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From demigods to slayers: Contemporary mythology and gender economies in Buffy the Vampire Slayer

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FROM DEMIGODS TO SLAYERS: CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGY AND GENDER ECONOMIES IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

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San Bernardino

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ABSTRACT

Joss Whedon's television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* conveys a mythology which not only borrows aspects from the Greek Demigod mythos, but also revises it. In classical mythology, Demigods—the hybrid offspring of a deity and a human—most typically realize a kind of hyper-masculinity that humans and gods revere and monsters fear. For example, Heracles is known for using his god-like strength to complete the twelve labors. The Slayers in *Buffy* are all adolescent girls, whose superhero qualities manifest as a hybrid mix of Demigod-like hyper-masculinity with the hyper-femininity associated to conventional female figures on the screen. Moreover, the non-slayer characters in *Buffy*—humans and demons alike—respond with reverence and fear to the Slayers' mixed nature. As Demigods represent a hybrid (half human/half god) super-masculinity, Slayers manifest a hybrid (half human/half demon) hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity—a new hybrid gender representation.

In *Buffy's* Slayer mythos, Joss Whedon revises and complicates the three fundamental Demigod tropes: origin, power, and service. "Origin" becomes complicated by the Watchers' domineering relationship with the Slayers; "power" becomes complicated by the possibility of a Slayer

misusing her power; and "service" becomes complicated by the adverse effects of the Slayers' mission-focus. However, those complications are ultimately rectified by an organization called the Guardians. The Guardians' assistance deconstructs the Slayer mythos, by altering the gender roles inherited from Demigod mythology. Through rectifying those complications, the Guardians help the Slayer mythos to further develop from that of the Greek Demigods, translating "hybridity" into new dimensions of identity signification.

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I dedicate this study to my Mother, Mechele, and Sister, Sarah. They know of my obsession with television series, such as *Buffy*, all too well. I thank them for having the patience to put up with my endless hours of watching/analyzing paranormal-themed TV programs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

CHAPTER ONE: FROM DEMIGODS TO SLAYERS: GENDER TROUBLE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE GOLDEN APPLE MYTHS OF HERACLES AND HELEN 1

Literature Review 4

Gender Trouble: Gender as an Act 12

Hybridity: Slayers and Demigods 16

The Golden Apple in the Myths of Heracles and Helen 18

Heracles: Demigod of Strength 18

Helen: Demigod of Beauty 23

Performance of Femininity in Demigod Myth 28

CHAPTER TWO: TROUBLED ORIGINS: GAZE ACCORDING TO MULVEY/MANLOVE AND THE SLAYER/WATCHER RELATIONSHIP 34

Troubled Origin 36

Gaze - Mulvey and Manlove 39

Gender Troubled Origin 46

The Slayer is the Instrument: The Slayer/Watcher Dynamic 48

Who Has the Power: Lacan and the Phallus 52

Fighting a War: The Cruciamentum and O'Reilly 55

Sharing the Power/Changing Destiny 58

This Slayer Which is Not One 60

CHAPTER THREE: FROM ISOLATION TO SUPPORT: THE TROUBLING ASPECTS OF FAITH'S POWER/NIKKI'S MISSION AND THE GUARDIAN'S ASSISTANCE 64

Gendered Source of Power 67

Slayers and The Law: Conflicting Ideologies 68

See…Want…Take…Forget 77

Service to Humanity through Monster Slaying 82

The Mission is What Matters 87

The Dance Never Stops 90

An End is Truly Near 94

The Evolution of a Myth 98

BIBLIOGRAPHY 101

CHAPTER ONE

FROM DEMIGODS TO SLAYERS: GENDER TROUBLE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE GOLDEN APPLE MYTHS OF HERACLES AND HELEN

Cultural anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn notes that "themes [of myths]…have been stated by various students of comparative mythology to be nearly universal in distribution" (*Myth and Mythmaking* 49). For instance, Navajo, Greek and Christian myths share tropes such as *flood*, *sibling rivalry*, and *slaying monsters*. As semiologist Roland Barthes suggests, "myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message" (*Mythologies* 109). Barthes' quotation imparts that myth's strength does not lie in its culture-specific message, but in its construction. By sharing the tropes that Kluckhohn references, myths become timeless, through the parallels that can be drawn from one culture's myth to another. In the critically acclaimed television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, writer-director Joss Whedon revises the trope of *monster slaying* into a contemporary feminist Slayer mythology. My thesis explores how *Buffy*'s Slayer mythology revises gender conventions

performed by Greek Demigod myths, specifically Apollodorus' rendition of the myths in *The Library of Greek Mythology*.

In classical mythology, the Demigods—hybrid offspring of a deity and a human—most typically realize a kind of hyper-masculinity that humans and gods revere and monsters fear. For example, Heracles is known for completing twelve labors, which required his god-like strength. The Slayers in *Buffy* are all adolescent girls, whose superhero qualities manifest as a hybrid mix of Demigod-like hyper-masculinity with the hyper-femininity associated to conventional female figures on the screen. Moreover, the non-slayer characters in *Buffy*—humans and demons alike—respond with reverence and fear to the Slayers' mixed nature. As Demigods represent a hybrid (half human/half god) super-masculinity, Slayers manifest a hybrid (half human/half demon) hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity—a new hybrid *gender* representation. Within this thesis, I show how Joss Whedon revises, in his Slayer mythology, the three fundamental Demigod tropes: troubled origins, gendered sources of power (masculine strength and feminine beauty), and service to humanity through monster slaying. With each trope, Whedon's revision adds a troubling aspect: "troubled origin" becomes complicated with the Watchers

domineering relationship with the Slayers; "gendered sources of power" becomes complicated with the possibility of a Slayer misusing her power; and "service to humanity" becomes complicated with the adverse effects that mission-focus has on Slayers. However, those complications are ultimately rectified by an organization called the Guardians. I analyze how the Guardians' assistance deconstructs the Slayer mythos, by altering the gender roles inherited from Demigod mythology. Through rectifying those complications, the Guardians help the Slayer mythos to evolve. In this thesis I argue that *Buffy* conveys a mythology, one which not only borrows from Demigod mythology, but also transcends it.

Chapter One examines the academic scholarship on *Buffy*; the performative nature of gender; hybridity within Slayer/Demigod myth; and Heracles/Helen as the prototypical masculine/feminine Demigods of Greek myth. Chapter Two analyzes the troubled origin trope and Whedon's revision of the trope through the Slayer/Watcher relationship. I examine the ways in which the relationship between (adolescent female) Slayers and their (older and usually male) Watchers reproduces and critiques both Demigod gender conventions and film gender conventions as described in the

theories of Laura Mulvey and Clifford T. Manlove. I briefly discuss the Guardians, an organization which assists the Slayers, who bring about a deconstruction of the Slayer mythos by destabilizing gender conventions. Chapter Three discusses how Whedon incorporates the gendered sources of power and service to humanity through monster slaying tropes into *Buffy*. I develop my analysis of the two tropes through correlations of Slayers and Demigods. Specifically, I analyze the impact of isolation on Slayers such as Faith and Nikki, and compare them with Demigods such as Heracles, Perseus, and Theseus. By the end of Chapter Three, I examine the impact of the Guardians and their role in reconstructing the Slayer mythos. The analysis of the Guardians continues Chapter Two's discussion of how they destabilize the Slayer mythos. More specifically, I delve into how the Guardians rectify the Slayer's troubled aspects.

Literature Review

Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* follows Buffy Anne Summers, the latest in a line of young women chosen by fate to battle against vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness. Like previous Slayers, Buffy is aided by a male

Watcher, who guides and trains her. Over the last eight years, a number of film and literary scholars have contributed important insights to Buffy's representations of gender, hybridity, and power. In particular, Frances Early and Gwyn Symonds have advanced intriguing arguments about the relationship between gender representations and power; Marc Camron has focused on gender identity and hybridity in the series; and Julie Sloan Brannon has focused on the ways in which the Slayer/Watcher dynamic enacts a Foucaultian power dynamic of docile bodies. Because my own argument examines the way in which Whedon deliberately re-enacts mythical demigod gender performance alongside canonical film gender performance, a review of these articles is useful.

Frances Early's article, "Staking Her Claim: Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Transgressive Woman Warrior," examines Buffy Summers as not only a "disorderly rebellious female" but as an "open image" woman warrior. "Open image" is a term generated by literary scholar Sharon MacDonald. As opposed to closed images, which are "analogous to…stereotypes that appear fixed in public consciousness," an open image is "not meant to reflect or define the social life" (22-23). Early argues that the use of open images

allows for "their creators to focus on human agency and the potential for intentional social change" (2). Unlike my argument, which focuses on the representation of gender identity in the Slayer mythology, Early primarily explores how Buffy follows the position of an "exceptional 'armed [maiden] of righteousness'" similar to Joan of Arc. However, according to Early, Buffy also serves as a means "to demystify the closed image of the male warrior-hero through her employment of non-violent actions to resolve conflicts via "rationality, tactfulness, compassion, and empathy" (5 and 6). In the end of her article, Early surmises that "Buffy [operates] as an open-image hero and Buffy (the program) [unfolds] stereotypes and coded symbols... [as] an attempt to chart new meanings for womanliness and manliness" (10). I agree that Whedon revises recognizably literary archetypes in the character of Buffy (in Early's argument, Joan of Arc; in my argument, Heracles and Helen). I also perceive that Whedon's revisions form a potent invitation to revisit gender conventions in "an attempt to chart new meanings for womanliness and manliness." However, while Early's argument hinges upon Buffy's occasional non-violent attempts to solve conflicts, my argument focuses on the use of violence

in Buffy's character as an important part of the "hybrid" hero Whedon develops.

Unlike Frances Early's article, which examines the nonviolent approaches that Buffy takes, Gwyn Symonds looks closely at the violence that Buffy exhibits. Gwyn Symonds has previously focused on the relationship between Buffy's violence and female empowerment in her article "'Solving Problems with Sharp Objects': Female Empowerment, Sex and Violence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Within this article, Symonds wishes to assess "the sum of the show's achievement as a dramatic statement about gender [and] whether or not Buffy as a hero truly 'represents her gender, herself, and more'" (par. 1). The primary lens for exploring female empowerment within the series is "the concept of power in male/female relationships" (par. 3). But what differentiates her argument from mine is her focus on romantic relationships between men and women in the series. Symonds focuses on the sex and violence found in the relationship between Buffy and Spike (a vampire). She argues "that Buffy is tentatively attempting to transcend polarity…through its exploration of the aspects of Buffy's empowerment that relate to engagement with violence and sex" (par. 6). While she acknowledges the ways in which

Buffy takes a masculine role in her relationship with Spike, she stresses that their relationship does not merely flip gender roles, but that Buffy and Spike both move fluidly between masculine and feminine qualities. This notion shows that Buffy's "journey is one of authentic self-discovery," and that she is a work in progress (par. 30). While I agree that the combination of violence and eroticism is crucial to understanding power in the *Buffy* series, my argument focuses on how the Slayer mythology recombines gender conventions inherited from classical Demigod tradition into a new and self-consciously hybrid hero. Within the larger conversation of *Buffy* scholarship, most arguments stress Buffy, the individual. My aim is to establish that *Buffy* creates more than just an empowered female hero, but a mythology that stands on its own.

While articles such as Early and Symonds have focused on Buffy, the main character, Marc Camron, in "The Importance of Being the Zeppo: Xander, Gender Identity and Hybridity in Buffy the Vampire Slayer" analyzes a supporting character, Xander Harris, and considers the relationship between gender identity and hybridity in his analysis. According to Camron, within *Buffy*, Xander

represents a marginalized male with no power or position. He argues that "beneath [Buffy's] progressive exterior exist situations enforcing the patriarchal society that created it" and he wishes to "prove how the show's apparent failings make it a better feminist text" (1). In short, Camron's article discusses how the male characters within the series both accept the roles of the empowered female characters and their own emasculated roles, but that overall, even if the males with in the series have emasculated roles, "the influence of society is not completely erased" because the male and female characters still "play the roles they were taught from childhood" (9). He concludes that what *Buffy* does best "is give the audience a successful hybridization of acceptable gender classifications" (10). In this thesis, I amplify Camron's recognition of "the acceptable hybridication of acceptable gender classifications" by acknowledging the generic hybridity of classical and film gender conventions in the gender performance of the Slayers. This amplification of hybridization offers a means of highlighting the parallels between Demigod and Slayer mythology. By looking at the role of hybridity in both mythologies, the audience gains a

better understanding of hybridtiy's multiple levels and appreciates how *Buffy* utilizes them.

