FANTASY AND PEDAGOGY:
THE USE OF FANTASY IN COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

by

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ABSTRACT

Fantasy literature is often considered a “low culture” genre, not fit for college classrooms. Many anti-Fantasy critics have erroneously argued that Fantasy is psychologically dangerous, without literary merit, or fit only for children. Despite the many pro-Fantasy critics who have attempted to refute these arguments, mainstream literary culture does not yet accept Fantasy as a useful genre.

In an attempt to determine how widespread the anti-Fantasy critics’ opinions are, I conducted a survey of college students designed to measure their personalities against their opinions of various types of literature, television programs, and movies. The results were, unfortunately, inconclusive due to the students’ tendency to engage in socially acceptable responding.

Fantasy can and should be included in classroom discussions, not only in classes devoted to literature surveys, but as a teaching tool. In order to explore the use of Fantasy as a teaching tool, I have applied three types of literary criticism to a popular Fantasy television show, Buffy the Vampire Slayer. This show is full of themes and metaphors that can be used to illustrate the concepts of literary theories such as archetypal, psychoanalytic, and cultural studies in order to assist students in comprehending and applying the principles of these and other types of criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

“These are the paired wonders of reading: the world-creating power of books, and the reader’s effortless absorption that allows the book’s fragile world, all air and thought, to maintain itself for awhile, a bamboo and paper house among earthquakes; within it, readers acquire peace, become more powerful, feel braver and wiser in the ways of the world.”
--Nell Victor, *Lost in a Book*

Classes including or focusing on Fantasy literature are extremely rare within college and university curriculums. While it is difficult to determine whether the genre is being deliberately excluded or merely neglected, neither should be true. Fantasy is at the heart of all storytelling from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to *Harry Potter*. Humankind has always created stories that are fantastic in nature, despite frequent attempts by the “elite” to keep literature away from invention and within the realm of “reality.” Leaving Fantasy out of education does a disservice to the students as well as to the professors.

In order to discuss Fantasy, one must first have a definition of the genre. It is one of the hardest genres to define, because it combines elements from myth, legend, horror, and romance. Critics often find it easier to define Fantasy by what it is *not* than by what it is. In the following discussion, I will examine definitions of Fantasy and attempt to build a working definition to be used as a basis for the discussion of Fantasy throughout this thesis.

The *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature* defines Fantasy as “imaginative fiction dependant for effect on strangeness of setting (such as other worlds or times) and of characters (such as supernatural or unnatural beings)” (Kuiper 403). This definition is quite simplistic; a story is made up of more elements than just its setting and characters. Kuiper fails to mention fantastic events, the existence or use of magic, or any other
element that may set Fantasy apart from similar genres. A dream vision or allegory, for example, may involve a strange setting and supernatural characters, but that does not necessarily make it Fantasy. Fantasy may contain, as a substructure, a dream or allegory, but the greater part of it must be more than just a dream or allegory.

Marshall B. Tynn, Kenneth J. Zahorski, and Robert H. Boyer, authors of *Fantasy Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*, claim Fantasy is “composed of works in which nonrational phenomena play a significant part,” containing events, places, and creatures that do not fit with “rational standards or scientific explanations” (3). Therefore, Fantasy cannot be explained in terms of a rational experience of the world. This definition necessarily excludes several subgenres such as dream visions, psychological fantasies, weird tales, lost race adventures, and science fiction. Authors of dream visions, which were common in the Middle Ages, explained their fantastic elements as “nocturnal meanderings of the mind,” which is a rational explanation and thus removes the dream vision from Fantasy (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 4). Psychological fantasies can be caused by traumatic experience and therefore also have a rational explanation. Weird tales, for example Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher,” tend to “present unexpected but perfectly logical explanations for [. . .] nonrational phenomena” (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 4). Not all weird tales contain these explanations, however; those that don’t—H.P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu mythos, for example—are considered Gothic Fantasy. Lost race adventures, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World*, while they contain settings and people “so exotic that they seem impossible,” are explained as evolutionary throwbacks. And Science Fiction,
while very close to Fantasy, is attributed to science that may be possible in the future (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 5).

J.R.R. Tolkien also defined Fantasy, or the faerie-story, by its exclusions. He felt that the term “fairy tale” had been too widely applied. In particular, he objected to the inclusion of pieces of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and beast fables such as “The Monkey’s Heart” in a book of faerie-stories his children owned. *Gulliver’s Travels* is, of course, satire rather than Fantasy; it was written specifically as a commentary on society, not as a fantastic story (Tolkien 114-17). In order for a story to fit into Tolkien’s definition of Fantasy, it must have been *intended* to be Fantasy, not merely contain fantastic elements.

Critic Colin Manlove has defined Fantasy as “A fiction evoking wonder and combining a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the mortal characters of the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms” (“On the Nature” 16-17). The story cannot be presented as truth, regardless of the subject matter; this presentation would reduce the fantastic and impossible elements of the story. Such a specification leaves stories like Doyle’s *The Coming of the Fairies* out of the genre, since he presented it as fact, claiming to have actually seen fairies. This specification also leaves out science fiction, since the basis in science usually gives the story enough credibility that it might eventually come to pass. Even when set on Earth, Fantasy always contains elements of the impossible, which science fiction attempts to avoid through the use of technology to explain the fantastic (Manlove 18). Also, the fantastic elements can in no way be explained away in the story, which leaves out dream visions. For example, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*
would not be considered Fantasy under this definition, since the entire adventure is explained away as a dream.

Very similar to Manlove’s opinion is critic Tzvetan Todorov’s definition, which defined Fantasy by three criteria. A Fantasy story must:

Establish a believable world and cause the reader to hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations of events described; it should provide a character who shares this hesitation and invites reader identification; and it must cause the reader to reject allegorical or poetic interpretations of the events described. (qtd in Wolfe 2226)

Again, this definition excludes stories which contain rational explanations for nonrational phenomena. These specifications also remove science fiction, dream visions, beast fables, and others from the Fantasy genre.

As a group, these definitions seem to agree on four basic requirements for Fantasy. In order for a story to fit into the genre, it must include fantastic elements including but not limited to setting, characters, and events. These fantastic elements must be presented as fictional but real within their fictional setting; the author may not attempt to convince the reader that the events actually took place, nor may s/he explain away the fantastic as a dream or psychosis, or give it a perfectly rational explanation. The fantastic must be a significant part of the story; relegating fantastic events to the fringes of the story ultimately results in Magical Realism, which is not Fantasy. Lastly, the story must be written with the intent to be Fantasy or, in cases where the author’s intention is unknown and unknowable, the readers must receive it as Fantasy. No matter how
fantastic a story may seem, if it was written as allegory or satire or read as religious truth, it is not Fantasy.

These exclusions still leave many subgenres that do fit into the Fantasy genre. Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer list four of them: myth and fairy tale, Gothic Fantasy, Science Fantasy, and Sword & Sorcery. Myths and fairy tales are the oldest example. Myths “posit supernatural causality”; the fantastic events are the work of gods (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 14). Fairy tales are similar, but contain magic causality. The gods have disappeared, and “once-divine power is now in the hands of beings of lesser strength and understanding,” such as witches, wizards, and faeries (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 14). Major authors in these subgenres are Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin, C.S. Lewis, and Jane Yolen. Gothic Fantasy, the “weird tales” that do not explain away their fantastic elements, contains a “profound sense of dread” that is conveyed through mysterious settings and evocative images (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 15). Authors of this subgenre include Lovecraft, T.H. White, and Robert E. Howard. While Science Fiction does not fit the definition of Fantasy, Science Fantasy does. Science Fantasy “offers a scientific explanation for the existence of the secondary world and, usually, for the portal by which one can pass from the primary to the secondary world,” but within the secondary world, it is magic, not science, that is the core of the phenomena (Tynn, Zahorski, and Boyer 17). Authors such as C.S. Lewis, Andre Norton, and C.J. Cherryh have written Science Fantasy stories and novels. Sword & Sorcery, otherwise known as Heroic Fantasy, is harder to define because it is a newer genre, but tends to include a high concentration of magic and themes of warriordom. Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan the Barbarian, is the most prominent author in this genre and may even be said to have invented it.
For the most part, subgenres within Fantasy are not often included in the curriculums of colleges and universities. In this thesis, I will explore the reasons for the exclusion or neglect of Fantasy as a genre and the rationale for including Fantasy in college classrooms. I will then demonstrate how one Fantasy text, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (the TV series), can be an effective tool for teaching a major component of literary studies: literary criticism.
CHAPTER 1
ATTITUDES TOWARD FANTASY

“Those who refuse to listen to dragons are probably doomed to spend their lives acting out the nightmares of politicians. We like to think we live in daylight, but half the world is always dark: and fantasy, like poetry, speaks the language of the night.”
--Ursula K. Le Guin, The Language of the Night

Writers, critics, and enthusiasts of Fantasy literature often have a sense that they are in an extreme minority, that the literary and educational “establishments” are generally either against them or indifferent to them. Most of these people feel that Fantasy is considered “fluff” or “trash,” certainly not the kind of thing that will win Nobel prizes or be taught in classrooms. Many writers and critics, including J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Ursula K. Le Guin, have attempted to explain why the establishment may feel this way, why they are tacitly not allowed to treat seriously the literature they love.

In order to determine how true their theories are and how accurate their sense of estrangement is, I have compiled the work of critics who have dismissed or attacked Fantasy outright and those who have defended it. In addition, in an attempt to judge whether these theories and attitudes are widespread, I conducted an empirical study of college students to measure their attitudes toward Fantasy literature.
“Magic is All Balderdash and Chicanery”: Anti-Fantasy Critics

It can be argued that the Golden Age of Fantasy, if there is such a thing, took place before the beginnings of literary criticism. Nearly every era of criticism concocts some reason why Fantasy is not a legitimate, or “literary” genre, why it should not be read except (or sometimes even) by children, and/or how it undermines society. Rosalind Field, teacher and researcher at the University of London, observes that “it has been commonplace [...] of literary criticism to decry the simplicity, crudity, ‘popularity’ of such works” (173). Fairy tales and legends have been banished to the nursery, declared fit only for the simple minds of children. Rosemary Jackson, former lecturer at the University of East Anglia, claims the “fantastic” has been associated with the “barbaric” and exiled to the “edges of literary culture” (172). According to critics, Fantasy is not worthy of serious consideration because it is trash or escapist or children’s literature.

In the seventeenth century, the fantastic was dismissed from literature as the “growing rationalist emphasis [...] led to a diminished role of the fantastic in art and literature” and Fantasy came to be considered a “manifestation of regressive superstition” (Kratz 28). This mindset continued into the Victorian era, which defined literary excellence in terms of the domestic novel, while “the industrial and scientific revolutions, with their overriding values of rationality and progress, tended to discourage the serious discussion of the values of the fantastic” (Magill 2221). Mythology, once a part of every gentleman’s education, was now considered “irrational” (Trubshaw). With the continuance of the focus on science and reason that had arisen during the Renaissance, popular opinion turned against the “superstitious” and “unrestrained belief and imagination” (Mathews 2). Scholars of the time began to refer to the Medieval period as
the “Dark Ages” and considered it “primitive, superstitious, and unenlightened” (Mathews 2). This attitude, of course, caused the dismissal of Medieval literature—most of it laden with fantastic images and themes—along with other such “superstitious” ideas assigned to the “Dark Ages.”

In The Romantic period, Fantasy began to be dismissed as a “children’s” genre when the Grimm brothers began publishing fairy tales as children’s stories, collecting German, French, and Italian folk tales, editing them for younger readers and to conform to Wilhelm Grimm’s “puritanical leanings” (Cashdan 8). The originally risqué tales (for example, “Little Red Riding Hood” included a literal deflowering) that had been told among adults in the Medieval period were defanged and handed down to children. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these tales were attacked “as [. . .] corrupter[s] of childhood” by such critics as Sarah Fielding and Laetitia Barbauld, who “deplored the divergence of the fairy tale from matters of fact and its violations of natural laws, its seemingly unlicensed imaginativeness and its relatively random attention to improving lessons for the benefit of the little men and women whom they saw as its potential readership” (Manlove, Impulse 2-3).

At the same time, other critics, such as Joseph Addison and Thomas Percy, were declaring that Fantasy had no place but the nursery. While Fielding and Barbauld decried the stories themselves, Addison and Percy were more concerned with the people who had created them—the Medieval storytellers. The theory of evolution (which predates Darwin’s theory of natural selection), in which animals and man improve over time, led scholars to believe that earlier people were less intelligent and more childlike than “modern” people (Couch 128-9). For example, Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English
Poetry (1785) is arranged chronologically in order to show “the gradual improvements of the English language and poetry from the earliest ages down to the present” (8). He claims that in his “polished age […] a great many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allowances to be made for them,” that they have a “pleasing simplicity” and “artless grace” that “compensate for the want of higher beauties” (Percy 8). Of the people themselves, Percy says they had “gross and ignorant minds,” which Bards (who “were held among [the people] in that rude admiration, which is ever shown by an ignorant people to such as excel them in intellectual accomplishments” [346-7]) exploited by telling “stories of adventures with giants and dragons, and witches and enchanters, and all the monstrous extravagances of wild imagination, unguided by judgment, and uncorrected by art” (340).

