Television series, as opposed to movies, present an immediate problem for analytic papers such as this one: how much of the series will be examined? This problem is compounded with Buffy the Vampire-Slayer which has not yet finished its initial run. The continuing story beyond the individual events of each episode will continue to develop after I have written this paper, which means that my conclusions must be tentative because we do not yet know how the series will finish its run. For this reason I am concerned with the dramatic logic as it is revealed in the first two seasons. Each episode follows a story through to conclusion, with the characters developing across the series as a whole; that is what makes it a series and not an anthology such as The Twilight Zone. Thus, within any individual episode we can say something about the meaning of the series as a whole. The premiere or pilot episode is a special case because it must establish what is happening, and can happen. It is for this reason that I am focusing my analysis mainly on the premiere. The beginning of this 2-hour episode establishes a sequence of connections between education and vampires, then between vampires and illicit (teenaged) love. These connections display the vampire-education-sexuality triad which necessitates the sexual denial and punishment that is the dramatic logic of the series as a whole.

There are two opening sequences to the Buffy the Vampire-Slayer pilot. The first is a trailer that follows a simple documentary format: still black and white images, a narrator telling about groups of deaths which only end when a particular woman arrives in the city. The implication is she stopped these killings. There is no mention of any cause or solution in these cases, but in the context of the show, we know it is a result of
vampire attacks and the woman was the “chosen one.” Following this is a second opening sequence. We see “Sunnydale High School” at night: the dark, closed exterior, an empty hall outside the Library, a vacant biology classroom. A boy and a girl break a window and enter the biology lab, by their age and the girl’s nervousness—she says “Are you sure this is a good idea?”—we know they are going to “play doctor.” They enter, and head into the hallway. Behind them is the entrance to the Library. They’re talking as they head down the hall. It’s obvious she doesn’t know him very well since she asks “Do you go to school here?”

Boy: I used to. On top of the gym it’s so cool. You can see the whole town.
Girl: I... I don’t want to go up there.
Boy: Aw... You can’t wait, huh?
Girl: You’re just going to get in trouble.
Boy: Yeah. You can count on it.
Girl: (gasp) What was that?

She becomes concerned, and claims she heard a noise—even though we did not—that there is someone in the dark. The boy reassures her there is no one, that “There’s nobody here.” We expect his reassurances to lead to some form of sexual encounter.

This is a familiar situation that we already know from our experience with “slasher” films. We expect there to be someone in the dark. The two young lovers off by themselves are always in danger. This is the scenario we expect; it is not the one we get. The boy calls out to anyone in the hall, and there’s no answer. He tells her “There’s nobody here.” There’s just the two of them. When she says “Ok,” we think they are going to have sex, or at least begin kissing. Instead she turns into a vampire and kills him. Roll credits.

*Buffy the Vampire-Slayer* has a double beginning for a reason. In each of these sequences we see the two thematic approaches to the vampires, each connected to education. This association of education and vampires is literally true in the documentary style opening; it educates us about the world of the show. In the second scene, it is continued with the two high school students. It is not accidental that this scene happens in school—literally outside the library; nor is it accidental that they enter through a biology lab filled with skeletons, tanks and various other scientific apparatuses. This is “sex-ed.” The vampire is intimately connected to both the educational experience and the sexual discoveries which form a corollary to teenagers’ experience of high school. The girl’s concern that there might be someone lurking in the dark, shows her fear of discovery; at the same time it also emphasizes the illicit aspects of their presence—that there could be someone in the dark prepared to stop them from doing “it.” Once she has been assured her fear is unfounded her transformation into a monster which consumes the boy can
happen. It is a primal scene. What the boy discovers is just how different she is. The difference is literal: she is a vampire. It is an explicit connection between vampirism and sexuality. That this attack happens outside the Library is also significant; within the school setting as a whole, the Library traditionally occupies a special position as a repository of greater knowledge than any of the teachers within the school. It is a site of extra-curricular research. This scares the students at Sunnydale, as Willow comments on how they feel about the Library to Buffy, “It has that effect [scare] most kids.” What they are afraid of is exactly the kind of discovery that the Boy makes in the opening. At the entrance to the electrical tunnels Angel tells Buffy to head towards the school to find the vampire’s lair where they took Jesse. The location of the vampires and the location of the school are equated. It is directly below the school. When the “Hell Mouth” opens at the end of the first season, it is no accident it is inside the Library, rather than somewhere else in Sunnydale. Education is posited as a discovery of horror and (sexual) difference.

