways, the series exploits its supernatural credentials  
288 to side-step the visceral results of the kind of slaying that Buffy engages in  
289 nightly. Vampires and most other demons either turn to dust or melt away  
290 once slain, leaving no evidence of their passing.<sup>21</sup> The corporeality of human  
291 bodies marks them as different *after the fact*: the bodies of Kendra, Jenny  
292 Calendar, Joyce, the Mayor's hapless assistant, Katrina, and Buffy herself  
293 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 294  
discussions of violence usually focus on men’s violence against women”; 295  
given that the primary form of violence in Gothic narratives is “symbolic of 296  
rape, which is symbolic of women’s oppression,” this is not unexpected.<sup>22</sup> 297  
Yet, Buffy’s primary concern is not the fight against women’s oppression 298  
but the ongoing struggle against Evil, which is finally revealed as ideology 299  
itself. Her use of violence is not primarily directed against men (nor are 300  
monsters understood reductively as metaphors for men in all cases), but 301  
against threats to humanity. Buffy “valorises physical violence on both a 302  
practical level (how to survive in a dangerous world) and a religious level 303  
(how to save the world from evil).”<sup>23</sup> She is both a provocative icon for 304  
women’s use of violence and an important figure for repositioning women 305  
as equal participants in the struggle against injustice. 306

Buffy’s introduction to violence via the Watchers’ Council initially 307  
connects her to a patriarchal institution, for which she is an instrument 308  
of violence. The Watchers’ Council (with the significant exception of 309  
Giles) demands the kind of submission and obedience expected of “good 310  
girls”—albeit for very different ends. After Dracula in Season 5, Buffy 311  
battles the only female “Big Bad” in the series, the unrepentantly vio- 312  
lent and spectacular “Glory.” In the fractured world of *Buffy the Vampire* 313  
*Slayer*, Buffy is both the moral center and the marginal threat. It is this 314  
careful maintenance of the liminal space between threat and that which 315  
is threatened that allows Buffy to act as the violent agent and, ultimately, 316  
as her own “guidance and judgement” on when and how violence will 317  
be used. This prevents, in Buffy’s case as it could not in Victoria’s, vio- 318  
lence from running amok—Buffy is no anarchist and will not allow the 319  
“means of destruction [to] determine the end”: Arendt warns, “where 320  
violence is no longer backed and restrained by power ... the end will be 321  
the destruction of all power.”<sup>24</sup> As the Slayer, Buffy is the “just warrior” 322  
whose justification for violence is in the act itself and needs no explana- 323  
tion. As Buffy Summers, however, she occupies the role of “bad girl” from 324  
the perspective of conventional authorities: her mother, her principal, the 325  
police, and her peers and classmates (outside of the selected few who are 326  
aware of her Slayer status). From the collective perspective of social and 327  
cultural authorities, Buffy is “bad”: she sneaks out (of her bedroom, of 328  
class, off school grounds); she hangs out in graveyards; she dates older 329  
men; she burns down buildings and has little regard for property; and, of 330  
course, she has a criminal record. Her secret identity *is* a “bad girl”—one 331  
that makes her as visible as her Slayer role requires her to be invisible. 332