Addison had similar views; in The Spectator (1711-1712), he calls Fantasy “the Traditions of Nurses and Old Women […] Notions we have imbibed in our Infancy” (300). He admits that Fantasy is “more difficult than any other that depends on the Poet’s Fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own Invention” (Addison 299), but even in praise he is condescending; he lauds Shakespeare for “touch[ing] this weak superstitious Part of his Reader’s Imagination” (Addison 301). This condescending attitude toward older cultures isn’t unique to literary critics, either. For example, in his A Literary History of the English People (1895), J.J. Jusserand claims that the Germanic tribes settling in the north of England in the fourth century “hated peace, despised arts, and had no literature but drinking and war-songs,” and no culture outside of fighting with neighbors and each other (23), mere pages before listing Germanic literature such as “Judith,” Beowulf, and the “Dream of the Rood” (39).
These attitudes, among others, have caused Fantasy to be “relegated to the ‘nursery,’ as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the playroom, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused” (Tolkien 130). These scholars were the primary perpetrators in the trend of “infantilizing” medieval legend and poetry (Couch 128). Stories such as Howard Pyle’s *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (1883) and Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) portray the people of the Middle Ages and earlier as young and innocent, even gullible, turning the Middle Ages themselves into “a time of thrilling boyhood adventures” (Couch 141). According to Tolkien, this “infantilization” was a nearly fatal blow to the genre; when Fantasy is written for children by adults who don’t know how children think or what children want in their literature, Fantasy stories became intolerable and nearly impossible to digest—even by children (Tolkien 130).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, criticism of Fantasy began to follow psychological and cultural lines. Despite defense from poets, writers, and some psychologists, popular opinion claimed that Fantasy was psychologically damaging and/or a fringe genre unworthy of serious study. Philosopher V.C. Belinsky claimed that “the fantastic in our time can have a place only in an insane asylum, and not in our literature” (qtd in Jackson 172); philologist Max Müller called mythology a “disease of language” (qtd in Tolkien 121); and an article in *The Ladies Museum* (1831) declared that “the days of Jack the Giant Killer, Little Red Riding Hood, and such trashy productions are gone by, and the infant mind is now nourished by more able and efficient food” (qtd in Manlove, *Impulse* 3). Fantasy began to be accused of being “escapist” literature, a danger to people’s minds and their ability to deal with the real world. The term
“escapist” first appeared in the 1956 Addenda to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, passing judgment on those who read to be distracted from the realities of life, defined as “a tendency to retreat from the unpleasant, especially when it should be dealt with realistically” (Nell 32). “Escapism” is inherently a value judgment, containing an “ethical connotation” that has created “a social stigma association,” mostly against the readers of Fantasy (Young 377), and “implies a general evasion of responsibilities on the part of the reader who should, after all, spend his time on ‘serious literature’” (Rabkin, The Fantastic 43-4). Rather than a true danger to the psyche of the reader, “escapism” is merely a moral judgment against those who prefer some fantastic in their literature because it is not real.

The popularity of Fantasy as a genre has contributed to its “low” standing, at least among the intellectual elite. Author and critic C.S. Lewis points out that the “literary” have always been snobbish:

> They [the critics] accuse [the ‘many’] of illiteracy, barbarism, ‘crass’, ‘crude’, and ‘stock’ responses which (it is suggested) must make them clumsy and insensitive in all the relations of life and render them a permanent danger to civilization. It sometimes sounds as if the reading of ‘popular’ fiction involved moral turpitude. (5)

The very act of classifying a genre as “popular” seems to render it unworthy of critical attention, leading to “its texts and producers [being] systematically neglected or excluded from the literary field” (Selling 5). Other critics claim that Fantasy—or rather, its writers—brought the lack of respect for the genre on itself as the attempt by authors and publishers to “cash in” on the phenomenon of The Lord of the Rings led to the publication
of hundreds of books that imitate Tolkien without capturing the depth and meaning of Tolkien’s works. These imitations have also, in the opinion of these critics, cheapened Tolkien’s work, dragging it down to the level of the worst Fantasy produced (Webster 11). Also, it is admittedly difficult to take seriously a book whose cover is graced with a curvaceous woman wearing a barely decent chain mail bikini and sporting a sword. Publishers have contributed to the fall of Fantasy by insisting on these covers. Doing away with them would most likely help the genre, and quite possibly the publishers’ sales, since not all readers of Fantasy are comfortable reading a book with a nearly-pornographic cover (Lacon 9).

The bias against Fantasy seems most pronounced in America. Author Neil Gaiman notes: “many folk stories, once they got to America, lost their magic. The magic fell out. There was a weird practicality that came in” (Blaschke 136). Critic Brian Attebery has noticed the same phenomenon, claiming that American writers are crippled by the “fundamental bias against fantasy in the folklore” of America (Fantasy Tradition vi). Even stories and ballads borrowed from the Europeans dropped any fantastic elements in America, becoming humorous rather than fantastic. “The Marriage of Sir Gawain,” for example, became “The Half Hitch,” in which the “old” woman is really a young one made up with rags and coal, and “The Twa Magicians,” in which a suitor pursuing his love changes shape in reaction to her own shape changing, became merely a series of boasts rather than actual magic (Attebury, Fantasy Tradition 19). Many place the blame for the loss of the fantastic on the Puritans, from whom American’s “work ethic, our profit mindedness, and even our sexual mores” came (Le Guin 35). In the Puritan value system, reading for pleasure is a sin because it is not work, and idleness and
pleasure are an affront to God (Nell 28). Today, reading for pleasure is considered a waste of time because it does not bring “immediate, tangible profit” (Le Guin 35). America’s bad opinion of Fantasy continued in the 1970s and 80s, when critics saw “fantasy as a fundamental expression of irrationality, divorced from all reason, reality, relevance, and value to normative adult society” (Selling 3). Early American Fantasy, by such authors as Poe and Hawthorne, borrowed heavily from the European traditions. Later fantastic stories, however, tended more toward the satirical than the fantastic, notably Twain’s Connecticut Yankee (1889) and Thorne Smith’s Topper (1926), until the pulp magazines of the 1930s popularized Sword & Sorcery.

The recent popularity of books and movies such as The Lord of the Rings and the Harry Potter series have caused a renewed backlash against Fantasy, this time mostly from conservative Christians who fear that their children will learn questionable ethics or the practice of the occult from such works. It is difficult to formulate an overall impression of the conservative Christian attitude toward Fantasy because it appears that they react with this sort of violent negativity only when a specific example of Fantasy becomes popular and seems to threaten their faith and their children. The most recent example of such an outcry is against J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series (1997-2007). The negative attention Harry Potter has garnered may provide some overall ideas as to what this group’s major objections to the genre are.

To Christian parents and leaders, Harry Potter functions not as a story, but as a dangerous instruction manual on the practice of witchcraft. Rather than the generic magic system used in Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings, or The Chronicles of Narnia, the use of “real” occult and Wiccan practices within Harry Potter makes them particularly
dangerous (Abanes 252). Reverend Mike Norris refers to the Harry Potter books as “nothing less than Satanic indoctrination” and advises burning any copies of the book listeners may have accidentally bought without knowing better. A study conducted by WisdomWorks Ministries—a group dedicated to ministering Christianity to teenagers—found that 12% of teens polled who had read *Harry Potter* books were interested in the occult as a result of their exposure (“New Study”). However, the press release stating these results does not provide the information on methodology necessary to establish the study’s credibility, and this information is not available anywhere on WisdomWorks Ministries’ website. Without this information, it is impossible to tell if their findings are significant or merely coincidental, and the study can not be repeated, which is necessary for valid scientific study. The lack of information necessary to double-check WisdomWorks’ methods and conclusions renders their entire study invalid.

*The Lord of the Rings* is frequently demonized because of its influence on J.K. Rowling and Dungeons & Dragons, a game which has been blamed for the actions of murderers such as Sean Sellers (Abanes 177-188) and suicides such as Bink Pulling (Stackpole). Critics are also threatened by the many references made to the books in popular music, most notably by Led Zeppelin, and even because J.R.R. Tolkien himself claimed no direct Christian connection in the books ( “Tolkien”; Barger). Like the Puritans, conservative Christians believe that if it is not directly connected to God, it must be from the Devil and hence evil.

A few critics have attempted to explain organized religion’s disapproval of Fantasy. Critic Roger Schlobin says that “[R]eligion, one of the richest indicators of the human faculty to create what is not empirically real, has long been antithetical to any
other fanciful constructs” (139). It is also possible that the classification of ancient religious tales as myth threatens modern religions (Mathews 6). The conservative Christians believe that the miracles and other fantastic tales in the Bible are literally true, and the presentation of magic as fiction appears to subversively threaten the truth of their miracles, many of which resemble magic. Also, they worry that the children will not be able to tell the difference between the Fantasy world and the real world and act accordingly. Rev. Mike Norris warns: “They may call it fiction, but it is real to the children who read it.”

Most of these arguments against Fantasy fall into three distinct categories: fear for the influence it has on impressionable minds, disdain for the people associated with the genre (children, the Medieval peoples, and “common” people), and misunderstandings of psychology. While fear, as a powerful emotion, cannot be overcome by logic, in the next section I hope to both show that the disdain is ill-founded and correct many of the errors in psychology that critics have made while dismissing or avoiding Fantasy as a “serious” genre.
“There’s a Veritable Cornucopia of Fiends and Devils and Ghouls to Engage!”: Pro-Fantasy Critics

While the fear Christian parents feel that their children will become involved in the occult cannot be dissipated by logic, in many ways Christianity and Fantasy are more compatible than they realize. Critic Colin Manlove points out several ways in which Fantasy is inherently socially conservative, even Christian. C.S. Lewis, for example, drew heavily on his faith. His books can be seen as an attempt to view God more clearly “by considering the spiritual dilemmas of mankind from the standpoint of devils [The Screwtape Letters], or the nature of choice by contrasting heaven and hell, or the condition of the Earth by viewing it from other planets [Perelandra]” (Manlove, Modern Fantasy 168). In Lewis’ case, Fantasy is another, possibly more interesting, way to explore and share one’s philosophy. Manlove also points out that many of the themes of Fantasy are inherently conservative, returning objects to rightful owners, people to rightful places, countries to rightful states . . . in general, “the preservation of an existing state of things” (Impulse 31). In the 1700s, the trend of Fantasy tended toward a Medieval revival. By the 1900s, this trend had “shifted and narrowed under the increasing impact of industrialism toward plain longing for a world felt to be more certain, more beautiful and more ordered than the doubting, grimy and vulgar condition which scientific progress had bestowed on man” (Manlove, Impulse 93-4). Fantasy writers such as Tolkien, Lewis, and T.H. White “look back to a lost moral and social hierarchy, which their fantasies attempt to recapture and revivify” (Jackson 2).

Fantasy also tends to have a deeply moralistic core. It provides a clear, black-and-white view of good and evil. Saving the world, in Fantasy, always depends on “great
personal sacrifice along with suffering and loss” (Owen 77). Philosopher Marie-Louise von Franz sees Fantasy as “characterized first and foremost by a simple, unshaded opposition between black and white, good and evil” (Archetypal 75). In Fantasy, evil is always defeated and punished, and—in fairy tales, at least—the hero/heroine is always unwavering in his/her goodness. If the hero ever wavers, as Frodo does at the end of The Lord of the Rings, the consequences—whether to the hero’s self or to the world—may be catastrophic.

The charge of “escapism,” possibly the most socially damaging, has been addressed by pro-Fantasy critics in two ways. Some say that Fantasy, far from escapist, provides a way to examine the real world. Others claim that while Fantasy does provide an escape, it is far from unhealthy.

Many defenders of Fantasy claim that rather than being “escapist,” Fantasy provides a lens through which to view the real world in a way that may provide deeper insights and suggest alternative ideas for handling problems. Author Lloyd Alexander claims that he writes Fantasy “because paradoxically, fantasy is a good way to show the world as it is. Fantasy can show us the truth about human relationships and moral dilemmas because it works on our emotions on a deeper, symbolic level than realistic fiction” (Marcus 13). Critic P.J. Webster claims that “the truly creative work of art does not seek to move away from reality, [sic] on the contrary, the great work of art seeks to act as a conduit to reality, [sic] it is the antithesis of escapism” (12). The use of Fantasy, in some cases, can mask a criticism of the real world; the created world is not real and therefore the readers don’t feel pressured to accept the “real” world with all of the problems the writer is trying to show and comment on. Instead, the parallels are left to
the reader to find, in which case, critic C.S. Ferns points out, “the connections are already present in the reader’s mind” (106-7). Professor Ann Swinfen claims that “for some authors, the writing of Fantasy has provided the most satisfactory mode of expressing their ideas about the contemporary world and contemporary values[. . . .] What they have not done, in most cases, is to use Fantasy as a means of escape from contemporary reality” (230). Fantasy seeks to explain the human condition, “an attempt by various writers to reconcile the spiritual and material sides of the human condition” (Fitzgerald 18).

On the other hand, some defenders of Fantasy claim that Fantasy can be seen as escapist, but without the negative moral judgment placed on the word. Escape, according to these critics and authors, is a healthy, natural part of life and not an avoidance of responsibilities or fast-track to insanity. Tolkien claims that Fantasy is not about insanity. After all, building a Fantasy world that is believable and enjoyable requires a clear reason (144). Of those who place a negative moral connotation on escapism he says, “[people] dislike any meddling with the Primary world[. . . .] They, therefore, stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming, in which there is no Art; and with mental disorders, in which there is not even control; with delusion and hallucination” (139). Tolkien claims critics are confusing the “Escape of the Prisoner,” in which the reader may think about something besides this world for a few hours, and the “Flight of the Deserter,” which is a descent into madness, a permanent, unhealthy leaving of reality (148). Expanding on this idea, Ursula K. Le Guin claims that if a reader is attempting to escape into a world devoid of human suffering, s/he ends up in “madness: infantile regression or paranoid delusion, or schizoid insulation” (206).
Escapism, according to these authors, is merely a mental “break,” not a complete abandonment of all responsibilities.

Far from being a danger to the psyche, Fantasy can actually protect the mind. According to a study by psychologist Jerome Singer, those who daydream have a lower chance of becoming schizophrenic and are less likely to report hallucinations (195, 164). He claims that this reduced risk occurs because daydreamers are more accepting of their own internal processes and have more experience separating fantasy from reality (164). In fact, daydreamers are so self-aware that they may actually score “neurotic” or “emotionally disturbed” on tests simply because they are more conscious of their own fears. Such scoring does not indicate an actual neurosis, but a healthier response to the world than losing their fears in drugs, drink, or “phobic avoidance” (74). In many ways, not daydreaming is easier and more comfortable for people. Singer claims that “attention to one’s own experience brings one into contact with the pettiness and evil in oneself, with the doubts and failures of the past, and the wishful deceptions or vengeances of the future” (213). Those who never daydream, he says, “can avoid all awareness of the ugliness in themselves or the world” (214). In many ways, daydreaming, or indulging in escapism, can make a person healthier, more aware of self and the world rather than lost in fantasies and heading toward psychosis. Any tool that promotes mental health should be employed in classrooms.