Ultimately, this thesis shows that the major narrative arc in *Buffy*, from the Slayers' troubled origin, through *Buffy*'s radical destabilization of inherited gender violent conventions in the final episodes, invites a deconstruction of the series' new hybrid hero. This aspect of my argument, which will be deferred until Chapter Two, has been partially informed by Julie Sloan Brannon's argument in "It's About Power": Buffy, Foucault, and the Quest for Self." The article chronicles seven seasons of *Buffy* and explores examples of how the relationship between Buffy and the Watcher's Council parallels that of Michael Foucault's analysis of power and the relationship between the docile subject and the surveilling body. Brannon argues that "Buffy the series reflects a Foucauldian understanding of social discourses and subject-formation through manipulating the classic hero quest" (1). The "subject-formation through manipulation" is shown through the numerous encounters between Buffy and the Council, mainly the circumstances in which Buffy is put through tests by the council, as a means of controlling her.

Brannon's article shares the most common ground with my analysis in that it specifically looks at the dynamic of the Slayer/Watcher relationship, not only Buffy's relationship with her Watcher Giles, but also Nikki's relationship with the Guardians. But Brannon's discussion focuses on how Buffy ultimately becomes the surveilling body for the potential Slayers in Season Seven and how Buffy proposes to those potential Slayers a means of no longer being docile bodies: by sharing her power with them. Buffy, the Chosen One, rejects the Slayer's origin myth, which dictates that only one Slayer, among all the potential Slayers, may realize her powers. Brannon concludes that "Buffy's shifting of the power dynamic made all potential slayers special and chosen-metaphorically, by extension all women are revealed to have the potential for agency" (9). I will also examine the way in which Buffy re-imagines Slayer mythology, but I will focus on how the Guardian's impact on the Slayer mythos' complications to the Demigod tropes and Buffy's decision to activate all the potential Slayers ultimately deconstructs gender roles inherited from their performance of gender in Demigod myth.

Gender Trouble: Gender as an Act

As a means of contextualizing my argument about *Buffy*'s hybrid gender performance, I will now compare the Slayer myth with its mythological ancestor, the Demigod myth in order to show that gender in both Demigod myth and in Joss Whedon's Slayer myth is, to use Judith Butler's notion, "performative." As Judith Butler has famously suggested in *Gender Trouble*, both femininity and masculinity are murky categories. Butler speculates that both the notions of gender and sex are nothing more than acts which gain power through repetitious performances. Judith Butler argues that the gender categories of "masculine" and "feminine" are not natural, inborn human traits. She states: "Gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (2500). Basically, if it were not for the established acts of gender, then gender itself would not exist. Instead, terms such as "masculine" and "feminine" are categories born from, and continually reinforced by, societies. As Butler puts it, "gender [is] a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent

construction of meaning" (2499). Hence, gender only gains meaning and value through its presentations and representations.

With gender only gaining value through representation, there is an assumption that gender is not natural. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler confirms the un-naturalness of gender when she comments:

> Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural notions is obscured by the credibility of those production - and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (*Gender Trouble* 2500)

This leads to the notion that there is no origin for us to trace regarding gender. It is as if there is a silent agreement to reproduce and perform gendered acts, which in turn creates the oppositional categories of masculinity and femininity. We also have the understanding that failing to adhere to gender expectations can have

negative consequences. Thus, gendered categories become deeply engrained within us. As Butler notes:

> Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (2501)

The notions of gender and gender differences have been repeated and performed so many times that the actors and audience mistake the labels of "masculine" and "feminine" to be natural and true.

These performative acts neither exactly reproduce prior views of gender, nor do they utterly change it. To put it in lay terms, an actor giving a performance on a particular gender is neither giving a clear understanding of the history of the gender dynamic, i.e. explaining how it came to be, nor is he/she looking to flip that very dynamic on its head - to reinvent gender totally. Instead that actor just reinforces the way that gender is universally known and expected; any other performance would leave the actor without a job. Ultimately, "genders can be

neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived" (*Gender Trouble* 2501). For example, a little boy is not immediately drawn to the color blue, football, aggression, and so on just by birth. Rather, the influence he receives from his parents, peers, and society shape him.

Returning to Butler's understanding of gender as performative, my argument about masculine and feminine representations in Demigod and Slayer myths relies upon her understanding of gender as a construction codified and questioned by performance. Instead of merely exploring gender as an entity presented in the myths, I also examine how the myths actively relay, perpetuate, and "perform" gender dynamics. My analysis originates in the "masculine" understanding of heroism represented by the demigod Heracles and the "feminine" understanding of beauty associated with that mythological archetype of feminine beauty, Helen. Ultimately I discuss how the Slayers use the gender constructions and blend them together, making them hybrids in two senses: they blend exaggerated gender traits of "masculine" heroism and "feminine" beauty, and they also claim a dual or hybrid origin emerging from a union of the mortal and the supernatural.

Hybridity: Slayers and Demigods

As I stated above, Joss Whedon uses *Buffy* to repeat and ultimately to deconstruct the forgotten elements of Demigod myth. The trope of "troubled origins," in particular, connects the Slayers with the Demigod, as both figures share the troubled consequences of very different ancestors (demons and humans for Slayers; gods and humans for Demigods). As I compare and contrast the Slayer myth to that of the Demigod, I will discuss the different levels of hybridity that appear in both myths. In Apollodorus' rendition of the myth, Perseus the Gorgon slayer was born from "Zeus ha[ving] intercourse with [Danae] by transforming himself into a shower of gold and pouring through the roof into Danae's lap" (*Library of Greek Mythology* 65). Similar to the Demigod myth, the Slayers are birthed from a supernatural source.

The Slayers, usually adolescent women, are hybrid beings because they are part demon and part human. As *Buffy* viewers learn in season seven, the original Slayer was born when three sages "knocked up [a village girl with]…demon dust," to give her the strength to slay a demon that was attacking their village (Season seven, "Get it Done" episode). In both instances the hybridity of the Slayers

and Demigods is a result of "troubled origin." Tellingly, the element of choice is utterly removed from the female characters, Danae and the village girl, upon whom the god and the demons, respectively, force themselves. The initiation of what was essentially rape by both Zeus and the three sages results in the births of Perseus and the First Slayer. Part of the troubled origins of the Demigod and Slayer myths, then, results from the ways in which heroes are born from violent situations in which brute "masculine" strength, divine and demonic, overpowers mortal women. Equally troubling is the way in which the narrative of the respective heroes—Demigods and Slayers—tend to over shadow the heroes' troubled and violent origins. Joss Whedon restores and emphasizes troubled origin into his hybrid Slayer mythology, in an attempt to renegotiate the power dynamics inherent in the "making of a Slayer."

Besides the hybridity that arises from troubled origins, there is another level of hybridity present in the Slayer mythos. In Slayer mythos, the perceived notions of masculinity and femininity are blended together. Slayer hybridity arises not only from their half human and half demon constitutions, but also from their gender performance. That is, the ways in which the Slayers perform

their heroism—rewriting their origin myth and serving humanity through monster slaying—results from a deliberately exaggerated integration of masculine strength and feminine beauty. In order to better understand how Whedon reproduces Demigod gender performance to ultimately deconstruct it, I will now consider the, arguably, most famous masculine and feminine Demigods: Heracles and Helen. Specifically, I will explore the ways in which their troubled origins and service to humanity result from divine strength and divine beauty.

The Golden Apple in the Myths of Heracles and Helen

Heracles: Demigod of Strength

In Greek myth, Heracles is often represented as the most famous and best respected hero; that extraordinary model whom mere mortals strive to emulate. Hesiod's *Theogony* describes Heracles as one "who performed a great feat among the immortals, and now lives free from trouble, free from old age, for all time" (lines 954-56). And in his *Hymns*, Homer describes Heracles as "The best by far of humans on earth...wandering over land and beyond sea on missions imposed upon him...he did much that was

reckless himself, but also had much to endure" (Hymn 15, stanza 7-8). Moreover, the kinds of masculinity represented by Heracles have become increasingly codified since the classical period. As Andrew Runni Anderson notes in "Heracles and His Successors: A Study of a Heroic Ideal and the Recurrence of a Heroic Type":

> . . . an extraordinarily large number of great men have aspired to Heracles as their ideal of achievement or been compared to him by their admirers" because heroes such as Heracles are "deified [by human beings] because of [their] conspicuous services to mankind. ("Heracles and His Successors" 7)

Understanding Heracles' conspicuous service to humanity requires first exploring his myth of troubled origins.

As with the other Demigods, the birth of Heracles is an important and troubled one. In *The Library of Greek Mythology*, by Apollodorus, the conception and birth of Heracles is relayed thusly: "Before Amphitryon arrived back in Thebes, Zeus came to the city by night, and tripling the length of that single night, he assumed the likeness of Amphitryon and went to be with Alcmene" (*Library* 70). As a result of her union with Zeus, Alcmene gave birth to

Heracles one night before she gave birth to Amphitryon's son Iphicles. Again, Apollodorus: "when Heracles was eight months old, Hera, wanting to destroy the child, sent two huge serpents to his bed. Alcmene cried out for Amphitryon, but Heracles leapt up and killed the serpents by strangling them, one in each hand" (*Library* 70). Heracles' killing of the giant serpents at such an early age exemplifies both the great strength at his disposal and his threatened origin. Arguably, in the logic of the myth, Heracles' god-like strength is almost necessary in order for his survival of the kinds of threats ultimately resulting from his dual ancestry.

If Heracles' god-like strength initially enables his survival, it also eventually threatens his adult happiness. In a rage induced by Hera, Heracles uses his strength to kill his wife and children. This aspect of the myth highlights the danger inherent in such superhuman power. Heracles' form of penance, to serve Eurystheus and to fulfill the prescription of an oracle, takes the form of Twelve Labors: "to settle in Tiryns while he served Eurystheus for twelve years, and to accomplish the [ten] labours that would be imposed on him…[and] after the labours had been accomplished, he would come to

be immortal"(*Library* 73). Thus, the Twelve Labors connect Heracles' troubling power with his service to mankind. Many of the labours, such as those involving the Hydra and Cerberus, test Heracles' resolve and strength. The quest to retrieve the Golden Apples most emphasizes the scale of Heracles' physical strength. "Eurystheus…ordered Heracles, as an eleventh labor, to fetch some golden apples from the Hesperides. These apples were to be found…on Mount Atlas in the land of the Hyperboreans…and were guarded by an immortal dragon" (*Library* 81). Heracles' immense strength shines when "Heracles followed the advice of Prometheus, who had told him not to go for the apples himself but to take over the sky from Atlas and send him instead" (*Library* 82). Atlas is a Titan cursed by Zeus to eternally hold up the heavens. The Titans are essentially gods; thus, for Heracles to perform Atlas's function in holding up the heavens underscores the divine source of his own strength.

Heracles' physical strength is complemented by his wily capacity for strategy:

> Atlas took three apples from the Hesperides and returned to Heracles; and not wishing to hold up the heavens again, he said that he himself would carry the apples to Eurystheus and asked Heracles

> to support the sky in his place. Heracles promised that he would, but passed it back to Atlas by means of a ruse. (*Library* 83)

Prometheus instructs Heracles to:

> . . . ask Atlas to take the sky back until he had prepared a pad for his head. And when Atlas heard his request, he placed the apples on the ground and took the sky back. In this way, Heracles was able to pick up the apples and depart. (*Library* 83)

Ultimately, the most codified aspect of Heracles' masculinity, incredible physical strength, is both cause and consequence of his half-god, half-human lineage and his threatened origin. Moreover, the Heracles myth emphasizes the ways in which the hero's service to humanity is a necessary channeling of potentially dangerous powers as well as the compensation for damage wrought by those powers—in the case of Heracles, damage wrought on his own wife and children. However, the warning implicit in Heracles' service to humanity is often overshadowed by the narrative's emphasis upon his god-like strength. Thus, even as Heracles' masculinity, in the form of physical strength and wily strategy, is normalized as a gender trait worthy

of emulation and codification; the warning about the dangers and costs of such masculinity becomes buried in the myth of his troubled origin. Conversely, the dangers present codified forms of classical demigod femininity, as typified in the myth of Helen, are emphasized by classical and contemporary mythological representations of Helen's troubled origins, divine beauty, and service to humanity.

