The Pen Is Mightier Than the Fang: Geek Lit as *Buffy*'s Equipment for Living[1]

Wayne A. Chandler

"If you grew up reading *Deathlok*, you're allowed to write serious, literary fiction about homicidal cyborgs." —Michael Chabon (qtd. in Callan)

[1] The idea that fiction can be beneficial to its reader, to the point of helping one interpret or even engage with reality, is not breaking news: Horace's observation that the poet may enlighten as well as entertain may have been among the first but was hardly the last. A more novel proposition—no longer obscure, but in some quarters still controversial—is that popular literature, even genre fiction[2], can mediate between the individual and the world. Christine Jarvis and Vivien Burr, for example, analyze and describe the ways in which viewers have used the television incarnation of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as fuel for transforming their perspectives of themselves and others. Both Burr and David Lavery, respectively, have written of the series' resonance for academic audiences[3] and of the unusual relationship that academics have developed with *Buffy*, *Angel*, and the associated characters.

[2] But why *Buffy*? What would enable a prospective viewer to benefit from this series in particular? Jarvis and Burr argue that the series' transformative potential may stem from, among other elements, its ethical and narrative complexity, citing "the multilayered referential nature of the text" (169). Textual complexity, however, is probably

Wayne A. Chandler is an Associate Professor of English at Northwest Missouri State University. The nominal Shakespeare Person there since 2001, in recent years he has also become the Science Fiction Person (and would gladly be the Heavy Metal Person if such were welcome). He has published one book about and one of Renaissance English commendatory verse, and his work has appeared in *Renaissance Papers*, *Extrapolation*, *Journal for the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, and other periodicals.

neither the full nor the most fundamental answer to the question. Let us recall that Kenneth Burke, in his discussion of "Literature as Equipment for Living," presents not complexity, but simplicity as a characteristic of the most obviously and immediately useful didactic literary form: the proverb. From that point, Burke argues to justify the assertion that even "complex and sophisticated works of [literary] art" can be regarded as "proverbs writ large" (646). Like the simple, even simplistic proverb, the work of complexity and sophistication can be potentially applicable to the individual reader's interaction with life, but that applicability is neither an inherent quality nor an inevitable effect of the complexity itself.

[3] Axiomatically, regardless of a text's level of complexity and regardless of that text's potential for providing a reader with any extra-textual benefits, the text can become a part of any particular reader's "equipment for living" only if read. For the text to be read, of course, the reader must initiate the interaction in the most immediate sense, by undertaking the act of reading. We may posit, then, that one reason *Buffy* has proven both popular with and, in some cases, beneficial to readers is that some quality or qualities of the text engage readers sufficiently to draw them in and keep them reading. The "multilayered referential nature of the text" to which Jarvis and Burr refer may represent one such quality (certainly academic audiences, by and large, love a challenging text). Burke's discussion of social narratives, situations, and strategies may point us toward another quality: *Buffy* consistently presents aspects of the real world—including social dynamics and situational dilemmas, among other things—in ways that jibe complementarily enough with the Buffyverse that the latter feels (for lack of a better word) like the former.

[4] In her discussion of space (and "space")[4] in *Buffy* and *Angel*, Karen Sayer characterizes both series as "sites of inter-textuality" (136), describing various instances in which the respective series appear not only to acknowledge, but even to depend on the audience's recognition of ways in which the real universe connects with the Buffyverse. Rhonda Wilcox, too, in her book chapter "T.S. Eliot Comes to Television," describes several occasions of intertextuality within the episode "Restless," in which the show's intra-textual reality intertwines

with the extra-textual reality of literary works. For the viewer who recognizes them, the references enhance the development of character and story. Engagement with the intra-textual, in short, sometimes depends specifically on the presence within it of the extra-textual. One respect in which the Buffyverse may engage readers sufficiently to become a potential part of their equipment for living is that the characters themselves frequently use literature in just such a way: the earlier series, especially, repeatedly presents intertextual references by having characters actively refer to texts. Through such intertextuality, *Buffy* illustrates and tacitly encourages emulation of the use of literature as a means of helping the individual make sense of life. As characters in *Buffy* make literary references, those references connect with the plot and characters in ways that help the audience better understand the show's themes and thus use the Buffyverse itself as equipment for living.

