The Slayer Studies by buffy.de Online

Leigh Clemons

Real Vampires Don't Wear Shorts:

The Aesthetics of Fashion in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

[1] One of the most popular aspects of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*) was its "look," especially the fashion sense displayed by the central character. Yet clothing was an iconographic statement for all of the characters on the show. Shifts in clothing provide ways to track the growth and development of each of the Scoobies over the course of the seven seasons. While Willow's transformation from the girl in the Peter Pan collars ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001) to "scary veiny Willow" ("Grave," 6022) is the most obvious manifestation, changes in clothing on the show marked not only shifts in fashion trends, but also the new roles in which characters found themselves as the show went by. Other characters, such as Giles and Joyce, changed little over the seven seasons, providing a visual reinforcement of their status as father- and mother-figures to the Scoobies. Fashion also served to demarcate "good" characters from "bad" ones, not only in the sense of evil, but also in the sense of ineptitude, as with vampire Harmony's obliviousness to the need to "look" evil in order to truly "be" evil once she turns.

[2] The recent works of fashion philosophers such as Joanne Entwhistle, Diana Crane, and Fred Davis explore the idea of a fashion aesthetic, or the sense of identity gained from clothing, and how it affects everyday social interactions as well as society's perceptions of media figures. Applying these theories to the changes in fashion trends, I will discuss how fashion was established as an aesthetic on the show, namely by pitting the (not-so) fashionable vampires against Buffy's fashion sense. Then, I propose to do a reading of the major looks in fashion aesthetics using the characters in *BtVS*, such as Buffy's change from rebellious daughter to mother-figure and Willow's transformation from computer geek to powerful light/dark witch. The fashion shifts range from the subtle to the overwhelming, yet each case documents not only a new development in the character's story arc, but also a change in the aesthetics of the show itself.

[3] While the study of fashion is not a new trend, it is only recently that scholars have moved beyond a straight semiotically-based analysis to a more culturally-grounded one which accounts for shifts in tastes and trends. The result has been the development of a fashion aesthetic better equipped to explain the complexities of fashion's codes and significations, including trends, brands, identity significations and deeper meanings. Fred Davis asserts that "the clothing-fashion code much more nearly approximates an aesthetic code than it does the conventional sign codes" (11). He bases this assertion on a 1976 statement by semiotician Jonathan Culler, who wrote "aesthetic expression aims to communicate notions, subtleties and complexities which have not yet been formulated, and therefore, as soon as an aesthetic code comes to be generally perceived as a code…works tend to move beyond it" (100). Under this rubric, a fashion aesthetic code such as Davis advocates deals with the fact that fashion's meanings are constantly in

flux, both in terms of changes in fashion and changes in the historical perception of what fashion meant in a given time period.

[4] First, it is necessary to distinguish the idea of "fashion" from other terms around it, such as dress, which have other meanings. In her review of recent theories of fashion and dress, Joanne Entwhistle looks at dress as the "process of covering," with a practical and aesthetic function (43). Fashion, then, is "a historically and geographically specific system for the production and organization of dress" (44). Fred Davis, on the other hand, sees fashion as a threshold event in the reorganization of what he calls the "clothing code: those code modifications that[…]somehow manage on first viewing to startle, captivate, offend or otherwise engage the sensibilities of some culturally preponderant public" (15). So, fashion is simultaneously a process (Entwhistle) and an event (Davis), existing both in the moment of contact and as a shifting pattern of meanings about said moment. Nonetheless, fashion scholars, however diverse their definitions of fashion, dress, and the relationship between the two, all believe that what one wears conveys a complex set of signifiers that reverberate throughout a society and over time.

[5] It must be noted that, according to fashion scholars, there is a danger in "ascribing precise meanings to most clothing" (Davis 6). Outfits shift and change their meanings over time as trends change. "The very same apparel that 'said' one thing last year will 'say' something quite different today and yet another thing next year" (Davis 6). One need only look at the recent trends towards "retro" clothing to see that styles can be reconfigured to signify different things to different generations of wearers. It is this lack of continuity that separates fashion aesthetics from more conventional sign codes, such as linguistic ones. I consider this idea of continuity shifting to be less of a problem for discussing fashion as seen on a television show as opposed to fashion trends in real life because the manipulation of fashion is part of the show's overall aesthetic. Characters may reflect certain clothing trends, but clothing first and foremost serves as a reinforcing agent for the character's development and change. While this may seem like an small distinction—are a character's clothing changes all that different than a young woman embracing this year's skirt length and color palate over last year's?—television characters are free to hold onto significant character clothing choices for as long as they serve to reinforce the ideas of the character within the given universe. For example, Willow can continue to wear Peter Pan collars and overalls long after a "real" girl her age (especially one with a friend who has as much fashion sense as Buffy) might have opted for trendier threads. Because clothing reflects the overall development of the show, the story may place a character into a sequence that falls outside of fashion trends, yet is integral to the show's story arc (as, for example, Spike's development beginning in season four and Dark Willow in season six).

