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“All Torment, Trouble, Wonder, and Amazement Inhabits Here": The Vicissitudes of Technology in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*[1]

By James B. South

At its best, popular culture provides our society with opportunities to impose a narrative form on our cultural presuppositions and anxieties. It allows its creators and its audience an imaginative space to explore issues central to society's self-conception by reaffirming our cultural biases or illustrating alternatives to cultural presuppositions. In the latter mode, it can propose societal critiques within a safe, that is, non-political, environment and allow its audience a chance to engage in thought experiments. As a result, the audience can come to recognize forgotten possibilities for change and action as well as develop a better understanding of the social attitudes and forces that limit our conception of what the world can be and what role the individual can play.

One pervasive set of social attitudes involves our understanding of and relation to technology. With the advent of modem technology and all of its revolutionary consequences, a philosophical critique of technology came into being. One particular theme prominent in that philosophical tradition is the notion of a technological society. On this view, technology and the social relations it requires have shaped our society in ways that are less than apparent and have restricted the scope of our imagination in ways that circumscribe the way we view our available actions. In this paper, I argue that several central themes in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be understood best against the background of philosophical discussions concerning technology and that by reflecting on the themes in the show we can understand more clearly the sources of our social relations as they are conditioned by technology. In brief, my thesis is that the "fantasy" world inhabited by Buffy Summers, the eponymous heroine of the show, is the technological world we inhabit, but one that vividly renders that world so we can better understand our own.

Two quotations should provide us with an approach to thinking about technology in this context. The first passage is from Adorno's "Theses Against Occultism." Written in 1947, it remains a very succinct and useful work that neatly expresses some main themes of his thought, but also speaks to the still current cultural obsession with the occult:

> Panic breaks once again, after millennia of enlightenment, over a humanity whose control of nature as control of men far exceeds in horror anything men ever had to fear from nature. (128)

The second passage is from Donald Phillip Verene's recent work. *Philosophy and the Return*

to-Self-Knowledge:

> Instinctively, the technological person knows that the idea of the hero is anathema to the technological society. There can never be true working together, because the individual, if he is not to be nothing, must cling to his cause—which is always the particular "mineness" he can work out in relation to the particular thing. (159)

These two passages provide the parameters for the discussion below. First, the Adomo passage suggests that fear is a motif for understanding today's society. The control of nature and the control of others is so horrific that it is hard for us even to see it. Instead, we experience some vague panic that misses the underlying causes of these methods of control. If Adomo is right, it is worth considering how the horror about which he speaks is manifested in society and a consideration of a prototypical horror show should provide us with a good sample case. The Verene passage speaks to the consequences of a technological society: an exclusive sense of individual entitlement, the demand to treat others as means to an individual end, and a lack of authentic heroes. All of these consequences relate to the way in which technology and its attendant way of looking at the world have restricted the stage on which we can act.

For the purposes of this paper, then, I want to stipulate that we live in a "technological society," as Jacques Ellul and others have argued; a world in which the use of machines is paramount and in which the "one best means" is constantly sought (Verene 141-91). This notion of a "technological society" is very important in this paper, so its referent needs to be sketched. A society is technological if it is characterized by the pervasive use of "technique." Ellul describes technique as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity" (Ellul 24-25). The most notable features, then, of a technological society is that it is dominated by the rational deliberation about means, while forgetful of the need to consider ends. In this way, technique refers to a mind-set, a way of looking at the world and its inhabitants.[2] One of the central themes in writers such as Ellul, Karl Jaspers, and Ernst Cassirer is that the rise of technological society has changed both human consciousness and social life so that, in the words of Jaspers, "When an attempt is made to render this inevitable institution absolute, there is a danger to the selfhood that the fundamental basis of mind may be destroyed" (Verene 171). Since we live in a technological society, there are dangers to us both individually and collectively that are more fundamental than questions about how to control or direct technology. So, thinking about technology must begin by questioning the very nature of technology and its effects on us, prior to asking what kind of technology we should choose or avoid. The overriding issue in respect to technology, then, is not to reflect on how technology ought to be used or to discriminate between harmful and harmless kinds of technology, but rather to try to examine the kinds of questions that motivated those who first began to think about

the role of technology in modern society. It is here that central themes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can come to our aid.

