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When, Where, and How Much is *Buffy* a Soap Opera?

Translated from the Italian and with the editorial assistance of Rhonda Wilcox.

> **Spike:** *Passions* is on! Timmy's down the bloody well, and if you make me miss it I'll —
>
> **Giles:** Do what? Lick me to death? (Something Blue, 4009)
>
> **Joyce:** I-I love what you've, um... neglected to do with the place.
> **Spike:** Just don't break anything. And don't make a lotta noise. *Passions* is coming on.
> **Joyce:** *Passions*? Oh, do you think Timmy's really dead?
> **Spike:** Oh, no, no. She can just sew him back together. He's a doll, for God's sake.
> **Joyce:** Ah, what about the wedding? I mean, there's no way they're gonna go through with that. (Checkpoint, 5012)
>
> **Tabitha** (talking to Timmy): When will you get it through your fat head? Charity is the enemy. Buffy the Vampire Slayer is the enemy. The busybodies that call themselves the Others are the enemy! One of these days Buffy and the others will be wiped off the face of the earth, but until that time, we don't want to make our friend in the basement mad, do we? (Passions)
>
> **Stephen / Caleb**: And your job is?
> **Rafe**: Vampire slayer. (Port Charles – Naked Eyes)

BUFFY AS A SOAP

(1) Very often, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is referred to as a soap opera. There are many occasions when it has been defined as such, or at least linked to the genre of daytime dramas. This perception is shared by at least three types of viewers. First, it is accepted by members of the general public, who have an almost instinctive awareness of this quality. They don't treat the program as such on the base of an elaborated reasoning process, after pondering over its structural elements, but simply they are drawn to "use" the series in the same way they use soaps. Much public response and fan fiction reflect a definite approach that for a long time has been associated with soaps. It is curious to note how in a site dedicated to this television genre, "Daytime and Primetime Central" [1], in the section dedicated to prime-time programming, in its menu there are only 3 programs: one of them is openly a soap, *Titans*; the two other shows are *Buffy* and *Angel*. And their presence is even more surprising and significant considering the absence of other prime time series that surely have more right to be enclosed in the soap opera category, such as *Melrose Place*, *Dawson's Creek, Felicity*, *Thirtysomething,* or *Six Feet Under*.

(2) Second, critics and scholars are ready to label the series as a soap opera. Boyd Tonkin talks of a "sophisticated blend of teen soap and Gothic fantasia" for example. [2] Karen Sayer says that "Buffy's visual feel and mode of address are drawn from a mix of action, horror and soap, better suited to themes of teen angst." [3]. And Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery explicitly concur with Joyce Millman in this argument too. [4]. Some other times, the labelling is just a implicit.

(3) Third and last, and definitely not least, Joss Whedon himself, owner and creator of *Buffy*, allows this idea to emerge. He is a master of mixing genres depending

on circumstances, and the taste of a peculiar genre rises above the others at his will. Describing how the then not-yet-aired *Angel* was supposed to be, compared to *Buffy*, he said that it was going to be "less of a soap opera," [5] therefore saying *a contrario* that *Buffy* was, at least a little, a soap opera. And explicitly he confirms it more than once in various contexts [6].

(4) The variety of origins of the three viewer types who recognize this characteristic is meaningful, because it proves that it is not an isolated perception. The abstract idea that the author has of it or his poetics have not influenced the perception of the final result. And, vice versa, it is not spoiled by the audience appropriation that makes it a personal experience and makes meta-textual inferences beyond the author's intention. It's accessible to everyone, and even where it was not explicitly indicated it is decoded according to the characteristics of a genre.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY: DISREGARDING THE STIGMA

(5) Traditionally the word "soap opera" does not necessarily have a positive, flattering value. It is most often used with a denigrating, disparaging intent. [7] This stigma is shared by the fantasy/science-fiction label that defines *Buffy* as a whole, and by the program itself. Almost inductively it is assumed that belonging to a specific genre could be the reason of bad quality, without taking into any consideration the actual product, as if it were irrelevant. Buffy, as a show that deals with supernatural themes all the time, has to battle constantly this bias that impedes recognition of its quality, at least in an official forum, such as the Emmy Awards. [8] It therefore shares this stigma with the soap genre. Both struggle for approbation.

(6) This negative bias loses strength once we move inside the program. *Buffy*, in its diegetic perspective, succeeds in becoming a true and real political statement on this regard and manages to acknowledge being a soap, mockingly winking to those who snub a book judging solely by its title. It is, in this way, a meta-comment on the genre at the same time. In fact a soap, *Passions*, is used as a means to make the villainous Spike more lovable, mellowed precisely by the fact that he gets hooked on the stories of the characters of this show. And he shares his watching with Joyce (Checkpoint, 5012). The process is very simple. Spike watches what Buffy's mom watches, what "a mom" watches, "your mom". Therefore he can't be that bad. At the same time a flattering image of the soap is given. It becomes an instrument that creates a link between genres on the base of a shared visual experience.

(7) One has to recognize Joss Whedon's intellectual honesty: he is not scared by definitions. He demonstrates awareness in what he is doing even as he recognizes the genres that he absorbs and then moulds to his own needs. And a genre is not good or bad as such, but becomes one or the other on the basis of its use. A genre is as good as you make it to be in the concreteness of the single experience. It should be devoid of preconceptions that could make it ontologically of positive or negative value solely resulting from the label. Once again Whedon exhibits consciousness and confidence in doing what he wants about *Buffy*, the *scientia* in using particular styles and a specific rhetoric, as well as other desired instruments. He simply uses this genre. And with "this genre" we mean daytime American soap operas. Not Italian nor German nor Hispanic ones, not even those of other Anglophone countries, because, while all these share many aspects, each has specific characteristics that make it different from the other.

(8) It is also useful to remember that *Buffy*'s creator is himself a great fan of soap operas. "Did someone mention Finola Hughes? Oh, the love! Anna Devane, deep college experience. *Gen* with my buds, senior year it was religion." [9] *Gen* is naturally *General Hospital* which airs on ABC, and Anna Devane was the character played by Finola Hughes (at the time of my writing she is in *All my children*), a police woman who was a courageous fighter. [10] Whedon's direct knowledge as a viewer is significant because it means that, in addition to his technical competence, he understands what gives pleasure in the watching of this genre, what makes the viewer go back day after day, what makes it an experience: a word that he uses specifically to describe what he means *Buffy* to be, an "emotional experience". [11] He has been both creator and viewer and his maturity as an author allows him to apply the rules he learned making them his, modifying them and bending them to his narrative demands, borrowing only the elements he needs.

(9) And Whedon is not the only one on the *Buffy* team who had contacts with this branch of entertainment. David Fury, one of the writers, was once an actor in soap operas [12], and is thus in a position to recognize those elements that characterize a soap and to translate them to and put them in a different context.

(10) Furthermore, we mustn't forget that Buffy is played by Sarah Michelle Gellar, who not only has always been very open in her appreciation for the soap opera genre, but who acted in one of them, *All My Children*. Her participation, and the gossip that surrounded her, is well-known. [13] Gellar won an Emmy for the role of Kendall, Erica Kane's daughter in *All My Children*. Such recognition cannot be anything but a proof of her ability to act in a context that she masters well. Nothing more normal, then, that she can reproduce its conventions in a sure and nuanced . Michelle Trachtenberg (Dawn) also walked her first acting steps on the set of *All My Children*; Emma Caulfield (Anya) is openly a fan of daytime dramas; and Anthony Stewart Head (Giles) looks to be pretty familiar with them too. [14]

THE FORMAT

(11) *Buffy* is decoded as a soap opera almost at first viewing. But if Buffy is a soap, the question that now we need to ask ourselves is: when and where and how much is Buffy a soap opera? Which are the elements of content and style that make it a soap opera? Asking ourselves this is not irrelevant. The aesthetic, the rhetoric of the camera that is behind the genre, the relationship between the syntagmatic path and the paradigmatic one, the structural and textual conventions, the dialogic development, the codes that shape it, the genre poetics, the terminology and the narrative syntax are readable in a different, unique perspective. It is useful to investigate this to better understand the *Buffy* phenomenon as a whole; it is even more so if we think of this as an opportunity to better dig into its meanings, to discover new hermeneutic perspectives, to trace its dialogue with other groups of series each with their own construction. [15]

(12) Seli Groves can help us try to answer these questions because she sets a base from which we can move toward further specifications. She says that the basic element to take into consideration is the way a story is built and told. "If it uses a device called 'arc' which carries a storyline over several episodes, it can be considered a soap or soap-like" [16]. *Buffy* fits this definition. Episodes are certainly auto-conclusive, in parts

of the story, but the dialogic flux is in other aspects uninterrupted, from episode to episode. One falls back on the other and yet another and so on. Every season is in fact explicitly constructed as real narrative arc: seen in the perspective of the enemy to defeat or the danger to face we have the Mayor arc (3rd season), the Initiative arc (4th season), Glory arc (5th season), etc.

(13) This kind of construction is not foreign to American daytime soaps. The most obvious case is *Port Charles*. This show, looking at *telenovelas* (Hispanic soap operas), has recently experimented with its format and enucleated in an explicit manner its own narrative arcs, generally of 13 weeks' duration. The arcs received different sub-titles: "Port Charles-Fate", "PC- Message in a bottle", "PC- Tainted Love", and, then, Tempted, Miracles Happens, Secrets . . . [17] Each of these, though using the same characters and keeping the continuity, has its own specific identity and a specific characteristic: "Time in a bottle" talks about time travel; "Secrets" about angels; "Tainted Love" "Tempted", "Naked Eyes" and "Surrender", all with a background of vampire stories, have each their own undertone that distinguishes them. For instance, "Tempted" focused its spotlights on the power of slander and insinuation to divide people; "Naked Eyes" was built heavily on the theme of doubles.

(14) Arc and soap, though, are not synonymous, and today a lot of television programs make use of continuing story. What becomes relevant is not so much the question of whetherthis element is used or not, but how it is used. This way we can go deeper and find a more radical indication to understand if and when we find ourselves facing a soap opera. Horace Newcomb comes to our help specifying how ""Soaps focus more on character problems, while arc is more plot […]. Whether or not a show is a soap becomes a question of how much interest there is in the main character. It may be an audience definition. If they're interested in plot, it's arc. If they're interested in character, it's soap – although that is changing as soaps become more involved with plot"" [18]. This allows us another "jump", recognizing in *Buffy* the main value of character development and of the psychology of the characters. Several times it has been variously underlined how the monsters that Buffy and the Scoobies (the group of friends around her that participate in and help her in her battles) have to face are nothing else but the mirror of the human problems that they are forced to come to terms with--metaphors that allow us to trace emotional paths, well visible in backlighting. Hermeneutic efforts bring the discovery of a rich sub-text and meta-text built by "character problems": dating, low self-esteem and social invisibility, growing old, end of childhood, sexual identity, relationship with one's parents…. And with this the major interest is put "in character", showing us to be facing a soap opera.

