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Between Good and Evil

On the Moral Ambiguity in
«Buffy the Vampire Slayer»

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Abstract

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Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* aims to empower young women through a declared feminist agenda. The main body of this thesis explores what it is that makes *Buffy* a television show with a feminist agenda. This thesis analyzes areas which privileges and problematizes human agency from the perspective morals in society. The series advocates using one's agency in order to optimize potentiality. The thesis examines emotions and human agency; manslaughter and notions of the *Übermensch*, and finally, the claim of agency and consequent empowerment of women.

I have found that several aspects of the series problematize moral choices and privilege a feminist agenda, with the tenets of qualified "girl power" / third way feminism leading to an alternative notion of feminine empowerment. Maintaining that *Buffy* is not purely entertainment, it also comments on the present state of society, with its moral ambiguities and wavering of feminism. Since this is a popular phenomenon which borrows freely from aspects of popular culture, the theoretical concepts of feminism, power, emotions, and Kant's moral agent have been qualified. Locke's theory on passion, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Michael Barkun's millenarianism, and Joseph Campbell's monomyth are also used to support the discussion.

This paper raises many questions concerning the status quo of gender. I have discovered that society still has a long road ahead to achieve full equality between the sexes, and that "battleground" of future negotiations is still very much between good and evil.

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Introduction

“It’s weird. You look at something and you think you know exactly what you’re seeing, and then you find out it’s something else entirely.”¹

When *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* debuted in the spring of 1997 it awoke within the culture an aspiration toward moral clarity linked with an innovative, eclectic feminism. Although the popularity of the show is comparatively limited, it is a widely viewed and highly acclaimed show among fans, viewers and critics. For example, the *Buffy*² episode “Hush”³ was Emmy nominated in 2000.⁴ It would be more appropriate to call *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a cult phenomenon rather than a mainstream television show. Whedon has famously said that: “I would rather have a show that a hundred people *need* to see, than a thousand people *like* to see. I want *Buffy* to live in people’s imagination.”⁵ The weight of novelized fiction based on the *Buffy* series as well as the abundance of fan fiction on the Internet prove that *Buffy* indeed live in people’s imagination. The recent scholarly discourse on *Buffy* proves that the show still lives in people’s imagination.

This thesis examines the concepts of good and evil in Joss Whedon’s television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* through a cultural moralistic stance, represented by the series’ feminist agenda of empowerment. This means that I will analyze morality which stabilizes our culture, but which stands in the way of altering the status quo for marginalized individuals. This is a study of the representations of good and evil in the narrative, how the stories negotiate and naturalizes the ambiguous nature of these moral categories and, that the stigmatization of gender is a comment on the present state of society which has an intended purpose to incite change. Through a shared cultural view of morality, viewers are able to derive moral meanings that the show covertly strives to establish. An ethical dimension is inherent in feminist thinking but not often highlighted. The type of power feminists advocate for requires the agency of its followers; insofar as equality of social status goes, power still belongs to patriarchy. Therefore, the feminist purpose is built upon an implicit notion of agency; which in the context of *Buffy* is made explicit. Human agency is pivotal to generate change in society; agency affects choice and vice versa, and choice raises an option to use

¹ Buffy in “Choices” S:3.19. This quote exemplifies my experience of working on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

² *Buffy* and *BtVS* are common abbreviations for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

³ S:4.10 (Season: Season Number. Episode Number)

⁴ Candace Havens, *Joss Whedon: The Genius Behind Buffy* (London: Titan Books, 2003) 1.

⁵ Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Television with a Bite*, Special Features, Season 6 DVDs, Disc 3, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

human agency to do right or wrong. I have chosen to look at three main areas of moral concern to determine the character and challenges of ethics and the concepts of good and evil. They are in broad strokes: mastery of emotions, the ethics of manslaughter, and the renegotiation of feminism. I will discuss the importance of emotions on human agency, then the morally ambiguity of manslaughter, and finally, leadership, identity and power in the face of millennial struggle. In discussing these three elements I aim to explain why, contrary to some scholarly critiques of the show, *Buffy* can rightfully be said to have a feminist agenda.

From 1997 to 2003 Whedon's creation thrilled, excited and engaged viewers. With a clear mission statement of "the joy of female power, having it using it, sharing it,"⁶ the show gained immediate cult status and popularity. In addition, the success was also due to what several scholars in the field has indicated Joss Whedon "designed *Buffy* to be an icon, not just a TV show."⁷ With a vague idea of "some woman who seems to be completely insignificant who turns out to be extraordinary,"⁸ Whedon expanded it further. The pitch for *Buffy* was the idea of a woman walking into an alley followed by monsters and not only being ready for them, but fighting back and winning. One woman's empowerment set the frame for realizing the show. The success of the show can, as Candace Havens explains, be attributed to: mixing up the genres, thorough planning which creates continuity, outstanding writing, Joss' opportunism and relentless perfectionism in his ability to "keeping it real," and the loving fans.⁹

Gazing into the Hellmouth With a View Toward Discovery

The creator Joss Whedon is a self-declared feminist. The narrative shows how women have been undermined, abused and treated as inferior in the past, and that they continue to be in the present. In addition, *Buffy* challenges traditional gender roles by providing an alternative to the position of women as victims and men as heroes. Contemporary to the show's creation and realization the third-wave of feminism was making a generation of young women excited about their "girlhood."¹⁰ I believe the show attempts to make use of third-wave feminism which started in the early 1990s, that is the "Riot Grrrl" movement and the "Girl Power" movement. However, it does so without committing fully to either extreme, but finding a balance which most people can prescribe to. "Girl power" is explained below.

⁶ From Jessica Prata Miller, "'The I in Team': Buffy and Feminist Ethics," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) 35.

⁷ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Television with a Bite*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Havens, pp. 47-52.

¹⁰ With the rise of the Riot Grrrl movement and the Spice Girl's credo of "girl power," a larger group of younger women were made aware of gender difference, but also the joy of womanhood.

Although the Riot Grrrl movement has been proclaimed dead, it was “extremely influential in introducing a younger generation of women to feminism and in reopening the question of women’s marginalization within the music and other industries, such as fashion,”¹¹ which represents areas of interest to young people. The movement extended beyond the music scene, and its “unifying principle is that being female is inherently confusing and contradictory and women have to find a way to be sexy, angry and powerful at the same time.”¹² This is Buffy in a nut shell, but the images of feminism in *Buffy* extend beyond its title character.

My initial claim is that *Buffy* has a feminist agenda. But this claim must be qualified: *Buffy* is not a feminist television show. It has been accused of being too committed to traditional portrayal of gender,¹³ and not daring enough in its portrayal of sexual relations.¹⁴ From my reading on second and third-wave feminism it seems that the first mistake feminist critics make is to claim that feminism is a constant entity within our culture. The mere fact that the diverse feminist critics themselves cannot agree on what feminism is, proves the difficulty in attempting to derive a description of what feminism was or is. The school of feminism which Elaine Showalter, Judith Butler and Toril Moi belongs to, that is second-wave or postfeminist, seem to agree that the woman as writer of women’s fiction is the primary goal to achieve a base for feminist criticism. This would immediately exclude *Buffy* from a second-wave feminist reading, because insofar as its origin it is created by a man. Many of the episodes are written by women, but again the storylines are “controlled” by Whedon, a man who is a feminist.

Feminism is not constant. It is not, on a general scale, what parents teach their children in association to morals. The most basic of morals which *are* constant parts of our culture is on a general scale the difference between right and wrong; the most simplistic form of morals. Although this forms a good foundation for acknowledging gender equality, i.e. it is wrong to perceive sexuality inferiorly because rules in society state that it is unjust, does not mean that gender equality is fulfilled or mutually agreed upon in society at large. Girls and boys are still typically brought up to become the stereotypes of their gender. We are not born with an inherent inclination towards gender equality, we are taught through experience and by our parents. My point is that we are still inclined to, and even strive to measure up to the

¹¹ Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., “Introduction to Part Four,” *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 204.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Michael P. Levine and Steven Jay Schneider, “Feeling for Buffy: The Girl Next Door,” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) pp. 294- 308.

¹⁴ Carol Siegel, “Female Heterosexual Sadism: The Final Feminist Taboo in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Anita Blake Vampire Series,” *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane puts it in a Box* (London; I.B. Tauris, 2007) pp. 56-90.

traditional stereotypes of our respective genders, typically if our identities are heterosexual, often white middle class.¹⁵ Therefore, it seems unreasonable, or at the very least prejudice, to criticize Buffy and *Buffy* for portraying gender traditionally. Prejudice, because they assume that because the show portrays a woman with “superpowers” that women and those around her have to revolutionize sexuality as we know it. Sure it is fun to watch a woman fight demons which are thrice her size and see her not only win, but do it humorously and with style. However, the appeal for us mere mortal humans who watch the show is that essentially the Scoobies are like us with their insecurities, failures and short-comings. In this context, what makes them different is that they at least try to do something about it; which is not to say they always succeed. Michael P. Levine and Steven Jay Schneider state that: “Far from being subversive in any positive sense, *BtVS* in fact embodies questionable values and stereotypes on a number of levels. Thus, for example, the show does not challenge sexual and gender stereotypes (except superficially), but instead reinforces them.”¹⁶ If they by “questionable values” mean that the characters make mistakes, they are correct, but since they provide no examples they leave the reader to guess. However, concerning the stereotypes of gender and sexuality, I believe that it is done deliberately. By illustrating the existing condition of feminism and sexuality, the narrative enables viewers to find the power within them to change the state of play.

Levine and Schneider call Buffy “the [archetypal] girl next door.”¹⁷ The girl next door is someone who in one way or another catches your interest. Although you do not initially know her, she is stereotyped as being a nice, pretty normal girl. However, once you do get to know her, you discover that she has an identity which goes beyond the initial stereotype. The beauty of *Buffy* is that, although it may be “obvious” to scholars what the morals are or what the “message” is, it is not so obvious to a teenager.¹⁸ Nevertheless, a teenager knows what the narrative is trying to convey to them because it appeals to them emotionally. It is partly due to the portrayal of Buffy as inferior in situations where she clearly is superior that young women recognize themselves. The other factor of recognition is that she, like many girls on mutual cultural ground, likes to date, shop, “hang out” and be included. On many occasions Buffy’s is the voice not heard. That is where the road to “girl power” has to start, not with theories about how things should be, but with a portrayal of how things are.

¹⁵ As this is part of my identity, I will not venture into the debate of whether or not this view excludes persons with another cultural and ethnic background. Of course it does, but this debate is not the point in this discussion. I can only speak from what I know.

¹⁶ Levine and Schneider, 300.

¹⁷ *Ib.* at 302.

¹⁸ I speak from personal experience as I was in my teens when I became a viewer.

The term “girl power” ironically stems from the British pop-music group Spice Girls.¹⁹ The term alludes to a mindset for girls to “be what you want to be,” and not settle for social conformity and gender stigmatizing for the sake of standards set by others, but rather to find one’s unique individuality. While the music industry wanted the Spice Girls to dress uniformly, they took the risk and instead developed unique and diverse personas. I am not claiming that the Spice Girls have done more for feminism than feminist critics. However, this is the type of feminism, towards which we are moving; a populist and individualistic feminism, where women can decide themselves to what degree and which parts of feminist traditions they want to subscribe to. As Rhonda Wilcox writes: “Joss Whedon has repeatedly said that one of his main goals in *Buffy* has been to change attitudes in the real world – in particular, attitudes about women.”²⁰ I even believe that he is able to change women’s attitudes about themselves. In addition, if women and gender were portrayed according to feminist ideology it would make the series’ ending themes of liberating marginalized individuals nonsensical. To have characters which fulfilled the approximation of the feminist extremes would indicate that liberation was already present and not something which still needs fighting for, as it indeed still does.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a moralistic television show. This has already been shown by other *Buffy* scholars, most prominently in the collection of essays; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy; Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. My task is to show how the dynamics of feeling, choices and action illustrate and actualize feminist perspectives. This is practically carried out by analyzing how they are shown within the selected episodes. In the narrative, morals are learned and negotiated by the characters through a series of choices and actions which have consequences and repercussions. These relationships aid in the acquisition of good morals and conforming to them, but they also reveal and problematize the ambiguous nature of good and evil. As Greene and Yuen state; “no character on the show is portrayed as perfect, each of the characters has been morally faulted at one time or another.”²¹ This affirms the human characters’ humanity, as life is full of wrong choices being made under circumstances which in hindsight could have been made differently. However, it also supports my hypothesis that they are stereotyped as mere human beings in order to illuminate the present state of feminism in the real world. Also, since not even the human characters are

¹⁹ “Spice Girls,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9114580>>. 17 Apr. 2007.

²⁰ Rhonda Wilcox, “Show Me Your World: Exiting the Text and the Globalization of *Buffy*,” *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005) 101.

²¹ Richard Greene and Wayne Yuen, “Morality on Television: The Case of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” *Buffy and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) 276.

perfectly good, it follows then that not even all demons are strictly evil. However, they can not attempt to be good if their feelings are malevolent, because feelings reflect on the type of choices and actions one makes.

The body of the narrative comprises 144 television episodes. Of these I have chosen seven to form the basis for my analysis. The first chapter provides an introduction to the “Buffyverse,”²² i.e. the world of *Buffy*. It presents the politics surrounding the show’s creation and realization, and the genres, setting and plot. In addition, the chapter provides a presentation of the worldview of the Buffyverse, as well as the concepts of the Slayer, the Scoobies, and the patriarchal power structure Buffy works for, the Watcher’s Council. In addition to the selected seven episodes I will refer freely to other episodes in other seasons of the show.

The second chapter examines the effects of emotions on human agency. For this purpose I have chosen the season two episode “Passion,”²³ which shows the ambivalence and the consequences of allowing emotions to stand in the way of action. Most importantly, it shows that morals are a social construct, and that in the society which constructs these morals, individuals have roles based on capability, not one’s current emotion, age or gender. The logic of the show advocates for the morally good to exert power, however, the type of action is relative to the power the individual possesses. Basically, this means that one is an asset doing what one is best at, as long as it does not deprive others of their agency. Displaying and utilizing emotions is also important from a feminist perspective because displaying certain emotions is traditionally viewed as a character weakness; e.g. women and anger and men and sadness (crying). Elyce Rae Helford explains that, “the case of anger has been central to feminist struggles for justice and equality.”²⁴ Women’s anger is viewed as inappropriate by both genders, as “[studies] on the development of girls’ emotions argue that ‘patriarchal norms’ teach girls quickly to shun anger.”²⁵ But in the case of Buffy, who clearly states that “my emotions give me power”²⁶ and that “anger gives you fire,”²⁷ it is one of her greatest strengths as a feminist heroine; she does not contain her emotions to meet the standards of a meek and compliant woman.

²² “Buffyverse” is a common term used to denote the world created by Joss Whedon which includes *Buffy* and the spin-off *Angel*.

²³ S:2.17

²⁴ Elyce Rae Helford, “‘My Emotions Give Me Power’: The Containment of Girls’ Anger in *Buffy*,” *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Lanham; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002)18.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “What’s My Line? Part 2” S:2.10

²⁷ Ibid.

In the third chapter I will look more closely at a character who exemplifies the ambiguity of good and evil. As a representative of firstly human but also female evil, Faith the vampire Slayer makes for an interesting analysis. In the traditions of many male heroes Faith could be their equal. Like her male counterparts, she uses the opposite sex for personal pleasure and values action over emotion. In comparison to Buffy who utilizes traditional sexual differences without losing her femininity, Faith's free spirit is what makes her more masculine than feminine. However, Jowett observes that the good women of *Buffy* "negotiate[es] viable postfeminist identities,"²⁸ while the bad girls "rarely seem to struggle to define themselves [because as outsiders to society, they] do not need to adhere to socially produced gender roles."²⁹ Rather, they subscribe to an individualistic definition of themselves. This means that the bad girls, that is, those women who do not fit the mold of stereotyped white middle class, do what they want, which is not a good thing. Typically they act without thought to the consequences of their actions, which problematizes the right of other individuals to exert their agency.

The season three episode "Consequences" deals with the repercussions of committing murder, which in the logic of the narrative is a forgivable act if the offender regrets it, but an unforgivable act if the offender remains callous and in denial. Most of the actions and choices which occur on the show, whether initially viewed as harmless, accidental or clearly ill-intentioned are always followed by some sort of consequence. Again, for this type of narrative, one might argue that consequences are necessary in order to "keep things interesting." However, the creator and his writers have also imposed consequences on the characters which have caused debate among viewers, fans and critics. This further validates the relationship between choices, action and the attendant consequences, as not being a device to retain viewers in a highly competitive media, but rather to maintain consistency in the establishment of desired and favored morals. The conflict arises as a direct cause of incompatible moral beliefs, and consequently different views on use of one's agency.

