

Christopher Lockett: “Into Each Generation ...”: Fantasy, Prophecy, and Power in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Buffy the Vampire Slayer begins in the absolutism of a Manichaean universe: demonic forces are invariably malevolent and evil, and the Slayer’s role is cosmically ordained as a bulwark against the darkness. However, as the series progresses over its seven seasons, and spins off into *Angel*, it slowly but surely erodes this absolutism. It complicates the narrative and mythic conventions in which it initially grounds itself, ultimately depicting the previously transcendental understanding of good and evil as contingent and arbitrary.

In this respect, *Buffy* effects a Foucauldian critique of power within the context of a set of intersecting genres—mythology and legend, fantasy, the gothic—traditionally predicated on the extrinsic logic of prophecy and destiny. In initially replicating this logic in its now-famous opening lines (“Into each generation, there is a chosen one”), *Buffy* employed what Farah Mendelsohn identified in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* as a generic “download of legend”—a brief historical or prophetic exposition tacitly granted the status of unquestioned truth. However, “The assumption that ‘the past’ is unarguable,” has narrative consequences (16), most specifically that in spite of the truism that all fiction is based in conflict, “the possibilities for such conflict are limited by the ideological narrative that posits the world, as painted, as true” (17). In spite of the specific agency granted Buffy as the Slayer, the extrinsic principle of prophecy—and its practices of power upon her—constrain her agency in the broader narrative (and ontological) sense.

What the series effects, however, is the shattering of this unitary, extrinsic conception of power into a network of intrapersonal agency that rejects the model of transcendental patriarchal power on which traditional fantasy predicated itself—in effect, using the tropes of fantasy to open an imaginative space within fantasy.

Works Cited

Mendelsohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2008.