

elements are another level of metaphor which introduces the contemplation of the metaphysical—a contemplation which spills out over the end of the episode, as we are plunged into mystery. If we accept the fact that all television is constructed, then we may see that the distance between the symbols capable of inhering in “realistic” texts are not so far from the symbology of fantasy after all. I once heard Ursula Le Guin say, with a cheerful sarcasm at the sociopolitical implications of the terms, “Women write fantasy. Men write ‘magical realism’.” If I may advert briefly to Žižek’s work on Lacan, we might say that neither realism nor fantasy is Real; both are variant kinds of the Symbolic. Those who do not recognize or maintain consciousness of the constructedness of television are less likely to accept the connection. I hope that we will work to expand the still generally accepted definition of Quality TV so that work such as “The Body” will be honored as it deserves.

Chapter 12

Song:

Singing and Dancing and Burning and Dying

Once More, with Textual Feeling¹

True to his title in his last act, [he] has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all courts ... where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally—inborn, inbred ...—Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.

The omniscient narrator in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens (346)

Xander: Somebody set people on fire? That’s nuts! ...

Giles: Certainly emotions are running high, but as far as I could tell the victims burnt up from the inside. Spontaneously combusted. I just saw the one—I managed to examine the body while the police were taking witness arias.

“Once More, with Feeling” (6.7) by Joss Whedon

The musical [has a] heartfelt belief that musical movies are born of spontaneous combustion. The more sophisticated ones set out to destroy this illusion.

Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (45)

In the spring of 2002, I was invited to give a lecture about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to a general audience, not academics, at Atlanta's Eyedrum, a nonprofit arts and music organization. During the discussion afterwards, we turned to "Once More, with Feeling," and I asked the audience if anyone knew the other most famous fictional occurrence of Spontaneous Combustion. Almost immediately, someone piped up "Dickens" and then someone added "*Bleak House*."² In the fall of that year, I discussed the Dickens-Whedon connection further in a talk at the University of East Anglia's "Blood, Text, and Fears" conference, comparing Joss Whedon's *Buffy Summers* and Esther Summerson, the creation of Charles Dickens, whom Whedon has called one of his favorite writers. In *Bleak House*, the novel for which Esther serves as the narrator for half the chapters, Dickens uses Spontaneous Combustion as a metaphor for the self-destruction of either an individual or an institution involved in secrecy and pretense. Whedon's use of the metaphor in "Once More, with Feeling" is clearly parallel. One could also, however, suggest that he spontaneously combusts the standard relationships of traditional musical comedy, as well.

The Dickens literary connection is only one of a myriad of connections laid in place by this episode of *Buffy*. The simple fact that television calls on multiple media is often ignored by those who wish to criticize its art. Joss Whedon and Co. use multiple avenues of communication and enrich the text of every episode by references both to their own earlier and upcoming episodes, and to other texts from a wide variety of fields. The sixth-season episode "Once More, with Feeling" is one extraordinary example of this richness. Allusions (verbal, visual, musical) to the worlds of literature, film, television, and music play through the episode. From Dickens to Disney, from Simon and Garfunkel to Sondheim, "Once More, with Feeling" is a constant dance of reference.

At the same time as the episode has viewers mentally reaching out to other texts, it is drawing us in to the emotional core of the characters' lives, including their moral and philosophical quests. One of the major themes of *Buffy* has always been the importance of community. As major characters struggle into their adulthood, "Once More, with Feeling" depicts the difficulty of balance between the individual and the community—

"Understand we'll go hand in hand, but we'll walk alone in fear," they sing in the finale—just as it depicts the interplay between solo and harmony, duet or group. (Compare the double narration of Dickens's *Bleak House*—the story of the individual interwoven with the panorama of society.) The device of the episode—having the characters magically forced to sing their true feelings—works like a soliloquy, in that we can be assured we will hear interior truth for that character.³ This magical assurance of emotional truth counterbalances the high consciousness of textuality in the episode.