The aim of the fourth chapter is to further illuminate and to specify how Joss Whedon pursues his declared feminist agenda. In this discussion I will use the five final episodes of the show's last season, which includes "Dirty Girls," "Empty Places," "Touched," "End of Days" and "Chosen."³⁰ In this season the protagonists face the core of all evil, the First Evil who threatens to end the world of humans in order to create a world of demons and evil, i.e. a

²⁸ Lorna Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy fan* (Middleton; Wesleyan University Press, 2005) 70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ S:7.18 -22

dystopian hell on Earth. To do so, it systematically kills every girl who might become a Slayer to hinder that anyone is called to the duty once it has killed Faith and Buffy. These episodes deal with leadership, identity and power. In this setting of war and in the narrative at large these concepts clearly challenge traditional gender roles. Zoe-Jane Playdon argues that; “Feminist writing reclaims the agency of marginalized individuals, it recognizes subjectivity as valuable, and it resists the fixity of state-sanctioned patterns of thought and behavior.”³¹ At the utmost extreme, the Slayer and in this context the potential Slayers are nothing more than foot soldiers recruited to rid the world of unspeakable evil. Their individual lives are worth little in the big picture, because who really cares if one girl dies at the expense of thousands of people saved? I will argue that, season seven’s final episode “Chosen,” successfully reclaims the agency, identity and autonomy of marginalized individuals. But most importantly, it is intended to arouse the viewer to claim *their* agency in order to “change” the world, because “Slayer” is simply an analogy of “woman.”

³¹ Zoe-Jane Playdon, “What You Are, What’s to Come: Feminisms, Citizenships and the Divine in *Buffy*,” *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel* (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004) 158.

Politics, Genre, and Gender of the Buffyverse

“In every generation there is a Chosen One. She *alone* will stand against the vampires, the demons and the Forces of Darkness. She is the Slayer.”³²

Background and Politics

The original idea of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was developed by Joss Whedon when he optioned the movie script to Sandollar Productions in 1988.³³ The movie was made in 1992, directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui and produced by Kaz Kuzui, later producers of the 1997 television series. The movie, was much lighter in tone and actualized as a comical parody of horror movies. This was not what Whedon had envisioned in writing the script, and the movie flopped, though it now has a certain cult status among fans of the television show. When Whedon got the chance to make *Buffy* into a television series five years later he took the failures of the movie to heart and stuck to his original vision. This maneuver bore fruits as the success of the TV- show exceeded all expectations and enabled the cast and crew to continue making *Buffy* for seven television seasons.³⁴

Requested by the WB television network as a midseason replacement in 1997, they were willing to take on a concept entitled *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The WB was an extension of Warner Brothers Inc., established in 1995 and targeted younger audiences and teenagers. Initially seen as a risk, *Buffy* proved to be a highly profitable one for the network. For the five years the WB was Whedon’s playground where he was executive producer, planner and occasional writer for his creation. In 2001 when the contract with the WB failed to be renewed the show was bought up by UPN,³⁵ another newly established network. As the show’s popularity grew on WB, so did the budget which improved the quality of the show, most notably the special effects. The UPN gave the show’s creative department free reign and generous funding. In 2006 Warner and CBS closed their respective networks the WB and UPN, and jointly launched *the CW*. The ability of the crew and cast to preserve verisimilitude in the series of events and to show them instead of implying them, made the scenes more powerful and naturalistic. In short, part of the show’s popularity lies in its layered characters,

³² This is the prophecy of the Slayer. It appears continuously throughout the narrative, but was first said in “Welcome to the Hellmouth,” S:1.1. Emphasis added.

³³ Havens, 20.

³⁴ From March 1997 to May 2003. the first season was a half season comprising of 12 episodes.

³⁵ The politics of the move was mainly due to the contract with WB ending and because Fox expected an increase of fees. Havens, pp 77-81.

its action and fight scenes, its simultaneous distance and familiarity to reality, due to its unique mixing of genres.

Genre, Setting, General Plot and Thematics

The narrative of *Buffy* applies a mixture of genres. The problem of genre in the narrative lies not in identifying which are present, but rather which genre takes precedence. Humor, horror, drama, action, science fiction, gothic, quest myth and detective genres are all applied according to the plot and story-lines, at times more than one simultaneously. Jason Mittell, providing examples from the first three seasons, has argued that as a TV-show it is explicitly a teen-drama, comparing it to Aaron Spelling's *Beverly Hills 90210*. "While *90210* is probably a 'purer' teen drama than *Buffy*, the latter program highlights the assumptions that are tied to teen dramas much more explicitly than on *90210*, activating the genre much more overtly in cultural practices."³⁶ It is true that part of *Buffy's* appeal lies in "soap opera," that is a focus on issues concerning the main characters, their relationships and trials. However, the show undoubtedly appeals to a much broader audience than viewers of "pure teen dramas," as is evident in the scholarly works written about the show.

The main plot structure is influenced by the soap opera genre. The soap opera genre form is dominated by emotions and interrelationships, and focuses on individuals in smaller societies. As a characteristic of television, it is the protagonists and their lives which have the strongest appeal. As the core group in *Buffy* the viewer's interest is focused on the Scoobies, not the novelty of demons and vampires they happen to come across. The writers of *Buffy* apply the genre in order for the message(s) to touch the viewer emotionally. But the interpersonal level of the genre also gives the protagonists a just cause for utilizing their agency, i.e. for the preservation of the members of their group in addition to society at large. Mittell explains that; "Soap operas, befitting their general focus on interpersonal relationship, treat political issues almost solely as personal matters, focusing on how issues affect specific characters and their relationships more than society at large."³⁷ This is exactly what *Buffy* does. There are countless examples of main characters' being tested and how they are affected by changes or the trials of their lives. As Whedon states; "It became clear early on that the interrelation between the characters were really interesting, the soap opera of it."³⁸ Therefore,

³⁶ Jason Mittell. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American culture*. (New York : Routledge, 2004) pp. 156-157.

³⁷ *Ib.* at 175.

³⁸ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Television with a Bite*.

it is the human aspect which prevails, not the seemingly obvious demonic and supernatural aspect.

The secondary plot structure is reminiscent to that of the detective story. This provides for the protagonists' practical use of agency. The group is typically presented with an evil threat which they identify and defeat. However, instead of incarcerating the "bad guy," there is a marked element of vigilantism in that they, usually Buffy, take matters into their own hands. Yet, no one would have believed that what they are fighting was real, therefore their ability to "catch" the wrongdoers is also a matter of preserving the disillusion that the uninitiated are quite comfortable with. For the protagonists fear is an emotion which should be avoided, because it inhibits action and rational behavior. Anger, on the other hand, is valued as it promotes and causes action. In addition, each episode offers closure, but there is a continuity which extends beyond the boundaries of episodes and seasons, because "Whedon assumes that his viewers know everything that has happened on the series to date and [that] he makes sure his characters remember that as well."³⁹

On the surface the Buffyverse looks realistic and the narrative lives very much up to the traditional fantasy genre seen in classical works such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, from which the writers of *Buffy* borrow ideas freely. In addition, the setting of *Buffy* is more or less in isolation from the rest of the real world. We see people entering from outside the community of Sunnydale, but we rarely see the characters outside the town within the narrative, and when they are they encounter the same world of supernatural activity.⁴⁰

The narrative is set in the fictional small town Sunnydale in California. It is a "somewhere that pretends to be nowhere (which is what 'Utopia' originally means),"⁴¹ but it is no more 'Utopian' than any other place in the real world. Sunnydale resembles many sleepy suburban American towns, with the exception of being located on top of a supernatural gateway to the demonic underworld, the Hellmouth, a fact of which the inhabitants of Sunnydale seem to be oblivious. Most people are aware that their town is not like most towns due to the mortality rate and the number of cemeteries. However, the cause seems to be either escaping their imagination or too frightening to come to terms with. The gateway to hell plays a major part in the early seasons of the show, and is most prominent in its last season. It creates a threat and consequently a fear of finality, i.e. the end of the world. The Hellmouth is

³⁹ Havens, 41.

⁴⁰ On some occasions the characters quest the spin-off series *Angel*.

⁴¹ Boyd Tonkin. "Entropy as Demon: *Buffy* in Southern California. *Reading the Vampire Slayer*. (New York; Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004) 84.

part of the conspiracy which threatens the peaceful lives of those who live in its presence. The added irony to the conspiracy which also contributes to the humorous identification among teenage viewers lies in localizing the entry to hell underneath Sunnydale High School. This creates a sarcastic allusion of the High School experience as being hell. Also, more specifically the gate way is directly underneath the library where Buffy and her friends, the Scoobies, strategize on how to defeat evil.

In his essay “Entropy as Demon: *Buffy* in Southern California,” Boyd Tonkin explains that in the sunny state the dualism “shines the blinding light that hides sinister secrets.”⁴² Therefore it is apt that a narrative which plays on these aspects of human life is also placed in a physical location which is known for not being what it appears to be. Very real issues such as climate, earthquakes and wildfires are threats to the traditionally laid-back and liberal Californians. In addition, the term “nothing is real in Hollywood” has spread outside its local limits and become something that ironically many people all over the world aspire to. This glamorized world, like that of the bright and welcoming Sunnydale, is blinding but not real. Both Hollywood and Sunnydale hide sinister secrets which threaten to change peoples’ concepts of their reality if their respective demons surface. In context to the Hellmouth, Tonkin observes that it also echoes the issues of California:

“The thin membrane of the ‘Boca del Infierno,’ the unstable portal between the human and demonic worlds that lies beneath the library at Sunnydale High, transforms a geological fact into the premise of fantastic drama. What anthropologists would call the liminal status of Sunnydale and its residents shifts the tectonic status quo into an endlessly resonant metaphor.”⁴³

The setting then is not only a framework for larger issues of human life, but it is a metaphor for life in the state of “la-la land.”

As a narrative in the literary tradition, the overriding genre in *BtVS*⁴⁴ is fantasy. One of the qualities of the genre is that it commonly takes place in a world outside reality. But it can also, when placed in the real world attempt to transcend reality.⁴⁵ Although the Buffyverse, with its specific physical setting is fictional, it is nevertheless a part of the real world. Also, its setting in time is non-fictional (1997-2003). However, despite the fact that the show’s timeframe is contemporary to its broadcasting, its themes are not concerned with current issues of newsworthy nature. Instead, the writers strive to incorporate universal social and

⁴² Tonkin, 84.

⁴³ *Ib.* at 87.

⁴⁴ Common abbreviation for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

⁴⁵ Rosemary Jackson. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. (London: Routledge, 1998) 2.

cultural issues in the frame of an alternative reality. Here emotional demons are made physical. This means that with positive use of human agency, these demons can be defeated, even killed. The show deals with timeless aspects of human lives, and despite the time frame gives the show a quality of being timeless. As the creator has said: “‘There will never be a very special *Buffy*,’ by which he means that there will never be an episode which self-consciously takes on an ‘issue.’ Much better [he] feels, is to seamlessly weave real issues into the plot. The big conflicts are issues that everyone can relate to.”⁴⁶

By “real issues” Whedon means interpersonal, social and political issues. An example of a social issue is found in “Ted,”⁴⁷ which deals with the issue of domestic abuse. Overtly it appears to be an episode about a daughter’s displeasure with her divorced mother’s dating, and juvenile annoyance targeted at the innocent boyfriend. However, it turns out that the boyfriend is actually a robot programmed with 1950’s attitudes towards women. An instance of a political issue is the much-debated “Earshot.”⁴⁸ This episode was scheduled to air the week after the Columbine massacre. Although it was already finished, the WB decided to temporarily cancel it because they found it to be inappropriate so close after the tragedy. In the episode, Buffy is contaminated by a demon and gains the power to read minds. While the power is driving her insane she hears that someone plans mass murder at her High School. The potential mass murderer turns out to be the cafeteria lady, which in itself is a political comment on the state of food served at educational institutions. However, in this case the person holding the rifle was aiming it at himself, which brings up the social issue of suicide among teenagers. Most importantly, *Buffy* is centered on a political issue of female empowerment, which from the title is not clearly recognizable. However, the seemingly uncomplimentary TV genres create an allusion to third wave feminism. The genres create instability of agency, where characters are forced to establish whether things are done to them or if they are doing them.

The narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* combines four other TV genres besides fantasy. Comedy, action, drama and horror are consistently used in every episode of the show. The emergence of these is highly unique because these genres tend to be viewed as incompatible by many in the visual entertainment industry. Most TV- shows are able to apply

⁴⁶ Havens, 47.

⁴⁷ S:2.11

⁴⁸ S:3.18

three of the genres at most.⁴⁹ As Candace Havens explains in *Joss Whedon: The Genius Behind Buffy*:

“Horror, for example, demands different framing and lighting than comedy or action. Horror is fundamentally about the loss of control, the main characters don’t control the action, can’t take the initiative. The action, instead, is controlled by the villain. A good director creates a mood consistent with this loss of control, with plenty of tight shots and deep shadows. Action is almost the opposite; it is all about taking control. In action, the main characters take the initiative and drive the plot, requiring a very different mood.”⁵⁰

This means that in the Buffyverse people are not always in control of the situation but that the main characters are mostly able to reclaim control in order to defeat those who made them lose it in the first place. Also, the comedy genre enables the audience to experience relief in difficult situations, as well as provide some levity when there is a shift from a critical turning point towards a status quo. In addition, the show activates and weaves conventions of soap opera, music video, and science fiction together with all the other genres mentioned. This thesis omits media analysis in the discussions, even though frame, soundtrack and positioning are mechanisms which enrich the visualization. For a moral and cultural discussion it suffices to keep in mind how the characters act and react in accordance to these genres.

Worldview and the Slayer: Hellmouth, Demons, Slayers, Scoobies & Watchers

In the second episode of *Buffy* the viewer is presented with the alternative view of the world which explains the presence of embodied evil. According to the character Rupert Giles, the High School librarian and Buffy’s “Watcher:”

“This world is older than any of you know. Contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons demons walked the Earth. They made it their home, their... their Hell. But in time they lost their purchase on this reality. The way was made for mortal animals, for, for man. All that remains of the old ones are vestiges, certain magics, certain creatures.”⁵¹

This perspective of the world is reminiscent of Pandemonium in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.⁵² In this epic poem creation starts with Heaven and God’s Angels. Since the ideals of

⁴⁹ Havens, 40.

⁵⁰ *Ib.* at pp 40- 41.

⁵¹ Giles, “The Harvest” S:1.2

⁵² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1971)

Heaven and the Garden of Eden are popularly interpreted as utopian, and Utopia is a somewhere that pretends to be nowhere, they could therefore be interpreted as being in this world. Indeed, the temple of the Pandemonium was dug out by the demons on Earth, which gives a nod to the Buffyverse's Hellmouth as a passageway to Hell. Furthermore, Milton's Lucifer bears similarity to the demonology of the Buffyverse. Lucifer is portrayed as an Archangel of enormous stature in the beginning before he defies the will of God who wants to make "way for mortal animals and for man." The pure demons that walked the Earth according to the Buffyverse were also enormous creatures. This was shown in the season three finale episode "Graduation Day, Part 2"⁵³ when the Mayor of Sunnydale ascends to the level of "pure" demon. Also, the Mayor turns into a giant snake. According to the *Paradise Lost* Lucifer took on the appearance of the serpent in Eden, which was instrumental in the Fall of Man, providing a reference from the poem to the narrative of *Buffy*. The treatment of *Buffy's* demons is similar to that of Lucifer and his demonic army; they all attempt the destruction of humankind. However, as humans gained a stronger foothold in the world of the Buffyverse, the pure demons died out, were killed or incapacitated and were replaced by lesser breeds. Before many of the lesser demons lost foothold in the world one girl got the power to defeat them. Therefore, much of the credit for the demons losing their advantage and power on Earth is assigned to the lineage of Slayers.

A Slayer is a woman chosen in each generation to fight vampires, demons and Creatures of Darkness. When one Slayer dies, another is called, which disputes the idea of "one in every generation," and signifies replaceability. A Slayer is bestowed with "superhuman" strength, stamina, reflexes, vigilance, attentiveness and extreme perseverance in addition to the ability of healing quickly. However, Slayers have a short life expectancy, which is due to the prophecy statement "she *alone* will stand against them." One girl against an uncounted number of evil makes for fairly low survival odds for the Slayers. In addition, the job entails self-sacrifice; most have been doomed to a life dedicated to the mission without ties to society. Their individual wants are compromised because they happen to be next in line, and their deeds are typically unknown to the people they save. They are marginalized heroines, like women throughout our history.

The first Slayer was created by a group of shamans, the Shadow Men who tied her to the ground so she could not escape. When they had degraded her, they violated and deprived her of her identity and magically infected her with the power of a demon. The powers are

⁵³ S:3.22

probably part of the same demonic essence as the Buffyverse vampires. This power caused her to lose her humanity. In the way she is portrayed, she is more like an animal than human. When she died the power was passed on to another girl and so started the lineage of the sisterhood of Slayers. This problematizes the concept of identity. Because we perceive ourselves through others, i.e. those closest to us and especially girls through their mothers, the fact that the Slayers do not know each other poses a problem to their definition of themselves as Slayers. The only knowledge they have of each others existence is kept in the Watchers' journals. It is therefore plausible to assume that a newly called Slayer is not supposed to know her predecessors individual traits as a way for the Watchers to gain authority over their protégées This way the Watchers can impose rules and restrictions as universal truth, while the reality of the past Slayers' autonomy might be quite different from the way it is presented. In this sense, the stories of the Slayers are presented as myth to maintain the status quo and in effect the power of the Watchers' Council over the Slayers.

