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Cover Page Footnote

Tara Elliott is a Ph.D. candidate in English at York University. Her dissertation examines the potential of the genre of speculative fiction for feminist readings.

**“Buffy vs. Dracula”’s Use of Count Famous
(Not drawing “crazy conclusions about the unholy prince”)**

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Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s episode “Buffy vs. Dracula” is not an attempt to portray Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula* accurately, but instead to comment upon the ways that it is already being used in the series. The characterization in this episode defies a merely allegorical interpretation because it distributes representation in a more complicated fashion. There is no simple one-to-one ratio of literary figures and television characters. Because Buffy is characterized as both Mina and Lucy simultaneously in this episode and she eventually repels Dracula (without actually defeating him), it seems that the damsel in thrall, but who carries a pointy object, ultimately triumphs. However, a closer examination of Buffy’s strategy during her physical confrontation with Dracula indicates that she is greatly indebted to *Dracula*’s character Renfield; consequently, the episode maintains the television series’s purview of championing outsiders.

Joss Whedon’s television creation *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* began airing in January 1997 and ran for seven seasons, finishing in 2003. “Buffy vs. Dracula” is the first episode in season five, which aired 26 September 2000 in Canada and the United States. For more than three years, more than half of its total run, *Buffy* was autonomous from Stoker’s character Dracula. Although it borrows heavily from *Dracula*’s vampiric tradition, the television program works out its own mythology. As Stafford notes,

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a welcome addition to the growing legend [of vampirism]. The writers on the show follow certain conventions of vampire lore while diverging from others. Joss Whedon’s vampires don’t fly around and change into bats – they drive cars and have relationships like mortals. But Whedon has created a whole new mythology with these demons, and makes their “lives” and how they affect the lives of others the focal point of the show. Whedon’s vampires aren’t all faceless monsters, but people who were once victimized themselves. (12)

Dracula is portrayed differently from the two main types of vampires on the show. He is neither developed as a character and given his own plots, like Angel and Spike, nor merely killed in his single appearance as a generic symbol of evil, like an unnamed Vampire Girl #2 in the closing credits. Importantly, Dracula is in Sunnydale seeking out Buffy – as she pronounces, “Count Famous heard of me” – crediting the Slayer mythology as independent from and equal in status to alternate vampire lore. Overbey and Preston-Matto explain Buffy’s success as the Slayer:

Buffy *is* the speech act. She is the utterance that communicates meaning, drawing on the linguistic capabilities of her companions: invention, playfulness, contextualization, archival knowledge, compilation, and translation... Buffy is able to survive longer than the other Slayers because she is embedded in language and because she embodies language. It is a very particular language, with its own vernacular, but it behaves like all languages

in that it creates, it compiles, it translates, it follows well-defined rules, it draws on shared knowledge, and it must be wielded with precision in order to be effective.... (83-84)

Be it a stake or a literary allusion, Buffy prevails because of her ability to use whatever is at her disposal as weaponry. The language being deployed in Buffy's encounter with Dracula is not only her trademark slayage punning, but also the *Dracula* text and its myriad spin-offs. As such, the use in "Buffy vs. Dracula" of the character Dracula and the elements of the novel from which he is drawn is specific with regard to its purpose, if not accurate with regard to the original text.

Dracula appears as a force of popular culture rather than as a character per se. The fact that his existence is legendary is acknowledged throughout the episode. Giles explicitly states, "There's a great deal of myth about Dracula" and mentions the legend of Vlad the Impaler; Xander wonders aloud if Dracula knows Frankenstein; and the former vengeance demon Anya inserts herself into existing mythology by repeatedly referring to her fleeting acquaintance with the infamous vampire back in her demon days. Further, Rudolf Martin's portrayal of Dracula immediately links the episode with the 2000 television series *Dark Prince: The True Story of Dracula*, yet another popular culture rendition of vampire mythology. (Incidentally, Martin also depicted Anton Lang, Michelle Gellar's character Kendall's lover-cum-enemy on the soap opera *All My Children* in the mid-1990s, adding another cultural studies layer to the psychosexual dimensions of Buffy and Dracula's relationship.) After Buffy and Dracula's fight unto un-death, which results in Buffy finally staking the unholy prince, Buffy reaffirms the power of *Dracula*'s legendary status in popular culture: when the mist that anticipates Dracula's physical transformation reappears and Buffy must stake him again in bodily form, she states, "You think I don't watch your movies? You always come back." As the mist begins to swirl yet again, Buffy reiterates the point comically by chastising Dracula, saying, "I'm standing right here." The mist dissipates, showing that Dracula has been deterred by Buffy in Sunnydale, but that he will continue his haunting existence elsewhere. Dracula is an un-dead, monstrous legend, being constantly re-born through popular culture reconfigurations, and the character is one of many aspects of popular culture continuously used by *Buffy* as it insists on developing its own mythology throughout the series.