In my title, I refer to textuality. I am here using the term to subsume extratextuality (reference to the "real" world outside the text), intertextuality (reference to other texts), and intratextuality (reference to other elements within a long text such as the *Buffy* series). The very fact that "Once More, with Feeling" was originally broadcast for 68 minutes—breaking from the series' normal 60-minute time slot in a fashion almost unprecedented for narrative television (as opposed, for example, to televised sporting events)—meant that the audience was unusually conscious of its straining at textual bounds (see Chapter 7). Pre-broadcast extratextual information meant that faithful viewers of the series in a sense cooperated in the break with the standard format, thus entering the viewing experience with a heightened consciousness of form. As Anahid Kassabian says, "The boundary between unconscious and conscious processes is permeable" (88).

As the characters balance the drive toward their individual searches with communal caring and purpose, the audience balances textual consciousness with emotional immersion. Just so, performers who practice a scene "once more, with feeling" must both attend to formal details of presentation and simultaneously invoke emotion. This balance can be found within the episode, and one can hear Hollywood harmony at the end. Analysis of the episode as a standalone production, however, provides an incomplete picture of the re-visioning of the musical genre offered by the episode when it is viewed as a part of the larger *Buffy* text.

The balance between textual immersion and distance is key to Jane Feuer's discussion of *The Hollywood Musical*. Feuer argues that "The Hollywood musical as a genre perceives the gap between producer and consumer, the breakdown of community designated by the very distinction between performer and audience, as a form of cinematic original sin" (3). She notes that the pretense of spontaneity is a standard technique to induce immersion and identification. Furthermore, many musicals—such as "backstage musicals"—include an internal audience to cue us emotionally (26–7) and to bridge that breakdown. We are offered a "doubled or split

identification of both stars and internal audience" (29). For those films for which there is no diegetic performance, no play-within-a-play, Feuer argues that "proscenium or stage-like arenas are often created" (23) so that, for example, Judy Garland is framed in windows in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (23–4). In other words, the distance between performer and audience is created only to be collapsed, for the pleasure of being overcome. Along the way, Feuer notes that techniques of apparently distancing the viewer from the fiction—such as the use of direct address by a performer—can, in fact, be used to give quite the opposite effect depending on the context. "One may argue that direct address is inherently subversive or radical. It is not," she says (39) and instances the difference between the subversive effect of a Godard film, on the one hand, and the wink to the audience of Maurice Chevalier, who allows viewers to imagine a connection to the fictional world. Thus in even sophisticated Hollywood musicals, Feuer contends, there is a process of distancing or "demystification and remystification ... The narrative gets sutured back together again for the final bow" (43–4). I would like to offer her ideas as critical background in part to make clear the originality and effectiveness of what UPN called *The Buffy Musical*.

Buffy has always used sound, music and musical reference very consciously. Janet Halfyard has analyzed at length the theme song's play with traditional genre and gender tropes (as well as the interrelationship with the theme song of the *Angel* series). As with many other categories of knowledge, the Buffy writers assume of the audience a familiarity with and ability to reference Hollywood musicals. In Season Two's "The Dark Age," after Jenny Calendar has emotionally withdrawn from Rupert Giles because of an encounter with a demon from his Ripper past, she says that she is fine—"I mean I'm not running around, wind in my hair, the hills are alive with the sound of music fine, but I'm coping" (2.8). His later unhappy translation of this for Buffy is the brief, sad, but humorously inexplicit report that "The hills are not alive." The characters in the Buffyverse do not live in the emotional world of *The Sound of Music*; its Nazis are eminently more escapable than the vampires and demons which incarnate the evil that imbues Buffy's world.

Not only allusion to the world of music but music itself, and sound, are delicately employed in the series. In "The Body" (5.16), there is non-diegetic music. At a particularly poignant moment, when Buffy, coming to terms with her mother's death, stands with her face in the sun looking out over the threshold of her back door, she hears the sounds of life proceeding—children's voices, the distant rush of the ocean, and a

horn playing scales. The rise and fall of the notes is faintly irregular and inexpert; it suggests someone making an effort, someone learning, and—as the scales continue—the idea of life persisting. As Kassabian says, there is an "attention continuum" (52) with some music, particularly vocalized music, more consciously notable; but the sounds in this scene in "The Body" cooperate to create a finely tuned emotional and thematic effect.