The dismissal of Fantasy as “not serious” or “popular” has contributed quite a bit to its exclusion from our classrooms. C.S. Lewis blames this exclusion on two factors: the serious-minded Puritan ethic and teaching Literature as a subject in schools. Those who have been influenced by the Puritans, he says, take everything too seriously,
including reading, and can’t relax enough to enjoy their literature. The analysis of literature required in English classes has also caused people to take literature too seriously: “Hence literature becomes for them a religion, a philosophy, a school of ethics, a psychotherapy, a sociology—anything rather than a collection of works of art” (86). He argues that we should not expect literature to always reflect or be applicable to life, that there is nothing wrong with reading purely for pleasure (74-7). However, due to the seriousness with which the “intellectual elite” have taken literature, anything not appropriately austere is “either disparaged or misrepresented as being really far more serious than [it] look[s]” (Lewis 86). Critic Dennis Kratz claims that, due to Fantasy’s long, rich history, it is the true “mainstream.” He points out that “the great works of art that form the basis of the Western literary tradition invent alternative realities rather than imitate or duplicate the mundane” (32, emphasis mine). The disdain for older peoples introduced in the Age of Reason has thrust all such fantastic stories into the realm of superstition, removing the respect due them.

Another group of people who despise Fantasy is made up of those who refuse to read imaginative works because they are incapable of, or reluctant to, imagine. The most non-literary reader, according to Lewis, prefers non-fiction because “he can hardly think of invention as a legitimate, or even a possible activity” (Experiment 28). Rather, he demands truth and realism in all his reading (Experiment 28-9). Le Guin claims that these are the people with the most tenuous grasp on reality, demanding “realism” in their reading because Fantasy offers only “a shortcut to the loony bin” (173). Those who have less awareness of themselves—due to a lack of daydreaming—despise Fantasy because they fear they will have trouble separating it from the real world and hence lose
themselves. These people repress the imagination, which leaves it undisciplined rather
than controlled. Le Guin worries that “the man who refuses to read novels [. . .] will
most likely end up watching bloody detective thrillers on television, or reading hack
Westerns or sports stories, or going in for pornography, from *Playboy* on down” (42). Of
course, there are those who would argue that Fantasy is no better than pornography, being
trash itself.

The accusation that Fantasy is “junk” has some validity. Every genre has some
effects of “trash,” and Fantasy is no exception. However, unlike other genres—except,
perhaps, for Romance—Fantasy tends to be defined by its “junk.” Lewis blames this
tendency, again, on the unimaginative who prefer “bad” writing because it is devoid of
description that gets in the way of the “Event,” or the action, but overwritten enough so
that the reader doesn’t have to work for the images (*Experiment* 32-4). This is the type of
reader who would skip the descriptive passages in *The Lord of the Rings* to get to the
parts where “stuff happens,” if they read it at all. They are so demanding of stimulation
from their literature that anything besides sheer action is unacceptable.

Le Guin has a different theory: the critics, having dismissed Fantasy as “junk,”
refuse to judge any of it, and so a writer of Fantasy has no standard by which to judge
his/her own work. And since “second rate stuff will be bought just as fast” simply
because it *is* Fantasy, and “the mediocre and the excellent are praised alike by
aficionados, and ignored alike by outsiders,” a writer may find him- or herself failing to
produce his/her best work because there is no pressure to do so (24-5). In fact, some
readers don’t *want* “literature” in their Fantasy: “they want junk, and they bitterly resent
aesthetic judgment of it” (Le Guin 205). At the same time, critics want Fantasy to be
junk so it’s “contemptible” and they can continue to look down on it as an inferior genre (Le Guin 205). When good Fantasy writers are sold side-by-side with, and by the same imprints as, formulaic writers, it is impossible to tell the difference and difficult for the writers to prove the worth of their work (Attebury, Strategies 11).

This two-pronged attack on Fantasy ensured its definition as “junk” for many years, and to some people, it still is. The lack of decent criticism also explains why Fantasy is scarce in our classrooms. After all, who wants to teach “junk”? Why would any teacher give a student “trash” to read? However, in the more modern Fantasy literature market, the editors and publishers do not have to settle for “junk” in order to publish Fantasy, and the genre has become much more respectable and more fit for our classrooms. In the 1980s, Fantasy began to be accepted by academics, gaining several annual conferences and journals such as the Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts and the World Fantasy Conference (Schlobin 140). Since then, defensive studies of the merit of Fantasy as a “serious” genre—such as Ann Swinfen’s In Defence of Fantasy—have petered out as critics have found it less necessary to actively defend the genre, and criticisms of texts within the genre become more prevalent. Unfortunately, within classrooms it is still, if not discouraged, certainly not widely encouraged, either.
In an attempt to determine which, if any, of the above theories about opinions toward Fantasy were actually true, I conducted a study intended to compare personality types and genre preferences. The subjects consisted of 164 Radford University students, mostly white Americans between the ages of 18 and 21. Sixty-seven of these were male and 96 female. Due to the homogeneity of the participant pool, gender was the only major difference, and hence the only demographic point, or defining characteristic of individuals, that I could use within correlations.

The survey (Appendix A) was designed to measure five major personality traits: Escapism, Introversion, Religiosity, Imagination, and Openness to Experience (the subjects were never made aware of these labels). The survey also asked about genre preference and the number of books the students bought and read for their own pleasure each month. The survey questions were taken from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), which was designed for researchers who are conducting personality inventories. These items are pre-validated, meaning they accurately measure the appropriate personality trait. The answers to the items fell along a seven-point scale, with “Strongly Disagree” being a 1 and “Strongly Agree” being a 7. These numbers were then averaged to provide each respondent’s overall score in each personality area, with 1 being very low, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very high.

Based on the opinions of critics and authors, I expected those who scored high in Escapism, Introversion, Imagination, and Openness to Experience to score lower in Religiosity and show a preference for more imaginative literature. I also expected those who scored high in Religiosity to score low in the others and show a preference for less
imaginative literature. Unfortunately, scores tended to clump in single areas rather than forming a normal distribution, which indicates that the respondents engaged in socially acceptable responding, meaning they answered the questions in a way that they felt society would expect them to rather than the way they honestly felt.* Therefore, no reliable correlation could be made between personality type and genre preference. The results did, however, provide some insight into these students’ understanding of social norms.

According to the subjects, society does frown on Escapism. On most questions designed to measure escapism, the answers tended toward the negative side of neutral; 56% of respondents scored a 3, with the highest score being 5. However, on questions covering Imagination, the answers tended toward the positive side of neutral. Thirty-nine percent of respondents scored 5; 34% scored 4; and only 9 of the respondents scored lower than that. At the same time, the respondents indicated that they were definitely not introverts; 42% scored a 3 and 36% scored a 4, with only 10% scoring any higher. From these numbers, we can theorize that the respondents did not want to be thought of as unimaginative, but also did not want to be considered “crazy” or “a loner.”

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* According to Phillipe Gaulin, doctor of clinical psychopathology at the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec, “A response bias is a systematic tendency to answer a questionnaire based on something other than the simple content of the items (Paulhus, 1991). Desirable responding, one of the most common response biases, can be defined as a tendency to claim positive attributes and deny negative images related to the content of a questionnaire (Carstenson & Cone, 1983; Nederhof, 1985). Subjects affected by this tendency do not describe themselves as they are; they describe a distorted self-image that is more consistent with a socially acceptable model.” Likewise, a research team at the University of Illinois found that “collectivists are more likely to engage in deception and socially desirable responding to maintain good relationships with others. In contrast, individualists are portrayed as candid and sincere because individualism encourages people to ‘be yourself.’ [. . .] [R]espondents from the United States scored higher on self-deceptive enhancement (SDE)-the tendency to see oneself in a positive light and to give inflated assessment of one's skills and abilities- but lower on impression management (IM) by misrepresenting their self-reported actions to appear more normatively appropriate” (Lalwani, Shavitt, and Johnson 165).
An open mind also appears to be a societal plus. Most of the answers to questions on Openness to Experience fell to the high side of neutral. Of the respondents, 33% scored 5; 31% scored 4; and only 4% scored 3, which was the lowest score in this area. Religiosity is more ambivalent, being the only trait that contained scores from the full range of possibilities (1-7). The majority of scores were positive; 28% scored a 6 and 23% a 5, but within the middle range, the scores were fairly evenly distributed. Only 7% scored at either extreme.

Despite the difficulties that resulted from the socially acceptable responding, some correlations could be formulated and therefore theories could still be established. While these personality types did not tend to predict genre preferences, they did predict other factors. Those who scored higher in Imagination tended to score higher in Escapism and higher in Openness to Experience. They also tended to buy and read more books per month than those who didn’t. Religion and Gender also correlated; females tended to score almost twice as high as males in Religiosity.

The survey contained another set of questions designed to determine if an enjoyment of popular culture and an enjoyment of Fantasy were mutually exclusive. These questions asked for the respondents’ opinions on TV shows, books, and movies such as *American Idol, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Harry Potter,* and *Talledega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby.* These opinions were scored on a 5-point scale from “Strongly Dislike” to “Strongly Like.” “Neither Like nor Dislike” tended to indicate an ignorance of or failure to see/read the item. (This conclusion was reached due to the large number of subjects who asked what they should answer if they had never seen the TV show or movie in question.) The wider spread of answers to these questions,
covering personal opinions about specific items, shows a more honest answering strategy than for the personality inventory. I theorize that respondents were more willing to answer these questions honestly because they believed that their opinions didn’t reveal as much of their personalities as the rest of the questions did, and therefore would not reflect on them in a way that they perceived as negative.

The respondents tended to score higher for those items categorized as “pop culture” and lower on those categorized as “Fantasy,” unless it happened to be a Fantasy item that had crossed over into pop culture, such as Harry Potter (34% said they “Strongly Like” the books) and The Lord of the Rings (24% answered “Strongly Like,” 26% “Somewhat Like,” and 26% “Neither Like nor Dislike”). Among other Fantasy items, Xena: Warrior Princess scored the lowest, with 29% claiming to “Strongly Dislike” the show, and 32% having no opinion. Older Fantasy items, such as The Princess Bride and Labyrinth scored consistently in the middle; The Princess Bride received a 32% and Labyrinth 62% in “Neither Like nor Dislike.” From these numbers, I can theorize that these items, having been released in the 1980s, are outside of the experience of the majority of respondents.

Within the opinion questions, a few correlations came to light. American Idol, Survivor, The Princess Bride, and The Devil Wears Prada (the movie) all showed positive correlation, meaning that an individual who enjoyed one of these was more likely to enjoy the others. Buffy the Vampire Slayer (the TV series), Xena, Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, and Labyrinth were also positively correlated. On the other hand, Survivor was negatively correlated with Buffy and Labyrinth. From these correlations, I
can theorize that those who enjoy “pop culture” TV shows and movies are less likely to enjoy Fantasy.

Some of the opinion questions and personality traits correlated, as well, mostly in predictable ways. Escapism and Imagination were correlated highly with Buffy, Xena, and The Lord of the Rings. Introversion was negatively correlated with Survivor, American Idol, and Cold Mountain (the book). Contrary to the hypothesis generated by my research, however, Religiosity did not negatively correlate with any of the Fantasy items. In fact, the only correlation between Religiosity, the opinion items, and demographic information was the tendency of females to be more religious and a positive correlation between American Idol and Religiosity. Those who scored high in Religiosity are no more or less likely than anyone else to enjoy Fantasy, or read or purchase books.

This is, obviously, a very preliminary survey within this field of study. Besides the above correlations and conclusions, this survey revealed how much more work truly needs to be done in this area in order to determine if, for example, Ursula K. Le Guin is right that Americans’ Puritan heritage tends to make them less likely to enjoy Fantasy, or if college students would be open to the inclusion of Fantasy in their classrooms. If I had a chance to repeat this survey, I would attempt to develop custom questions rather than use the IPIP, which would involve the much more complicated process of full test validation. These custom questions may have to involve deceptive design in order to prevent the subjects from engaging in impression management and socially acceptable responding. I would also attempt to reach a more diverse subject pool than college freshmen and sophomores, including upperclassmen, graduate students, and faculty.
“Fantasy—and all fiction is fantasy of one kind or another—is a mirror. A distorting mirror, to be sure, and a concealing mirror [. . .] but it is a mirror nonetheless, which we can use to tell ourselves things we might not otherwise see. (Fairy tales, as G.K. Chesterson once said, are more than true. Not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be defeated.)”
--Neil Gaiman, *Smoke and Mirrors*

Short of collecting catalogues from colleges and universities, it is nearly impossible to discover exactly how many classes in American schools use and explore Fantasy literature. Some idea, however, can be gleaned from a Google search for “fantasy syllabus.” Such a search returns an encouraging 177,000 hits, but a closer look reveals that disappointingly few of these apply to classes that specifically use or examine Fantasy literature. Most have nothing to do with education at all. Many of the classes are teaching courses dedicated to children’s literature. Some are classes in universities outside America. Others use literature that does not conform to the definition of Fantasy as outlined in the introduction to this paper—magical realism, for example. Very few classes are true surveys of Fantasy literature. Granted, this search covers only those classes for which professors have posted syllabi online, but it is still a disappointing result. So what is keeping Fantasy out of the modern American college classroom?
The reasons for the exclusion of Fantasy from many college classrooms can be traced to its exclusion from elementary and high school classrooms. After all, if children are not brought up being allowed or even encouraged to read Fantasy, it is unlikely that they will be interested while in college. Children brought up in this way who become teachers may not, in turn, allow or encourage their students to read Fantasy. While arguments against the use of Fantasy in elementary and high school classrooms abound, few exist against the use of Fantasy in college classrooms, possibly because, for the most part, the exclusion of Fantasy has already been achieved. Possibly, the bias against Fantasy as an adult genre is so ingrained that many would not consider it a viable genre for a college classroom. Professor Eric Rabkin points out that “At research universities such as mine, if you publish [. . .], you can teach the subject on which you publish virtually without exception” (“Re: Fantasy”). Therefore, if Fantasy is not often included in college curriculums, the reason could simply be that professors are not interested enough in the genre to study, write, and publish on it, which would indicate a passive exclusion rather than an active one, possibly based on the assumption that Fantasy is for children and contains nothing worth exploring.