However, even though *Buffy the Vampire-Slayer* is a horror program, this opening scene is very funny. The absurd reversal that ends it—the girl turning into a vampire—comes as a surprise. It plays with the ambiguity present in their dialogue. Either of them *could* be the monster. Yet we are expecting *something* to be waiting in the dark to get them. That this scene plays out as comedy rather than terror is important. It suggests that the discovery is not monstrous, but natural. This is important because it tells us about the order of this world—Sunnydale, CA—and that natural sexual libido produces the vampire, a monster. The impact of the horror inherent in this discovery is diffused through the comedy of the scene.

Until the revelation of the girl being the vampire at scene’s end, it is erotically charged. That she is the vampire connects vampirism with eroticism. This connection is significant. Because the boy is unknown to the girl, her being the vampire comes as a surprise to us (I think we can assume he was surprised). We expect either (1) the boy is the monster, or (2) that there is a monster waiting for them in the dark. These are the two traditional options for the teenage-horror genre. We discount the girl being the monster because she exhibits her fears and (reasonable) worries about the consequences of their actions. She doesn’t act the way we expect a vampire to act. What we believe is “playing hard to get” is actually a ploy to determine it is safe to kill him. When she becomes the monster, the sequence anchors vampirism in teenaged sex and sexual desire.

This sequence is echoed later in the pilot when Willow meets the vampire at the Bronze, the nightclub. Meanwhile, Buffy learns how to identify vampires from Giles. She sees Willow downstairs with the vampire and runs off to save her. This time the second opening sequence plays in reverse: Buffy is the one lurking in the dark trying to catch the two lovers. Instead of finding them, Cordelia surprises Buffy from behind and is almost killed with a stake through the heart. Even though this scene is happening in a crowded, noisy night club, it plays out in nearly total silence, as with the school. The connection between vampirism and high school life is made here: Cordelia takes the place of the
monster. Her social climbing and cliquish behavior is a less-harmful analogue to the vampire’s dangerous eroticism and sexuality.

In Sunnydale, there are three locations where the characters learn about their world: home, school and the nightclub. The nightclub is, in this order the least of the three. Thus its name, “The Bronze” implies that home should be “The Gold” and school “The Silver,” an arrangement that is appropriate to the dramatic logic of sexual denial and punishment. Expertise in one location does not necessarily mean expertise in another. The only parent we encounter in the show is Buffy’s mother, who alternately acts like a parent and like a big sister, asking her how well she did the “parent thing.” Her mother relies on her opinion about how to be a successful parent. Buffy’s father is absent. We know that Buffy lacks expertise in school not only from her reaction to Cordelia’s poor treatment of Willow, but because she transferred to a new school due to her performance at her last one.