[5] Central to these intertextual demonstrations and appeal is a repeated series of acknowledgements of a specific audience that is not only receptive to but, both within and outside the show, primarily defined by such intertextuality: geekdom.[5]

[6] The terminology for referring to this audience is not concrete: the labels "geeks," "nerds," and "fan[girls/boys]" all have different shades of meaning but at times are applicable (or at least applied) to the same audience. J. A. McArthur, discussing characteristics of Internet subculture, notes the evolution of "geek" from "label for carnival sideshow freaks" to "insult [for] intelligent outcasts" to title and even (very arguably, in this writer's opinion) "term of affection" for persons "who demonstrate expertise in a certain field" (61).[6] The specific "certain field" can be one of many. Jessica McCain, Brittany Gentile, and W. Keith Campbell, investigating the psycho- and sociological roots of the impulse to geekness, allow that "enthusiasts in science, technology, and engineering" may fall under the geek umbrella, but McCain et al. narrow the focus of their study to members of the more specific (but still dauntingly wide) population of "fandom geeks," who comprise a "subculture of enthusiasts that is traditionally associated with obscure media." The present essay, too, will focus on fandom geeks (referred to hereafter simply as "geeks"). Further, McCain et al.'s description of this population may benefit from a slight revision: while

some of the media forms, themselves, traditionally have been relegated to the sidelines of the greater culture (American and British comic books, for example, or Japanese manga and anime), other media forms are quite mainstream (film, novels, theater). Consequently, it may be more accurate to characterize geeks as enthusiasts not only of obscure media, but rather of obscure or traditionally marginalized *genres* of media or activities.

[7] Researched foundations aside, the decision to use forms of "geek" for the present discussion stems ultimately from a scene in "Flooded" (6.04). This episode gives us multiple peeks inside the lair of the Trio, the self-proclaimed supervillains Warren, Jonathan, and Andrew. The items listed on their whiteboard, the "action figures" that Jonathan "deploys," and other bits of set dressing and dialogue illustrate the interests and activities that the Trio value and share. Further, in case those elements have left any doubt as to the Trio's tastes, we are even given a label for these characters, a word printed in industrial bold on their periscope. When Andrew brings the periscope down (after noting that Warren's mom is "weeding tulips again"), for a moment is visible on it a series of Cyrillic letters: **Г**ыык. Translated into English phonetically, their sound would be, more or less, "geek."

[8] So "geek" it is. Regardless of the label, geekdom is a multi-faceted, often fractious community whose members' characteristics find expression most commonly (but not exclusively) through interests in fantasy and science fiction movies, television series, comic books, and video- and role-playing games. The term "geek literature," accordingly, encompasses those same media forms and genres (including—appropriately, for the purposes of the present article—"Joss Whedon Films" [McCain et al.]). In other words, geekdom—including the geeks portrayed within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—is a community and culture whose coherence originates with shared interests in and enthusiasm for exactly the sorts of literature that the series itself exemplifies.[7]

[9] Another characteristic of geekdom is that it traditionally has been marginalized from mainstream popular culture. The Buffyverse acknowledges this marginalization through the direct linkage of geeks and geek culture to a theme that runs through every season, nearly every episode, of *Buffy*, that of the outsider. The Scooby gang are all clearly

outside the societal mainstream in various ways. Buffy is the Slayer, of course (how many times do we hear her lament her destiny and inability to be a "normal" girl?); Anya is a former demon; Giles is a middle-aged British expert on the occult in California; Oz is a werewolf and (within the context of the show, just as unusual and potentially more horrifying) a musician; Tara is a gay witch; Dawn is the now-mortal, self-aware, immaculately conceived physical embodiment of a non-sentient mystical force; and Willow is a bookishly smart gay witch computer nerd. Given the Scoobies listed so far, and basing one's conclusion more on social skills than origins, one might be tempted to argue that, of the series' main characters, either Anya or Willow most epitomizes the social outsider.

[10] However (albeit arguably), one would be incorrect: rather, the main character who most pointedly exists outside of other communities—including, to some extent, outside his own primary social group, the Scoobies—may well be Xander. He is the only Scooby who does not go to college; he is the only one without any particular command of or even relationship to superpowers or magic; he is not considered "cool" in or after high school; and he is a geek. Further, the character elements that signify Xander's geekness—his intimate familiarity with comic books, movies, and superheroes, and his passion for acknowledging and sharing that familiarity—repeatedly crop up as characteristics by which he is embarrassed and which he tries (unsuccessfully) to conceal.