But why, then, has Fantasy been excluded from elementary and high school classrooms? Professor Mark West theorizes that exclusion is all about control: “Perhaps, then, the real reason so many Americans have attempted to suppress fantasy literature for children is because they fear the possible consequences of granting children the freedom to exercise their imaginations” (38). In his article “Fantasy Literature for Children: Past,
Present and Future Tensions,” West examines the chronology of the censorship and exclusion of Fantasy for young readers, beginning in the 1880s when librarians removed fantastic literature from the children’s section, instead stocking literature that would “help children grow up to become responsible and virtuous adults” (35), which conforms to Plato’s view of literature, as outlined in the previous chapter. Other critics, completely missing the point that reading is about stepping outside of one’s own experience, claimed that because the fantastic does not conform to the child’s experience of life, it must be excluded from children’s literature (West 36). In the 1920s, attitudes still mirrored the Age of Reason, as teachers and librarians claimed that children should read “realistic” literature and that Fantasy was not proper reading material. In a 1971 edition of *New Society*, philosopher Mary Warnock worried about the tendency of young adults to read “children’s” literature—mostly fantastic—rather than more adult material, speculating that this tendency could lead to a “laziness” of intellect and imagination (823). And in the 1980s, when teachers did attempt to assign Fantasy stories, the modern religious backlash against the fantastic began, with parents complaining that the fantastic stories their children were assigned for class glorified anti-Christian ideas and themes. The religious objection was applied even to overtly Christian literature such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Madeline L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time* series (West 37).

Critics find it nearly unnecessary to argue against the use of Fantasy in college classrooms, partly because few professors are interested enough in the genre to try, and partly because so few have had exposure to it as children. Initially considered so light and harmless it was fit only for children, critics are now finding Fantasy too dangerous for them and removing it from their reach. Having never been exposed to it as children,
college students do not miss Fantasy in the college classroom, despite the benefits Fantasy could provide their educations and minds, which I will explore in the next section.
“To Read Makes Our Speaking English Good”: The Inclusion of Fantasy in Classrooms

The elementary school age is a crucial time for the introduction to Fantasy. Singer’s examination of daydreaming found that children exposed to and encouraged toward fantastic thinking and daydreaming are better adjusted than those who are not. Children who “act out,” he claims, often have had little encouragement toward imaginative behavior by parents and teachers. Thus they are “limited in their behavioral repertory to external channel priorities”; they have less experience in deferring gratification (204-5). Because these children cannot find enjoyable distractions within their own minds, they must demand stimulation from the world around them, often loudly and in public.

Joseph Campbell linked the lack of Fantasy to antisocial behavior, as well. He worried about the loss of mythology in American society, claiming that the neglect of mythology in society led to the loss of rituals, specifically adulthood rites. With no such rites to show them how to act in civilized society, children are forced to find their own way and often join groups that have intricate inclusion ceremonies such as gangs, fraternities/sororities, the military, or law enforcement (Campbell, Power 9). Each of these groups has an ingroup/outgroup bias, which fragments society rather than brings it together. Without mythology, people don’t know “how to behave in a civilized society” (Campbell, Power 9). The best way to introduce people to mythology, Campbell believed, was to teach it in classrooms:

Greek and Latin and biblical literature used to be a part of everyone’s education. Now, when these were dropped, a whole tradition of occidental mythological information was lost. It used to be that these stories were in
the minds of people. When the story is in your mind, then you see the relevance to something happening in your own life. [. . .] [I]f you don’t know the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself. 

*(Power 2)*

Since children and young adults are no longer reading mythology in classrooms, they are not exposed to what Jung called the “collective unconscious,” and therefore do not recognize patterns of mythology in their own lives, which leaves them floundering when faced with life-changing decisions. While the loss of cultural mythology is not the only reason for the splintering of society and the many problems people face, it may explain quite a bit.

In the 1970s and 80s, high school and college teachers published several articles on the reasons and methods for using Fantasy in the classroom, though few dealt with the use of Fantasy in a college classroom. However, many of these articles can be applied, with some adjustment, to a college classroom. Lucia Owen, (now former) high-school English teacher, points out the innate morality of and intellectual exercise provided by Fantasy literature. Fantasy, she says, provides a clear, black-and-white view of good and evil which may provide insight and clarification into our own world (77). At the same time, the morality in Fantasy is not necessarily based on any one religion, but on the archetypal ideas of good and evil as understood through the collective unconscious. Solving problems—which often involves saving a world—depends on “great personal sacrifice along with suffering and loss” (76-7). In this case, Fantasy teaches children that doing good, while difficult, is ultimately rewarding.
The use of imagination encouraged by reading Fantasy can also help students with critical thinking; Owen claims that “an imagination educated in part by reading fantasy [. . .] isn’t hampered by words like ‘impossible’” (76). Problems in Fantasy are solved, not “put off or compromised about” (Owen 76). Professor of English Robert Crossley agreed. In 1975, he speculated that “the appeal to Fantasy may become a pedagogical trick which teachers can safely employ to engage students in a process which will not undermine rational modes of thought and discourse” (288). Far from causing “laziness” of intellect or imagination, Fantasy actually encourages rational and critical thinking and an optimistic attitude toward problem-solving. As Singer concluded, children who are exposed to Fantasy are aware of their own internal thoughts, ideas, and fears and therefore can find solutions to problems more easily than those who are not.

Rabkin specifies a right way and a wrong way to approach teaching Fantasy literature. According to Rabkin, the wrong way to make Fantasy seem more legitimate is to assign more work, to “frighten [the students] with quizzes and befuddl[e] them with arcans [sic] that ought to teach them that they were wrong in thinking fantasy fun” (“Fantasy Literature” 7). The teacher should not destroy the students’ enjoyment of Fantasy—or any—literature. After all, as Lewis pointed out, literature was created for enjoyment (77). Instead, Rabkin encourages focusing on a consistent human trait or problem such as religion, science, sex, or utopias, or teaching symbolic analysis (8-9, 10). Other teachers agree. Writer and teacher Melissa Thomas claims that Fantasy “is a metaphor for the human condition—ripe with mythic structures, heroic cycles, and social and religious commentary” (60). Fantasy explores important human realities like heroism, which students can apply by standing up to “bullies, drugs, gangs, violence,
abuse, prejudice” (Thomas 61). Authors such as Tolkien, Lewis, and MacDonald provide religious commentary. Tolkien also analyses ideas of history. Tolkien, Le Guin, Butler, and L’Engle explore ideas of gender roles. Fantasy also provides social commentary as the characters deal with “hunger, pain, loss, confusion, simple human fallability, and triumph” (Thomas 61-2). In Professor Michael Stanton’s class on *The Lord of the Rings*, discussions included such topics as battle strategy, religion, history, feminism, and characterization (5). To preserve the enjoyment of Fantasy literature, the teacher should be a guide to the world of the story, to show the students how deep the rabbit hole goes rather than destroying the joy and imagination with dry facts and brutal analysis.

Fantasy is important for the mental health and cognition of both children and adults. It assists in the healthy growth and adjustment of children and allows them to mature into adults who can find the more subtle undertones in the genre and successfully analyze them. Even if the resulting adult has little or no professional contact with literature, s/he will be better equipped to successfully approach and interact with the world and engage in critical thinking.
“Cause Most Schools Aren’t on Hellmouths”: Why Use Buffy?

While the above arguments back up the use of Fantasy in the classroom, and many professors might not be averse to discussing Spenser, Tolkien, or Lewis in their classes, I must now defend my choice of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (the series) as a teaching tool in general, and for Literary Criticism in particular. After all, many would argue, why use a TV show rather than a book, especially a TV show based on a campy movie that failed in both of its attempted genres—comedy and horror?

Quite simply, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the series (henceforth *Buffy*), despite its unfortunate association with the movie of the same name (from which even Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy*, has divorced himself), is a deeply metaphorical examination of many aspects of life. The first three seasons cover the horrors of high school—which most people will never forget and consequently can always relate to—and growing up. The fourth season deals with the adventure, displacement, and exploration of the first year of college. The fifth continues the theme of growing up and, with the death of Buffy’s mother, examines loss and life after loss, as well as personal sacrifice. In season six, life itself becomes the “big bad,” as Buffy and her friends deal with jobs, addictions, and taking care of themselves. Season seven explores the feminist theme of the show most thoroughly, examining the idea of female power and the sharing of it. In each of the seasons, problems become actual demons and monsters that must be defeated. For example, in “The Pack” (1.6)† cliques and teenage hormonal changes are presented as animal possession, specifically hyenas. In “I Robot . . . You Jane” (1.8), an internet

† Individual episodes of *Buffy* will be referenced by season and episode number; “The Pack” is the sixth episode of season one, hence 1.6. After the first mention of an episode, it will be referenced only by number rather than title and number.
predator is a literal demon. The consequences of the loss of virginity and the female fear that the lover will become a different person post-coitus are explored when Buffy sleeps with her ensouled vampire boyfriend, Angel, in “Surprise” and “Innocence” (2.13 and 2.14). An abusive boyfriend is literally a Jekyll-Hyde monster in “Beauty and the Beasts” (3.4), and censorship and bigotry culminate in a literal witch- and book-burning in “Gingerbread” (3.11).

Despite its position as a fantasy television series (both genre and medium working against it), *Buffy* lasted for seven years; survived a change of network and the death (and resurrection) of the title character; spawned a spinoff (*Angel*) that itself lasted five years; and inspired graphic novels, comic books, novels, and fanfiction. The show has gained scholastic and online followings that are still going strong. A Google search for “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” returns 15.3 million hits, and the same search on WorldCat returns 686 books out of a total of 910 hits. In contrast, the same searches for “Friends the series” (chosen because of its own longevity and popularity) provides only 41,700 Google hits (this search proved impossible on WorldCat, returning hits for books on baby animals and *Barney* regardless of the different permutations of the search term). The continued popularity of *Buffy* even five years after its final TV episode (the eighth season is currently underway in comic book form) indicates that people see something important about it that “mere” popular culture cannot justify. *Buffy* scholar and critic Rhonda Wilcox attempts to explain:

Why does *Buffy* matter? It matters because it shows that television *can* be art, and deserves to be so studied. It is a work of literature, of language [. . .]; it is a work of visual art [. . .]; it is a work of music and sound [. . .].
The depth of the characters, the truth of the stories, the profundity of the themes, and their precise incarnation in language, sound, and image—all of these matter. Last and first of all, Buffy matters for the same reason that all art matters—because it shows us the best of what it means to be human. (13)

Buffy is so popular and long-lived because every part of production was taken seriously, from writing to set building to sound mixing. The series as a whole was designed to examine the human experience in a way that a diverse audience could respond and relate to. Buffy was created to be a work of art, not disposable television. The fans have responded to the writing, the set, the cast, and the characters in a way that even Whedon may not have expected.

The openly metaphoric nature of Buffy makes it a useful tool for teaching literary criticism, especially the schools of criticism that deal with metaphor. Much of Buffy’s metaphoric meaning is readily accessible, but more of it lies below the surface, waiting to be discovered. In this sense, Buffy can be used as both a teaching tool—to illustrate concepts of psychoanalysis or archetype—and as a text to be explored, to which the students can apply the criticism they have learned.

In the next chapter, I will more specifically examine how Buffy can be used as a tool to teach three major fields of literary criticism: psychoanalytic, archetypal, and cultural studies. Buffy could possibly be used to explore many other areas such as feminist and Marxist criticism, but these three are possibly the most applicable to the show.
“In every generation there is a Chosen One. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer.”
--Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Using a text as large and involved as Buffy as a teaching tool can be difficult. For example, story and character arcs can span several seasons, and watching the entire series in a classroom setting is unfeasible, as is assigning the DVD boxed set as a required text. Thanks to modern technology, however, significant pieces of the story can be pieced together and viewed as a montage. Very few episodes would need to be viewed in their entirety, and scripts can be accessed online or in printed form (most of the scripts have been released in the Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Script Book series).

In the hypothetical classroom, lesson plans would involve a pre-discussion reading of texts addressing the critical theory, followed by an in-class discussion and viewing of the related Buffy arc. The students would then be required to analyze an episode of their choice in the style of the critical theory under discussion. The final paper would involve a much deeper analysis of one or more episodes in any critical style of the student’s choice.

While not every type of criticism can be used on a single text, Buffy is flexible enough to cover most of them. The discussion below is designed to illustrate how three types of criticism can be explored using examples from Buffy.
“She’s a Hero, You See. She’s Not Like Us”: Archetypal Criticism

Archetypal criticism is a form of psychological criticism that focuses on groups of people rather than individuals. It examines the “symbolic projections of a people’s hopes, values, fears, and aspirations” (Guerin 183). Critics search for similar motifs and themes throughout the mythologies of different cultures to form archetypes of symbol, personality, and landscape (Guerin 185-90). These motifs form the unconscious of a civilization. The highly metaphoric nature of Buffy makes it ideal for illustrating the concepts of the mythological theories of Jung and Campbell. At the same time, the show is far from simplistic, since characters can be read as several different archetypes depending on their relationships with each other and the story arc. Buffy has several shadows, or characters who stand for her dark side, throughout the series, including the vampire Drusilla, the rogue Slayer Faith, and the vampire Spike. Buffy herself acts as Spike’s anima. Buffy, Angel, Faith, and Spike each embark on heroes’ journeys, while the other major characters act in supportive roles. The arc of the hero’s journey and the major personality archetypes can be illustrated through these characters in order to assist students in recognizing the archetypes in other texts.

The Hero’s Journey

The hero’s journey is a major theme in archetypal criticism and in most literature. Examples can be found in literature from ancient Greek myth to Tolkien to James Joyce. The hero’s journey involves an individual completing a major task or obtaining necessary knowledge for his/her society. Campbell defines a hero as “someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself” (Power 151). The two types of heroic deeds are the physical and spiritual. The physical involves a physical act such as saving a life
or displaying courage in battle. In the spiritual, the hero has a supernatural experience and returns with a message. Both of these types of deeds can be found in *Buffy*.

The hero’s journey itself is very specific, following guidelines that have been developed over centuries of storytelling. Campbell describes it thus:

> The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there’s something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society. This person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what is lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It’s usually a cycle, a going and returning. (*Power* 152)

*Buffy* engages in several such journeys. Almost every episode of season one involves an abbreviated version of the hero’s journey, culminating at the end of the season with a much more complete journey, in which Buffy must finally kill the “big bad” of the season: the Master (a very old, powerful vampire). Seasons two through five are a much more drawn out hero’s journey, ending with Buffy’s death. In season six, Spike embarks on a compressed version of the journey he has been on since the middle of season four.

