The vampire Spike in text and fandom: unsettling oppositions in Buffy the Vampire Slayer

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Introduction

This special issue examines a number of key issues in cultural theory through the development of, and reaction to, a popular television character, the vampire Spike from the cult television success *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. As the latest in a long line of sympathetic vampires, Spike's textual construction rearticulates the dualities which fictional vampires have long embodied: the simultaneous expression of erotic repulsion and attraction; a fear of and desire for the 'Other'; the ambivalences of a troubling ontology figured through a creature that is neither dead nor alive. As Nina Auerbach has stated: 'Vampires are neither inhuman nor nonhuman nor all-too-human; they are simply more alive than they should be' (1995: 6). Like his fictional ancestors, Spike blurs boundaries and raises ambiguities, but he does so in a manner firmly located in today's cultural landscape. Spike joins *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in Season 2 with a swagger and a vulnerability which alludes to the many oppositions that he will come to unsettle. Spike is polymorphous: he is both man and monster, both masculine and feminine; and his increasingly fractured self undermines the Manichaean struggle which is central to so much of today's popular culture.

Spike's character also raised important questions about the boundaries of the text. Our understanding of Spike depends upon a number of extra-textual factors: intertextual pop culture references; allusions to musical subcultures; and knowledge of the actor James Marsters, who plays him. Spike has spawned a huge fan culture and his audience appeal suggests that he articulates a number of cultural issues, of which this special issue

examines several in depth. However, in this introduction we would like to provide some contextual background to the television show in which Spike comes to such prominence, and offer a way into the text for those unfamiliar with it.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (aka *Buffy* or *BtVS*) first appeared in 1992 as a film. It was written by Joss Whedon, directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui and started Kristy Swanson as the eponymous heroine – high-school student by day, but vampire slayer by night. The film was not a huge success, but in 1997 the character of Buffy returned to TV (played by Sarah Michelle Gellar) and became a huge hit. This time Joss Whedon was more firmly in control as creator, executive producer and (on occasion) writer and director. In the words of Jane Espenson, one of the show's writers, 'it is so Joss's show' (2004: 101), and it is his creative vision that has to be held to account for the success of the TV show when the film had made such little impact.

Whedon has argued that it was always his intention that *Buffy* should become an iconic show. In an oft-quoted interview he said:

> I designed the show to create that strong reaction. I designed *Buffy* to be an icon, to be an emotional experience, to be loved in a way that other shows can't be loved. Because it's about adolescence, which is the most important thing people go through in their development, becoming an adult. And it mythologizes it in such a way, such a romantic way – it basically says, 'Everybody who made it through adolescence is a hero.' And I think that's very personal, that people get something from that that's very real. (quoted in Lavery, 2004: 4)

Within the world of cult TV Whedon has become regarded as genius/ auteur (Lavery, 2002) helming not only *Buffy* (1997–2003), but its spin-off series *Angel* (1999–2004) and the ill-fated *Firefly* (2002). All three series have received critical acclaim and have become the subject of fan devotion. At the beginning of 2005, the website Buffysearch.com listed a total of 3973 sites dedicated to *Buffy* and *Angel*, including 1094 general *BtVS* sites, 627 sites featuring fan fiction from the two series and 612 sites focusing on the cast. Of these, 68 focus on Spike and/or James Marsters, with only Buffy and/or Sarah Michelle Gellar herself having more fan sites.

In addition, Whedon's work has attracted considerable academic attention. Speaking at the 2004 Slayage Conference on Buffy the Vampire Slayer, David Lavery (co-editor of the first academic book on *Buffy* – *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) claimed that '*Buffy* studies' 'comprised at least fifty disciplines, methods, and/or approaches' and Sue Turnbull (2004) has noted that there are at least 12 serious academic books on *Buffy* and an (online) international journal. There have already been three international conferences on the show, in the UK, Australia and the US. This year will see a further conference held at the Centre for Constructions and Identities at the University of Huddersfield on 'Social Life, Human Experience and the Works of Joss

Whedon' and a 2006 conference, again focusing on the oeuvre of Whedon, is to be held in Nashville, TN.