[11] For example, in "Doublemeat Palace" (6.12), Xander reacts to Willow's account of the Trio's lair, which Willow describes as "the nerd natural habitat." Willow becomes obviously excited as she talks about the various magic items that the Trio have, but she finishes her description with the dismissive comment that the Trio also have "other stuff, you know. Razor scooters, and pictures of the Vulcan woman on [the television series] *Enterprise*." At this reference to "the Vulcan woman on *Enterprise*" (played on that series by Jolene Blalock) Xander perks up immediately. That one phrase of Willow's contains Xander's two primary driving forces: sex and geek culture, combined. His response is an appreciative "Oooh!" but he immediately appears to try

dampening his own enthusiasm, making the trivializing yet obviously insincere comment, "I mean—*nerds*."

[12] Xander's geekness bubbles up again in "Never Leave Me" (7.09), as he, Andrew, Buffy, and Dawn are leaving the school basement after having (re)covered up the Seal. Andrew's comment that the school's creepy basement reminds him of *Wonder Woman* issues #297-299 elicits a knowing response from Xander, "Catacombs!": "Catacombs," written by Dan Mishkin and penciled by Gene Colan, is the title of the main story in the comic book *Wonder Woman* #298. At this point, Andrew and Xander simultaneously exclaim, "That was cool!" But immediately, Xander—realizing, no doubt, Buffy's contempt for such references—scowls and pushes Andrew on his way.

[13] These moments and others from the series make clear both Xander's geekness and his feelings of embarrassment about it, and other such intertextual references both emphasize Xander's geek status and clarify—for us and for the characters within the show—Xander's status as outsider among the Scoobies. So, Xander's a geek. But he's not the only one. The most representative members of geekdom in the Buffyverse, as shown by repeated intertextual references to geek literature, are the Supervillain Trio of Warren, Jonathan, and Andrew. In terms of "literature as equipment for living," the biggest difference between Xander and the Trio is that while Xander tries unsuccessfully to repress his geekness, the Trio boldly project—nearly radiate—that very quality: their fascination with comic books, science fiction, etc. does not alienate the members of the Trio from each other as Xander's geekness separates him from the other Scoobies, but instead is the principle bonding agent among the three.

[14] In this respect—one's willingness to accept and even embrace the characteristics and label of geek—the Trio more accurately than Xander reflect the attitudes of real-world geeks. For example, McCain et al.'s study categorizes geeks through various avenues of self-identification,[8] and celebrations of geek literature and interests regularly draw tens of thousands of participants.[9] Geeks, in short, commonly revel in their geekness. In her contribution to the Introduction of *Geek Rock*, Victoria Willis recalls her younger (and, one may assume, current) self's "unabashed" love of geekly interests, adding, "My glasses and

braces and vampiric paleness were the frosting on my identity cake. I was a geekling, and I was ready to rock."

[15] Yet Willis' real-life journey into the geek community, it appears, was not immediate. It began with books and extra classes and led Willis into her first full-on geek immersion not in person, but virtually, through her discovery of a segment of the online community:

> I had never before been so surrounded (albeit mostly by dial-up modem) by geeks.
>
> At the time, however, we didn't call ourselves geeks. We were smart people who liked to play with ideas, who were passionately enthusiastic about things that we liked, and who were less concerned with whatever it was that other people seemed concerned about.

Willis' description hints at a situation—depending on the duration and intensity of the situation, it may even be called a dilemma—in which many geeks, whether actualized or incipient, find themselves prior to their opportunity and/or choice to join the community/ies of geekdom: social isolation.[10] In *Buffy*, this transition from isolation to community is shown through the changing situations of Jonathan.

[16] Before Season Six, we last see Jonathan in Season Four's "Superstar" (4.17). In that episode, he is a lonely social outcast, so he uses magic to change the world into one in which people like him and admire him, a world in which he is a person whom everyone *else* wants to know. That plan, of course, lasts slightly less than the duration of one episode, but by Season Six, Jonathan is no longer only a high school outcast: he belongs somewhere. In the Trio, Jonathan has found a community. It is not a perfect community, by any means, but it is a group of friends who have bonded through common interests and through a common way of looking at the world: through geek literature, through comic books, movies, toys, science fiction, fantasy. Although Warren is the dominant personality in the group, each member contributes and each recognizes the contributions of the others. In this respect, the Trio are a lot like the Scoobies. Different than the Scoobies, though, is that among the Trio there are (initially) no outcasts. No one in the Trio holds the position that Xander holds in the Scoobies, that of *not really fitting in*.