The Heroine: Buffy and the Scooby Gang – *She Saved the World. A Lot.*⁵⁴

The character of Buffy Summers functions as main protagonist throughout the series. Jana Reiss explains that Whedon “[says] that the lead character – whom he intentionally named Buffy to highlight the incongruence of her superficial appearance and her unique destiny as her generation’s chosen Slayer- reversed the stereotype of young pretty women in film and TV.”⁵⁵ Although she is not the victim, in the first three seasons of the show “Buffy is *chosen* to be Buffy the Vampire Slayer (fairly typical for action heroes or superheroes); she does not have the power to make her own choices.”⁵⁶ This is due to the patriarchal organization of the Watcher’s Council; “Buffy is another degrading exploitation of the patriarchy, a woman who is objectified as a function – ‘the Slayer’ – and controlled to serve ends which are not her own.”⁵⁷

As the stereotypical troubled teenager, Buffy’s choices are also controlled and restricted by her mother, teachers and fellow High School classmates. Trying to balance all of one’s “identities” is something most viewers can relate to. In addition, Buffy’s superficiality is more due to what she can allow to show people, more so than a factual statement that she lacks substance. She hides literal demons, while most people have traits about them which are

⁵⁴ Words on Buffy’s headstone, “The Gift” S:5.22

⁵⁵ Jana Reiss, introduction, *What Would Buffy Do? The Vampire Slayer as Spiritual Guide*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004) XI.

⁵⁶ Jowett, 24.

⁵⁷ Playdon, 157.

disagreeable and consequently not brought to the surface, that is, symbolic demons. Her physical appearance is superficial, as is her interest in current fashion; this is arguably just another way for her to fit in to the human world. It is also what gives her “girl power.” By this I mean she breaks barriers of stereotypical traditional views on gender and at the same time is “traditionally feminine.”

Buffy is an unconventional hero for several reasons. Firstly, she is a woman, which in traditional views makes her position problematic. Usually women are not assigned the role of being heroes, but rather the prize, the adversaries or the admirers of the male hero.⁵⁸ In essence Buffy is a very feminine heroine with all the poise, strength and stamina of any male hero, but also with the needs and longings of a young woman. Most importantly by season three these two sides of her are not distinctly separated: “All right, yes, [I want to] date and shop and hang out and go to school and save the world from unspeakable demons. You know, I wanna do girly stuff!”⁵⁹ We accept that she is both “masculine” and “feminine” simultaneously, because these are concepts which shape and are a part of her identity.

Like many classical heroes, Buffy is assigned specific tasks throughout the narrative. The obvious one is the task of carrying out her calling as the Slayer. Like traditional heroes she has assistance to carry out her tasks. However, unlike traditional heroes, she is helped by friends she consider equals. Although it is Buffy herself who typically and physically defeats the embodiments of evil, the process of investigating them is a team-based activity. These friends are also instrumental in her survival and unusually long life-span as her generation’s Chosen One. The friendship between the team-members is also a basis for the show’s appeal, that is, the interpersonal relationships common in soap operas. It is therefore necessary to give a brief presentation of the “Scoobies.”

The name is taken from the 1969 Hanna- Barbera cartoon “Scooby Doo” about a group of mystery and crime solving youths and their endearing dog.⁶⁰ The original Scooby Gang includes Willow Rosenberg, Xander Harris and Rupert Giles. Willow starts out being the nerdy sidekick. Her inquisitive nature and aptitude for absorbing knowledge helps her to grow into a powerful Witch. In the trajectory of the series, Willow is the heterosexual nerd come lesbian Wicca, come potential world destroyer, come goddess. Xander Harris starts out as the geeky but witty High School outsider. He provides for comical relief but also vocalizes

⁵⁸ Margery Hourihan. *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children’s Literature*. (London; Routledge, 1997) pp. 157-202.

⁵⁹ “Faith, Hope and Trick” S:3.3.

⁶⁰ The animated series was broadcasted on the WB Network from the same year as *BtVS*. Also, Sarah Michelle Gellar, who plays Buffy, also plays Daphne in the “Scooby Doo” movies.

the unpopular opinions which the viewers are thinking but unable to implement because they, unlike Xander, are passively viewing the events. When asked how much Xander is still a part of him, Whedon answered; “A huge amount in fact. We pretty much made the statement when Dawn said, ‘Maybe that’s your power. Seeing everything, knowing. Being the person who observes and reports.’ That’s basically the same as thing as being the writer, not the star.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, Xander is also the character which most resembles the viewer, because he has no special powers except for representing the heart of the group. Rupert Giles is Buffy’s Watcher. This term is explained below. In the logic of the show, he is her mentor and father figure, a relationship which also extends to Xander and Willow. It is intrinsic to understand that the Scoobies are not only friends, but that they, through the initial friendship, become an alternative family.

By the standards of the Buffyverse, this is unconventional for a Slayer. Through the course of the narrative the distinction between friends and family disappears as the friends become an alternative family. Because of her unusual ties to what the Watchers’ Council terms “civilians,” Buffy tries to manage a normal life in addition to her calling, or as is often the case, vice versa. In the relation to the prophecy of “she alone will stand against the Forces of Darkness,” she disobeys the simplest rule of the Watchers’ Council and thereby opposes their authority. Buffy’s unconventionality of having friends to assist her in her job is in fact how she, unlike her predecessors, is able to survive for as long as she does. Although Buffy often considers herself as an outsider to general society because of her unusual “hobby,” she is nevertheless part of a society which is centered on herself and her friends. It is her membership of a society which distinguishes her from her predecessors. As Giles explains to another Slayer, Kendra:

Giles: Uh-uh, Kendra, uh, there are a-a-a few people, uh, ci-civilians if you like, who, who know Buffy’s identity. Willow is one of them, a-a-and they also, um, spend time together, uh, socially.

Kendra: And you allow dis, sir?

Giles: Well, uh...

Kendra: But de Slayer must work in secret for security.

Giles: Of course, uh, but, uh, with Buffy, however, it-it’s, um, some flexibility is required.⁶²

The reason for why “some flexibility is required” in the case of Buffy is because she, unlike Kendra, identifies herself with more than just her “calling.” She refuses to be stigmatized,

⁶¹ Havens., pp. 172-173.

⁶² “What’s My Line? Part 2” S:2.10

and opposes authority when she knows that it is wrong, in this case denying social beings participation in society

Buffy, like the Slayers before her, is neither invulnerable nor immortal. In fact, she dies twice. The first time it was part of a prophecy which she was instrumental in fulfilling.⁶³ Her first death triggers the prophecy of her heritage and a new Slayer is called, opening up for the possibility for several Slayers being extant simultaneously. In the course of seven seasons, Buffy has been through all the stages of the Hero's Journey, as Campbell describes it. Campbell's monomyth is typically reserved for male heroes, however, in *Buffy* it is applied throughout the narrative. Two stages of the Hero's Journey are of importance to the series finale; the Ultimate Boon,⁶⁴ i.e. knowledge or thing the hero acquires which her society will benefit from, and Freedom to Live,⁶⁵ i.e. the hero bestowing her boon on society, in this case fellow women. Her will to preserve humanity, and her strong advocacy for fighting against an enemy which is seemingly indestructible in season seven, stems from her newfound vigor to live after her last death in season five, and consequent resurrection in season six. Buffy's Ultimate Boon is simply a love for the world and a wish to be the instrument which makes it better. She knows the price of being the hero and leader, and she has faced death. Buffy's "gift" to her fellow women, is the gift of power, which is the way she can change the world and make it better.

Although Buffy has the authority to kill demons, the narrative makes it explicit that a Slayer is not the same as a killer. Her primary task is to keep the easily created and growing population of vampires to a minimum, as well as slay demons and the supernatural who threaten world order. However, a Slayer is not a vigilante in the sense of taking action toward human evil. This even goes for people who try to kill her: "Being a Slayer doesn't give me a license to kill. The human world has its own rules for dealing with people."⁶⁶ She does, however, constitute the law in the case of demonic evil:

"It is always different! It's always complicated. And at some point, someone has to draw the line, and that is always going to be me. You get down on me for cutting myself off, but in the end **the Slayer is always cut off**. There's no mystical guidebook. No all-knowing council. **Human rules don't apply. There's only me. I am the law.**"⁶⁷

⁶³ "Prophecy Girl" S:1.12

⁶⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. (UK: Paladin. 1988) pp. 172-192.

⁶⁵ *Ib.* at pp. 238-243.

⁶⁶ Buffy in "Villains," S:6.20. This quote follows in a discussion about Willow going after Warren who shot and almost killed Buffy, and shot and killed Willow's girlfriend Tara at the end of "Seeing Red," S:6.19.

⁶⁷ Buffy justifies the decision to attempt to kill her friend Anya, the vengeance demon after she has slaughtered a fraternity. In this context, seeing as Anya is a demon human laws do not apply. "Selfless" S:7.5. Emphasis added.

The Watcher and the Council: Patriarchal Power

For the purpose of trying to fit *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* into a feminist perspective, it is important to note that The Watchers' Council, the power structure behind the Slayer, is clearly a male-dominated organization. Although the organization has members of both sexes, we are mostly presented with male members. All the Watcher's who are assigned to Buffy are men; Merrick,⁶⁸ Rupert Giles⁶⁹ and Wesley Wyndam-Pryce.⁷⁰ The authority they implement belongs to the patriarchal tradition. This aspect of the Watchers is important in the discussion of agency and feminine power below. Watchers, with the exception of Giles, view **their** jobs as being above that of the Slayer's. Metaphorically, she is the weapon, while they're playing war lords. They restrict the Slayer's rights to a personal life and give these powerful women orders to fight nightly wars; the institution of Watchers in effect denies the Slayers their right to individual autonomy.

The descendants of the Shadow Men, who created the first Slayer, became the Watchers and later formed the Watchers' Council. The Watchers' Council is dedicated to finding, training and supervising Slayers, but also to training and educating new Watchers. They locate "Potentials" to the calling in order for their training process to start as early as possible; Slayer Kendra, Buffy's successor, grew up with her Watcher.⁷¹ The Council is conservative in their methods. They follow the prophecy of the Slayer to the point, believing that with the obvious exception of the Watcher's assistance "she alone" must defeat the Creatures of Darkness.

The Watchers' Council also makes use of unconventional methods which they deem necessary to uphold their authoritative status in relation to their "subjects." They have a special unit which deals with Slayers which does not shy away from the possibility of murder if necessary.⁷² The most striking example of the Council executing their alleged power over their Slayers is shown in "Helpless."⁷³ On the rare occasion that the Slayer reaches her 18th Birthday she is drugged and stripped of her powers, left in a contained environment to face a vampire. This "Test," as it is referred to, shows abusive behavior on behalf of the Council for two reasons. The test is in itself unreasonable and ludicrous because the Slayer's ability to survive her everyday trials should be evidence of her capabilities. A staged scenario where the

⁶⁸ "Becoming, Part 1" S:2.21

⁶⁹ "Welcome to the Hellmouth" S:1.1

⁷⁰ "Bad Girls" S:3.14.

⁷¹ "What's My Line, Part 2" S:2.10

⁷² "Who Are You?" S:4.16

⁷³ S:3.12

Slayer is left without the tools that are pivotal to her long-term survival, i.e. her power, is not representative of her abilities.

The Watchers are not the only ones who watch over the Slayer. In the final season's "End of Days,"⁷⁴ Buffy retrieves a weapon, the Scythe which she pulls out of a block of stone. This weapon was forged by a group of women who call themselves the Guardians. While the significance of these events will be discussed in the final chapter, suffice to say that the Scythe plays a pivotal part in the strategy which inverts the authority of patriarchy into a matriarchy, or better yet it finds a balance between the feminist movements in music business, the "grrl power," the angry voice of third-wave feminism and "girl power," the voice of gender pride of third-wave feminism, both of who advocates gender equality and equal opportunities for men and women.

There are no clear definitions available on either movements; however, there are common understandings of the concepts. Dafna Lemish explains that girl power "refers to both physical and mental strength," that it is "about freedom of expression and inner peace, about standing up for one's opinions and beliefs."⁷⁵ In addition, it advocates for "the capacity to inspire and to help others," and is "actively interpreted by many of the girls as an expression of independence, strength, success, and sense of self-worth."⁷⁶ As for Riot Grrl, the name "was chosen to reclaim the vitality and power of youth with an added growl to replace the perceived passivity of "girl."⁷⁷ The movement advocates "real freedom when it comes to creative self-expression,"⁷⁸ "its greatest power is that it gives girls room to decide for themselves who they are,"⁷⁹ although to most girls it signifies "a community and emotional support."⁸⁰ Technically, then the difference in the movements lies in their origins, i.e. pop/rock music (felicitous) vs. indie,⁸¹ grunge and punk music (aggressive); at their cores lies the advocacy for individuality, de-marginalization, and application of one's agency.

⁷⁴ S:7.21

⁷⁵ Dafna Lemish, "Spice World: Constructing Femininity the Popular Way," *Popular Music and Society*: vol.26, nr. 1, 2003. pp.17 -29, available online, April 26, 2007 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0300776032000076360>> 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within,"

Signs: Vol. 23, No. 3, Feminisms and Youth Cultures, 1998, pp. 809-841. available online, April 26, 2007.

<<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00979740%28199821%2923%3A3%3C809%3ARGRFW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>> 809.

⁷⁸ Ib. at 816.

⁷⁹ Ib. at 811.

⁸⁰ Ib. at 810.

⁸¹ Short for independent; it is an alternative rock form Its appeal lies in the fact that it was a not mainstream and company controlled form of music.

“Passion:” Without Agency We Would Be Truly Powerless

“Passion.
It lies in all of us.
Sleeping, waiting, and though unwanted.
Unbidden, it will stir, open its jaws, and howl.
It speaks to us, guides us. Passion rules us all. And we obey. What other choice do we have?

It hurts sometimes more than we can bear.
If we could live without passion, maybe we’d know some kind of peace.
But we would be hollow, empty rooms, shuttered and dank.
Without passion, we’d be truly dead.”⁸²

The season two episode entitled “Passion”⁸³ attempts to show the consequences of allowing emotions to enslave and pacify individuals, as well as advocates for utilizing emotions to promote human agency. Agency is explained as follows: “[An agent is] one who acts. The central problem with agency is to understand the difference between events happening to me or in me, and my taking control of events, or doing things.”⁸⁴ In addition, human agency can be interpreted as the individual’s abilities to make rational choices and take action to consciously impose those choices through action on the world. Carolyn Korsmeyer explains that:

“The treatment of emotions in *BtVS* covertly links the fanciful fictional world with ongoing philosophical issues concerning the relative power (or lack thereof) of reason and emotion to determine choice and action. Emotions have been interpreted as *passions*, internal forces, before which we are literally ‘passive.’ On the other hand, *emotions seem necessary to motivate action, and despite the presumption that they hinder the exercise of reason, emotions are sometimes capable of an intuitive canniness that guides reason when it falters.*”⁸⁵

“Passion” illustrates the importance of being in emotional control, by showing the lack or absence of it. Overall, the narrative of the series advocates that emotions are human assets for our agency. In addition they are part of our properties which makes us human; in the series it is the one of the principal qualities which makes us *good* humans. The areas of analysis are first, what other choices we have than to “obey our passions,” second, how emotions/passion problematizes human agency and how they privileges it, and finally, interaction as setting for emotional experience, or rather how social commitments and

⁸² Angelus’ voice-over. “Passion” S:2.17.

⁸³ S:2.17

⁸⁴ “Agent,” *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2005 ed.

⁸⁵ Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Passion and Action: In and Out of Control,” *Buffy and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) 160. Emphasis added.

circumstances make us good human beings. First, since my analysis depends on an interpretation of Buffy's emotional interaction with an ambiguous representative from the dark side, I will start with positioning the episode in the narrative, and establish the character Angel/us.⁸⁶ I will then give a brief summary of "Passion" before proceeding with my analysis of choice, emotions/passions and human agency, and their contributions to our moral "construction" as human beings. Furthermore, one might argue that agency in itself is essential in a television show because the entertainment quality rests on some form of action on the part of the characters in the story arc. However, the series strives not only to entertain, but also has as an objective to illustrate through the symbolism of teenage life on the mouth of hell, the extremes of everyday struggles and to provide a moral platform by showing the extreme outcome of wrong choices or even the absence of choices. Also, "we consider that an emotion is not a raw feel, but is identified by its motivational powers, and their function in prompting action."⁸⁷ This advocates that there must be some sort of agency, that is, choices made.