Helen: Demigod of Beauty

While Helen of Sparta is famously known as the woman whose "face launched a thousand ships" (Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*), it is often forgotten that Helen, that ultimate beauty of Greek myth, is, like Heracles, a Demigod. Helen is the daughter of Leda, a mortal, and the sky god, Zeus. Helen was born of the rape of Leda by Zeus. Just as males in Greek myth idolize great physical strength, the most valued feminine characteristic is that of beauty. However, if Heracles' strength poses a potential danger to his loved ones, the feminine trait of beauty most directly poses a threat to its bearer—inviting, as it does, the violent and unsought attentions of the god. Thus, Helen's own conception—her very being—signifies the terrible consequences of her mother Leda's beauty. Moreover, the logic of this feminine Demigod myth dictates

that Helen's otherworldly beauty both reproduces her human mother's already dangerous and self-threatening beauty and further intensifies that troubling power, through the divine and other-worldly aspect of her beauty that traces her divine lineage. Helen's beauty reproduces the human characteristic that invites violent, overpowering masculine strength and violence.

As with the Heracles myth, the troubled origins of the Helen myth—compelling as their warning is—are nevertheless largely overshadowed by the disservice to humanity resulting from her beauty: the role played by her beauty in sparking the Trojan War. Nevertheless, Apollodorus' account of Helen's birth emphasizes the striking similarities between the narration of her birth and that of Heracles: "Taking the form of a swan, Zeus had intercourse with Leda, as did Tyndareus on the same night, and she bore Polydeuces and Helen to Zeus, and Castor [and Clytemnestra] to Tyndareus" (*Library* 120). Eventually, as *The Library* states, "Helen grew into a girl of…remarkable beauty" (121). Helen's beauty was so remarkable that just about all of "the kings of Greece came to Sparta to seek the hand of Helen" (121). When Helen wed Menelaus, all the kings of Greece agreed to defend the marriage with their lives.

As with the Heracles myth, the Helen myth also shares potent connections with the Golden Apple. In Helen's case, the Golden Apple is tied with the goddess of discord, Eris. In *The Library*, the tale is recounted thusly: "Eris threw [a Golden Apple] in front of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite as a prize for the most beautiful, and Zeus instructed Hermes to take them to [Paris] on Mount Ida, to be judged by him for their beauty" (146). Each of the goddesses had something to offer Paris for his decision: "They promised to give [Paris] gifts; Hera promised him universal dominion if she were preferred above all other women, while Athena offered victory in war, and Aphrodite the hand of Helen" (146).

Setting this in context; here we have Paris, offered "universal dominion," "victory in war," and the greatest beauty. As suggested by scholar P. Walcot, the Greeks believed women to be incapable of not exercising their sexual charms and that the results were catastrophic, irrespective of whether or not women set out to cause trouble deliberately or acted in a blissful ignorance of what they were doing" (P. Walcot, *Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence* 39). Helen does not actively flaunt her beauty to Paris; rather, in most

versions of the Helen myth, it is the goddess Aphrodite who uses her as a bargaining device. Mary R. Lefkowitz similarly acknowledges Helen's victimization by the masculine, martial violence and the feminine, divine vanity that both seek to use her beauty in: "it was because of [Helen's] beauty that Aphrodite selected her for Paris. But Helen in the Iliad is more than just a pretty face" (*Women in Greek Myth* 27). Lefkowitz further notes that "Helen constantly reminds us by using her words and by her actions that Paris has offended Zeus, the god of hospitality, and that the Trojans, by defending Paris, are ultimately in the wrong. Priam blames the gods rather than Helen for the war; but Helen also blames herself" (27-28). In Homer's *Iliad*, Helen's affair with Paris is figured as resulting from an almost god-like self absorption; the two most god-like humans in the epic, Helen and Achilles, both (initially) show a disregard for their respective communities that results, ultimately, in war and its escalation. However, even in the *Iliad*, Helen's beauty is only partly to blame for the war—the breached hospitality code forms the larger transgression.

Nevertheless, in the *Iliad*, while Helen is not under control of her beauty's affect on others, she accepts the

blame and even goes so far as to contemplate the option of suicide: "Would that cruel death had been acceptable to me when I followed [Priam's] son [to Troy]…but that did not happen, and so I am wasted away by weeping" (Lefkowitz 28/Iliad 3. 173-76). Even here, we see that Helen's beauty acts as an important metonymic signifier for Greek myth as a whole. As Lefkowitz argues: without Helen, "neither [the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey*] would have happened. The Trojan War would not have been fought, and Odysseus (assuming he had gone to Troy in the first place) would not have bothered to return home" (26). Still, as Lefkowitz recognizes, such an important cause for narrative is strikingly absent from the action itself: "Helen, the woman for whom Troy was destroyed, does not appear until Book 3 of the *Iliad*" (26).

As if to suggest the dangerous potency of feminine beauty, Helen's distant and passive connection with the Golden Apple itself forms a troubled origin for the most famous narrative of classical mythology: that of the Trojan War. Thus, Helen's own origin myth is arguably metonymic for the origin myth of classical Greek culture as a whole. Moreover, Helen's troubled origins, potentially dangerous power, and ultimate disservice to humanity, both parallel and contrast with Heracles Demigod myth. This dichotomy of

the male/female role in Greek myth is a much-discussed topic. As Mary R. Lefkowitz's examination of this topic will help contextualize my later Slayer/Demigod analysis, a fuller rehearsal of her argument is called for.

Performance of Femininity in Demigod Myth

In her text *Women in Greek Myth*, Mary R. Lefkowitz notes that in regards to Greek myth, women and men would not perceive "the [Demigod myths]…as 'norms,' since they all belonged to a heroic past that no longer existed" (Lefkowitz 42). Thus, the representation of women and men in the stories were not understood as transparent representations of manifest femininity and masculinity; rather, these categories themselves seem to belong to a murky origin. However, Lefkowitz also acknowledges that "the myths place emphasis, although in idealized or exaggerated forms, on the kind of experiences and problems that most ancient women would encounter in the course of their lives" (42). So, while the Greeks did not consider the myths to be truths, there was an understanding that the myths still carried worthwhile messages within them. Regarding women's roles in Greek myth, "there were essentially two main courses of female existence: celibacy

or involvement with males and (inevitably) childbearing" (42). Limiting the female role to two stereotypical areas represent how myths contain exaggerated elements, used to get a point across, i.e. carrying messages. What we receive in myth shares striking similarities with Judith Butler's notion of gender resulting from the performance of repeated acts: the codification of women in myth as either virgins or mothers result from exaggerated and repetitious narratives and representations.

One major problem with the virgin/mother binary for human female mythological characters is that in classical mythology, the "option" of celibacy is usually reserved for goddesses. Lefkowitz states it best when she notes:

> . . . virginity offered freedom only to goddesses like Athena and Artemis, who as goddesses had the power to defend themselves and by definition were ageless and immortal...but to mortal women, who by definition as humans could be destroyed and would grow old, disengagement offered fewer rewards and posed greater dangers. (Lefkowitz 42-43)

So, with that in mind, females were pigeonholed into a singular role: "involvement with males and (inevitably) childbearing," i.e. motherhood" (Lefkowitz 42).

Lefkowitz acknowledges the many positive attributes associated with motherhood as an idealized role for human women. Thus, "Hesiod's catalogue attributes to women a significant role in this formal history. Each 'founding mother' is listed by name; none is merely an anonymous bearer of divine seed" (Lefkowitz 46). For example, the event of "the birth of a son who will be the ancestor of a famous race" such as Heracles, will lead to Alcmene always being brought up (Lefkowitz 45). In that respect, Alcmene's name will never be forgotten, because as the mother to the greatest of the Greek heroes, she herself also achieves a kind of narrative immortality.

With Alcmene receiving immortality for giving birth to Heracles, we can assume that the role of Mother is highly valued. According to Mary R. Lefkowitz, the role of a Mother was so important that Greek myth:

> . . . tended to condemn to infamy those who some way rebelled against it. A confirmed mortal virgin who resist the advances of a god might get away simply with metamorphosis into a tree or flower; but women who consciously denied their femininity…were regarded as enemies and monsters. (Lefkowitz 48)

One example of such "enemies and monsters" is the Amazon. P. Walcot, in "Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence," notes that:

> . . . the Amazons are fantasy creatures, the type of predatory woman or domina; they are everything a woman ought not to be and they define the norm and the acceptable by setting that norm on its head; they illustrate the appalling consequence of woman usurping what is properly man's role. (Walcot 42)

Walcot suggests that Amazons "challenged and defied woman's function as wife and as mother, the first by rejecting the institution of marriage and preferring to mate with neighboring men just once a year, and the second by inverting the practice by which daughters rather than sons were exposed on birth" (Walcot 42). Walcot brilliantly analyzes the symbolism of the Amazon's physical manifestation of their refusal. She suggests, "the popular etymology of their name would make them 'breastless' and certainly the amputation of the right breast represents a denial of motherhood and an unwillingness to pander to male concepts of feminine beauty" (Walcot 42).

Thus, the Amazon's rejection of motherhood and of the "male's concepts of feminine beauty," ultimately functions as the antithesis of the power that women in Greek myth could hold (Walcot 42). Lefkowitz's understanding of motherhood underscores the way in which beauty functions as a source of both threat and power for women in classical mythology: "the mother of a hero clearly must be more beautiful than other women, but she must also be cleverer or swifter than most men; and, in the end, she can be subdued only by or with the assistance of the gods" (Lefkowitz 47). Again, while the ultimate asset for men in Greek tales is physical strength, the women's trump card is, in narrative after narrative, their beauty.

Such feminine beauty has, as epitomized in the role of Helen in causing the Trojan War, a deep classical connection with masculine martial displays of physical strength. Joss Whedon emphasizes this connection between beauty, danger, and regulation of feminine beauty by masculine hegemony in his development of Slayer mythology. That is, in Whedon's mythology, the Slayer's supernatural strength is closely governed by the Watchers. The next chapter focuses upon how the Slayer mythos utilizes the troubled origin trope through the relationship shared by

Slayers and Watchers. Toward examining how the Slayer mythos resurrects the often neglected elements of Demigod myths, the next chapter will focus on troubled origins; the problematic connections between spectacular performances of feminine beauty and of masculine strength; and, finally, how the Watchers' attempt to control and regulate such potentially dangerous powers is radically shifted with the Guardian's assistance.

CHAPTER TWO

TROUBLED ORIGINS: GAZE ACCORDING TO MULVEY/MANLOVE AND THE SLAYER/ WATCHER RELATIONSHIP

In Chapter One, I explored Judith Butler's speculation that both gender categories are nothing more than acts which gain power through repetitious performances. I discussed how, according to Butler, terms such as "masculine" and "feminine" are categories born from, and continually reinforced by, societies. One such way for gender categories to be reinforced by a society is through myths. Myths can actively relay, perpetuate, and perform gender dynamics. As seen with the ancient Greeks, Heracles and Helen embodied their society's perception of divine gender dynamics. Heracles represents the masculine understanding of heroism; Helen represents the feminine understanding of beauty. Moreover, there is a codification of women in Demigod myth being either virgins or mothers. The option of being a virgin is only available to goddesses such as Athena and Artemis, while mortal women are relegated to supportive roles such as mother/wife.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Joss Whedon reproduces the Demigod myth's gender dynamics in his Slayer mythology. Whedon's Slayer mythology uses the Demigod's gender constructions and blends them together, making the Slayers hybrids in two senses: they blend exaggerated gender traits of "masculine" heroism and "feminine" beauty, and they also claim a dual or hybrid origin emerging from a union of the mortal and the supernatural. In this chapter, I show how Whedon uses the troubled origins inherited from Demigod myth alongside categories of "masculinity" and "femininity" inherited from the gender performance of canonical cinematic tradition, to inform his own Slayer mythology. In particular, this chapter focuses on how the dynamic between (young and female) vampire Slayers and their (usually older and male) Watchers signifies and ultimately destabilizes the troubled origins and gender performance that Whedon borrows from Demigod myths and incorporates into the Slayer myth.