[17] That the Trio is eventually and violently reduced to a Duo does not negate the realism of the initial representation of community, no more than the presence of magic negates the realism of the representation of geek literature. One could argue that it is, in fact, the Buffyverse's consistent verisimilitude, its faithful reflection of the mundane, that allows the credible inclusion of the fantastic: in reality, groups of friends do not commonly experience the sacrifice of members for demonic rituals, but the initial depiction of the Trio as a geek community is sufficiently realistic that when Jonathan is murdered, the viewer reacts not with disdain at the unreality of the development, but with surprise at the horror of it. The representation of the Trio as, at first, geek friends stands as believable despite the murder of Jonathan, in the same way that the depiction of the Scoobies as friends remains believable despite the transformation of Alyson Hannigan's character into Evil Willow and back again.

[18] For Jonathan and the surviving members of the Trio, though, there is no going back. It is during this phase of the series, after some characters' bad choices and while hell is (literally) breaking loose, that the depiction of geek literature as equipment for living achieves its poignant zenith, through the representation of Andrew.

[19] Burke writes that literature chosen as equipment for living is so selected as it represents "*strategies* for dealing with *situations*" (646). Among the population of the Buffyverse, Andrew most blatantly displays the application of such choices. Particularly in "Storyteller" (7.16), Andrew's strategy for dealing with life is to attempt interaction with Buffyverse reality in a manner as similar as possible to that in which he interacts with fiction, the very same fiction that exists outside the Buffyverse as well as within it: geek literature, especially comic books and movies.

[20] It would be inaccurate to say that the reading of a comic book is a physical or intellectual act no different than the reading of a novel, say, or other unillustrated prose. Scott McCloud's widely praised tome *Understanding Comics* presents more than 200 pages of description of the history and state of illustrated storytelling—comic books in particular—and of the intricacies of the interaction that occurs between the reader and the art. Regardless of the medium, though, the most

common fictive form is that of the story: in comic books, film, and prose fiction the reader is presented with characters who encounter problematic situations and engage with those situations through acting or reacting. Those comic books that succeed either aesthetically and/or financially do so in large part through the same fundamental means that fiction in other media most often succeeds: through effective *mimesis*, characters and situations presented in a sufficiently engaging fashion to draw the reader into the tale. The most common genre within comic books is that of the superhero, and, like any other genre in any other medium, the superhero tale can be recognized as such by its employment of conventions. To speculate on how or why some readers respond strongly positively to capes and radioactive spiders and improbably common (and collaterally destructive) hand-to-hand combat—all conventions of superhero comics and, increasingly frequently, films—would be to engage in psychoanalytical extrapolation that is beyond the scope of the present discussion. That being said, there is little, if any, reason to suspect that the essence of *why some people like this sort of thing* in their fiction is fundamentally or even particularly different in essence than why some people like any other sort of thing in *their* fiction.

[21] And in the Buffyverse, as noted above, Xander, Warren, Jonathan, and Andrew are written as liking this sort of thing very much, indeed. Of these four geeks, Andrew is the one who likes—and uses—geek literature the most.

[22] Scholar Maddie Rowe in "Up Against the Buffers" interprets Andrew's literarily inspired interpretation of intra-series reality in "Storyteller" as evidence of his "misunderstanding" of that reality. However, Andrew's admission at the episode's conclusion implies that he understands his reality perfectly. He is using his relationship to literature, imitating an author, a storyteller, not to distort reality, but to help himself cope with it by re-viewing it as a context in which he can understand his own relationship to it. He appropriates the role of storyteller as a means of asserting control. This control is not over the events of life, but over his understanding of, and consequently his response to, those events: literature resonates for Andrew in a way that reality cannot, so he chooses to regard life as literature, geek literature in particular. Andrew's choices of literary references are Burkean in the

sense that they represent "a pattern of experience that is . . . representative of [the] social structure[s]" (Burke 648) in which Andrew finds himself. His relationship to literature helps him to locate, understand, and attempt to articulate his position first within the Trio and then within the Scoobies.