The notion of a technique, of a mind-set induced by technology, might seem rather abstract. However, there is a striking metaphor available that can be used to grasp the point that these critics of technology are making, a metaphor for the way in which technology affects us, both as a society and as individual psyches within such a technological society. That metaphor is the "vampire." The clearest feature of vampires, is that they are soulless or selfless and, as a result, exhibit merely instrumental reasoning in their exploitation of humans. Such monsters are portrayed as self-conscious, but soulless, and that is an important distinction. They may know what they want, but what they want is governed by their always wanting more. Their continual need for human victims, for blood, is representative of the unquenchable need for satisfaction of desires, of the need for more at the heart of technological society. This reduction of the self to an aggregate set of desires is a topos of many modern thinkers who point out the dangers of technology and the instrumental rationality at its center (Verene 179-82).

Again, reflecting on the nature of vampires as portrayed on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can help us to understand better the nature of technological society. In the substitution of our technocrats and their servants with vampires and their associates, the show both illuminates our fears about technology and portrays the technological rationality in a clear and striking manner. In addition, the show provides us with imaginative models of resistance to technological society, most obviously by showing us a way in which a hero can exist within technological society. It tums out that a key aspect of such a possibility involves the renunciation of the individual "mineness" that provides one of the hallmarks of technological society.[3]

The analogy between our technological society and the universe of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is striking. The world of the series appears vastly different from the one we inhabit. We do not run across vampires or monsters, much less secret govemment agencies, gypsy curses and the like in our world. However, the quotation in the paper's title was chosen with care. “All torment, trouble, wonder, and amazement inhabits here" is, of course, from *The Tempest* and describes Prospero's island with its very strange mix of magic, witches and monsters and hapless humans. *The Tempest* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have similar themes that highlight the weekly "torment, trouble, wonder and amazement" present in the fictional setting of the series, Sunnydale, California. Consequently, it is legitimate to note that just as the themes in Shakespeare's most theatrical of plays can illuminate issues about society in his day as well as ours, so too an examination of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can provide us with keys to understanding our own society.

The story of *The Tempest* is well-known. Prospero, having been aided by fortune, has managed to restore himself to his former status as Duke of Milan. He accomplished this by using magic as well as his native wits. Having been fortunate enough to have those who overthrew him come close to his island, he causes a sea storm that washes them up onto his island. He subjects them to various ordeals and at the end he forgives them for the original usurpation. He then renounces both the island he has "commanded" for the last dozen years and his magic (symbolized by his cloak, staff and most significantly, his books) before returning to rule over Milan. The Tempest is one of the more controversial plays of Shakespeare, and the themes emphasized by critics range widely between interpreting it as a statement on colonialism to an autobiographical study of Shakespeare's own conception of his art as a playwright. However, for our purposes it is enough to stress the Janus-like figure of Prospero, who both looks back to the magical practices of the Renaissance sage and forward to the rationalism central to the seventeenth century, where the technological society has its philosophical origin.

Two passages central to the finale of the play are of particular interest as they can provide a contrast to themes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* The first occurs after Prospero has freed his monster Caliban and promises to explain everything to those who had been part of his revenge fantasy:

> And in the morn
> I'll bring you to your ship, and so to Naples,
> Where I have hope to see the nuptial
> Of these our dear-beloved solemnize,
> And thence retire me to Milan, where
> Every third thought shall be my grave.

A bit later in his epilogue, Prospero:

> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant. And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer
> Which pierces so, that it assaults Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

Without dwelling on the ambiguities present in the passages, it is easy enough to see that this is less than a happy ending for Prospero, even if it is not a tragic one. There is a sense of loss, a recognition of mortality, a resignation of hope in the agency of humanity, all consequent on the loss of magic. The result is a world without enchantment, a world that is unchanged from the world he was banished from originally.[4] However, while it is interesting to note that nothing changed in Prospero's situation prior to the events of the play and the subsequent ending of the play, something was lost. That something was his magic and that

loss informs the major difference between *The Tempest* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* The world at the end of *The Tempest* is unchangeable in the sense that there is less human hope, less human control. The primary tool of that hope was magic and that is precisely what Prospero renounced.