The characters of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in this episode are not neatly aligned with the characters from the novel *Dracula*. This is in accordance with patterns on the show more generally, in that "simple dualism is not allowed – virgin/whore, devil/angel, hero/villain" (Wilcox 16) and that "[i]n *Buffy*, the human condition *is* its radical hybridity" (Molloy 107). Giles is usually like Van Helsing, but here he is positioned as Harker. Xander normally provides comic relief, but here he is mad (which fails to summon attention). His positioning as Renfield is the most obvious cross-characterization in the episode. Buffy's mother, Joyce Summers, is a marginal character, yet here she is given the important role of resembling Mrs. Westenra in that she unwittingly aids Dracula's scheme by easing his entry into the residence. Mrs. Westenra innocently removes the garlic flowers from Lucy's bedroom and opens her window (Stoker 142) and Joyce unknowingly invites Dracula to come in for a casual coffee at the house that she shares with Buffy. Willow is generally like Mina and Buffy is like Lucy, but here Buffy is both. The scarf Buffy ties around her own neck after being bitten by Dracula approximates the shawl Mina fastens around Lucy after Lucy's sleepwalking escapade on the cliffs. Also, the mist wafting into Buffy's bedroom, embodying itself as Dracula, is clearly indicative of the scene in the novel during which Mina describes Dracula's entering her bedroom: Mina notes "the fog, which had evidently grown thicker and poured into the room" and that "some leaden lethargy seem[s] to chain [her] limbs and even [her]

will” (264). Mina’s fog, which is first like “smoke” and then “a sort of pillar of cloud” (264) is admittedly more excessive than Buffy’s experience with Dracula “waft[ing] in...with [his] music-video wind” and the wisps of mist creep in through Buffy’s window as opposed to Mina’s door frame. Because Buffy’s boyfriend Riley exhibits similarities to all three suitors – Quincey P. Morris, Dr. John Seward, and Arthur Holmwood – the “Buffy vs. Dracula” episode nicely demonstrates Leonard Wolf’s point about the novel, that there is “a sort of composite hero riding to the rescue of their composite maiden, Lucy Westenra-Mina Harker, who is in the clutches of the dark and foreign vampire who would keep her in thrall” (vi). Of course, Buffy manages to overcome the thrall on her own and the heroes are instead finding themselves in their own predicaments and rescuing each other.

Although Giles generally conforms to the character Van Helsing from the novel, Van Helsing does not find himself in the company of the three sisters as Giles does in “Buffy vs. Dracula.” Because the program is set in America, being from England, Giles is from somewhere else. Although he is a Westerner, he is foreign – as is often commented upon in the series with regard to his accent and word selections. In her article “Is Giles Simply Another Dr. Van Helsing? Continuity and Innovation in the Figure of the Watcher in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” Dupuy explains that “Giles and Van Helsing are both outcasts and their status as non-nationals underscores their liminality.” Further, both Giles and Van Helsing symbolize vast receptacles of specialized knowledge. The fact that Giles is being cast as Harker in this episode is not striking, however, if one notes, as Dupuy does, that “Giles is regularly helpless, and his role hovers between that of protector and protected.” In this way, Giles exhibits traits similar to Harker in “Buffy vs. Dracula” and in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* more generally.

Unlike Harker, and resembling his typical Van Helsing persona, Giles recognizes the three sisters. Like Harker, Giles succumbs to their predatory advances. Further, and more tellingly, Giles feminizes himself through his dialogue. At the conclusion of his meeting with the three sisters, Harker’s diary entry describes that he sinks “down unconscious” (Stoker 48). Upon falling into what Riley later calls the “chick pit,” Giles remarks to himself, “Oh, good show, Giles ... at least you didn’t get knocked out for a change.” This indicates Giles’s propensity to be knocked out. Fainting, weakness, and the unconscious are all associated with femininity and both Harker and Giles are connected with them.