(15) One could argue that, for exactly this reason, what counts in the end, the discriminating factor, is fights. Being the definition of action, they are an expression of plot. The analysis of these confirms our thesis. Let's take a step back. Italian television author Paolo Taggi in a de-construction of soap operas writes that "(…) they are built on a series of invisible omissions: "our heroes don't eat, don't go for walks, don't wash themselves, don't sleep. They are always on the point of… They only do symbolic gestures…only words matter". [19] It is immediately evident how such a phrase, as a whole, cannot be in any way referred to *Buffy*. Our heroes eat, take walks, wash themselves (thanks!), sleep. They are not on the point of. They are action. Their gestures are not prelude and ostensible reason for words; they envelope them. Yet in a micro-analysis, pointing a magnifying glass on Buffy as a slayer, on Buffy as the heroine who fights, we discover that the expression "they only do symbolic gestures" is more true

than one thinks. In fact, analyzing the way she fights, Dave West tells us "Buffy's style is a formless mish-mash of wildly thrown punches and kicks." And he notes that "the movements of the fight are slotted in around any dialogue that need to be performed by the actors" [20]. This means that they indeed "only do symbolic gestures", while the real fulcrum is words. What counts, what carries the narration is not action. Action is instrumental to dialogue, not the other way around. From the point of view of the dialogic texture, action is a waiting moment, a moment "on the point of" bringing us to the real apex, the emotional one. What I've just said is reinforced by West's concluding consideration. He declares that fighting is not the peak of the narration, but the emotional aspect is: "the narrative heart of the show is to be found in matters of love, not war" [20]. We are therefore in the most pure soap opera realm. And this is confirmed by John Medlen, *Buffy*'s stunt co-ordinator, too, who describes, in the changes of the required combat style, a change in Buffy's feelings. The type of movements are conditioned by the stage of life she's in [21].

CONTENT COMPATIBILITY

(16) At this point we could ask ourselves: what kind of stories does *Buffy* tell, and what does she have to look out for? From a content point of view, are soaps compatible with what is told on *Buffy*? We could start observing how the vocation to the supernatural, *Buffy*'s *specificum*, is strong in daytime. In its annual report on what's in and what's out in soaps, already, in 1995, "*Soap Opera Digest*" [22] considered the supernatural definitely in, and since then the trend has become stronger. At this very moment it is very present, so much so that we could almost say two schools of thought compete in the field. There are the classics – represented by shows like *The Young and the Restless* – against the more campy ones – like *Passions* – in a fight to the last rating in the Nielsen battle. [23]

(17) In the past, this kind of narrative has had questionable fortunes among the critics, but cases are abundant. *Loving*, at the beginning of the 1980s, tried this road, without success. Scared to death by a cross and an exorcism, devil-like Jonathan was eliminated, transforming at his death into a snake--and every intention to follow that supernatural road crawled away with him. In *General Hospital* the storylines of the "Ice princess" (probably the most successful story of its entire run), of "Casey the alien" (one of the most derided) and of "Stavros, the human popsicle" (the deep bottomless pit in which fell the then-head-writer, Megan McTavish) are even, if possible, too well-known to soap fans. *Another World* immediately cut the oxygen to this temptation after it played with the idea of turning the character of Tomas Rivera into a vampire [24]; *Guiding Light* has seen sour times when it adventured in ghosts and clones (most notably with Reva), and the "travel to the center of the Earth" of *One life to live*, which went to the mythical city of Eterna, is still considered one of Paul Rauch's false moves [25] in his time there as executive producer. And for this soap too, it's not the only venture in the field of gothic and macabre: mind control devices, mad scientists, trips to Heaven have all been part of the soap's canvas. Bad storytelling and having betrayed the identity of the program have mostly been the causes in the instances where this kind of narrative didn't succeed.

(18) This doesn't mean that the soap genre didn't know how to play and insert these elements, in a way that was well-done and very much appreciated-- even in a Buffy-like manner, we could say. *Days of Our lives,* which started a true revolution in this sense, hit it big time with demonic possessed Marlena and its "buried alive" story arc in the 1990s. James Reilly, head writer of the time, brought his distinctive brand of storytelling with him in the soap he went on to create, *Passions*. And in *Passions,* the soap that *Buffy* knows and mentions, there are talking dolls – the Timmy of Spike and Joyce's conversations [26]; Cracker Connie, a demonic living doll;zombies; floating heads; demons; and much more. The aforementioned *Port Charles* has incorporated this kind of story without renouncing its status as being in every aspect a soap. And it's explicit in citing *Buffy* as a source. ABC daytime president Brian Frons programmatically admits a plan: to keep *Port Charles* in a specific tone: "(…) the show is driving forward

that sort of "BUFFY" meets Frankenstein' manner" [27]. It's not by chance that the fulcrum of several arcs has been formidable vampire Caleb. And it even introduced a vampire slayer, Rafe. "Rafe *would* be a good match for Buffy – but he belongs to PC!" has been an actual comment on *Soap Opera Digest* [28]. And besides a trained slayer, one of the historic heroines of the show, Lucy, discovered that she, too, is a slayer. According to the mythology of the soap, this is possible because she comes from a family of slayers. All this underlines how what ontologically defines a soap doesn't get obliterated at contact with other elements, like the supernatural ones, but lives with them.

BUFFY* AND *DARK SHADOWS

(19) Contamination is a two-way street. At times there are crypto-models. Other times the dialogue between programs is more explicit, especially when this happens with prestigious models, like *Buffy*. We wouldn't be surprised if we learned that the *Port Charles* micro-story of vampire and slayer meeting in the dream of the latter's girlfriend was suggested by "Restless" (4022), or if we discovered it was "Life Serial" (6005) that triggered the *General Hospital* 2002 Thanksgiving, wherein the heroine finds herself repetitively in the same situation that she tries to modify. Similarlly, it doesn't surprise us how much *Buffy* goes deep into the roots of the soap opera history incarnated by *Dark Shadows*.

(20) With influences that can be traced back to the most various sources, from the Bible to ancient mythology, from Mary Shelley to the Brontë sisters, from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry James, *Dark shadows* was a soap that aired between June 1966 and April 1971 on ABC. In its brief run, it left an indelible print in the public imagination [29]. Vampires, witches, zombies, leviathans, ancient beings that aim at the conquest of the world, even a Phoenix, who every century leads her own children to ghastly deaths, are part of this program's mythology. *Buffy* draws from this *mare magnum* and - it's not clear how consciously - it takes the same route in some of its ground choices. Though the match is, naturally, not perfect, it's fascinating just the same to notice some correspondences.

(21) First and foremost, the vampire Angel. The authors always explicitly said they wanted to portray him as an addict, in a perennial fight with himself. It's an addiction to killing more than to blood, as I understand it, in the episodes in general. The fight with himself is not just caused by the personal demon of having to cope with an addiction, but it's more radical and profound. Cursed with a soul, Angel sees with a newly awakened conscience how much his actions made people suffer. He has the constant awareness of what he is and, even more, of what he isn't, in the continuous comparison with those who are around him. J. Gordon Melton [30], author of the encyclopaedia *The Vampire Book,* is immediately ready to identify as a possible reference of Angel's humanity, the icon vampire of *Dark Shadows*, Barnabas. Barnabas was layered by the writers with conflicting emotions that made him very intense. Macerated by guilt and morally ambivalent, Barnabas was a vampire who constantly craved to become human, mortal. Enriched and coloured by a wry hatred for himself, he soon became the center of the show, and so did the dilemma that tortured him. The main ingredient that made the soap popular was his quest toward humanity, his constant desire for a "cure". [31] This same perennial affliction characterizes Angel, who is in a way Barnabas' son, condemned by the presence of a soul in a vampire body to fight within himself the eternal fight of good and evil, to hate the pleasure and the rush he gets from torturing others, to torment himself for the inflicted pain ("Amends", 3010) and to try to remedy the situation through constant atonement (fulcrum of the *Angel* series itself). It's a witch in

Dark Shadows who, jealous of the love between Barnabas and Josette, curses him into becoming a vampire. We can find here the same themes of *Buffy*: Angel cursed to have a soul, despite being a vampire, so that he can suffer for the atrocities he has committed. In *Dark Shadows* Barnabas, as noted, was in constant search for a cure to his condition. And although the experiment of Dr. Julia Hoffman (who offered to help him) backfired, for some time Dr. Lang actually succeeded in curing him. But it was just temporary. The "Dream Curse" (Episodes 461-536) is one spell Angelique put in place to turn Barnabas back into a vampire, during a time when he was cured. (Dreams are an integral part of Buffy's texture.) The same way, in *Buffy*, Angel oscillates between times in which he appears "cured" (he has a soul and he behaves like a human) and times in which he is not (when he loses his soul and his monster side takes over).

(22) Other episodes and aspects of the show have similarities of recurring themes that directly point to the old soap. Barnabas and Julia, the blood specialist who had attempted to cure him, first helped Dr. Lang, then, after his death, continued the experiment to give life to a brand new man created from human body parts. *Dark Shadows*' Adam came to life (Episode 490). In "The I in Team" (4013) *Buffy*'s very own Adam comes to life, created by Dr. Maggie Walsh from demon, human, and electronic parts. In *Dark Shadows* Adam asked for a mate, and Eve was created (Episode 595), but later on Adam killed her (Episode 626). This pattern reminds us of "Some Assembly Required" (2002) in which Frankenstein-like Daryl asks for a life companion and, again, "The I in Team" (4013) in which Adam kills Dr Walsh, pronouncing the famous "Mommy" line (which also offers an interesting transverse reading if linked to "The Body" [5016]). *Buffy* has in Oz its werewolf. *Dark Shadows* had Quentin, who was a werewolf because of a curse gypsy Magda placed on him for having killed her sister Jenny. Buffy's curse from gypsies is on Angel, as noted earlier One might note that Jenny was the name of the killed sister in *Dark Shadows*, while Jenny Calendar is discovered to be the descendant of a gypsy clan ("Surprise", 2013). Just a coincidence, for sure, but nonetheless fun to notice.

(23) The character of Vicki transported into 1795 was tried and condemned as a witch. A similar experience befalls to Willow Buffy and Amy in "Gingerbread" (3011). A monster called Der Kinderstod fed upon children who were "Killed by Death" (2018). Quentin in *Dark Shadows* lost his love, Amanda, in a struggle with Mr Best – Death. The ghosts of Quentin Collins and Beth Chevez appeared and possessed David and Amy. Buffy and Angel themselves get possessed by two ghosts ("I only have eyes for you", 2019). But to this we'll return later. [33]

(24) A few more themes can be collected. "The Wish" (3009) first, and "Doppelgängland" (3016) later, go all the way with an alternative universe, showing all the Scooby Gang in parallel characters in a Sunnydale without Buffy. Parallel times (1795-1796; 1840; 1897; 1995) and dimensions were a permanent feature in Collinsport, Maine, the town where *Dark Shadows* took place. There was a room in Collinwood's east wing, the mansion that was big part of the action, that was the entrance to a parallel time, where people had made different choices and lived different lives (Episodes 980-1060 for instance). At one point, Dr. Julia Hoffman killed her alter ego in a parallel dimension. Willow faces this possibility in the aforementioned "Doppelgängland". *Dark Shadows* actors said they felt like a repertory company, [32] a thing that could be said for the cast of Buffy too, in some cases.

