



Buffy Jack

One Vampire Slaying
Soldier Rides Away
aka
Requiem for a Diagesis

By Basil Joe Rocker 5/25/2003

There are heroes in this world. Some of these are only alleged to be so. They are called heroes, celebrated, yet are quite undeserving of the title. Quite often, they are only figureheads taking credit much more deserved by their subordinates or equals who did the dirty work. For we Americans, the prime example is Thomas Edison. He invented little, if anything. He merely took credit for the work of his employees. The employee had the imagination and did the work. However, Edison got the patent. This is one of the pitfalls of capitalism. Yee who has the capital takes the credit of labor. But I shall not digress into Marxist diatribe.

This is not to say all celebrated heroes are undeserving of their title.¹ Nor is it to state that all unsung heroes act in selflessness. After all, isn't purity nothing but a destructive myth?² A pure hero could not be human. The caveat is that a celebrated hero should be taken with a grain of salt. Their celebration is not without intent from the outset to gain such. They wish to be recognized far and wide for their efforts. Thus, the heroism is diminished by the egoism. The positive community,³ or those whom the hero serves, is merely a vehicle for the ego gratification of the alleged hero, and its preservation is not the heroic end in itself.

Most heroes on this planet are quiet and unsung. They do their work to defend, and often better the community, before slipping back into the shadows, often to see their work co-opted by grandstanders desperate for recognition no matter how undeserved it may be. These heroes continue to toil anonymously in the Tiny Ugly Postmodern World, a world where nothing happens and no one exists unless there is a headline or television news magazine segment espousing the virtues of the act, and thus the person.⁴ The daily hero, be it a he or she, is doomed to a normal life lived in quiet desperation, so much fodder for demographers and marketers who see him as nothing but a hero worshipper, a mere consumer of the image- the

image of the hero - the image of the so-called better life, a life outside his grasp.⁵ Indeed, the lifestyle, the aggrandizement of the egotistical hero may be outside his grasp. But the simple ability to be heroic is not. The egotistical hero devalues only the image of the true hero and not the value of the hero himself or heroism itself.

But on occasions, there are diegetic⁶ projections of the everyday hero. Their frustrations and cruel plight are writ large in metaphors and archetypes as easily recognized by modern youth as the aging Jungian. When we see these heroes on the screen, we recognize them, we empathize and resonate with them no matter their human faults and failings. In fact, the failings are more sympathetic than the heroism. These heroes are not Wagnerian Übermensches or Uberfraus, but ordinary people in extraordinary situations,⁷ rising above their limitations in the name of honor, courage, community and what has become a fading tenet in our world - justice, be it on the physical or metaphysical level. These heroes are us, fighting on behalf of us.

I have recently revisited one of my first cinematic heroes, one I discovered when I was maybe eight years-old in a rapidly deteriorating cinema built as a National Recovery Act project during the 1930's in a small North Texas town. This hero inhabits and gives name to one of the most overlooked films of the 1970's. While that decade in cinema was known as one of daring and anarchy in the film industry, one in which many young turks like Coppola, Scorsese, and others made their first marks, the most resonant film for me from that decade seems to escape most of the "best of" lists of and relating to that time. A recent IFC Magazine best of list of the 70's "rebel" films included *Harold and Maude*, *The Conversation*, and *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, but managed to completely miss the sprawling genius that is *Billy Jack*, and its relatives⁸. Most critics and even many laypersons consider this film a massive headtrip for Producer/Director/Star Tom Laughlin, and his partner in crime, Delores Taylor, who plays the incredibly strong and idealistic female lead in this film. Many have passed over the film as just so much dated late 60's/early 70's "down with the man" drivel. Yet there is a deep spiritual transcendence in *Billy Jack* in that the hero is not only acting as hero and protector of the community, but is seeking redemption from his sordid past. Billy Jack is not unlike late-*Buffy* Spike in a black hat decorated with a colorful Indian band, and functional denim in lieu of peroxide blonde hair and black leather.