[23] As "Storyteller" begins, we are given a look at some of the items in Andrew's meta-fictitious study. Panning down and across the dressings of this *Masterpiece Theatre*-esque set, the camera first shows us a volume of Nietzsche and the collected works of Shakespeare, both resting amid a row of other apparently leather-bound, oldish books. Nietzsche is the heaviest stuff, certainly, and the most ostensibly concerned with (if not the most directly applicable to) real life. Then comes Shakespeare, whose work never masquerades as other than fiction yet which often serves as philosophical commentary (or, at least, fodder for such commentary). Neither Nietzsche nor Shakespeare, however, represents the kind of writing with which Andrew is represented as identifying. The camera view becomes fuzzy as it moves past the Real Literature Books, and, when it focuses again, its gaze is moving over items more dear to Andrew and more relevant—and similar—to *Buffy*: a comic book featuring the characters The Hulk and The Silver Surfer and two posters made from the covers of late-seventies *Star Wars* comic books.

[24] The comic book, issue #93 of *Tales to Astonish*, is opened to the title page of the second installment of a two-part story that depicts a meeting of and conflict between The Hulk and The Silver Surfer. Individually, the characters parallel aspects of Andrew's situation, and their interaction in the particular story can be seen as analogous to the relationship between Andrew and Buffy. Like the combined pro- and antagonist of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's[11] Hulk represents an externalization of internal conflict. Although Hulk's conflict is spectacularly augmented through fistfights and the appearance of monsters and extraterrestrials, the greater story arc never lets the reader forget that the character at the heart of all the spectacle signifies a human being, and a relatively ordinary one at that. He is a human whose destructive inner desires and impulses sometimes take control of him and result in his doing things

that later he regrets, things of which he sometimes is even ashamed. This seems a suitable character for us to equate with Andrew, who admits plainly, in the episode's closing scene, that because he killed his best friend, if he himself dies in the coming battle, that is probably the way it should be.

[25] The other character noticeable on the comic pages is The Silver Surfer. The Surfer is an intelligent, sensitive being whose role is as herald to the cosmic titan Galactus, Devourer of Worlds. The Surfer has no choice but to do the bidding of his more powerful master, seeking out suitable worlds for Galactus to consume, destroying all life on them to appease his own hungers. This character, too, reflects Andrew, who served the more powerful, more charismatic, and blatantly evil Warren. Additionally, the relationship in *Tales to Astonish* #93 between The Hulk and The Silver Surfer parallels that between Andrew and Buffy in being characterized by desperation, mistrust, and misunderstanding: The Hulk sees The Silver Surfer as a potential avenue for escape from Earth and thereby for the attainment of a peaceful future, yet both Hulk and Surfer fail to communicate clearly, and consequently cooperation and mutual goodwill elude them. Similarly, Andrew sees Buffy as a potential source of forgiveness and escape from the chaos in which he has allowed himself to become embroiled, yet he is unable to convince Buffy of either the sincerity of his wish or his worthiness for forgiveness. As The Hulk's savagery becomes all that The Silver Surfer can see, Andrew's geekness is, until very late in the series, all that Buffy can see.

[26] The final specific literary references in the opening scene of "Storyteller" are two posters of *Star Wars* comic books. The original *Star Wars* movies to which Andrew's posters refer, and upon which those comic books were based, are light fantasy, but even they present characters faced with moral dilemmas. As a trilogy, they form a *bildungsroman* in which a young man, essentially carefree at first (his weightiest burden, it seems, being his unfulfilled longing to pick up power converters from Toshi Station), is thrust abruptly and unpleasantly into adulthood. He makes some grievous mistakes yet learns the value of community and accepts the responsibilities that come his way. Again, not a bad way to think about Andrew.[12] This idea—that he has learned from the bad things he has done—is one of which he

tries to convince Buffy and the Scoobies throughout Season Seven, frequently employing literary references to help him do it.