(25) *Mutatis mutandis*, the relationship between *Dark Shadows* and its public forerun *Buffy*'s. Trading cards and puzzles, board games and records, postcards and books, both novels and comic books, collectibles and even official fan conventions were all part of the fan experience. So it is today for *Buffy* and its fans. And if now this is a relatively common possibility, then it was the first time a daytime program came to acknowledge its following in this form. [34]

WRITING THE EMOTIONAL TRUTH: "INTO THE WOODS"

(26) To go to the heart of the soap opera as a genre, we have to exactly do that: go to the heart, to the emotions. "We have to write the truth, the emotional truth" states Bridget Dobson, *Santa Barbara*'s co-creator and writer for other soaps too [35]. It's also what *Buffy*'s writers aim at. "Emotional realism is what Joss Whedon is interested in" say Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery in the introduction to "Fighting the Forces" [36]. Both Tracy Forbes and Jane Espenson are adamant in declaring that this is what they do when constructing the single episodes: Start with the emotions. Jane Espenson states Joss Whedon first sets the foundation for the emotional arc the characters go through, and only later maps out the act breaks [37]. He plans ahead not so much events, as "emotional places for the characters to be". Pointing to a specific episode, she comes up with the time they decided to turn Giles into a demon ("A New Man," 4012). They marginalized him at the beginning of the season, so that his feeling alienated happens for a reason. The emotional high point is the end of each act. Tracy Forbes agrees. The first thing that gets discussed while breaking the story is the place the character is emotionally at the given point of the season. Their starting point is the emotions, the themes they want to tackle, and the metaphors they want to use to do that. "And then we work out the emotional arcs for Buffy and the other characters in the episodes." [38]. The personal life of the character becomes the pivotal center, the strength, the invisible engine. The fact of being character–driven instead of plot-driven is the basis of good fiction--in a broad sense, for all fictions. But what makes a soap a soap is how much these personal elements are left showing, how much they shine through and how much they become themselves action. The more of the character is left floating on the surface, the more we have a point of contact with the soap genre. This in *Buffy* happens more in later seasons, a thing that is in part normal because the life of the character has been told for a longer period of time. We have layer upon layer of happenings. The past to come to terms with is more present in the mind of both authors and audience.

(27) Let's take an actual example. There is an episode in Season Four entirely dedicated to emotional matters – "Into the Woods" (5010) (written and directed by Marti Noxon), where Buffy and Riley leave one another. After Buffy's hospitalized mother seems to be recovering, Buffy and Riley celebrate, dancing cheek to cheek and making love. Riley though - disappointed and hurt by the fact that Buffy doesn't love him enough to have felt free to cry in front of him, and therefore to lean on him, when she was worried and upset because of her mother's health problems - lets himself be bitten by a vampire-prostitute, in exchange for money. Spike discovers it and brings Buffy to the nest-brothel to see for herself the betrayal. Riley, caught in the act, first menaces Spike to stay away from her, later confesses to Buffy what he feels and gives her an ultimatum: he will leave, unless she gives him a reason to stay. Xander convinces Buffy not to let Riley go if she loves him for real. She runs to stop him, but the military helicopter which had been waiting for him has already left the ground and, even though

she screams his name, he doesn't hear her. Xander, convinced by conversation with Buffy that he's not been clear enough himself, at home confesses to Anya that he loves her deeply.

(28) Told like this, it's not very different from a soap synopsis. There aren't enemies to defeat here. There isn't the big bad of the episode that the Scooby gang has to discover and eliminate; there aren't a beginning or an end that are not linked to the past or that don't have repercussions into the future; there aren't stories that are not emotional. This installment talks about relationships and about love. This focus starts with Riley's meaningful "we need to talk" ("the emphasis in soap is on talk rather than on action" states Robert Allen [39]), in the main scene of their confrontation. "Let's fight", he soon says. They do it with words here, just words [40], because Riley feels excluded, because he turned someplace else (to a brothel, to drugs, both images that can be linked to the nest of vampires in this episode). We arrive at, "What else do you want from me, Reilly? I've given you everything that I have, I've given you my heart, my body, my soul" (Buffy), and "You say that, but I don't feel it. I just don't feel it" (Riley). Feel.

Riley and Spike fight over Buffy, dissect their emotions, and end up sharing a drink over her. "Ain't love grand!" says Spike. Xander forces Buffy to see her relationship with Riley in a new perspective: "If you really think you can love this guy--I'm talking scary, messy, no emotions barred need--f you are ready for that, then think about what you are about to lose". He's the "talk-to" person, not a quiet sounding board, but an active one. Nonetheless he is the place where Buffy can check her emotions. Others have already proven that Buffy is empowered by her emotions, by the accessibility of them to her, as the comparison to Kendra's character aptly shows. [41] Finally Xander declares to Anya: "I'm in love with you. Powerfully, painfully in love. The things you do, the way you think, the way you move. I get excited every time I'm about to see you. You make me fell like I never felt before in my life: like a man". And, soon after, they share a kiss. We can also see the accent on feelings in minor scenes: when Buffy rallies Willow, Giles and Xander it is because she wants to bring them to the betrayal scene; when she practices against the punching bag it is to work off her rage and pain; with her mother she talks about herself and Riley; Dawn, left with Xander and Anya, is aware that she is at their place because Buffy and Reilly want to be together romantically. If soaps are more "character problems", less plot, then this episode shows best how Buffy can be called a soap. And it's not just content, it's style. It's a style that is appropriate to the content.

(29) At the beginning of "Into the Woods" Buffy and the others are at the hospital waiting to learn from a doctor about Joyce's health condition. The doctor arrives to tell his prognosis. They all stand up. The camera pans on Buffy's face. And on a tight close-up of her, it breaks away and goes to the opening credits. This is a typical use of the camera according to soap opera style. You get closer and closer, until you could swear you couldn't get physically any closer, without getting through the body, entering into the intimate layers of the character, into the soul, into the gut. In soap operas "...we are struck by their use of close ups and extreme close ups. This shooting style is consistent with the kind of world soap opera portrays. As a narrative ritual that centers on intense, concentrated forms of emotion, soap opera requires an intense, intimate camera style." [42]

(30) And that's not all: At the same time in a scene like that one, another convention that's dear to soaps is used, almost a definition of the entire genre: the augmentation of tension and the procrastination of fulfilment. There's a "dramatic movement of suspended crisis", temporary without an outlet. [43]. The answer, the solution and the closure are delayed. In soaps this is done as common procedure, and in the same way it's done here. There's a suspension for the duration of a theme song, that musical breath that rightfully leads you in the world of the program. Until you are outside the gate (the credits), you only have questions. Only when you step over that threshold can you have the answers. The narrative gratification is suspended – that is what the "sexual theory" is about, receiving pleasure from soaps because of the continuous postponement of the narrative climax – and you can have it only after you've passed through specific, known visual and auditory signs (the credits with the theme song to be specific), during which the scene remains frozen in time. This postponing is also, in another version, an apparent, perennial absence of ending, of finale. And in presenting stories that continue from instalment to instalment, this is inevitable.

(31) At one point in "Into the Woods," Buffy meets the "brothel" vampires who want to attack her for having destroyed their nest with fire. Buffy stakes all of them. Only a she-vampire remains, the one who sucked Riley's blood. Buffy recognizes he through a swift flashback. The usage of a targeted flashback of a specific element of that same episode is typical of the soaps. They could have chosen to let Buffy and us know it was that same woman-vampire with a glance, a hint, something else. A flashback was chosen.

(32) There's ample use of back-story here: Riley mentions Angel and Dracula to Buffy. Memory of past happenings is required of the soap audience (*infra sub* # 46).

(33) In this episode moreover it is clear that not only the syntax of the visual phrases follows soap rules, but a similar visual grammar is chosen too. When Buffy and Riley share their reasons, there's a real ping-pong between the respective positions: it's point-counterpoint also in camera movements. And there is an eye-level camera angle that is common to soap operas. That is, we go back and forth between the two characters and the perspective chosen to look at them is the eye level of the other character. There's mostly a shot/reverse shot editing with several portions of shots that are over-the-shoulder. [44] And though directing never truly indulges in it, there is even a slight sketch of a character talking to the back of the other character figure with this facing the screen, which is used in soaps more than in other genres.

(34) Also the closing image, with the two faces--one beside the other, which fades into the other--is very common in soap endings. It's sufficient to take whatever instalment from 1988 of *Days ofOur Lives*, for example, to have a good chance of finding a similar directorial choice.

(35) The sex scene, one that easily could have been linked to soaps' style, on the contrary, distances itself from them quite a lot, in my opinion: Buffy is shown too much feeling pleasure, whereas if the soap opera filter had been chosen it would have been more ethereal and dreamlike than carnal.

"SANTA BARBARA" AND "THE BODY"

(36) Let's consider "The Body" now: the episode where, as reality sinks in, Buffy goes from her answer "No, my mom" to the operator that asks her if *the body's* cold, to her

own referring to it as "the body" to Giles. As the body went cold so did her feelings. This is the episode wherein she can see the face of the EMT in its entirety only when he says he is sorry. Otherwise it doesn't completely register – it is just a moving mouth. It's an episode that, to me, tastes little like a soap, despite dealing almost only with personal matters.

(37) The scene where Buffy goes to Dawn's school and tells her their mother is dead, though, directed by Joss Whedon, instantly brought to my mind a scene from *Santa Barbara*, directed by the late Michael Gliona, at the beginning of 1989. In it Cruz reveals to his wife Eden that their daughter has disappeared, kidnapped by her rapist. The scenes are different, but for a directorial point of view, they present a strong parallelism. In *Santa Barbara* the scene takes place in a hospital. Eden is looking at a row of cribs with babies in them. Cruz goes to her as he tells her the news. They are behind a glass window, we don't hear anything, we barely see Cruz. What we see is Eden's reaction; her face, from happy, becomes desperate. We can read her lips, while, crying, she asks about her child, denying the reality of what she's been told has happened. In "Buffy" the scene takes place at school. Dawn is called outside the classroom, by her sister, who wants to talk to her. Dawn understands immediately that something's wrong. Buffy tells her that it regards their mother. They are behind a glass window and we don't hear the words Buffy chooses in order to tell her Joyce is dead. We don't even see Buffy say it, because she gives us her shoulders. We see Dawn cry and fall to the floor. And, the sound feebly dampened by the glass, we hear her say no, accuse her sister of lying. We hear something, little. Music is absent from the scene and the entire episode.

(38) Now, the two series' scenes are different. In *Buffy* we are not alone watching the scene. There are the schoolmates, inside and outside the classroom; there's the teacher. With Cruz and Eden the scene is more intimate. The spectator is the only eye. In *Buffy* the scene is filmed more from a distance, almost as if to avoid getting too close and disturbing such an immense pain. *Santa Barbara* shows a close-up of the face of Eden, whose image is frozen. *Buffy* shifts its shot on an unfinished drawing on which Dawn was working in the class, leaving space for the thousand themes that are entwined in the episode: from incompleteness (of the body, of a broken life, of the bereaved….), to the body (the subject of the drawing and the title of the episode), to the role of art in life and in the face of death…. *Santa Barbara* is shaped on silence, re-introduced in other forms, in the several instalments that formed this moment of the storyline. They are framed by the child's Uncle Mason's quote from Shakespeare: "[…]my grief lies all within,/And these external manners of laments/Are merely shadows to the unseen grief/that swells with silence in the tortured soul". [45]

(39) The two scenes have a lot in common: the person who brings the news and the person who receives it are on the same level: two sisters speaking about their mother (*Buffy*), husband and wife speaking about their daughter (*Santa Barbara*); both messengers (Buffy, Cruz) give a pain equal to the one they are themselves living; the messenger is partly concealed, hidden, and we don't need to have the news ourselves, because we already know, so as spectators, we are in the same position as those who give the news, and the attention is therefore focused on the person who receives it (Dawn, Eden); a transparent glass separates us, divides us from the action, detached spectators , which is what we are in front of such a personal and lacerating tragedy, as in life. We can be nothing more, the scenes seem to be saying. Silence, deafened by pain. And that silence which is broken by Dawn has weight, intended to maximize the effect, to transmit a pain and a moment. We are close and distant at the same time.