Despite the demise of *Buffy* in 2003 (after seven seasons and a total of 144 episodes) and *Angel* in 2004 (after five seasons and 110 episodes), interest in both shows and their characters remains unabated and the show is an ongoing, international phenomenon. In fact, in the US, revenue creation and audience interest in TV shows only begins with the network run, which is followed by syndication and then sales of DVDs, videos and related merchandise. Today in the US *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reruns are shown twice a week in syndication on the cable channel FX and numerous local affiliates. Indeed, according to Nielsen ratings, the weekend debut of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in broadcast syndication in October 2001 was the highest rating premiere of an off-network weekly rerun since *ER* in 1998.[1]

Furthermore, reruns currently air on terrestrial, cable and satellite channels in over a dozen European countries, a number of Latin American and South American countries, and at least one Arab TV channel. The show continues to be a thriving source of licensing and merchandising revenue, with large numbers of websites selling everything from DVDs, video games, posters, photos, stickers, patches and jewellery, to life-size cardboard stand-up figures of the show's stars, mobile phone ringtones, stationery sets, spin-off novels, guidebooks and fridge magnets. Both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* continue to be important players in the media world and audience interest in both shows and their characters remains high.

Buffy (and Spike) for beginners

But what exactly is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*? Apart from the reasons given by Joss Whedon that we have quoted, why did the show become such a phenomenal success? As stated in the show's title, Buffy herself is the 'vampire slayer'. In the mythology of the series, this means that she is the one girl who has been chosen to defend the world: as the opening voiceover to many of the early episodes states, 'She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness'. Yet the voiceover is misleading — for Buffy is not alone. Unlike earlier Slayers, Buffy breaks the mould by having a range of friends and allies who help her in her fight. From the outset she has loyal friends — Willow and Xander. These two form the core of the group known in the 'Buffyverse' (the colloquial term used to describe the diegetic world of *Buffy*) as the Scooby Gang, or 'Scoobies', in homage to the TV show *Scooby Doo* (premiered 1969). Over the course of the seven seasons of the show additional characters come and go, including Cordelia, Oz, Riley, Anya and Tara. In Season 5 Buffy also acquires a sister, Dawn. In addition to these characters, Buffy is able to call on the services of a mentor, Rupert Giles (generally known as Giles) sent   277

by the Council of Watchers (a mysterious organization that oversees the world of the vampire slayer).

There is also Angel, a vampire since the mid-1700s who, at the end of the 19th century, is cursed by gypsies with a soul that leads him to repent of his evil-doing and to side with Buffy. Of course in the 'Buffyverse' (as in all serial TV, which relies on long drawn-out story arcs) things are never this simple. Each season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* generally revolves around a drawn-out battle between Buffy and the Scoobies and one major enemy (known in 'Buffyspeak' as the 'Big Bad').[2] In Season 2 (1997–8) the Big Bad turns out to be Angel who, having experienced a 'moment of true happiness' through sex with Buffy, loses his soul and turns on Buffy and her friends.[3] However, Angel does not turn into Buffy's nemesis until part way through the season (episode 14).[4] For the first part of the season viewers are misled into thinking that Buffy's key enemy this year is to be another vampire – Spike. Spike's evolving role in this season marks his move from one of the show's expendable adversaries to one of its central and most enduring characters (see Hills and Williams, in this issue, for more on Spike's transition from guest appearance to regular cast member).

Spike's first appearance is in the episode 'School Hard' (2:3). He is shown arriving in Sunnydale with his long-time girlfriend (and fellow-vampire) Drusilla. According to the narrative, Drusilla is weak, having been set upon by a mob in Prague, and Spike has brought her to Sunnydale (which in the mythology of the show has been built over the Hellmouth, the site of convergence for a range of evil and mystical forces) in order to restore her to health. From the very beginning we are told that there is a connection between the two vampires Angel and Spike, with Spike describing Angel as his sire, 'You were my sire, man! You were my ... Yoda'[5] (see below for the way that the series rewrites their history). As Spike was intended only as a temporary villain he is inactive for much of the latter part of Season 2, coming to prominence only in the final two episodes when he helps Buffy to defeat the now-evil Angel (who, when he reverts to his original vampire ego, takes the name of Angelus). Spike appears in only one episode of Season 3, but returns as a key character from Season 4 onwards when he becomes the main vampire character (Angel having departed for his own show). And when *Buffy* finally finishes its seven-year run in 2003, Spike migrates to the spin-off show *Angel* for its final year.