By comparison, the fictional city of Sunnydale, California—a city literally situated over a Hellmouth—provides a metaphor for our technological society, the result of seventeenth century rationalism, the industrial revolution and other forces. Demons, monsters, vampires and the like constantly assail Sunnydale and the only thing that stands between it and total destruction is the figure of the Slayer, that is, Buffy Summers. As the voiceover explaining the series in its early episodes reminded us, the Slayer is unique to each generation, and stands as a defense against the forces of darkness. She is a truly heroic figure, indeed almost a Promethean figure, since her destiny is to fight continually against the legions of vampires, monsters, and demons until, at last, she is killed, after which another will take her place. There is no apparent hope for some final apocalyptic victory of good over evil in this scenario, just the constant struggle against evil. Moreover, it is clear that the slayer does this job for the sake of the community, not for self-preservation, while at the same time it is a community that, for all practical purposes, does not know she exists as a slayer.

Now, mitigating a bit this bleakness is the presence of Buffy's mother (we are told, at one point that it is unusual to let a slayer remain with her family)[5] as well as her watcher, Mr. Giles, whose "cover" in the early years of the series is as a librarian at her high school. It is the watcher's responsibility to train and teach the slayer what is necessary, both mentally and physically for the fight against evil. In addition, early on a group of friends (significantly, one that has expanded over the years) coalesced around Buffy and they help her in many ways, from providing donuts at research sessions to helping fight the monsters that torment Sunnydale. Two characters. Willow Rosenberg and Xander Harris, constitute the core of this group. Friends since youth, they welcomed Buffy when she first arrived at Sunnydale High School and continue to stay at her side throughout her ordeals.

While there are several persistent themes that run throughout the series (the most obvious early on was the brilliant analogy between high school and Hell), two bring into focus the attitudes the series possesses towards the issues of technology I mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The first is Buffy's purpose, and the second is the way in which her friends, the self-described "Scooby Gang," come to her aid. Buffy's purpose is simple enough: she is a vampire slayer, although she also must deal with assorted monsters and demons. It is important to point out that there is no romanticizing of vampires in the series; in fact, the so-called "goth"

subculture and the kind of romantic otherness of vampires we find in the works of Anne Rice and other novelists is explicitly rejected. Vampires in the series are blood-sucking, soulless, and ruthless. They are remorseless in their need for human blood and are relentless in their pursuit of it. In short, the vampires in the series represent the exploitation and means centered rationality so typical of modern technological society. Allied with this representation is a related one that owes its inspiration to Marx's frequent comparison of the capitalist's need for labor with the vampire's need for blood: "Capital is dead labour which vampire-like, lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (Marx 342).[6] Also, Marx provides a useful link between the critique of technological society and the economic exploitation of capitalists since he connects the creation of the machine, the spinning wheel, with the origins of the industrial revolution. Marx argues that this invention, and by extension the use of machines in general, has so colored our way of thinking about the world, that we can hardly see the technological forest for the tree-like machinery.[7]

The connections between the television series and themes in the philosophy of technology have been highlighted within the series in stark terms and alluded to on numerous occasions. For example, in the third season episode "Anne," Buffy, having left Sunnydale briefly because of a rather unpleasant set of personal circumstances, finds herself waiting tables at a diner. There she comes across several people who progress from being youthful to being aged within the course of one day and in that process lose all memory of their identity. She finds the culprit in a monster, masquerading as a leader of a religious community, who has fashioned a hellish subterranean workplace in which consciousness of time has ceased to exist for those working for him, although the effects of time continue in that they age. In setting the culprit within the context of a religious community ostensibly helping its members, there is an echo of the famous Marxist equation of the human need for religion as yet another way in which humans lose control over their own lives. When the leader of the community has exploited the workers' usefulness, they are cast back up above ground, nameless, unrecognizable and ready to die. The symbolism is a bit less then subtle: the capitalist exploitation of workers turns humans into nameless drones and, sucking the life out of them, it discards the empty husks. The workplace masquerading as a religious community is the very model of a Fordist assembly line and in the climactic battle scene, Buffy is seen holding a weapon in each hand, one a sickle and another a hammer: a clear reminder of the classic working class symbols in the Marxist tradition.

