Buffy to Batgirl: Essays on Female Power, Evolving Femininity and Gender Roles in Science Fiction and Fantasy. Edited by Julie M. Still and Zara T. Wilkinson. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2019. 244 p. ISBN 9781476664460. $39.95.

Buffy to Batgirl, published in 2019, is a collection of essays following an academic conference of the same name. In her foreword, "Punk Academe: The Rise of the Rule-Breaking, Boundary-Shaking DIY Conference," Katharine Kittredge explains the advent of something she likes to call the "Pippi to Ripley" model. This conference would welcome scholarship from independent voices, graduate students, librarians, high school teachers, and undergraduate students, thereby challenging the outdated and hierarchical traditions of academia. Later emerging as Pippi to Ripley: The Female Figure in Science Fiction and Fantasy, this event combines the best of fan and academic conferences, incorporating elements of the film festival, community art events, and passionate debate. Their goal is "to create a space in which fans, media creators, and scholars of all ages and stages [can] meet and exchange ideas" (2). One of the most important aspects of the Pippi to Ripley model is its capacity to inspire and support daughter conferences. With regard to this text, the Buffy to Batgirl conference became a space for scholars to focus on comics. After the success of their first event in 2014, Julie M. Still and Zara T. Wilkinson, two librarians from Rutgers University and Rutgers University-Camden respectively, set out to create an edited volume, *Buffy to Batgirl: Essays on Female Power, Evolving Femininity and Gender Roles in Science Fiction and Fantasy*.

Despite the conference's focus on comics, the collection of essays in *Buffy to Batgirl* spans everything from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Accordingly, in the introduction, Still and Wilkinson state that their motivation for this collection is to share with a wider audience the kind of scholarship that comes out of a conference of this type. What emerges is a group of scholars united by the pursuit of innovative academic spaces. In many ways, Buffy to Batgirl could be considered kin to our *Slayage* conference. This kinship is certainly represented in the content of these essays. A full quarter of the pieces featured in *Buffy to Batgirl* focus on either *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) or *Firefly* (2002). Even the essays that step outside of the Whedonverses call on *Buffy* and *Buffy+* scholarship to explore notions of feminism, heroism, and the vampire as a metaphor.

While the editors position the collection as more of a showcase for the conference, the curation of this text reveals a singular link that speaks to the mission of both the Pippi to Ripley and Buffy to Batgirl conferences. That is, the essays in this text are united by the assertion that there is no one way to perform femininity or gender, whether the lens is the witch figure, the hero's journey, or children's cartoons. This is *Buffy to Batgirl*'s greatest strength. Via its structure, readers find themselves engaging in a rich comparative exercise as they move from one essay to the next. From the perspective of *Slayage: The International Journal of* Buffy+, this fluidity widens the scope of the fuzzy set to include texts like *American Horror Story* (2011-), *Grimm* (2011-2017), *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018, *Divergent* (2011-2013), Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series (1983-2015), *Doctor Who* (1963-89, 2005-), *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2006-2011), *Superman* (1938-), *Smallville* (2001-2011), *Dead Like Me* (2003-2004), *Wonderfalls* (2004), *Pushing Daises* (2007-2009),

Twilight (2005-2008, 2008-2012) , *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011-2017, 2015-2018), *Adventure Time* (2010), *Steven Universe* (2013-2019), and Miyabe Miyuki's *The Book of Heroes* (2011).

That said, there are a few places where *Buffy to Batgirl* struggles. In terms of weight, the essays in this collection are quite disparate in length. Alice Nuttall's piece, "Selfish Girls: The Relationship Between Selfishness and Strength in the *Divergent* and Tiffany Aching Series," is only seven pages in length. It asserts that Tiffany Aching and Tris Prior use selfishness as a source of strength and that this attitude becomes a key part of their identity as heroines. In doing so, they challenge literary and social norms of "'good womanhood'" (54). This claim aligns with the objectives of both conferences and with the underlying objective of *Buffy to Batgirl* as a whole, but it is the shortest piece in the collection. Compare this to Al Valentín's forty-page article, "Using the Animator's Tools to Dismantle the Master's House? Gender, Race, Sexuality and Disability in Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time* and *Steven Universe*." This piece is incredibly well-researched, with almost six pages of citations, and asserts that shows like *Adventure Time* and *Steven Universe* represent how children's cartoons can provide representation and new modes of understanding when it comes to gender, sexuality, race, and ability. While reasonable variability in length is expected, the scope of Valentín's piece dwarfs Nuttall's. This disparity inevitably undercuts the presence of "Selfish Girls" because it establishes a precedent Nuttall's piece cannot match.