Although Giles as Harker is feminized, he remains securely in the heteronormative framework of the episode. Importantly, the relationship between Dracula and Harker is not reflected in “Buffy vs. Dracula.” It becomes impossible, in fact, because Giles and Dracula never actually meet. Moreover, Buffy serves as a heterosexual symbol for both Riley, Giles’s saviour but Buffy’s chosen beau, and Dracula, who exchanges blood with her, mooring these male figures safely inside the realm of heteronormativity. Consequently, even as an unattached, feminized male, Giles cannot be interpreted homoerotically as Harker can. Frolicking with the three sisters aside (he too was obviously under “thrall”), Giles tends to be desexualized. His role as Buffy’s father figure (and periodically for the rest of the Scooby Gang, Buffy’s friends and helpers, as well) approximates the traditional cult of motherhood in the sense that in order to be a respectable, responsible guardian or parent figure, he must be chaste and self-sacrificial. Like Van Helsing, who is a “faithful husband to [his] now-no-wife” as she is “dead” to him with “no wits, all gone” (Stoker 182), Giles is not a suitor, but a mentor.

Riley’s character performs triple duty, acting as the suitors Quincey P. Morris, Dr. John Seward, and Arthur Holmwood. Understandably, Riley demonstrates only traces of each of these characters. For example, when Riley visits the vampire Spike regarding information about Dracula, Spike refers to Riley as a “cowboy,” a term that directly corresponds with the Texan’s proposal to Lucy, during which he states, “Won’t you just hitch up alongside of me

and let us go down the long road together, driving in double harness?" (Stoker 67). Although it is a fleeting reference, one should take Wilcox's advice seriously, "never [to] overlook the significance of naming and language in *Buffy*" (9). Further, like Seward, Riley punches Dracula's emissary when provoked by him. Renfield attacks Seward in his study with a dinner-knife and Xander threatens Riley, stating, "Nobody harms my master.... You want him? You come through me." Each of the emissaries ends up "sprawling on his back on the floor" (Stoker 149). And, finally, like Arthur Holmwood, Riley is the chosen beau. Buffy, as Lucy, swears that she's his "girl, and [she's] gonna' stay that way."

Although Willow could generally be viewed as akin to Mina because of their shared respected intelligence, Buffy co-opts the roles of both Lucy and Mina in this episode. As such, Willow is relegated to the margins of the narrative and it is not striking that Dracula shows absolutely no interest in her. Apart from greeting Buffy, Willow has no dialogue in the only scene that she shares with Dracula and the sole line of Dracula's that could be cursorily understood to be directed towards her (its main recipient is, of course, Xander, who has been chatting incessantly) is "I have no interest in you. Leave us." This is similar to the novel, however, insofar as Dracula shows no interest in Mina while Lucy is either alive or un-dead.

As the episode lacks the relationship between Dracula and Harker, Dracula's most meaningful relationship in the episode is arguably with Xander, who is clearly a representation of Renfield. Although Xander as Renfield consistently appears to be under the "thrall" of "the dark master," Dracula seems to be either utterly indifferent to him (as when he expresses his disinterest in Buffy's friends while in the cemetery) or somewhat irritated by him (as when he calls Xander "strange and off-putting"). Moreover, Dracula seems to be continually ordering Xander to remove himself from Dracula's presence; this happens in the graveyard, on the street after Xander has become Dracula's emissary, and in the castle once Xander has delivered Buffy to him, in fact, each time Xander is in Dracula's physical presence. Like Renfield, Xander is attractive to Dracula only insofar as he is useful as a means of approaching the currently desired victim, Mina and Buffy respectively.

Before Xander becomes Dracula's emissary, before he becomes a surrogate Renfield, that is, Xander's character has resonances of a mad person. The most compelling evidence for this is the fact that, although the other characters look at him somewhat strangely or with confusion following a couple of his remarks about Dracula, none of them surmises what has happened. In fact, Giles readily agrees to allow Buffy to stay with Xander in order to keep her out of Dracula's reach and the others do not display any concern with this scheme. In this episode, Xander acts in ways correlative with foolishness bordering on madness before his transformation into Dracula's minion. For example, Xander mocks Dracula by referring to the Count on Sesame Street, scoffs at Dracula in a monologue because he's a "darks-only man," and challenges Dracula to "fisticuffs." Those familiar with the programme recognize comments and actions such as these to be consistent with Xander's character. And because Renfield is required here, as Spike notes that Dracula insists on having his "bug-eaters," Xander seems to be the logical choice for Dracula's underling.

