Hello, and thank you all for coming this morning. My name is Jennifer Stuller, and for those who may not know, I’m a writer and pop culture historian. One of the many things that fascinates me about popular culture are the ways it shapes our values and personalities, and how it influences our work.

And because the Buffyverse is pop culture that has influenced me, I wanted to take a deeper look at it by exploring some of the comic books, cult television, and B-movies that inspired and influenced its creator, Joss Whedon.

As Roz Kaveney observes in her book, Superheroes!, creatives such as Whedon have “an obsessive habit of popular culture intertextuality in their dialogue and plotting … and their core work tropes are often derived from the favorite reading and viewing of their youth.”
In regards to what those favorite stories are, David Lavery has written, “We know quite a lot about Whedon’s influences . . . and Whedon has himself stated there are “almost too many to name.”  
Indeed, this is almost overwhelmingly true – and so I’ve had to be selective, choosing a mere handful of my faves of his faves – which all happen to focus on the Buffyverse. (Big surprise, right? ;)
So let’s begin our introduction to these pop culture influences with a delicious little multimedia taste of what they are and then I’ll come back and provide more context...
“There’s a whole recipe for how to make Buffy.” - Joss Whedon
Recipe for 1 Buffy Summers
From the Kitchen of Joss Whedon

1 cup, Sarah Connor

1 cup, Ripley

[and ] 3 tablespoons of the younger sister from Night of the Comet

"Take one cup Sarah Connor
from the first Terminator movie.

"One cup Ripley.

"[and] three tablespoons of the younger sister from Night of the Comet.

I wish I had time to talk about Sarah and Ripley . . .
• ...but

• since they're discussed at length in my book, I'll move on to the 3 tablespoons of Night of the Comet.
Night of the Comet was a big influence. That actually had a cheerleader in it. With a title that would actually make people take it off the video store shelves, because it has to sound silly and not boring.” - Joss Whedon

• 1984’s B-movie classic, *Night of the Comet* is a genre mash-up of horror, sci-fi, and comedy, about two teenage sisters who kick zombie ass in a post-apocalyptic SoCal.

• Our girl heroes are Sam and Reggie Belmont, two of the only survivors left after the Earth passes through the tail of a comet.
“Comet’s low-budget, B-movie roots are center stage with no apologies, and they make the movie work as much as anything else.” —Thom Eberhardt

• While this natural disaster has left most everyone else on the planet turned to either red dust or zombies, the Belmont sisters survive. First through the magic of B-movie science . . .
“Daddy would’ve gotten us Uzis.”

• ... and then through a combination of the military combat training they’d received from their father, quick wit, and a couple of allies.

• Older sister, Reggie, played by Catherine Mary Stewart, recognizes the severity of the situation and stresses to her kid sister that the “burden of civilization is upon us” — a sentiment echoed in the Slayer’s burden of being the “one girl in all the world.”

• Sam, played by Kelli Maroney, feels a more personal angst. In perhaps what is a response only a teenager could have to such an impossible event, she grieves not for the end of humanity, but for the fact that the boy she wanted to date is now dust.
Several themes from *Comet* can be detected in *Buffy*:

- the weapon-wielding high school cheerleader, teen angst over parents,
- teen angst over dead boyfriends, the blending of horror and humor, low-budget, B-movie roots,
- and the girl that kicks monster ass – in an alley no less.
• “Come here your ass.”
• “The Mac-10 submachine gun was practically designed for housewives.”
• “They said you were dead!”
• “They exaggerated. Totally.”

• “Alright... yes, date, and shop and hang out and go to school and save the world from unspeakable demons. You know, I wanna do girlie stuff.”
• “If the apocalypse comes, beep me.”

The influence of Comet on Buffy is also evident in its dialogue.

Lines such as “Come here your ass” and “The Mac-10 submachine gun was practically designed for housewives” surely served as stylistic inspiration for Buffy Speak:

“Yes, date, and shop and hang out and go to school and save the world from unspeakable demons. You know, I wanna do girlie stuff.”

And, “If the apocalypse comes, beep me.”
Moving on to swoon-inducing pretty-boy vamps! Young hunks Kiefer Sutherland and Adrian Pasdar each starred in a teenage vampire movie in 1987 that subverted genre traditions.