The emotional effect of the diegetic use of "Tales of Great Ulysses" in "Forever" (5.17) depends on, among other things, its being doubly allusive. When Giles and Joyce listen to the Cream song in "Band Candy" (3.6), in which they magically lose their inhibitions and return to an exaggeratedly emotional state, the song served to signify, through its connection to the sixties, Giles's Ripper attitude. We also see that for this encounter, Joyce is going to be sharing his music and following his attitude, rather than the reverse. Thus the first level of the allusion. In the episode "Forever," Giles plays the music again after Joyce's funeral, and it serves as an emotional connection to the past and a reward to faithful viewers, the recognition of the musical reference allowing a consciousness of involvement with the series' fictional world. This particular musical instance of continuity is widely cited by scholars and fans alike; Viv Burr, in *The Refractory*, for instance, cites it as an example of intertextuality (or what I would here call intratextuality) creating connection for fans.

A very different effect is created by Giles's own song in his dream sequence of the fourth-season finale "Restless" (4.22). Giles repeats Willow's focus on performance in dream—hers dealing with acting, his with singing—as he performs a song in the Bronze with Xander, Willow, and other Bronze patrons listening. But the song is at the same time a declaration of information—operatic in function, though not in style—as Giles ponders aloud the mystery of their dream danger. As Halfyard says in her essay "Singing Their Hearts Out," "Effectively, this song manages to be both diegetic and non-diegetic simultaneously. Although Giles clearly knows he is singing, he and everyone else fail to perceive what we the audience do, namely that the song itself is abnormal, the usual rules of musical diegesis having been suspended by the dream-state" (14). While Giles's playing "Tales of Brave Ulysses" serves to bind viewers to the characters' world, awareness of the nature of Giles's "Restless" dream song, in contrast, separates viewers from characters (though this may serve to indicate a failure in perception on the part of the character, and does not necessarily indicate a separation of viewer from identification with the text).

Throughout the series, then, there is a precisely effective use of music and sound. By the time of the sixth season—their “baroque period,” as Marti Noxon called it—Whedon and Co. could draw on considerable expertise in these techniques as well as in the use of narrative, language, and visuals. Michael Dunne argues in the forthcoming *Hollywood Musicals: Singing and Dancing, Fear and Loathing, and Big Production Numbers* that “Once More, with Feeling”’s “self-conscious separation of ‘natural’ diegesis and ‘unnatural’ musical production numbers would seem to fulfill Bertolt Brecht’s program for denaturalizing art” (14). Of the standard “fused” production Brecht complains, with imagaic prescience, that “Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against” (38). And in “Once More, with Feeling” we share in fighting the spell.

Even before the episode aired, as Halfyard notes, the trailers “combined clips from the forthcoming show with footage of the actors both rehearsing in a dance studio and singing in the recording studio” (15) and, as I’ve mentioned, Joss Whedon let it be known through the Internet and the popular press that the episode would run long—both of these pre-episode tactics leading to demystification.

Consciousness of the textual form is interwoven with reminders of the story in which we are to lose ourselves (“It’s wonderful to get lost in a story, isn’t it?” Andrew asks in “Storyteller,” 7.16). The “Previously on Buffy” segment locates us in the narrative. It appears on screen immediately after UPN informs us that we are about to see a “television event”: “The Buffy Musical”—in itself an extratextual direction towards heightened textual awareness. The first words we hear in the “Previously” are Spike’s declaration of love to Buffy, and we see her rejection. The images show us Buffy physically reincarnating as she returns from the dead, brought back by Willow, Tara, Anya, and Xander. Buffy has told only Spike, however, that she feels that she has been torn out of heaven by the return; while insisting that they cannot tell the others, she has become conversationally close with him in spite of rejecting his advances. Xander and Anya, in contrast, have finally openly declared their intention to get married. The troubled Dawn, we are shown, has been stealing. The “Previously” images do not make clear (though seasoned viewers know) that her thefts are unrecognized, but the images do make clear that Buffy has attempted to pass off to Giles the parental burden of dealing with whatever is troubling Dawn. We are also shown that Willow, who led the group in returning Buffy to this life, has been accused by Tara of “using too much magic” and has in response—in one of the most chilling moments of the series—magically