In "Alternate, Not Arrested Development: Bryan Fuller's Female Protagonists," Trinidad Linares looks at the effects of third-wave feminism in *Dead Like Me*, *Wonderfalls*, and *Pushing Daisies*. Linares asserts that George, Jaye, and Chuck challenge the tendency for supernatural forces to turn female

protagonists into passive victims. Again, we see the underlying theme of *Buffy to Batgirl* emerge in Linares's argument that Bryan Fuller's female protagonists demonstrate multiplicity in how they express their gender, but the essay has several typographical errors that distract from the reading experience. While the scope of the article is appropriate, and Linares's perspective on the power of visible alternate development in female protagonists is compelling and valuable, the mistakes damage the objective of *Buffy to Batgirl* because they call into question the collection's editing process.

To that point, the collection also features two essays on the character of Inara Serra in *Firefly*: Patricia Isabella Schumacher's "'Have good sex': Empowerment Through Sexuality as Represented by the Character of Inara Serra in Joss Whedon's *Firefly*" and "'Little Geisha Dolls': Postfeminism in Joss Whedon's *Firefly*" by Peregrine Macdonald. Schumacher's piece argues that Inara is a complicated but sex-positive character whose femininity enhances her empowerment. Macdonald's essay asserts that Inara is postfeminism personified. More specifically, Macdonald argues that Inara's extreme femininity threatens to undo the work of feminism. Both of them use Inara's appearance, her association with the 'exoticism' of the East, and her role as a Companion to parse through their claims. In fact, they both use the same scene, Inara bathing in front of Book, to show how the camera's gaze objectifies her character. Schumacher argues that this scene is actually subverting the male gaze because Inara is deliberately making her body a spectacle, but Macdonald asserts that this scene maintains the male gaze because the camera focuses on one body part at a time. Including both pieces in this collection could, arguably, exemplify the complicated nature of third-wave feminism. But, from the perspective of the reader, using

the same elements to argue two opposing positions undermines the objectives of both Macdonald's and Schumacher's pieces.

Despite these discrepancies, several essays in *Buffy to Batgirl* present new and refreshing takes on texts both familiar and unfamiliar to *Buffy*+ studies. In "Girl Power and Depression in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Shyla Saltzman argues that *Buffy* depicts the price of postfeminist toughness, proving that heroism is often disempowering. She uses the series' final seasons to parse through the trauma of Buffy's resurrection. Against a backdrop of postfeminism, Saltzman argues that characters like Buffy Summers are not allowed to experience depression or voice their struggles with it. Saltzman pushes back against Valerie Estelle Frankel's assertion in her book, *Buffy and the Heroine's Journey: Vampire Slayer as Feminine Chosen One*, that depression is an obstacle that Buffy must overcome. Saltzman insists that Buffy's desire to die accomplishes two important tasks. First, it disrupts complacent depictions of the relentlessly charismatic and polished heroine continuously rising above hardship. She insists that "Buffy's death, resurrection, and depression should not be dismissed as a metaphor for the challenges of growing up" (98). Rather than categorizing Buffy's struggle with her return as representative of her character's infantilization, viewers should reposition their interpretation of her resurrection as representing her *friends'* infantilism. Second, Saltzman insists that it is Buffy's depression that leads to the end of *the* Slayer. Disillusioned with the cycle and the pressure of singularity, Buffy decides it is time for her community to empower themselves. This conclusion, born from the unseen cruelty of her resurrection, frees Buffy and all future Slayers from the burden of being the one force on Earth that can defeat the vampires and the demons.

In the same vein, Caolan Madden revisits *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* in "Vampires Who Go to High School: Everyday Women's Culture in *Twilight, Dracula* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*" to challenge criticism about their "boring" nature. She posits that by featuring the mundane so heavily, *Dracula*, *Twilight*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* are actually engaging with the feminist tradition of centering everyday life. Madden takes this further by addressing critics' complaints about vampirism in *Twilight*, explaining that by removing the traditional threats these monstrous figures pose, Edward Cullen's vampirism becomes a metaphor for the everyday threat of patriarchal violence against women. As an extension of Edward, "Christian Grey is a man with a taste for sexual violence who serves as a metaphor for men with a taste for sexual violence" (169). Countering the 'happily ever after' narrative of an endless, loving marriage, these texts, through centering the everyday as harmonious and safe, become a fantasy of optimism.

Eleanor J. Hogan's article, "Beyond the Monomyth: Yuriko's Multi-Mythic Journey in Miyabe Miyuki's *The Book of Heroes,*" also uses Frankel's *Buffy and the Heroine's Journey: Vampire Slayer as Feminine Chosen One,* alongside *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell, to define Yuriko from *The Book of Heroes* as a "'multi-mythic' hero" (226). Hogan argues that *The Book of Heroes* challenges the "monomyth," a distinctly male path, and incorporates third-wave feminism via its insistence on diversity. Once again, the underlying theme of *Buffy to Batgirl* emerges as Hogan asserts that Yuriko's journey exemplifies the power of choice. There is no one path to empowerment just as there is no one way to perform femininity and gender.