Billy Jack is a reluctant hero, a former Green Beret disenchanted by the U.S. government's ill-advised forays into the Vietnam Civil War⁹ and the killing

of multitudes of innocents by U.S. soldiers in Southeast Asia. He tries to live alone in an abandoned Arizona Pueblo, shunning society, only to be called out by a needy community of pacifist artists and misfits who are being threatened by the violent hostility of rednecks in an adjacent town.

Sound familiar *Buffy* fans?

Though *Billy Jack's* narrative flow is very languid and "go with the flow" and miles from the crisp, clean, witty- snap, crackle and pop- narrative form that *Buffy* inhabits, the trials and tribulations of the reluctant community savior are incredibly similar, and *Buffy* seems to take no dearth of thematic cues from the former.

Like *Buffy*, *Billy Jack* is martial arts adept. In one dramatic scene, the former Green Beret takes down about 20 townies with nothing but his bare feet and hands. He is also a known factor in the less than savory community to which he is adverse - i.e. - the local townie, or redneck. In the *Billy Jack* diagesis, the rednecks serve the role that demons supply in *Buffy*. Indeed, like *Buffy*, he is also feared. In so many instances throughout the seven year tenure of the Slayer, no few rooms have cleared of demons and vampires upon the mere mention of "the Slayer," much less her actual presence. The same could be said of *Billy Jack's* ability to invoke "Uh-oh moments" among his adverse community.¹⁰

But unlike *Buffy*, *Billy Jack* is less in need of the community than it is of him in regards to the actual planning and execution of the fight against the adverse community. Though the Native Americans whose land he protects¹¹ give him spiritual guidance and lead him through initiation rites¹² to find his true calling, his other charges, the students and teachers of The Freedom School located on the reservation, only marginally assist in his attack plans and are never integral like the Scoobies.

At the end of *Billy Jack*, there is no concise victory over the adverse community. In fact, *Billy Jack* is arrested and hauled away to jail. In *Trial of Billy Jack*, the adverse community appears to win on the physical level. Yet the Spirit of the Misfit Community lives on. At the end of the *Buffy* Series, the opposite occurs. The adverse community is decimated, with the Misfits victorious. However, the spirit of the adverse community goes on. As Giles remarks, there is another Hellmouth in Cleveland, apropos.

I originally meant for this meditation to simply be called *Requiem for a Diagesis*, being that the *Buffy* Series was ending, and thus the end of the diagesis commonly known as the Buffyverse. But two things got in the way of this requiem for a story-world that has engrossed millions of hearts for seven years. One, I purchased the *Billy Jack* DVD and saw similarities between the two heroes which I could not resist riffing upon. Two, a casual stroll through a Castro District bookstore revealed the breadth and depth of the thoughts and words that have been dedicated to Our Dearest Slayer. An entire section was dedicated to Buffy fiction and books going into deep academic analysis of the Slayer and the Buffyverse. I bought several of these intending them to be used for ameliorating the pain of the loss.

Yet while devouring the fiction, and pondering the analyses, I realized that the Buffyverse was not created by Joss Whedon, but merely given form by him. This is not to discredit his genius, and indeed, his work in the Buffyverse is the closest the televisual medium has come to pure genius, ever. Like any great artist, Mr. Whedon has tuned his frequency to ideas and archetypes that have always been "out there," emanating within the waves of creativity, but never heard. He received, or "picked up," these messages, and rebroadcast them to the world. However, his sensitivity was acute not only in regards to the Buffyverse, but to the world to which he gave it. He resonated, basically serving as a conduit between the idea of *Buffy* and the hunger of a world famished for a hero who is super, yet human. Buffy makes mistakes, pisses off her friends, but is always tough enough to never give up on the fight for what is right and the people of the community

Comparing and Contrasting *Billy Jack* and *Buffy*

The Mission- Neither Buffy nor Billy Jack chose their mission. It chose them. Buffy was called by an ancient tradition in which only one girl in the world has the strength and power to fight demons, vampires, and the forces of darkness. Billy Jack, is chosen by the duty of the strong to protect the weak. He just happens upon his extraordinary situation by chance, and lives up to the task.

Super Powers- Buffy has super powers passed down by the ancients. Billy Jack has developed his own "super powers" through discipline, transcendental meditation, and strict adherence to the deeply spiritual ways of the Native Americans. He believes in the power of the medicine bag he wears around his neck that keeps him in tune "with life's forces." The character Barbara likens the medicine bag to Samson's hair.

