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