(40) "The Body" has little of the taste of a soap, yet another element makes us think of one. In this episode two characters are missing. Glory, the arch-nemesis, is absent. One of the historic archetypes of the soaps, created by pioneer Irna Phillips, is identified in the "bitch goddess". [46] We could say Glory represents a literal image of this expression. Here, in "The Body," as noted, she is absent. It doesn't matter, it doesn't add or detract anything, because the actress who plays her has always been a "guest star". But Spike too is absent, and this, on the contrary, is quite relevant. James Marsters, who plays him, has a contract with the series and a protagonist role;he is a regular, appearing in the opening credits. The fact that a character present in the opening is then missing within the episode is extremely rare, but it's less and less so the more we get closer to the soap opera format. *thirtysomething*, whose genre definition has been discussed [47], used to omit some of its characters from some shows. This is definitely a choice that orientates the product toward something that can be qualified as a soap opera. The same happens in "Normal Again" (6017). Anya is missing from the entire episode, and this despite her being present in the "previously" segment. The absence doesn't reflect on the episode tone, but allows a wide range of interpretation on the aesthetics of the series as a whole, since it induces the audience to think not in terms of a single segment, but in terms of the totality of the narrative flow.

THE "SOAP TEST"

(41) The aforementioned Seli Groves suggests a true "Soap Test", to be applied to programs, to understand if they are soaps or not. And she cites the criteria offered by Marnie Winston–Macauley, author and, in the past, writer for *As the World turns*. Let's try indicate some of her statements to make sure if they can be applied to *Buffy*. Firstly, a soap has a "concentration on heightened emotions. Melodrama must be involved". *Buffy*, which was meant by Joss Whedon to be an "emotional experience", as we already said, gives abundant and constant proof of this. Buffy decides to kill Angel, the love of her life, to save the world ("Becoming," part two, 2022); She makes a dying Angel bite her neck, even if this means risking her own life to save his ("Graduation," part two, 3022); She desperately runs toward Reilly to ask him not to leave and tell him that she loves him, but he flies away in a helicopter without seeing her ("Into the Woods," 5010); to save her sister and the world, Buffy dies voluntarily falling into an evil chasm that is opening to destroy the Earth ("The Gift," 5022). High emotions. Melodrama. This last example could perhaps qualify more as a tragedy than melodrama, if it weren't that Buffy "comes back from the dead".

(42) Here we can graft another soap *leitmotiv*. As a humorous page from *Soap Opera Digest* [48] says: "Soaps are the place…where you only die twice – unless you are extremely popular". And "You just can't keep a good soap character down, or, for that matter, six feet under. The truth is, death on soap is almost never final". [49] And so it has been for Buffy too, who died twice. It could be argued that deaths on soaps are more apparent than real. Bodies don't get found or, only later, what looked like a proof of a permanent demise, in reality wasn't so. Death in *Buffy* is real. Buffy has truly been buried, as she really rose from the dead. Truth be told, the moment soaps accept the supernatural – which is not the most common choice – deaths are just as real. A case in point is *Port Charles*, where the character of Rafe truly died twice. We discover this the

first time from a memory. Rafe is an angel and he remembers becoming one after he was killed by the vampire he was trying to defeat. Recalled to Heaven because he had finished his mission on Earth, he sells his soul to the Devil to go back and save the woman he loves. The Devil sends him back without memory. Following several adventures, he re-discovers the love which brought him there and his memory comes back to him just in time to be killed again by a gun shot. He dies in the loved one's arms. For a second time, he comes back to life, this time sent back among others as a normal human being. Others are granted a second chance at life. Alison briefly dies struck by the falling of a tree, and Rafe, with his angel powers, brings her back. Jack was thought dead when everybody saw him as a semi-vampire. He was bitten, but he himself hadn't bitten anyone yet, so, according to the mythology of the show, he wasn't completely transformed into a vampire. Here death is as real as in *Buffy*. What counts is the level at which one decides to play the game. Accepting the supernatural, soaps don't do anything more than bring to the next level to a more radical level, one of their consolidated narrative rules.

(43) Another criterion is suggested by Winston Macauley: ""the show should have what we call in the business a DPU for each character: That stands for Direct Pick-Up". This means that, in a daytime drama, what happens to a character in the last episode is directly picked up for the next day's show. If it's a night-time soap, the pick-up for each character is directly linked to the last week's episode". This often happens on *Buffy*, more and more so as the show progresses. Let's consider two succeeding episodes like "Smashed" (6009) and "Wrecked" (6010). In "Smashed" Buffy and Spike make love, while Dawn and Tara, on the couch, in front of the TV, wait for her and Willow to come home. "Wrecked" picks up the following morning: Buffy wakes up beside Spike after a night of sex, while Dawn and Tara wake up in front of the tv, which is on, and realize that neither Buffy nor Willow came back for the night. But even more to the point, let's take a look at the passage in the fifth season between "Tough Love" (5019) and "Spiral" (5020). Glory discovers that Dawn is the key and it's her intention to get her into her possession. She destroys the building in which all the gang is, and enters to take her and… the episode ends. The following one resumes at the exact same point where the previous one was stopped. Glory is bent on taking Dawn and… now they can flee. It is a standard mechanism of ending and resuming used by soaps. [Editors' note: See David Lavery on endings in "Apocalyptic Apocalypes."] It underlines the more significant moments, the ones with more tension, the ones that create a bigger suspense. We could think about a normal cliff-hanger, but it's more than that. If it were only that, a program like *24* could be called a soap, since, narrating 24 hours of the same day in real time, it inevitably resumes the action from the immediately previous scene. It's not like that, though. In "Tough love" the scene that gets frozen in time is severed, chopped off in a more radical and soap-like way: the action itself is not closed, but has been blocked, slashed, deprived itself of any closure whatsoever, even a temporary one.

(44) Yet another criterion is that soaps have an ensemble cast. And again Seli Groves tells us: "Relationships should exist among the characters portrayed by the ensemble cast". Relationships that naturally have meaning and weight for the attention that's been accorded to them. In series these can be ignored or put aside, or limited to the bare essentials, like for example the way *Law and Order* or *CSI* do. Or you can, as *Buffy* does, give them much weight: to friendships (Buffy-Xander; Buffy-Willow); to loves (Buffy-Angel; Spike-Dru; Willow-Oz; Cordelia-Xander; Willow-Tara); to family or family-

like relations (Buffy-Joyce; Buffy-Dawn; Mayor-Faith); to adversarial relations (Snyder-Buffy; Buffy-Glory; Buffy-Faith) and to the thousand variations, facets and shades that relationships can offer thanks to their intrinsic complexity and, at times, indefinableness. Besides the flowing of the narration, besides a "syntagmatic determinacy," in *Buffy* we participate in a strong meaningfulness of the "paradigmatic complexity" that does not allow the events to be irrelevant in the relationship between characters, but just the opposite, to be heavily felt. And this- the small nuances that can't be perceived by an uninitiated, the waterfall repercussions on a multiplicity of subjects – is one of the biggest pleasures that soap watchers get, giving an ulterior meaning to otherwise negligible details. Events assume meaning for the viewer not so much on the basis of "their place in a syntagmatic chain but rather in terms of the changes in the paradigmatic structure of the community those events might provoke". [50] Linked to this reason is also the fact that rarely, on soaps, are villains an outside threat. They are an integral part of the canvas. Within itself each soap has to find a place to work them and use them and keep them. In Season Six we observe exactly this: villains are chosen within pre-existing characters – Jonathan, Warren – and once defeated, some are still in town (Jonathan, Andrew).

LITURGY, TIME, MEMORY

(45) Let's put Seli Groves aside and go beyond. *Buffy* is near to soaps also in its use of what may be called liturgy. In daytime dramas it's very weak. When we find it, it's in a year span, not in their single instalments. The rituality of the plot is mainly built around specific events, such as Christmas for *Days of our lives*, 4th of July for *Guiding Light*, the Nurses' Ball for *General Hospital* or the Crystal Ball for *All my children*. Not so in regular evening series. Rituality is structural to each episode. Think of "Murder: She wrote": the discovering of the body, Ms Fletcher called into the investigation, the interrogation of the suspects, the solution. Think of an author like David E. Kelley (*Picket Fences*, *The Practice*, *Ally McBeal*), loaded with rituality. There's a built-in liturgy, enhanced by the trial procedure – arrival of the client, opening arguments, witnesses, closing arguments, verdict – that this author emphasizes with his style. In *Buffy* also there's a liturgy: the demon, the research, the hunt, the defeating of the peril. Sometimes, though, this liturgy is upset, thrown upside down, such as in the case of "Into the Woods". And this brings it near to the soaps. If in the first seasons *Buffy* was more aligned to soaps from a content point of view than a stylistic one, after the third season there were more structural contacts, too. This, taking Season Six as an example, can be gathered by putting under observation liturgy, reduced to the bare bone. Let's take an episode like "Dead Things" (6013): Buffy believes she has killed a girl. The gang realizes it's not like that, but that there's been a sort of temporal planes interpolation. It does it in the blink of an eye. Research and solution, once a long and fatiguing trail, are here given at the same time, as if to get rid of a duty and to concentrate on what in this moment is more relevant: what Buffy is going through. The research is, as far as *Buffy* is concerned, the basic liturgical element, in which the characters are, with their noses in the books, working for a solution. They are so detached from it at this point that Anya, faking research, is reading a hidden wedding gowns magazine instead. It says everything: liturgy is on the back burner, even in the mind of the protagonists. We get in "Hell's Bells" (6016) to a total absence of the stage of the research. And "Hell's Bell's" is exactly where the soap

expedient of a wedding halted at the altar is represented, as much a classic as is the characters who are about to get married who imagine a dreadful future.

(46) On the other hand, in parallel, there's a clear sense also, in *Buffy*, of seasonal rituality: Halloween is the holiday when (in this fictional universe) nothing demonic should happen, but when regularly the unthinkable happens (Halloween, 2006; Fear Itself, 4005); and Buffy's birthday (Surprise, 2013; Helpless, 3012; Older and Far Away, 6014) is always a disaster. There's unpredictability within a settled *datum* we expect and we look forward to just the same as in daytime, where otherwise liturgy is linkable only to the behavioural patterns of the characters or, moving to a *preater*-textual dimension, to the repeated patterns of program viewing required from the watcher to an extent incomparable to any other medium. Liturgy, in this sense, is the faithful participation in the everyday function that's enacted on the screen, the partaking in the quotidian ritual. Analyzing "attendance" is not our aim here, but it leads us – being its *conditio sine qua non* – to our next point. "This is a genre, unlike all others, that requires one thing of its audience – its memory, its collective recollection of who you are and what you've done," states Charles Keating (James in *Port Charles*, and most notably Carl Hutchins in *Another World*) [51]

(47) On *General Hospital*, at the end of the 70s, Luke raped Laura. Twenty years later, under head-writer Robert Guza Jr., they take on the story again. The characters find themselves needing to deal with the ghosts of those events in front of their teenage son, who asks for explanations and makes them re-live the meaning, then and now, of those events. The same actors as then, Anthony Geary and Genie Francis, play Luke and Laura; the same director of that time, the late Alan Pultz, directs the scenes, working with his notes on the original script, which he saved. Sure, not all soaps can afford to retrieve such a past, nor, if they could, would they retrieve it with such precision and carefulness, but one thing is certain: soaps stand on memory and continuity. It is what makes them rich and vital. Here, it is a settled part of their ability to move, enthrall and pleasure the audience. We refer to this genre as continuing dramas. It's true that continuing doesn't mean continuity, but it's also true that, to continue, this genre must necessarily take into account its past, the bits of personal history that remain attached to the characters. We could almost say that time, memory, history and continuity are for soaps the ultimate defining element. In "Words without end – the art and history of the Soap Opera" we read: "Time and memory for both the character and the audience are at the heart of the soap opera […] the very narrative structure of the soap demands that the viewer bring memories of the pain and joy and subtle emotional nuances to each scene.