At the end of the episode "Surprise"⁸⁸ preceding "Innocence,"⁸⁹ Buffy had sex with her vampire love Angel with devastating repercussions. Angel first appeared in the season one premiere of the show "Welcome to the Hellmouth", and originally functioned as what Campbell refers to in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* as the messenger to the hero Buffy. The messenger has the task of calling the hero to its first task, which succeeds what Campbell terms as the "departure."⁹⁰ For the calling to adventure the hero meets a protector and guide. This supernatural aid is offered to the hero who has not refused the call. However, in relation to Buffy, who is given a protector and guide in the form of her Watcher Rupert Giles, Angel takes the role of her supernatural aid⁹¹ in this context. Angel⁹² is the vampire with a soul, which is what makes him humane in comparison to other vampires, approaches her with information about the Hellmouth they are on, the rising Master,⁹³ and presents her with a cross for protection. He also acts as fellow warrior, friend and boyfriend, assisting Buffy in her mission to rid the world of unspeakable evil, something he knows about first hand.

⁸⁶ When I refer to Angel/us it is as both Angel and Angelus. Where they are "separated" I refer to them specifically. Angelus signifies here the vampire without conscience, and Angel the vampire with a soul.

⁸⁷"Emotion," *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2005 ed.

⁸⁸ S:2.13

⁸⁹ S:2.14

⁹⁰ Campbell, pp 77-89.

⁹¹ *Ib.* at pp 69-77.

⁹² Angel, from greek: Angelos- messenger.

⁹³ The Big Bad of the season who later mesmerizes her and drowns her in "Prophecy Girl" S:1.12.

A vampire Slayer dating a vampire is highly unconventional even in the Buffyverse. She is supposed to rid the Earth of demons, not “make out” with them. On the other hand, it is understood that since Angel has a soul he is in possession of qualities and abilities which makes him an asset. As Miller points out; “a ‘soul’, [is] code in the show for moral conscience. [Angel] deeply regrets his evil past and now fights alongside Buffy for good.”⁹⁴ In addition, Greene and Yuen affirm that “what makes Angel stand apart from other vampires is that he has a soul, or more specifically, that because he has a soul he has no desire to harm people.”⁹⁵ However, it is first and foremost his choice to do good which makes him an asset, not the fact that he has a soul. As the dark, handsome, mysterious and brooding older man who has assisted as well as saved Buffy and her friend’s lives, Angel gained and earned the Slayers trust through the course of the narrative, which changes in a moment of passion. In effect, Buffy and Angel’s shared emotions releases a creature which is a threat to the Scoobies and their agency.

“Passion” deals with supernatural male evil, represented by the vampire Angelus. Briefly, Angelus is the evil side of Angel. Since she is a vampire Slayer and Angel is a vampire, he functions as a liminal figure, in addition to a Romeo to her Juliet in the sense that their love is doomed to fail. Like one of many complex characters in the narrative Angel/us also represents moral ambiguity. Angel has the moral conscience and the will to do good. This originates from a combination of having a soul and living with the remorse of his past self. Angelus on the other hand is driven by the same forces as most vampires in *Buffy* with the luxury of killing and causing pain without feeling remorse: “When you become a vampire the demon takes your body, but it doesn’t get your soul. That’s gone. No conscience, no remorse. It’s an easy way to live.”⁹⁶ In addition, because Angelus has Angel’s memories intact, and Buffy made them feel human she is Angelus’ primary target of resentment; “She made me feel like a human being. That’s not the kind of thing you just forgive.”⁹⁷ When Angelus is acting out his human agency he is in effect depriving others of their agency. Most prominently, through his torment of Buffy, he is able to deprive her of the one emotion she values the most; she contains her anger because still feels that she cannot kill Angel.

Angelus functions as the abusive male who contains a girl’s anger through oppression. Although Buffy has not been pacified from her duties concerning threats from evil forces, she has let her emotions towards her ex- boyfriend incapacitate her from taking

⁹⁴ Miller, 43.

⁹⁵ Greene and Yuen, 271

⁹⁶ Angel explains what a vampire is, “Angel” S:1.7.

⁹⁷ “Innocence” S:2.14.

direct action towards him. Although she has been given good reasons and even opportunities to kill him in the preceding episodes, as well as in “Passion,” she still clings to a hope that Angel will return to her. After leaving her a drawing of herself sleeping on her pillow and Willow’s aquarium fishes in an envelope, Buffy confides to Willow that “it’s so weird. Every time something like this happens, my first instinct is still to run to Angel. I can’t believe it’s the same person. He’s completely different from the guy that I knew.”⁹⁸ It is apparent that even with the intimate nature of his badgering, Buffy is not ready to face him. This hinders her agency as the Slayer, because as she herself recognizes by the end of the episode she could have prevented a murder by taking immediate action.

Feeling out an emotion and acting upon it is a delicate relationship also in relation to other individuals. Emotions which lead to inner turmoil for the individual can have healing qualities in hindsight; e.g. grief is a way of processing loss, and anger is a way of relieving tension or clearing the air. This transition requires that the emotion is processed so it can eventually come to an end and be replaced with emotional stability. Those emotions which have a tendency to lead to action taken directed at others can cause a moral downfall for the individual, as acting on one’s emotions can also affect other individuals. Uncontrolled use of emotions can lead to the deprivation of other individuals’ agency, and unprocessed emotions can lead to the absence of personal agency. The emotions expressed by the characters/actors always have repercussions, and these are presented as possible outcomes of acting on emotions. As Jana Reiss explains in a direct comment to Angelus’ voice-over in “Passion”:

“Without passion our lives would be worth little- easy, safe, and predictably boring. *Buffy* never adopts the stoic position that passions, which we refer to as strong emotions, are inherently harmful and to be avoided at all costs. Neither, however, does the series give license to Angelus’s approach of giving full sway to unchecked emotions, especially negative and destructive ones. Rather, *Buffy* and her friends carefully negotiate those two extremes, searching for what the Buddha would have called the middle way.”⁹⁹

As mentioned earlier, the series does not as Reiss puts it “give license to Angelus’ approach of giving full sway to unchecked emotions.” This is because by killing and torturing humans he is depriving them their agency. However, vampires are not, in the mythos of the *Buffyverse*, capable of feeling and acting on positive emotions as this would inhibit them of their evil deeds, nor are they willing to allow for pure, benevolent feelings. Therefore, by not killing Angelus *Buffy* goes against two of the moral principles of the show according to

⁹⁸ “Passion” S:2.17

⁹⁹ Jana Reiss. “The Anger Gives You Fire: Can Negative Emotions Be Constructive?” *What Would Buffy Do? The Vampire Slayer as Spiritual Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey- Bass, 2004) 33.

Greene and Yuen: “One ought to stop (either by killing or incapacitating) those who [and] all non humans that typically can or will harm other human beings.”¹⁰⁰ The Scoobies generally manage to find a balance between predictable and destructive emotions, and thereby ascribe to moderation. Moderation is a preferred trait of rational minds.

The logic of the series in general, and this episode in particular, argue that we do not have another “choice than to obey our passions.”¹⁰¹ Although we have little control over when we experience an emotion, we do have some control over to what degree or length we allow our passions to develop and excel. “Obey” in the Angelus’ quote does not require or even entail surrender to emotions; it requires feeling them out and allowing them to occur instead of suppressing them. As Giles says in this episode, neither Buffy nor we, “have the luxury of being a slave to [our] passions.” She cannot because of her weighty responsibilities which come with being a Slayer, and we cannot because of our everyday responsibilities which require our agency. As the advocate for human reason, philosopher John Locke proposed that the ideas of pleasure and pain “cannot be described, nor their names defined; the way of knowing them is, as of the simple *ideas* of the senses, only by experience.”¹⁰² Fundamentally, all emotions are caused by good or evil and experienced as either pleasure or pain.

Buffy shows how emotions privilege human agency, but also that emotions problematize human agency. As discussed above, the show cautions about allowing our emotions to rule us and simultaneously advocates us to use our emotions for our benefit. “What’s My Line Part 2”¹⁰³ introduces Buffy’s would-be successor Kendra who has been taught to suppress her emotions. Buffy explains to Kendra that emotions, and especially anger, are assets to a Slayer; “You feel it, right? How anger gives you fire? A Slayer **needs** that.” Emotions are therefore not weaknesses which one should not entertain as Kendra puts it, they are “total assets,”¹⁰⁴ in general. To Buffy they are also of importance to her imagination to be unpredictable in the battle against evil: “While anger can send one out of control, judiciously cultivated, it can also hone one’s focus and energize efforts to enhance effectiveness.”¹⁰⁵ In addition, “anger is a natural response to oppression, a necessary component of resistance, and an articulation of a compelling need for social change.”¹⁰⁶ This means that the liberation of girls’ to anger from containing it to expressing it, is pivotal in

¹⁰⁰ Greene and Yuen, 272.

¹⁰¹ From Angelus’ voiceover during the episode.

¹⁰² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Kenneth P. Winkler ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996) pp. 90-91.

¹⁰³ S:2.10.

¹⁰⁴ Buffy. “What’s My Line, Part 2” S:2.10

¹⁰⁵ Korsmeyer, pp. 164-165.

¹⁰⁶ Helford, 18.

empowering women; i.e. make the transition from “victim (feminism)” to “power (feminism),”¹⁰⁷ in other words from second- to third- wave feminism.

The privilege of passions or emotions on human agency, then, is that one can benefit from emotions by applying them to various aspects of life. Exhibiting an emotion does not signify a character weakness, but enables the individual to grow from experiencing them and even contribute to changing society. As far as the emotion in itself is concerned, it alone does not spur one to meaningful deliberate action; as we see with grief and infatuation. However, an emotion often leads to some sort of action being taken to make it more bearable, especially in regard to the ones which have a tendency to linger or fester. The ability to experiment with the entire range of emotions is a great asset to the Scooby Gang, because it allows them to learn, fail and grow from the consequences of acting on their passions. Ironically, the Scoobies’ realization of their failures has a way of bringing the group closer because the process builds stronger bonds among them. The main privilege of emotions on their human agency lies in the fact that their shared experiences enable them to instinctively know how to avoid negative consequences, that is, it is pivotal in the negotiation of the difference between good and evil. In addition, they avoid acting in a way that causes conflicts with other human beings, and they help each other to resolve emotional turmoil. Passions are therefore necessary to good humans to fight evil in whatever shape or form.

Emotions can also problematize human agency. This is evident when individuals are incapable of utilizing emotions to a positive effect, but instead focuses their emotions to do evil. In “Passion,” this problem on agency is expressed through Angelus’ actions towards Buffy through his harassment of her, and his actions towards Giles through the murder of his girlfriend. However, Buffy’s lack of agency as a girl grieving the change and loss of her boyfriend, and Giles’s irrational choice to act on the loss and murder of his girlfriend causes them both to lose their abilities for positive and rational agency. The differences between Angelus and Buffy/Giles, is that Angelus operates out of the pleasure-principle. He thrives on causing pain, which spurs his agency; this is what he chooses to impose on the world. Humans can not avoid pain, but we instinctively try to rectify the feeling of pain; the need for feeling better spurs our agency. Therefore, avoiding certain emotions also compromises positive agency. The need to constantly feel good overshadows morality because the inner life of the self takes precedence over other individuals right to agency. Accordingly, the inability

¹⁰⁷ Heywood and Drake, 2.

to effectively enable the self to feel good, extinguishes the individual's will to act, as often seen with depression and severe grief. Korsmeyer explains that:

“grief is the emotion that acknowledges irreversible loss, and not to feel it seems virtually impossible, even wrong. (...) for unlike anger or fear or love, which are capable of motivating action to effect positive ends, grief is never, ever able to bring about its desperate desire. Grief includes the terrible wish that events not have happened the way they did, and it can prompt fruitless fantasies of turning back time.”¹⁰⁸

Buffy's loss has, as far as Angelus is concerned, impaired her from taking action. In addition to her grief, which is clearly making her passive, the support from her friends who allow her to grieve has provided her with an excuse not to act. Her emotions stand in the way of her duties as the Slayer and also in her agency as a rational and capable human being. The emotion she claims “gives her fire” is the active anger and it is this emotion she is not able to utilize. After the tragic murder of Jenny Buffy realizes that she could have prevented it by basically doing her job; “I'm sorry. I'm sorry I couldn't kill him for you, her, when I had the chance,” and she admits that she “wasn't ready.” By the end of “Passion,” however, she manages to regain a sense of rational agency when she tells Giles that “I think I finally am [ready]. I can't hold on to the past anymore. Angel has gone. Nothing's ever gonna bring him back.” With this she realizes that Angelus is not Angel, and that the loss is irretrievable. This observation is essential for regaining her agency. In effect this means that through the course of this episode Buffy is finally able to process the emotions which inhibited her. The result is the regained empowerment to stand up against her former lover.

As indicated earlier, “Passion” is not solely about regaining agency. It is also illustrates the unpredictability of individuals acting on their emotions, and that for every action there is an equal (in size) and opposite (in direction) reaction. For example, Giles did not expect Angelus's hateful harassment of Buffy to be directed at anyone but her:

Giles: I know how hard this is for you. All right, I don't. But as the Slayer, you don't have the luxury of being a slave to your, your passions. You mustn't let Angel get to you. No matter how provocative his behavior may become.

Buffy: So what you're basically saying is, 'just ignore him, and maybe he'll go away'?

Giles: Yes. Precisely.

What Giles fails to foresee is that Angelus' harassment of Buffy is a tactic to mentally break her down so that she cannot physically destroy him. Therefore, the abuse includes Buffy's

¹⁰⁸ Korsmeyer, 166.

alternative family, which is her emotional reason for fighting evil. When the turn comes to Giles, he is not able to ignore Angelus. In the words of Reiss:

“when Giles is on the receiving end of Angelus’ reign of terror, he doesn’t follow his own counsel. After discovering the body of his love interest, Jenny Calendar, he knows that Angelus is responsible for the murder. And Giles- that stuffy, bookish, scone-y Watcher – utterly loses control. Although, his character is typically reserved and hyper-rational, he now goes hunting for Angelus with his best weapons, endangering himself. The same man who earlier told Buffy that she did not have the luxury of being a slave to her passions has become his own cautionary tale. Now a servant of his fury and his desire for revenge, he has become very much like Angelus. This temporary loss of control almost costs Giles his life.”¹⁰⁹

Giles clearly grieves his loss. However, it is not grief, but desire for revenge which triggers his agency. Vengeance is not rational, and rationality is Giles’ strong suit. Vengeance is dysfunctional because at its core is hatred and a claim for retribution. Both grief and vengeance are genuine passions, however, when one act on the extremes of either of them the consequences can be devastating. Basically, Giles wishes the fiend that killed his girlfriend dead, and he is morally justified to wish it and to see it carried out. However, he is not capable of carrying out the vengeance himself, much less survive the attempt. This is why the emotion becomes destructive. In the larger scale, his job is to assist and train the Slayer, not to put his life in peril. He is, like Buffy, obliged not to let his personal life get in the way of the mission.

During this episode Buffy’s grief becomes Giles’s grief. Both Buffy and Giles wish that they had done things differently, but instead of taking the easy way which would be to blame each other, they take respective responsibility for their actions and blame themselves for their choices which led to the circumstances at hand. They cannot let emotions hinder their cause, as they rely on each other to carry it out:

Giles: Why did you come here?! This wasn’t your fight!

Buffy: Are you trying to get yourself killed?! You can’t leave me. I can’t do this alone.

The final problem of emotions to the force of human agency is posed by the non-humans who have the power to kill, thereby depriving individuals of their agency. Guided by malice, one could claim that vampires in *Buffy* have no free will. They are, in the mythos of the series expected to do evil deeds because they are demonic. Therefore, they act on their limited range of emotions. Moreover, the human “agents” in the narrative do not forgive their acts because the demons do not ask for forgiveness. That would require a sense of guilt and remorse which demonic creatures seemingly are not capable of experiencing. Arguably these

¹⁰⁹ Reiss, “The Anger Gives You Fire,” 37.

two emotions enable us to maintain our humanity by acting as moral guideposts. We instinctively try to avoid creating situations which lead to feelings of guilt, remorse or other emotions which have consequences which are difficult to resolve; but we do not escape them.

For the good-hearted Scooby Gang, there is always someone present to lead the individual to the proverbial “right path” before, and after, they make the “wrong” choice. This indicates how important social bonds are in relation to the individual’s survival but also that close friendships creates responsibilities and co-dependence which the vampires, are not in possession of. Angelus, Drusilla and Spike are shown as dysfunctional, not only due to the fact that they are vampires, but also because their emotions are never positive either in respect to their own gang or the greater society. The symbolic quality of this outsider gang (they even wear gang colors of black and red) shows that when individuals express negative emotions and feed off each others’, negative actions, the result is dysfunctional bonds which can only be severed by turning on each other. As representatives of social groupings, Angelus’ coterie and the Scoobies illustrate the contrasts of expressing, processing and acting on emotions.