In contrast to Buffy’s problems with school, Willow is generally successful; however, she is alone at the night club, and does not seem to be having fun when Buffy meets her at the bar. Her expertise in school work does not enter the social realm, a fact suggested by Cordelia’s treatment of Willow. When they meet at the Bronze, Buffy and Willow talk about dating boys; Willow does not date much because she is overly self-conscious around them—unable to say anything. Buffy suggests that she try a new philosophy: “Life is short.” This sounds like a reasonable suggestion, but it has disastrous consequences for Willow—she immediately meets a vampire and leaves with him. This is the only possible outcome of Buffy’s advice because she lacks expertise in both the school and the nightclub. Within the dramatic logic of this world, Willow must fall prey to a vampire. Buffy’s conversation with her mother shows her expertise is in the home; the scene where she dresses for the Bronze reveals that she is no longer sure of how she should dress for a nightclub -- whatever knowledge she once had is now gone. When she does leave, she isn’t dressed like any of her fellow students. Her difference is a result of knowing who and what the vampires are; she spends her time destroying them. That she is the only one, literally “the chosen one,” able to destroy the vampires places her in a special category normally reserved in the vampire genre for doctors or priests. She is not a part of the normal order of the world.

That the vampire is linked to both eroticism and sexuality, logically means that Buffy’s destruction of them is an assertion of control over sexuality. However, it cannot be accurately described as a repression of sexuality. After the night at the Bronze, she is visibly different her dress is both alluring, and restrained at the same time. Her sexuality clearly is not repressed, so it is a matter of controlling or restraining it.

Active sexuality in BUFFY is shown through the vampires. They can only be
defeated by holy water, a stake through the heart or warded off by a cross. The connection between this restraint and Christianity is obvious; restrained sexuality is connected to Christianity, unrestrained to the vampire. It is a binary opposition that informs the connections between vampirism, education, and sexuality. Education tends towards sexual discoveries which then result in the teenager falling prey to vampires. This is a formula which can only encourage sexual restraint and denial, since any active sexuality provokes the monstrous.

Before entering the Bronze, Buffy meets a mysterious figure, later revealed to be named “Angel,” who warns her of impending danger. Angel gives her a box that contains a silver cross. Even though we do not see her put it on, when she is being assaulted by Luc in the coffin, he burns his hand on it, allowing her escape. Later Xander fends his now-vampiric friend Jesse off with a cross in the electrical tunnels. Even though the cross is a traditional means for warding away the vampire, we should consider that in this context it is also an effective warding away of unwanted sexual advances. Buffy is saved from Luc in a context that suggests rape; Xander is saved from Jesse, following a dialogue suggesting homosexual assault. Jesse talks about how he was having no ability getting dates but now that he’s a vampire, he feels powerful and can have anything he wants. He wants Xander. When Xander drops the cross, he is saved by Buffy who lifts Jesse over her head and throws him into the hall. The male-female couple is restored. Together they push the door closed on the vampires and escape from the dead-end tunnel through a previously unknown grating in the ceiling.

Georges Bataille has discussed the connection between sexuality and the monstrous: “Christianity associated eroticism unambiguously with evil. What in paganism was only the momentary reversal of the course of events became the lot of the damned, the share that came under god’s eternal curse. Not only was eroticism the object of a definitive reprobation, because of the appeal to horror that precipitated its movements, but it became the inexpiable wrong, something like an essence of evil.”6 This association places the fact that there can only be one slayer—a special girl called “the chosen one” —in a new light. What was initially an odd fact about this world now makes sense. It replicates the virgin/whore opposition which allows the identification of “good” girls and “bad” boys. Buffy is a teenage Madonna figure, with the whore represented through the various female vampires, and the “bad” boys through the male vampires. These boys pose a danger to “good” girls. Willow finds herself in danger because she violates the natural order: she actively goes and starts talking to a boy -- that boy, as already discussed, turns out to be a vampire.

Any character acting on erotic impulses falls prey to vampires. Jesse, spurned by Cordelia, met the female vampire (Darla) from the opening at the Bronze. He is the only male character who is actively sexual in the premiere. As the series develops, Xander and Cordelia’s relationship is able to work initially because they both deny their attraction and relationship not only publicly, but when they are alone together.7 The relationship is
allowed to resume after their public discovery by Willow only because Xander professes (via the magic potion) his real love for her. In contrast to the Xander / Cordelia relationship, Willow’s relationship with the musician Oz is not shown. Sexual desire must be denied, acting on it places the characters in danger from vampires. This is clearly the case at the nightclub which Giles calls a “breeding ground for vampire activity.” Under such a logic, the only character Buffy could become involved with is one of equally good standing, an angel. That her boyfriend is literally named “Angel”—and is a “reformed” vampire who later reverts to his evil ways. His fall from grace is shown by his change to the name “Angelicus,” (the cursed angel), after they have sex. This situation is inevitable and logical within this framework: when an Buffy’s ex-boyfriend appears for an episode, the plot concerns his desire to become a vampire.