(48) When characters with such rich, penetrating histories as Victor Newman and Nikki Reed on *The Young and the Restless* or Alan and Monica on *General Hospital* confront each other, the viewer fills in the sustained silences and piercing reaction shots that characterize the genre with a keen knowledge of their pasts, thus becoming an important partner in the scene. This deep, emotional involvement in a story that is unfolding day by day over years is ultimately the triumph of the soap opera. No other art form can achieve, much less sustain, this kind of connection with an audience for so long in such a deeply satisfying way" [52]. Robert C. Allen echoes it: "The long time viewer can immediately sense when something is "wrong", with his or her soap: a character is behaving in an uncharacteristic manner, for example. The frequent viewer can recognize

not only appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in a given character, but appropriate responses of a given character to another, based on the two characters' relationships in the show's past. Characters in soap operas have memories, and relationships might well stretch back for a decade or more." [53]. According to Wilcox and Lavery [54] "On *Buffy* (…) characters remember, and we remember with them." A shared characteristic that not only characterizes quality TV, but that creates, as Horace Newcomb says [55], a "sense of direct involvement" so strongly associated with soaps. Taking about *Buffy*, Wilcox and Lavery cite the two perfect examples of "Restless" (4022) and "Forever" (5017), and handling a copy of *The Watcher's Guide* and reading the sections titled "continuity", it is easy to understand that to continuity is given attention . . . with continuity.

(49) And this also contaminates the way in which long-gone characters remain in the memory of the public and the characters. J.P. Williams [56] reminds us how Jenny Calendar, once gone, remains present in the character's mind through fantasies and dreams. The same happens in daytime where constantly beloved people now absent are brought back to the mind of the remaining protagonists. A significant example is that of young Stone, untimely passed away because of AIDS, in the collective memory of *General Hospital*, or Ryan's death, in *Another World*, or Vicki's trip to Heaven on *One life to live*, where she meets again, in a brief out-of-body experience, characters gone out of the canvas, but not out of the hearts of the characters and the viewers.

DEFINING FAMILY

(50) The sense of family is a good field for comparison. Family in the traditional sense of the term is absent from *Buffy*. Her father is never seen, not even on her birthday (Helpless, 3012), and with her mother she often has a relationship of conflict ("Gingerbread," 3011; "Becoming" part II, 2022, for example). Willow has a mother who doesn't even know the name of her best friend (Gingerbread, 3011) and Xander's quarrelsome parents are invisible presences that should remain so, considering the relationship they have. Faith also in the end has nobody and Dawn is devoid of parents in the true sense of the word. *Buffy* is a world of orphans, just as Giorgio Bellocci [57] defines *Guiding Light*, a fictional world where characters are marked by their being orphans: "real ones" (for the actual lack of a parent) and "ideal ones", those who have a dysfunctional, ruinous relationship with their parents or in whose life parents have been profoundly absent.

(51) And just the same, one of the most classic soap figures is the single mom, the female parent who raises her children alone. In *Buffy*, Joyce does it for Buffy, but Buffy herself ends up doing it for her sister Dawn. The entrance of Dawn (5004), who had never been heard of before, reflects a standard practise for soaps: they introduce a new character who is tied to pre-existing characters and therefore receives immediate and important status within the program structure. An example, but they could be numerous, is Nikolas Cassadine on *General Hospital*, introduced as the son nobody knew Laura Spencer had had. For Dawn it's the same. The twist to explain her arrival is what makes it original, ingenious, logically believable, and different from soaps.

(52) It's the community of friends that in Buffy becomes family (Wilcox and Lavery). Family are the people you love and that you want around yourself. In *Buffy* this

is strongly stressed in "Family" (5006), where Tara rejects her natural and legal family, that doesn't give her love and respect, to choose, over them, what she considers her real family, the one of affection and friendship, the Scooby Gang. And in the modern era, the traditional family model, in truth always the fulcrum and the hearth of soaps, is every day less indispensable. Next to blood ties, those that Bellocci calls "symbolic" also make their way. They set an indefinite kindred. An example is the "step-son" one, that in *Buffy* could be the one between slayer and watcher. There are even "hypothetical ones". And, in these past few years, the concept of a group of friends that create among themselves familiar ties elbowed its way through, beside the more traditional family concept. Again, *Port Charles* comes into consideration. The interns of a hospital become a family for one another; their working relationship and their mutual liking make them family for one another. The traditionally formed family (here represented by the Collins, the Scanlons and the Baldwins) is extremely feeble, imperceptible, we could say. And right from the start, from the *incipit* of its stories, the now-cancelled *The City* lacks a matriarchal or patriarchal family. The emotional bond and the consciously opted one between friends and co-owners of a building substitutes for the blood one. [58] A radical choice was made, one that associates itself with the one made on *Buffy*. Villains too stop being perceived as such, once they are accepted in the "family", or at least a crack is open for their redemption – Spike *docet*.

ROMANCE: SUPERCOUPLES

(53) Naturally what soap operas are most well-known and remembered for is romance. [59] "(Daytime) knows how to get a couple together, split them up, and how to start from square one with the same couple and go through the whole thing again – and you're still watching. I think prime time can learn a lot from how daytime develops romance" says Shelly Moore. [60]. Star-crossed lovers, destined to love each other, even when this seems impossible, are everyday bread and butter for soaps: Luke and Laura (*General Hospital*), Lily and Holden (*As the World Turns*), Joe and Siobhan (*Ryan's Hope*), Josh and Reva (*Guiding Light*), Bo and Hope (*Days of our lives*)…. Even without reaching the extremes *Days of our lives* arrived at in the 1980s, when everything could be reduced to this, soaps are stilleasily summarized in terms of couples. Buffy is no different: Buffy-Angel, Xander-Cordelia, Willow-Oz, Giles-Jenny, Spike-Drusilla, Buffy-Spike, Xander-Anya, Willow-Tara.

(54) Every soap has its reigning couples that ache to be together and manage to do so in spite of everything. The word "supercouple" was minted for this. Buffy and Angel are a supercouple, a couple that has an intense chemistry on screen and whose union is a bona fide challenge to the world. Angel is a version of the boy "from the wrong side of the track" who tries to better himself and seeks redemption through the love of the woman he loves (like Luke on *General Hospital* or Patch on *Days of our lives*). Lovers face dangers together and this binds them. But it's in the modes in which love between Buffy and Angel is portrayed that the series follows soap's style, first and foremost for the melodramatic tone, as we said before, but for other elements too.

(55) Their brushing up to one another, their getting near each other, their mental, before than physical, caressing: *Buffy*, like soaps, has the courage and the weakness of playing and flirting with allusive elements and with sexuality and sensuality (especially in

the case of Angel) for jest and in a very provocative way. The series constantly teases the public, showing sexual tension between the characters through light contact, intense looks and situations that are openly instrumental to this aim: A provocation of sensual tension that cannot and does not mean to be satisfied and released. Characters and public get tickled. Getting or not getting satisfaction is secondary here, because in this case allusiveness is for its own sake. Characters are forced by events, often by micro-happenings, to share space and to come into physical contact in a forced way, so as to make the ashes of desire smoulder, without having them immediately catch fire. It's a progressive approach. The writers put the characters into such a position so that they cannot deny the physical attraction they feel for one another. Like the viewer, the characters see it for themselves but they cannot act on it. The excuse on soaps is often the classic fall from the ladder into the arms of the loved one; in *Buffy* it's the work out, it's Tai-Chi. And this sense of lacerating desire is even more radical in the face of the imperative to not-do, to not consume the relationship on a physical level. In *Buffy,* the problem of the protagonist's being vampire-slayer first and the issue of Angel's risking his soul for that sole moment of happiness later come into play. They are tempted; they have to resist temptation. For soaps this impediment is represented by wedding or religious vows by which the protagonists feel bound. Father Jim, in *Loving*, according to the Catholic Church tenets he abides by, "would lose his soul to sin" if he decided to betray his vows to go to bed with Shana, the woman he's in love with. If he doesn't want to lose his soul, he has to renounce sex, just as Angel does on *Buffy*. And when Buffy and Angel make love for the first time ("Surprise"), before they know what it would mean, the direction almost skirts the event. This also in accordance with the age of the protagonist. Several times we see this on sudsers. The camera moves away from the couple, to set on flowers or more frequently on burning candles.

(56) The apex of love, according to the *Weltanschauung* of daytime programming, is its consecration through the wedding ceremony. That is the finishing line. With this yearned-for goal, it's normal for the heroines involved in a romantic dream to become brides to their beloved. Once they put their head on a pillow, the fantasy enters a dream world with comic, tragic, or simply romantic shades, according to the circumstances, but is always, sooner or later, there. Angel, following the custom (with a male twist), dreams of Buffy in the traditional moment in her white dress (3020, "The Prom"). If in fact that day will never actually come, at least the viewer, who knows what is the final goal we are aiming for, can just the same live the event, even if on a fantasy level. Those who desired to see Buffy and Angel married and happy, for the classic happy end will be satisfied in the instant of releasing of the tension of desire that that fantasy brought. In *Buffy* that scene lends itself to a lot of interpretations of desire for "normalcy" for Buffy. This doesn't take away the fact that the chosen style assimilates it to the soap genre.

(57) Another staple is the "fake getting back together". In creating obstacles to the happiness of couples, writers end up separating them for long periods of time. And so, often, it is necessary to find expedients to get the two lovers back together, even if it's only for brief moments. It pleases the viewer and in a sense, anticipates what he will get in the future if he holds on and continues watching as the story unfolds and the couple gets back together for real. It has an mnemo-inducing function, in respect to what diachronically precedes and follows. The more common form is the fantasy. But it's not the only one. In "I only have eyes for you", the spirits of two now-dead lovers, a student named James and his teacher, Miss Newman, possess Buffy and Angel respectively.

James had killed Miss Newman and then shot himself in the head in 1955. Now as ghosts they are trying to solve their conflict. They manage to do so by taking possession of Angel and Buffy's bodies and they manage to kiss through the borrowed bodies, allowing at the same time Buffy and Angel, now enemies, to kiss, and recuperate even if just for an instant, the tenderness they shared before. A very similar experience befell Cruz and Eden from *Santa Barbara*, in 1988. The ghosts met by the two of them were the spirits of Amelia and Captain Anderson. We are in a mirror situation here, because Cruz and Eden, thanks to their strong love, succeed in getting the two ghosts back together. Amelia and Captain Anderson had not been able to get married because on the day of the wedding she saw the ship of the groom-to-be sink into the ocean, and threw herself from the cliffs. Since then they haven't been able to be together. Cruz and Eden also get protected by the two ghosts: they vicariously unite themselves in marriage for them too, so that they can finally go back to one another as they wished, and can rest in peace [61]. And like Cruz and Eden have their contrapuntal voices in Keith and Gina, a couple of villains with a twist of humor, so do Buffy and Angel who have just as strong a pair in Spike and Drusilla.