The hero’s journey begins with a call to adventure, usually delivered by a herald after the hero has stumbled onto an unfamiliar world. The herald is often “dark, loathly, or terrifying, judged evil by the world. [. . .] Or the herald is a beast [. . .], representative of the repressed instinctual fecundity within ourselves, or again a veiled mysterious figure—the unknown” (Campbell, *Hero* 53). The calling often takes place in a forest, or near a large tree, or near a spring (Campbell, *Hero* 51). The place of Buffy’s initial calling, as shown in “Becoming, Part 1” (2.21), is atypical—in broad daylight, on the
steps of her high school—but the herald is not. Merrick is a mysterious figure, vaguely threatening—Buffy, in fact, mistakes him for a police officer or store security guard—and tells Buffy that she is “the only one who can stop them. [...] The vampires” (2.21). Throughout the first season, she has to be repeatedly called to action, usually by her Watcher, Giles, since she would rather be pursuing a “normal” teenage life.

Spike also has to be called more than once. The first call is delivered by the Initiative, a government project experimenting on and attempting to domesticate demons, whose scientists insert a chip in his brain that makes him unable to attack humans (though still perfectly capable of attacking and killing demons) (“The Initiative,” 4.7). The herald, in this case, is mysterious, their ultimate goal unknown even to the viewer, and evil, upsetting the balance of natural and supernatural. The second call takes place in Buffy’s bathroom, near the tub (which could be considered a spring), but the herald is himself. In his frenzied desire to prove to Buffy that she loves him, he attempts to rape her, a bestial, evil act that places him firmly within the domain of the herald. When he realizes what he’s done, he finally embarks on his journey (“Seeing Red,” 6.19).

Sometimes, the hero will refuse the call, after which his/her life becomes meaningless; “all he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration” (Campbell, Hero 59). Buffy does initially refuse the call—“I’m destiny-free, really” (2.21)—though she does end up accepting her duty. But throughout season one, she continuously refuses, only to realize that her refusal could cost people their lives, after which she reluctantly agrees, despite the havoc it wreaks on her social life. By the end of season one, she is beginning to accept her duty, but then Giles finds a prophecy stating that the Slayer will face the Master and die. She violently
rejects her duty, once again, but when Willow is put in danger, she accepts the necessity of her own death and descends to the sunken church to do battle with the Master ("Prophecy Girl," 1.12).

Spike refuses his first call, choosing to remain as evil as possible despite his inability to do violence to humans, though Giles points out that “there may be a higher purpose” to Spike’s ability to fight only demons ("The I in Team," 4.13). His life does indeed become meaningless, despite his attempts to experience as much vicarious evil as possible. Spike feels, as Adam (the Initiative-created man/demon/cyborg) describes it:

[S]mothered. Trapped like an animal. Pure in its ferocity, unable to actualize the urges within. Clinging to one truth, like a flame struggling to burn within an enclosed glass: that a beast this powerful cannot be contained. Inevitably it will break free and savage the land again. ("The Yoko Factor," 4.20)

Only after he discovers that he is in love with Buffy does he begin to try to be good, but she already regards him as unredeemable evil, with “nothing good or clean” in him ("Dead Things," 6.13). He attempts to become the kind of person she would love, but realizes that, without a soul, he can’t. After his attempted rape, he finally accepts his duty and goes seeking the return of his soul (6.19).

Once the hero accepts his/her duty and begins the journey, s/he is usually offered supernatural aid by a wizard or fairy godmother figure (Campbell, Hero 69-70). Buffy has her own powers, which are supernatural in nature, as well as the direction and assistance of Giles, the magical powers of her Wiccan friend, Willow, and the protection of her ensouled vampire boyfriend, Angel. Later, Spike replaces Angel. Spike himself
has only his own supernatural vampire strength, which was bestowed upon him by Drusilla when she turned him. Very soon after this gift is received, the hero crosses into the supernatural realm (Campbell, *Hero* 77).

Often, the hero is “swallowed into the unknown,” a step Campbell calls “The Belly of the Whale,” and may appear or be presumed dead (*Hero* 90). Buffy often has to track vampires and demons into the caves and sewers of Sunnydale, and at the end of season one, she hunts the Master through the sunken church in which he is trapped, where he drinks some of her blood and leaves her face down in a puddle, to all appearances dead (1.12).

In his quest to regain his soul, Spike must descend into a cave and find his way through the cave system to a demon who will grant him a boon. Of course, before Spike can be granted this boon, he must survive a series of trials. The hero must accomplish certain tasks or pass certain trials in order to complete his/her journey. S/he is often aided by supernatural objects, persons, or forces (Campbell, *Hero* 97). Spike’s trials include fighting several demons and enduring a swarm of beetles, which closely resemble flesh-eating scarabs, crawling over him. Buffy must fight and defeat many minor demons and several “big bads” between seasons one and six before her death. Spike’s reward is his soul, and Buffy’s is the fulfillment of her potential and duty to save the world by sacrificing her life.

After the hero has accomplished his/her mission, s/he must return to the world, but some heroes refuse to do so (Campbell, *Hero* 193). Buffy is forced back to life when her friends cast a spell to resurrect her (“Bargaining” Parts 1 & 2, 6.1 & 2), but she refuses to really live. She feels nothing, barely managing to go through the motions of
her duty, and cuts herself off from her friends. Only when the world is, once again, put in
danger, this time by Willow, does Buffy literally and figuratively pull herself out of the
grave (“Grave,” 6.22). Spike doesn’t willfully refuse to return, but the sudden return of
his conscience after more than a hundred years of killing and mayhem drives him a bit
mad.

When the hero finally does return, his/her most difficult task is providing his/her
people with knowledge s/he gained in the supernatural world (Campbell, *Hero*
217-18). Spike’s main obstacle to sharing his knowledge is his insanity, though he does try to
explain his predicament to Buffy:

I think they were dreams. So weak. Did you make me weak? Thinking
of you, holding myself and spilling useless buckets of salt over your . . .
ending. Angel, he should have warned me. He makes a good show of
forgetting but it’s here in me . . . all the time. The spark. I wanted to give
you what you deserve. And I got it. They put the spark in me . . . and
now all it does is burn. […] Buffy, shame on you. Why does a man do
what he mustn’t? For her. To be hers. To be the kind of man who would
nev. . . . To be a kind of man. […] And she shall look on him with
forgiveness and everybody will forgive and love . . . and he will be loved.

So everything’s okay, right? (“Beneath You,” 7.2)

On the other hand, Buffy can’t explain to her friends that she was not, as they assumed, in
a Hell dimension after her sacrificial death, but in Heaven. The trouble isn’t her own
ability to articulate it, however, but her friends’ refusal to know the truth. It makes no
sense, in the context of the show, to think that Buffy would have gone to Hell; she
sacrificed her life to save the world in general and her sister in particular. When Buffy realizes that telling her friends the truth would only make them feel bad and possibly destroy their friendship, she tells them what they want to hear: that she was in Hell, and they rescued her. Immediately afterward, however, she admits the truth to Spike:

I was happy. Wherever I was . . . I was happy. At peace. I knew that everyone I cared about was all right. I knew it. Time didn’t mean anything . . . nothing had form . . . but I was still me, you know? And I was warm. And I was loved. And I was finished. Complete. I don’t understand about theology or dimensions, or any of it, really . . . but I think I was in heaven. And now I’m not. I was torn out of there. Pulled out . . . by my friends. Everything here is . . . hard, and bright, and violent. Everything I feel, everything I touch . . . this is Hell. Just getting through the next moment, and the one after that . . . knowing what I’ve lost . . .

They can never know. Never. (“After Life,” 6.3)

A few aspects of the hero’s journey are not illustrated in Buffy. One possible aspect of the return, which Campbell called “The Magic Flight,” for example, does not seem to make an appearance in the series. The Magic Flight usually involves the hero fleeing the prior owner of whatever magic trinket s/he has been sent to retrieve, and is often a “comical pursuit” which may be “complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion” (Campbell, Hero 197). Another element, the “Master of Two Worlds,” in which the hero is capable of passing between the mundane and supernatural worlds at will, is also not applicable to Buffy, as the characters live constantly in the supernatural world (Campbell, Hero 229). Only once does Buffy return to the “normal” world, while
under the influence of some sort of toxin, and she chooses to remain in the supernatural, unable to return to the mundane again (“Normal Again,” 6.17).

These are only two of the possible hero’s journeys, of which there are at least four in *Buffy* and its spinoff *Angel*. The information provided by these two would illustrate the concept of the hero’s journey so that the students would be able to identify and map others within the show and in more traditional literary texts.

**Archetypes of Personality**

Carl Jung defines archetypes as the “contents of the collective unconscious” (4). They are “archaic or [...] primordial types, [...] universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (5). Many of these archetypes are based on images, shapes, and landscapes, but some are based on personalities. Most of the possible archetypes of personality can be found in *Buffy*. Giles is the Wise Old Man, the imparter of knowledge. Tara and Joyce are the Good Mother, associated with fertility and nurturance. Drusilla is the Temptress, the destroyer of men. And Ethan Rayne, worshipper of chaos, is the Trickster, “mischievous, disorderly, and amoral” (Dobie 58). Many of the main characters can be classified as more than one archetype: Buffy as hero and anima to Spike, Spike as hero and shadow to Buffy, Faith as Temptress and shadow to Buffy. The overlap of character and archetype is part of what keeps *Buffy* from being formulaic and two-dimensional.

One of the most interesting relationships in *Buffy* is that of Buffy and Faith. Faith is a rather obvious shadow for Buffy. They are both Slayers, both gifted with extraordinary strength and power, but they use it in different ways. Jung defined the “shadow” as a person’s dark side, full of aspects of ourselves that we don’t want to
confront. The shadow must be accepted and integrated, or it “functions behind one’s back” (Franz, *Shadow* 5). Faith is the violent side of Buffy, the side Buffy doesn’t want to admit exists despite her Slayer status. She is also the side of Buffy that would rather be playing than working, enjoying herself rather than saving the world.

Buffy has a strong moral imperative that drives her to fulfill her duty as the Slayer despite her personal desire to be a normal teenager. Her efforts to be “one of the group”—by trying out for cheerleader, going on dates, and running for Homecoming queen—are continuously thwarted by her responsibilities to protect her peers—and the world—from the forces of evil (Stevenson 106-7). Buffy’s sense of responsibility stems from “a deep and abiding sense of the value inherent in human beings” (Stevenson 107). She doesn’t fight evil for the reward (there isn’t much of one), but because it’s the right thing to do (Stevenson 110).

However, Faith is amoral. She slays because it’s fun, not because it’s right. “Isn’t it crazy how slaying just always makes you hungry and horny?” she notes (“Faith, Hope, and Trick,” 3.3). She arrives in Sunnydale expecting to find another version of herself, but instead finds Buffy, who is still dealing with issues stemming from the necessity of killing Angel and his subsequent return. Buffy doesn’t share everything with Faith, and Faith takes it personally, allowing Buffy’s issues to drive her away. Faith initially tries to imitate Buffy by having what she has—family and friends—but fails due to her lack of trust in anyone and her own self-centeredness. When Faith’s attempt to be just like Buffy fails, she falls back on her power to give her meaning, trying to be important to Sunnydale in general and Buffy’s friends in particular by being a better Slayer than Buffy. But Faith lacks Buffy’s innate moral compass, which leads her to
abuse her power by stealing and accidentally killing a man, then going over to the “dark side” and killing for fun as she works for the evil Mayor of Sunnydale (Stevenson 118-19).

Once Faith realizes that she can’t be like Buffy, she attempts to make Buffy into her. The season three episode “Bad Girls” (3.14) shows Buffy giving in to the possibilities that Faith represents. “We’re Slayers, girlfriend, the Chosen Two,” Faith reminds her. Buffy skips a chemistry test in order to fight a nest of vampires with Faith. Later, while hunting a demon, Faith breaks into a sporting goods store to stock up on weapons. When Buffy protests, Faith says, “When are you going to get this, B? Life for a Slayer is very simple: want . . . take . . . have.” Buffy goes along with Faith’s hijinks, but there are consequences. They get arrested, escape from the police, and wind up killing an innocent man by mistake. This is the action that reminds Buffy of her responsibilities, though she does still cover up their involvement in the murder when the police come asking questions.

At this stage, Buffy does not accept or integrate her shadow. Instead, she fights Faith and puts her into a coma. But the shadow does not go away just because it’s repressed. Faith wakes up eight months later, and, thanks to a postmortem gift from the Mayor, switches bodies with Buffy (“This Year’s Girl,” 4.15). Faith now has what she has always wanted: Buffy’s life. But her attempt to start over and become Buffy backfires. She is uncomfortable with the love and affection that Joyce and Riley shower on her, thinking she is Buffy. Faced with other people’s negative perception of her, which they feel free to express in her presence since they think she is Buffy, Faith begins to understand the root of her unhappiness. But the more time she spends as Buffy, the
more like Buffy she becomes until she sacrifices her own plans to run away in order to help others, losing Buffy’s body in the process (Stevenson 120-1; “Who Are You?” 4.16). Buffy learns less from her stint in Faith’s body, though she does discover what it’s like to be hated rather than loved, disrespected rather than revered. While this incident starts Faith on her hero’s journey to redemption—most of which occurs on Angel—it does not serve to incorporate Buffy’s shadow. That role must be taken over by another: Spike.

Both shadow and anima can be illustrated in Buffy’s relationship with Spike. In the sixth season, after Buffy has sacrificed her life and before she is resurrected, Spike takes Buffy’s place as the muscle of the vampire-fighting group (6.1). After she is resurrected, she confides her pain to Spike, though she can tell no one else. Significantly, she tells him, “I can be alone with you here” (6.3). She can, because he is a part of her, an aspect of her. He is the only one she can talk to because he is the only one of her circle who knows what it’s like to be dead (Davidson 30). Buffy uses Spike in an attempt to feel something, to shake off the apathy she’s felt since she crawled out of her grave. She sees Spike “as representing some part of herself she [feels] she [can’t] respect, but need[s] in order to feel alive” (Davidson 31). Spike continuously pulls her toward the dark, urging Buffy to leave her friends and join him. “You try to be with them,” he says, “but you always end up in the dark. With me” (6.13). Buffy tries, several times, to leave Spike, but only when he begins to function behind her back (smuggling demon eggs), and when Riley’s brief return reminds her of who she is supposed to be, is she able to break away. This time, though, the shadow is more fully integrated. Buffy better understands the darkness in her, and Spike’s darkness has thinned. Not long after Buffy calls off their
relationship, Spike decides he needs to regain his soul in order to be the kind of person Buffy deserves. A truly evil creature would not have made such a decision, showing that Spike’s interactions with Buffy have made him less evil.