wiped her lover’s memory. With the “Previously on Buffy” segment, we are reminded that this episode is part of a longer narrative, a narrative which some viewers will know well, others in part, and some very little or not at all—except that they will have garnered information from the “Previously” segment, if they attend to it.⁴

The episode proper begins with distancing, demystification, through various avenues, many of them allusive. The Buffy theme song, as Halfyard has noted, normally starts with instrumentation recalling horror movies and shifts to rock instruments, thus indicating the series’ genre-bending take on horror, with the rock music associated with the feminist hero Buffy (“Love, Death”). For “Once More, with Feeling,” instead of a rock arrangement, there is an orchestral arrangement of the theme song with instrumentation and rhythm recalling 1950s and 1960s television. The visuals add to the effect: the names—series title, characters, actors, and creator—are presented in cartoon red lettering, and the faces (not including Whedon’s) are presented in cartoon outline, in sepia colors. I thought of the *Bewitched* series and was confirmed in my impression by Keith Topping’s having made the same connection (75)—though the *Bewitched* opening uses even more cartoon elements and a different tempo and instrumentation.

After the commercial break, the screen again shows cartoon red lettering with the episode title. Incidentally, for Keith Topping the episode title is an allusion to Joan Armatrading’s “Love and Affection” (71), while for Michael Dunne (11), it is a reference to the title of a “1960 Stanley Donen film starring Yul Brynner and Kay Kendall and the Broadway play on which it was based, with all the aura of musical show business common to both.” For the first several moments of the action on screen, we hear an orchestral overture and are given glimpses of the characters without, however, hearing any dialogue; furthermore, their motions are correlated with the rhythm of the music. All of this goes towards creating distance—the conscious realization that we are watching a special episode, which is balanced for many of us against an emotional investment of many years’ standing. And this pull of distancing vs. emotional identification can be seen in the group dynamics of the characters as well.

Other credits run as the overture proceeds; the penultimate credit acknowledges Joss Whedon for the music and lyrics of the songs, and last we see that the episode was written and directed by Whedon; these letters disappear from the screen just before the first notes of the first song number. The Buffy series has been noteworthy to many of us for its emphasis

on communal values and group cooperation which directly undercut the declared solo heroics of the standard opening voiceover claim that “she alone will fight the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness.” In this episode’s so-called “I Want” song for the protagonist, however, Buffy makes clear that she feels cut off from that sense of connection; in fact, she feels cut off from life—and to reconnect is what she wants. Buffy’s anomie (as Dunne terms it) is hardly a standard old-time musical complication (though one could reference more modern works such as Fosse’s *All That Jazz*). The adult nature of her emotional problem is emphasized by contrast with the fact that this number is what Whedon calls the “anti-Disney.” (It might be seen as having some elements in common with the opening number of *Beauty and the Beast*—in itself a variant on the usual Disney because of the heroine Belle’s unhappiness with small-town anti-intellectuals. But Buffy’s number is certainly anti-the-usual-Disney.) Instead of dancing with cute little mice, or tea cups, or sea creatures, she dances with monsters. Instead of closing her song in a Little Mermaid’s spray of hair and foam, she is framed in a spray of vampire dust (76)—ashes of the dead cheerfully crossing musical comedy with horror. (Someone should contrast the camp of *Rocky Horror* and *Little Shop of Horrors*.) And the capital H Handsome Young Man she rescues—with his Disney-like flowing white shirt and shining blond hair—who by all appearances should be playing the role of romantic hero—is so far from interesting her that he does not even merit formal rejection, merely the one word “Whatever” before she turns away from him. It is appropriate that the alienated Buffy is singing solo, only heard by the monsters—though they are occasionally harmonious.