In another notable episode, "The Wish," the plot revolves around the premise that Buffy never arrived in Sunnydale. It is a complex episode and requires a rather detailed summary. A demon named Anya is summoned by one of the series characters, Cordelia, who has had a

relationship setback. Anya's demonic specialty is granting the wish of women who have revenge against men on their minds. The wish, that Buffy had never come to Sunnydale, is granted and we get a rather grim episode in which Buffy's two best friends. Willow and Xander have become vampires and Sunny-dale has become a war zone with the vampires clearly winning. In this alternate universe story, Sunnydale's vampire population is being led by a character known only as "The Master," a character whom Buffy had killed at the end of the first season of the series. Since in this alternate universe Buffy has never arrived at Sunnydale, we get some glimpse of how the Master's plan evolved. We see, for example, that he has fashioned a machine whose purpose is a more efficient form of blood extraction from still living humans, and the humans remaining in Sunnydale have developed responses to the situation that are rather non-confrontational: they don't wear bright clothes and they have instituted a pre-sundown curfew in order to avoid the vampire population. In short, a kind of herd mentality is in place in which the mere survival has replaced the concerns of normal living. A few hardy souls, including Giles, patrol the streets at night, but are no match for the vampires. As the episode progresses, Buffy, having finally been summoned to Sunnydale, arrives just in time to try to thwart the culmination of the Master's plan. The tragic nature of this alternate universe is shown most clearly to the audience when Buffy must kill the vampire version of Xander in the process of defeating the Master. Since she had not previously been in Sunnydale, she has no sense of the pathos of the situation yet the viewer is clued in to the true nature of the situation. In addition, in the course of the fight we see other members of her inner circle, her friends, killed including the vampire versions of Willow and Xander. The Master's plan to harness technology for efficient blood extraction has destroyed everything that the "real" Buffy has cared about, and that the unreal (to the audience) Buffy has never experienced. The human cost tells in the face, appearance, and demeanor of the alternate universe Buffy, who looks and acts differently from the "real" Buffy. The episode itself points to one major difference between the two Buffy characters. In the teaser opening to the episode, Buffy is fighting a monster and seems to be finding herself on the losing end of the fight. Luckily for her, she has Xander and Willow as back-up and between them, they make it possible for her to kill the demon. Buffy's comment, "If you guys hadn't been here to help," is interrupted by Willow who states "But we were." Later in the episode, when the alternate Buffy arrives in Sunnydale, she remarks to Giles that "I don't play well with others." The viewer knows that this does not have to be the case, but something about the alternate universe changes who Buffy is. The absence of her friends and her watcher have made Buffy into a different person, rendering vividly the importance of Buffy's friends for her identity. At the end of the fight with the Master, he kills the alternate Buffy. However, luckily for

the world, Giles has managed to summon Anya, discover her "power source" in a locket that she wears and destroy it, thus returning the series universe to its original state. The final image of the episode is one of Buffy, Willow, Xander and Giles talking and laughing together.

In "The Wish" we are presented with a multi-layered plot that manages to make us recognize both the reality of the ordinary series universe, while reminding us that the it is fictional—after all, in the real world, we don't have alternate realities. In the theatricality of this episode, the episode bears an uncanny resemblance to the reality/illusion confusions of *The Tempest,* in which the very real seeming shipwreck at the beginning of the play is, in fact, a carefully contrived illusion made possible by Prospero's magic. In fact, at one point in the episode Anya refers to the altered universe as a "brave new world," a phrase taken, of course, from *The Tempest.* More specifically, these two episodes make it possible for us to consider the association between technology and the disposability of human life.