Martial Arts- Both are way into and very good in the martial arts. The use of all the limbs, and the strength of the entire body enables them both to arise victorious when outnumbered.

The Misfit Community- Both defend communities of outcasts. Buffy has joined forces with a geeky gang called the Scoobies while Billy Jack defends and marginally associates with the misfits and runaways of The Freedom School. His only equal there seems to be the Directress, Jean. They may even be lovers. Buffy considers all the Scoobies her equals though they do not possess her super powers.

Initiation Rites- Buffy goes through two such rites involuntarily throughout her seven year tenure. Billy Jack volunteers for the Snake Ceremony as a means of concentrating his inner peace and strength.

Involvement of the Misfit Community in the Fight Against the Adverse Community- The Scoobies are an integral part of Buffy's heroism. She could not be victorious against the adverse community without them. Though Billy Jack tends to act alone, he does allow for moments of heroism among members of the misfit community. Though they are not integral to the fight, most members of the Freedom School seem to have the wherewithal to defend themselves or die trying. They are not damsels in distress, no matter their respective gender. Martin is a pacifist, but dies defending himself in a shoot out with the son of the town's most repugnant patriarch. Barbara chooses to risk her life with Billy Jack in a hail of bullets rather than go back to her physically abusive sheriff deputy father who is a classic redneck archetype if there ever was one- he acts tough, but is nothing but a fearful wimp deep down. He stands for nothing and falls for anything. He conforms due to lack of spine and imagination.

which that fight upholds, not matter how grotesque or transgressive those mistakes. *Buffy* highlighted the gray amid the black and white, and illuminated those shades as what makes us human, and what makes us all heroes just for getting up everyday and doing what we have to do- not just to survive, but to be truly alive.

As Spike sings to Buffy after stopping her self-immolation in "Once More with Feeling:"

*Life's not a song. Life
isn't bliss.
Life is just this.
It's living.
You'll get along. The
pain that you feel,
you only can heal, by
living.
You have to go on
living.
So one of us is living.*

Just after this refrain, little sister Dawn throws back Buffy's season five-closing, pre-swam dive line back into her face to remind her of her own preaching.

"The hardest thing in this world is to live in it."

It is messy, it is frustrating, and it is often cruel this life, but like some crazy dialectic, the collision of all that pain and confusion never fails to occasionally create something bright, shiny, and unique. *Buffy* not only illustrated that occasional heightened state of being, but, indeed, more often than not, was

Misfit Community as Tether to Humanity- Both Buffy and Billy Jack, despite being compelled by loner hero tendencies, are tethered to the world and their humanity by the misfit community. As Billy Jack defines "mental toughness" for Martin in a pivotal scene, "it is the ability to realize that you are human and make mistakes, yet keep doing your best despite those mistakes and the knowledge that you'll make more of them." That definition of Mental Toughness could well be the overarching theme throughout the seven seasons of *Buffy*. The theme applies not only to Buffy but the entire Scooby gang. This especially includes Angel, Spike, Anya, and Cordelia, characters who are seeking redemption for past transgressions.

Adverse Communities- Buffy has demons. Billy Jack has rednecks. Both adverse communities wish to quash to misfit communities by killing the hero. In fact, Buffy's demon community wishes to jettison humanity altogether. Neither succeeds. In a later *Billy Jack*, *The Trial of Billy Jack* (forgive me if I correlate the scene to the wrong film, I have not seen the other *Billy Jack* films in more than 25 years), the Freedom School is decimated in a fire, but the spirit of the community lives on. Both Adverse communities contain at least one vestige of sympathetic grayness toward the Misfit Community. Buffy has Angel, Spike, and Clem. Billy Jack has the Sheriff, the town doctor, and a couple of open-minded City Council members.

Ability to Strike Fear in the Hearts of the Adverse Community- The sensible members of the respective adverse communities avoid Buffy and Billy Jack. Those foolish enough to tangle with either of them usually wind up dead or seriously wounded. The wise members of the adverse community tend to either join the Misfit Community or broker peace between the opposing sides.