The next number, “I’ve Got a Theory,” purports to celebrate the sense of community. Giles, Xander, Anya, Tara, Willow and Buffy try to decide how to deal with the curious situation in which people all over town (including a large dancing chorus of customers expressing the ecstasy of successful dry cleaning) tell their feelings in song. The “Theory” number is structured with various solo vocals as different characters express different theories—from Giles’s spot-on but self-dismissed “dancing demon” to Anya’s bunnies—culminating in Buffy’s solo question “What can’t we face if we’re together?” which is then reiterated in choral unison by the Scoobies. The singers look into each other’s eyes as they sing, then conclude by turning to face in the same direction—as if towards the edge of a stage—though not directly into the camera. The superficial vocal and visual togetherness, however, is undercut lyrically by Buffy’s theory that “it doesn’t matter”; and though she then seems to say we don’t need to care

because we can be confident of success, she also adds that, since these are “the same old trips, why should we care?”—a question which Giles hears clearly, if the others do not.

As noted, the device of the episode is that the characters are involuntarily expressing their hidden feelings; as Dickens long ago suggested, “false pretences” can lead metaphorically to spontaneous combustion; as the Lord of this dance, the demon Sweet, says, “Some characters just die combusting”—apparently those who were holding in so much that the final release is overpowering. But there needs to be someone to listen to the vocal expression. In “I’ve Got a Theory,” the Scoobies chant the same old message to each other. When Giles tries to tell Buffy that he is “standing in the way,” however, she does not look him in the eye; instead she moves right into that training montage from a 1980s movie which she had declared she wished to avoid, dancing by him as he sings, and concludes his solo by asking him, “Did you say something?” When Spike sings “Rest in Peace,” she rolls her eyes, but at least she listens.

Towards the end of the episode, “Walk Through the Fire” operates like the “Tonight” number in Sondheim and Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, cutting from character to character in different locations as they sing first separately, then in interwoven parts, just as they move together physically as well.⁵ But “Walk Through the Fire,” in the Christophe Beck/Jesse Tobias arrangement, begins with the same guitar notes that open Simon and Garfunkel’s “Sounds of Silence,” that ultimate ode to the failure to communicate. And for that matter, the “Tonight” number in *West Side Story* propels us towards tragedy.⁶ Michael Dunne praises “I’ve Got a Theory,” saying, “The song sets all of the characters in motion and even predicts the ultimate resolution because Buffy does need the help of others to stand up to Sweet in the end.” But as Buffy and her friends seem to move towards each other in “Walk Through the Fire,” they are not simply singing of the traditional idea of going through difficulty for each other, walking through fire for each other; they end the song by singing that they will “let it burn.” And, in fact, in the succeeding number, “Something to Sing About,” they do almost let Buffy burn: they are so shocked by her announcement that they have pulled her out of heaven, that they do nothing as she begins to spontaneously combust, to dance herself to death. It is the late-arriving Spike (presumably the most flammable among them) who stops her, not the group acting together (although Giles has earlier asked Tara and Anya to act as her “back-up”). It should also be noted that when Buffy uses direct address to the audience in “Something to Sing About”—looking at the

camera and singing “and you can sing along”—she is inviting the audience to share not the traditional musical wish-fulfillment, but her sense of lonely despair. No Maurice Chevalier here.⁷