(58) The expedient of nudity and of the wounded hero is part of this same stylistic river-bed. It's the sex of the soaps, and also a staple of romance literature depictions: the wounded naked hero who needs attention and care. One can smile at the ingenuousness of the technique, which succeeds, if carried out with taste and mixed with other elements. It's the veneer over something else. If it can be condoned it is because it titillates while being discreet and appropriate to the age of the characters. Often in *Buffy* they are teen-agers, and to limit the kind of contact to this "sweet torture" is natural and becoming, not merely instrumental. And it's fertile in consequences on the emotional side, as well as the ratings one. It might provoke some smiles, but half-naked hunks in pain are never lacking in daytime. These heroes and anti-heroes suffer spiritually too; they are brooding over the pain they caused and over their personal demons. Their agony can be read on their faces. Sonny Corinthos on *General Hospital* blames himself and never gives himself a break, showing this way he is a "good guy" despite being a mobster.Every occasion is good to undress good-looking guys and to keep them shirtless. Angel, once back from the hellish dimension, is often shirtless. He's wounded and Buffy nurses him. Jason and Elizabeth on *General Hospital* are another good example. They suffer and they are feverish. On *Days ofOurLives*, Kayla often ended up being a nurse (and she was for real, too) to an injured and bruised Steve, who was regularly beaten up, and who remained half-naked, naturally.

(59) The teen scene becomes more animated during summertime on soaps. It has always been a trend, all the more nowadays when the attention to younger demographics is addressed and taken into consideration all year long. Willow-Xander-Buffy-Cordelia of the first two years happily incarnate that kind of emotional chasing back and forth between the characters, a lack of matching and the frustrated search for the other. Willow wants Xander, who wants Buffy, who wants Angel: unrequited love. Willow runs away at the sight of Xander and Cordelia together; Spike is jealous of Dru's glances at Angel; Giles is embarrassed at asking Jenny out: these are soap opera elements that succeed in not being pure mannerism. They reconstruct the narrative reasoning, subjugating soap styles to the context's needs, cleaning it from excesses, but rather showing a propensity to restructure the elements.

WHEN BAD IS GOOD: ANTI-HEROES AND THE BAD BOY MYSTIQUE

(60) Spike, and his relationship with Buffy, are equally built according to soap rules. We can dissect several critical passages where this can be recognized.

> A) A villain comes to town. He commits a series of heinous acts in the eyes of the community within the narration as well as the public who follows the plot on the screen. In *Buffy*, Spike arrives in Sunnydale and it's clear from the start that he's up to no good and that he is the bad boy of the situation ("School Hard," 2003).
>
> B) The public loves him and there's the need to redeem him. So writers proceed in that direction. They make us understand what motivates that character; his conflicts, his needs. Executive Producer Laurence Caso points out how "Villains don't perceive themselves to be villains". "They have needs and their villainy results from how they go about trying to fulfill those needs" [62]. So they dig into their past to discover where everything started, what drives them to behave as they do. Writers concur. They "will be inclined to devise buried, significant, understandable reasons why the character turned bad." [63]. Characters like these are another classic of the genre*: Guiding Light*'s Roger, *Another World*'s Carl, *General Hospital*'s Luke…. Spike's motivations are given by the fact that he is a vampire and, in the moment a chip is implanted in his brain, the components that motivate his behaviour become more conscious. The writers build a past that justifies, in hindsight, his present behaviour, showing what made him sour and go against the world ("Fool for Love," 5007). Up to what point the bad boy can be redeemed, and which acts can be forgiven, is a topic that remains burning and open both in the soap discussion arenas and in the *Buffy* ones.
>
> C) In the present, the character's change is grounded in love. And there are two paths most often followed.

(61) The *first* one is through making the character an anti-hero. How to become one? *Soap Opera Digest* offers a humoristic, and true, hand-book. First of all, the characters make a bad impression upon their arrival in town; they conceal their true feelings and apparently are always in control; they have an arrogant and insolent attitude, and operate in shady business, but their true nature takes over and makes new men out of them. They are lonely men, stoic and hurt by a past of atrocities and pain. They have to gain respectability: "Your lady will be put into jeopardy when she endeavours to help, simultaneously incurring the wrath of her many friends and relatives who still don't trust you" (Duke Lavery, *General Hospital*). They have to suffer being separated from the only woman they have ever loved, and they have often to do it for noble reasons (Steve Johnson, *Days of our lives*): "you will have the compelling need to right the wrongs of the world. You may even have to pretend that you have been lured back to the dark side of the force in order to catch a villain." Jesse Hubbard, *All My Children*: "If your troubles and travails have turned you into a wildly popular character, the actor who plays you will probably want to leave the show […] The writers probably won't kill you off […] then you can be brought back for guest appearances". *Buffy* has travelled this road, in most of its main stages, with lonely and brooding Angel. When Angel decides to leave Sunnydale, a door is left open for him for a possible return. His exit is naturally due to David Boreanaz's getting his own spin-off. For this reason he has an epiphany – it is better if he and Buffy live separately – that could have be placed at

any useful moment. If presumed-death is frequent, and if often the couple walks off together into the sunset, other times there's the awareness that for different reasons love isn't enough and it is best for the characters to go their separate way to live their life. [63]

(62) The *other road* is to keep them bad (within reason), and just the same, bring them into the lives of the heroines. Charles Pratt Jr, General Hospital's co-head-writer, deems that the bad boy mystique is the mystery of the "darker, edgier guy" that the viewer vicariously accepts in his/her life in the safeness of fiction, whereas in real life it would be dangerous to do so. And the defining element is, indeed, the sense of danger that these characters offer. His soap offers a good range, from Sonny Corinthos to Jason Morgan, to Zander Smith. It's the "guy who can't be possessed, can't be changed, can't be tamed". And there's sort of a sense of freedom in this' the same freedom Buffy lives with Spike during season Six. And to this another *datum* has to be added. Hogan Sheffer, *As The World Turns* head-writer, points the finger to the fact that to the bad boys a certain amount of sexuality is allowed, whereas to good guy it isn't. And he cites Jessica and Marshall's case. "Our request to the powers-that-be was 'we just want it to be sexual. We want her to be so overwhelmed by this guy's physicality that they just fell into bed.' It's not a romance, they are not doing it because she thinks he's really bright. It's just raw sex. And because Marshall's a bad boy, we were able to do it and not have to apologize for it". Even if, the morning after, Jessica hates herself for having gone to bed with Marshall--a road, again, we can find on *Buffy*'s map. These are words that could easily be adapted to her situation with Spike, a mostly sexual relationship, without excuses, with the heroine who lives this experience as a negative one. [64]

(63) Moreover, we could add the phrase which is probably the most famous and quoted of the soaps, the golden rule set by Agnes Nixon: "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait". We can apply it to the whole series and specifically to the physical consummation of Spike and Buffy's relationship, who needed more than a season to come to completion, from Spike's awakening from the dream that revealed to him he was in love with Buffy, to the moment he finally gets to have her physically. The wait was even longer if we take as valid this quote by Sarah Michelle Gellar, at the end of Season Three, regarding her Fantasy Date for her character: "Spike – though, 'when I mentioned the possibility of Spike and Buffy to Joss', says Gellar 'he was like, "No more vampires!"'". [65]

MIRRORS OF THE SELF: CLOTHES, MUSIC, PLACES

(64) If *Buffy* can use clothes as a mirror of the events, as a demarcation of the characters and their role within the dialogic path, with contrasts between whites and blacks and reds or whatever, soaps do this commonly. In *Port Charles*, Rafe, the slayer-angel, in white, and devil-sent James, in black, can be distinguished right away. And where good and evil are in opposition often the chromatic palette has the task to emphasize narration. Let it be enough to mention *Guiding Light* where at the beginning of the 90s, Mindy organized a fashion show. (The protagonists belong to the middle class, to a generic middle class.) They were all in white. Eve, the psycho who wanted to ruin the clothes, was the only one in black. Immediately the villain is identified and by contrast the general sense is reinforced. Clothes colour is often studied also keeping in

mind symbolic values, in symbolic occasions *par excellence*, like weddings, but not only then. Symbolism in *Buffy* succeeds in being more incisive where it weaves a transversal thread between the episodes by using clothes. I think about an episode like "Helpless" (3012). It can be read from different angles: as a new awareness of impotence in life, for example, despite coming of age (that Buffy, on her eighteenth birthday, does in this episode); or as a metaphor of the difficulty to react in front of a possible betrayal of one's own parents (here represented by Giles). From another angle, a Chronic Fatigue Syndrome patient could see his/her condition in it, the invisibility of an inner enemy to fight and the inability to understand where the sudden situation comes from, the feeling of being lost in the face of the failing of physical capabilities that one was taking for granted…. But Buffy, who walks on the dark street with a red hood, suggests Little Red Riding Hood and her defenselessness, exposed to the dangers of the world. Later on, watching "Fear, Itself" (4004), where Buffy was Little Red Riding Hood, the viewer could instantly recall that previous episode - and therefore there is a visual link that only thanks to the dress is possible in such a direct way. In this episode (4004), easily, the aggression to Buffy, in the shots the direction chose, hinted to a sexual violence. Thanks to the linking, the fear for rape is suggested even more that it would have been otherwise possible. There's intersection between episodes.

(65) Many more elements here and there within *Buffy* lead us to the soap imaginary. Generally, the musical montages, such as the one offered in "Tabula Rasa" (6008), or even at the end of season Six ("Grave") are pretty conventional. You could take any random *Days of our lives* instalment at the end of the 80s or any soap in times when Jill Farren Phelps was executive producer there (therefore *Santa Barbara*, *Guiding Light*, *Another World, One Life to live* and *General Hospital*). Ricky Martin sang on *General Hospital* as Michelle Branch sang for *Buffy* inhabitants. Ricky Martin was an actual member of the cast, but we could just the same remember other "guest" musical apparitions like BB King, Julio Iglesias, 98 Degrees or SheDaisy, to remain on *General Hospital* ground, which has always been a singing soap. And Xander watching Anya, while the music plays, through a glass window while she's working ("Seeing Red," 6019) is even – dare I say it – "soapy". On *General Hospital* characters may stop at "Kelly's" and watch people inside, to music, all the time.