[6] While *BTVS*'s dialogue does give lip service to Buffy's control over her clothing choices from the very first episode, it must be remembered that she, like any television character, is at the mercy of the show's desired look. Her likes and dislikes are programmed as part of her character. They change only when those in charge—producer, director, costume designer—deem that change is needed. Lorna Jowett has pointed out that fans are particularly savvy to this aspect of fashion aesthetics; fans readily understand that there is a larger force that decides about hair and clothing shifts

on the part of characters (22). Finally, because *BtVS* is now off the air, the signifying circle is now closed. No new trends can be introduced; only the exploration of the existing trends contained within the episodes remains. (I am excluding consideration of the *BtVS* comic books from the discussion, as well as any clothing trends mentioned the *BtVS* novels, focusing instead on performative aesthetics of fashion, not literary ones.) Therefore, *BtVS*'s fashion aesthetic falls dangerously close to Culler's border between the ambiguous and the defined code.

[7] The aesthetics of fashion consists of three facets, or "looks." First, and most obvious is the "look" of the trends and branding as a status symbol. The first season establishes fashion as a major aesthetic on *BtVS*. Buffy is portrayed as fashion-conscious (in fact, in the *Revised Core Rulebook* for the *BtVS* Role-playing Game, fashion is Buffy's consistent "wild card"). She is fashionable enough, at the beginning of the pilot, to merit Cordelia's attention and possible admission to the Cordettes. Much of "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001) centers around fashion concepts. Buffy agonizes over what to wear to the Bronze ("Hi, I'm an enormous slut! Hello, would you like a copy of the Watchtower?"), identifies potential vampires by their lack of fashion sense, and informs Giles that one of her greatest worries upon arriving at Sunnydale High was that she "would have last month's hair."

[8] As Buffy's reflection of her pre-Slayer self, Cordelia is the denizen of trendy fashion at Sunnydale High. Much of her early dialogue is devoted to promoting her own fashion aesthetic or to denigrating those who do not meet her standards, as when she tells Willow, "so glad you've discovered the softer side of Sears" in "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001). Cordelia's attachment to fashion is a constant throughout her three seasons on *BtVS*. In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1011), Cordy announces that her May Queen gown will be "specially made" because "off-the-rack gives me hives." In "Reptile Boy" (2005), Cordelia instructs Buffy on what (not) to wear to the fraternity party, "don't wear black, silk, chiffon or spandex—these are my trademarks." (Buffy responds by wearing a little black chiffon-looking number, both asserting her own ownership of these fashion signifiers and undercutting Cordelia's attempt to dictate fashion requirements.) Cordelia also resorts to designer names and power colors such as red and black following her breakup with Xander in season three as an attempt to re-establish her position within the school. She further bonds with new student Anya over Harmony's snide remarks, remarking that her former friends "can't tell Prada from Payless" in "The Wish" (3009). Cordelia's ultimate fall from Queendom (which paves the way for her acceptance and redemption on *Angel*) occurs in "The Prom" (3020), when she is also forced into an off-the-rack prom dress (which Xander pays for) following her father's problems with tax evasion.

[9] This focus on fashion-conscious clothing was a choice from the outset of the series. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide, Vol. 1* contains a reference to the care taken by costume designer Cynthia Bergstrom in selecting the show's "contemporary clothes" (Golden and Holder 88). Bergstrom used national chains, such as Barney's, Neiman Marcus, and Macy's, as well as local shops like Fred Segal (spelled incorrectly in the *Guide*; Golden and Holder 88) to help keep the show's major characters hip and trendy. In so doing, Bergstrom was able to keep a clear focus on the show's contemporary feel even as storylines themselves dealt with ancient demons, vampires,

and occult practices. Fashion provided the bridge for the audience between the "unreality" of the Hellmouth and the "reality" of a one-Starbucks California town like Sunnydale, where high school cliques still doled out stinging rebukes to those students, such as Willow and Xander (and later Buffy), who did not follow the trends.