To this end, the chapter briefly reviews the Slayer mythology's origin with a synopsis of the *Buffy* episode "Get it Done." From the origin of the Slayer myth, the gender dynamics of "passive female" and "active male" are re-imagined in the very creation of the Slayers by the men

who would ultimately evolve into their Watchers. These gender dynamics, in turn, invite the use of the theoretical views of Laura Mulvey and Clifford T. Manlove, two scholars who have contributed fundamental theories regarding the ways in which cinematic performance of gender can perform or revise gender categories. Specifically, I show how the Watchers embody caricatures of conventional forms of masculinity. To further my argument of Watchers as caricatures, I deliberate over the Watcher/Slayer relationship, which is complicated, including as it does both elements of oppression of, and support for, the Slayers. The end of chapter discusses the supportive organization of the Guardians and analyzes the correlation between their impact and Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*. I integrate Irigaray into the discussion because the language of her text vocalizes the importance of the Guardian's impact. However, I briefly touch upon the Guardians impact on the Slayer mythology because a more in-depth analysis of them is given in Chapter Three.

Troubled Origin

Even though *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ran for seven years, it was not until the final season that the origin of

the Slayer was revealed. In the season seven episode "Get it Done," Buffy's sister, Dawn, reads the Slayer myth aloud from a Sumerian tome. The story starts with an ancient and unspecified village over-run by demons. Dawn's narration follows: "After [the] demons, there came [the Shadow Men]. [The] Men found a girl. And the men took the girl to fight the demon - all demons" (Dawn, "Get it Done"). Here, the girl's instrumentality is clear. The original slayer (now known as the First Slayer) is a figure of violent hybridity, in which supernatural powers are forced upon her in a form of rape:"They chained [the girl] to the Earth," then infused her with "the energy of the demon" (Dawn, "Get it Done"). Ultimately, the Slayer's ability to slay monsters and serve humanity results from troubled origins; as if a form of compensation for those troubled origins, or as if the end justifies the means. All this was done to "make [her] ready for the fight" (Dawn, "Get it Done"). Thus, for the Slayers, as for many Demigods, the heroic narrative of service to humanity almost overshadows or overwrites problematic origins. Moreover, "Get it Done" suggests that a girl is required to form the hybrid hero, precisely because a kind of rape, resulting in hybridity, also enables the Slayer's superhuman strength. The Slayer

is both vessel and instrument; and, in the logic of "Get It Done," victim of a violent and ostensibly masculine will.

Put simply, the Slayer origin mirrors that of the Demigod's troubled origin. The similarity stems from a hybrid hero arising from circumstances in which the mortal, not necessarily by choice, births a hybrid being. Just as Alcmene and Leda were tricked into sleeping with Zeus, resulting in the births of Heracles and Helen respectively, the village girl is chained down by the Shadow Men and symbolically raped. Buffy puts this succinctly when she suggests that the Shadow Men basically "knocked up [a village girl with]…demon dust" (Buffy, "Get it Done"). Buffy emphasizes that the Shadow Men fundamentally raped the young girl by forcing heroism and hybridity upon her *against her will*. This image portrays the Shadow Men in active/violent roles and the girl as a passive victim. My use of terms such as "active" and "passive" stem from Laura Mulvey's canonical theory of the gendering of the audience gaze in cinema, within her text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*.

Gaze - Mulvey and Manlove

Laura Mulvey develops and famously critiques Sigmund Freud's analysis of gender and sexual development presented in his controversial lecture *Femininity*. As a means of portraying gendered binaries, Mulvey explores how the audience's gaze reproduces a masculine ego constitution. The audience's gaze is considered masculine when viewers develop "narcissism and the constitution of the ego…[through] identification with the image seen" (*Visual Pleasure* 18). This notion of "ego constitution" is deemed masculine because the on-screen active heroes that audiences identify with are primarily men. For simplification, I will from here name the audience's view of the active heroes as the "action gaze." The "action gaze" results in identification of the audience with the hero, whose actions further the film's narrative. The conventionally masculine hero facilitates the film's progression because all events in the film relate to him or result directly from his actions. In action films, the hero utilizes physical skill and often technology to achieve his ends; as a result, the audience desires his skills and his tools. By the end of the film, the hero obtains a happy ending through public recognition for his deeds, monetary

compensation, and often, the realization of his love interest. According to Mulvey, such results draw envy from the audience.

Another aspect to this dynamic is "the male gaze." Mulvey defines "the male gaze" as one in which the viewer has visual "pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (*Visual Pleasure* 18). This notion of an audience gaining "sexual stimulation" for an on-screen character functions as what I like to call the "attraction gaze." The "attraction gaze" and "male gaze," in Mulvey's analysis, are necessarily the same, because both objectify the female lead in the film. As opposed to the Action Gaze, which facilitates the film's plot progression, the Attraction Gaze literally stalls the action on screen. Mulvey notes:

> [T]he powerful look of the male protagonist (characteristic of traditional narrative film) is broken in favour of the image in direct erotic rapport with the spectator. The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the

> film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look. (*Visual Pleasure* 22)

Here, the attraction gaze freezes the film's action while the audience observes the leading woman's beauty. This kind of close-up results in not only a pause in the action for the audience, but also enthralls the hero. Women in the narrative of the film who become subject to the attraction gaze normally embody the love interest of the hero, and in most action films she becomes a damsel in distress. As opposed to the action gaze, that involves, in Mulvey's terminology, "egotistical identification", the attraction gaze ("voyeuristic scopophilia") functions as a distraction for both the audience and hero. The narrative and action pause around the woman, who courts the pause passively. The audience, identifying with the hero, views the woman as a possession to be won. The potency of Mulvey's analysis lies in her recognition that such a masculine gaze regulates the body of the woman into an object. In the audience's eyes, the attraction gaze epitomizes a beautiful woman that they would like to either possess or to become in order to court such possession and admiration.

Ultimately the attraction gaze results in the performance of femininity as glorified eye-candy. The

female lead gives the audience someone to not only gaze at with lust, but she also makes them more envious of the hero, who will possess her by the film's ending. The female lead's beauty reflects his heroism, which it rewards. In Mulvey's analysis, the passivity and objectification of female beauty and the activity and subjectivity of masculine activity are mutually constitutive.

Since its publication, many film and psychoanalytic scholars have agreed with, expanded upon, and/or critiqued her analysis. One theorist particularly relevant for my own analysis is Clifford T. Manlove, who acknowledges the value in Mulvey's essay. In *Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey*, Manlove reviews the reception of Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. He notes how

> . . . many feminist film critics variously sought to question and/or redefine Mulvey's focus on three issues: gender positions in the gaze, heterosexuality of the gaze, and seeing the gaze as exclusively (male) pleasure in voyeurism. (*Visual "Drive"* 85)

Manlove sees the value in Mulvey's essay, but also feels that there is an over-emphasis on the role of pleasure in her analysis. He contends instead that "pleasure and repetition work together, making the visual drive a dynamic, transgressive power" (*Visual "Drive"* 84) and claims that the best examples of transgressive power can be found in Alfred Hitchcock's films *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, and *Mamie*. Manlove argues that in these films, instead of the usual active male heroes who use their gaze to "control passive, 'to-be-looked-at' women," there are "less-than-powerful heroes struggling to resist patriarchy [and] to wrest control of the gaze from the world around them" (84). As a means of linking Mulvey with the psychoanalytic semiologist Jacques Lacan, Manlove argues that while "Mulvey's theory is not strictly Lacanian, it nevertheless recognizes the power of the gaze present in cinematic art and in the politics of gender everywhere culture is present" (103).

Through this Lacanian lens, Manlove's contribution to my own argument becomes clearer. Exploration of gender performance in *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, and *Mamie* allows a consideration that moves beyond Mulvey's simple subject/object division. According to Manlove, "the gaze

has a power…[that] can be used by the subject" which can lead to a reversal "of hierarchy or subject/object relations" (*Visual "Drive"* 104). The recognition of such a reversal has two consequences for my argument: First, the 'to-be-looked-at' female has the power to turn that gaze on to the active male. In Mulvey's analysis the woman represents a human trophy for the hero, with essentially no agency and no voice. Manlove observes that a woman situated in the Attraction Gaze can use it to her advantage. She no longer has to be the damsel in distress. Instead she can use the hero's gaze to further her *own* story. Her life-struggles become a part of the narrative, which she can resolve by using the hero's infatuation as motivation. She is no longer a part of the hero's story; he has become a part of *hers*. The ability to bring a secondary story through the attraction gaze challenges the one-protagonist structure recognized by Mulvey's analysis. Manlove suggests that while, in conventional cinematic narrative everything revolves around the hero, when the female uses the attraction gaze to her advantage, the norm is challenged. Instead of only having one focal character, a secondary story arises.

According to Manlove, the introduction of a secondary story which focuses on a woman using the attraction gaze to her advantage, "can be useful for understanding more about the visual dimension of power, gender, and subjectivity - in human cultures" (104). Its usefulness surfaces because it denotes a change, one that allots power to a figure that used to merely be an object. Manlove's desire to see the gendered preconceptions turned on their heads shares a connection with my discussion of Judith Butler in Chapter One. The representation of gender within cinema, where males serve as active heroes and females are the "to-be-looked- at" damsels, becomes that way because those notions of gender have been acted as such. But with Manlove and my analysis of *Buffy*, the "to-be-looked-at" females gain power from the attraction gaze and their own story is told. According to Butler, if this power is continually represented, it may eventually become engrained within cultural norms. Applied to my analysis, then, if power is continually represented in television narrative, the performance of attraction as a source of power may eventually become engrained within the viewers.

Gender Troubled Origin

Taken together, Butler and Manlove suggest the ways in which Whedon's revision of the Demigod's troubled origins ultimately reimage the gender performance they seem, at first glance, to codify. As Butler notes:

> Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (*Gender Trouble* 2501)

The notions of gender and gender differences have been repeated and performed so many times that the actors and audience mistake the labels of "masculine" and "feminine" to be natural and true. Gender performance represents the conventions that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* both revises and critiques. *Buffy* takes the notions of the active male and passive female and recreates it in the origin tale with the Shadow Men and Village girl. *Buffy* utilizes the mythological/cinematic gendered categorizations and critiques them. We can clearly see that the village girl in

"Get it Done" is a representation of the passive female of narrative cinema. The once-defenseless girl is imbued with demonic essence which grants her physical power which can lead to her taking on the active role. This resonates with and critiques the Demigod prowess for monster slaying as an aspect of heroic narrative meant to compensate for troubled origins.

Similar to heroic Demigod mythology, Slayers are "birthed" through a troubling origin. After the origin, the Shadow Men maintain an active role over the First Slayer; by instilling their way of thinking upon her. The indoctrination of their values upon her establishes the Shadow Men as active figures, even after the village girl attains physical power. While troubled origin arises out of the Shadow Men imbuing the village girl with demonic essence, it is continually materialized within *Buffy* through the Slayer/Watcher relationship. Over time the Shadow Men evolve into the Watcher's Council, and the Council continues to instill values upon the Slayers.

The Slayer is the Instrument: The Slayer/Watcher Dynamic

The Watchers' role, to train and guide the Slayer, ostensibly re-inscribes the associations, highlighted by Mulvey's analysis of masculinity with activity *and* "the gaze" and femininity with passivity and the object of "the gaze." At the same time, the importance of the Slayers as the action-heroes is also deliberately performed. For example, when a Slayer is engaged in active, impressive and violent combat with a demon, it is not uncommon for the Watcher to calmly observe the action going on, take notes, and when the fight is over to critique whether the Slayer's technique is performed properly. A Watcher would make comments such as: "You telegraph punches, leave blind sides open and, uh, for a school-night slaying, take entirely too much time" (Gwendolyn Post, "Revelations"). Two elements of this are noteworthy. Using Mulvey's categories, the active and critical gaze of the Watchers renders even the heroic slaying sequence as passive; something subject to the approval or disapproval of the ultimately more powerful Watchers. In this respect, the Watchers literalize the power, and codify the masculinity, of an ultimately masculine gaze. On the other hand, the troubled origins of

Slayer mythology, in which male control is violently exercised over a female victim, become exaggerated and deliberately displayed in the conventional gender dynamic of the Slayer/Watcher dynamic; such a performance problematizes the notion of masculine control over feminine activity. This second aspect invites a Manlovian interpretation of gender categories, in which the Slayer's beautifully choreographed *and* heroic, decisive action function to overturn conventional categories of femininity and of masculinity. That is, Whedon's crafting and exaggeration of gender categories deliberately courts, not only the gaze of the audience, but the critique of the audience upon those gender categories.