Triumph Over the Adverse Community- At the end of the *Buffy* series, the Hellmouth, the source of all demons, and the city of Sunnydale which sits atop it are destroyed. Still, there is talk of another Hellmouth in Cleveland. In *Trial of Billy Jack*, the last film of the trilogy (I'm completely discounting the ludicrous *Billy Jack Goes to Washington* as part of the story arch), the school is decimated by rednecks and government troops in what is essentially a recreation of the incident at Oglala in the early 70's. The gathering place of the community, like Sunnydale, is destroyed, but the surviving members of the community keep the spirit of that community alive. Buffy has the opposite resolution. The adverse community is destroyed. The Misfits win, but the spirit of the adverse community goes on, hence Giles remark about the other Hellmouth in Cleveland.

Cult Icon Status- Both diagenetic heroes have achieved cult status, though Buffy's appears to be more universal and timeless in scope. Billy Jack's iconic status appears to be limited to late 60's/early 70's nostalgia and

just that.

The Buffyverse is not ending. It is only ending in its televisual form. The myth, the legend, the icon, the diagesis will live on, perhaps forever.

residents and fans of Southwestern romanticism. *Buffy* on the other hand has spawned rampant enthusiasm among fans. This enthusiasm has itself spawned hundreds of *Buffy* books, numerous of them academic and analytical in nature. *Buffy* novels and fan fiction will keep the diagetical torch of the Buffyverse lit for some time to come, if not forever. *Buffy* as epic myth could well be elementary school Language Arts reading for our great great great great grandchildren and beyond. To go really out on a limb, Joss Whedon could achieve Homeric status.

MY TOP TEN *BtVS* Eps (Actually it Turns out to be Fave 20)

Okay, Everyone Else is Doing It,
Why Not Me?

- 1) **Once More With Feeling/S6-** The ep I can watch over and over again. Joss Whedon knew this venture into uncharted territory would be hit or miss. It was pure hit. Spot-on, one-nil. This is a musical in which a singing and tap dancing demon casts a spell on all of Sunnydale, making everyone reveal their deepest darkest fears and secrets in song and dance. The catch is, if you get too emotional, you turn into turbo Billy Elliot and you'll burst into flame. This is the pivotal ep of the Season 6 arch- Buffy reveals she was in heaven and that Willow's mojo has pulled her out of there. Buffy basically thinks that being back on earth sucks in the largest, most hideous sense of the word, and tries to immolate herself in one big final Flashdance. Spike stops her, and sings the series-defining lines per above, with a little help from Dawnie.

Fave lines from the ep: Buffy- "Dawn's in trouble. Must be Tuesday."

Buffy- "Well, I'm not exactly quaking in my stylish yet affordable boots, but there's something definitely unnatural going on here and that usually doesn't lead to hugs and puppies."

Xander- "Respect the cruller, and tame the doughnut."

Spike- "So, you've come to pump me for information." Buffy- "What else would I wanna pump you for? I really just said that, didn't I?"

Spike- "I've seen a lot of strange things in my life, but a 600 pound Chirago demon making like Yma Sumac. That one will stay with you. "

Tara- "Willow said they have a lead on the whole musical extravaganza evil. This demon that can be summoned, some sort of Lord of the Dance. But not the scary one, just a demon."

One could do a book on this episode. Plus, airing less than two months after the 9/11 attacks, the celebration of the feminine in the form of Buffy and the Willow/Tara relationship made the whole ep a triumph of Western Civilization.