In turn, Buffy acts as Spike’s anima. The anima, according to Jung, is a person’s life force, but also a magical female (for men) being, usually connected to erotic fantasies (25). The anima is “a mischievous being who crosses our paths in numerous transformations and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us, causing happy and unhappy delusions, depressions, and ecstasies, outbursts of affect, etc.” (Jung 26). Before Spike realizes that he is in love with Buffy, he feels oppressed by her. As he rails at his sometime lover, Harmony:

Buffy, Buffy, Buffy! Everywhere I turn, she’s there! That nasty little face, that bouncing shampoo-commercial hair, that whole sodding holier-than-thou attitude. [. . .] She follows me, you know, tracks me down. I’m her pet project. Drive Spike round the bend. Makes every day a fresh bout of torture. [. . .] You don’t understand. I can’t get rid of her. She’s everywhere. She’s haunting me, Harmony! (“Out of My Mind,” 5.4)

His first few “encounters” with Buffy after this rant are in the form of dreams and daydreams. The first one shows him his true feelings for her, which he vehemently denies when he wakes (5.4). He isn’t sure how to deal with these feelings for someone who isn’t a demon, but soon begins to try to help her. After a disaster at the local club, the Bronze, Buffy finds him doctoring a victim. When she asks him what he’s doing, he replies: “Making this woman more comfortable. I’m not sampling, I’ll have you know. Just look at all these lovely blood-covered people. I could, but not a taste for Spike, not a
lick. Know you wouldn’t like it” (“Triangle,” 5.11). She is disgusted, but he continues to put himself in her path and help her as much as possible. Eventually she trusts him enough to leave her little sister, Dawn, in his care while she handles her slaying duties. He assists in the final battle at the end of season five out of love for Buffy and affection for Dawn, and continues to help the “Scoobies” out of a sense of responsibility to Dawn and Buffy’s memory. He backtracks into evil in order to act as Buffy’s shadow during season six, but when she leaves him, he turns back to good and goes seeking his soul. Every good thing he does is for Buffy, “to be hers” (7.2).

Other archetypes, those of shape, color, and landscape, can be used to analyze Buffy episodes more specifically, but the above discussion and illustrations would assist the students in understanding some of the more complicated interpersonal archetypes. Showing the students these archetypes in a format that is familiar to them, a TV show that speaks their own modern language and shares their modern sensibilities, will assist them in identifying them in other texts.
“I’ve Got Your Number, Id Boy!”: Psychoanalytic Criticism

The theories of Sigmund Freud are another way to examine the psychological processes and symbols in a text. Literature studies recognize three main areas of psychoanalysis: the unconscious, sexuality, and dreams.

**The Unconscious**

Freud divided the mind into three main impulses: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id, the “source of our psychic energy and our psychosexual desires” (Dobie 51), takes up most of the unconscious, the part of the mind that is hidden from conscious awareness (Freud 636). The id seeks to gratify desire with no concern for restriction or consequence. In literature, it can resemble the Devil archetype in that it “offers strong temptation to take what we want without heeding normal restraints, taboos, or consequences” (Dobie 51). Buffy’s psychology professor explains the id thus:

> These are the things we want. Simple things. Comfort, sex, shelter, food. We always want them and we want them all the time. The id doesn’t learn. It doesn’t grow up. It has the ego telling it what it can’t have and it has the superego telling it what it shouldn’t want. But the id works solely out of the pleasure principle. It wants. Whatever social skills you’ve learned, however much we’ve evolved, the pleasure principal is at work in all of us. (“Beer Bad,” 4.5)

“Beer Bad” is the most fitting episode for exploring the pleasure principle. In it, Buffy, still upset over the rejection of Parker, with whom she had a one-night-stand, begins drinking with “four really smart guys” (4.5). These men, majors in philosophy, have angered the bartender with their attitudes to the point that he mixes up a potion to put in
their beer that turns them—and, consequently, Buffy—into cavemen. In her primitive state, Buffy demands immediate gratification for anything that strikes her fancy—music, television, and more beer—but she realizes that “Parker bad!” The cavemen, also seeking immediate gratification, drag a couple of coeds to a coffee shop, where they proceed to build a fire and nearly burn the building down. Parker and Willow are trapped in the building. Smelling the smoke, Buffy rushes off to help, even though she can’t remember how to use a fire extinguisher (she throws it at the fire), and rescues Willow and Parker. When Parker recovers from his smoke inhalation, he comes to thank Buffy, his speech mirroring one in her daydream at the beginning of the episode. Buffy regards him for a moment, then smacks him over the head with a tree branch, knocking him unconscious. This is the end of her mourning over her failed relationship with Parker. Some students may find it odd that, in her id-driven state, Buffy wouldn’t forgive Parker and attempt to rekindle their relationship. After all, that’s all she’s wanted for the past four episodes. But to attain more immediate gratification, Buffy needs to hurt Parker for hurting her, hence her decision to hit him rather than forgive him.

Spike also illustrates the id. He is unrestrained, constantly seeking “fun.” He “follows [his] blood, which doesn’t exactly rush in the direction of [his] brain” (“Touched,” 7.20; Wilcox 49). During one of his briefer trips to Sunnydale, he is moping over Drusilla leaving him, but a brawl puts him back in a good mood:

Now that was fun. Don’t tell me that wasn’t fun. Oh, God, it’s been so long since I’ve had a decent spot of violence. Really puts things in perspective. [. . .] I’ve been all wrongheaded about this. Weeping, crawling, blaming everybody else. I want Dru back, I’ve just gotta be the
man I was, the man she loved. I’m gonna do what I shoulda done in the first place: I’ll find her, wherever she is, tie her up, torture her until she likes me again. (“Lovers Walk,” 3.8)

The unrestrained fistfight reminds Spike of his nature, which is ruled by his id. Rather than sulking, he decides to pursue what he wants without restraint and do whatever it takes, even torture (which, to Drusilla, isn’t necessarily a negative approach) in order to get her.

The two remaining parts of the mind, the ego and the superego, are harder to illustrate with examples from Buffy. The ego regulates the id, delaying gratification or diverting its attention to socially acceptable actions. It lies between the unconscious and the preconscious, and “mediates between our inner selves and the outer world” (Dobie 51; Freud 636). The chip inserted in Spike’s brain can be considered an electronic ego; whenever he attempts to attack a human, it sends an electric shock through his brain, resulting in immediate searing pain and lingering migraines, forcibly stopping him from indulging in his desires. The superego is the conscience, the part that makes one feel guilty for breaking rules. It lies mostly in the conscious mind. The character of Angel can be viewed as a superego, since he has to force continuous control over his desires in order to keep from losing his soul (the gypsy curse that restored his soul also takes it away if he achieves a single moment’s true happiness). He can’t be a vampire because his conscience bothers him about harming innocent people. He also can’t indulge his sexuality, at least not with Buffy, because it makes him happy enough to lose his soul and become a monster (Wilcox 49). He suffers from a guilt complex, which is the result of an imbalance between superego and id (Dobie 51).
Faith is the best example of a character who is struggling with the balance among id, ego, and superego. She readily admits to enjoying her work, even so far as to be sexually aroused by it. Anything she enjoys she throws herself into wholeheartedly, whether slaying, eating, having sex, or killing. She sees Buffy as “a stuck-up tightass with no sense of fun” (4.16) but realizes that Buffy is happier and more fulfilled than she is. This realization sends her into a downward spiral of self-loathing and suicidal tendencies. Her superego is working overtime to make up for everything the id has gotten away with, causing a massive guilt complex. While in Buffy’s body, she repeatedly strikes her own body (which, at the time, is inhabited by Buffy), crying “You’re nothing! Disgusting! Murderous bitch! You’re nothing!” (4.16). Once back in her own body, she leaves Sunnydale and runs to L.A., where she attempts to provoke Angel into killing her. When he refuses, instead wanting to help her, she finally finds a balance and turns herself in to the police to serve her time for the murders she’s committed (Angel “Five by Five” & “Sanctuary,” 1.18 & 19).

**Sexuality**

Vampires, as a mythological creature, are sexual by nature. Nearly everything about them is symbolic of sexuality; they penetrate their victims’ bodies with their teeth, they must be killed with a phallic wooden object or by removal of the head, and the taking of blood is a sharing of bodily fluids. In some tales, Stoker’s *Dracula*, for instance, they are considered objects of horror because they have given in to unrestrained sexuality (Williamson 12-13). In many tales, the bite of the vampire is an intimate act that is accompanied by sexual arousal, and in fact, many tales refer to the bite as an “embrace.” James Marsters, who plays Spike, comments on the sexuality of the
vampire’s bite: “The sucking of blood and taking of a life is very much like the taking of a woman. It’s a very sexual thing. If you’ll notice, guy vampires don’t bite guys. They take woman victims” (Marsters). Critic Anne Billson theorizes that the vampire is considered sexually appealing because “In terms of human-monster miscegenation, it’s only really the vampire who holds out any potential” (40). Zombies and demons are disgusting and werewolves are violent, but vampires look human, for the most part. They are frequently cast as sympathetic characters, Byronic heroes who have chosen their outsider status (Williamson 37).

In Buffy, vampirism is often used as a metaphor for sex. For example, in the finale of season three, “Graduation Day,” Angel has been poisoned by a toxin specific to vampires, which can only be cured by the blood of a Slayer. Buffy initially attempts to capture Faith to feed to him, but when this fails, she forces Angel to drink from her instead. The ensuing scene is what Whedon called “one of our thinner metaphors. That was really pretty close to the surface” (Whedon, “Graduation Day”). They begin in a standing position but topple backward onto the floor with Angel on top of Buffy. Her facial expressions are ambiguous; they can be taken as pain or arousal or both. She reaches out for something to hold on to and crushes a pewter jug with one hand. She curls up for a moment with her hand on Angel’s side and her lower leg resting along his thigh, then kicks out, breaking a coffee table. The camera spirals up away from them as Buffy lays flat on her back, a single tear sliding toward her temple, a shocked look on her face. This is the point at which she has lost too much blood, but it is also a post-orgasmic moment. Angel regains control seconds later and rolls off of her, gasping, his mouth smeared with her blood. This scene is, as Whedon says, the one in which the metaphor is
the most obvious, although vampiric feeding is quite often portrayed or discussed as a sexual act throughout the series.

As the id-character, Spike often discusses biting in sexual terms. In “Lovers Walk,” he abducts Willow to force her to cast a love spell on Drusilla so she’ll come back to him. After crying into Willow’s sweater, he suddenly looks up at her and says, “I haven’t had a woman in weeks.” The fact that his face has changed to the “demonic visage” that comes on vampires when they’re ready to feed gives his words a double meaning, both sexual and vampiric. Willow realizes this, too, and says, “I’ll do your spell for you, but [. . .] there will be no ‘having’ of any kind” (3.8). Later, after Spike has been “chipped,” his new restrictions are often spoken of in terms of castration or impotence. When Spike attempts to bite Willow, before he realizes that he has been chipped, the conversation is reminiscent of lovers discussing erectile disfunction:

SPIKE. I don’t understand. This sort of thing’s never happened to me before.

WILLOW. Maybe you were nervous.

SPIKE. I felt all right when I started. Let’s try again. (He attempts to bite her again, but the chip kicks in.) Ow! Oh! Ow! Damn it!

WILLOW. Maybe you’re trying too hard. Doesn’t this happen to every vampire?

SPIKE. Not to me, it doesn’t!

WILLOW. It’s me, isn’t it?

SPIKE. What are you talking about?
WILLOW. Well, you came looking for Buffy, then settled. I . . . You didn’t want to bite me. I just happened to be around.

SPIKE. Piffle!

WILLOW. I know I’m not the kind of girl vamps like to sink their teeth into. It’s always like, “Ooh, you’re like a sister to me,” or, “Oh, you’re such a good friend.”

SPIKE. Don’t be ridiculous. I’d bite you in a heartbeat.

WILLOW. Really?

SPIKE. Thought about it.

WILLOW. When?

SPIKE. Remember last year, you had on that fuzzy pink number with the lilac underneath?

WILLOW. I never would have guessed. You played the blood-lust kinda cool.

SPIKE. Mmm. I hate being obvious. All fang-y and “rrrr!” Takes the mystery out.

WILLOW. But if you could...

SPIKE. If I could, yeah.

WILLOW. You know, this doesn’t make you any less terrifying.

SPIKE. Don’t patronize me.

[. . .]

WILLOW. You’re being too hard on yourself. Why don’t we wait a half an hour and try again? (4.7)
(The “fuzzy pink number with the lilac underneath” was, of course, what Willow was wearing in “Lovers Walk.”) Later, when Spike goes to Buffy for help, he says, “Spike had a little trip to the vet, and now he doesn’t chase the other puppies anymore” (“Pangs,” 4.8). He offers information on the Initiative in exchange for board, blood, and not being staked. Giles and Buffy keep him chained in the bathtub, “Until we’re sure that you’re . . . impotent,” Giles says. When Spike protests that choice of words, Buffy suggests, “flaccid?” (“Something Blue,” 4.9). The impotence jokes cease soon afterward, but the effect of the chip does not. Spike is unable to harm any living being, which means that he cannot acquire the blood he needs to survive, at least not directly from the source. He is deprived not only of his sustenance, but of his sexual release. Not surprisingly, it is after Buffy’s death and resurrection, when the chip fails to recognize her as human and Spike discovers he is able to hurt her, that they consummate the relationship that has been building tension for months (“Smashed,” 6.9). Buffy herself recognizes the parallel: “This is what I hate about you vampires,” she rants. “Sex and death and love and pain, it’s all the same damn thing to you” (“Conversations with Dead People,” 7.7).