[27] For example, in "Never Leave Me" (7.9), Andrew, tied to a chair, attempts to talk Buffy into untying him before the attack by the uber-vamp. Yes, he admits, he did bad things, and he recognizes that Buffy sees him as a villain, like "Dr. Doom, Apokalypse, or the Riddler," three comic-book villains (and note that as Andrew names them off, Xander smiles and nods appreciatively at the mention of each). But, Andrew continues, he really has reformed and is actively seeking "redemption," much like "Vader in the last five minutes of *Jedi*—redemptive power" etc. Faced with the reality that he killed his best friend—regardless of the influence of The First—Andrew is struggling to cope with reality, to understand life, the best way that he can, through literature. In the climactic scene of *Return of the Jedi*, Darth Vader demonstrates his true repentance for the bad things he has done by fighting sincerely on the side of goodness. Andrew, by the end of the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, does the same. Through the use of literary models to show him the way, Andrew arguably finds the redemption he was seeking: the next time we see Andrew, after the end of *Buffy*, is in the *Angel* episode in which we learn that Buffy has not only accepted Andrew, as he long desired, but has entrusted him with a position of power and responsibility within the new community of Slayers and their allies.

[28] Whether coincidentally or purposefully, the portrayal of Buffy in "Storyteller" suggests—consistent with the rest of the series—that she is the character least able, or at any rate least inclined, to use literature. Throughout the series, Buffy makes the fewest literary references in conversation and pays the least attention to literature of any kind. For example, at various points in the series, Xander, Willow, Dawn, and Tara talk about going to the movies, but Buffy herself almost never goes to the movies or even talks about them. Further, in "Storyteller" Buffy shows herself to be intolerant of Andrew's use of literature. Near the beginning of the episode, when Andrew is filming in the kitchen, Buffy calls what he's doing "idiotic" and "a waste of time," and she is plainly irritated and nonplussed that no one agrees with her. Later in the episode, when Buffy is scaring Andrew into tears, she rants at him that

"life is not a story" and accuses him of "always doing this," by which she appears to mean "relating life to fiction." Buffy's anger in the scene is so strong, written so clearly, that it is reasonable to interpret it as suggesting something more than merely irritation that Andrew is awkwarding up the place. Given the emphasis that the episode as a whole places on the relationship of fiction to life and on Andrew's dependence on fiction, one may conjecture that the root of Buffy's anger is not that Andrew uses fiction to cope with life, but that she is *un*able to do so. Buffy in Season Seven bounces repeatedly between expressing self-importance to the point of arrogance, and exhibiting defeatism and disappointment that she is not living up to heroic ideals—ideals found most commonly in fiction. She is angry, it appears, not because Andrew desires to see her as a hero such as found in fiction, but rather because she feels incapable to be such a hero in reality. Buffy, who wrestles with arguably the heaviest ethical burdens, is consistently portrayed as both the unhappiest character and the one who least uses literature in any way, as inspiration or actual equipment for living. It is, perhaps, not too great a stretch to hypothesize that the latter condition is being presented as related to the former.

[29] The present discussion represents but the tip of the socially awkward iceberg of intertextuality between *Buffy* and geekdom. Depending on how one chooses to define geek culture, there could be more than 200 specific references thereto—citations of comic books, science fiction and fantasy movies, and related topics—scattered throughout the series' seven seasons.[13] Further, while the series uses more—and more types—of intertextual references than only those connected with geek lit, the series itself exemplifies the genre from which it derives such liberality of reference.

[30] Regarding one section of readership, then, our earlier question of "Why *Buffy*?" can be at least partially answered: for geeks, one reason *Buffy* can serve as equipment for living is that it shows them representatives of themselves, using their own literature, to help them find their respective ways in the world. *Buffy* neither talks down to geeks nor dismisses them. It sometimes mocks them, but it does so with simultaneous acknowledgement that this is what happens in the real world and reassurance that mocking in either the real world or the

Buffyverse does not indicate that they are unworthy of respect or unable to become the heroes they might seek to be.

[31] Ironically, the end of *Buffy* in 2003 overlapped with the beginning of geek literature's dominance of popular culture. Disputably beginning with the double-movie punch of Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring* in December 2001 and Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* in May 2002, mainstream culture has become progressively more inundated each year with characters, concepts, and references originating in geek literature: from *The Avengers*' conquering of the global box-office, to the replacement of coin-tossing with rock-paper-scissors-lizard-Spock,[14] geek culture today appears all but ubiquitous in much of the English-speaking world. Given such a cultural context, in which scholars argue for the educational potential of vampire literature and in which a Pulitzer prize-winner may blithely refer to cyborgs and "literary fiction" in the same breath, it is reasonable to expect geek literature to have become a common choice as equipment for living. The paucity of geek lit references in television and film is therefore puzzling. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* remains unusual in its presentation of geekdom intertextuality: of subsequent television series and films, only *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-) approaches (let alone surpasses, as it does) *Buffy* in either references to geek literature or the representation of geeks using that literature to enrich their lives.

