

## **The Look of Blood**

Cyndi DeVito-Ziemer

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*“The look of [blood]  
Is in your eyes  
A look your smile can't disguise  
The look of [blood]]  
It's saying so much more  
Than words could ever say  
And what my heart has heard,  
Well, it takes my [life] away.”*

With apologies to Hal David and Burt Bacharach

According to common mythology, vampires are neither alive nor dead. They inhabit the space between the corporeal and the desiccated. The practice essential to vampiric existence is a need to feed on blood. After all, as Spike eloquently explains to Xander and the Scoobies in Season Five (Episode 22 “The Gift”) at a pivotal moment when the stakes are raised and it is Dawn’s, and then ultimately Buffy’s, blood in the balance, “‘Cause it’s always got to be blood. . .Blood is life, mag-brain. Why do you think we eat it? It’s what keeps you going, makes you warm, makes you hard, makes you other than dead.” Yet, there is a puzzling absence of blood visuals in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

In my paper, I will discuss some reasons for the ‘sanitary’ presentation of vampiric feeding and blood in *Buffy*, that is, why was there a lack of ‘wetter and redder’ in the show? Could the producers have been inhibited by the primary audience demographic, timeslot, network sensibilities and plotlines? As an art historian, I focus on the visual appearance and use of blood and its metaphors, utilizing the methodologies of visual culture and semiotics. In addition, I will discuss the special effect of ‘dusting’ a vampire and link it not just to decomposition but to the phenomenon of arterial blood spray. By applying what Rhonda Wilcox did as a reader, I will connect these elements to a more specifically visual analysis. This approach allows the consideration of the politics of viewing.