While I know this is a group with not a small amount of experience in vamp research, I still think it's worth touching on these.
The premise of *The Lost Boys* is that a recently divorced woman and her two sons move to the fictional beach town of Santa Carla, California to live with the family patriarch.

Plagued by missing persons and gang activity, Santa Carla is the so-called “murder capital of the world.” The truth, of course, as it is in the fictional town of Sunnydale, is that the town is infested with vampires.

Director Joel Schumacher changed the original script from a story about young kids fighting vampires to a sexy movie about teenage vamps — making *Lost Boys* what he calls “Goonies go vampire” — a film infused with gypsies and motorcycles — and which he refused to define as either a horror or a comedy.
Reflecting on the appeal of vampires Schumacher has said:

- "The werewolf is not sexy.
- Frankenstein is not sexy.
- The Mummy is not sexy. . . .
- Vampires are the most fun monsters to do because they’re very, very, very, sexy."

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“If vampires couldn't have erections, our show would have been 12 episodes long.” - Joss Whedon

And as we know from Whedon, who originally didn’t want sexy vamps, they are in fact so sexy, that even lack of blood flow doesn’t preclude the ability to get it up.
So besides the elements of comedy, horror, and family drama, pop culture and literary references, and the sexy, what else of *Lost Boys* can we see in *Buffy*?
• Well, we know from Whedon himself that the idea “Vamping Out” came from *Lost Boys.*
• that Spike has a little of Kiefer Sutherland’s character in him.
• And while I don’t want to over-speculate, other immediate similarities to Buffy include:
  • a fictional So. Cal town
Sunken Residence (Result of Earthquake)

Rock Star Look-a-likes

- vamps living in a residence sunken by an earthquake
- rock star look-a-likes,
• and hoyay!
  • (for those who don’t know – short for “homoeroticism – Yay!”).
It made Lost Boys look like Tinkerbell playing Tiddly Winks.”

- Whedon has mentioned Kathryn Bigelow’s vampire-western, Near Dark, as an influence, though details are scarce.
- Regardless, Near Dark, which was overshadowed by Lost Boys, is the story of Caleb, a young man in Oklahoma, who encounters the mysterious, Mae, one night. After a make-out session that ends with a bite – Caleb begins an uncomfortable physical transformation and is kidnapped by Mae’s rag-tag family. This clan of vicious transients intends to kill Caleb, but Mae, smitten by the handsome cowboy, manages to have his life temporarily saved.
Near Dark is part teenage love story, part road movie, part Western, it’s weird and dark, and at one point kind of reminiscent of James Cameron’s The Terminator (and not because it stars half the cast of James Cameron’s Aliens) and the word vampire itself is never used once throughout the film. Then again, it could be argued that Near Dark isn’t really a film about vampires. As Whedon had said of Buffy,
“Ultimately, my show was less about vampires than most shows with vampire in the title.” - Joss Whedon
• As I mentioned, I couldn’t find much on what of *Near Dark* specifically plays into the Buffyverse.
• But there are certainly narrative themes of adolescence, rebellion, and chosen family.
• And there are some obvious visual references. For instance, Spike blacks out the windows of his vehicles in order to travel in daylight — just like Mae’s family.
• One can suspect in a ‘verse laden with observant pop culture nods that someone like Spike might have even gotten the idea from a viewing of the film. He mirrors the clan patron’s use of protective goggles, and a drab wool blanket to shield himself from sunlight.
“Probably the biggest influence on my work there is.” - Joss Whedon

- We know that Whedon grew up reading Marvel Comics, and that he has said that the X-Men are probably the biggest influence on his work there is.  
- Though the X-Men were created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and premiered in 1963 -
The Chris Claremont Years

• The Chris Claremont/ John Byrne years in the 1970s and 80s are considered to be the definitive version, as their characters and stories continue to influence franchise.  

• Additionally, as Roz Kaveney notes, these are the years that seem to have had the most effect on Whedon.

• She suggests that Claremont’s mastery of ensemble writing, the original idea of the X-Men as a young team, coming to maturity and identity, their stories being about their missions as well as “their complex interactions, crushes on each other, desire to have relationships with missing or rejecting parents . . . their need to study, [and] to save the world, makes the Claremont period X-Men . . . at least as relevant a model for Whedon’s Scoobies . . . as the original Scooby-Doo team.”
“She was such a figure of both affection and identification.” - Joss Whedon

• In particular, we know Whedon has said that Kitty Pryde was “both a source of affection and identification” for him and “was not a small influence on Buffy.”