[10] Buffy's trendy fashion sense is held in direct opposition to the lack of fashion sense found in Sunnydale's vampire population. Vampires in *BtVS* are portrayed as being "out of touch" with current fashion, or dressing in unusual ways. As Matthew Pateman has observed, "the undead's dress sense is [often] the motor for comedy" (142). It is also a vehicle for self-referentiality and character reinvention: the former prostitute Darla, Angel's sire, first appears in a schoolgirl uniform ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001); innocent and almost-nun Drusilla appears as a 19th century gothic novel heroine in "What's My Line?" (2009, 2010). Her outfits are complete with Georgian waistlines and Victorian high collars, depending upon the dress. Later, she appears in a striking red gown ("Becoming, Part Two," 2022) and in black gothic lace ("Crush," 5014). As a one with an eye to fashionable trends, Buffy is easily able to use the vampires' lack of fashion sense to spot them in public. In "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001), Buffy identifies a vampire to Giles by the former's clothing: "only someone living underground for 10 years would think that was still the look." Like Cordelia, Buffy is also not afraid to dish out fashion commentary when appropriate, telling one particularly 1980's-styled vampire that "you look like DeBarge."

[11] Having a sense of the importance of fashion does not necessarily translate into fashion sense itself, especially in the vampire world. Sunday, the goth vampire from "The Freshman" (4001), is ironic because she laments the lame fashion and music choices of her victims even as she wears a black miniskirt, leggings, neck collar, and ankle boots with her spiked hair—a classic 1980's Madonna-esque new wave look, dating back to the supposed time of her arrival in Sunnydale (1982). As Sunday laments what she sees as Buffy's fashion faux pas—"those jeans with the little patches—she has no one to blame but herself," she herself embodies the stereotypical dress of vampire wannabes such as Chantarelle from "Lie to Me" (2007) (and society in general, if one can believe the pictures on vampire clothing websites like http://www.dracinabox.com/vampire.htm). Likewise Harmony, fashion maven and one of the Cordettes, also begins to have clothing issues after she is turned. When she reappears in "The Harsh Light of Day" (4003), she has gone from a trendier look to trashy red hot pants, supposedly reflecting her "kinky" relationship with her "blondie bear," Spike.

[12] Even Spike, whose Billy Idol-look is considered stylish, gets into the non-stylish act in Doomed (4011), when his laundry faux pas forces him into Xander's Hawaiian shirt and cut-off shorts; the outfit nearly drives him to suicide because he looks ridiculous—a vampire in shorts—and knows it. He once again goes under fashion cover in "Tabula Rasa" (6008) with the tweedy suit he wears to outwit the loan shark, the same one he wore in "Restless" (4022) in Xander's dream. However, it is made clear that when Spike strays from his traditional rebel look, it is for reasons of self-protection or necessity, not due to any lack of fashion savvy. (In fact, Spike's clothing is the one look that does not change at all over the course of the show.)

[13] The second aspect of the fashion aesthetic "look" concerns character significations. According to Davis, "in all societies clothes serve to communicate more or less standardized meanings about their wearers, but not all societies subject wearers to the periodic alterations of meaning affected by fashion" (27). Shifts in what characters wear signify changes in character, and "viewers engage readily with these [fashion] aspects, making judgments about characters" (Jowett 21). Buffy, for example, starts out in teen-oriented micro miniskirts/dresses and knee-high boots in season one and ends up in long straight skirts by season six and in (trendy) mom-like scoop-necked pants suits by season seven. These changes in her dress signify her changing role from teenager to mother-figure over the course of the show.

[14] From the outset of the series, Buffy's fashion aesthetic is considered to be an outgrowth of her slaying; she is to look good *and* kick butt. Her clothes are not a hindrance to her abilities. When they are, she makes them adapt to her, as in "Flooded" (6003), when she slits her fashionable long skirt so she can fight the Trio's demon in the bank. However, her clothing choices do earn commentary. The Master, having killed Buffy in "Prophecy Girl" (1012), comments, "by the way, I like your dress," referring to her white Spring Fling gown in which she has come, like a lamb to the slaughter, to confront him. This is the same gown in which she later kills him—marching to the confrontation to the blaring of the show's main title, gown billowing behind her—a further indication of her clothing's adaptability. "The I in Team" (4013) contains a classic Buffy fashion moment; responding to Maggie Walsh's concern that she is inappropriately attired to help search for the Polgara demon, Buffy replies that she has "patrolled in this halter [a backless, spaghetti-tied orange thing] many times." This moment is important because it establishes the disparity between the spit-and-polish Initiative grunts and the unique style of the Chosen One. Clearly, Buffy's look is the one to emulate. In season six's "As You Were" (6014), the reverse is true; Buffy dons the new fashionable black Kevlar suits to help Riley and his wife hunt the Doctor because, as Riley mentions, her Doublemeat Palace uniform is hardly conducive to covert operations.