Spike's story arc in *Buffy* is compelling, and as the show progresses we find out more about his history (shown to the audience through the use of flashback). William, Spike's human incarnation, was born into a middle-class Victorian household. As we find out from the episodes 'Fool for Love' (5:7) and 'Lies My Parents Told Me' (7:17) he was shy and retiring, fond (perhaps overly fond) of his mother, and given to writing 'bloody awful' poetry – much of it dedicated to his unrequited love for Cecily. One evening in 1880, after being rejected by Cecily, who has told him that she

can never love him because he is her social inferior, he ventures into the street where he is lured into an alley by the vampire Drusilla. In this flashback it is Drusilla who (in a revision of the storyline from Season 2) sires him. Free of his mortal incarnation, William reinvents himself as 'Spike', adopting a working-class persona and becoming a fearsome killer. Over the course of more than 100 years he makes himself the scourge of Europe, and manages to kill two of Buffy's Slayer predecessors – one in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion in China and another in New York in 1977.

However, Spike's murderous persona begins to alter slowly in relation to Buffy, initially in Season 2 when, for personal reasons, he helps her defeat the evil Angelus. His permanent return to the show in Season 4 sees Spike rendered harmless to humans when a covert group of government operatives (the 'Initiative') implant a 'chip' in his brain which prevents Spike from harming humans. He finds, however, that the chip does not prevent him harming other demons and vampires so, as an outlet for his violence, he finds himself an unlikely ally to Buffy and the Scoobies. By Season 5 he has fallen in love with Buffy although, not surprisingly, his affection is not returned (in an echo of his relationship with Cecily, Buffy tells Spike he is beneath her). By the end of Season 5 he is willing to give his life to save Buffy and her sister Dawn, but it is Buffy who makes this sacrifice and dies.

Resurrected in Season 6 (brought back from the dead by a spell from Willow, who has become a powerful Wicca) Buffy finds herself increasingly isolated from her friends and turns to Spike for comfort, embarking on a passionate but soulless relationship. When she finally renounces this relationship Spike endeavours to re-ignite it, but ends up attempting to rape her. This act provokes a crisis of conscience that results in Spike departing for Africa where, after a series of trials, he is able to win back his soul (see Abbott, in this issue, for more on the ambiguity surrounding this development). Season 7 sees the newly-ensouled Spike return to Sunnydale and attempt to rebuild his relationship with the Slayer, once again fighting at her side as she faces the greatest challenge of her life – a battle against the 'First Evil'. The season ends with Spike sacrificing his life to save the world. If this echoes Buffy's sacrifice at the end of Season 5 then his return on the spin-off show *Angel* echoes her resurrection (see Wilcox (2002) for a more detailed analysis of parallels between Spike and Buffy). In the early episodes of *Angel* Season 5, Spike is quite literally a ghost of his former self. But recorporealized he joins Angel's side in, once again, fighting evil (albeit reluctantly). The final episode of the final series of *Angel* ('Not Fade Away', A5:22) sees Spike in an alley alongside Angel facing seemingly insuperable odds. The show ends as the battle is about to commence – Spike's ultimate fate remains unknown.

Spike's character progression (or 'arc' as Whedon and his scriptwriters prefer) throughout *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comes to represent the show's

key themes of angst and outsiderdom perhaps more fully than that of any other character. All of the central characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are, as Roz Kaveney (2004: 7) puts it, 'refugees from hierarchy of one sort or another'. Buffy's best friend Willow is a high-school geek turned Wiccan, who has a lesbian relationship with Tara, herself an exile from an oppressive patriarchal family. The other prominent (and permanent) character in the Scooby Gang, Xander, is depicted as a 'loser' both in terms of his high-school experience and his masculine identity. He eventually finds love with a fallen vengeance demon, Anya, only to abandon her at the altar. Even Buffy herself, locked into a role as the Slayer which is beyond her control, is depicted as an outcast. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is concerned centrally with the issue of outsiderdom, both in terms of its character portrayal and in individual episodes ('Out of Sight, Out of Mind [a.k.a. Invisible Girl]', 1:11; 'Earshot', 3:18). However, it is Spike who expresses this marginality most completely, as even members of the Scooby Gang generally want nothing to do with him. He is, in effect, the outcast's outcast.