The relationships between vampires are also quite Freudian. The main vampires in the Buffyverse—Spike, Drusilla, Angel/Angelus, and Darla—are “related” in a sense, but have sexual relationships at the same time. Darla sired Angelus, who sired Drusilla, who sired Spike. Angelus and Darla frequently have sexual relations, as do Angelus and Drusilla, and Spike and Drusilla. Spike’s relationships with women tend toward the Oedipal. As a human, he had an unhealthily close relationship with his mother, and attempts to continue this relationship after he is turned by siring her. Ostensibly, his
motives are altruistic; she is very sick, and he knows that becoming a vampire will cure her. However, as she points out to him later:

You want to run, don’t you? Scamper off and cry to your new little trollop. Do you think you’ll be able to love her? Think you’ll be able to touch her without feeling me? All you ever wanted was to be back inside. You finally got your wish, didn’t you? Sank your teeth into me. An eternal kiss. […] You wanted your hands on me. Perhaps you’d like a chance to finish off what you started. This is what you always wanted. Who’s my dark little prince? (“Lies My Parents Told Me,” 7.17)

This scene effectively, if not healthily, ends Spike’s attachment to his mother, and he kills her. But he then turns his affections to Drusilla, his new mother. Drusilla splits her attentions between Spike and Angelus, her “father,” which makes Spike insanely jealous. He hates Angelus for a myriad of reasons, but Angelus’ “taking” of Drusilla is the main one. Throughout the two series, *Buffy* and *Angel*, Spike constantly tries to have whatever Angel has, or destroy it if he can’t. Buffy’s affections are often split between the two vampires, as well, which annoys Spike. During their magically-induced engagement in “Something Blue,” Buffy mentions Angel in passing, and Spike is immediately sullen: “You weren’t going to say that name,” he sulks. When their relationship is real rather than magic-induced, Buffy has a momentary interlude with Angel, only to send him away and go back to Spike. Spike is, again, sullen:

SPIKE. So, where’s tall, dark and forehead?

BUFFY. Let me guess. You can smell him.
SPIKE. Yeah, that and I also used my enhanced vampire eyeballs to watch you kissing him.

BUFFY. It was . . . a hello.

SPIKE. Most people don’t use their tongues to say hello. Or I guess they do but. . . .

BUFFY. There were no tongues. Besides, he’s gone.

SPIKE. Oh, just popped by for a quickie, then?

BUFFY. Good, good! I haven’t had quite enough jealous vampire crap for one night.

SPIKE. He wears lifts, you know.

BUFFY. You know, one of these days I’m just going to put you two in a room and let you wrastle it out.

SPIKE. No problem at this end.

BUFFY. There could be oil of some kind involved. . . .

[. . .]

BUFFY. Faith still has my room.

SPIKE. Well, you’re not staying here! [. . .] You’ve got Angel-breath. I’m not going to just let you whack me back and forth like a rubber ball. I got my pride, you know.

BUFFY. I understand.

SPIKE. Clearly you don’t, ‘cause the whole “having my pride” thing was just a smokescreen.

BUFFY. Oh, thank God. (“Chosen,” 7.22)
While Spike’s relationship with Buffy is much healthier than his relationship with either Drusilla or his mother, he is still competing with his “father,” Angel, for her affection. Fittingly, neither vampire can claim Buffy at the end of the series.

**Dreams**

According to Freud, dreams are the “language of the unconscious” (Dobie 53). They can impart wisdom by solving problems, act as wish-fulfillment, or help to identify problems unknown except to the unconscious (Freud 140). When analyzing dreams, Freud claimed, one must identify the themes, which tend to be compressed or condensed, so that one element can stand for many different ideas or objects (151). Often, dreams are also dramatizations in which thoughts are transformed into situations so they can be more easily dealt with. However, the most obvious symbols or events in a dream may not be the most significant in terms of the conscious mind. Sometimes the more subtle elements illustrate the true significance of the dream (Freud 154-5).

Dreams play an important part in *Buffy*. As a Slayer, Buffy has a minor gift of prophecy, and she has dreams that warn her about trouble coming or help her to solve problems. When she first arrives in Sunnydale, she knows the evil is real because of her dreams. Giles reminds her that these are important: “Or perhaps you’re right. Perhaps there is no trouble coming. The signs could be wrong. After all, it’s not as if you’ve been having the nightmares . . .” (“Welcome to the Hellmouth,” 1.1). The prophetic element does not keep Buffy’s dreams from being symbolically significant or indicators of her unconscious state, however. Three dreams in particular have enough Freudian overtones to be useful for teaching Freudian analysis. One warns Buffy of the loss of
Angel’s soul, one shows her who to go to for information about Angel’s soul, and one tells her how to defeat the Mayor.

The first dream takes place in season two’s “Innocence.” Buffy wakes and reaches for the water glass next to the bed. Finding it empty, she gets up and goes into the hall. Drusilla appears behind her, following her. Buffy turns her head slightly but keeps going. She opens the door to the bathroom and finds herself in the Bronze. Willow is sitting at a table with an organ grinder’s monkey. “The hippo stole his pants,” she says in French. Buffy is confused but continues deeper into the club. The next person she sees is her mother who is holding a cup and saucer. “Do you really think you’re ready, Buffy?” she asks. Buffy replies, “What?” Joyce drops the saucer, which shatters on the floor, then turns and wanders away. Buffy heads toward the stage, then sees Angel. She smiles and takes a few steps toward him. Drusilla appears behind him and drives a stake into his back. Buffy screams his name and reaches toward him, but he crumbles to dust. Drusilla steps forward and says, “Happy birthday, Buffy.”

For the most part, this dream is a foreshadowing of Buffy and Angel’s sexual intercourse, which results in the loss of Angel’s soul. Drusilla, who often acts as Buffy’s shadow, is both herself and Buffy in the dream. She is a threatening figure hovering just outside of Buffy’s awareness. At the time, Buffy had assumed Drusilla was dead, and her appearance in the dream warns Buffy that she’s not. Although Drusilla stakes Angel in the dream, Buffy considers herself his murderer when she causes him to lose his soul and later has to kill him in order to save the world. At the moment that Angel and Buffy consummate their relationship, Drusilla, who is also precognitive, collapses, crying Angel’s name. After a moment, however, she ceases crying and begins laughing evilly.
Her connection to Angel is such that she knows about Angel’s loss of his soul before Buffy does (2.14).

Joyce’s part in the dream is twofold as well. She questions Buffy’s readiness to consummate her relationship with Angel, and the scene itself is a harbinger; later, while Buffy is discussing the possibility of acquiring her driver’s license, Joyce says, “Do you really think you’re ready, Buffy?” and drops her saucer to shatter on the floor. It is a warning that the events in the dream are about to come to pass, which they do at the end of that very episode.

Willow’s part in the dream is more vague. The comment about the hippo and the monkey’s pants refers to a conversation she had with Oz, her werewolf boyfriend, about animal crackers:

OZ. Oh, look! Monkey! And he has a little hat. And little pants.

WILLOW. Yeah, I—I see!

OZ. The monkey’s the only cookie animal that gets to wear clothes, you know that? [. . .] So, I’m wondering, do the other cookie animals feel sorta ripped? Like, is the hippo going, “Hey, man, where are my pants? I have my hippo dignity!” [. . .] And you know the monkey’s just, “I mock you with my monkey pants!” And there’s a big coup in the zoo.

WILLOW. The monkey is French?

OZ. All monkeys are French. You didn’t know that? (“What’s My Line, Part 2,” 2.10)
Buffy was not present for that discussion, nor, to our knowledge, did Willow ever mention animal cookies and their pants to her. However, Willow is not out of place in this dream; with her introduction to Oz, her own sexuality is awakening. Obviously, on some level, Buffy realizes that Willow is growing up, as well. Later, Willow performs the gypsy curse to return Angel’s soul to him, though it is completed too late to save him, which makes her a party to Angel’s death (‘Becoming, Part 2,’ 2.22).

After the loss of Angel’s soul, Buffy has another dream. It begins with a memory of her sexual encounter with Angel. The scene is surreal, dimly lit, with only glimpses of skin, sheets, and lips and the faint sound of sighs and moans. Angel says, “I love you.” Buffy opens her eyes, and there is a brief flash of Angel in his vampire face. The scene immediately cuts to a daytime funeral. Angel steps out from behind a headstone. When Buffy looks up at him, he says, “You have to know what to see.” She looks over her shoulder, where Jenny Calendar, Giles’ girlfriend—and, unbeknownst to any of them, a gypsy of the same tribe that cursed Angel—is lifting a veil from her face. Buffy wakes, a determined look on her face.

The first part of the dream needs no analysis. It is simply Buffy’s memory of the pleasure and joy of sleeping with Angel. However, her mind reminds her of the consequences by flashing to Angel in vamp-face. The act, while in itself a beautiful sharing of love between two people, is tainted by the consequences: the loss of Angel’s soul and his reversion to an undead, soulless monster. At the time, Buffy’s conscious mind only suspects that their lovemaking had anything to do with Angel’s change. Her unconscious mind links the two as cause and effect, which is, of course, true.
In Freudian dream analysis, a person will wake when the symbolism becomes too obvious, when the unconscious begins speaking too clearly (Dobie 53). This tendency may be the case with Buffy’s sudden awakening from this dream, since she has realized that Jenny has something to do with Angel’s new temperament. Some of this realization may be precognitive, but it’s possible that Buffy’s unconscious could have worked it out. Once Jenny realized the consequences of Buffy’s involvement with Angel, she began—not very subtly—to try to pry them apart. On an unconscious level, Buffy may have realized that Jenny was something more than she had been admitting to the group.

The dream also acts as wish-fulfillment. Buffy wants to know what happened to Angel, and she wants him back the way he was. The initial part of the dream, her memory of their lovemaking, takes her back to before he was a monster, but it does not tell her what happened or how to fix it. In the cemetery scene, however, Angel gives her enough of a clue for her to piece unconscious cues together and go seeking answers. The cemetery setting is no accident; hours before the dream, Angelus tells her, “Your boyfriend is dead,” and Buffy has indeed lost someone very dear to her (2.14). It is no stretch to assume that the funeral is for Angel, or Buffy’s innocence, or both. Angel’s appearance during the day is also wish-fulfillment, since Buffy has often bemoaned the fact that they never see each other during the day. At the same time, it indicates that Angel—or at least the version of Angel in the dream—is not a threat. She does not have to fear the dream-Angel. If he were dangerous, he would not be able to walk around in daylight. It’s possible that the dream-Angel is a spirit guide, Angel’s soul come to give Buffy a hint, since it no longer resides in his body (Keller 169). Whether Angel’s soul is
actually in her dream or he is just a projection of Buffy’s desires, the outcome is the same: Buffy knows exactly who to go to for information about Angelus.

The third dream takes place after Buffy’s fight with Faith and her subsequent offering of her blood to Angel. The two girls lie in adjoining hospital rooms, both suffering from blood loss, and Faith also afflicted with head trauma and a stab wound. Both are unconscious. In the dream, Buffy walks into Faith’s apartment. The window is still broken from the fight, and half-packed boxes sit everywhere. Faith is facing the window, her back to Buffy. A small cat sits on her bed. “Who’s going to look after him?” Buffy asks.

FAITH. It’s a she. And aren’t these things supposed to look after themselves?

BUFFY. A higher power guiding us?

FAITH. Pretty sure that’s not what I meant.

BUFFY. There’s something I’m supposed to be doing.

FAITH. Oh, yeah. Miles to go. Little Miss Muffett counting down from 7-3-0.

BUFFY. Great. Riddles.

FAITH. Sorry, it’s my head. Lotta new stuff.

(The cat on the bed flickers and changes into Faith in her hospital gown, lying comatose.)

FAITH. They’re never going to fix this, are they?

(The Faith on the bed changes back to the cat.)

BUFFY. What about you?
FAITH. (Turns to face Buffy, motioning to her own face.) Scar tissue. It fades. It all fades.

(Buffy looks down and the knife she used to stab Faith flickers in and out of view in her hand.)

FAITH. You want to know the deal? Human weakness. It never goes away. Not even his.

BUFFY. Is this your mind or mine?

FAITH. (Laughs) Beats me. (She walks toward Buffy.) Getting toward that time.

BUFFY. (Looks around at all the boxes.) How are you going to fit all this stuff?

FAITH. Not gonna. It’s yours.

BUFFY. I can’t use all of this.

FAITH. Just take what you need. (She reaches out to touch Buffy’s face.) You ready?

(The scene flashes to white as Buffy wakes up.) (3.22)

Faith’s comment about Little Miss Muffett, while cryptic, does not require analysis outside of the show. It is in place to foreshadow the introduction of Dawn, which takes place two years (or 730 days) later. The rest of dream is full of symbolism, and while Freud claims that most symbolism is personal and cannot be interpreted by anyone but the dreamer, other symbols are universal (170). For example, a person’s house represents her body. In this case, Faith’s house is destroyed, mirroring her own physical condition. She worries that “they’re never going to fix this,” meaning both the window and her
injuries, and indeed, the doctors claim that the head trauma is too extensive and Faith will probably never wake up (3.21). Faith’s belongings are packed, indicating that she will soon be leaving her body in death. She hasn’t left, or even finished packing yet, meaning that she is close to death, but not quite dead.

In Freudian symbolism animals stand for younger siblings (Keller 167). Faith and Buffy have each referred to themselves as “big sister” at different times. In this case, the cat represents Faith. Her comment that “these things [are] supposed to take care of themselves” indicates her acceptance of her responsibility for her own life. Just as Buffy had recently fired her Watcher, Wesley, and was ready to graduate from high school, so Faith was ready for a similar rite of passage.

The knife, often a phallic symbol, in this case represents Buffy’s understanding that Faith’s condition is her doing. The knife appears in her hand, still bloody, as Faith talks about scar tissue. At the same time, the knife is a symbol of what Buffy needs to defeat the Mayor. He gave Faith that knife, and Buffy took it away from her and stabbed her with it. Buffy has often seen the father-daughter affection shared between Faith and the Mayor, and her unconscious mind knows that his weakness is Faith. She reminds Buffy that this weakness will never go away, even after his plan to “ascend” and become a demon is complete. In order to defeat the Mayor, Buffy uses that knife to taunt him—in his new, ascended, gigantic snake form—into chasing her into the school building, which has been rigged with explosives.