[15] Buffy's look changes after her return in third season and into fourth. According to costume designer Cynthia Bergstrom, "her character is definitely stronger. She's no longer hiding who she is. She's the Slayer; she knows that she's the Slayer" (Holder, Mariotte and Hart 350). Yet fashion remains key; Bergstrom believes that "the way she dresses is an outlet for her" (Holder, Mariotte and Hart 350). Her look remains very fashionable, with a color palate ranging from "brighter tones, the rich jewel-tones, Indian-or Moroccan-influenced colors to deeper darker blacks and browns." Another constant is the use of skirts, although they are no longer the mini-skirts of season one. Bergstrom believes that skirts "[give] her that playful girly image" (Holder, Mariotte and Hart 350). Yet her clothing choices still retain that practical aspect necessary, at this point, to slaying, and significant of the fact that she bears few, if any other, responsibilities besides those attached to being the Slayer.

[16] While Buffy does not always patrol in fashionable attire, often preferring pants, a coat and knit cap, she rarely is seen in completely unfashionable clothing. A notable exception is "Helpless" (3012), where Buffy, bereft of her powers on order of the Council, wears a slouchy shirt and overalls (less fashionable than Willow's typical look of this time period) to rescue her mother from the vampire Kralik during the

Cruciamentum. Yet, in later seasons, Buffy is seen more and more patrolling in what one might see as impractical clothing: white turtleneck sweaters, dress pants. (Even the Buffybot of "Intervention" (5018) gets into the act; she is initially costumed in a gauzy skirt and top and has to be asked by "her" friends to change into something more appropriate to the task of rescuing Spike from Glory. Buffy condescendingly refers to her as "skirt girl.") Buffy is still the Slayer, with all the physical duties such a calling entails, but she is also becoming an adult and learning about the disparity between the relatively simple world of slaying and the complexities of finances, jobs, raising a teenage sister plus, in season seven, counseling troubled teens and training an army to save the world.

[17] Buffy's sexual transgressiveness is also reflected in how she wears, or does not wear, her clothing. Though she dresses in miniskirts and tight shirts, her look is attributed to be trendy, not trashy. Her sexuality in season one is seen as more of an innocent, teenage ideal. Even after she has sex with Angel, her clothing reflects little shift in her sexual presentation; she is able to clearly recognize the difference between fashionable clothing and "slutwear." It is important that many of her early romantic encounters occur when she is not fashionably dressed: in her pajamas at the end of "Halloween" (2006) and soaking wet in "Surprise" (2013).

[18] The introduction of Faith in season three provides a perfect foil for Buffy's look. From her first appearance in "Faith, Hope and Trick" (3003), Faith is a heavily sexualized character, wearing suggestive clothing (Cordelia calls her "Slut-O-Rama") and exercising her sexuality as a weapon in the fight against the vampires and as protection against her own loneliness and outsider status. Her clinging shirts and leather pants mark her as different from Buffy and her friends, who dress in brighter colors and patterns (Buffy sports two particularly annoying coats through this phase: a pink one and a faux-fur black and white spotted one). When Buffy goes to confront Faith in "Graduation Day, Part One" (3021), needing the other Slayer's blood to cure a poisoned Angel, she dresses for the first time in an outfit reminiscent of Faith's: red leather pants and a black shirt (Tjardes 75). This outfit became the "signature" outfit for the season, appearing on the cover of the second volume of *The Watcher's Guide*, emphasizing her shift into a more ambiguous ethical territory. Although earlier in season three, she had suffered remorse over the accidental death of the Deputy Mayor, Buffy has no compunction about killing Faith to get the blood she needs to save Angel. This shift in attitude—a move into the "darkness" that her character will struggle against for the next four seasons—takes its first shape in her clothing.

[19] Nowhere is this shift into darkness better reflected in fashion terms than in Buffy's affair with Spike. In season six, she has sex with Spike fully clothed in public places, such as an abandoned house ("Smashed," 6009) the Bronze ("Dead Things," 6013) behind the Doublemeat Palace (6012), or in her front yard ("As You Were," 6015), as opposed to her more "traditional" naked, bed-oriented "vanilla" lovemaking with Angel, Parker, and Riley. Buffy's willingness to engage in sex fully clothed can be seen as a further indication not only of her clothing's "adaptability," but also of how far into darkness and the monstrosity of "vampire sex" she has fallen (Larbalestier, in Kaveney 207). During their last confrontation of the season, "Seeing Red" (6019), Buffy is at her most vulnerable, emotionally, physically, and fashionably, clad only in a simple gray bathrobe. The robe's color itself indicates her slow climb back into the "reality" of her

world and its proper view of Spike's place within it, sustained by her rebuff of Spike's advances (this time, "no" really does mean "no"), and his attempted rape.