Not only does Spike express the marginality associated with the fictional vampire more generally (neither dead nor alive, a figure on the edges of humanity), he is an outcast in a fictional world that otherwise embraces marginal social identities, and in a show that speaks to and from the experience of outsiderdom. Shunned even by the Scoobies – themselves social outcasts – Spike suffers an extreme form of outsiderdom and marginality. This may partly explain the tremendous interest in this figure and the enormous fandom which surrounds him, for Spike's character fully articulates that which makes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* such a cult success – the experience of the outcast and the pain of liminality, of not belonging. Williamson (in this issue) will explore this aspect of the show's, and in particular Spike's, appeal in more depth.

Buffy – unsettling the codes of representation

Buffy the Vampire Slayer may have started out as teen TV dealing with the trials of adolescence, but – as the number of books and articles that the show has generated testifies – quickly transcended this generic label to develop a cult following among audiences of all ages. Perhaps the key reason for this is that while, at its literal level, it functions as a coming-of-age story about a girl with superpowers, at the metaphorical level it deals with many of the fundamental themes of existence that haunt the post-modern condition (see, for example, South, 2003; Wilcox and Lavery, 2002; and the numerous contributions to the online journal *Slayage*; http://www.slayage.tv). Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984: xxiv) has summed up the postmodern condition as 'incredulity toward metanarrative', and certainly metanarratives of good and evil, the human and the monstrous, the clear distinction between right and wrong, all are disrupted

systematically in a show that is formally structured around 'good' versus 'evil'. Each of the Scoobies in some way blurs these distinctions (for example, Willow's witchcraft spins out of control and becomes an addiction; Buffy kills Ted, who she suspects is a monster but who might be human), but it is Spike who disrupts them most fully. Spike's ambiguity and his movement between the poles of good and evil, human and monstrous, upset the dichotomies on which modern Manichaean thinking rests.

Spike's character also unsettles the metanarratives regarding the wholeness of the 'self'. Spike's character poses interesting questions about the 'self' in our time in ways which resonate with the experience of marginality, but which also raise questions about the fractured self. Just as Spike expresses the outcast more fully than any other character in the show's ensemble, so too does he embody most fully the predicaments of a fractured subjectivity: the idea that we have not one, but multiple identities, which contend for dominance and that our subjectivities are neither fixed nor stable over the course of our lives. The way in which this applies to Spike is made clear in many of the articles in this issue, but receives perhaps its fullest expression in Abbott's detailed study of his character in Season 7.

Even more challengingly, Spike's character explores the ambiguity of gender and the pleasures of the queer self, and most fully blurs the persistent binary narrative governing representations of gender and sexuality. Both *Buffy* and *Angel* are populated with figures who seek to question traditional modes of classification, who undergo unexpected transformations and who embody the polymorphous perverse (as taken from Freud, but with an attempt to strip the notion of any pathological connotations). Indeed, the key to the appeal of the 'Buffyverse' is the way in which it invites the notion that binary ways of thinking are redundant. The possibilities offered by challenging binary constructions of gender are articulated most completely through the body of Spike. Indeed, it seems as though Spike's character performs that which other characters in the series (and other sympathetic vampires in history) only promise. Where other character pairings in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* only promise the pleasures of homosexual and/or queer desire that are never realised, Spike acts out erotic desire in a manner that undermines heterosexual/ homosexual and masculine/feminine binaries. As this issue will demonstrate, Spike thereby exemplifies Braidotti's 'nomadic subject', 'a myth, that is to say a political fiction, that allows [me] to move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges' (1994: 4).

In the sense that Spike acts out erotic desire, he has a great deal in common with the 19th-century lesbian vampire (despite his male identity). Nina Auerbach (1995) suggests that unlike her male counterparts, the lesbian vampire Carmilla (Le Fanu, 1991[1872]) performs the

promises of the sympathetic vampire, 'she arouses, she pervades, she offers a sharing of the self. This female vampire is licensed to realize the erotic, interpenetrative friendship male vampires aroused and denied' (1995: 39). While the erotic relationship between the vampire Angel and Buffy results in the reanimation of Angel's bad self, Angelus, which amounts to a refusal of interpenetrative intimacy and a reassertion of gender boundaries, Buffy's pairing with Spike is far more fluid and complex. Like the lesbian vampire of more than a century earlier, Spike is capable of an intimacy and a sharing of the self that other males in the series (even other sympathetic vampires) cannot accomplish. Thus Spike absolutely blurs the line between male and female desire, and between homosexual and heterosexual desire.