In comparison to Angelus’ gang, the Scoobies are morally autonomous individuals. Miller explains that; “moral autonomy is a social achievement, at least in the sense that socialization is required for a person to learn a moral language, to develop moral virtues, skills and capacities, and to recognize which situations are morally problematic.”¹¹⁰ As argued above, the Scoobies negotiate their individual experiences of emotions in relation to each other and through mutual experiences in their small-scale society. This enables them to develop moral codes which they negotiate and try to abide by. Furthermore, they, unlike vampires and demons have the need and ability to feel out both positive and negative emotions. Most importantly, typically it privileges their human agency in the battle of good and evil, and morally it ensures the continued agency of other human beings in their society.

Buffy is able, and justified to make the decision to kill her ex-lover because it is the morally right thing to do. “The justice tradition requires that the moral actor use reason, not feelings, and that he treat everyone in the same manner,”¹¹¹ and as mentioned earlier Buffy has let her emotions towards Angel/us impede her. Most importantly, however, is the fact that Buffy rarely lets her passions get in the way of achieving her objectives. Insofar as the evil embodiments are “non-humans that typically can or will harm other human beings,”¹¹² she

¹¹⁰ Miller, 45.

¹¹¹ *Ib.* at 44.

¹¹² Greene and Yuen, 272.

has a responsibility to “stop [them] by killing or incapacitating [them].”¹¹³ As the moral individual, she has to evaluate and judge on the same moral scale regardless of her emotions, even if she does evaluate based on a case-to-case basis. The consequences of making judgments purely based on emotions can be devastating. But to not allowing oneself to experiencing emotions can be destructive for positive human agency.

¹¹³ Greene and Yuen, 272.

Being “Bad Girls” Leads to “Consequences”

“It was intense. It was like I just... let go and became this force. I just didn’t care anymore.”¹¹⁴

The season three episode “Consequences” emphasizes the effect of hiding or ignoring one’s actions and shows the community’s responsibility to help the individual realize he or she has made bad choices with an eye to improving the future choices. Three factors contribute to this discussion: the issue of responsibility and authority, the Slayer and the Mayor as self-proclaimed *Übermensch*,¹¹⁵ and the ethics of claiming human life. Briefly, an *Übermensch* is someone who rises above “slave mentality”(herd) to become a “master”(leader) of sorts. The popular interpretation is that they are people who believe and know they are better than the “slaves.” This enables them to create their own morals and do what they want, because morally they are beyond good and evil. Their actions are justified from a sense of superiority to the masses. The problem of persons claiming the position of *Übermensch*, as most villains do in *Buffy*, is that they oppose the shows Kantian moral view that:

“No one agent is allowed to use her external freedom of action in such a way as to preclude others from using their freedom of external action. A state of right is created when equal agents act in such a way as not to harm the capacity of other agents to act.”¹¹⁶

This particular episode succeeds “Bad Girls,”¹¹⁷ and illustrates how differently Buffy and fellow Slayer Faith view slaying,¹¹⁸ how easy it is to be impressionable to other people’s opinions, and how tragically the outcome of carelessness can be. When Buffy finds herself unable to describe a fight to her friends, she realizes that because they are not in her position as a Slayer they cannot possibly understand her experiences. However, as her equal, Buffy believes that Faith understands. Blinded by the limitations of recognition, Buffy adopts Faith’s behavioral traits as part of their bonding. First, Faith manages to convince Buffy to drop a test at school to go slaying in the middle of a day after she has discovered a vampire lair. Then they go out to the local hangout, the Bronze, to blow off steam in a highly

¹¹⁴ Buffy Summers on slaying with Faith, “Bad Girls.” S:3.14.

¹¹⁵ I chose to use the original term because in the narrative of *Buffy* Slayers are super(wo)men.

¹¹⁶ Scott R. Stroud, “A Kantian Analysis of Moral Judgement,” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Open Court: Chicago, 2003) 191.

¹¹⁷ S:3.14.

¹¹⁸ The act of killing vampires and demons.

sexualized scene where we see Buffy adapting Faith's indifference to the opposite sex by acting out the role of sex object to a group of teenage boys. Afterwards, they break into a sporting goods store to steal weapons to fight the evil of the episode, the demon Balthazar, based on Faith's simple principles of "want, take, have." In the mist of their crime spree they are apprehended by the police. However, on the way to the police station Faith convinces Buffy that they need to take action and break out of the police car by triggering Buffy's sense of responsibility, since "we can't save the world in jail." Finally, on their way to defeat the demon they run into his henchmen and in the heat of the aftermath Faith mistakes a human for one of the vampires and kills him. However, the problem here is not the act itself; it is the choices Faith made by hiding the body and not acknowledging the moral responsibility of manslaughter. She refuses to admit to the act, and claims that "there is no body." This makes her a difficult case. When Buffy confronts her about it in the last scene, Faith retorts to Buffy's pleas to make her understand that she "killed a [hu]man," with a determined but casual, "I don't **care!**"¹¹⁹ The focus' in "Consequences" are naturally on Buffy, as the heroine, on Angel as the voice of conscience, but most importantly on Faith, as Buffy's equal in slaying and the character whose actions are central for the repercussions in this episode.

When Faith arrived in Sunnydale¹²⁰ she immediately claimed her position in the Scooby Gang as the adventurous and sexual Slayer. It is clear that she, like the developed vampires in the series are driven by natural forces, i.e. basic needs, and therefore ascribes to the survival of the fittest rather than the survival of all, whereas Buffy and her friends do fight for the weakest. Natural forces pertain to Faith because she is prompted by instinct; she is spontaneous rather than rational. In addition, she is uneducated and therefore not "civilized," especially in comparison to the Scoobies. They are a part of a society, which promotes codependence and rational behavior; i.e. they are civilized. Their purpose and conviction for fighting evil is for the greater good, while Faith fights against evil for the same reason she later fights for it, that is, it gives her personal pleasure. In addition, she dislikes feeling pain as much as she dislikes dealing with her problems. Wanting to meet the "infamous Buff and compare notes"¹²¹ was not the only reason for her journey to Sunnydale. Her arrival to Sunnydale was marked by her aptitude for running from her problems rather than literally facing her demons. She came to Sunnydale to seek refuge from an ancient vampire who had murdered her Watcher.

¹¹⁹ Dialogue between Buffy and Faith, "Consequences" S:3.15. Emphasis added.

¹²⁰ "Faith, Hope and Trick" S:3.3.

¹²¹ S:3.3

Faith's presence influenced Buffy's perception of being a Slayer. With the arrival of another Slayer, Buffy gained an equal and as her friends and mother point out, someone who could baby-sit the Hellmouth while Buffy could potentially pursue what she desires, which is a normal life. However, instead of gaining an equal, she gains an enemy. In the beginning of the Slayers' relationship, Buffy was concerned with Angel's return from the hell dimension where she had sent him.¹²² In her attempt to conceal the fact, she was absent minded not only Faith, but also in relation to her friends. When Faith discovers that the reason for Buffy's detachment was due to protecting a vampire,¹²³ it has a bad effect on their budding friendship. Faith feels excluded from Buffy's life, because she realizes that despite their common calling, she does not know Buffy. Sadly, after discovering the fact of Angel, Faith believes she cannot fully trust Buffy. Nevertheless, the Slayers had assumed that simply because they are Slayers they had similar identities. This is the mistake that many postfeminist critics made; they assumed that all women throughout history have the same experiences simply because they are women.¹²⁴ They are not considered as individuals, because marginalization does not require elaboration. Ignoring individuality is as much a crime to women's liberation as patriarchal institutions of authority.

In "Consequences" we are confronted by four types of authority. The first is represented by the worldly authority of law enforcement, the second is represented by the authoritarian organization which claims to educate Slayers, the Watchers' Council, the third is represented by Faith's justification of vigilantism and her claim of superiority, and the fourth is the authority of the Mayor. This is one of the few times the audience is presented with a portrayal of law enforcement in Sunnydale as non-corrupt. Ironically, this is also one of the few episodes in which murder makes the news, as if these were indicators of a human perpetrator in contrast to demons who repeatedly kill people without real world law enforcers being involved. The detective who is working the case of the Deputy Mayor's murder is genuinely looking for the murderer, not attempting to frame anyone or cover it up. Buffy's position as the wrongly suspected in "Consequences" reinforces her moral position in contrast to Faith who is rightly accused. Because Buffy is the only eyewitness, and because Faith is not willing to go to jail for an accident, she chooses to place the blame on Buffy by lying to Giles.

¹²² "Becoming, Part 2" S:2.22.

¹²³ Some of what Angel did as Angelus is discussed in chapter 1. In addition, when Buffy sent Angelus Willow had restored his soul, but seeing as Angelus had opened a portal which threatened to literally swallow the world and everything in it, she sacrificed him sending him to hell.

¹²⁴ Naomi Zack. *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality*. (Rowman Littlefield Publishers; Lanham, 2005) pp. 8-18.

The second authority is the ever present Watchers' Council. In this episode their authority is represented by Wesley, the newly assigned Watcher to Buffy and Faith. Although Rupert Giles remains the librarian at Sunnydale High School and Buffy's confidant in her duties, he is no longer employed as her Watcher by the Council. However, after Giles was fired for having "a father's love for the child,"¹²⁵ Wesley was employed to take over Buffy and Faith's training. He is met with suspicion from his new charges. While Buffy displays her resentment by making it clear that he is patronizing her, Faith rejects him with a simple "screw that." Although Buffy has never been one to follow orders she was not going to do anyway, she does respect authority figures as long as they operate with the same moral code as her, while Faith simply states that "I just have a problem with authority figures"¹²⁶ because they hinder her doing what she wants:

Faith: You're actually gonna take orders from him?

Buffy: That's the job. What else can we do?

Faith: Whatever we want. We're Slayers, girlfriend, the Chosen Two. Why should we let **him** take all the fun out of it?¹²⁷

Wesley aided by the Council, hinders Buffy and Angel in their attempt to help Faith to come to terms with her murderous side. Wesley has the power to lock Faith up and take away her freedom, the one thing she is afraid of. He exhibits authority "by the book," and without regards to individualism. He does not care to know them, and can therefore not gain the Slayers' respect. Buffy is used to having the support of those around her when she makes decisions, and she made the decision to give Faith a second chance when she assigned the task of getting Faith to come to terms with manslaughter to Angel. Wesley's inability to recognize Buffy's authority in the matter, and his consequent maltreatment of Faith is condemned by the Scoobies because in essence he does not have the authority over them; he simply claimed it. The Watchers Council is an unwanted authority in the Buffyverse, as most of their representatives on screen are men, and their job is to supervise girls with "superhuman" strength.

Not surprisingly, as a "super-chick" it is Faith who makes the highest claim to authority by ascribing to a perverted interpretation of Nietzsche's ideals of the *Übermensch* in this episode. Nietzsche states that "one has duties only to one's peers; that against beings of lower rank, against anything alien, one may behave as one pleases or "as the heart desires,"

¹²⁵ Quentin Travers, Head of the Watchers' Council, "Helpless." S:3.12.

¹²⁶ "Revelations" S:3.7.

¹²⁷ "Bad Girls" S:3.14.

and in any case “beyond good and evil.”¹²⁸ Again unwilling to take a “hands on” approach to the consequences of her actions, Faith makes the claim that as Slayers “something made us different. We’re warriors. We’re built to kill,” She states that as Slayers they “**are** better” than other humans because they “need **us** to survive.” However, a Slayer also needs humanity to survive. To Faith, being a Slayer means being able to do what she wants as long as the scales are balanced. It is simply about raw power to her, not a noble cause which enriches and saves the lives of people. This connotes that she is new to both the power and the cause. The following dialogue verifies three things about Faith’s attitude to her calling: that she lacks Buffy’s experience to see the downsides of fighting evil, that she has an egotistic perception of her given powers, and that she is a pleasure seeker:

Joyce: So you’re a Slayer, too. Isn’t that interesting! Do you like it?

Faith: God, I love it!

Buffy: Uh, Mom?

Joyce: Uh, just a second, honey. You know, Buffy never talks that way.

Why do you love it?

Faith: Well, when I’m fighting, it’s like the whole world goes away and I only know one thing: that I’m gonna win and they’re gonna lose. I like that feelin’.

Joyce smiles at that and takes her seat.

Buffy: Well, sure. Beats that dead feeling you get when they win and you lose.

Faith: I don’t let that kind of negative thinking in.¹²⁹

Faith is in possession of a supernatural power which has properties to shape human destiny, and therefore comes with responsibilities. It is not for her to decide over life or death, which Angel attempts to convey to her through his experienced fact. Most importantly, her actions are fundamentally based on personal desires. Her will is an internal drive which she exercises freely from “Bad Girls” to “Who Are You?”¹³⁰

Although Faith expresses the ideals of the *Übermensch*, it is arguably the mayor of Sunnydale “who most closely approximates Nietzsche’s concept”¹³¹ of it. Mayor Richard Wilkins III built the town knowing that a Hellmouth lay beneath it more than a hundred years ago in order for demons to feed on the unsuspecting inhabitants. In return he would turn into a pure demon, which is part of his quest to achieve ultimate power and superiority over humans. Quite fittingly, he turns into a giant serpent on Graduation Day becoming “Mr. Patriarchal

¹²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York; Vintage Books, 1966) 206.

¹²⁹ “Faith, Hope and Trick” S:3.3

¹³⁰ S:4.16.

¹³¹ Schudt., 28.

Phallos of 1999.”¹³² Like a snake in the grass he has made the people of his town trust him. To attempt to eat his voters’ children is a display of the ultimate deceit. In addition, his portrayal as being conspiratorial to achieve power, as well as his name, makes his character a likely nod towards Shakespeare’s Richard III. The Mayor’s tendency of punning and making dry remarks not befitting his identity as the current ultimate evil force supports the allusion, as does the fact that they both have to, and do, “play nice” to remain in control of their respective conspiracies. Mayor Wilkins does not appear as an evil man, as Buffy points out after she and Faith investigate Deputy Mayor Finch’s office in this episode, “I didn’t get the bad guy vibe off of him.” Neither is Nietzsche’s “master morality” inherently evil. On the contrary, it is the “slave morality” which is “bad” because “it is an ethics of the weak, who hate and fear strength, pride, and self-affirmation.”¹³³ At the end of the episode the Mayor hires Faith as his assassin, and her stepping over the threshold to his office symbolizes her crossover from the side of good to that of evil.

During the remainder of season three, Faith and the Mayor develop a father-daughter relationship which he is devoted to even after his transformation to a “pure demon.” In the worldview of the Buffyverse the demons were on Earth before the humans, and ruled the lands. Even after they lost their grandeur and accommodated in size to be able to walk unseen among humans they still consider themselves superior to humans. After kidnapping Buffy and believing she has managed to turn Angel back to Angelus in “Enemies,”¹³⁴ Faith blurts out that;

“No one can stop the Ascension. Mayor’s got it wired, B. He built this town for demons to feed on and come Graduation Day, he’s getting paid. And I’ll be sitting at his right hand. Assuming he has hands after the transformation. I’m not too clear on that part. And all your little lame ass friends are going to be kibbles’n’bits.”

As Nietzsche explains, “the noble type of man experiences *itself* as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, ‘what is harmful to me is harmful in itself.’ It knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is *value-creating*.”¹³⁵ As long as she affiliates with the Mayor, Faith remains a dependant of his good will. Furthermore, by escaping the authority of the Watchers’ Council and changing sides, she is not liberating herself from patriarchy but simply trading one patriarchal institution for another one. Faith is not capable of master morality, she remains with the herd. Their twisted father-daughter

¹³² Rhonda Wilcox, “Pain as Bright as Steel: Mythic Striving and Light as Pain,” *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005) 41.

¹³³ Peter Singer. “Ethics” (In Encyclopedia Britannica). Chicago; 1985. Available at: <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1985----.htm> April 13, 2007.

¹³⁴ S:3.17.

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, 205.

relationship indicates that the Mayor will still maintain his responsibilities towards Faith after he transcends humanity. This is very much in accord with Nietzsche's statement that the *Übermensch* only has duties towards ones peers.

The moral issue of claiming human life is problematized in *Buffy*. To take another human being's life is generally condemned in *Buffy*. It is Buffy's job as the Slayer to rid the world of supernatural murderers and by doing so preventing human casualties and saving lives. It would therefore defeat the purpose of their calling as Slayers to ascribe to Faith's notions of superiority and uses one's agency to cause more pain. Buffy's response after Faith's wrongful assessment of their calling, is that being a Slayer or more generally having power, "does **not** mean that we get to pass judgment on people like we're better than everybody else." This agrees with Greg Forster, that "in the Buffyverse, people do not get to decide what shall be good and what shall be evil; protecting the weak is good, and preying on the weak is evil, period."¹³⁶ This insight is not as straight forward in the ethos, because essentially it is "the mission that matters." As Giles informs Buffy, Faith's crime is not unique in the history of Slayers; "the Slayer is on the front line of a nightly war. Now, it's, it's tragic, but accidents have happened."¹³⁷ However, this particular accident is not what gives Faith the label of rogue. It is her own choices after the fact which makes her morally in the wrong. Her transitions to evil starts when she offers her services to the Mayor at the end of "Consequences."