[20] The character who makes the biggest transition over the course of the series is Willow, and much of her clothing reflects these changes. She starts out in season one as the geek in Peter Pan collars, sweaters with tights, or overalls—looks that she maintains throughout the first three seasons. During her high school years, Willow is not a fashion trendsetter, dressing in clothes her mother buys for her. We first see her in a plain gray plaid jumper and tights (the aforementioned "softer side of Sears") in "Welcome to the Hellmouth." (This is similar to the jumper that Willow will wear again in "Restless" (4022), when her deepest fear is publicly revealed, by Buffy, no less, that she is still the same insecure geek she was in high school.)

[21] In fourth season Willow goes about in cheerier colors, with her tie-dyed shirts and broom skirts. As indicated in "The Freshman" (4001), college is Willow's Mecca, a place for self-reinvention where her talents can fully shine (the "spurty knowledge" speech). Her full-blown relationship with Oz has caused her to blossom, with a trendy haircut and an end to her sweaters and skirts. The abrupt ending of the relationship causes a loss of confidence that throws her back into her high school perceptions of herself, even though she has changed on the outside. She is still believed to be an outsider, as former fellow student Percy indicates when he calls her a geek in "Doomed" (4011). Her relationship with Tara, however, brings about a calming effect; her focus on magic (and on Tara) gives her a confidence that transforms her clothes into her fashionable look. What once was geeky becomes, by season's end, her trend.

[22] As Willow's character changes over fifth season, she develops the ability to offer commentary on how unfashionable her previous clothing has been. Nowhere is this ability more in evidence than in "The Body" (5016). In her room with Tara, Willow is trying to decide what to wear to the hospital to sit with Buffy after Joyce's death. After vacillating back and forth between several choices (including a pink sweater with a ballerina on it) and searching in vain for her blue sweater ("Joyce really liked the blue one—she told me one time"), Willow finally loses it: "why do all of my shirts have to have stupid things on them? Why can't I just dress like a grownup?" She changes clothes two more times before leaving, finally settling on a fuzzy darker pink turtleneck, a very grown-up outfit, indeed. In the episode commentary, Whedon says that such behavior is indicative of the impact of grief. By focusing in on her clothing and its inability to provide the comfort or support she so desperately needs, Willow acknowledges the inability of material things to blunt the trauma of grief (just as Xander's punching of the wall a short time later reinforces the futility of action to do the same). Willow's clothing changes dramatically after this episode, as she takes on more of a leadership role within the Scoobies and care of Tara following Glory's mind suck. Her color palate shifts more to the darker hues that will follow her into sixth season and also reflect her growth—not only into addiction, but into adulthood and redemption (in season seven).

[23] Fashion, however, is as much a way of hiding one's identity from the world as it is of announcing it. Therefore, not all aspects of a character's identity were

necessarily expressed through the clothing he/she wore on a daily basis. As Diana Crane notes, "clothing as a form of nonverbal, visual communication is a powerful means of making subversive social statements, because these statements are not necessarily constructed or received on a conscious or rational level" (237). One way that the characters on the show were able to express hidden aspects of their personalities was through costuming, namely Halloween costumes. Buffy's Halloween costumes reflect the underside of her public, hip, trendy persona, namely, the lack of stability she feels in her relationships with men. Both the 18th century gown from "Halloween" (2006) and the Little Red Riding Hood costume from "Fear, Itself" (4004) give insights into Buffy's insecurities in her role outside that of the Slayer. In "Halloween," Buffy allowed her uncertainties about Angel to drive her choice of costume; believing that Angel wants a woman like those he knew before he turned, she gravitates toward an 18th century dress in Ethan Rayne's shop. Her Little Red Riding Hood costume from "Fear, Itself" signifies the void/forest she feels lost in following Parker's seduction and abandonment of her. The fact that she has no Halloween costume in season six's "All the Way" (6006) is a further symptom of her lack of engagement with the world around her following her resurrection.

[24] Other characters also use Halloween costumes to point up hidden aspects of their makeup. Usually shy Willow reveals her innate sexuality in "Halloween" (2006) by dressing as a rocker babe in "black leather miniskirt, belly shirt, choker, thigh-high boots, and makeup" (Heinecken 109), but covers it up with a standard ghost costume, reflecting her insecurities with her own sexual allure and, one may infer, her later shift in sexual orientation in season four (which she hides from her friends for most of the season). Xander's Soldier Boy ("Halloween") and Secret Agent ("Fear, Itself"), and Pirate ("All the Way") all play on his insecurities about his ability to defend himself as the only "powerless" member of the Scoobies and on his desire to be a full-fledged, take-charge fighter of evil (and of his own life). Anya's "scary" bunny outfit and her unique Angel costume are a further symbol of her inability to read traditional contemporary social codes. Giles' Halloween costumes—his Mexican costume from "Fear, Itself" and his wizard outfit from "All the Way"—provide the audience with a glimpse of the underlying whimsy that the normally reserved (if not stodgy) Watcher displays, often making him appear to be more of a child than the Slayer in his care.