- 2) **Doppelgangland/S3-** This one is Willow-centric, by far my fave character whom I worship like a goddess, an archetypal geekgirl paramour. The mousy, sweet girl Willow has her parallel-universe self revealed to herself and the world. The shy bookworm in this world is a steaming, pansexual dominatrix in the netherrealm. A great look at the duality of human nature and great foreshadowing of Willow's Season 4 blossoming. (Was that a pun?) It makes you wonder, how many people are all Librarian on the outside, and Heidi Fleiss on the inside. Yes, duality. If you like adventure, seek out the shy ones.
- 3) **The Zeppo/S3-** Viva Xander. The poor schlep, no special powers, but he manages to have the night of his life. He gets bouncy with bad-girl slayer, Faith, then saves the High School from detonation by a gang of teenage dead guys. The worst part. No one sees or knows of his heroism. See what I mean?
- 4) **This Year's Girl/S4-** Faith, the rogue slayer wakes from her Buffy-induced Season 3 coma to find out that her surrogate dad, the Mayor, has been killed in his attempt to ascend to a state of pure demon-ness, again, at the hands of Buffy, with a little help from her friends. She tries to kick Buffy's ass and fails, but uses a little gift left behind by the Mayor to Switch bodies with Buffy.
- 5) **Who Are You?/S4-** The continuation of "This Year's Girl," Faith has fun being Buffy while Buffy, looking like Faith, is arrested by the Council to be returned to England for punishment for being a bad, naughty slayer. This is the beginning of Faith's redemption. She sees that Buffy's life is more than an act, and that people really love her and she loves them back. Her tough girl act falls apart, and her self-loathing is revealed. This one also includes one of the best lines in BtVS history. Upon figuring out that Tara and Willow are involved, Faith in Buffy's body kicks back and languidly drawls in a moment of revelation, "So, Willow's not drivin' stick anymore." See the two actresses mimic each other's ticks and inflections is a treat in itself. The two actresses get it spot-on.
- 6) **Seeing Red/S6-** Season 6 was too dark for most folks. Not me. This episode was its darkest, and by far my favorite of that season, save OMWF. I thought the Spike/Buffy relationship of S6 was only natural, very primal- the undead Bad Guy and the recently risen Slayer just trying to feel alive again. This ep features the attempted rape of Buffy by Spike, and the death of Tara. Willow goes shouty crackers in the worst way, and the Seasonal Arch kicks up two notches.
- 7) **The Gift/S5-** the finale of S5. Buffy makes the ultimate sacrifice to save her sister and the world. If you didn't cry at the end of this one, you are not human.
- 8) **Grave/S6-** The finale of S6. Xander prevents Wiccapalooza Willow from destroying the world by declaring his love for her. Unknowingly dosed with good magic by Giles, Willow regains her humanity, and collapses in a lachrymose heap. This ep plays Greek tragedy to the hilt, and if you didn't cry...
- 9) **Restless/S4-** The finale of S4. This is a surrealist journey into the subconscious of the Scoobs. Their greatest fears and hopes are revealed, as are upcoming plot lines. Like

OMWF, this one has more layers than an onion. Giles sings and it is a total gas, man.

10) The Body/S5- Buffy's mom *est mort*. Unlike the majority (if not all) of deaths on *Buffy*, she is not killed by evil forces, but an aneurysm. The ep is quiet and meditative, a look into the mirror of our own mortality, and our tenuous nature of this mortal coil.

Very Honorable Mentions-

Passion/S2- Angel, having lost his soul following a moment of true happiness with Buffy, uh, hmf..cough, runs riot, teasing and torturing the Scoobs. One of the better eps visually, the editing is fluid and clever.

New Moon Rising/S4- Oz is back after storming off. Willow comes out of the Wiccan lesbian closet to her friends. Much poetry in the final shot.

The Wish/S3- How terrible life would be in Sunnydale sans Slayer who, come to think of it, lives in Cleveland in this ep. Yes, there is another Hellmouth there after all. Also Cordelia and Anya-centric. More naughty Willow. Whew Hoo!!! With naughty Xander, too.

I Robot, You Jane/S1- One of the more disparaged eps, I personally love this one because it is the first Willow-centric ep, introduces the concept of technopaganism, reveals Jennie Calendar as a wild woman hot to get bouncy with Giles, has a great conversation about books vs. computers, and ends with a beautifully poetic image of the three young scoobs realizing that they are the anti-Dawson's Creek.

Band Candy/S3- Hysterical ep where the adults revert to teenagers.

Selfless/S7- Anya revealed. Loved the Bergman homages and the use of real Swedish dialogue.

Conversations with Dead People/S7- Beautiful foreshadowing about Spike and his relationship to the first, and his indispensable role in saving the world.