The closing production number, “Where Do We Go from Here?” does bring the group together physically on the floor of the Bronze, which has become the stage of the small screen; but the number undercuts that togetherness in a variety of ways. While in “I’ve Got a Theory,” the Scoobies sing directly to each other, in “Where Do We Go,” they start the song scattered about the stage, facing different directions; only Buffy and Spike are facing each other, and they seem hardly to dare to glance at each other; similarly, Xander and Anya look at each other only briefly, and the others do not make eye contact. In fact, their placement echoes the positioning of the mourners in Edvard Munch’s 1893 painting *Death in the Sickroom*.⁸ Not only composition but color is significant. Costumer Cynthia Bergstrom notes, “Throughout the episode there was a very subtle color coding going on. I had picked various colors for each character” (74). In this scene at one point, the eight characters—an octave—stand in a line literally displaying all the colors of the rainbow. The rainbow could suggest joining in variety, or simply difference. But the interrelationships are even more specific: Willow and Tara are in complementary colors, violet and yellow; Xander and Anya are in similarly complementary orangey-brown and grayish blue; Spike and Buffy are dressed in the same colors of black and red. The separation of colors could, of course, indicate the separation of the characters—or, in Buffy and Spike’s case, the joining that would soon come. “The color coding,” as Bergstrom terms it, is perhaps most clearly apparent at the part of the production number which displays the tension between individual and group: all the characters stand in a diagonal line, clasping hands in a heavy-handed, mechanical fashion in time to the music, one after another, and then at once flinging apart from each other. The accompanying lyrics for this visual in the dance are “Understand we’ll go hand in hand, but we’ll walk alone in fear”—Not “We’ll walk alone in fear, but understand we’ll go hand in hand”—and it hardly takes a rhetorical expert to note the difference in the emphasis.

I could, and will, say more about this. But for now I hope that the main point of this section of the chapter is clear: “Once More, with Feeling” demonstrates that working in community is not a simple or easy thing. Its narrative, visual, musical, and dance structures challenge, without finally rejecting, this important Buffyverse value (though one should recognize that the nature of community in the Buffyverse is a debated issue). The

effect is all the more significant because the Buffy musical concomitantly questions the traditional Hollywood musical value of the concluding reintegration into the community. And this questioning finds repeated support in the episode’s various methods of demystification.

Jane Feuer, as I have mentioned before, demonstrates that many Hollywood musicals provide both demystification and remystification. In particular, she emphasizes that “Heterogeneous levels of reality are created so that they may be homogenized in the end through the union of the romantic couple” (68). Certainly one of the most memorable images from “Once More, with Feeling” is the concluding Buffy-Spike kiss, given the seal of closure with the “rising music” (Spike’s descriptive term from the next episode, “Tabula Rasa,” 6.8) and the big red “The End” shining over the couple (with just enough space between the words so that we can still see them kissing). There is much more to be perceived, however, in this conclusion. Furthermore, Feuer’s very useful discussion does not take cognizance of the kind of structure provided by the “Once More, with Feeling” episode as part of the Buffy series (though she does elsewhere acknowledge the difference in film and serial television’s long-term structure, *Seeing Through the Eighties*, 122). As Jamie Clarke says, “Music as utopian and therefore demonic interferes [with] and distracts from the day-to-day experience of living, suffering, and living as struggle. Indeed the significance of the episode within the series is to drag Buffy back from heaven/utopia and into the real world of struggle and slaying.” In the last section of this chapter, I would like to examine the two elements of closure linked by Feuer—the romantic union and the narrative structure. Do these romances make for, in Buffy’s words, “Something to sing about”?

In “Once More, with Feeling” there are three major romantic couplings: Xander/Anya, Willow/Tara, and Buffy/Spike. The ironically titled Xander/Anya number “I’ll Never Tell” is perhaps most clearly modeled on a traditional Hollywood couples dance; Anya calls it a “retro pastiche,” and not only the setting of their apartment, as Whedon points out (77), but also the clothing they wear evokes the 1930s—as costume designer Bergstrom confirms it was intended to do (74). They use direct address in a way that could be interpreted as bringing the audience into their humorous complaints (to receive Xander’s mugging unhappiness over Anya’s cheese, we must locate ourselves in the back of their refrigerator), and they invite identification by longterm viewers with intratextual references such as Anya’s complaint (referring to “Pangs,” 4.8) that “his penis got diseases from the Chumash tribe.” And they exhibit a seemingly chipper reflexivity,

such as Xander's irritation at Anya's vocal interruption: "This is my verse, hello!" At the end of the number, they fall together laughing in a typical musical comedy closing suggestive of the supposed spontaneity of their performance (cf. *Singing in the Rain*).