[25] The final "look" of *BtVS*' fashion aesthetics deals with deeper, unconscious meanings, which Davis calls "master statuses." These meanings consist of "different combinations of apparel with their attendant qualities [that] are capable of registering sufficiently consistent meanings for wearers and their viewers" (13). It is here that the show's fashion aesthetic truly enters the realm of the ambiguous and complex, due in large part to the use of color in clothing choices. Certain colors, such as red, black and white, carry special significances in American culture. White is the color of purity; black, the color of evil or death; green, the color of jealousy; and red, the color of lust or sensuality (http://goinside.com/98/4/colors.html). Varying degrees of these colors, or of light and dark, provide an underlying text for audience members to incorporate into their reading of the show. (For example, *The X-Files* use of an almost exclusively monochromatic color palate both parodied the mundane color palate of the FBI and reinforced the sense of conspiracy, mystery and foreboding that ran through the show's underlying story arc.)

[26] The uses of black and white on *BtVS* often problematize the traditional interpretations of white as the color of innocence and black as the color of evil. Black is worn by many characters, both good and evil. Angel and Spike constantly wear black, despite their transitions from evil to good to evil (and back). Buffy often wears black for climactic battles; in "Becoming, Part Two" (2022), she wears a black outfit for her final fight with Angelus before he is re-ensouled, as well as for her battle with Dark Willow in "Two to Go" (6021). (A notable exception to this is "The Gift," 5022 in which Buffy wears a cream-colored outfit more befitting the sacrifice she becomes at the episode's end, just as she wore the white Spring Fling gown when she died the first time in "Prophecy Girl" (1012). On the whole, however, Buffy does not merge well with light colors; her waitress uniform in "Anne" (3001), her uniform in "Doublemeat Palace" (6012) and the institutional clothes from "Normal Again" (6017) are all symbols of her inability to cope with her life, not her strength (which comes from her unique fashion aesthetic). Yet these are some of the lightest clothes that she wears over the course of the series, which calls into question the ability to continually ascribe lighter colors with positive significance.

[27] "Tabula Rasa" (6008) provides a good example of the ambiguous nature of black and white as symbolic colors. Buffy starts out patrolling in a white high-collar sweater and tan coat, refusing Spike's advances following their kiss at the end of "Once More, With Feeling" (6007). She changes to a white shirt with black leather coat before the scene in which she learns Giles is leaving; it is in this outfit, with black/white contrast, that she ends the show in a makeout session with Spike. Buffy's spiritual and moral ambiguity in season six is further reflected in the fact that she is in black at the beginning and end of season six as she crawls out of holes in the ground. In "Becoming, Part Two" (6002), she comes out of the ground in a black dress; in "Grave" (6022), it is a black top and pants. The context of the crawl changes the aesthetic of the black she wears, even as it lends aesthetic symmetry to a dark season and signifies her long-awaited return to the light.

[28] One of the most significant black fashion accessories with multiple layers of significance is Spike's leather duster, which he took from Nikki Wood, the Slayer he killed in New York in 1977. The duster is a trendy piece, especially in light of the return of the duster in male fashion following the character of Neo in *The Matrix* (1999). In the early seasons, the duster serves as a symbol of Spike's evil and prowess as a killer. It also serves to link him to Angel/Angelus; Spike is, ironically, the golden-haired dark mirror of Angel (a fact which season five of *Angel* explores in more depth). As Spike becomes a more sympathetic character in seasons four and five, the duster begins to signify the complex redemptive process he follows, much as it does for fellow wool-duster-wearer Angel. The symbol of the duster as part of a vampire's redemptive journey is highlighted both by Riley (who refers to Angel as "Mr. Billowy-Coat-King-of-Pain" in "The Yoko Factor," 4020) and Spike himself (in the *Angel* episode "In the Dark," A1003). Spike's jacket (black? leather?) also serves as a symbol of his masculinity, as it has for American culture since the days of James Dean and Elvis Presley. (The Fonz on *Happy Days* was a parody of this jacket equals penis tradition; when the Fonz loses his jacket, he loses his ability to be cool.)