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[1] A version of this essay was presented at SC2: The Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses, at Gordon College in Barnesville, Georgia, under the title "'Cool! I mean—*nerds*!': Courting Geeks for Fun and Profit in the Buffyverse" on May 26, 2006.

[2] I use the term "genre fiction" in the standard academic sense but with some reservation. The fundamental implication of Michael Chabon's essay "Trickster in a Suit of Lights"—that all fiction is ultimately genre fiction—is difficult to dispute.

[3] See also Cochran, "Whedon Studies: A Living History, 1999-2013."

[4] Sayer addresses "space" in *Buffy* and *Angel* as representing not only physical places, whether real or fictitious, but artistic and psychological constructs, "imaginative space" (137). Lorna Jowett also discusses *Buffy*'s conflation of physical with symbolic space.

[5] Or, more respectfully but perhaps less mechanically correct, "Geekdom."

[6] McArthur (61-62), among other writers, asserts that geeks have experienced a growing acceptance within the greater culture and even "have carried this appellation to positions of power and wealth in American economy" (61). Conversely, the term "wonk" does not appear in McArthur's or (so far as I have seen) others' lists or descriptions of geek synonyms. "Wonk" is a label applied to those who demonstrate knowledge of and apparently delight in the minutiae of economic or political policy (i.e. "policy wonk" and *Wonkette*). A wonk, in other words, is a politics geek. That "wonk" and "geek" are not used as synonyms, despite their identification of persons who share specific qualities or characteristics of interest, suggests that "geek," however less insultingly used now than in decades past, retains a stigma that some members of society would rather not wear.

[7] The only dedicated examination of the intersection of *Buffy* and geek culture that I have found is Tanya Krzywinska's article, "Playing Buffy: Remediation, Occulted Meta-Game Physics, and the Dynamics of Agency in the Videogame Version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." J. Gordon Melton's piece "Images from the Hellmouth" provides a listing of every *Buffy*-oriented comic book published until that time—and, as discussed in the present essay, comics are indeed one hallmark of geekdom—but no actual discussion. Likewise, Massimo Introvigne's discussion of social and academic reactions to vampire comic books provides an interesting context in which to consider some aspects of Buffy studies but no discussion of Buffy studies with extant geek culture.

[8] McCain, Gentile, and Campbell locate the beginning of geek self-identification in the 1980s, the decade during which "geeks began adopting the term for themselves to express pride in their membership in a media and computer-based subculture."

[9] San Francisco's Comic-Con International, Atlanta's Dragon Con, and Indianapolis' Gen Con are among the largest and most well-known such gatherings, celebrating primarily comic books and comic book movies; fantasy and science fiction literature and film; and tabletop and video roleplay gaming, respectively.

[10] I am in no way attempting to psychoanalyze Willis or to make any claims about her or her experience beyond the observations made here.

[11] As has been repeatedly and thoroughly documented, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created the character The Hulk for Marvel Comics in 1962. The specific story to which the present discussion refers—"He Who Strikes the Silver Surfer"—was written by Stan Lee and penciled by Marie Severin.

[12] One might object to my assertions about the connection between set dressing and characterization on the grounds that the dressing in the opening scene of "Storyteller" is visible so briefly, and the specific literary references so obscure, that it is unlikely many viewers would recognize the books, let alone suss out the connections to the episode. I would counter this objection by noting that such "Easter Eggs"—small, essentially parenthetical references that provide extra information (or at least satisfaction) to the audience members who notice them—are quite common in films belonging to the same general category of geek literature that *Buffy* does (several such references appearing in both of the Marvel Studios films directed by Whedon). Further, Whedon has shown that he does not shy away from rarefied allusions: for example, Rhonda Wilcox notes the thematic significance, in the opening scene of the *Buffy* episode "Restless," of the Sapphic ode that Willow is painting on Tara's back—painting it in Greek, no less.

[13] Keith Topping's book *The Complete Slayer* was valuable in helping me track down several references whose locations I had forgotten.

[14] The practice has been popularized by the television series *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-).