• Kitty was created by Byrne, subsequently developed by Claremont, and debuted in January of 1980 as an adorable young teenager that could walk through walls – her mutant power being the ability to phase through solid objects –
– a power that becomes a playful nod to X-Men fans in a recent issue of Buffy Season 8.

While testing our her new enhanced superpowers, Xander asks if she can “phase.”
“And you’re really cute, and you have this spunky personality . . .”

• Explaining that that means “You can control your molecules . . . and mess up machinery . . . and - - and - - and - - and you’re really cute, and you have this spunky personality and you’re not afraid of the tough guys who everyone else is terrified of.”
“I don’t see the appeal . . .”
Kitty went through all the adolescent trials we saw on Buffy: fear of change – especially in the people around her, insecurities about romantic relationships, friendships, rebellion and frustration, and rites of passage – as well as the unique challenges associated with her gift.

As with the Scoobies, readers got to watch Kitty grow up – some even grew up with her.
• We know Kitty remains important to Whedon, as he agreed to write *The Astonishing X-Men* title only if he could use her character.
• While Whedon has said Kitty was an influence on Buffy many have wondered whether this quote refers to Buffy herself, or Buffy the series, because Willow Rosenberg shares specific traits with Kitty, including their computer skills and their Jewish faith.

• We know for sure that the character of Jean Grey has been referenced in Willow's storyline and characterization – or rather more specifically, Jean Grey after she has bonded with the abstract cosmological principle known as Phoenix.

• Initially, this was a sacrifice Jean made to protect her teammates, but the Phoenix infused her with unimaginable power.
“No longer am I the woman you knew! I am fire! And life incarnate!”

“There’s no one in the world with the power to stop me now.”

• But Jean could not contain such power, it became unstable, and as with Willow, this intense amount of power corrupted her – though it’s still debated whether Jean was actually corrupted or if she was possessed. Regardless, like Willow, Dark Phoenix’s desire for more was an insatiable pursuit that made her dangerously destructive.

• In Jane Martin’s presentation at Slayage 3, “The Dark Redhead: Willow and her fury. Martin addressed similarities in the characters and evolutions of Jean and Willow.
• Including Telepathy, red hair, a father figure (which is actually true of most female heroes)\textsuperscript{12}, and a dark side – one which, I would add, they both take immense pleasure in indulging.
• The Dark Phoenix Saga is specifically referenced by Andrew in the season six episode, “Two to Go” – and the Dark Willow storyline mirrors the Phoenix saga both visually and narratively.
“Renee, I told you, it’s ‘Xander.’ Or ‘Sergeant Fury.’”

• Marvel continues to influence the Buffyverse through the Season 8 series with visual and narrative references such as the aforementioned Kitty Pryde moment, as well as Xander’s embrace of his eye patch by equating it with Nick Fury,
• and cheeky homages such as this recent cover.
“That show with the puppets that live in the barrio.” - Dwight Schrute

• And now, for something completely different – Muppets!
“Alcohol probably was as responsible for its success as anything else.” - Sesame Street Producer on the show’s creative team

• We know that Joss Whedon is a third generation television writer and that his father, Tom Whedon, worked for the Children’s Television Workshop – the company responsible for creating the edutainment programs Sesame Street and The Electric Company.

• The creators of Sesame Street regularly drank together after-hours – sometimes at a bar, but often at Tom Whedon’s apartment – where artists, writers, musicians and actors gathered to imbibe.