(66) The "mythical town", the fictional place that could be the condensation of what one wants to tell, the symbolic spot of what the narrative poiesis aims to communicate, is a long tradition in daytime. Instead of Sunnydale we have Oakdale (*As the World Turns*) or Corinth (*Loving*) or or the Genoa City of *The Young and the Restless* or Harmony (*Passions*). The soaps that choose as an environment an existing town are relatively few. For *One Life to Live* head-writer Josh Griffith, , Llanview, where the stories unfold, is the 35th character, true dais of the human condition. [66]

(67) The use of outdoors in "Buffy" though, the entire geography of the program, for the most part strongly separates it from the soaps. Daytime dramas prefer indoors settings, more appropriate to the nature of their storytelling, which constantly depicts emotional intimacy. When this is required, "BtVS" has to go indoors too. Joss Whedon explains the material forced them to make such a choice when shooting "Innocence" (2014). What was originally supposed to be an outdoors scene became a bedroom scene, allowing an intimacy level that couldn't be reached before and couldn't have been reached otherwise. [67] As a rule anyway, "Buffy" isn't confined indoors.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-AWARENESS

(68) Self-consciousness. Regarding this aspect I defer to the ample literature about it. On soaps, suffice it to say that the parodies of the genre, references to pop culture and to the niche culture of soaps themselves, inside jokes and the breaking of the fourth wall to address the public directly aren't lacking. *Santa Barbara* in the 80s and *Sunset Beach* in the 90s were masters in this, toying with the genre peculiarities and taking shots at specific episodes, at times even at scenes. And they can conceal jokes for a sort of "treasure hunt" the same way. *Buffy* for example has written "geek" in the Cyrillic alphabet, ГЫЫК, on the periscope of the trio of villains, making fun of them, in Season Six ("Flooded"). *All my children* has written "Bobby" on the baseball cap of a skeleton found in the attic near a pair of skis, acknowledging the fact that there was a "legend" running about how the character of Bobby went upstairs to polish his skis and was never heard from or referred to again. [68]

(69) Both sides have to come to terms with the same dialectic within literature, with the same dichotomy between those who maintain that feminist themes and the image of an empowered woman prevail and those who, vice versa, deem the position not radical enough, but lament the return to the old patriarchal model or at least the leaning on it more than it's desirable.

(71) The sense of un-revealed future development, of anticipation that doesn't spoil the plot, a sense that Joss Whedon seems to have, goes hand to hand with the "Tune in Tomorrow" principle.

(72) Arcs have their own closure, but *Buffy* relishes cliff-hanger *à la* soap manner, from time to time, and a final kick that leaves viewers wanting more because events change just at the end: Angel comes back from the hellish dimension; Spike asks to build a Buffybot; Spike gets his soul back. Granted, soaps resist closure, while *Buffy* at the end of each season, for explicit will of Joss Whedon, was always given a possible definite end.

(73) Soaps are always *in fieri*, and last for decades; therefore, save for a few exceptions, the viewer arrives *in medias res* of the narration. There's no way to avoid it. Not so in *Buffy*, where, even not having followed the plots from the beginning it is possible to recuperate them thanks to reruns, to technological media and to the lesser amount of material (compared to the soaps).

(74) Also, soap operas' diegetic time tends to be dilated, whereas other genres compress it. In this sense *Buffy* is definitely not a soap.

BUFFY IS A SOAP: OR IS IT?

(75) I believe that, despite all of the soap opera qualities, we can rest assured that in many other aspects *Buffy* is not a soap opera. At times it may have indulged in this genre style, but overall it does not go in that direction.

(76) Credits are not built like those of the soaps and the title, in which I see a programmatic stance, goes to a different direction than contemporary soaps. Unlike *Port Charles* or *As the World Turns,* the title is the name of a single person, a heroine strong

enough to be alone in the projection of the show to the outside. This doesn't happen anymore in daytime dramas. But we can't deny it for the past. As *telenovelas* still do nowadays, in the past American soap operas, both on television and on the radio, had in their titles the name of a lone female heroine: *Our Gal Sunday*, *Valiant Lady* (1953-1957), *Portia Faces Life* (1954-1955); *Miss Susan* (1951). The Hummerts, pioneers of the genre, were strongly attached to the "dominant heroine archetype" later used by other soaps. In *Buffy* the archetype resists, but it gets filled with new content.

(77) Many elements, however, continue to distinguish it, and not only budgetary ones or the fact that it is recorded on film and not on tape, like soaps. *Sunset Beach* tried to do something different and to jump to film, to try a more modern and original look, more similar to prime time series, but it didn't work out and it went back to the good old way.

Continuing dramas, despite alternatives, build the flux of images aiming to create what is called a "realist illusion". The intellectual construction is hidden, or better yet, tries to conceal itself to better create the illusion of reality. In *Buffy* the poiesis of the fiction is, on the contrary, visible, nor does it strive not to be.

(77) The use of objects, a symbol, but also a strong narrative element in several soap contexts – picked up again and again in the storyline, by the directions and from an emotional point of view - isn't present in *Buffy*. The computer disk containing the instruction to give Angel back his soul, fallen between desks, is shot by the camera and forgotten until necessary. This would have never happened on a soap where they would have gone back to it again and again, with gusto. The only times something like that happens on a soap is when the object in question signifies the beginning of a new story, but it's rare. The object that in *Buffy* was mostly used in accordance to soap fashion is the ring Angel gives to her. It's the only instance that I recall.

(78) Eavesdropping is a traditional device employed by daytime dramas. It allows characters to discover secrets they shouldn't have known. In *Buffy*, it's not in this way that Dawn discovers she's the key. Moreover, in this instance they even play a trick on the viewer, letting us believe for a moment that Dawn will discover everything by overhearing a conversation, but in the end it doesn't happen that way. She does it in a completely different manner (by reading a journal). Here *Buffy*'s writers, with this move, have fun showing that they well know the eavesdropping road, but that they consciously decided not to take it. They explicitly give us a red herring and then surprise us, but they let us know at the same time that they master the genres and they use them as they wish, not necessarily as we would expect them to do.

(79) Another *τόπος* (topos) is the characters who remain locked against their wishes in a room, without any way out. Thus, they are forced to come to know each over and confront each other, and to bond on a human and personal level. *Buffy* used this expedient in "Where Wild Things are" (4018) when Buffy and Riley remain locked in a room and in "Older and Far Away" (6014), when Dawn expresses the wish that everybody should not leave, but stay home with her. Both cases were built in a far different way than it would have been done on soaps, however. The personal relationship became secondary to their frustrated attempts to get out of that situation.

(80) Social issues are often part of daytime texture--Rape, for instance, to indicate an issue on which daytime literature is abundant and carefully crafted. Every show has its fair share. So, reading *Buffy* as a soap, with the direction it was taking, viewers aware of the conventions could see Spike's attempted rape of *Buffy* coming (Seeing Red, 6019) long before it really happened. Once in the soap frame of mind, it was the most predictable thing to expect. Similarly to be expected was Spike and Anya's having sex and all of the others finding out by watching them in the act – "Entropy"

(6018) (a classic). Making it just an attempted rape though, *Buffy* avoids directly facing the issue the way soaps are forced to do. Because of the genre style chosen to tell this tale, *Buffy* would have just the same needed to face the issue directly, if it had taken the road of going ahead with the act. *Buffy* has its own peculiar *modus operandi*, when it comes to issues. The allegories it proposes are crafted so that their reading conveys a point of view on social issues. Take "Hush" (4010) as an example. I have been somewhat disappointed – in an episode that I otherwise think perfect - by the fact that no-one in Sunnydale appeared to be deaf, and therefore un-affected by a situation that was so shocking for all others. It could have been just a hint, a passer-by among others, in the news, who signed, while the Scooby Gang couldn't get each other's gestures straight. On an episode so centered in the theme of communication, it would have been a powerful message. I still believe it should have been there, but somehow I wonder if it was a conscious decision to not be too explicit about a topic, not to make it become an "issue". [Editors' note: Joss Whedon has vowed to eschew heavy-handed treatment of social issues; see Rhonda V. Wilcox, "'There Will Never Be a "Very Special" *Buffy*.'"]

CONCLUSION: DEEPENING THE COMPREHENSION

(82) Joss Whedon and his pool of writers do use soap opera. They grasp, beyond the storylines, the identifying elements, the narrative modes, the structure, the constants that make a genre such, beyond experimentation, tangential choices, the poetics of each author. And using these elements, they make them their own. They do not dodge or avoid choosing the puzzle pieces only because they end up using them in a different context. They recognize the compound the bricks are made of, even when the house they are building - the mental construction they want to build - is different. And they blend them, they integrate them, making them fit in a structure that is different. They are eclectic architects who don't feel constrained in a module. Intimately knowing the materials at their disposal, they use them where they can be useful, even when it has probably never been done before. Thus they reinvent the blueprint and they make it come alive with structures that get themselves renewed in contact with new elements. If we try to understand *Buffy*'s aesthetics we have to come to terms with remnants of soap-taste that flavour and colour the narration and that can't be ignored. They give shadows and layers and depth to everything that happens.

(83) Soaps have their own language, a visual and narrative jargon that, unless you are among the initiated, is often hard to appreciate. The surface of the events is understood easily, but to make viewing a meaningful experience, that surface comprehension is not enough. Soap operas often put people off at first because they are "opaque": apparently easily readable, in truth not instantly read. The required *forma mentis* allows us to discover far more striking points of contact than an un-educated look would suspect. Therefore, the similarities shouldn't be put aside. Soap language is a huge building element to comprehend and decode *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that can't be ignored in any epistemological search that tries to understand it in its whole complexity. [69]

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[5] Springer. Matt. "Last Call." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Official Magazine,* Summer 99, Volume 2, Number 3: p. 22

[6] Whedon often uses the term "soap opera" in some of his interviews on the DVDs that collect *Buffy*'s seasons, for example.

[7] Agnes Nixon well conveys the attitude soaps are faced with when, desolated, she observes "soap opera became the clichéd denigration of anything ". Her resolution was to change that: "Well, is there anything we can do to make them pay attention?". Her determination was frustrated by the realization that no matter what she did, it still wasn't enough. This in: "On the genre". *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. Ed. Robert Morton. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: p. 74.

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Mimi Torchin, soap maven and reviewer for many years, offers the same disheartened take on biases that have to be faced in her Sept. 20 column *News and Views*: "Mimi for the Defence", at http://soapnet.go.com.

They are just the tip of the iceberg.

[8] Shuttleworth, Ian. "'They always mistake me for the character I play!': Transformation, identity and role playing in the Buffyverse (and a defence of fine acting)." *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An unofficial Critical Companion to* Buffy *and* Angel. Ed. Roz Kaveney. London-New York: Tarius Parke Paperbacks, 2002: 211- 236

[9] This was one of the comments collected on Little Willow's site. It's dated Fri Jul 16 02:03:39 1999. (http://members.tripod.com/~Little__Willow/)

[10] Lynn Leahy, *Soap Opera Digest* editor-in-chief, was asked to choose the characters she thought were the best 12 daytime had through the years. This is what she said about Anna Devane, who was among the ones she selected: " A grown-up – how refreshing! Smart and sophisticated, self sufficient Anna Devane never needed a man to take care of her. Anna was a woman in charge of her life, too confident to settle for less than she deserved. Not that she'd send a man packing at the first sign he wasn't perfect. Anna had made mistakes too and paid for them. She didn't demand perfection, just

honesty. But as forthright as she was, Anna came to Port Charles as a woman of mystery and never lost her enigmatic edge." In: Waggett, Gerald J. *The Soap Opera Book of lists.* New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1996: p.156

[11] Wilcox and Lavery (*supra*) tackle this issue, among others.

[12] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide - Volume 2*. Ed. Nancy Holder with Jeff Mariotte and Maryelizabeth Hart. New Yourk: Pocket Books, 2000: p.327

[13] Sarah Michelle Gellar recently appeared on the cover of *Soap Opera Digest* (September 24, 2002) for its "50 Superstars who started on Soaps" issue. While she was on the show, her not getting along with Susan Lucci was very much publicized. And gossip on their jealously and rivalry were rampant. The infamous feud makes people talk to this day (April 2003): just check http://www.soaptownusa.com/ message board for proof.