[29] Spike loses his jacket when he loses control and tries to rape Buffy in "Seeing Red" (6019), when his desire overrides his reason. He goes off seeking his soul without his jacket. In season seven, Spike remains duster-less throughout the first episodes as he adjusts to having a soul. A soul seems to be incompatible with the tradition symbolized by the duster. Then, in "Get It Done" (7015), after Buffy mocks his inability to fight, Spike returns to the Sunnydale High School basement to retrieve his coat before going to confront the demon sent by the Shadow Men. It is portrayed as an empowering moment; once Spike dons the duster, he is able to defeat the demon that, previously, had thrown him through the ceiling of the Summers' home. However, this moment is also the reintroduction of the duster as symbol of evil, for it marks him as Nikki Wood's killer to her son, Robin, and sets Robin back on his quest for revenge. Ultimately, the black duster and its wearer are redeemed through the cleansing yellow light that incinerates Spike, duster and all, and closes the Hellmouth for good. (What a duster could possibly mean for a reconstituted ghost I will avoid discussing due to length.)

[30] The sixth season is, obviously, the darkest season on the show, and the color palette for the costumes reflect the show's shift into oppressive and obsessive topics. The overall color palate is very dark, with a lack of pastels as season progresses. White does appear from time to time, but it is only to reinforce the darkness into which characters have fallen. In "Bargaining, Part One" (6001), Willow goes about in a white dress with sweater, primarily to highlight the blood spatters that occur when she slaughters a fawn for the resurrection spell. Buffy wears white or white/black combinations during several of her encounters with Spike, including "Tabula Rasa" (6008), both at the beginning in the graveyard and at the end when they are kissing at the Bronze, and "Dead Things" (6013), when they have sex in the loft of the Bronze.

[31] Other colors, however, work within the black/white spectrum to help further significations. Wassily Kandinsky believed that, "Generally speaking, colour is a power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings" (Kandinsky, section V). It is ironic, then, that the most obvious use of color comes with music: the "rainbow look" during "Where Do We Go From Here?" at the end of "Once More, With Feeling" (6007). As they sing, the characters stand in a line, each outfitted in a different color representing the rainbow. As Rhonda Wilcox has pointed out, the subtleties of the coding extend to complementary color pairings between connected characters, such as Willow and Tara in purple and yellow (200), as well as the spectrum of emotions embodied in and motivated by certain colors, such as red, which can have multiple meanings, according to shade. Color pairings vary according to the palette being used (lighting color is different from painting color, and some painters, such as Kandinsky, had their own systems), but the vigorous energy of vibrant red/yellow colors contrasted with the cool internalization of blue/green-oriented colors is somewhat constant.

[32] Willow's fall into dark magic in season six is also reflected in her muted color palate. The vibrant reds, pinks, and blues that were still evident early in season five are gone in favor of darker colors. As would be expected, she casts the resurrection spell in "Bargaining, Part One" (6001) wearing all black. From there on out, she is in either black or other dark colors until "Seeing Red" (6019), when she wears a white top, once again to be spattered by blood: Tara's. Her outfit in "Dead Things" (6013), black pants with a

black, high-collar jacket, foreshadows the Dark Willow who will appear in “Villains” (6020), even as she brags to Tara of being on the road to recovery.

[33] The Dark Willow outfit is a masterpiece of character significations and deeper master symbols. The black high-collar jacket (which appears blue in the “moonlight” of the park where she flays Warren) and pants, reminiscent of the costume worn by the Master in season one (but with more frills) are initially set off with white cuffs, but by the beginning of “Two to Go” (6021), she is all black from head to toe (literally). Willow not only wears black, she becomes black: “scary, veiny Willow,” as Xander calls her, with her black eyes and hair, makes a strong visual statement (some critics say overstatement) of how far she had fallen from the “stupid, mousy” girl who “packed her own lunches and wore floods” (“Two to Go,” 6021). The appearance of Dark Willow, with her black clothes and pale skin, also harkens back to Vamp Willow from “The Wish” (3009) and “Doppelgangland” (3016). However, as befits her status as vampire, not dark witch, Vamp Willow’s contrasting colors were red: high contrast red hair (more so than usual), red lipstick, red shirt under her bustier. Vamp Willow’s evil came from the demon residing within her physical shell, a demon that could alter her appearance as needed by going all bumpy-faced, but otherwise could appear normal looking (at least, normal enough to fool Xander, Oz, Angel, and Cordelia in “Doppelgangland”). Dark Willow’s evil comes from the magic she absorbed literally through her skin; its effects cause a complete shift in her look—head to toe—to reflect the totality of the change. Dark Willow literally becomes black magic—the aesthetic pinnacle of black-equals-evil significations.