• Jon Stone, who had previously worked with Tom on the television series, Captain Kangaroo, said: “We would drift in sometime between six or seven and midnight, and it seems there were always eight or ten or fifteen of us exchanging views and jokes and ideas and sipping vodka and laughing till all hours. You could come early and leave late or come late and stay all night. People joined the group after the theater, whether performers or audience, and the constitution of the salon assemblage was constantly changing.”
“It just occurred to me that if Angel were a Muppet, it would make me very happy.” -Joss Whedon

• Joss Whedon has said that puppets were a big thing in his life when he was a kid.
• And that: “A lot of our friends and family were Muppet people. We were part of a whole Muppety circle.”
• And the fifth season Angel episode, “Smile Time”, is a shout-out to his father.
“Jim always said that Kermit was the character he felt closest to. Kermit was very much the center of things – the way Jim was -- but not necessarily in control of all these people. Jim was an amazing gatherer of talent and he recognized talent in people and brought them into the fold and let them do their own thing—and Kermit of course does that very much in The Muppet Show.” - Karen Falk, Head Archivist for The Henson Company

• Of course, the Muppets wouldn’t be the Muppets without Jim Henson – so I want to tell you just a bit about him – especially since this year marks the 20th anniversary of his untimely death.
• And on a side note, though Whedon has not mentioned Henson as a direct inspiration, but rather the Muppety people, it could be argued that Whedon is a spiritual creative successor to Henson.
• You’ll likely know that Henson was a puppeteer, voice actor, and Kermit the Frog’s alter ego.
• But his early work is something that the general public might not know much about.
• For example, many mistakenly believe that his most famous character, Kermit the Frog, originated on Sesame Street, but he was first created in 1955 – long before Sesame.
Henson was really the first person to embrace the television camera as an artistic medium that could be hugely versatile for the performance and filming of puppets, if he had puppets that could stand up to a close-up, move naturally, and engage the camera the way a human face would.
Instead of using hard faced puppets or marionettes – stage puppets that couldn’t move their eyes or their mouths – Henson created his early puppets from soft fabrics so that they would be more effective television actors.
• The early Kermit the Frog was, in a sense, sort of a glorified sock puppet.
• The fabric was stretched over Henson’s hand without any padding and so every little movement of his knuckle changed Kermit’s expression.
• It made the characters really come to life for audiences and for the first time, people could connect with puppets on television as though they were “real” actors.
• And so I think about this when I think about the technology, such as green screens, that are used in an episode like “Smile Time.”
Henson experimented artistically with music, television and film, and also used these media to communicate messages, bring people together, and teach children about everything from counting to getting along with your friends and caring for people you didn't even necessarily know. He taught us about respecting difference, community and environmental awareness and responsibility.
“It was really one of the most important projects that he did.” - Karen Falk

- In fact, *Fraggle Rock* was created with the intention of inspiring World Peace.
- Which reminds me of Whedon’s statement regarding how the idea of changing culture is important to him, and how he believes it can only be done in a popular medium.
In fact, both Henson and Whedon have created entertainment with a message, utilized old media in new ways, and experimented with new ways of storytelling.
“Artists working in popular media draw their influences from other popular media as much as from the canons of great art.”
- Roz Kaveney

• As Roz Kaveney points out:
• “It ought to be . . . acknowledged that artists working in popular media draw their influences from other popular media as much as from the canons of great art.”
• And that, in order to truly understand the richness of our texts, and the artistic personality of the writers who are our subject we must explore these influences.
• Whedon provides this information for us. He so often uses the word influence that we need to perk up when he does if we want to better understand his work.
• Plus, I kinda see it as recommendations from someone whose opinion I really trust!
“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it to my grave: high school was a horror movie. And a soap opera. And a ridiculous comedy.” - Joss Whedon

• Everything I’ve touched on today has focused on what it means to be human, growing up – and quite specifically the paths from childhood to adolescence to adulthood.

• And it should come as no surprise that Buffy the Vampire Slayer was influenced by genre-bending and blending teenage entertainment media considering Whedon has proclaimed: “I’ve said it before and I’ll say it to my grave: high school was a horror movie. And a soap opera. And a ridiculous comedy.” 17
“I love fantasy. I love horror. I love musicals. Whatever doesn’t really happen in life is what I’m interested in as a way of commenting on what does happen in life. Because ultimately, what I’m really interested in is people.” - Joss Whedon
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Notes

3 http://lostboys.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Carla
7 As Stacey Abbott notes in her book, Celluloid Vampires, in both Near Dark and The Lost Boys, the vampire serves as an allegory for the bodily changes of adolescence.
11 Kaveney. Superheroes! pg. 210-211
14 Official Angel Fan Magazine
15 Angel Season 5 DVD featurette
16 Kaveney. Superheroes! pg. 201
18 Angel Season 5 DVD featurette
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