Spike, intertextuality and kinship

As befits its status as a canonical popular text of postmodernity, *Buffy* quite deliberately courts an intertextuality that addresses the knowing fan-reader. Seeking to supersede the vampire chronicles of Anne Rice as the defining vampire text of the late 20th century, *Buffy's* vampires mock the portrayal offered by Rice. But at the same time the show acknowledges her influence – for by making Angel Spike's 'sire' it knowingly reproduces the relationship between Lestat and Louis. At this point Spike is cast in the role of Louis, but as befits the complexity of the 'Buffyverse' this identification is rapidly called into question. As Williamson argues in the first article in this issue, Spike may be the more junior of the two vampires, but at the point in time at which we encounter these two it is he, not Angel, who takes the role of the modernized, sceptical vampire who does not abide by the traditionally sanctioned vampire law embodied by Lestat (see Gelder, 1994). This is summed up in Spike's penultimate line in 'School Hard' – 'From now on, we're gonna have a little less ritual and a little more fun around here'. Much later in the show's history (in a flashback in 'Lies My Parents Told Me') there is a further nod to Spike-as-Lestat when we find that, on becoming a vampire, one of Spike's first acts is to 'sire' his mother.[6] As befits the non-normative kinship of vampire families, the son gives the gift of unlife to the woman who gave him life.

Yet the show subsequently denies the erotic reading of the Angel/Spike relationship implied by the initial Lestat/Louis intertextual reference. Siring has always been a metaphor for sexual intercourse, as Rice's description of Louis' siring at the hands of Lestat makes clear. Gelder comments that Lestat 'takes' Louis like a lover in a 'drawn-out ecstatic moment which has them mingling their fluids together' (Gelder, 1994: 112). It is perhaps for this reason that, when we get to see Spike's siring in flashback in the Season 5 episode 'Fool for Love', the show rewrites its own history to make Drusilla Spike's progenitor (although, as so often, this show has it both ways with a scene shortly afterwards showing Angel(us)

straddling Spike and holding a stake to his chest in a classic gesture of phallic mastery). Moreover, the homoerotic reading of the relationship between Angel and Spike resurfaces with a vengeance in the volume of fan writing that surrounds the show and provides a parallel to the canonical text.

'Fool for Love' is a notable episode in that it makes explicit the queer nature of the vampire family within the 'Buffyverse'. Of course, queer vampire families are nothing new. Gelder explores the nature of the family ties between Lestat, Louis and Claudia (and beyond to the original vampire 'parents' Enkil and Akasha) in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* (Gelder, 1994) and questions of family feature in the cult vampire films of the 1980s such as *Near Dark* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1987) and *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, 1987). However, the family dynamics in the 'Buffyverse' take questions of kinship to a new level in the very complex relationship between Angel, Spike and Drusilla and a fourth vampire, Darla (the woman who sires Angelus in the 18th century). But the real point about kinship in the 'Buffyverse' is that queer kinship extends beyond vampire families and into the world of the human characters. Judith Butler has argued that:

> If we understand kinship as a set of practices that institutes relationships of various kinds which negotiate the reproduction of life and the demands of death, then kinship practices will be those that emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying, and death (to name a few). (Butler, 2004: 102–3)

If we accept Butler's definition of kinship practices then one of the most meaningful aspects of Whedon's work (and this applies to *Buffy*, *Angel* and *Firefly*) is the opportunity that it offers to explore the complexities of affiliation which govern non-normative communities of support – thus further complicating the dynamics of gender and sexuality underpinning the show(s). This definition of kinship also chimes within fandom, as fans often understand their practices to be part of forming alternative communities (see Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992), and creating 'cyber families' (Williamson, 2005: 212).