Alongside the critique on the part of the viewer invited by the Watcher/Slayer sequences, *Buffy* provides its own meta-critique of some of the Watcher/Slayer conventions, and hence, of canonical mythic and cinematic gender conventions. For instance, there are circumstances in which a group of Watchers observe the Slayer, by conducting a review or what the Watchers like to call "an exhaustive examination of [the Slayer's] procedures and abilities" (Travers, "Checkpoint"). Individually and collectively, the Watchers serve as caricatures of

conventional masculinity, through the exaggerated portrayal of their 'logical' and aggressive approach to all situations. Watchers take a cold, calculated approach to all matters no matter the circumstances. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention that Watchers such as Rupert Giles and Wesley Wyndam-Pryce deviate from the norm. Unlike most Watchers, Giles and Wesley are prone to giving into their emotions—a conventionally "feminine" trait"—which means they fail to follow Council protocol and treat their Slayers as people rather than tools. As a result, because they decide to care for their rather than utilize them for battle, Giles and Wesley are ultimately removed from the Watchers Council.

Generally, the Watchers tend to privilege logic over emotions. Any instance in which a Watcher uses his emotions leads to their removal from the Council. Quentin Travers, head of the Watchers Council, notes that "affection… render[s] [Watchers] incapable of clear and impartial judgment," and this makes them "useless to the [greater] cause" (Travers, "Helpless"). This matter-of-fact approach also extends to interaction within the Council itself. If an operative is under the threat of an enemy, other operatives are to cut their losses and let the

operative die. As an operative said: "When we go on a job, we always put our affairs in order first, in case…[there are any] accident[s]" (Collins, "Who Are You"). Here we have a parallel with Watchers and the stereotypical (Freudian) conventions of masculinity. Both areas value logic and reason over heart and emotion, making them more like machines than humans. While the Watchers serve as examples of masculinity, the Slayers serve as atypical examples of the female persona in Mulvey's gender dynamic. And through their relationship with one another, we can see those normalized gender dynamics arise.

Within the beginning of Slayer mythology, a female is subjugated under male whim, through what is essentially a rape. To further lend credence to the Slayer as an oppressed figure, a Watcher makes this statement: "The Council fights evil. The Slayer is the instrument by which we fight. The Council remains, the Slayers change. It's been that way from the beginning" (Travers, "Checkpoint"). Here we see that Watchers perceive the Slayers as objects as opposed to partners. This relates to Mulvey's concept of the Male Gaze, with women representing objects or instruments of the male-driven narrative rather than actors in their own right. Using the Slayers as assets allots the

Watcher power. The primary concern for the Watchers is to maintain this power.

Who Has the Power: Lacan and the Phallus

For the Watchers, "it's about who has the power" (Buffy, "Checkpoint"). This claim relates to Jacques Lacan's concept of the Phallus functioning as a symbol of power. As does Mulvey's analysis of the gaze and her theory as a by-product of Freudian gender theory, Lacan makes use of Sigmund Freud's conception of the Phallus. In *The Signification of the Phallus*, Lacan explores how masculinity is associated with "having the phallus" and femininity is linked with "being the phallus;" where "the phallus" represents the site of desire. The notion of the Phallus was originally discussed by the psychologist Sigmund Freud. Freud famously points out that the penis is an anatomical source of physical and psychological power, in the developing psyches of boys and girls. According to Freud, its appearance/presence gives men a psychological advantage over women, as the penis serves as a visual reminder of something women literally can never possess. Lacan, famously, attempts to recuperate the obviously absurd literal/anatomical elements of Freud's analysis

toward a semiotic analysis of power; Lacan is interested with the symbolic nature of the Phallus.

According to Lacan, "the phallus is the privileged signifier of…the advent of desire" (*The Signification* 1308). With the Phallus as a signifier, there are two outlooks, i.e. "a 'to be' and a 'to have' [dynamic]" (1309). Simply put, the Phallus is representative of power and there are two sides to it: a person wants to either have the Phallus or be the Phallus. In Lacan's binary, having the phallus is associated with a person being in possession of something that everyone else desires, which can be another person or an actual object. This most frequently accords with masculinity. Being the phallus relates to a person being that object of desire, hence making them a tool that garners attention; this most frequently accords with femininity.

Lacan's terminology illuminates the ways in which the Watcher/Slayer dynamic enacts a struggle over the "privileged signifier of the site of desire." Put differently, this notion of a person acting as a tool functions as the basis of the Slayer/Watcher relationship. As suggested by Quentin Travers: The "Slayer is the instrument by which we fight" (Travers, "Checkpoint").

Borrowing from Lacan's terminology, the Slayers represent the symbolic power of the Phallus. However, the Slayers also "have the Phallus," Perhaps most obviously in that trademark tool of vampire slayage, the very phallic and very traditional wooden "stake." On a less literalized level, though, the symbol of power manifests in the Slayer's supernatural abilities. The effects of infusing demon essence with the village girl are superhuman attributes which make the Slayers dangerous. A Slayer has the strength to throw human-sized subject over sizable distances; reflexes quick enough to set off a bear trap and not get caught in it; and the resilience to be hit by a moving truck, immediately get up and then run off ("Where the Wild Things Are," "Homecoming," and "Anne," respectively).

Moreover, the Slayer's physical power threatens the Watchers Council's power. In order to maintain their power, the Watchers incorporated certain conditions to the Slayer's power. For example, there can only be one Slayer at a time. Girls who may receive the power, known as potential slayers, can only do so when the current Slayer dies. Even then, the power is passed on at random. However, an anomaly occurs from this. At the end of season one,

Buffy drowns and is later resuscitated by her friend, Xander Harris ("Prophesy Girl"). Because Buffy technically died, another Slayer is called, meaning two Slayers are active. The aberration of having two Slayers hints to the Guardians' impact upon the Slayer mythos. Discussion of the "extra" Slayer is in Chapter Three and analysis on the Guardians will occur at the end of this chapter. For current purposes, it is sufficient to note that with only one girl in possession of the Slayer's power, the Watchers can provide guidance for her. The Watcher's guidance molds the Slayer into a vessel for the Council's will. Just as the Shadow Men rendered the village girl into an instrument of their will, the Watchers Council makes the Slayer into a perfect tool of war; by emptying her of both personality and personal relationships.

Fighting a War: The Cruciamentum and O'Reilly

In "Restless," the season four episode of *Buffy*, the First Slayer articulates the mindset that the Shadow Men taught her:

> I have no speech. No name. I live in the action of death, the blood cry, the penetrating wound. I am destruction. Absolute...alone. The Slayer does

> not walk in this world. No ... friends! Just the kill. We ... are ... alone. (First Slayer, "Restless")

This mindset comes about because the Slayer and potential slayers are taught to see friends and family as "distract[ions] from [their] calling" (Kendra, "What's My Line Part 2"). Besides teaching the Slayer to abstain from friends and family, the Watchers put them through life-threatening tests. One such examination is the Cruciamentum.

The Cruciamentum transpires in "Helpless," a season three episode of *Buffy*. Prior to this examination, a Watcher injects the Slayer with a hypodermic needle. Within the needle is "an organic compound... of muscle relaxants and adrenal suppressers," which renders her powerless (Giles, "Helpless"). Buffy's Watcher, Giles, discloses these details (going against the Council's protocols) to her: "[The Cruciamentum is] given to the Slayer…if she reaches her eighteenth birthday. The Slayer is disabled and then entrapped with a vampire foe whom she must defeat in order to pass the test" (Giles, "Helpless"). A key phrase from this description is "if she reaches her

eighteenth birthday." The "if" imparts the peril that comes with being a Slayer.

Even with all of her supernatural abilities, the Slayer's life can end in any given battle. The most tragic aspect: if she survives to the age of eighteen, the Slayer is forced to fight without her abilities. Such a situation is excessive, but the Watchers do not see it as so. In "Helpless" Quentin Travers is addressed with the unfairness of the examination, his reply: "We're not in the business of fair… we're fighting a war" (Travers, "Helpless"). Travers follows with: "once [the Cruciamentum] is all over… [the Slayer] will be stronger for it" (Travers, "Helpless"). Travers' comments reinforce that Watchers view Slayers as tools; tools that need to be constantly sharpened. If the tool breaks, then Watchers will simply replace it. The revolving door duty of being the Slayer is an issue in Julie O'Reilly's article "The Wonder Woman Precedent: Female (Super)Heroism on Trial."

Julie O'Reilly argues that the gender of the hero greatly affects the representation of the hero's autonomy. Her assertion is that "Female superheroes on trial must prove their merit to a sanctioning institution, while male superheroes on trial affect the outcome on their

own behalf" (274). A male hero such as Superman inherits his power from birth, while a female hero like Wonder Woman has to participate in a deadly tournament to obtain hers. In Buffy's case, the Watchers Council represents the sanctioning institution and the Cruciamentum her trial.

O'Reilly's key concern with these imposed trials is that they come with a threat of replacement. If a female hero fails her trial, another woman is chosen to take her place. "The successive nature of their power" shows how interchangeable female superheroes are (O'Reilly, 281). In order to rectify such a situation, stability in the task of being the Slayer needs to be inserted. The Watchers Council only offers power to an individual and only in her death can that power be passed on. By season seven of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, another organization is introduced: The Guardians. The Guardians present an alternative for the Slayer mythos. Instead of imbuing one girl with the Slayer power, all potential slayers can gain access to that power.

Sharing the Power/Changing Destiny

Just as the Slayers' origin was not revealed until season seven of *Buffy*, the Guardian's existence was also kept hidden. In the season seven episode "End of Days" it

is revealed by a Guardian that "the Watchers watched the Slayers… but [the Guardians] were watching them." The Guardians are an organization of "women who want to help and protect" the Slayers (Guardian, "End of Days"). In order to assist the Slayers, the Guardians forged a scythe. "A weapon…Forged in secrecy for [the Slayer]. [They]…kept it hidden from the Shadow Men" (Guardian, "End of Days"). It is appropriate that an actual tool is used in this situation, since the Slayers have been treated as such by the Watchers. At the end of the television series, Buffy "use[s] the essence of the scythe to change [the] destiny" of all the Slayers (Buffy, "Chosen"). "From now on, every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer" (Buffy, "Chosen"). The scythe allows for all potential slayers to access the power normally held by the Slayer.

Buffy's act of distributing power to all of the potential slayers deconstructs the gender roles established in the Slayer origin. Initially, the Watchers maintained their power by only having one Slayer at a time. With multiple Slayers, the successive nature of the Slayer mythos is rewritten. The Slayer/Watcher relationship now becomes a partnership and a Slayer's life no longer ends before twenty years of age. This distribution of power not

only benefits the Slayer dynamic as a whole but it benefits those potential slayers whose lives are constantly being threatened. We see this, for example, in the episode entitled "Chosen," when an abusive father raises his hand to strike his young daughter only to have his arm stopped in mid-swing, his wrist caught in a vice-like grip, as his daughter goes from victim to champion in an instant ("Chosen"). This action of changing the power structure from one Slayer to many Slayers corresponds with Luce Irigaray's text *This Sex Which is Not One* and as such it articulates the importance of Buffy's power dispersal.

This Slayer Which is Not One

Luce Irigaray is a cultural theorist who illustrates, in order to deconstruct, "the dominant phallic economy" (*This Sex Which Is Not One*, 24). In other words, Irigaray disputes assertions that men should hold symbolic or anatomical privilege over women. One such claim is Sigmund Freud's observation that a man's penis functions as an anatomical force that grants sociological privilege for men. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray challenges the supposition that female sexuality is dependent on male sexuality. Although my analysis does not focus on

sexuality, there are aspects from Irigaray's article which correlate with my discussion.

In her observation, Irigaray notes that "Woman...is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies" (25). This remark of a woman as a prop likens to two aspects of my study. First, the quote relates to Laura Mulvey's comment on how cinematic narrative uses "the beauty of the woman as object" (Mulvey, 22). Secondly, woman as a "more or less obliging prop" is comparable to the Slayer/Watcher relationship, especially since the Slayer mythos began with heroism and hybridity forced upon a young girl (Irigaray, 25). This notion of women being props also connects to the Slayer being "the instrument by which [the Watchers] fight" (Travers, "Checkpoint"). On the other hand, Irigaray's examination of female sexuality in *This Sex Which Is Not One* and Buffy's deconstruction of the Slayer mythos are also strikingly similar. The parallelism between Irigaray's essay and Buffy's feat is so strong that the achievement of distributing the Slayer's power can be designated as *This Slayer Which Is Not One*.

