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Response: **Tweens, Teens, and In Betweens: The Legacy of the WB**

The WB network has left a lasting legacy within television programming through the popularity and cult status of many of its shows. The majority of these shows targeted a teenaged demographic, but within this there can be identified a trend towards the supernatural, evidenced in shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *Supernatural*. These shows modernised fantastical themes by adding soap operatic conventions, skewing them to a younger audience both through often-adolescent characters as well as through an emphasis on supernatural elements.

Each of the fantasy shows I have mentioned here are very different in tone and style and cultivated different fan bases. Nevertheless, they present a thematic unity that speaks to the unity contained within The WB's programming more generally, as the characters existed within similar settings and faced the same day-to-day challenges as the characters of more straightforward dramas such as *Dawson's Creek* or *The Gilmore Girls* alongside their fantastical challenges. The merger of The WB with UPN into The CW marked an evolution in this programming. Whether this evolution represented a change in times or a conscious rebranding for the new network, The CW can be seen to continue the thematic content of The WB's programming, with an updated style that reflects the increased popularity of high-style cable television shows, such as *True Blood*. The prime example of this is the teenaged vampire drama *The Vampire Diaries*, often linked to the contemporary vampire trend in popular culture but also evidently a direct descendent of *Buffy*.

Taking *The Vampire Diaries* and *Buffy* as my main points of comparison in considering The WB's legacy and the ways in which it was continued by The CW, we can identify an important tonal shift, from what I consider to be the relatively more innocent programmes of the 1990s, at least in their presentation, to the glossier and sexier shows of the past five years. There are many similarities in plot and content in, specifically, *Buffy* and *The Vampire Diaries* that go beyond the inclusion of vampires and a central female figure who contends with them. In addition to the typical romantic and dramatic motifs common to television dramas, both shows feature a dichotomy between 'good' and 'evil' vampires, with the central heroine struggling to reconcile her desires with her morals.

However, the two shows present a dramatic difference in tone. While *Buffy's* humour speaks to the campiness that I feel was often present and perhaps even embraced in WB programming from this era, *The Vampire Diaries* elides any sort of camp that is otherwise inherent to the format through an extremely serious approach to its subject matter, presenting hyper-mature teenagers and adding a glossy sheen to the show's style. While *Buffy* and her friends cannot be said to act like regular teenagers, there was still an attempt within that show to depict normal problems that teenage girls undergo alongside her supernatural adventures. *Buffy's* struggles at school, fights with her mother and her sister and her other mundane problems were underlined by a strong bond with her group of friends, and a strong tie with her community in general. In this way, small town living was often used to highlight the

absurdity of the events in the show, such as repeated references to the fact that no one seemed to pay any attention to the scores of mysterious and gruesome deaths at Sunnydale High. By contrast, *The Vampire Diaries* features no such self-referential aspects. Furthermore, while the central character of Elena has a close friend in Bonnie, her bonds with other friends are much more contentious, contributing to a character that is more independent and presenting an even more exaggerated level of maturity to the characters than we see in *Buffy*. This unrealistic character type is becoming typical of the teen-oriented programming on The CW, from *Gossip Girl* and *90210* to *The Secret Circle*, another fantasy show.

The increasingly dramatic treatment of fantasy narratives described above, I feel, owes a debt to the popularity of cable TV, which rose significantly as The WB's declined. Cable networks have presented a range of themes and genres in a supposedly highbrow fashion, pioneering a new style thanks to its ability to present more adult themes. Network television, or at least The CW, seems to have followed suit, particularly with shows such as *The Vampire Diaries*. This isn't to say that this is universally true of all of The CW's programming. There are still shows that embrace camp and quirk and continue the legacy of The WB's programming in a more direct fashion. Nevertheless, the tonal shift that can be identified in many of these shows, and in particular it seems the fantasy shows, reflects how The CW has adapted The WB's mandate to a contemporary style.