In both episodes, humans provide mere fodder for those who would subjugate them. The demonic reliance on technology is a central theme in each episode. Moreover, the resonance with Marx's standpoint is obvious enough. Just as capitalists exploit workers, demons and vampires exploit humans for their labor or literally for their blood.[8] The loss of human sovereignty made possible by the demons and vampires is striking in both episodes: Anya's magic makes playthings of the characters; the Master's plan requires the sacrifice of countless humans while still alive; the nameless demon in "Anne" uses the work power of people until they are no longer useful, thereby sapping them of their very personhood. Especially noteworthy are the uses that humans have for the vampires and demons and those uses are cashed out in technological terms. The assembly line and the blood extraction machine taking place at what the Master refers to as "the factory" both allow for what the Master calls "the technical wonder that's about to alter the very fabric of our society." The emphasis on the "one best means" that critics of technological society see as required in such a society is echoed again by the Master: "Hunt and kill, hunt and kill. Titillating? Yes. Practical? No." As the Master introduces his followers to the blood extraction machine at the factory, he states: "Humans with their plebian minds have brought us a truly demonic concept—mass production."And the vampire version of Xander responds, "We really are living in a golden age." The Master's final words in the episode as he starts to drink a cup of blood extracted by the machine from a still living human are "Welcome to the future."

We see, then, that both magic and technology can be put to use in the subjugation of humans, much as Prospero's magic subjugates Caliban and Ariel and makes playthings of the people unfortunate enough to sail near his island. This notion, that magic too can be used by the

vampires, monsters and demons that populate the series adds an important dimension to the issues under discussion. Humanity in the series is under the shadow of technological society and must fight not just technology, but also the use of forces beyond nature. What does it mean that humanity must fight supernatural forces? It would seem to be the place where we find the most obvious dis-analogy between the series universe and our world, yet in fact there is a role that vampires, demons and monsters play in our world. One answer to the question can be found in the Enlightenment understanding of supernatural phenomena, an understanding to which Marx himself was indebted. On this understanding, talk of supernatural creatures is useful to social authority since they require a kind of superstitious dogma that veils the human ability to see the world as it is. Thus, for example, Rousseau thought that the relation between vampires and their prey was a symbol of the ordinary relations that hold us together in civilized society, relations that are not at all neutral.[9] In populating Sunnydale with vampires, demons and monsters, the Buffy universe renders "supernatural" obfuscation actual.

In this regard, it is notable that many traditional authority figures in the series have some connection with the supernatural, either being themselves supernatural creatures or by being allied with them. The Mayor of Sunnydale, for example, was a demon who prepared the inhabitants of the city for his own use as, ultimately, food. Buffy and the gang successfully defeated the Mayor's ascension to full demonic mode, in the process destroying Sunnydale High School where the mayor was both delivering the commencement speech and preparing to devour the graduating seniors. We can consider the mayor as representative of a civil society with an attendant set of social relations that will, in fact, destroy the autonomy of students ready to face a future. That future with its use of technique and its exploitative social relations provides the students with no real future, but one like that faced by the nameless worker drones in "Anne." At the close of the episode featuring the mayor's attempt to destroy Sunnydale's future, the camera zooms in on a Sunnydale High School Yearbook half charred and lying in the still smoldering ruins. The class motto, "The Future is Ours" can be clearly seen. The analogy with the Master's welcoming us to a future dominated by mass production is resonant here. If there is a future in Sunnydale, it is because of Buffy and her friends, not school or civic authority figures, and certainly not because technology holds out some future golden age.

Clearly, there is present in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a real worry about the uses of technology and the ways in which it can dehumanize humans. Whether it is a matter of a more efficient blood delivery system or a matter of exploiting human labor, technology provides a means to the ends of those who would subjugate humanity. Vampires and demons are at work who are literally soulless, yet quite good at devising technological schemes for satisfying their

need for more, whether it is human blood, or human labor. Moreover, the technology so deployed also snatches away human personhood, and its victims are either used up and discarded without any regard for them as persons or they are killed and/made into vampires themselves. While these episodes provide a salutary warning about the ways in which technology can be misused, that is only half of the story being told in these episodes. While the series artfully presents us with a way to view the horror of which Adorno speaks, it does not stop there. It also offers models of resistance to the technological society in which we live by showing that heroes are possible and that the mindless individuality that Verene mentions can be avoided by those who work together.