333 The tension resulting from Buffy's daytime performance of daughter,  
334 girlfriend, and all-American girl leaves her unsatisfied, however. In "Buffy  
335 V. Dracula" (Season 5, episode 1), the link between violence and desire  
336 materializes in the form of Dracula. Dracula reminds Buffy of her respon-  
337 sibilities and, paradoxically, the pleasure of the kill, the joy in violence.  
338 Following from the finale of Season 4, "Restless," in which Buffy con-  
339 fronts the "first Slayer" who hints that the Slayer's power is rooted in  
340 darkness, the opening of Season 5 offers a new glimpse of Buffy's relation-  
341 ship to violence. Opening on a post-coital scene with her boyfriend clearly  
342 sated and asleep, the episode focuses on Buffy, awake and frustrated. She  
343 slips out of bed for a spot of slaying, returning contentedly to bed only  
344 after staking a vampire after a gruelling chase and fight. Conflating the  
345 domestic scene with Gothic violence, this moment destabilizes generic  
346 conventions. Furthermore, it is Buffy taking on the traditionally male  
347 act of slipping away. Unfulfilled by domestic pleasures, Buffy leaves the  
348 warm embrace of her lover for the illicit thrill of a graveyard staking.  
349 Precisely at this moment, Dracula appears to expose the inadequacy of  
350 her conventional relationship with Riley. Compared to Buffy's previous  
351 antagonists, Dracula is hardly an obvious threat. Dressed like a reject  
352 from a Lestat look-alike contest and sporting an indeterminate European  
353 accent, Dracula nonetheless brings skills to the fray that are either not  
354 present or implicit in other opponents. More than any other vampire,  
355 except perhaps Spike, Dracula returns the particularly sexualized threat  
356 of vampires to the forefront. Dracula is no different from vampires in  
357 the end, but his *modus operandi* makes him particularly dangerous: he  
358 makes his victims want the violence that he brings. As Mimi Marinucci  
359 argues, human blood for vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is "resist-  
360 able": there are several examples of alternatives to human blood that work  
361 over the course of the show and other examples whereby the extraction of  
362 blood does not need accompanying violence or death.<sup>25</sup> Dracula, on the  
363 other hand, makes explicit the buried violence of patriarchy and gender  
364 expectations. Not that these are ever far from the surface—Faith finally  
365 points out the elephant in the room when she declares in her first appear-  
366 ance that slaying makes her "hungry and horny" (Season 3, episode 3),  
367 later demonstrated in her sexual encounter with Xander ("The Zeppo,"  
368 Season 3, episode 13). For Dracula, however, violence and desire order  
369 the world as evidenced in his assumption of the power to name and clas-  
370 sify. His attraction for Buffy is his knowledge of her gifts, her ability, her  
371 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 "thrill" 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?"<sup>26</sup>) 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.<sup>27</sup>

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."<sup>28</sup> 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

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

424 Following her encounter with Dracula, which provokes her curios-  
425 ity about the roots of her relationship with violence, Buffy enters into  
426 a new contract with Giles, formerly her official “Watcher” and connec-  
427 tion to the Watchers’ Council. Rather than focusing on the refinement  
428 of her violent skills, Buffy now wishes to understand the origins of those  
429 abilities, signalling a transition away from a preoccupation with the act of  
430 violence and a move toward an understanding of the ideological bases of  
431 violence. At the end of Season 4, Buffy and her friends invoke the power  
432 of the “first Slayer” to enable their defeat of Maggie Walsh’s Frankenstein-  
433 creature, Adam. Once called, however, the first Slayer proves remarkably  
434 resistant to returning safely to the past.<sup>29</sup> She appears with appropriately  
435 enigmatic advice in Season 5 (when Buffy’s “gift” shifts from “love” to  
436 “death,” Season 5, episode 18) and again in Season 7 when Buffy seeks  
437 the original Watchers’ Council, the “Shadow Men” (Season 7, episode  
438 15). Significantly, the first Slayer is not present during this final encounter  
439 and Buffy takes her place in a re-enactment of the original ritual that cre-  
440 ated the Slayer line. The ritual gestures toward the “revolutionary act of  
441 lawmaking violence”: “the necessary lawlessness involved in the act that  
442 founds or makes law ... justified retrospectively through its law-preserving  
443 iteration—even as the latter, law-preserving violence ... inevitably bears  
444 the traces of the original lawless imposition of the law.”<sup>30</sup> The gender  
445 dynamics of the scene also allow a connection to Carole Pateman’s “Sexual  
446 Contract” that underwrites the social contract. Pateman argues that the  
447 sexual subjugation of women precedes and supports the foundation of  
448 patriarchal systems that require but erase all trace of that deliberate subju-  
449 gation.<sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup>

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.

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

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

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

- tively in her first appearance beyond insisting, "No ... friends ... just ... 609  
kill" ("Restless," Season 4, episode 22). During the meeting, she is spoken 610  
*for* by Tara, dressed in a sari, another layer of cultural appropriation. In 611  
"Intervention" (Season 5, episode 18), she appears again as a spirit guide 612  
when Buffy seeks to uncover more about the origins of her abilities. In this 613  
episode, the spirit guide speaks, while the first Slayer stalks the perimeter of 614  
the fire, silent again. 615
30. Deborah Elise White, "Burning the Library: Benjamin, Hugo, and the 616  
Critique of Violence," *European Romantic Review* 20.2 (April 2009), 617  
p. 248 [247–260]. 618
31. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998). 619
32. White, p. 248. 620

# Author Queries

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