[34] In the end, *BtVS*’s fashion aesthetic reflects the same complex universe as other aspects of the show previously examined by scholars. Issues of gender empowerment, sexual identity and agency, good and evil, reality and fantasy are all reinforced by the characters’ clothing and their commentary on fashion, their own and that of others. By foregrounding the importance of fashion, yet allowing shifts in the fashion aesthetic to occur “naturally” as part of a character’s development, the writers, producers, and costume designers of *BtVS* create a fashion aesthetic that embraces contemporary looks, yet contains enough timeless elements and underlying significations to be easily read long after those looks are, as Buffy would say, “carbon-dated.”

Bibliography

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Seasons 1-7. Creator Joss Whedon. Mutant Enemy Productions. 1997-2003. Specific episodes cited in text.

Crane, Diana. *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.

Culler, Jonathan. *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1976.

Davis, Fred. *Fashion, Culture and Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1992.

Entwistle, Joanne, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

Golden, Christopher, and Nancy Holder. Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: The Watcher's Guide, Vol. 1*. New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 1998.

Heinecken, Dawn. *The Warrior Women of Television: A Feminist Cultural Analysis of the New Female Body in Popular Media*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

Holder, Nancy, with Jeff Mariotte and Maryelizabeth Hart. Buffy the Vampire Slayer: *The Watcher's Guide, Vol. 2*. New York: Pocket, 2000.

Jowett, Lorna. *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the* Buffy *Fan*. Middetown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2005.

Kandinksy, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Trans. Michael T.H. Sadler. Project Gutenberg E-text 5321. http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/5321

Kaveney, Roz, ed. *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The New Updated Unofficial Guide to* Buffy *and* Angel. New ed. New York: Tauris Parke, 2004.

Pateman, Matthew. *The Aesthetics of Culture in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.

South, James B., ed. Buffy the Vampire Slayer *and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Chicago: Open Court, 2003.

Tjardes, Sue. "Constructions of Faith, the Vampire Slayer." *Athena's Daughters: Television's New Women Warriors*. Eds. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2003.

Wilcox, Rhonda. *Why* Buffy *Matters: The Art of* Buffy the Vampire Slayer. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005.

Leigh Clemons is Associate Professor of Theatre at Louisiana State University, where she teaches history, literature and criticism to undergraduates and PhDs. She also teaches in the university's Women and Gender Studies program, focusing on gender constructions in popular media (including *BtVS*). She has published articles and reviews in *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Survey*, *Theatre Research International*, *Modern Drama*, *Theatre History Studies*, and *Intelligent Agent* magazine. Her first book, *Lone Stars: Theatre, Performance and Texan Cultural Identity*, is forthcoming from the University of Texas Press.

See the histories of fashion theory development in Crane, Chapter 1, and Entwhistle, Chapter 1.

Local star-guide websites tout the store's connection to *BtVS* on their websites (http://www.seeing-stars.com/Shop/FredSegal.shtml)

Fashion aesthetics also help differentiate "white hats" from the Big Bad of a given season. Perhaps the greatest fashion maven (or victim, depending upon whom you ask) after Cordelia is fifth season's Glory, the malevolent, ditzy god from the hell dimension. Glory is almost as obsessed with clothes and shoes as she is with finding the Key that will get her home (and destroy the world in the process). Glory's wardrobe has a vibrant color palate: deep reds, stark blacks, patterns—even a bit of gold lame'. Glory's choices of short, clingy dresses in satins and other non-cotton fabrics (because cotton is "so pedestrian" "Blood Ties," 5013) are daring fashion choices, even in the Buffyverse, and they are cast as inherently trashy and inappropriate. She is called "skanky" and a "fashion victim," among other terms, and her constant focus on wardrobe is seen as evidence of her insanity and evil nature. Glory's piece of fashion irony is that the least trendy piece of clothing she wears is the robe for the ceremony that will get her home.

Also, it is not necessary for a character to look "evil" to be evil. Harmony's wardrobe once she turns often belies her newfound status. She dresses in neat blazers ("Real Me," 5002) and other clothing that belies her attempts to be "evil" (a discontinuity further explored on *Angel* in "Disharmony," A2017 and in fifth season during her employment at Wolfram and Hart).

She will retain this ability into season seven, when she takes Dawn to task for the latter's clothing choices in "Him" (7006).

For example, Kandinsky believed that "yellow and blue have another movement which affects the first

antithesis--an ex-and concentric movement. If two circles are drawn and painted respectively yellow and blue, brief concentration will reveal in the yellow a spreading movement out from the centre, and a noticeable approach to the spectator. The blue, on the other hand, moves in upon itself, like a snail

retreating into its shell, and draws away from the spectator. [Footnote—*Kandinsky's*: These statements have no scientific basis, but are founded purely on spiritual experience.]"