[14] In *Soap Opera Update*, April 16, 1996 p.72, Emma Caulfield (Anya) says she is, like Whedon, a hopeless *General Hospital* fan, which she has watched since she was nine or ten. At that time, at least, she was very much into Sonny and Brenda, Robin Scorpio and the heartbreaking death of Stone. She also kept tabs on *The Young and the Restless*, *Days of our lives* and *As the World Turns*.

In *Soap Opera Digest*, March 17, 1998 p.63, Anthony Stewart Head declares: "I used to get SANTA BARBARA in England. I adored Robin Wright [Penn, ex-Kelly]. I occasionally watch SUNSET BEACH or YOUNG AND RESTLESS in my trailer. Then, there's some woman with very odd teeth [DAYS OF OUR LIVES's Susan]. What's going on with her?".

[15] The word I really wanted to use here, instead of "group of series" was "formanti". ("Formants" we could probably say). Since it's a neologism only used by Italian comparative jurists though, hardly even found on Italian dictionaries themselves, I opted not to use it. Even if the concept is less rich. In a nutshell, we can think of several sets interacting in the legal system: the scholars, the judges, the legislators, customs… Each of these is a "formant". (Should someone be interested, this text could be checked: Sacco, Rodolfo. "Introduzione al diritto comparato". Torino: Giappichelli Editore, 1998). I truly believe we could trace, in parallel, TV "formants": Tv critics/scholars/reviewers, authors, networks, the public… They interact. These "formants", these "lobbies", at times with different ideas, compete. The richer the one, the more challenged the others. The dynamics that get established inside a Country have particular, individual, unrepeatable histories, which are heavy from the point of view of the cultural legacy they hold. They enter in the cultural DNA of a society. But that's not all: within genres and within the programs themselves, they have all an autonomous development – simply think of the critics-public relationship, or at the critics-authors one, that's intense in both the daytime and prime-time communities, with partially different characteristics. Some "formants" are a true pull for a show, they can support or boycott it, attribute values and meanings to it. Crypto-formants may be traced: soaps often being a "silent" influence, an influence hardly admitted proudly that is (a shame, in my opinion), may be ascribed to this category. *Buffy* and the "formants" having a dialogue with it, and how they interact, are very interesting pieces of studying, for sure.

[16] Groves, Seli. "Introduction". *The Ultimate Soap Opera Guide*. Detroit: Stearn Publishers Ltd., 1995: p. xiii

[17] PC arcs have been so far: Fate (12/4/2000 – 02/02/2001); Time in a bottle (03/05/2001 – 06/01/2001); Tainted Love (06/04/2001-08/31/2001); Tempted (09/03/2001-11/29/2001); Miracles Happen (12/02/2001-12/31/2001); Secrets (01/02/2002-03/29/2002); Superstition (04/01/2002-06/28/2002); Torn (07/01/2002-09/27/2002); Naked Eyes (09/30/2002-12/30/2002); Surrender (12/30/2002-04/01/2003); Desire (04/02/03 – 07/02/03); The Gift (07/03/03 - …)

For more on the single arcs go to: http://www.portcharlesexplosion.com/

[18] Hoke-Kahwaty, Donna. "Is your favorite prime-time show a soap?" *Soap Opera Digest*, Dec 11, 1990: 24-29. The quote is taken from p.28

[19] Taggi, Paolo. "Un programma di". Milano: Nuova Pratiche Editrice srl, 1997: p141. The translation is mine. The original Italian says: "(…) sono costruiti su una serie di invisibili omissioni: "I nostri eroi non mangiano, non passeggiano, non si lavano, non dormono. Sono sempre sul punto di…Fanno solo gesti simbolici… contano solo le parole"".

[20] West, Dave. "Concentrating of the kicking movie: Buffy and the east Asian cinema." *Reading he Vampire Slayer: An unofficial Critical Companion to* Buffy *and* Angel*.* Ed. Roz Kaveney. London-New York: Tarius Parke Paperbacks, 2002: p 181-182-185

[21] Bernstein, Abbie. "Fight Club: Supervising the slaying". *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Magazine*. Vol. 1. Issue 33, May 2002: p. 18-19

[22] *Soap Opera Digest*, Aug 1, 1995

[23] Rice, Lynette. "Bursting Bubbles – Campy vs. classic: Two soap opera styles duke it out for daytime ratings supremacy". http://www.ew.com/ew/report , 02 DEC 02

[24] Wagget, Gerard J. "Another World". *The Soap Opera Encyclopedia*. New Tork: HarperPaperbacks, 1997. p. 38

[25] *Soap Opera Digest*, March 26, 2002, p.44

[26] Timmy could be considered a sort of modern day Pinocchio. In the end *Passions* lets Timmy truly die, following the untimely demise of his portrayer, Josh Ryan Evans, who was only 20. The actor passed away the same day his character died on screen. He had already pre-taped other scenes, in witch Timmy was supposed to appear in heaven looking down to Charity, who got his heart in a transplant. The executives, though, decided to edit them out, out of respect toward him.

[27] News for the week of 02-Dec-2002 by Carol Banks Weber at http://soapzone.com/pc/Gossip.shtml which quotes ABC Soaps in Depth November 26, 2002

[28] "Port Charles: Looking out for a Hero". *Soap Opera Digest*, November 6, 2001. The article is in the "Thumbs Up! And Down!" section of the magazine. The critique is even juxtaposed to one on *Buffy*'s "The Gift".

[29] Da Ros, Giada. "Soap Opera su Italia1: l'immortale Dark Shadow". *Il popolo*. Domenica 12 marzo, 1995 and Waggett, Gerard J., "Dark Shadows". *The Soap Opera Encyclopedia*. New Tork: HarperPaperbacks, 1997: 237-245

[30] Melton opinion can be found in Iyer, Vinnie. "Dead and loving it – a look at how Buffy's vamps stack up against the classic bloodsucker of the past". *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Official Magazine*. Issue No. 4 /Summer 1999

[31] "Dark Shadows". *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. Ed. Robert Morton. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: p.144

[32] Klein, Cheryl. "Dark Shadows did Pre-Buffy Vampire camp". http://www.zap2it.com - Tv news- March 9, 2001

[33] Scott, Kathryn Leigh and Pierson, Jim. *Dark Shadows Almanac: 30th Anniversary Tribute*. Los Angeles – London: Pomegranate Press, Ltd., 1995. *Dark Shadows: Program Guide*. Compiled by Ann Wilson. Los Angeles – London: Pomegranate Press, Ltd., 1995.

[34] Pierson, Jim. "30 Years in the Shadows. Remembering Daytime's scariest soap." *Soap Opera Weekly*, July 2, 1996, p. 32-35

[35] She expressed this on a Tv special, "*Santa Barbara* - domani" (*Santa Barbara* - tomorrow), aired on Italian channel Rai2 in June 30th 1992. She was dubbed, so the quote is a translation form the Italian. For more on "Santa Barbara", you can visit this site: http://www.cybercom.net/~jima/sbhome.html.

[36] Wilcox Rhonda V.,and Lavery, David. "Introduction." *Fighting the Forces. What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2002: p. xxiv

[37] Nancy Holder with Jeff Mariotte and Maryelizabeth Hart. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide - Volume 2*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000: p. 335

[38] Nancy Holder with Jeff Mariotte and Maryelizabeth Hart. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide - Volume 2*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000: p. 338

[39] Allen, Robert C.. "Introduction". *To be continued… Soap Operas around the world*. Ed.. London and New York: Routledge, 1995: p.20

[40] On *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. Ed. Robert Morton. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: p.32 we read how "Daytime was the province of perceived feminine values, talk and negotiation". Plus, we can remember the aforementioned Taggi's comment on words in soaps.

[41] Helford, Elyce Rae. ""My Emotions Give Me Power': The containment of Girl's Anger in *Buffy*". *Fighting the Forces. What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2002: 18 - 34

[42] Timberg, Bernard. "The Rhetoric of the camera in television soap opera." *Television, the Critical View* – Forth Edition, Ed. by Horace Newcomb p.175.

[43] Timberg, p.174

[44] Timberg, p.173.

[45] Shakespeare, William. "Richard II". Act IV, scene 1. *The complete Works.* Ed. Weels, Satnley W. and Taylor, Gary. Oxford University Press: 1988: 367 - 395

[46] Morton, Robert. *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: p.36

[47] Hoke-Kathwaty, Donna. "Is your favorite prime-time show a soap?". *Soap Opera Digest*, December 11, 1990: 24-29

[48] Gratton, John. "Soap Opera: The place where you only die twice." *Soap Opera Digest*, March 8, 1988: 88-89

[49] Rabinowitz, Naomi. "The Greatful Dead". *Soap Opera Digest*, September 17, 2002: 40 - 42

[50] Allen, Robert C.. "Introduction". *To be continued… Soap Operas around the world*. Ed. Robert C. Allen. London and New York: Routledge, 1995

[51] "On the genre". *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. Ed. Robert Morton. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: p.36

[52] *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. Ed. Robert Morton. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: 37-38

[53] Allen, Robert C. . "*The Guiding Light*: Soap Opera as Economic Product and Cultural Document". *Television, the Critical View* – Forth Edition, Ed. by Horace Newcomb: p. 151

[54] Wilcox Rhonda V. and Lavery, David. "Introduction." *Fighting the Forces. What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2002: p. xxiii

[55] Newcomb, Horace. "Toward a Television aesthetic". *Television, the Critical View* – Forth Edition, Ed. by Horace Newcomb p. 620

[56] Williams, J.P. "Choosing your own mother: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in *Buffy*". *Fighting the Forces. What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Ed. Wilcox Rhonda V.,and Lavery, David. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2002: p 70-71

[57] Bellocci, Giorgio. *"Sentieri": Come nasce una leggenda televisiva*. Milano: Edizioni dell'Arco, 1994: p.40-41

[58] Even if I believe that in soaps there's neither one of the two, rather what we could call a "couple-archal" mentality.

[59] ""I believe that [daytime] serial drama is all about 'When will they kiss?'" says Leah Laiman. "Give me romance. I don't care about anything else. Action/adventure only works as a backdrop for 'Will they kiss?' If that's absent, it's not interesting." (*infra sub* #60). Though a little extreme, expressed this way, it well conveys the importance of love stories for daytime. And I think putting Spike and Buffy's kiss at the end of "Once more, with feeling" (6007) was a huge statement. They wanted us to wait for it till the last possible chance. They leave us craving for more, asking "What now?".

[60] Caploe, Roberta. "Are soaps better in the dark? Daytime vs. prime time: you decide". *Soap Opera Digest*, June 26, 1990: 140-143

[61] "Santa Barbara" synopsis. *Soap Opera Digest*, May 3, 1988: 69-70

[62] Kelley, Adam. "Redemption Convention". *Soap Opera Digest*, April 11, 1995: 46-49

[63] Bednarz, Stella. "How to become and anti-hero: The Rocky Road From Chump to Champion". *Soap Opera Digest*, December 15, 1987: 114-119

[64] Levinsky, Mara. "Rebel without a pause". *Soap Opera Digest*, November 26, 2002: 40-43

[65] *Entertainment Weekly* #505 – Oct 1, 1999 – The ultimate Buffy viewer's Guide: p 24.

[66] Dawn, Randee. "Second Time around". *Soap Opera Digest*, December 24, 2002: p-48

[67] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* - The Complete Second Season on DVD – Disc 4 – "Innocence" – Special Features – Interview with Joss Whedon

[68] Waggett, Gerald J. *The Soap Opera Book of lists.* New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1996: p. 91

[69] All *Buffy*'s quotes are taken from www.buffyguide.com