During the first three seasons of *Buffy*, Angel was the epitome of the redemptive murderer/sinner. His character possesses many of the signs of a recovering alcoholic, and he states himself that killing was "like a drug for me." Accordingly, his inclination to murder eventually had consequences. When the gypsies cursed him with a soul after he brutally murdered their favorite girl in the late 1800s, the impact of regaining his human soul affected him similarly to an addict going through withdrawal. His addiction is to drink the blood of humans, but also to use his agency and power to hurt people, as discussed in chapter two. In this respect he is not wrong to claim that he and Faith are "very much alike." Faith is made to look ragged in the scenes during which Angel tries to entice a sense of redemption in her by appealing to her humanity and his experience with the lack thereof. To commit murder without remorse means that one can take human life without having to feel bad about it. This problematizes the desired ethics of our culture, because to take human life is the worst thing a

¹³⁶ Greg Forster, "Faith and Plato: 'You're Nothing! Disgusting. Murderous Bitch!'" *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Open Court: Chicago, 2003) 9.

¹³⁷ "Consequences" S:3.15.

person can do. In *Buffy*, to become a murderer is the second worst thing. Unless the murderer comes to terms with the nature of the crime, the denial of the act causes the individual to irretrievably lose its innocence, and with it the ability to regain desired morality.

However, the narrative is not naïve enough to claim that all murderers are innocents before they commit murder. Most of the killing is performed by demons or vampires who are exempt from feeling remorse based on the simple fact that they are incapable of such human emotions and insight. For the humans or humanized characters there are always some redeeming factors in the characters which make them objects of our sympathy. However, it is their humanity and the viewer's wish for their redemption which intensifies their evil acts. When Angel returned from the hell-dimension, he had to face the consequences of his acts as Angelus. Although, in the moments before he was sent there he had no recollection of what his evil persona had done, it is implied that he knows when he returns.¹³⁸ Having Angelus' acts fresh in mind, he is the most capable person to aid Faith, because he knows what it means to suppress and contain his evil self, and how to successfully undertake the road to redemption.

Faith's past also gives her redeeming sympathy.¹³⁹ No matter her past, it is the choices she makes in the present which determine where she is positioned on the moral scale, as Willow points out;

“You know, it didn't have to be this way. But you made your choice. I know you had a tough life. I know that some people think you had a lot of bad breaks. Well, boo-hoo! Poor you. You know, you had a lot more in your life than some people. I mean, you had friends in your life like Buffy. Now you have no one. You were a Slayer and now you're nothing. You're just a big, selfish, worthless waste.”¹⁴⁰

Faith, like Angel's evil persona Angelus, subscribes to the pleasure principle which in psychoanalytic theory is closely linked to the id. The pleasure principle is “the view that human beings are governed by the desire for instinctual gratification, or pleasures, and for the discharge of tension that builds up as pain or “unpleasure” when gratification is lacking.¹⁴¹” As the id is most prominent during childhood, Angel is correct in his assessment that Faith is

¹³⁸ In the Buffyverse other dimensions operate with a different concept of time. While Angel was, in Earth time, only gone for three months, he did spend 100 years in the time aspect of the hell dimension.

¹³⁹ In “Faith, Hope and Trick” (S:3.3) we learn that her abusive mother is deceased, as she tells an attacking vampire that “my dead mother hits harder than that,” in “Enemies” (S:3.18) we learn that her mother was unloving and alcoholised, and that Faith has probably inherited an addictive behaviour from her; “See, when I was a kid I used to beg my mom for a dog. Didn't matter what kind, I just wanted, you know, something to live. A dog's all I wanted. Well, that and toys. But mom was too busy, you know, enjoying the drinking and passing out parts of life, that I never really got what I wanted.”

¹⁴⁰ “Choices” S:3.19.

¹⁴¹ *A.P.A Dictionary of Psychology*, 2006 ed. All terminology used in the paragraph.

“not much more than a child.” She is driven by primitive forces and instant gratification such as hunger and sex, and slaying is not enough to satisfy her urges; “Isn’t it funny how slaying always makes you hungry and horny?”¹⁴² Angel tells Faith that continuing to be governed by the id will ruin her. However, since there is no pleasure for her in feeling guilt and remorse she chooses the easy path, which is the one she is already on.

Because Faith’s psychological mindset derives from her id, she cannot be an *Übermensch*. Singer explains that, “What Nietzsche meant by *Übermensch* was a person who could rise above the limitations of ordinary morality, and by the “will to power” it seems that Nietzsche had in mind self-affirmation and not necessarily the use of power to oppress others.” As Faith is very much still acting on the basic needs of a child to verify her right to “do what she wants,” and the only “will to power” she exudes is the wish to maintain her freedom after murdering another human being, she is not the *Übermensch* in the narrative. In the ideologies that form the base for morals in *Buffy* there is no room for the *Übermensch*.

Faith is only partially right to claim that “[humanity] need **us** to survive.” There is no statements made in the mythos of the Slayer that she is the savior of humanity, rather she is the killer of evil which threatens to kill humans. One seemingly cancels out the other; however, the Slayer also kills embodied evil in order to create a sense of order in the chaos of the world. It is suggested that revealing the nature of darkness would cause chaos and fear in human society. This again suggests that Nietzsche’s slave mentality, which what the *Übermensch* is able to rise above, is not favored in the Buffyverse. By not knowing that they need saving by and from someone stronger than them, humans maintain ignorance, but they retain their agency, autonomy, as well as their innocence. As shown by Giles’ quote above, the Slayers are fighting a war, but unlike historical wars, theirs must be fought in secrecy for life to persist. It is this secrecy of the mission that Faith has misunderstood. In addition, the Slayer supports the favoritism of the “slaves,” and contests Faith’s statement that they are better than other humans. They act out of the responsibilities which come with having power and their choices must lead to maintaining the status quo. They cannot harm human beings because that might reveal the Slayers identity and cause, and they should not harm human beings because their powers were given to them to do good, not “to pass judgment on people like we’re better than everybody else.”¹⁴³ Buffy resists Faith’s claim of superiority because she is burdened by her destiny. She desires a normal life and wishes she was ignorant of demonic evil so she could be like everybody else. However, Buffy knows that she cannot be

¹⁴² “Faith, Hope and Trick” S:3.3.

¹⁴³ Buffy, “Consequences” S:3.15.

“normal” because she is in possession of a power which requires her agency. Nevertheless, she has foothold in the “normal” world as well; she has her mother and friends to keep her firmly grounded. It is also these human lives she typically saves. Moreover, Buffy is aware that they enable her to make good choices because to her they are not inferior, but equals although she clearly exceeds them in physical strength and stamina in their endeavors. Essentially, Buffy cannot agree with Faith because she subscribes to Kantian morals, unlike Faith who idealizes a Nietzschean principle of supremacy of the powerful individual; in this context right and wrong use of human agency.

Not “Dirty Girls,” but “Chosen”; “From Beneath You It Devours”¹⁴⁴

“There’s moments in your life that make you, that set the course of who you’re gonna be. Sometimes they’re little, subtle moments. Sometimes they’re not.¹⁴⁵ Bottom line is, even if you see ‘em coming, you’re not ready for the big moments. *No one asks for their life to change, not really. But it does.* So what are we, helpless? Puppets? No. *The big moments are gonna come. You can’t help that. It’s what you do afterwards that counts. That’s when you find out who you are.*”¹⁴⁶

Buffy scholar Roz Kaveney argues in his discussion on season seven that “the prevailing theme is the getting of wisdom.”¹⁴⁷ Fittingly so the first episode of the season is entitled “Lessons.” It begins with the knowledge of resistance and of one’s opponents’ weaknesses, when Buffy teaches her sister Dawn how slay, and moves on to institutionalized knowledge, with the opening of the newly rebuilt Sunnydale High School. The episode ends with this season’s villain, the First Evil tormenting the re-ensouled vampire Spike by appearing as the six main villains of the previous seasons in descending order before it morphs into our heroine. The last of these representations, the very first villain is the Master, who represented traditional patriarchy in season one. It is in his form that the First chooses to introduce what the season will be about, or rather the goals of the lessons taught. In the narrative the Master who represents the show’s structural beginning, the first “end” of Buffy¹⁴⁸ and new beginnings. It is therefore fitting that the First morphs into Buffy who has had the power, i.e. the potential, to defeat all of the previous Big Bads:¹⁴⁹

[And that’s where we’re going (Drusilla)], right back to the beginning. Not the Bang, not the Word, the true beginning. The next few months are going to be quite a ride. And I think **we’re all going to learn something about ourselves in the process.** You’ll learn you’re a pathetic schmuck, if it hasn’t sunk in already. Look at you. Trying to do what’s right, just like her. You still don’t get it. **It’s not about right, not about wrong (the Master), it’s about power (Buffy).**”¹⁵⁰

Buffy is ultimately about power, and ultimately the lesson learnt is a qualification of the concept of power. James South observes that throughout the narrative we hear the word

¹⁴⁴ The First Evil’s tagline.

¹⁴⁵ Angelus “Becoming, Part1” S:2.21

¹⁴⁶ Whistler “Becoming, Part1” S:2.21

¹⁴⁷ Roz Kaveney, “She Saved the World. A Lot: An Introduction to the Themes and Structures of *Buffy* and *Angel*,” *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel* (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004) 43.

¹⁴⁸ i.e. her physical death.

¹⁴⁹ Big Bad is what the Scoobies call the main villains of each season.

¹⁵⁰ “Lessons” S:7.1. Emphasis added for highlighting purposes.

used, but it is not until “Chosen”¹⁵¹ that we find out what it means in the context of *Buffy*. He explains that, “power is not force, or brute strength, or anything that we’re accustomed to associate with the term. Instead, we learn at the end that power is just potentiality; from the Latin *potere* to be able, in this sense ‘power’ involves possibilities.”¹⁵² Ethically it is about the power to make choices and influence outcomes which are morally good, i.e. use one’s human agency. Therefore, the “power” that Whedon and crew hands over to the viewer with the series’ ending, is modified to be capacities different individuals possess which makes each of us unique, and the ability of individuals to utilize their individuality for personal empowerment. In the fight against evil, one is concerned about the type of power they have. This is essential knowledge to obtain in order to defeat any given enemy on the show. Furthermore, by knowing the enemy’s powers one can easily deduct the enemy’s weaknesses. Therefore, in fighting evil, knowledge and insight to one’s own strength and capacities is a pivotal part of making morally right choices and impose those choices on the world. The message is get to “know thyself.” Monique Deveaux explains in connection to second wave feminism’s usage of “power:” “Here the focus is on Foucault’s later development of an agonistic model of power-the notion that “where there is power, there is resistance”-as well as on the assertion that individuals contest fixed identities and relations in ongoing and sometimes subtle ways. This power paradigm has proven particularly helpful for feminists who want to show the diverse sources of women’s subordination as well as to demonstrate that we engage in resistance in our everyday lives.”¹⁵³ Although it is understood that as a Slayer Buffy has powers, they are not “superpowers” in the sense of abnormality in scale. A Slayer has more strength, but is not inexhaustible, possesses vigilance, but has no ex-ray vision, heals quicker from injuries, but is not invulnerable. Therefore, a Slayer’s power is the potentiality to kill representatives of evil, and not superpowers. Furthermore, the wisdom gained through the lesson taught in season seven is that of feminism. The victory of the battle against evil is an attempt to illuminate the status quo of gender in the real world. Insofar as season seven summarizes the show’s feminist agenda, power is given to each individual in the show. The fact that everyone has some sort of power, i.e. potential to use it, by the end makes it a clear message to viewers. It is an appeal to find ones own powers, whatever they may be.

¹⁵¹ S:7.22

¹⁵² James B. South, “On the Philosophical Consistency of Season 7,” *Slayage: the Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 13-14 (2004), <http://www.slayageonline.com/essays/slayage13_14/South.htm > March 23, 2007.

¹⁵³ Monique Deveaux, “Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Women’s Agency: Empowerment and the Limits of Resistance (Summer, 1994) pp. 223-247. The Scholarly Journal Archive April 19, 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org/view/00463663/sp040055/04x0725w/0> > pp. 230-231.

In this chapter I will look at the final five episodes of season seven which include; “Dirty Girls,” “Empty Places,” “Touched,” “End of Days,” and “Chosen.” The final season of the television show takes us back to the beginning, that is, to what the show was originally designed to be about. As stated in the introduction, the mission statement is “the joy of female power.” Therefore, the last episodes of the show attempt to resolve and summarize the prevailing theme, which is why the main discussion of this chapter is concerned with power. Within this discussion of how power is treated in the selected five episodes I will also look at the treatment of leadership and human agency in war, and, how the threat of evil can make an impending end a moral guidepost. The objective is to make an attempt to answer the question; what makes *Buffy* a TV-show with a feminist agenda? For this purpose I will use Arwen Spicer’s essay “It’s Bloody Brilliant! The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of *Buffy*”¹⁵⁴ as a basis for this part of the discussion. As there is limited academic writing about season seven available, most of the discussion will rely heavily on the dialogue and plot.

These episodes are millenarian in tone, promising the ultimate battle between good and evil with only one victor. According to Michael Barkun, millennialism is the belief that an end will come where either the powers of good or the powers of evil will prevail.¹⁵⁵ The latter is referred to as anti-millenarian, but both outcomes entail a change of sorts. Neither of the many great and small battles, some even of apocalyptic nature that have been fought till now can compare to the final war which wraps up the narrative. This time Buffy and her friends face the source of all evil, the First evil. Their ultimate victory of the final battle does not indicate that good has won the war against evil. With the destruction of the evil epicenter, that is Sunnydale and the closing of its Hellmouth, this apocalyptic battle does, however, assign the victory in favor of good. With the empowerment of marginalized individuals this liberation creates a change in the status quo.

In accordance to Barkun, I suggests that the ends in *Buffy* follow an improvisational millennial¹⁵⁶ thought; “the improvisational style is characterized by relentless and seemingly indiscriminate borrowing,¹⁵⁷ [and draw their ideas from] rejected knowledge, the cultic

¹⁵⁴ Arwen Spicer, “It’s Bloody Brilliant!” The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of *Buffy*,” *Slayage: the Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 14 (2004) <<http://www.slayageonline.com/essays/slayage15/Spicer.htm>> Jan. 15. 2007.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Barkun, *Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (California: University of California Press, 2003) pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ib.* at pp. 15-38.

¹⁵⁷ *Ib.* at 18.

milieu, and stigmatized knowledge.”¹⁵⁸ The overall narrative borrows relentlessly, as many of the situations and monsters are recognizable from other culture and pop culture phenomena. As for the end of the show, the writers borrow indiscriminately in order to resolve the outcome of victory, namely from Arthurian myth (the Scythe); the amulet¹⁵⁹ which appears in most religions and belief systems (this means that its purpose can be anything); and Willow as goddess, inverting patriarchal Christianity into a matriarchal form as she becomes the creator of newly empowered individuals. In addition, the last episodes make use of “rejected knowledge,” i.e. the occult; the cultic milieu, i.e. in this context groups which apply the occult, but which are not necessarily occult cults; and stigmatized knowledge, that is knowledge which once was considered truth but which has lost its original meaning and importance to the world in general.¹⁶⁰ In these episodes the magic spells Willow uses to extract the power of the Slayer from the Scythe represents the occult. The group of the good, that is the Scoobies and the Potentials can be said to be a cultic milieu, because by the end they “reject the authority of normative institutions,”¹⁶¹ insofar as the standards of the Slayer lineage has been forced to conform to is those of the patriarchy. The best example of a cultic milieu is that of the Guardians, the women who watch the Watchers and Slayers. They are the creators of the Scythe, once considered part of the Slayer heritage but hidden and then forgotten. The general narrative often makes use of millennialist ideas; the occult is often both encountered and used to rectify or change situations; many of the Scoobies’ opponents are part of cultic milieus; and the Scoobies’ knowledge of the occult is often stigmatized by the uninitiated.

In the context of the narrative, apocalypse is not an exact science. Simply because something is written and foretold, does not mean that it will occur. It does, however, indicate that things will change and consequently so will individuals. Events unfold in accordance to how people react to the challenges at hand, not in accordance to predestination. Human agency and free will enable individuals in the narrative to be a part of the change for the better, because the Scoobies, unlike the representatives of evil they fight, do not know with certainty that they will win; all they can do is fight with all they have, which usually is each other.

¹⁵⁸ Barkun, 19.

¹⁵⁹ Lat.; “an object that protects a person from trouble.” In this case it protects persons from evil.

¹⁶⁰ Barkun, pp. 15-38.

¹⁶¹ *Ib.* at 23.