In-class analysis of these three dreams would guide the students through Freudian dream analysis. Several other dreams in the series, mostly Buffy’s but occasionally other characters’, can be analyzed and discussed in much the same way. For example, the
season four finale, “Restless,” is made up of the dreams of the four main characters—Willow, Xander, Giles, and Buffy. While the dreams are overtly in place because the spirit of the first Slayer is attempting to kill the four because of a spell they performed, they also serve to explore aspects of the characters’ psyches—their fears, wishes, and insecurities—that are not often seen.
“Reconnaissance? You Mean Where We All Sculpt and Paint and Stuff?”: Cultural Studies

The area of cultural studies is a collection of subcategories which explore facets of “social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation” (Guerin 276). The overall area is difficult to define. It is a mix of Marxist, Feminist, pop culture, and racial and ethnic studies (Dobie 161). Cultural studies critics examine the cultural phenomenon of a text outside of literature or art. The criticism is politically engaged, examining inequalities in power structures, while the critic ignores or attempts to break down the boundaries between “high” and “low” culture and art, between the popular and elite cultures (Guerin 278; Dobie 162). The critic also analyzes the “means of production”; who supports the work, who distributes it, and who reads it (Guerin 280). Since the definition of “culture” is so broad and the scope of the criticism even broader, the critic must choose one particular topic or aspect of culture from which to view a text in order to “connect historical, social, and economic knowledge surrounding the topic” (Dobie 162). By incorporating as much information as possible, the critic comes to his/her own conclusions about the work and the culture in which it was formed (Guerin 280).

In general, cultural studies critics assume that every group of people contains a dominant group that “determines what is acceptable and unacceptable for the larger body” (Dobie 162). Critics examine the groups outside of the dominant one and their defiance of the hegemony, attempting to bring subaltern writers into the dominant discourse (Dobie 162). Cultural studies criticism includes subcategories such as new historicism, postcolonialism, American multiculturalism, postmodernism, and popular
culture. New historicism attempts to find all of the voices in a historical period, not just the dominant ones, and make them heard. Postcolonialism examines the effect of colonization on a culture and the lingering effects after the colonization ends. American multiculturalism examines the arts and literature of marginalized American groups such as African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics (Dobie 164, 186, 196). Postmodernism breaks down the cultural assumptions of the preceding age, pointing out how these assumptions have served and empowered the dominant group. Popular culture examines the production, text, audience, and history of popular culture “artifacts” such as TV shows, songs, and movies (Guerin 300, 302). As a modern show, *Buffy* is not necessarily useful for illustrating new historicism since it does not often deal with history, but certain aspects of the show are convenient for illustrating postcolonialism, American multiculturalism, postmodernism, and, of course, popular culture.

A fourth season episode, “Pangs” (4.8), can illustrate both American multiculturalism and postcolonialism, besides starting an in-class debate over the necessity of modern people attempting to make up for the crimes of their ancestors. The episode takes place around Thanksgiving. During the groundbreaking for a new Cultural Center at UC Sunnydale, an avenging spirit of the Chumash Indians is released. Buffy and her friends are unsure of how to deal with the spirit; Willow believes that it’s justified in its vengeance-seeking, Giles believes that they should kill it because it is killing people, and Buffy is torn between the two opinions. Spike, annoyed by their dithering, sums up the idea of colonization rather succinctly:

I just can’t stand all of this namby-pamby boo-hooing about the bloody Indians. [. . .] You won, all right? You came in and you killed them and
you took their land. That’s what conquering nations do. It’s what Caesar did, and he’s not going around saying, “I came, I conquered, I felt really bad about it.” The history of the world isn’t people making friends. You had better weapons, and you massacred them. End of story. (4.8)

Willow and Buffy are willing to hear the spirit’s side of the story, to bring its voice into the open, but when it lays siege to Giles’ house in an attempt to kill Buffy—whom it sees as the leader of the “tribe” since she’s the strongest fighter—any attempt at negotiation is off, and Buffy has to kill it before it can kill them.

By creating *Buffy*, Whedon has criticized the horror genre in a postmodern manner and provided an illustration of the use of postmodern criticism. Whedon stated in many interviews that the inspiration for *Buffy* came from a sense of sympathy for the blonde girl in the beginning of horror movies who goes into an alley and ends up dead. He thought about how “cool” it would be if the blonde girl went into the alley not only knowing the monster was there, but being ready for it and killing it. His intent in creating *Buffy* was to introduce a strong female character into popular culture as well as subverting horror genre stereotypes. The very first scene in the show illustrates this subversion: a couple breaks into Sunnydale High late at night. The boy is obviously up to no good, telling the girl she can “count on” getting “in trouble.” When the girl is sure that there’s no one else stalking the halls, she turns to the boy, her face changing to the “demonic visage” of the vampire, and bites him. Rather than the boy being the dangerous one, intent on killing the girl, it is the other way around. And it’s no accident that the girl, Darla, is blonde and petite (1.1). Whedon’s intentions for the show are postmodern in nature. Most horror movies involve punishing teenagers, usually for
experimenting with sex, which promotes the cultural morality that seeks to keep children chaste and pure. In *Buffy*, nobody dies immediately after or as a result of having sex. While sex does have its consequences, they are not fatal. Only one character, Buffy, is underage when engaging in sexual activity for the first time, and her consequences are the most severe. When Xander and Willow lose their respective virginities, they are both eighteen or very close to it. Willow does not suffer any negative consequences, since her encounter was a true sharing and expression of love within the confines of a healthy, equal relationship (3.21). And Xander’s consequences, while negative (Faith tries to strangle him when he attempts to talk to her a few weeks after they have sex), are not directly tied to his sexual encounter with Faith, but to her own insanity (“Consequences,” 3.15). Whedon claims that he is not trying to tell teenagers they “must boff! You must boff now, boff each other, do it!” but he wants the consequences to “resonate on a normal emotional level instead of on some evil higher power that must put an ax into their heads just because they dared to have sex” (Whedon, Commentary).

Popular culture theory might be the most enjoyable for the students because it would not immediately seem to be work. This part of the class would involve examining the text of *Buffy* to discover what literature, film, art, and TV has influenced *Buffy*. References to other cultural artifacts abound in each episode of the show. Even well-read students might need to look up many of the references since Whedon and his fellow writers do not discriminate on the basis of high or low culture; they refer to all of it equally. For example, in a single episode in season three, “Band Candy,” the characters refer to *Real World*, Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, NBC’s
Nightline, Billy Joel, Welcome Back, Kotter, Juice Newton, Burt Reynolds, Esquire, and KISS (3.6).

While using this criticism, the students would also explore major literary works, movies, religions, and mythologies that contribute to the larger themes and arcs. The most obvious influence is Stoker’s Dracula, but influences from other literature are present as well. For instance, the idea of a vampire with a soul first appeared in Anne Rice’s Interview with the Vampire. The writers have also borrowed ideas from Shelley’s Frankenstein, Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Apocalypse Now, among others.

The magic system in the series is nominally based on Wicca—the witches refer to themselves as Wiccans and often discuss the balance of the elements and the Mother Goddess—although the witches are capable of feats, such as floating pencils and teleporting, that are not possible for Wiccans.

Popular culture criticism would also explore the impact of Buffy on the culture. Students could examine the fan culture of Buffy, which would involve reading novels based on the series as well as fan fiction, exploring online communities, finding—and possibly attending—Buffy conventions, and otherwise interacting with the overt effect of Buffy on culture. More subtly, the success of Buffy has inspired many more Fantasy TV series, been referred to in popular series such as Charmed and Will and Grace, and influenced language by helping to introduce non-traditional word constructions. The characters often add suffixes, such as –y, –ness, and –age, to words that would not usually take these suffixes, creating words such as “kissage,” “explainy,” and “rampagey.” The characters also play with sentence construction, creating statements
such as “You’re so very much the person I wanted to see,” “Don’t you have an elsewhere to be?” and “And you’ll be stopping me how?”

_Buffy_ is metaphorical enough to provide examples of symbolic and mythological schools of criticism such as archetypal and psychoanalytic. It is thought-out enough to illustrate criticisms such as postcolonialism and postmodernism. The show is also popular enough to provide rich ground for popular culture analysis. As with any single text, it cannot illustrate every possible type of criticism, but it does manage to cover enough of them to provide a useful teaching tool. And the series is enjoyable enough to keep the students’ attention so they can learn the essentials of literary criticism and apply them to other texts whose underlying meanings and metaphors may be more difficult to discover.
CONCLUSION

“Stories are, in one way or another, mirrors. We use them to explain to ourselves how the world works or how it doesn’t work. Like mirrors, stories prepare us for the day to come.”
--Neil Gaiman, *Smoke and Mirrors*

Fantasy literature may never be “mainstream.” Too many assumptions have been made about its lack of literary quality and threat to children, however ill-founded, for that to happen. However, none of the arguments given by critics I have mentioned are legitimate reasons to continue to exclude Fantasy from or neglect it in the classroom. The benefits, both literary and psychological, are too great. Most works of Fantasy are just as layered, dense, and intertextual as *Buffy* and may serve as equally effective or even better teaching tools. Teachers should not prevent students from enjoying the literature they are learning about or analyzing. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, literature was made for enjoyment, and often literature courses force students to take their reading material so seriously that they forget to take pleasure in their reading. Forcing students to be too serious about their literature only leads to the sort of elitism that has caused the neglect and exclusion of Fantasy that we see now.

While not every professor can study, publish on, and teach Fantasy, I am sure that many more can than are. Even acknowledging the genre status of some literature that is already taught—Romance, Gothic, and mythology, for example—as Fantasy literature can go a long way toward undoing the bias against Fantasy that has taken root in schools. In many cases, college may be the best time to introduce students to Fantasy if they have not been exposed to it in primary or secondary school, whether due to parents insisting on
banning Fantasy literature from the school, teachers refusing to teach anything but “realistic” fiction, or the school simply lacking available Fantasy literature.

A lack of exposure to imaginative literature has been shown by psychologist Jerome Singer to cause an inability to create internal stimuli and a greater tendency toward mental illness. Likewise, Joseph Campbell theorized that failure to educate children about mythology causes an inability to integrate into society, which causes a fragmentation of society. Far from causing unhealthy escapist tendencies, Fantasy literature can actually protect against them. Denying students access to Fantasy literature is potentially dangerous to their mental health.

Not all students will enjoy Fantasy, just as not all students enjoy Victorian literature, for example. However, how are they to know whether they enjoy Fantasy if they are never exposed to it or given a chance to treat it as seriously as they treat Victorian, Romantic, Appalachian, or Shakespearean literature? At the same time, it would be a mistake to try to treat Fantasy so seriously that it loses all of its magic. To do so would defeat the entire purpose of Fantasy literature. Fantasy is just as legitimate a genre for analysis and teaching as any genre now taught in schools, and should be embraced, not avoided.
WORKS CITED


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<http://hdl.handle.net/2123/932>.


Stevenson, Gregory. *Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.  


“Welcome to the Hellmouth.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete First Season.*


APPENDIX
CARROLL FANTASY-LIKING QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Fill in the circle that applies most accurately to you. Remember, all information is confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I do not have a good imagination.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I act comfortably with others.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I am not interested in abstract ideas.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I do not believe in a universal power or a God.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I can talk others into doing things.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I have difficulty imagining things.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>7. I adjust easily.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I avoid philosophical discussions.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I don't mind being the center of attention.</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I seldom daydream.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I rarely have fantasies that include intricate details.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. I do not enjoy going to art museums.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am a spiritual person.</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>15. I seek to influence others.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. I seldom get lost in thought.</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. I enjoy wild flights of fantasy.</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I do not like art.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I am who I am because of my faith.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I take charge.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I indulge in my fantasies.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I tend to vote for conservative political candidates.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I believe in a universal power or God.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I want to be in charge.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I have a vivid imagination.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>I act as if I’m somebody else and completely identify myself with the part.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>I believe that each person has a purpose in life.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>I dislike being the center of attention.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>I am a very private person.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>I believe in the importance of art.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>I have spent at least 30 minutes in the last 24 hours in prayer or meditation.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>I don't like to draw attention to myself.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>I like to get lost in thought.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>I am apprehensive about new encounters.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>I carry the conversation to a higher level.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>I keep my faith even during hard times.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>I don't talk a lot.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>I love to daydream.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>I confuse fantasies with real memories.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>I enjoy hearing new ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>I know that my beliefs make my life important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>I am the life of the party.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>I keep in the background.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>I spend time reflecting on things.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>I feel that fantasy is more powerful than reality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>I tend to vote for liberal political candidates.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please indicate your opinion of the following items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Like</th>
<th>Somewhat Like</th>
<th>Neither Like or Dislike</th>
<th>Somewhat Dislike</th>
<th>Strongly Dislike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>American Idol</em></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</em> (the series)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Xena: Warrior Princess</em></td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. <em>Survivor</em></td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Harry Potter</em> (the books)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Cold Mountain</em> (the book)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <em>Confessions of an Heiress</em></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <em>The Lord of the Rings</em> (the books)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. <em>The Princess Bride</em></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. <em>The Devil Wears Prada</em> (the movie)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. <em>Labyrinth</em></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. <em>Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby</em></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please answer the following questions about yourself. Fill in the circle that applies most accurately to you. Remember, all information is confidential.

1) Are you Male or Female?
   - Male
   - Female

2) What is your age?
   - 18-21
   - 22-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51-60
   - 61 or older

3) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
   - less than High School
   - High School/GED
   - Some College
   - 2-year College Degree (Associates)
   - 4-year College Degree (Bachelor's)
   - Master's Degree
   - Doctorate

4) What is your current marital status?
   - Single, Never Married
   - Married
   - Separated
   - Divorced
   - Widowed

5) What is your race?
   - White
   - African American
   - Hispanic
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Native American

6) Did you attend secondary school (high school or below) in the United States?
   - Yes
   - No
7) What genre of stories do you prefer to read?
   o None
   o Non-Fiction
   o Romance
   o Fantasy
   o Science Fiction
   o Manga/Anime
   o Other Fiction

8) About how many books in your preferred genre do you purchase for your own enjoyment in a month?
   o None
   o 1
   o 2
   o 3
   o 4
   o 5 or more

9) How many books in your preferred genre do you read for your own enjoyment in a month?
   o None
   o 1
   o 2
   o 3
   o 4
   o 5 or more