Within *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray asserts that, unlike men and their singular sex organ, women are not restricted to just one source of pleasure. It is her

contention that a "woman has sex organs more or less everywhere" (Irigaray, 28). As a sexual being, a woman "is neither one nor two" (Irigaray, 26); "Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural" (28). This indication of plurality is the central theme which connects the activation of all potential slayers with Irigaray. Both instances see a detriment in only having one: be it a Slayer or a source of pleasure. Irigaray's statement that: "[she is] a sort of expanding universe to which no limits could be fixed" is applicable to both her discussion on feminine sexuality and the activation of all potentials (31).

Irigaray's concept of a woman as an expanding universe with no limits literalizes the outcome of Buffy's achievement. By distributing the Slayer essence to all potential slayers, Buffy has effectively expanded the universe of the Slayer, no, the universe of the Slayers. Because "every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer," the Slayer/Watcher relationship is rewritten (Buffy, "Chosen"). In what used to be a tool/handler dynamic, the Slayers and Watchers are now equal - both in numbers and position. No longer are Slayers replaceable instruments of war. With there being multiple

Slayers, horrendous tests like the Cruciamentum are eliminated. The Watchers are still free to train the Slayers in combat and research, but they have become tools for the Slayers. Slayers are no longer objects; they have become an organization in their own right. In spite of this, the influence of the Guardians cannot be fully appreciated until I discuss their impact upon the remaining two tropes. Thus, the final chapter explores how Joss Whedon incorporates the *gendered sources of power* and *service to humanity through monster slaying* tropes into the series. Towards the exploration of the power and service tropes' presence in *Buffy*, the chapter focuses on specific Demigods/Slayers; an analysis of Heracles, Helen, and Faith guides the Power trope; discussion of Perseus, Theseus, and Nikki directs the Service trope; and an in-depth look into the Guardians' impact upon the Slayer mythos. This analysis is necessary, because in order to convey how *Buffy* transcends Demigod mythology, I need to explore the hurdles it has leaped.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM ISOLATION TO SUPPORT: THE TROUBLING ASPECTS OF FAITH'S POWER/NIKKI'S MISSION AND THE GUARDIAN'S ASSISTANCE

Chapter Two examined *Buffy*'s use of the troubled origin trope. It illustrated that like the Demigod narratives, Joss Whedon's Slayer mythos begins with the birth of a hybrid hero, from circumstances in which the female mortal has the heroic narrative forced upon her. Just as Alcmene and Leda were tricked into sleeping with Zeus, resulting in the births of Heracles and Helen respectively, a village girl is chained down by three Shadow Men; having heroism and hybridity forced upon her, against her will. Using Laura Mulvey's terminology, chapter two also argued that the Shadow Men represent active/violent figures and the village girl is a passive victim. As the descendants of the Shadow Men, the Watchers Council isolates the Slayer from family and friends, and conducts life-threatening tests. Through the constant isolation and testing, it becomes apparent that the Watchers Council perceives the Slayers as objects, as opposed to partners. This relates to Laura Mulvey's concept

of the Male Gaze, with women representing objects/instruments of the male-driven narrative rather than actors in their own right. As alleviation for the violence and surveillance that the Council imposes upon the Slayers, the Guardians provide the assistance necessary to develop the Slayer myth.

While the Guardians help to rectify the Slayer/Watcher dynamic, the influence of the Guardians cannot be fully appreciated until I discuss their impact upon the remaining tropes. A reoccurring theme between those two tropes is isolation. The isolation instilled upon the Slayers by the Watchers Council negatively impacts Slayers such as Faith and Nikki. Faith's isolation stems from her mistrust in people, which leads to her abusing her Slayer power. Because of her isolation, Faith represents the dangers of a renegade Slayer. Nikki's isolation, on the other hand, stems from her unyielding focus on the mission. Her focus on the never-ending task of monster slaying affects both her psyche and that of her son, Robin.

To that end, this chapter focuses on the troubling aspects of isolation regarding the power and service tropes. Each trope is contextualized with the Greek Demigod derivation of the trope, and how Whedon complicates the

trope through a specific character. The gendered sources of power trope relates to Heracles and Helen's supernatural qualities. Both their strength and beauty are misused by the gods, causing repercussions to everyone around them. Whedon's Slayer myth uses Faith as an example of how dangerous a Slayer can be if she misuses her power. To illustrate Faith's power abuse, I review how Faith's mistrust in people results in her conflicting ideals with Buffy and Faith's misuse of physical strength to satisfy her sexual desires. The service to humanity through monster slaying trope manifests with Perseus and Theseus in Greek myth. I examine their exploits of slaying Medusa and the Minotaur, respectively. To illustrate the service trope's representation in Slayer myth, I analyze how Nikki's focus on the mission negatively affects her son, Robin, and her psyche. Continuing my analysis in Chapter Two, I return to exploring the Guardians. For my analysis on the Guardians, I will review Buffy's encounter with the final Guardian and discuss how the Guardians help to rectify the troubling aspects to the Slayer mythos. Through this discussion of *Buffy*'s troubling aspects and the Guardian's assistance, I will explain how Whedon's Slayer myth transcends the Greek Demigods.

Gendered Source of Power

Joss Whedon's complication of the power trope starts with Faith. As a quick reminder: the correlation between the Slayer and Demigod mythos regarding the gendered sources of power trope occurs because both myths exhibit a hero whose lineage is half divine/demonic and half human. In mythology, lineage from a supernatural source normally results in the hero possessing supernatural qualities such as god-like strength or beauty. However, the supernatural qualities of a Demigod/Slayer are known to be used against them. Ultimately, both Slayers and Demigods are in danger of having their power misused. Through this misuse of their power, trouble arises and affects everyone around them. Examples of two Demigods who have their power misused include Heracles and Helen.

As referenced in Chapter One, Heracles and Helen exemplify divine strength and beauty. Heracles' divine strength permitted him (as a baby) to kill two serpents "by strangling them, one in each hand" and to "take over the sky from Atlas," i.e. hold up the heavens (*Library* 70 and 83). Helen's divine beauty, on the other hand, enticed just about all of "the kings of Greece… to…seek [her] hand" in marriage, and Paris chose the hand of Helen over

"universal dominion [and]… victory in war" (121 and 146). However, these divine attributes are susceptible to unintentional misuse. Divine strength becomes Heracles' bane when "[he] was struck by madness through the jealousy of Hera, and threw his own [wife and] children…into the fire" (72). Because Aphrodite offered Helen's hand in marriage to Paris, Helen left with him, sparking the Trojan War. In both circumstances, the misuse of divine power greatly affects lives of the Demigods and people around them. In Heracles and Helen's instances, the gods played a part in the misuse. But, in Whedon's Slayer mythos, it is the Slayer who can misuse her power. The Slayer who dramatizes the misuse of power is Faith. Faith's first Watcher was murdered before her eyes and her second Watcher deliberately abused her power over Faith. Both events caused Faith to lose her trust towards people. By losing trust, Faith misuses her power so no one else can.

Slayers and The Law: Conflicting Ideologies

It is my contention that Faith, like the Shadow Men, is a caricature of masculinity that complicates the power dynamic. As stated in the previous chapter, the Shadow Men imbued only one girl with demonic essence. But, as also

referenced in Chapter Two, an anomaly occurred. When Buffy Summers drowned at the end of Buffy's first season and was resuscitated, another Slayer was activated. After the new Slayer died, the Slayer power was passed on to Faith. Both Faith and Buffy have different ideologies. The difference between the two is best represented in the season three episode "Bad Girls." In the episode, Buffy is confronting Faith (after Faith accidentally killed a man):

FAITH. There's nothing to talk about. I was doing my job.

BUFFY. Being a Slayer is not the same as being a killer.

FAITH. Okay, this is the last time we're gonna have this conversation, and we're not even having it now, you understand me? There is no body. I took it, weighted it, and dumped it. The body doesn't exist.

BUFFY. Getting rid of the evidence doesn't make the problem go away.

FAITH. It does for me.

BUFFY. Faith, you don't get it. You killed a man.

FAITH. No, you don't get it. I don't care!

In this conversation, Buffy and Faith's ideologies are presented. Buffy's ideology consists of owning up to one's mistakes, while Faith believes that sweeping the matter under the rug and continuing like nothing has happened is the best course of action. Faith's feelings towards accidentally killing a man will be discussed later on in the chapter. For a better sense of Faith and Buffy's conflicting ways of thought, the season three episode "Consequences" presents more dialogue between the two Slayers:

FAITH. You don't give up, do you?

BUFFY. Not on my friends, no.

FAITH. Yeah, because you and me are such solid buds, right?

BUFFY. We could be. It's not too late.

FAITH. For me to change and be more like you, you mean? Little Miss Goody-Two-Shoes? It ain't gonna happen, B.

BUFFY. Faith, nobody is asking you to be like me, but you can't go on like this.

FAITH. Scares you, doesn't it?

BUFFY. Yeah, it scares me. Faith, you're hurting people. You're hurting yourself.

FAITH. But that's not it. That's not what bothers you so much. What bugs you is you know I'm right. You know in your gut we don't need the law. We are the law.

BUFFY. No.

FAITH. Yes. You know exactly what I'm about 'cause you have it in you, too.

BUFFY. No, Faith, you're sick.

[. . .]

FAITH. See, you need me to toe the line because you're afraid you'll go over it, aren't you, B? You can't handle watching me living my own way, having a blast, because it tempts you! You know it could be you!

From the first dialogue, Buffy notes that being a Slayer does not equate with being a killer. In this dialogue, Faith's line that "we are the law" insinuates Faith's belief that Slayers are above the law. In Faith's point of view, Buffy is a "Little Miss Goody-Two-Shoes," while she (Faith) is living life without restrictions. However, in Buffy's eyes, Faith's way of living is self destructive, i.e. Faith is both hurting people and herself. Faith and Buffy represent two different Slayer ideologies.

Buffy's ideology centers on not using her Slayer powers to indiscriminately kill; being responsible for her mistakes; and trying to make people aware of their self-destructive nature. Faith's ideology focuses on using her Slayer power without regard for the law; solving problems by burying, then forgetting, about them; and believing anyone who does not follow her way of thinking is just jealous of her. Faith represents not only what Buffy could be, but what other Slayers could be. Faith is aware of her position of not being a "Goody-Two-Shoes" and believes in living her own way; that way she only has to worry about herself. This mindset arises from Faith's experiences with her Watchers.

Faith's first Watcher was killed by a vampire. She "saw what he did to her [Watcher]... what he was [going to] do to" her ("Faith Hope and Trick"). Faith's second Watcher was Gwendolyn Post. Faith was told by Gwendolyn that: "I will make you a better Slayer, and that will keep you alive. You have to trust that I am right" (Gwendolyn, "Revelations"). However, this is a lie. Gwendolyn was only using Faith, and when she was done with her she declared: "Faith! A word of advice: you're an idiot" ("Revelations"). With her first Watcher, Faith lost someone who she trusted; Gwendolyn's betrayal gave Faith the realization that: "you

can't trust people" (Faith, "Revelations"). After those experiences Faith decided to be "on [her own] side, and that's enough" for her ("Revelations"). Faith's isolation and mistrust in people results into her abusing her Slayer power. Her abuse of power is a risk that all Slayers may face. Faith's role as a Slayer without a Watcher reflects a caricature of the Shadow Men's caricature of masculinity.

Faith is fully aware that as a Slayer she possesses unmatched strength. As referenced in the excerpt from "Consequences," Faith believes that her Slayer power places her above the law. Her disregard for society's rules reflects the Shadow Men's mindset in the Slayer's troubled origin. Because they had the power to force hybridity upon a village girl, they did it. With both Faith and the Shadow Men, there is an abuse of power. The comparison between Faith and the Shadow Men suggests that not only did the Shadow Men imbue power into the Slayer myth, but they also passed on their propensity of using their power for their own purposes. The inherited forcefulness of power that Faith exhibits leads her to feeling that the "life [of] a Slayer is very simple: want...take...have" (Faith, "Bad Girls"). The mindset of a Slayer being above all rules extends to murder. This claim connects to my larger

argument of Slayers, Watchers, and isolation in that because the Watchers Council treats the Slayer as a tool, Faith takes the Council's view of the Slayer as an object and shapes it for her own purposes. In Faith's case, her isolation changes her way of thinking. Faith accepts herself as a weapon made to kill. She embraces being the blade that cuts down demons. Because a blade does not care if an innocent is slain accidentally, Faith tries to remove those emotions, so that they will not control her. This denial of emotions was referenced earlier in Faith's dialogue with Buffy. But in "Consequences," Buffy and Faith continue this conversation.