This, however, is not where we are allowed to rest. We cut immediately to Xander and Anya complaining vociferously to Giles about the experiences, and their unhappiness with each other, while still humorous, seems worrisome. Xander—who we later learn has set the whole business in motion—asks "And we're sure it's all connected—the singing and dancing and burning and dying?" His wording suggests to me the Siva dance of creation and destruction which we see so many times in life and in this series. (This is the scene in which we hear Giles speak of spontaneous combustion.) Anya also undermines the jolly audience connection by complaining, "I felt like we were being watched, like a wall was missing from our apartment, like there were only three walls, no fourth wall." Instead of the joy of barrier-breaking for the characters and those who identify with them, we are given a sense of loss of control. At the end of the musical we find that Xander, the least magical of the Scoobies, has invoked the demon of the dance—because, as he says, addressing Anya, "I wanted to be sure we'd work out. Get a happy ending." Even by the end of this episode, with Anya and Xander barely looking at each other, the musical comedy ending is in doubt; and before the end of the series we have seen Xander leave Anya at the altar and Anya return to being a vengeance demon—"There's wedding and betrayal." This is, as Whedon calls them, the "comic couple" (77).

Willow and Tara, instead of comedy, have a beautifully romantic number with Amber Benson's performance of "I'm Under Your Spell." Like Xander and Anya, they wear distinctive costumes—not evocative of the 1930s, but rather of an imaginary medieval romance. They, like Xander and Anya, at first seem to express ludic pleasure in the power of breaking through dramatic walls; as they whirl in the dance, they magically move from the idyllic park scene directly into their bedroom in an identification of magic, music, and sexual intercourse. But, once again, we are not allowed to exult in the completion of the experience. As Tara sings "You make me complete," she is interrupted in her magically third and presumably last iteration after the first three words: "You make me." There is a smash cut to Xander and Buffy complaining of Willow and Tara's "get-a-roomy" behavior, and high romance shifts gears to sexual comedy. We are not allowed that completion. The gears shift even further, of course, when Tara later realizes that being under Willow's spell is not a metaphorical but a literal matter. And, in the

subsequent "Tabula Rasa" episode, she charges Willow with "violating" her. It is worth noting that Willow sings very little in this episode; aside from the extratextual reason of Alyson Hannigan's request not to, in the context of the episode it means that we are not given too direct an indication of Willow's coming darkness. It also means that Willow does not sing to Tara. Once again the denial of the Hollywood happy ending is hinted at in the episode and demonstrated in the series as a whole. And of course series viewers, in re-watching "Once More, with Feeling," know that by the end of the season Tara will be dead. The interruption of the song corresponds to the interruption of the relationship.

This use of the interrupted song occurs again in what is perhaps the most startling break in structure for "Once More, with Feeling"—an extra musical number which occurs approximately a year later in a separate episode. No Hollywood musical ever managed such an effect as this. Whedon and Co. show us that television is capable of creating a structure which is temporally beyond the capacity of most other media. In the seventh-season episode "Selfless" (7.5), Anya flashes back to the time of "Once More," and we hear her sing another number about her relationship with Xander—one only she heard originally—in which she declares, in effect, her intention to give up her name and her self in order to become "Mrs. Xander Harris" (see Chapter 3). It closes with a smash cut from Anya singing of her joy in her wedding dress to Anya with a sword through her heart. Like the Willow/Tara relationship, the Xander/Anya relationship ultimately ends in death—again, after the episode is over, but within the series.

