

## “Love’s a Funny Thing”: The “Divine Comedy” of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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The concept of physical entrances to the hell from our world, like *Buffy*’s Hellmouth, goes back well before the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE (Davidson and Seiler), but the best known is portrayed in Dante’s 13<sup>th</sup> century *Divine Comedy*. Whedon scholars have linked *Buffy* and Dante in other ways: Rhonda Wilcox contrasts *Buffy*’s season two “Innocence” with that of Dante’s tragic lovers Paolo and Francesca (111). Richardson and Rabb suggest that Sunnydale High’s motto “Enter all ye who seek knowledge” may be read as “an ironic echo” of the inscription over the gate to Dante’s *Inferno*, “Abandon all hope you who enter here” (*Inferno* 3.9) (16). Sakal compares *Buffy* to Beatrice, inspiring Spike as “a feminine ideal to be worshipped. . . . Like Dante, it is this love that moves [Spike] along the path to redemption” (248). While these analogies are intriguing, this paper will go further to argue that the three key principles which Anthony Esolen describes as “fundamental to Dante’s view of the world [and] that underlie the beauty of Dante’s poem” (xvii), may also help us interpret *Buffy* and its seven-season narrative arc: “Things have an end”—applies not only to *Buffy*’s destiny as Slayer (“end” as goal or fulfillment), but also to narrative structure(s) (“end” as finish). “Things have meaning”—we haven’t produced reams of “Whedon studies” from nothing. “Things are connected”—as Willow finally figures out, “It’s all connected.” These three principles, says Esolen, make the *Divine Comedy* a poem “not finally about wickedness and punishment, but about beauty and love” (xxvii)—and, I will argue, they make this show about slayage also, finally, a show about love. [297 words]

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