That education may be the root of all evils is shown through the associations of knowledge of vampires with the library, hence with Giles the librarian. The main location for Buffy’s training is the Library. It is no accident that his name sounds like “giles” -- since those are the vehicle of eroticism. Knowledge of these giles taught by Giles reveals the vampires among us. The association of Giles and education about vampires begins with his introduction. Buffy enters the library looking to get a history book for one of her classes. Instead, Giles says “I know what you’re looking for” and puts a large book marked Vampyr on the counter. It is clearly a very old textbook. She objects and runs away. Throughout the series Buffy attempts to escape her destiny as the “chosen one,” often to disastrous consequences. She cannot ever escape any prophesy about her future. Her desire is continually thwarted: she is the “chosen one” and so has no choice but to slay vampires. Once the truth about vampires has been discovered, there can be no going back. Xander learns about the vampires from Buffy and Giles by being in the library when Buffy comes to talk about the boy killed in the opening sequence. This is knowledge which changes Xander’s entire world view: “Yesterday my life's like, 'Oh, oh, pop quiz'. Today it's 'Rain of the Toads'.” He has become privy to secret knowledge of the way the world is, and he—as with Buffy—wishes he could go back to the way things were originally.

The surface drama appears to offer a feminist version of the strong woman and her subordinate males, of a woman who is mistress of her fate. Buffy is always running to the rescue and protecting the much weaker male and female characters within the world of Sunnydale. However, when we consider the structures of meaning that create the vampire-education-sexuality triad, and its relationship to the binary opposition between “good” sexuality and “bad” sexuality that constructs the different relationships between the teenage characters, what we have is a recreation of a non-feminist world view based on restrained or denied sexuality. This is not a world where girls can decide to go and talk to the boys without being punished for their actions.

Nor is it a world where Buffy has a choice about killing or not killing vampires. As the scenes in the Bronze show, active sexuality promotes vampirism. The vampires in
Buffy the Vampire-Slayer are aberrant creatures, examples of pure evil that she must destroy. Giles spends half of the first hour convincing Buffy of her obligation. She is not free, nor is she mistress of her fate. This entrapment is a source of comedy in the episode called What’s My Line: at the “career fair” Buffy discovers the only career she is suited for is the police, a role she already plays\(^\text{16}\). The discovery of sexual difference results in the appearance of a monster; sexuality is not a lure used by these vampires, it is their identity, their reason for being. Education is not a mixed blessing here, it is literally the entrance to hell\(^\text{17}\). Sexual discoveries are shown exclusively as a bad thing, defeated only by an appeal to Christianity and a traditional world order divided into “good” girls and “bad” boys. The only means to control sexuality is to destroy those who act on it, or through systematic denial. This is not a feminist universe.

(1998)

**Postscript to Educating Buffy: The Role of Education in Buffy the Vampire-Slayer**

In the fourteen years since writing *Educating Buffy: The Role of Education in Buffy the Vampire-Slayer* the show and its creator Joss Whedon have moved into positions of significance for critical and theoretical analysis. The show itself has moved from a program whose survival season-to-season was at times possibly open to question, into a show whose seven year run (and spin-off show *Angel*) were both successful enough to ensure a longer presence on TV thanks to syndication. Their commercial success and sharply drawn scenarios provide ample justifications for the analysis as they have received.