The central couple, Buffy and Spike, close the episode with a really smashing kiss (yes, it's a pun). The lyrics have just recited "the curtains close with a kiss, God knows"—and they kiss to the accompaniment of what Spike in a later episode describes as "rising music"—"all Gone with the Wind" ("Tabula Rasa"). Anyone who chooses to can focus on that wish-fulfilling image and sound; and Michael Dunne declares that Buffy "regains her lust for life ... That's what we would expect from series television." But, as Kassabian argues, all the elements of a musical scene should be taken into account. The visual and the orchestration are positive, but the lyrics of the group are calling attention to the fact that the scene is a closing cliché ("the curtains close with a kiss, God knows"). And the next lyrics, of course, are asking "Where Do We Go from Here?" The typical Hollywood musical ending is about having arrived. Furthermore, if we return to the earlier-mentioned pattern of expression and listening, individual and connection, it should be noted that Buffy and Spike break from the group,

interrupting the communion of the finale; even further, it is not at all clear that Buffy and Spike hear each other in the words they sing to each other for their episode conclusion. While Spike's lines offer the typical romantic view that his love lives beyond death—no idle hyperbole for a vampire—Buffy is simultaneously singing “This isn't real, but I just want to feel.” And again, the text continues beyond the episode. What lies in store for Buffy and Spike? Shattering sex, anguish, and ultimately death for Spike.

Clearly, the *Buffy* musical overtly refers to and then thoroughly undermines the Feuer pattern of the Hollywood musical both in its denial of the standard romantic union and its extraordinary disruption of structure at every level. It does this through intertextual references such as the anti-Disney number; it does this through extratextuality, such as viewers' awareness of the extra length of the broadcast; it does this through interruption of musical numbers; and it does this preeminently through intratextual connections such as the seventh-season song and the later romantic disposition of the characters. By the end of the series, every one of the core Scoobies has lost a significant other to death: the oldest, Giles, goes first, losing Jenny Calendar in Season Two; Season Six brings the death of Tara, and Anya and Spike die in the last episode of the series. In answer to the song's question, this is where they have gone.

This is not, however, the complete story. Consider further the concluding relationships of the couples. Xander and Anya become once again what Anya would call “orgasm friends.” There is no indication that they expect to marry, but they clearly forgive each other and make their peace. They both fight evil in the last battle of Sunnydale. Willow and Tara reconcile; they are torn apart by external forces rather than spontaneously combusting. And in the end, Willow achieves the self-acceptance and power that Tara would have wished for her. Buffy uses then renounces Spike—and then comes his attempted rape, his self-recognition, and his quest for a soul. At the point of his self-sacrificial death, Buffy is able to tell him that she loves him; for his part, he has been able to provide her with the self-confidence that allows her to share her power. In this world, the only certain source of happiness is not romance but virtue. Though *Buffy* thoroughly combusts the institution of the Hollywood happy ending, it shows a way to make a good end. It is part of the fascination of “Once More, with Feeling” that we can, if we wish, choose to select our relationship with the text and dwell on a happy ending—or we can share the struggle of the characters. Through various avenues (Internet discussion, scholarly conference, fanfiction, fan conventions, repeated viewings, etc.) we are

offered the opportunity to participate in an involvement with the text which surpasses such opportunities for the Hollywood musical film in terms of immediacy,⁹ continuity, and length; yet the text itself does not recommend wish-fulfillment, but right relationship with the world.

And in the end, we feel with the song. There is a joy in the realization of the music itself—of our ability to sing—that balances the pain of our suffering, that can give solace for human misery. Like the pleasure of the dance of language we have seen from Season One, the music in “Once More, with Feeling” holds off the tide of night. This musical was not “born of spontaneous combustion,” but of the triumphal, hard-won effort of scores of artists working in concert with a man of genius. The very existence of a work like *Buffy* shows us the power of our humanity. Where do we go from here? Like all great literature, *Buffy* returns us to reality. As Spike says, “Life's not a song”; and as Buffy later teaches us, “It's real. It's the only lesson ... It's always real” (“Lessons,” 7.1). By the end of the episode we see that “The curtains close with a kiss, God knows.” But by the end of the series we can see that it is “all connected—the singing, and dancing, and burning, and dying.”