Greg Stevenson points out that “[the apocalypses on *Buffy*] function as a moral guidepost in that they bring clarity to life and thereby inform moral decisions.”¹⁶² And they do, insofar as “speculation on the end of the world actually functions as a comment on the present state of the world.”¹⁶³ The comment is clear. The present state of the Buffyverse is, as I mentioned in the introduction, not unlike the present state of the real world in relation to the state of female empowerment. To have a potential army is not enough to defeat evil in whatever form it presents itself. “She alone” cannot stand against these forces, and she does not have to, the Slayer has equals and like-minded waiting to join her army. Fighting evil should not be a one person battle; it should be a communal effort. In worldlier terms, as far as gender equality goes, that is to say that woman themselves claim it and are accepted for claiming equality the struggle is not at the end yet.

Buffy: That’s what [the First] wants.

Giles: Yes, to erase all the Slayers in training and their Watchers along with their methods.

Buffy: And then Faith, and then me. And with all the Potentials gone and no way of making another, it's the end. No more Slayer. Ever.¹⁶⁴

This season builds up a tension between characters and the First Evil. This is the primordial evil which is at the core of every demonic force the Scoobies have fought in the preceding six seasons. The First was introduced in season three.¹⁶⁵ Having faced it before, it is therefore Buffy who recognizes who they are up against:¹⁶⁶ “It claimed to be the original evil, the one that came before anything else.”¹⁶⁷ In the final season its objective is to remove the guardian of the Hellmouth and the main threat to evil, which is the Slayer and the legacy, and in doing so tip the scale of good and evil. Its ambition is, as Kaveney observes, “to overrun the world with ancient vampires [the Turok-han] and achieve physical form when the dead outnumber the living.”¹⁶⁸ The First is not corporeal, while it take on the likeness of any dead person it wants, its true form is seldom seen. Being incorporeal, it cannot use physical force like vampires and demons. Instead it targets people’s psyche to either manipulate or destroy them by pretending to be persons of significance to its target. However, its power of

¹⁶² Greg Stevenson, “The End as Moral Guidepost [in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*],” *Televised Morality: the Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Reprinted in *Slayage* 15. Dec. 2004.

<<http://www.slayageonline.com/essays/slayage15/Stevenson.htm>> Jan. 15, 2007.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ “Bring on the Night” S:7.10

¹⁶⁵ “Amends” S:3.10.

¹⁶⁶ “Never Leave Me” S:7.9

¹⁶⁷ “Bring on the Night” S:7.10

¹⁶⁸ Kaveney, 48.

deception and lies is its weakness. It relies on the power of words and discourse to impose meaning on its victims, but it cannot force individuals to believe them.

In relation to the First, Wilcox observes that “it should be noted that in the *Buffy* story the First Evil *falsely* takes the place of the true Eve, just as one might say women have been falsely represented, wronged by the more recent patriarchal story of Eve.”¹⁶⁹ In addition to the false representation of women, the First seems to favor the representation of Buffy in the selected five episodes. This is not coincidental. Buffy is power in the context of the narrative. She is the superordinate Slayer to whom the potential Slayers flock like children for protection. On one hand she is the “mother” figure, or the “first woman,” which imagery the First happily perverts. On the other hand, she is a woman who possesses abilities to “change the world.” In the end, Buffy wins freedom over patriarchal restraints when she causes the Fall of Evil, most prominently by defeating the entity which falsely represented her. Buffy represents the Judeo-Christian Eve, falsely represented and victimized by patriarchy. However, Buffy uses her agency to change “the world” by empowering women.

In the episodes leading up to the selected five, Buffy’s primary concern and burden has been to protect the potential Slayers from the First carrying out its plan to destroy the lineage. The Potentials are potential Slayers, girls who are “in waiting” for the powers of the Chosen One. Some of the girls show signs of strength as well as other qualities of a Slayer, but essentially they are just girls who “could be.” The number of girls occupying the Summers’ house indicates that not all Potentials will become Slayers, and that not all girls can even be Potentials. Although there are individuals in the Buffyverse without special powers or abilities who are able to fight incarnations, they have knowledge about their opponents which comes from experience, long training and a dose of “street smarts.”¹⁷⁰ Most of the remaining girls who are under the protection and training of Buffy have only recently been initiated into this world of vampires and demons. The pedagogy of fighting evil is learning by doing. In the Buffyverse knowledge in the traditional sense is also a form of power, not just the supernatural powers such as magic, or the physical through blunt force.

In “Dirty Girls” we are introduced to the vessel the First has chosen for its corporeal form. He is the misogynistic, fallen preacher Caleb. He is a human to whom the First transfuses its power in order for him to become indestructible. It is explicit that Caleb, unlike the First’s victims, is a willing follower and servant, i.e. little manipulation, if any, went into

¹⁶⁹ Rhonda Wilcox. “I Think I Can Name Myself: Naming and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*” *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005) 51.

¹⁷⁰ Examples are: Rupert Giles, who has proved to be useful in battles and the recent Principal Robin Wood whose mother was a Slayer. Upon her death he was raised by her Watcher. In addition, Charles Gunn on *Angel*.

persuade him. In addition, according to Buffy “a guy like [that] didn’t just get in the game. He’s been playing for a while.”¹⁷¹ He has a history of abusing and killing women, but more importantly he was the agent who blew up the Watchers’ Council and killed the Watchers and some potential Slayers. The destruction of the Council also signifies an end of patriarchal power over the Slayers. The authority of this dominating, yet well-meaning institution is distorted by the self-righteous “authority” of Caleb. He symbolizes the centuries of patriarchal suppression and demonizing of women by men who uses the good book, or any unreasonable “logic,” to justify inequality between the sexes. And he can do so because he is a man in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, unlike the First whose words have a sting to them, Caleb’s physical blows are more threatening to the Slayers and Potentials than his relentless and blasphemous sermons.

From “Bring on the Night”¹⁷² Buffy has held the sole role of leader of the Potentials. This is not purely because she has the ability to protect them and train them, but because of her position as the Chosen One. With no one else capable of protecting and leading them, the Potentials have had no choice than to follow Buffy. In “Dirty Girls”¹⁷³ Buffy’s peer Faith returns with a new and improved outlook on slaying. As the rogue Slayer she became morally deviant after the events discussed in chapter three despite the Scoobies’ best efforts to moralize her. Faith exemplifies a notion that women are greater enemies to each other than men are. This is a hated misconception among feminists; however, in this context it is true because Faith and Buffy “compete” for the same status of power. The Slayer prophecy states that one girl is chosen, and although it is ridiculous to send a one-woman “army” out to defeat legions of evil representations, Faith undoubtedly sees her calling as a way of rising to superiority. Furthermore, she was jealous of Buffy because of her status as white middle-class with family and friends, and Faith’s decline to evil resembled the acts of a teenager rebelling her, in this case mother; i.e. Buffy. In her quest for superiority, Faith made enemies with Buffy by causing her great grief. Nevertheless, it is clear that Buffy has an aptitude for sacrificing her own personal opinions about people despite how much they have hurt her. Understanding that Faith has change and by putting their history aside for the sake of the mission, Buffy accepts Faith’s offer to assist in the upcoming battle because she recognizes Faith as a valuable asset.

¹⁷¹ “Empty Places” S:7.19

¹⁷² S.7.10

¹⁷³ S:7.18

This offers a prophetic indication to the seasons ending. The Slayers understand that it is the combined effort which can defeat evil, i.e. strength in numbers. This is also something “evil” is often well aware of.

In a moment when Faith is alone in “Touched,”¹⁷⁴ the First attempts to lure out the evil side of her. The part of her identity which made her morally bad is something she continuously has to deal with. In the logic of the series, murder is treated like an addiction, meaning that neither are something one just quit, but rather stays as part of one’s identity. However, Faith is on the right path, but still vulnerable. Although the First is a liar, one of its devices is to break people down is by bluntly being just truthful enough. When the First approaches Faith in an attempt to subvert and persuade her to come over its side, it appears as her former employer, the deceased founder of Sunnydale,¹⁷⁵ who enabled her to formally become a moral deviant. In the representation of the Mayor, the First attempts to make Faith “[fall again] into the temptation of the serpent.”¹⁷⁶ It tries to make Faith believe that to mean that Buffy is enforcing patriarchal restraints which will lead to Faith’s destruction:

“Buffy’s dangerous. If you’re not careful, she’ll destroy you.”¹⁷⁷ By this the First means that Buffy will destroy evil. It also tells her that; “Deep down, you always wanted Buffy to accept you, to love you even.(...) Why do you think that is? You keep looking for love and acceptance from these people, these friends of yours, but you’re never gonna find it. The truth is, nobody will ever love you. Not the way I love you.(...)They’ll forever see you as a killer.”¹⁷⁸

This illustrates that identity is a social construct. We are prone to see ourselves through the eyes of the people we socialize with. That is why the encounter between Faith and her new beau Robin Wood, is so important in her return to the Scooby Gang and society at large. This is a social recognition of Faith by Robin that she is more than just a valuable warrior. She is an individual. In the “girl power” of feminist perspective the forming of individuality over gender is important, but equally important is the idea that one ought to be all one can be; i.e. not be stigmatized for one trait of one’s identity. Faith is therefore the first of the characters to be de-marginalized. In addition, Robin is a man comfortable enough with his own sexuality that he has no problem being lead by a woman:

Faith: Forget about tomorrow. This is tonight. It’s been a while. Am I out of line?

Robin: No. You’re the leader.

¹⁷⁴ S:7.20

¹⁷⁵ See chapter 2

¹⁷⁶ Wilcox, “I Think I Can Name Myself,” 51.

¹⁷⁷ “Touched” S:7.19

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

The power structure of the two Slayers was not questioned upon Faith's arrival. She found it comfortable to be under Buffy's lead, apparently because she had recently been put in charge in LA.¹⁷⁹ More likely, considering their history and Faith's newfound sense of responsibility, Faith falls in line because firstly, she wants to prove by doing that she has changed for the better, and secondly that by showing herself as loyal and resourceful she can be worthy of Buffy's forgiveness. It is evident that they still have unresolved issues when the Potentials and the Scoobies question Buffy's leadership after a failed mission.¹⁸⁰ In the heated debate of whether or not Buffy should be in charge simply because she is the Slayer, the others, Potentials and Scoobies alike, choose Faith as their leader:¹⁸¹

Buffy: Look, I wish this could be a democracy. I really do. Democracies don't win battles. It's a hard truth, but there has to be a single voice. You need someone to issue orders and be reckless sometimes and not take your feelings into account. You need someone to lead you.

Anya: And it's automatically you. You really do think you're better than we are.¹⁸²

Until this "mutiny scene," Buffy has seen Faith as an asset to her battle, but when confronted by a new situation where Faith seems favored Buffy changes her attitude. When push comes to shove, Buffy is quick to bring up their past. This time, however, Faith has cause to put Buffy in her place, seeing as Buffy now believes herself to be superior. In this situation Buffy is coming close to being the mirror image of the rogue Faith. As discussed in chapter two, Buffy accused Faith of believing that being a Slayer made her better than other people. In this situation Buffy has allowed her responsibility and position as leader to get to her head. She is becoming like the patriarchal Watchers' Council, demanding sacrifice for the mission. This is the battle of the wills, where Buffy wants her position and Faith just wants to speak for the Potentials, which in this situation is the "little guy":

"I didn't come here to take anything away from you, but I'm not gonna be your little lapdog, either. I came here to beat the other guy, to do right, however it works. I don't know if I can lead. But the real question is...can you follow?"¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Shortly, Angel lost his soul and turned into Angelus (see chapter two). According to her former Watcher Wesley, she was the only one who would want to return his soul rather than simply kill him. She took the lead of the salvage mission. "Salvage" *Angel* S:4.13.

¹⁸⁰ "Dirty Girls" S:7.18.

¹⁸¹ "Empty Places" S:7.19.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Faith, "Empty Places" S:7.19

Although Buffy is appalled and disappointed, that she is overthrown by her former enemy Faith, she tells Faith “Don’t. Don’t be afraid to lead them. Whether you wanted it or not, their lives are yours. It’s only gonna get harder. Protect them, but lead them.”¹⁸⁴ She knows that Faith will not have the same immediate acclaim to the position as leader. Buffy did have immediate acclaim because she was then the only Slayer, while Faith was imprisoned. After trying the democratic approach Faith acknowledges that Buffy was right; “Things are different, because now... I’m your boss. Look, you guys, I’m not Buffy. I’m not the one who’s been on your asses all this time, but I’m not one of you anymore, either. I’m your leader, which means I go first, and I make the rules, and the rest of you follow after me. Is that clear?”¹⁸⁵ In war, there has to be a single voice strong enough to make the tough decisions, but without having established one’s authority one cannot expect that anyone will follow. By claiming her position, which Buffy had done gradually, she manages to get the Potentials to follow her.

While Buffy is in exile from her house, she is given time to reflect. As the leader she did not have the luxury of vocalizing her concerns, unless it was part of her motivational speeches to the Potentials. It is apparent that Buffy, starting her speeches with despair and ending with hope, speaks to uphold morale. She is clearly burdened by her responsibilities as leader and as a lonely empowered woman:

Buffy: That’s my problem. I say the word, some girl dies, every time.

Spike: There’s always casualties in war.

Buffy: Casualties. It just sounds so casual. These are girls that I got killed. I cut myself off from them. All of them. I knew I was gonna lose some of them and I didn’t—You know what? I’m still making excuses. **I’ve always cut myself off.** I’ve always— Being the Slayer made me different. But it’s my fault I stayed that way. People are always trying to connect to me, and I just slip away. You should know.¹⁸⁶

It is her recognition of the loneliness of those who are on top which is part of what makes her, not only a unique hero, but a feminist heroine. In fact, since society is still very much patriarchal, one could interpret her comment as that of a victimized woman, powerful but not autonomous. As a prologue to being overthrown she tells the group that she believes that Caleb and the First are hiding something from her at the very vineyard the Potentials are reluctant to reenter; “The bad guys always go where the power is. They’re protecting the vineyard or something at the vineyard.”¹⁸⁷ She is not wrong. In “Touched,”¹⁸⁸ Buffy revisits

¹⁸⁴ “Empty Places” S:7.19

¹⁸⁵ “Touched” S:7.20

¹⁸⁶ “Touched” S:7.20

¹⁸⁷ “Empty Places” S:7.19

the vineyard on her own. The Scythe, is not the “bad guys’” power. In fact, it is something both the First is afraid of; Caleb for its physical application, and the First of its potentially mental power. The symbolism of the Scythe resembles the legendary Sword in the Stone of Arthurian myth. When Arthur extracted the sword it had by the act found the rightful heir to the throne of Britain, and reunited the Britons after the dispute over who was to be King Uther’s successor. The offer to extract the sword was given to all noblemen by Merlin. When this tale is inverted to all female participants it has a similar outcome.

The application of Arthurian myth in connection to the Scythe does not end with its presentation and removal from the stone. As mentioned in chapter one, the Watchers are not the only ones who watch over the Slayer. The imagery surrounding the following event is also closely linked to Arthurian myth. However, here the Scythe represents both the sword which signified the true king and that of Excalibur. Buffy tracks the origin of the weapon to the last remaining member of a community of women who called themselves the Guardians; “the Watchers watched the Slayers, but we were watching them. [We are] women who want to help and protect you.” While holding the Scythe the woman explains that the Guardians “forged [it] in secrecy for one like you,” and that “it was put to use right here, to kill the last pure demon that walked upon the Earth. The rest were already driven under.”¹⁸⁹ When she returns the weapon to Buffy it echoes the Lady of the Lake presenting Excalibur to King Arthur. The woman explains that “this is a powerful weapon” but that “you already have weapons.” The fact is that Buffy has a house full of potential soldiers with the potentiality to defeat the primary evil. They are young women waiting for the power of the Slayer, the power that the Shadow Men enforced on the first Slayer, the essence of which the Guardians transferred into the Scythe. Ironically it is the First who inadvertently gives Buffy the clues to how it can be overpowered. While taunting her, the First’s gift of gab backfires;

“Then [again] you do have an army of your own. Some thirty-odd pimply-faced girls, don’t know the pointy end of a stake. Maybe I should call this off. None of those girlies will ever know real power unless you’re dead. You know the drill: Into every generation, a slayer is born. One girl in all the world. She alone will have the strength and skill to— There’s that word again. What you are. How you’ll die. Alone.”¹⁹⁰

The newfound weapon is a piece needed to make the Potentials into Slayers. Although the Scythe’s harbored powers enables Buffy to change the rules of the heritage, it alone is not

¹⁸⁸ S:7.20

¹⁸⁹ “Touched” S:7.20

¹⁹⁰ The First Evil, “Chosen” S:7.22

enough to empower the Potentials. In her final speech Buffy invites her fellow sisters to take part in her power and become the masters of their own destinies;

“This is about choices. I believe we can beat this evil. Not when it comes, not when its army is ready, now. Tomorrow morning I’m opening the seal. I’m going down into the Hellmouth, and I’m finishing this once and for all. Right now you’re asking yourself, “what makes this different? **What makes us anything more than a bunch of girls being picked off one by one?**” It’s true none of you have the power that Faith and I do. So here’s the part where you make a choice(...): What if you could have that power...now? In every generation, one Slayer is born, because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men. This woman [Willow] is more powerful than all of them combined. So I say we change the rule. **I say my power, should be our power.** Tomorrow, Willow will use the essence of the scythe to change our destiny.”¹⁹¹

Buffy’s assessment of Willow’s power as being “more powerful than all of [theirs] combined,” is important to this discussion. Buffy’s plan of empowerment relies on Willow’s power to make it so. Willow’s powers are primarily magical. But, magic is, like murder, treated like an addiction. A dark side is still part of Willow’s identity in “Chosen”¹⁹² because she chose to use her agency for destruction: “This goes beyond anything I’ve ever done. It’s a total loss of control, and not in a nice [way]. I—I’m not sure that I’m stable enough.”¹⁹³ In this situation it is ultimately the support from her “society” which makes Willow into the goddess she is portrayed as when she performs the spell which activates the Potentials. “Dark-Willow” came to the surface when Willow suffered loss of an empowered woman, in this scenario she is the creator of empowered women. She changes the Slayers’ destiny, but also she becomes a part of a larger network, the network from which her own empowerment into magic stems from. Together, Buffy and Willow are indeed “more powerful than all [the men] combined,” because they recognize on one hand how the state of the world should be, and on the other hand implement changes. When the battle is “won”, Xander states that “we saved the world,” whereupon Willow corrects him by saying “we changed the world.” As Wilcox point out: “Saving the world is a battle that happens over and over again in the Buffyverse with grim regularity; it is only at the series’ end, however, that Willow speaks of changing the world. And they do it, of course, through the globalization of Buffy’s power.”¹⁹⁴

By changing the rules made by “powerful men,” Buffy brings the “evil empire”¹⁹⁵ of patriarchy to an end. The empire is the patriarchal society of Sumerian men who first made the Slayer and went on to form the Watcher’s Council. It is therefore pivotal that it is a

¹⁹¹ “Chosen” S:7.22

¹⁹² S:7.22

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Rhonda Wilcox, “Show Me Your World,”101.