Some of these analytics have proceeded based on presuppositions about the nature of the program (i.e. the unphilosophical, and unepistemological claim of “Feminist Epistemology”) which then guide and justify an analytic claim that the program was Feminist, rather than looking at the actual structure of the program itself, and assessing it from the internal structures and their elaboration: in this regard, the conclusion to that first paper on the program must remain unchanged. *Buffy the Vampire-Slayer* (TV), however strong and capable its female protagonist might be, is not a Feminist or feminist program.

Even a cursory review of later events in the series simply reiterates this conclusion, both in small details within individual episodes and across the large narrative organization of the seasons themselves: during the five seasons leading up to the show’s
ending, what it demonstrated was that a second Slayer (Faith) actually within the narrative space of the program as an ongoing, long-term character required she become the anti-Buffy, allied with the forces of evil (The Mayor); the danger posed by male sexuality remained problematic: the only coming-of-age male protagonist (Xander) discovering sex literally was the “end of the world,” unlike Oz (the Wolfman, hence as with all wolfmen, already compromised, and whose wolf nature ultimately removed his character from the show).

Buffy’s time in college is cut short after only one season there. Riley, her boyfriend during this time, is both a highly sexualized character (they have so much sex it puts the world at risk) and a member of a military unit that performs the same role of “Slayer” that Buffy does, but with Patriarchal overtones (Riley’s fraternity is cover for their real activity). The potential complications posed by the more complex world of college, and the adult world beyond are truncated because of Dawn (her “little sister”), allowing Buffy, in another literalization of her initial authority source, to become “Mom,” replacing her real mother. This fifth season ends with Dawn being cut so her blood can open the “portal,” which Buffy closes at the cost of her own life: a reiteration of the classic position that female power must result in the elimination of the powerful (a death that also closes season one).

In season six, Buffy becomes the “mother” character providing both housing, food and safety not only for Dawn but also for Willow and her girlfriend. The transition from fighting external threats to fighting internal threats to the home becomes the main focus of this season’s narrative where Buffy must ultimately confront and end her lesbian friend’s murderous rampage against the men who shot Amber Benson, her girlfriend. Season seven sees her return to High School, and the repeat (this time as farce) of plots from the first three seasons. The final season revealed the inability of the show’s logic to accommodate the potential for more than a single (potentially) powerful, female protagonist (the Slayer). While the climactic finale for the show revolved around the creation of just such an outcome, its actual ramifications literally fall fully beyond the framework established: the show ends, rather than developing just what a sisterhood? confederation? alliance? of Slayers might mean. That Buffy’s primary ally in this fight is the principal of the high school further demonstrates the close linkages between her
actions, the central metaphor of education-as-sexually corrupting influence, and the role she plays within the narrative structure as the arbitrator of patriarchal authority. Throughout these transformations, the high school library remained the entrance to Hell, reiterating the triad operative from the beginning of the series.

Precisely because Buffy is, remained, and ultimately concluded the series as an actor for patriarchal authority—without any alternatives or other potentials being developed—means that not only is \textit{Buffy the Vampire-Slayer} not a Feminist text, it is quite the opposite, masquerading as one (aided and abetted by critics who should know better).

(2012)

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Appendix: Episode Listing, in order

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<td>Killed By Death</td>
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1 Double episodes are an obvious exception to this characterization.
2 The broadcast premiere presented the double-opening; this opening is absent from the commercial VHS tape.
3 Episode 12: Prophesy Girl
4 There can be only one slayer is a fact conveyed in the first opening sequence as part of its documentary appearance.
5 Consider the role of Dr. Van Helsing in \textit{Dracula}
Episodes 22-25
Episode 25: Surprises
Episode 28: Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered
Episodes 21-22: What’s My Line
Episode 7: Angel
Episode 26: Innocence
Episode 19: Lie to Me
Episode 12: Prophesy Girl
Episodes 21-22: What’s My Line
Episode 12: Prophesy Girl

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