Interestingly, the show does not advocate a complete rejection of technology. In fact, computers are used and viewed in a favorable way by characters in the series. Indeed, the Librarian is the butt of frequent jokes because of his inability to use computers efficiently. Willow, Buffy's friend, is the group computer expert. Her responsibilities include research, hacking into computer systems, and in general being the person to ask about any technology questions. She is clearly something of a prodigy, and in one episode she is recruited, while still in high school, by a firm similar to Microsoft. With these credentials in place, we might expect her to be the member of the group with a commitment to scientific rationality. However, there has been an ongoing character development as Willow, while retaining her technological expertise, has also become a practicing witch, or in the series slang, a techno-pagan. This development is quite important for seeing the overall series approach to issues of technology. Willow, in becoming a practicing Wiccan, points out to us the weaknesses in a purely technological approach to solving problems in the battle against vampires and other monsters. Not only do the vampires and monsters try to control us by means of technology, we find that they are not going to be vanquished by technology. Technology is both a major cause of our subjugation and at the same time insufficient for our liberation. It is significant that the show recognizes that technology cannot fight technology, since we would merely end up being subjugated by yet another technology. Hence, the significance of magic and witchcraft becomes apparent. There is something about magic that can in fact lead us to our liberation.

The most noteworthy feature of magic in the series, at least as it us used by Willow, is that it is a magic rooted in tradition, and that tradition is signified by books. The spells are recorded in and learned from books and thus Willow is not an autonomous witch, but rather dependent on a long and even almost pre-historical magical tradition. The books Willow uses consists in accumulated wisdom the function of which is to combat precisely those forces that Buffy and her friends face regularly. At the same time, as with the case of Anya, the show

acknowledges that there is another kind of magic, a magic that aids those forces who would enslave humanity for their own ends. This latter kind of magic can be used by humans as well as non-human creatures, so it is important to emphasize that the type of magic used by a practitioner depends on a choice made before the magic is ever used. What this means is that the magic used to combat the vampires and monsters presupposes a certain moral stance in the practitioner.

This factor is underscored by the way in which the series is careful to separate Willow's Wiccan commitments and magical abilities from what we might call a New Age approach to witchcraft. Practitioners of the latter, called contemptuously "wanna blessed-be's" by Willow and her Wiccan friend Tara, are those who have no idea of the real magical powers Willow and Tara possess, but only have some vague enthusiasm for the idea of witchcraft and magic. It is clear that there is something about those who have real magical powers that separates them from other humans, although how they use their powers subsequently is dependent on their character and commitments. In this sense, magic is not a technology substitute, but rather indicates some intrinsic feature of the person using magic. There are, then, two layers of additional defense that mediate a positive use of technology: there must first be a prior commitment to the side of the slayer and there must be a facility with magic that is both natural (and presumably rare) as well as rooted in tradition and books.

The parallels with Prospero and his island are again rather striking. Like Willow, Prospero's magic is rooted in his books and his renunciation of magic consists in his leaving behind those very same books. Like his island, Sunnydale is a place of amazement and trouble. The difference, obviously, is that no one in Sunnydale is ready to renounce the use of magic and the reason is clear: Buffy and her friends are in a fight. There is no doubt that vampires, monsters, and the like are trying to exploit and subjugate the citizens of Sunnydale, and kill Buffy and her friends, the main obstacle to their plans. The indisputable conflict is what gives the show its sense of urgency. Rather than renounce magic and let nature and technology have their way, the gang instead embraces magic and technology to defeat evil and they can do this precisely because of prior commitments that they have towards fighting the vampires. Technology and magic are both tools, not techniques. They do not entail a mind-set or impose ideological shackles on those who use them provided that they are used as tools. Just as Buffy uses a stake to kill vampires, thereby becoming like vampires, so too the characters in the show can use technology and magic without becoming slaves to them.