Beneath You/S7- The conversation at the end of this ep where Spike reveals he has regained his soul is one of the finest scenes in the history of the series. It is more passionate than most of the heated Buffy/Angel scenes.

Lie to Me/S2- Grand statement on eternal youth and the narcissistic nature of vampirism. Anne Rice would be proud.

Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered/S2- Xander-centric with a catchy classic song title to boot.

Same Time, Same Place/S7- Willow's back in Sunnydale after a stint of Wicca Rehab in Merry Olde. But she has inadvertently cast a spell that keeps her from seeing her friends in Sunnydale. Another triumph in clever editing and non-linear narrative from the cast,

crew, and writing staff. This ep should be used as a textbook for editing and continuity classes at film schools.

The final score:

Season 1 - One Fave

Season 2- Three Faves

Season 3 - Four Faves

Season 4- Four Faves

Season 5- Two Faves

Season 6- Two Faves

Season 7- Four Faves

Fave Seasons- 3, 4, and 5

¹ Nelson Mandela, Ghandi, among others, come to mind. Of course, these, as is the mental state and intent of all heroes, are arguable.

² See Hitler, the Crusades, the recent Croats v. Serbs debacle, and other outbreaks of madness in the form of ethnic and/or religious "cleansing."

³ As opposed to the adverse community which I will dwell upon herein.

⁴ This is a reference to the Alice Donut song "Tiny Ugly World," a spot-on indictment of the ubiquitous striving of the modern individual's narcissistic craving for public recognition.

⁵ Again, refers to Alice Donut's "Tiny Ugly World."

⁶ Diagetis is the adjectival form of the noun Diagesis- a fancy media studies term for "world of the story."

⁷ I say this despite the fact that Buffy has Super Powers beyond the ordinary human. She is quite human and frail emotionally. Despite her special powers, she does not see herself as above the human fold. In fact, she revels in her humanity, rendering it as important, if not more important than "the mission" for which she uses the special powers. She tumbles in love, and out. She fights with her friends and authority figures. She could well use her superstrength to put herself above the fray, but chooses not to.

⁸ This includes *Born Losers*, *Trial of Billy Jack*, and *Billy Jack Goes to Washington*.

⁹ Robert McNamara has recently admitted that the U.S. military got involved in a Civil War in Vietnam while under the misbegotten impression that they were fighting a cold war, and thus their failure there.

¹⁰ By "Uh Oh moment," I mean a moment in which a member of the adverse community is suddenly and surprisingly confronted by the hero- either directly or indirectly. For example, an Uh-Oh moment in *Buffy* occurs when Buffy comes upon a feeding vampire. In *Billy Jack*, the Uh-Oh Moment (UUM) occurs when Billy Jack happens upon a redneck doing harm to one of his misfit community. The prime example is when he happens upon the son of the local corrupt big wig, dousing some of his Native American friends with flour to make them white, and thus acceptable to the ice cream vendor who wants to throw them out of his establishment for nothing more than having too dark skin.

¹¹ The Freedom School is located on the Reservation and there are numerous Native American students at the school.

¹² The initiation rite illustrated in *Billy Jack* is the "Brother Snake" ritual. Billy Jack is given special herbs by the Native Americans then put into a stone circle to be bitten repeatedly by a rattlesnake. The bites render him unconscious. If he is worthy of the Native way of life, he will experience rapture and find his true calling in life. If he is not, the snake's poison will kill him. This is reminiscent of the Season Three Episode "Helpless," in which Buffy is drugged and left without her super powers to defend her against a monstrous "Hannibal Lector" type vampire. She survives by sneaking Holy Water into his drinking glass. The big difference between the initiation rites of Billy and Buffy are that Billy Jack underwent the rite voluntarily, while Buffy was unwarily drugged by her Watcher, Mr. Giles. We're not really sure what the point of Billy Jack's rapture was and if he found his true calling. There is one scene during his rapture where he speaks of how the young white people are seeking the Native way because their Christian gods have failed them and no longer heed true spiritualism. The true calling is never explicitly stated, but only implicitly demonstrated by Billy Jack's defense of the youth seeking a higher understanding of the Native way.

Buffy underwent another involuntary initiation rite in Season Five's "Checkpoint."