In the season three episode of Buffy, entitled "Bad Girls," Faith accidentally kills a man who jumped out at her. Upon killing the man, Faith pretends not to care about taking the man's life. A further establishment of Faith's mindset regarding the accident comes through in the season three episode "Consequences." In the episode, Buffy confronts Faith about the murder a day later:

> FAITH. […]. I missed the mark last night and I'm sorry about the guy. I really am! But it happens! Anyway, how many people do you think we've saved by now, thousands? And didn't you

stop the world from ending? Because in my book, that puts you and me in the plus column.

BUFFY. We help people! It doesn't mean we can do whatever we want.

FAITH. […] You're still not seeing the big picture, B. Something made us different. We're warriors. We're built to kill.

BUFFY. To kill demons! But it does not mean that we get to pass judgment on people like we're better than everybody else!

FAITH. We are better!

(Buffy is taken aback.)

FAITH. That's right, better. People need us to survive. In the balance, nobody's gonna cry over some random bystander who got caught in the crossfire.

BUFFY. I am.

FAITH. Well, that's your loss.

This conversation encapsulates Faith's mistrust in people and her ideals on what it means to be a Slayer. In Faith's eyes "people need [Slayers] to survive" and "nobody's [going to] cry over some random bystander who got caught in the crossfire" (Faith, "Consequences"). This

belief about not caring about who gets hit in the crossfire once again mirrors the Shadow Men's action on the village girl. Just as the Shadow Men did not care how their actions impacted the village girl's life, Faith does not care if an innocent man is accidentally killed. In both cases, we see caricatures of masculinity. However, in Faith's case there is a caricature of hyper-hyper masculinity. Faith's hyper-hyper masculinity stems from her position as renegade Slayer; in which her deliberate/violent actions are void of emotion. While the Watchers Council stifles their emotions in their war against demons, they still work as a collective; no one person holds absolute power. Faith's mistrust in others leads to her thinking of herself as the law. The Watchers Council trained Faith to be a weapon. Without trusting in anyone to support her, Faith embraces her role as a weapon. Unlike Heracles, who performed the twelve labors as penance for killing his family, Faith believes that, as a weapon, she can pass judgment on other people because she is stronger. Ultimately, she functions as a warning of a hero unchecked. Faith's self-appointed authority over people extends to her abusing her Slayer power for sexual purposes.

See…Want…Take…Forget

As an extension of her mistrust in people and seeing herself as superior to others, Faith uses her Slayer power to get what she wants sexually. Faith takes on the role of 'Man-Slayer,' in which she becomes an eye-candy that bites back. Put differently, Faith represents an object that "objectifies back," which partially relates to Clifford T. Manlove's analysis. In Manlove's text *Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey*, there's a discussion noting that the 'to-be-looked-at' female has the power to turn that gaze on to the active male. She no longer has to be the damsel in distress. Instead she can use the hero's gaze to further her own story. In Faith's case, she uses her Slayer power to use the male gaze to draw in men and then use them. When slaying demons, Faith receives an adrenaline rush that makes her sexually aroused, or as Faith puts it: "It['s] crazy how [slaying]…always makes [me] hungry and horny" ("Faith, Hope , and Trick"). In order to satisfy those feelings, she extends her "want…take…have" principle to take what she wants from men. Faith comments that: "[Men are] just skin. I see… I want… I take. I forget" ("Consequences"). Faith sees sex as "strictly get some,

get gone. [Because] you can't trust guys" ("Revelations"). Faith's mistrust skews her perception of sexuality so much that her "want…take…have" way of thinking becomes dangerous.

When Faith encounters a man who is not willing to have intercourse, she uses her Slayer power to get what she wants. In the season three episode of Buffy, entitled "Consequences," Faith decides to use Xander, Buffy's friend. In this encounter, which encapsulates Faith's stance on men, Xander confronts Faith about killing a man (an act that Faith publicly blames Buffy for). Because the dialogue/scene between Xander and Faith are sufficiently complex, it is useful to display it at length:

> XANDER. Can I come in? Just to talk. I promise.
>
> FAITH. Like you could make something happen if I didn't want it to?
>
> XANDER. Hey, yeah. Got me there. Pretty much not gonna try to... take you under any circumstances. (holds out his arm) See, here, feel that. (points to his biceps) Probably like a wet noodle to you, huh?
>
> [. . .]

FAITH. I know what this is all about. (she steps closer) You just came by here (she runs her fingertips all around his face) 'cause you want another taste, don't you?

XANDER. No! I mean, it was nice. It was great. It was kind of a blur. But, okay, some day, sure, yay, but not now. Not like this.

FAITH. (she grabs hold of his head) More like how then? Lights on or off? Kinks or vanilla?

XANDER. (he jerks away) Faith, come on. I came here to help you. (he looks her in the eyes) I thought we had a connection.

(Faith laughs. She grabs him by his shirt front, shoves him onto the bed and jumps on top of him.)

FAITH. You wanna feel a connection? It's just skin. (she opens his shirt) I see... I want... I take. (she kisses him hard) I forget.

(She keeps moving above him and rubbing his chest and shoulders)

XANDER. No. No, wait. It was more than that.

FAITH. I could do anything to you right now, and you want me to. I can make you scream.

(She licks her tongue over and around his face and returns to his lips, and kisses him forcefully, seizing his lower lip between her teeth and pulling at it.)

FAITH. I could make you die.

(She kisses him again and gets her hand around his neck. When she pulls away from his lips, he's choking. She kisses him once more, and then rises above him, never letting up on her chokehold. Xander reaches up with one hand to try to push her away and tries to pry her hand from his neck with his other hand, but doesn't have anywhere near the strength necessary to do so. Faith has both hands tight around his neck now, and squeezes hard. He begins to lose consciousness. A few moments more and he's passed out. Faith hears a noise behind her and looks over just in time to be knocked unconscious).

By forcefully kissing and choking Xander, Faith represents a masculine/active on-screen persona, with Xander as a feminine/passive body. The encounter reverses the normal cinematic gender representation. Unlike Laura

Mulvey's analysis in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, where the woman functions as a human trophy for the hero, without agency or voice, Faith serves as the male in this situation. Once again, this experience correlates with the Shadow Men's treatment of the village girl. Both circumstances have an active/domineering figure using their power over a passive/powerless subject. The escalation of rape to almost murder illustrates the danger that all Slayers are capable of. Faith's way of thinking, coupled with her Slayer power exemplifies the troubled nature of the Slayer's gendered source of power. Faith's use of men as sex objects reflects the dynamic of men and women in Demigod myth.

In Demigod myth, the gods use their power to initiate encounters with women, by impersonating their husbands or taking an animal form. Faith, however, takes a more physical approach with her "connections." Essentially, both Faith and the gods, such as Zeus, use their power to rape the opposite sex. Not all of the Slayers use their strength for sexuality in such a way. If Slayers did not have Watchers to train and guide them; or if she did not have anyone to trust, she may use her power in a similar manner to Faith. Like Faith, a renegade Slayer has nothing to keep

her from taking advantage of men sexually. One of the primary reasons why Slayers care about innocents is because of their Watchers. However, there is a Catch-22; while the Watchers Council keeps the Slayers honest, they are also the reason why Slayers die at such a young age. The psychological repercussions of the Council's mission, service to humanity through monster slaying, are the primary cause for why Slayers die young. The Slayer's short life-span represents a hurdle that prevents the Slayer mythos from surpassing Demigod mythology. In order to understand how *Buffy*'s Slayer mythology transcends the Ancient Demigods, a review of the service trope is necessary.

Service to Humanity through Monster Slaying

The final trope that Joss Whedon revises with his Slayer mythology is service to humanity through monster slaying. In the Greek Demigod myths, a hero's legacy is connected to his protecting people by slaying a mythical creature which threatens them. The greater the threat, the greater renown a hero will receive for accomplishing the slaying. Both the Demigod and Slayer myths "services" equate to missions of slaying monsters to

protect civilians. Two Demigods renowned for slaying monsters for the sake of others are Perseus and Theseus. With those two figures, we see success in the service because they are not alone in their quests.

In Chapter One, I briefly discussed Perseus' troubled origin, with the tale of Danaë. In Apollodorus' Library of Greek Mythology it is conveyed that:

> When Acrisios consulted the oracle about the birth of male children, the god replied that his daughter would give birth to a son who would kill him. For fear of this, Acrisios built a bronze chamber beneath the ground and kept Danae guarded within it. (*Library* 64-65)

One night, Zeus took the form of golden dust and impregnated Danae. When Acrisios saw her with the child, Danae and Perseus were placed in a chest and sent out to sea. They eventually came upon the island of Seriphos and were taken in by a fisherman. When Perseus became a young adult, Polydectes, king of Seriphos, demanded Danae's hand in marriage. In order to protect his mother, "Perseus declared that he would not deny [Polydectes]…[a] Gorgon's head…and [was] ordered…to fetch [Medusa's] head" (*Library*, 65). Gorgons are creatures that have "heads with scaly

serpents coiled around them…large tusks…hands of bronze…wings of gold…and they turned all who beheld them to stone" (*Library*, 66).

Out of the three Gorgons - Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa, "only Medusa was mortal, and for that reason it was her head that Perseus was sent to fetch" (*Library*, 66). For Perseus to complete this service, he is given aid by his siblings, fellow children of Zeus: Hermes and Athene, the messenger and wisdom gods, respectively. They give him an adamantine sickle and a bronze shield. In Apollodorus' telling of the myth: "Perseus stood over [Medusa] as [she] slept, and while Athene guided his hand, he turned aside…looking into a bronze shield in which he [saw]… the reflection of [Medusa, and] he [proceeded to] cut off her head" (*Library*, 66). With that act Perseus protected his mother from the King and the villagers from Medusa. This act would not have been possible without Athene and Hermes' assistance. Without them, Perseus would have been another victim of Medusa. Similar to Perseus, Theseus' mission would not have been successful with assistance.

Theseus' parentage is a notable occurrence in Greek myth. Unlike most Demigods, who are birthed from a mortal woman and male deity, Theseus was born from a mortal woman

and two males: Aigeus, king of Athens and Poseidon, god of the sea. In Apollodorus' account: "Pittheus…made Aigeus drunk and ensured that [Aigeus] went to bed with his daughter, Aithra. On the same night Poseidon slept with her too" (*Library*, 136). Aigeus left Aithra to raise Theseus on her own. When Theseus became a young adult, he traveled to Athens and reunited with Aigeus. Upon his arrival into Athens, Theseus learned of Aigeus' treaty with Minos, king of Crete. As a stipulation for the peace treaty between Athens and Crete, "Minos ordered [Aigeus] to send seven boys and seven girls, all unarmed, to serve as food for the Minotaur" (*Library*, 137). The Minotaur "[has] the face of a bull…[and]the rest of his body [is] human" (*Library*, 98). Minos confines the Minotaur to a Labyrinth, and "anyone who entered it found it impossible to escape, for its maze of winding ways ensured that the way out remained undiscovered" (*Library*, 137).

In order protect the people of Athens from the Minotaur; Theseus took on the mission to slay the creature. According to Apollodorus' account: "When the third tribute was sent to the Minotaur…[Theseus] offered himself as a volunteer" (140). Similar to Perseus' service, Theseus needed assistance to complete his service. Minos' daughter,

Ariadne, assisted Theseus in finding a way out of the Labyrinth. As recounted in Apollodorus' *Library*:

> [Ariadne] gave Theseus a thread as he entered [the Labyrinth]. [Theseus] attached it to the door and played it out as he went in. [When he discovered] the Minotaur in the innermost part of the Labyrinth, [Theseus] killed it with blows from his fists, and then made his way out again by pulling back on the thread. (140)

Without Ariadne's assistance, Theseus would have slain the Minotaur. However, he would not have been able to save himself and the 13 other Athenians, by escaping the Labyrinth. Perseus and Theseus represent two Demigods who take it upon themselves to serve the people of their respected villages from the creatures which threaten them. In Perseus' case, he pursued Medusa to protect both his mother and future victims. Theseus, on the other hand, slew the Minotaur to protect the 13 youths and future youths of Athens. In both cases these heroic Demigods are assisted in their exploits. Perseus receives assistance from Hermes and Athene, while Theseus received help from Ariadne. In order for heroic Demigods to accomplish the service of protecting humanity through monster slaying; assistance is

a necessity. Without help, the mission is a failure. In the Slayer mythos, Nikki represents the negative effects of not having assistance.