Ultimately, the central issue in the series, the fight between Buffy and her friends against the vampires who would kill them and subjugate humanity, can be viewed as a reminder that we

not only live in a technological society, but also a class stratified one. The vampires and monsters are best viewed as metaphors for the way that capitalism functions in industrial society. The vampires are a class that uses technology to enslave others and Buffy and her friends are representative of those who are exploited by capital and provide us with a model of resistance to that domination. There is, then, one final analogy between Buffy and the real world that we inhabit. One persuasive reading of Marx focuses on the way in which he simultaneously denies the existence of a universal morality, while effectively promoting a method for advancing a form of working on behalf of others (Miller 53-75). Marx argues that universal principles of morality are inadequate in class conflict because they require equal respect and concern. Obviously, within a context of class struggle, there is no way in which the two sides can treat one another as a typical universal morality would dictate. Overcoming massive inequalities of wealth and the power that allows takes more than an appeal to treat others fairly, or to universalize a maxim to treat each other as ends. The problem with treating each other fairly is that fairness from the perspective of the oppressed is rather different than fairness from the perspective of those who are doing the oppressing. As a result, Marx rejects "morality" because of its uselessness for solving class conflict. The breach between workers and capitalists is not one that is going to be bridged by universal sentiments of justice and respect. Instead, Marx argues that the work of liberation can be accomplished only by the heroic self-sacrifice of many (although not necessarily most) who are willing to take on the established powers and wrest control from them. Nonetheless, heroic self-sacrifice on the part of some to advance the workers' movement is insufficient. The capitalist has at his disposal many more resources than several workers can muster. What is called for, Marx believes, is a growing sense of solidarity among workers. This comes about through the feelings of cooperation and trust that develop by struggling against the forces of capitalism.

The analogy with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is straightforward. Buffy's heroic self-sacrifice is a motif running throughout many episodes, perhaps most notably in a two-part episode that centers on career day at Sunnydale High School. It is then that Buffy comes to realize forcefully that her destiny is such as to make any ordinary life unavailable to her. Her friends make sacrifices as well as a result of Buffy's. After High School graduation, for example, Willow chooses to enroll at the University of California-Sunnydale rather than go to an elite college. Xander takes on a series of meaningless jobs that allow him to continue to help as well. Earlier, I mentioned that one of the features of Willow's psychology that makes technology available to her as a weapon against the exploitation threatened by the series' monsters is her choice to use it for good. In turn her sense of solidarity with Buffy's destiny, the shared travails and fights that she

has been a part of alongside Buffy, are what make that choice possible. In short, the lesson we leam from Willow and Xander is that our place in the struggle is what determines our attitude in respect to the right kinds of uses for technology within a technological society. The added layer of complexity is provided by the sense of solidarity with those making sacrifices on behalf of people who would be exploited otherwise. It gives the lie to the alternate Buffy's statement in "The Wish" that she doesn't play well with others. In fact, she does play well with others and we see in that episode what would result if "you guys hadn't been here to help."

Interestingly, it is precisely this feature of the world portrayed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that is lacking in Prospero's sacrifice of his magic. He returns to Milan as little more than a caretaker. His life is essentially over; a point suggested by his phrase that once he has returned "every third thought will be my grave." The magic that he renounces is cashed out in the series in terms of a connection to the tradition of struggle against the forces of darkness. The solidarity that Willow experiences is personal to her, yet at the same time echoed throughout history by those who have preceded her in using magical power to advance the cause of humanity. This extended solidarity with the past, different from but related to her immediate solidarity with Buffy and her friends, gives her magical power efficacy. Prospero by contrast renounces his magic and returns home to a "brave new world" where the sense of solidarity with the past is gone, as well as his magical powers. That "brave new world" has taken shape in the series universe and it is modem technological society, with its instrumental rationality, loss of personhood and lack of heroes and allies.

Central to the point that Marx is making, though, is that numbers do count and the series has been careful to make the same point. When the school is threatened by the mayor at graduation, it is not just Buffy and her friends that fight off the apocalypse; they are able to recruit many students to help as well. Some of those students die. Moreover, the series has made it clear that Buffy's schoolmates know that what she does is important, even if they keep their distance from her, viewing her as too different. In an episode that takes place at the senior prom, the students of Sunnydale high give Buffy a special award. The remarks that precede the presentation point to the fact that her fellow students know she is different, yet appreciate her efforts:

> But whenever there was a problem or something creepy happened, you seemed to show up and stop it. Most of the people here have been saved by you; or helped by you at one time or another. We're proud to say that the class of '99 has the lowest mortality rate of any graduating class in Sunnydale history. And we know that at least part of that is because of you. So the senior class offers its thanks and gives you, uh... this. It's from all of us. And it has written here, Buffy Summers—Class Protector.