Sheila Sandapen and Sandra Eckard revisit classic texts, *Doctor Who* and *Superman*, to trace the development of iconic female sidekicks in their articles, "Girl Rebooted: Transforming *Doctor Who's* Sarah Jane Smith from Sidekick to Hero" and "The Evolution of Lois Lane: Reflections on Women in Society." Sandapen posits that early representations of Sarah Jane, one of the original companions to the Doctor, devolved from a curious, independent character to a "'softened'[...] damsel in distress" as a result of the rampant sexism that emerged in the 1970s to counterbalance rising awareness of feminism (108). However, in 2006, Sarah Jane was brought back in season two, episode three of *Doctor Who*, "School Reunion." No longer simply a sidekick, renewed interest in her character led to *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, which depicts a former companion as a hero. Regarding visibility, Sarah Jane is middle-aged and nontraditional, a self-sufficient single mother equal to the Doctor in capability. More importantly, she is no longer waiting for the Doctor to intervene, and she does not need his permission to behave heroically.

Eckard takes up a similar task in tracing the development of Lois Lane alongside the evolution of feminism. She asserts that Lois Lane's character acts as a mirror, reflecting changes in society's attitude toward the roles and beliefs of women. Eckard explores these changes via Lois's approach to her job, her relationship with Clark Kent/Superman, and the secret of his identity. She posits that in earlier iterations of the television shows and comics, Lois Lane acts as a somewhat bland love interest who cannot make the connection between Clark Kent and Superman. In the 1990s, this conundrum was reconfigured to represent the evolving attitudes of their audience. *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* positions Superman as the third wheel in Lois and Clark's relationship. In this series,

Lois is more interested in trying to learn about her partner, not his alter ego, and she even makes the connection between the two on her own. Eckard then shows how *Smallville* takes Lois's development even further by fleshing out her personhood until we get to *Fallout*, a 2015 young adult novel that focuses solely on Lois and her backstory.

The final two pieces to discuss in *Buffy to Batgirl* are Alissa Burger and Stephanie Mix's piece, "Something Wicked This Way Comes? Power, Anger, and Negotiating the Witch in *American Horror Story*, *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*," and "Witches, Mothers and Gentlemen: Re-Inventing Fairy Tales in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" by Kerry Boyles. While these essays use different texts to explore the witch figure and the fairy tale, they come to remarkably similar conclusions. The women in *American Horror Story: Coven*, *Grimm,* and *Once Upon a Time* go beyond classic depictions of good versus evil, instead favoring complexity and fallibility. Boyles uses "Gingerbread," "Hush," "Ted," and "Witch" to posit that the fairy-tale elements of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* contribute to the feminist objectives of the show. While the traditional fairy tale formula necessitates the punishment of willful and powerful women, the fairy-tale elements in *Buffy* reinforce female empowerment and underscore the dangers of patriarchal oppression. Following Burger and Mix's conclusion concerning representations of complex women, Boyles states, "Buffy, as a composite of both light and dark, is more human, real, a role model rather than a rehashed character for viewers to recognize and condemn or applaud accordingly" (47).

Buffy to Batgirl is doing important work when it comes to the study of female characters in science fiction, fantasy, and comics. While there are some issues with this collection, they do not take away from its underlying assertion that the

performance of gender and femininity should not be prescribed. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, *American Horror Story*, *Grimm*, *Once Upon a Time*, *Divergent*, Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, *Doctor Who*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Superman*, *Smallville*, *Dead Like Me, Wonderfalls, Pushing Daises*, *Twilight*, *Fifty Shades of Grey, Adventure Time*, *Steven Universe*, and Miyabe Miyuki's *The Book of Heroes* all depict complex representations of gender, specifically womanhood, which provide abundant conversation about the evolution and mercurial nature of feminism. Regarding the editorial purpose of *Slayage: The International Journal of* Buffy+, *Buffy to Batgirl*'s heavy use of *Buffy+* scholarship, along with the way each piece is connected, positions several previously unexamined texts as worthy of inclusion in the fuzzy set.

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Savannah Richardson works at the University of North Alabama. She is currently writing an article for a special edition of *Monstrum* titled "Shirley Jackson: Intertexts and Afterlives," and one of her essays has been accepted for an upcoming publication titled *The 'True' Case Files of the Warrens: Essays on the Conjuring Franchise*. She has presented at Trinity College Dublin's virtual symposium on Shirley Jackson, PCAS/ACAS, and *Slayage*. After serving as a member of the transition team, she was selected in 2022 to serve as the Web Administrator for The Association for the Study of *Buffy+*.