About this special issue

Williamson opens this special issue by exploring what Spike has in common with a much longer tradition of sympathetic vampires and, drawing on empirical research, she examines the appeal of this figure to fans of the vampire. Offering an historical overview of the evolution of the sympathetic vampire, she explores how this figure entered the 20th century as one of empathy whose 'Otherness' does not provoke fear, but

rather is often that which we recognize in ourselves. Williamson suggests that Spike is both constructed and read through these historical and inter-textual modes, but that he updates the appeal of Otherness in significant ways. For example, unlike previous incarnations of the vampire, the cult TV text from which Spike emerges deliberately encourages audiences to acknowledge and play with its many intertextual references to previous vampires; it encourages a fannish immersion in the text by constructing the text as subtext, with deliberate textual winks and nods, and extended plotlines which dwell on their own convoluted construction. The inter-textual and sub-textual nature of the show is revealed most through Spike's construction and is clearly identifiable in the relationship between Spike and Buffy, which draws on the 'subtextual' conventions of the 'slash fiction' written by fans. In this sense the text offers the polymorphous sexuality (through Spike) that is usually the realm of erotic fan fiction.

In the second piece in this volume, Amy-Chinn argues that this poly-morphous sexuality is one of the many ways in which Spike transgresses boundaries. She contends that Spike does not simply subvert gender norms or sexual norms, but that Spike is 'queer'. Amy-Chinn deconstructs the artificial boundary between gender and sexuality through which trans-gression has previously been theorized in order to demonstrate that Spike's 'queerness' operates through his erotic mobility. Spike's sexuality and gender are simultaneously intertwined and fluid – he performs excessive masculinity and active femininity. Yet while his biological maleness is never in doubt, what it signifies is endlessly shifting. Amy-Chinn examines not only the ways in which Spike switches between male and female, but also his ability to accommodate 'vanilla' sex and erotic variation.

For example, Spike's relationship with Buffy is often based on Spike taking the traditional 'woman's part' (a desire for intimacy) and Buffy taking the 'man's part' (sex followed by flight) and it is one based on polymorphous sexual desire on both their parts. Spike refuses to define their encounters as abject or degrading, despite the fact that he is rejected and abused by Buffy. But, Amy-Chinn argues, it is the power imbalance in their relationship (with Buffy firmly in the driving seat), rather than their unconventional and socially unacceptable sex life, that makes their relationship a failure. She also insists that the show has an ambivalent attitude to the 'queerness' it depicts by locating it in Spike, who for most of the seven seasons is a figure of revulsion. However, Amy-Chinn suggests that for all of its hesitations, the depiction of Spike is one that contributes to the breakdown of gender oppositions, and to the visibility of uncon-ventional erotic practices, thus unsettling the prevailing heteronormative matrix and contributing to the 'thinkability' of traditionally taboo practices.

In the third article, Abbott elaborates upon the way in which Spike updates the conventions associated with the reluctant vampire by focusing

on the depiction of moral ambiguity. Abbott argues that, while previous vampires walk a fine line between good and evil, Spike inhabits a far more fractured self that overreaches this binary opposition. Through an analysis of the narrative structure and *mise-en-scène* of the final series of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Abbott demonstrates that Spike undergoes the most dramatic character development of any of the characters in the show, and that this is effected through the presentation of multiple Spikes, a self that is looking for unity, but that has been exponentially fragmented. Noting Spike's move from being 'bad', to being 'chipped' (an implant which prevents him from harming humans), to being 'mad', to being ensouled, Abbott examines in detail the manner in which Spike's multiplicity is overtly addressed within the narrative and dialogue of the show. She relates this to the deconstruction of Spike's leather-clad bad-boy biker image in Season 7, each of Spike's multiple selves being depicted through a different visual look. Abbott examines how these multiple selves operate to push the narrative forward in the final season, arguing that it is only Spike's recognition and acceptance of his own fractured nature which enables him to acquire the strength he needs to sacrifice himself in the season finale. Only this way can Spike contribute to the show's ultimate lesson, which abjures the privileging of uniqueness (of himself or even the Slayer) in favour of celebrating the power of collective action.