The most important cross-signification from *Dracula* to "Buffy vs. Dracula," however, is arguably the correlation between Renfield and Buffy, or rather, Buffy's use of Renfield's strategizing. In the novel, Renfield attempts to avert Dracula's further victimization of Mina by using physical strength at the moment when Dracula transforms from mist to bodily appearance, as Renfield relates to Dr. Seward and the others shortly before dying:

So when he came to-night I was ready for him. I saw the mist stealing in, and I grabbed it tight. I had heard that madmen have unnatural strength; and as I knew I was a madman – at times anyhow – I resolved to use my power. Ay,

and he felt it too, for he had come out of the mist to struggle with me. (Stoker 286)

Buffy too has unnatural strength, but she learns upon her first encounter with Dracula in the cemetery that this is not enough to conquer him. As she lunges at him with a stake poised in her hand, intending to direct it through his heart, he easily avoids her attack by changing into ethereal form. Dracula's seemingly unassailable control of the situation, in that he effortlessly thwarts Buffy's advances in this way twice, results in Buffy's portrayal as clumsily comedic in her methods of combat, a fact emphasized when she then accuses Dracula of "cheating."

In the final battle between Buffy and Dracula in his newly erected castle in Sunnydale, Buffy intuitively that she must use cunning in addition to her strength in order to overcome Dracula. Here, Buffy seems to act upon Van Helsing's surmise that one "may gain more knowledge out of the folly of this madman [Renfield] than ... from the teaching of the most wise" (Stoker 261). Although Dracula condescends to fight physically with Buffy for a while, supplying obligatory action scenes depicting both of their bodies and even a chair being assailed, once Buffy notices and seizes the torch on the wall, the tone of the encounter changes. Dracula becomes more cautious and Buffy becomes more aware. Instead of instantly attacking him, Buffy watches him transform and realizes that she can gauge his movements by attending to the telltale mist trailing in the air. Her moment of revelation prompts her to drop the torch, grab the stake, and run towards the mist. The trick to overcoming Dracula is attacking him at the moment of his transformation into a bodily being, as Renfield discerns. Previously, Buffy attacked his body as it became mist; now she is again poised with her stake aimed at Dracula's heart at the moment his ethereal form becomes physical and consequently susceptible to being wounded (inasmuch as Dracula is able to be wounded at all, that is).

Despite the facts that Buffy is poised to be Mina or Lucy because of her role as an attractive, seemingly vulnerable woman in the programme and that she is specifically characterized as both of them through various means in this episode, likening Buffy to Renfield does not deviate from the programme's agenda. Wilcox and Lavery explain *Buffy's* dual impetus:

Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, has often said that the original kernel of an idea for *Buffy* came with the reversal of an image from traditional horror: a fragile-looking young woman walks into a dark place, is attacked – and then turns and destroys her attacker. Thus the character of Buffy was born to fight the forces of darkness – vampires, demons, monsters of all varieties.... But in that same kernel ... Whedon implies other forces to be fought: social forces that restrict and constrain us... (xvii)

Indeed, the fact that the exiled Renfield reveals the means to Buffy's resistance of Dracula is in accordance with one of the main themes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* – a show widely acknowledged to be about social outcasts. Like Willow, Xander, Buffy, and the rest of the Scooby Gang, Renfield is an outsider. His enclosure in the asylum indicates his status of *not belonging* in everyday society. Likewise, the Scoobies were excluded in high school: Willow, on the basis of her fondness for books; Xander, for his social ineptness; and Buffy, because she toted weapons which she occasionally dropped in the hallway, periodically assailed unknowing students in order to save them from potential danger, and was known to have destroyed the gymnasium in her previous high school. Because Buffy and her friends are social misfits like Renfield, it is logical that the episode uses Renfield's combination of strength and cunning to vanquish Dracula from Sunnydale.

The episode is in part a tribute to both the character Dracula and his namesake novel, acknowledging the genealogy of vampirism that spawned *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It is using Dracula to further its own purposes, not trying to be faithful to the text, so it freely incorporates some aspects of the text, but it cross-signifies, distributing the representations. The program does not map onto the novel in any straightforward way. Instead, the episode recognizes that Dracula exists and his paraphernalia also exists – he is an un-dead being and he is also a legend, not just lore, but mass-produced and marketed. As such, Buffy cannot actually kill Dracula: that would work against the show as it is a part of Dracula's lineage. She can only defeat him for the time being by fending him off and keeping herself and others safe from him. The ending is a stalemate. Buffy is as strong, physically and mentally, as Dracula, but not stronger. And, unlike Renfield, the Slayer has pointy objects readily at her disposal.

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