They know, in short, that she is on their side, even if they are not sure of the nature of the enemy. The award bestowed, "class protector," has a double meaning: she has protected her fellow schoolmates, but she also models a strategy of defense and liberation from the oppressive social forces that would exploit them as workers. In this sense, she is a model for our world, a world without vampires, but a world oppressed by technology and its concomitant mode of production associated with the economic exploitation of late capitalism.

In sum, then, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* teaches us that we must regain a sense of the sources of self-knowledge available to us from the past in order to fight the technological forces that overwhelm us today. The metaphor of magic within the series provides one key, since it suggests that the resources for fighting technological society are not present within the society itself. Hence, any method used will appear magical, that is, scientifically irrational, to those within a society dominated by instrumental rationality. Therefore, a magic-aided technology is necessary to fight the technological society wrought by human fear of nature, and to defend ourselves from the ways in which vampires, demons and monsters would enslave humanity. Ultimately, the series points to the need for someone whose gifts, whose nature, seems to us magical. The metaphor of the "slayer" presents us with exactly the kind of oddness we need to recognize that heroes are still possible, even within technological society. From our perspective, any such hero would appear impossible or of a nature very different from ours. Buffy has that different nature and as we accept who she is, we come to realize that technological society is not necessary and that human solidarity is still possible. Moreover, as Buffy continues to surmount the odds, to continue to defeat the monsters, vampires and their allies, we might just start to think that our fight against the forces of "technique" and capital can be won as well.

Notes

1. An early version of this paper was given at the third annual PGSA Philosophy Conference at Marquette University in February 2001.1 would like to thank Kelly A. Wilson and Timothy S. Yoder for helpful comments on an earlier draft of the paper and the participants at the conference for helpful questions. Also, I would like to thank my Fall semester Phil 150 (Marx and Marxism) class at Marquette University who helped me think more clearly about Marx and vampires.

2. Lovekin (33), correctly characterizes technique as a "mentality." Technique, then, should not be confused with tool use. The medireview knight using a horse and armor is not availing himself of technology in the sense in which Ellul defines it. So too, when Buffy

Summers uses a stake or crossbow to dispatch vampires and demons, that does not mean she is using technology.

3. By "hero" in this context, it should be clear that I do not mean "celebrity." We obviously have many celebrities and even "role models" within technological society. Instead, as a rough start I use "hero" to denote that characteristic of Buffy Summers that makes it possible for her to see the human predicament within technological society and to fight against it by renouncing her own "mineness." Further attributes of her heroic nature will become clear as the discussion proceeds. "

4. For a good discussion of ambiguities in Prospero's character, see Orgel (50-56).

5. I should note that in a Fifth season episode that aired after this paper was written, "The Body," Buffy's mother dies.

6. For discussion of the metaphor of the "vampire" in Marx, see Carver (14-20).

7. Verene (144) links up Marx's observation with the origins of technological society. Marx's remark about the invention of the spinning wheel can be read at Marx (493). In a footnote accompanying this discussion, Marx adds:

> Technology reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and therby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations.

The similarity between this last comment and the notion of technique as a mentality is striking.

8. "Of course, the Marxist notion of exploitation is complex. For my purposes here, the central feature of exploitation is the loss of freedom and lack of control. Such loss of freedom has been well characterized by Panichas (238): "But impoverishment here is not simply economic impoverishment (though Marx would not deny this result), it is impoverishment of workers" autonomy where autonomy is understood, broadly, to be the ability to direct one's practical efforts oneself—that is, to be self-determining."

9. The classic discussion is that of Frayling and Wokler. Carver uses this study and applies it to Marx's use of the vampire, as well as other supernatural, imagery. See especially Carver (18-19) where he states: But for Marx, as I read the text, those phenomena [vampires and werewolves] were not simply fantasies or collective delusions. They were constituent concepts within oppressive institutions which opened the possibility and usually the actuality of fraud, manipulation, and keeping people in ignorance and fear so that they are easily cowed and intimidated.... The capitalist as vampire reveals the exploitative character of vampirism as a real social institution, as well as the contrived and sinister nature of the social

role of "capitalist."

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