Hills and Williams' piece shifts the discussion from one which concentrates on the textual construction of, and the fannish engagements with, the character Spike, to one which examines the relationship between the character and the meanings attached to him by the actor who plays him, James Marsters. Hills and Williams argue that Marsters' impact on our understanding of his character is 'situated'. By this they mean that Marsters does have agency in terms of interpreting Spike (both on-screen and off), but that this is tempered by his role in the hierarchy of production (wracked as it is with internal struggles) in which he does not have an entirely 'free hand' in the performance of his star persona. Hills and Williams consider Marsters to be a 'subcultural celebrity', by which they mean a celebrity specific to the audience and fandom surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, rather than by general star recognition. There is an overlapping between Marsters and Spike in a number of secondary texts that circulate around the show, which Hills and Williams consider not only to merge actor and character, but which also make Marsters appear 'fan-like'; they suggest that this disrupts the distance between 'fan' and 'celebrity'. Key to this intervention is Marsters' self-styled accessibility to his fans. His positive encounters with fans having been perfected, he manages to perform simultaneously the role of accessible nice guy and enigmatic persona. In addition, rather than seeing celebrity as only a product of institutional forces, Hills and Williams suggest that Marsters' celebrity indicates a need to examine more closely the way in which actors participate in industry forms of promotion.

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This special issue then moves on to a shorter piece by Sue Turnbull which develops Hills and Williams' contribution by offering a personal meditation on the way in which Marsters performs Spike, and the effect that this has on the author. Turnbull explores the way in which performance can become part of our own lived experience – inspiring and transforming the viewer – and suggesting that watching television can indeed have an impact on the way in which we experience the world.

This special issue closes with a commentary by Vivien Burr on the 2004 Slayage Conference on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* held in Nashville in May 2004, and combines ethnographic analysis with reflection on the fan–scholar divide that has been the subject of much academic attention (for example, Burt, 1998; Doty, 2000; Frith, 1990; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Michael, 2000). In his own reflections on the conference, one of the organizers, David Lavery (2004), talks about almost 400 *Buffy* scholar-fans and fan-scholars 'having the time of their lives talking about, dissecting, and singing about a show they love beyond the possibility to describe'. Lavery is responding to criticism by Levine and Schneider (2003) in 'Feeling for Buffy: The Girl Next Door' that *Buffy* scholars are so in love with the show that their scholarship is often unreflective, narrow and mistaken.

Yet Burr calls into questions Lavery's emotive response to Levine and Schnieder's criticism noting that she, and several other conference attendees who responded to her enquiries, felt stirrings of unease when it was mentioned that thought had been given to inviting a member of *Buffy's* cast to the conference. Moreover, she notes that sessions did, on occasion, veer away from academic analysis into heated discussion on topics that did not seem to fit into a scholarly environment. She notes, in particular that emotions ran high on the subject of Spike – and that any scholar presenting a paper that sought to criticize the character was met with considerable hostility. This, of course, is to show precisely that lack of critical distance for which Levine and Schneider so roundly condemn *Buffy* studies.

Burr does not attempt to address the reasons why Spike is such a site of contention among fan-scholars and scholar-fans and we were intrigued, although not surprised, that this was the case. Rather, it confirmed to us that there was indeed something about Spike that resonated with fans and scholars of the show in a way not found in the other supporting characters, and that this warranted an in-depth analysis.

As far as we are aware, despite the huge volume of *Buffy* and *Angel* scholarship available in print and on the internet, this is the first time a single, supporting character of the shows has been the focus of an academic endeavour. We hope that the articles in this issue convince the reader that Spike is worth both the accolade and the effort.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. http:/www.reallyscary.com/news101501.asp (accessed 11 January 2005).
2. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has become renowned among both fans and scholars for its creative use of language and the creation of 'Buffyspeak'. A *Buffy* lexicon has been published by Oxford University Press (Adams, 2004), and Adams will be editing the first special issue of the online journal *Slayage* on 'Beyond Slayer Slang: Pragmatics, Discourse and Style in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*' (forthcoming).
3. For an analysis of the ideological implications of Angel's curse see Amy-Chinn (2003).
4. Throughout this special issue, episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* will be referenced by title with the season and episode given in brackets afterwards. Episodes of the spin-off show *Angel* will follow the same format but will be prefixed with an A. Episodes are referenced in each article, but only the first time that they are cited.
5. 'Siring' is the 'Buffyverse' term for the process by which a human becomes a vampire and involves, in keeping with vampire mythology, the exchange of blood between two parties.
6. In the DVD commentary to this episode the writers (David Fury and Drew Goddard) reveal that they gave Spike's mother the name 'Anne'. They say they chose this as it is Buffy's middle name, but we might note that it is also Rice's first name.

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