The Mission is What Matters

Nikki Wood was an active Slayer in New York City in 1977. Just as Faith's use of power deviated from Heracles' use, Nikki's connection to the service trope differs from Perseus and Theseus. In both Perseus and Theseus' missions they receive the vital assistance needed to complete the missions. Nikki, on the other hand, only has herself to rely on. Because the Watchers engrained the perception that family and friends only hinder the Slayer, Nikki is at a disadvantage. Nikki's situation becomes even more troubled because she does something that is very rare for Slayers: she has a child. Unlike the Demigod myths, where the child of a mortal and divine being has supernatural gifts, the child of a Slayer and a mortal is just a mortal. As Nikki's son, Robin, says to Buffy, regarding his parentage "I don't have powers. No super-strength or mythic responsibilities" ("First Date"). An interesting detail from the statement is his emphasis on "mythic responsibilities."

Nikki's mythic responsibilities prohibit her from becoming close with her son. As a Slayer, her responsibilities are to carry on the Watchers Council's mission: to slay demons. To a four-year-old Robin she engrained the phrase: "Always got to work the mission…You know I love you, but I got a job to do. The mission is what matters" (Nikki, "Lies My Parents Told Me"). Robin could not receive his mother's full attention and when she was killed by a vampire, all Robin could do was go through a never-ending "avenging son phase" of tracking the vampire who killed her ("First Date"). But the most intriguing aspect to the Robin and Nikki relationship is that it was the vampire who killed her, Spike, who understood Nikki's feelings. In the season seven episode of *Buffy*, entitled "Lies My Parents Told Me," Robin confronts Spike about Nikki:

> SPIKE. I don't give a piss about your mum. She was a Slayer. I was a vampire. That's the way the game is played.
>
> ROBIN. Game?
>
> SPIKE. She knew what she was signing up for.
>
> ROBIN. Well, I didn't sign up for it.

SPIKE. Well, that's the rub, innit? You didn't sign up for it.

ROBIN. You took my childhood. You took her away. She was all I had. She was my world

SPIKE. And you weren't hers. Doesn't that piss you off?

ROBIN. Shut up. You didn't know her.

SPIKE. I know Slayers. No matter how many people they've got around them, they fight alone. Life of the Chosen One. The rest of us be damned. Your mother was no different.

ROBIN. No, she loved me.

SPIKE. But not enough to quit, though, was it? Not enough to walk away... for you.

Through this conversation Spike is able to relay how Nikki's life of being the Slayer causes her inability to give her full attention to anyone else, even her own son. As insinuated by Spike, all Slayers share this burden of the mission. Buffy reflects Nikki's comment to the four-year old Robin, state of mind when she (Buffy) confronts Robin about his vendetta with Spike. Buffy states: "I have a mission to win this war, to save the world. I don't have time for vendettas. The mission is what matters" ("Lies My

Parents Told Me"). However, Nikki and the Slayer's resolute devotion to the mission ultimately lead to their undoing.

The Dance Never Stops

Just as Spike has insight on Nikki's focus on the mission, he also has insight on the consequences that the mission has on the Slayer's psyche. In the season five episode, entitled "Fool for Love," Spike recounts to Buffy about how he killed two Slayers. When Spike describes how he killed Nikki, he gestures and narrates the event:

> SPIKE. She was cunning, resourceful... oh, did I mention? Hot. I could have danced all night with that one.
>
> BUFFY. You think we're dancing?
>
> SPIKE. That's all we've ever done. And the thing about the dance is, you never get to stop.Every day you wake up, it's the same bloody question that haunts you: is today the day I die? Death is on your heels, baby, and sooner or later it's gonna catch you. And part of you wants it...not only to stop the fear and uncertainty, but because you're just a little bit in love

with it. Death is your art. You make it with your hands, day after day.

(Spike motions as if he is strangling Nikki)

SPIKE. That final gasp. That look of peace. Part of you is desperate to know: What's it like? Where does it lead you? And now you see, that's the secret. Not the punch you didn't throw or the kicks you didn't land. Every Slayer...has a death wish.

(Spike motions as if he is gripping Nikki's head between his hands and twists violently, snapping her neck and killing her)

SPIKE. Even you. The only reason you've lasted as long as you have is [because] you've got ties to the world... your mum, your brat kid sister, [your friends]. They all tie you here, but you're just putting off the inevitable. Sooner or later, you're gonna want it. And the second - the second - that happens...

(Spike claps his hands together inches from Buffy's face)

SPIKE. You know I'll be there. I'll slip in... [and] have myself a real good day.

Once again, Spike articulates an understanding of the Slayer's state of mind. There is also a return to Laura Mulvey and Clifford T. Manlove's statement of active vs. passive in cinema. Although Buffy is physically stronger than Spike, he briefly reasserts himself as the active figure with Buffy as a passive/still figure. Spike's rehearsal of killing Nikki places Buffy in a pseudo-trance, one that he takes her out of when he makes the clap at the end. Buffy's trance and Nikki's "look of peace" that Spike mentions both represent a stillness that Slayers are susceptible to. Because of their physical prowess, a Slayer is constantly active. Being still represents a weakness known as respite. Since the mission drives a Slayer to be in unending motion, stillness, even for a moment, leaves the Slayer unguarded. Becoming lost in the mission is ultimately damning for the Slayer.

Unlike Demigods, who obtain narratives/songs of their exploits and respect for slaying monsters, Slayers receive no praise and are constantly slaying monsters until they themselves die. The most interesting aspect to the hopelessness of the Slayer's situation is that they are understood best by the creatures they hunt: vampires. For Nikki, Spike, the vampire who killed her, has the best

insight on her. With the idea that Slayer myth is best understood by a vampire, the nature of the vampire shares a connection with the relationship between gender and myth. It's possible to assess that like vampires, gender feeds on people. In a similar vein of Judith Butler's analysis that gender is a repeated act which codifies itself over time, gender can be a vampire that feeds off of people's perceptions; growing stronger over time.

Nikki's service to humanity differs greatly from her Demigod counterparts. Demigods such as Perseus and Theseus receive assistance in the task. Perseus receives help from his siblings; Hermes and Athene, and without their help Perseus would not be able to Slay Medusa. Theseus' help comes from Ariadne, King Minos' daughter. Without Ariadne's help, Theseus would not have been able to help the seven girls and six boys escape the Labyrinth. In Nikki's case, no such help is given. As the Slayer, she must focus on her mission above all else, even her son. Nikki's focus on the mission affects her son, where he constantly came in second to her mission and when she was killed, all he could do was try to avenge her. But the mission of the never-ending fight with demons also hurts Nikki's frame of mind. The constant need to fight weighs so heavily on Nikki and

Slayers in general, that the death wish that Spike mentions holds truth. With so many adverse effects on her psyche, the service trope is troubling for the Slayer. Through understanding the troubled nature of the Slayer mythos, the Guardian's intervention presents a profound alteration to it.

An End is Truly Near

In Chapter Two I examined an organization different but symbolically equivalent to the Watchers Council. This organization, the Guardians, wishes to support the Slayers as opposed to controlling them. The Guardians assist the Slayer mythos into undergoing a significant change. Through their ancient scythe, the Guardians allot a dispersal of the Slayer power. In the season seven episode of Buffy, entitled "End of Days," Buffy enters a pyramid-shaped pagan temple within a cemetery. With the scythe in hand, Buffy encounters a Guardian. The dialogue between Buffy and the Guardian is given at length:

> BUFFY. Who are you?
>
> GUARDIAN. One of many. Well...time was. Now I'm alone in the world.
>
> BUFFY. So what are you? Some kind of ghost?

GUARDIAN. Nope. I'm as real as you are. […]

(She holds out her hands and Buffy hands over the scythe)

GUARDIAN. You pulled it out of the rock. I was one of those who put it in there.

BUFFY. What is it?

[. . .]

GUARDIAN. We forged it in secrecy and kept it hidden from the Shadow Men, who—

BUFFY. Yeah. Met those guys. Didn't really care too much for 'em.

GUARDIAN. Ahh, yes. Then you know. And they became the Watchers. And the Watchers watched the Slayers. But we were watching them.

BUFFY. Oh! So you're like... what are you?

GUARDIANS. Guardians. Women who want to help and protect you. We forged this centuries ago, halfway around the world.

[. . .]

BUFFY. I don't understand. How is it possible that we didn't know any of this?

GUARDIAN. We hid, too. We had to until now. We're the last surprise.

BUFFY. Does this mean I can win?

GUARDIAN. That is really up to you. This is a powerful weapon.

(She hands the scythe back to Buffy)

BUFFY. Yeah.

GUARDIAN. But you already have weapons.

BUFFY. Oh.

GUARDIAN. Use it wisely and perhaps you can beat back the rising dark. One way or another, it can only mean an end is truly near.

Buffy follows the Guardian's advice and uses the scythe wisely. Instead of using it as just a weapon, Buffy "use[s] the essence of the scythe to change [the] destiny" of all the Slayers (Buffy, "Chosen"). A key phrase that the Guardian states is "an end is truly near," which suggests that the scythe's purpose is to put an end to not only the Watchers Council's domineering authority, but an end to the troubling aspects to the Demigod tropes. The scythe rectifies the troubled aspects to the tropes of troubled origin, gendered sources of power, and service to humanity through monster slaying.

With the tropes of origin, power, and service, the Slayer mythos carries a troubling slant. For origin, the

rape of a village girl by three Shadow Men initiates both the Slayer mythos and a domineering influence by the Watcher's Council upon the Slayers. The village girl and the Slayers after her lose family/friends and are subjugated to being the Council's tool or war without the influence of the Council or trust in people, a Slayer is susceptible to going renegade and using her power as an agent above the law. She may even use her power to physically abuse others. However, if a Slayer sticks to the Council's orders, her service of slaying demons damages her psychologically. By focusing on the mission, a Slayer is trapped in an unending battle, in which death eventually becomes an acceptable release. Thanks to the Guardians, the ancient scythe's function of dispersing the power to all potential slayers resolves these issues.

Multiple Slayers liberates them from the heel of Watchers Council. They are no longer tools; it is the Council which becomes the Slayer's tool, by affording combat and research training. By having countless Slayers, no one Slayer will take the law into her own hands because she will have other Slayers to trust in and keep her honest. The countless Slayers also provide relief from the constant battle against demons. No one Slayer has to

attempt to win the war alone, she has others to take the pressure off. Without that pressure, Slayers can have peace without dying and any children born of a Slayer will not be second place to the mission. Having other Slayers to fight the war, allows a Slayer mother to safely take care of her child.

The Evolution of a Myth

Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creates a contemporary feminist Slayer mythology. The critically acclaimed television series acknowledges the Demigod mythos through implementing the tropes of origin, power, and service. Whedon also acknowledges the gender polarities present in classical hero myth. As Judith Butler comments, the gender dynamics of masculine strength and feminine beauty are repetitive performances which become codified over time. This dynamic is integrated into the Slayer mythos through combining the two into a new gender representation. The Slayer mythos allots women divine strength, comparable to Heracles, yet it also reflects the supportive role that women play in Demigod myths. Through the origin of the Slayer, the physically gifted warrior becomes a supportive tool for the Shadow Men; the

organization which creates her. The relationship between Slayer and Watcher reflects Laura Mulvey's notion of the gender dynamics present in cinematic narrative; in which the male figure controls the action of the narrative, while the female is passive object.

In the Slayer mythos, the Watcher's represent the controlling figures, while the Slayer plays as an object at the Council's disposal. Before the Guardians can provide assistance to the Slayers, Slayers were trapped into either deviating from or complying to the Watchers Council. Both actions are troubling for them though. By deviating from the Council, the Slayer could end up like Faith and misuse their power; hurting innocent bystanders in the process. If the Slayers comply with the Council and undertake their mission, they become trapped into an endless battle with demons, in which the only respite is death. However, because of the Guardians aid, the Slayer power is ultimately dispersed to all potential slayers. Because "every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer," the Slayer mythos is rewritten (Buffy, "Chosen"). The Slayer myth is no longer a 'troubled cousin' to its Demigod ancestor. By shedding its troubling aspects, Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* evolves heroic mythology

by providing a new hybrid gender representation; one that carries on the classic tradition of Greek Demigod mythos and also transcends it.

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