¹⁹⁵ Barkun, 18.

powerful woman who inverts the rules set down by the men who first enforced the power on the Slayers as well as those who came after them. This end also gives a nod to the First's tagline; "from beneath you it devours." Taking "beneath" to mean "under the force, control, or influence of" it is a direct reference to the First's methods and the concepts of evil. However, taken to mean "unworthy of" it is a nod to the Watcher's Council and the men who in essence were unworthy of being in charge of and giving orders to these women whose power made them by far above these men. As Buffy expresses; "In every generation, one Slayer is born," but by breaking with this rule there is no more "I", but truly the "us." This supports Joss Whedon's message to fans; "Okay, great that you've worshipped this one iconic character, but find it in yourself, everybody."¹⁹⁶

As I have already stated, power is something everyone is in possession of because we all have potentiality. It might not be as extensive and grand as that of a Slayer or magical as Willow's. Whedon's message is to find the power in oneself and to do good with it. As far as role models go, the characters of *Buffy* live up to the standards of society; they are good people who make mistakes, and spend time to rectify those mistakes because they genuinely want to make a difference in their world. When Buffy in the heat of the battle is confronted by the First wearing her body, it taunts her by saying; "Oh no, ow! Mommy, this mortal wound is all itchy. You pulled a nice trick. You came pretty close to smacking me down. What more do you want?"¹⁹⁷ Buffy's answer is clear; "I want you to get out of my face."¹⁹⁸ With these words she reclaims her exterior self which holds and is a part of her identity, and that is what she really has been wanting for the seven seasons; to be "normal." She wants to be more than a tool against evil as the Slayer of her generation; she wants to be Buffy the autonomous individual in charge of her own personal destiny, not just the destiny of the world. Jowett notes that; "At times Buffy defines herself wholly as the Slayer, and frequently she complains that she cannot have a normal life. *Buffy* has been described as 'a wry, ongoing parable of the modern woman's greatest conflict: the challenge to balance personal and professional life' Thus the double life of the superhero becomes the bind of the contemporary professional female, who can never 'have it all,' despite the notion of the postfeminist 'superwoman' balancing career, family, and social life."¹⁹⁹ The notion of not always measuring up to the tasks of daily life is something both genders can relate to, however,

¹⁹⁶ Joss Whedon. "Chosen" commentary. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Seven, 2002- 03. DVD, Twentieth Century Fox.

¹⁹⁷ "Chosen" S.7.22

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Jowett, 24.

arguably the pressure is greater for women to stake their claims in all aspects of their lives. And here is a good reason to do what Buffy does, i.e. share the responsibility and thereby empowering oneself.

Not all *Buffy* scholars agree with the “brilliance” of the season’s ending. In her essay,²⁰⁰ Spicer criticizes the validity of the events surrounding and leading up to “Chosen.” Although her discussion is well argued and scholarly, portions of it seems marked by disagreement and unwillingness to see mission statement for what it is and appreciate the way the creator wanted it to end. She does however make a good debate, but rather than convincing me, it raised a need to counter her main points as I view them differently.

Although I agree with her critique of Buffy’s leadership methods in a traditional feminist perspective, that is that Buffy takes on masculine traits and at times an almost totalitarian role after declaring “war on Evil,” I believe its easily justified. Spicer accuses Buffy of being univocal and suffering from a superiority complex. This is how Buffy lost her role as the leader. However, what Spicer is reluctant to see, but what Buffy vocalizes in the “mutiny scene” is that “democracies don’t win wars.”²⁰¹

In wars there has to be a single voice strong enough to make the tough decisions, because in wars one has to act according to the task at hand. One does not have the luxury of time to discuss everything to death. If the main tactic is to be democratic, that is exactly how armies wind up, i.e. dead. In this battle, the Scoobies are fighting a force which cannot be reasoned with, which means that mediation is pointless. In addition, the objective of *Buffy*, in my opinion, has never been to uphold traditional gender roles, but rather to celebrate individual diversity regardless of gender. Buffy has always been shown as possessing both traditional masculine and feminine traits, as has her friends. The situations where they apply them have always been circumstantial. Why then, in times of war, is it not plausible for Buffy to adopt the traits of the stereotypical univocal, masculine General? And, more importantly, why would her adaptation of this role make the agenda of the series any less feminist? This is not who she ends up as, it is a role she takes on for the sake of her own, her friends and the Potentials’ survival. In fact, in the scene before the final battle, Buffy is right back to her familiar self, which is the normal girl with a less than normal identity as Vampire Slayer, and moreover, she is clearly a part of a multivocal community:

²⁰⁰ Spicer.

²⁰¹ “Empty Places” S:7.19

Buffy: So... what do you guys want to do tomorrow?
Willow: Nothing strenuous.
Xander: Well, mini-golf is always the first thing that comes to mind.
Giles: I think we can do better than that.
Buffy: I was thinking about shopping. As per usual.
Willow: There's an Arden B in the new mall!
Xander: Good. I could use a few items.
Giles: Aren't we going to discuss this? Save the world and go to the mall?
Buffy: I'm having a wicked shoe craving.
Xander: Aren't you on the patch?
Willow: Those never work.
Giles: And here I am, invisible to the eye, not having any say...
Xander: See, I need a new look. It's this whole eye patch thing.
Buffy: Oh! You could go with the full black secret agent look.
Willow: Or the puffy shirt, pirate-slash-poet feel. Sensitive yet manly...
Xander: Now you're getting a little renaissance fair on me.
Buffy: It's a fine line.
Giles: The earth is definitely doomed.²⁰²

I also agree with Spicer that the planning of the final battle, and the battle in itself, are questionable. However, this is where the disappointment that there was not a longer and more elaborate resolution and closure of the show really shows in her discussion. She argues that we never see the Potentials making the choice to become Slayers. Spicer interprets this to mean that Buffy makes the choice for them and therefore taking the role of the unchallengeable hero. Secondly, Spicer argues that the battle plan is flawed, because a handful of Slayers could not possibly defeat an innumerably sized army of Über- vamps. Finally, she argues that the season is permeated with scenarios that contradict the mission statement of a feminist agenda, therefore making the ultimate "sharing of power" and "empowering women" themes implausible.

First, the problem with Spicer's assumption that Buffy makes the Potentials into Slayers without allowing them to have a say in the matter, is that she forgets the media she writes about. In her interpretation, when Buffy presents her speech on how she plans to win the battle, "the Potentials watch her attentively like children in a classroom (...) receiving wisdom, not participating in its construction,"²⁰³ and that "there is no sign of any Potential offering an opinion during any part of this exposition."²⁰⁴ Buffy is not a tyrant, therefore, it is implied that this decision was taken by the Potentials off screen which then led to it being carried out by Willow who released the Slayer power from the Scythe. In other words, where Spicer sees no consent, I see no evidence of the contrary, only the lack of visualization on

²⁰² "Chosen" S:7.22

²⁰³ Spicer.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

screen. In all fairness, the last time the Potentials and the Scoobies disagreed with Buffy's plans they did let her know and assigned leadership to Faith.

Second, Spicer views the final battle plan as flawed. Admittedly, there have been more reasonable strategies which are more in keeping with internal logic of the show to the defeat of previous Big Bads.²⁰⁵ She argues that: "season Seven's strategy is not [logical]. We are given no reason to believe that the activated slayers could plausibly defeat a large army of Über- vamps. Though we accept that a Slayer has super-strength, we also know that a Slayer has limits."²⁰⁶ Part of the excitement of the show is that viewers are always kept on their toes, anything goes, anything can happen. And it has happened. The writers of *Buffy* have killed off many favored characters through the show's seven seasons; not to mention its title character twice. Where's the logic in that? I do agree that the battle plan is pretentious and flawed. It is true that the army, consisting of Buffy, Faith, Spike and the newly called Slayers is lacking in number to defeat the First's army of countless vampires. However, in the logic of the narrative, the sheer fact of not measuring up in quantity has not stopped the morally righteous from fighting back. For most of this narrative, and in the history of Slayers there has only been **one** girl with the power to fight all the evil in the world. Why then is it not plausible that thirty odd Slayers and a vampire with an amulet can not fight a fraction of all the evil in the world? As Spicer criticizes this scenario for, none of the characters were certain what the amulet would do, therefore making the plan to enter the Hellmouth even less plausible. In the end it was the power of the amulet and Spike who wore it that ultimately closed the Hellmouth. Again, this is television, in addition it is a television show entitled *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The characters that for seven seasons have faced "more apocalypses than birthdays"²⁰⁷ have always portrayed doubts of victory. In this type of narrative it is the way things pan out which makes victories plausible. And, in this particular narrative, as mentioned earlier, the morally good never know for certain that they will win.

Finally, Spicer questions the metaphor of "sharing power" as being univocally decided by an unquestioned leader. As I have already discussed the unlikelihood of it, I will not venture into it again. However, Spicer uses the scenario of Buffy's final speech to question the show's feminist agenda, saying that silencing the Potentials is not empowering but taking away their individual identity.²⁰⁸ I disagree. The fact is that Buffy knows the loneliness of being in charge which comes with unique powers. And in all fairness, ever since

²⁰⁵ Spicer.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Stevenson.

²⁰⁸ Stevenson..

the Potentials arrived in Sunnydale they have been looking more or less willingly to Buffy for the answers, not to mention protection. The fact that the majority of these girls sought protection puts them in the category of children, and they stayed that way, arguably until they got the Slayer power. In “End of Days” after Faith unknowingly led a group of the potential Slayers into a trap set by the First where some of the girls were injured and one died, Amanda tells Buffy with the remorse of a child that “I think we got punished,”²⁰⁹ that is for choosing Faith as leader over Buffy. This is not the assessment of a person ready to make a lifelong commitment to hard decision-making. The fact is that these girls still act like children. They can continue to do so because they are Potentials. In my opinion, this means that they have not fully developed their individual identity. This means that, Buffy cannot take away their identity, because they are, like her “cookie dough.”²¹⁰ In other words not fully developed their unique identities, they have not become whoever they are supposed to be yet. On the contrary, Buffy is not taking it away from them but rather adding the missing layer which is part of their identity anyway and highlighting it. As Potentials they are neither typical teenage girls, nor are they full-blown Slayers, a fact which seems more challenging to their individual development and the equality of women than Buffy’s supposedly single voice.

Buffy’s plan to share her power proves that she does not want to be univocal. By making all the potential Slayers into Slayers this gives every Potential an equal voice. As she told Spike above, as the Slayer she cut herself off from people, but by sharing her power she has finally and definitely connected herself to people. Not only that, the plan allows the girls to take another step on the ladder to womanhood. The previous seasons of *Buffy* have shown us the awkwardness of teen-age years, as well as the succeeding lack of confidence in the “trying to become adult” period. It is clear that the Potentials confidence rises when they get the power, enough in fact to face monsters they previously believed impossible to defeat. And as Buffy states, this power was supposed to be theirs to begin with, it was only because “a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up [the] rule” to only allow for one Slayer in each generation. I do not see “the sharing of power” as robbing the girls of their individual identity, but rather a breach with the restraints of a patriarchal society who saw it fit to enforce power, and with it the fate of the world, on one woman. The First Slayer is portrayed as not belonging to their cultural society, that is Sumerian, and furthermore as having no language. This would assumably have made her life and her own destiny insignificant to them. Chained to the ground while the men made her their warrior she could

²⁰⁹ “End of Days” S:7.21

²¹⁰ Ibid.

not make a choice. Having the weight of the world on their shoulders, every Slayer from the First to Buffy has been forced to solitude, and premature deaths in fulfilling the mission of these men. Therefore, instead of subverting, as Spicer claims, I believe the final season, and the five last episodes in particular, asserts “the show’s intended message of disseminated, multivocal, and critical female empowerment.”²¹¹

²¹¹ Spicer.

Postscript: “What Can't We Face if We're Together?”²¹²

In the season six musical episode “Once More With Feeling,”²¹³ the characters sing out their ambiguous feelings towards fighting evil: “The battles done, and we kinda won/ so we sound our victory cheer (...) understand we go hand in hand, but we walk alone in fear/ tell me, where do we go from here?”²¹⁴ In addition to describing the ambiguity of victory, this also makes for a comment on the past and present state of feminism in society. People have fought for power and equality and “kinda” won. Like Buffy who has “power” without being empowered in the sense of social recognition, marginalized women and men have throughout history been unsung heroes simply because their deeds have not been recognized as powerful or important enough. However, as Buffy expresses, it is “[their] own fault for staying that way.”²¹⁵

The common denominator of the discussions is human agency, which has been proven to be pivotal in order to create any form of change. The importance of human agency in a feminist perspective is due to the fact that women are traditionally stigmatized as passive, which is more a matter of “controlling” than a fact. Through this thesis I have shown how *Buffy* highlights that emotions are valuable to human agency and advocate for expression contra containing. *Buffy* shows that acceptance of one’s identity happens on a personal level through experience. In this context, gender is mostly a question of perception, not indicative of personality; i.e. women should express their anger and men should express their sorrows. Conventions of gender should not matter for expression of emotions. The narrative shows that emotions are character builders not, as they are often stigmatizes as, character weaknesses according to which gender expresses them. I have touched on the moral ambiguity of manslaughter to emphasize that current views of gender challenges traditional stereotypes of “masculinity” and “femininity.” This was represented by a woman’s ambiguous relationship to human agency, and her claim to unjustified superiority. Although the claiming of position is not negative in relation to feminist ideas of women and power, it was the circumstances which led to the claim that problematized human agency and the “feminine” position of preservation over destruction. Finally, I have shown that *Buffy* contextually succeeds with its intended feminist agenda. The empowerment of the Potentials who are marginalized

²¹² “I’ve Got a Theory/Bunnies/If We’re Together,” from “Once More With Feeling” S:6.7

²¹³ S:6.7

²¹⁴ “Where Do We Go from Here?,” from “Once More With Feeling” S:6.7

²¹⁵ “Touched” S:7.20

individuals and the reclaiming of autonomy for subordinate individuals, is made possible with the use of human agency.

The title and the narrative have raised interest among a wide range of audiences. Although it does not immediately invoke a feminist agenda, it does signify agency and empowerment of a woman in a mythological setting which is traditionally reserved for men. As I have shown, *Buffy* is able to invert a phallogocentric tradition of myth, by giving the next generation of women their long-awaited fictional hero. However, the timeless aspect of the narrative makes it not only a comment on the status quo of feminism during the series' seven seasons. *Buffy* has not been viewed widely enough to generate change of significance in the real world, therefore, Whedon's feminist agenda and "message" is still of significance to viewers. With the condition of gender differences still stereotyped, it seems that it is time that feminism has another revival. Every generation of women requires their own definitions of "femininity." Although the third-wave is ideologically more inclusive than its predecessor, it can nevertheless be perceived as too radical for the novice. Battles have been won for newer and newer generations of women so that they could have rights and possibilities we now take for granted. However, with the change in generations we make higher demands for equality, which means there are still battles to be fought ahead. The Slayers of the Buffyverse do not have to "walk alone in fear" after the series' finale, but can "go hand in hand." With society still set on stereotyping and stigmatizing gender, where *do* we go from here?

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