

Kristopher Woofter: Archival Anxiety and the Hysterical Male: Andrew Wells as Gothic (Mock-)Documentary “Storyteller” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s seventh and final season, Andrew Wells, self-proclaimed super-villain in season six, stakes his claim as one of the most alienated major characters in the *Buffy* metanarrative. Effete, simpering, whining, meek, and, accordingly, more-than-probably gay, Andrew is one of the series' most comedic evocations of “alternative” masculinity. As such, his disenfranchisement in socio-cultural terms goes mostly overlooked in the series. That is, until Andrew attempts to stake a claim for agency in the *Buffy* narrative in the 16th episode of the series' seventh and final season, “Storyteller” (before it's too late!).

In one of the most inventive episodes of an otherwise lackluster season, Andrew taps into the recent popularity of cinematic (mock-) documentary horror popularized by films like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) to redress his grievances in the form of a wresting of agency that harkens back to 19th century Gothic narratives centered on women such as Jane Austen's parody, *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Charlotte Brontë's hugely influential *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Wilkie Collins's under-appreciated *No Name* (1862). In these narratives, women, alienated by a colonial and patriarchal worldview that writes women entirely out of history (and even legal claim to an identity), attempt to reclaim status as active subjects with power and voice.

Andrew's anxiety to document the struggles of *Buffy* through his unique perspective can be read as an attempt to reframe the history of the *Buffy* narrative to feature himself as a key player, similar to the season four episode “Superstar” (episode 17) in which one of Andrew's supervillain “bros,” Jonathan, imagines himself as the show's true hero and narrative center.

Taken together, these two episodes (both written by key series writer Jane Espenson) show clear inspiration by a Gothic tradition of narratives that feature alienated outsider-abjected others struggling to write themselves into history, akin to American Gothic feminist narratives such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) in which a woman undergoing a “rest cure” for what seems to be post-partum depression must struggle for a voice among so many that would remove her only outlet for expression—writing—as a violation of her isolation treatment. In *Buffy*, Andrew's homosexuality is here refigured as an abject figuration that is the equivalent of the feminine other in the traditional female Gothic. The documentary he records in “Storyteller” is, thus, his attempt to write himself into *the Buffy* narrative by inscribing his own point of view, his narrative, his reconfiguration of *the Buffy* legacy, on the terms of the “other.”

In constructing this alternative narrative, Andrew reveals himself as part of another horror tradition, from 18th century Gothic to film noir, to the 1970s Poe adaptations by Roger Corman (especially *The Fall of the House of Usher*): the hysterical male. In one way, Andrew's minor intervention in the *Buffy* metanarrative or myth, embellished or not, highlights the entire *Buffy* series as a “historical” narrative emphasizing the play of power in getting a story told—and this may also relate directly to Whedon's pre-*Avengers* (2012) struggles with TV networks who provided his only outlet and support at that time. The corporate powers-that-be in *Angel*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse* can then be reframed as particularly media-oriented juggernauts who “own” the stories and exercise the power of distribution and omission as they see fit.) In this context, Andrew's revisionary act of documentation is a critical intervention in a series that

already wants to be a critical intervention in situating a female as its “hero.” Here, Andrew stakes a claim as the series’ most “queer” subject, crying out for a voice equal to others whose privilege they owe to a heterosexual, bourgeois, monogamous culture that leaves perspectives like Andrew’s uncomfortably buried.