

THE AUD ONE OUT IN THE FINAL BATTLE: AN ANYA-CENTERED  
FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

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Jessica Noelle Gibson-James  
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

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APPROVED BY:

---

McCombe, John  
Faculty Advisor

---

Farrelly, James  
Faculty Reader

---

Bardine, Bryan  
Faculty Reader

---

Conruff, Brian  
Chair, Department of English

## ABSTRACT

### THE AUD ONE OUT IN THE FINAL BATTLE: AN ANYA-CENTERED FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

Gibson-James, Jessica Noelle  
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. John P. McCombe

Recently, scholars from many academic disciplines have taken an interest in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Feminist critics have been central in establishing *Buffy* as an academic topic worthy of study. Generally, feminist critics argue that Buffy, a teenage girl with super-hero powers, is a positive role model for young women and a symbol of postmodern female empowerment. Contemporary feminist critics have found themselves in a period of transition: the second wave of feminism has clearly ended but the next wave of feminism has not been made clear. Contemporary feminism critics claim *BtVS* as a feminist text to argue that feminism is possible in a postmodern world and to help establish the importance of third wave feminism. Most feminist critics, because they are focused on Buffy-centered readings of the series, do not address how other important female characters' struggles to be empowered affect the cultural meaning of the series. Focusing on Anya, an important female character in the series, drastically changes the series' ultimate feminist message of female empowerment and, in fact, calls into question whether the message of the series is actually feminist at all.

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## Introduction

The value of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*) as a feminist text has been debated with various outcomes in the scholarship of the Buffyverse. Though feminist critics usually identify something problematic in the show's feminist message, they still embrace Buffy as a postmodern, post-feminist symbol of female empowerment.<sup>1</sup> The former California valley girl cheerleader turned demon-slaying fighting machine has been described as "television's outstanding emblem of [. . .] feminism—confident, powerful and focused" (Rogers 1) and as "a positive role model for young women, one which feminism should celebrate" (Vint 1). Joss Whedon, the series' creator who also wrote the 1992 movie by the same name, agrees. As a self-described feminist, Whedon has stated that he had a "feminist agenda" in creating the show (Udovitch 65). Whedon says quite explicitly that he created Buffy to subvert the characterization of woman as victim, specifically the stereotypically dumb blonde character in horror films who always gets killed (Longworth 209). In an interview Whedon explained, "When we pitched *BtVS*, it was an odd idea for people and not just the silly name but the idea that we were going to build an action/horror show around a young woman without giving her the fellow to come and rescue her every five minutes" (*Last Sundown*). He created his blonde to be a hero, and for seven seasons, Buffy saved the world—a lot.<sup>2</sup> Feminist critics have been quick to accept that Whedon was trying to do something different with his show, something unusual for television and something potentially feminist.

*Buffy* premiered in 1997 as a mid-season replacement on the WB. Though Whedon claims that having an empowered, attractive teenage girl as the lead was an “odd idea for people,” at that time culturally the girl power movement was in full swing, and the Spice Girls topped the charts in both the UK and the US.<sup>3</sup> Trendy and cute Buffy, with her love of boys kept in check by her fierce devotion to her female best friend, could arguably be described as the sixth Spice Girl—Slayer Spice—though Whedon and fans would understandably object.<sup>4</sup> But as Fudge makes clear, “It’s not surprising that a character like Buffy would surface in this pop cultural moment [. . .]Buffy could be the poster girl for an entire decade of girl-oriented mass media/culture” (2). Feminist critics, however, want to claim her instead as the poster girl for third wave feminism (see Patricia Pender, Anne Millard Daughtery, and Sherryl Vint).

According to Pender, who argues that Buffy is a “third wave feminist icon” and that the show as a whole offers a “straightforward and decisive feminist message” (“Kicking Ass” 163), feminist and television critics “alike have been quick to appreciate the implicit feminist message of the series as a whole” (165). The show’s feminist message is easiest to appreciate if critics focus solely on Buffy as the empowered, exceptional female, a girl/woman warrior, whose “girl power” and can-do attitude serve as a positive role model for young women. Buffy-centered feminist critiques of the series usually do identify some contradiction in the show’s feminist message, namely the series’ privileging of white, middle-class, heterosexual normativity, but still conclude along the lines that “it is hard not to recognize *BtVS* as articulating a vision of feminism” (Byers

185). When feminist critics only focus on Buffy, the series' "vision of feminism" at first appears undeniably positive. If *BtVS* represents third wave feminism, as Pender convincingly argues, it seems feminism is alive and well—and "kicking ass"—in what has been labeled a post-feminist (anti-feminist) age. This is what drives critics to celebrate the series; if *Buffy* can be claimed as a feminist text, it proves that feminism can be made relevant in a postmodern, "post-feminist" world. Feminist critics argue that Buffy successfully "takes back the night" without subscribing to a patriarchal world view *or* sacrificing her femininity. In fact, it is *because* of her femininity that she is "the chosen one." Buffy, as the poster girl for third wave feminism, is empowered while still being sexy, flirty, and fun.

Importantly, however, critics have failed to acknowledge that Buffy is not the only female in the series who is faced with creating an empowered, postmodern identity. Anya, the series' other beautiful, (usually) blonde character, faces the same challenges in constructing an empowered identity that Buffy faces. Yet, because Anya is not "chosen" and does not have more than human capabilities, she fails to become empowered where Buffy succeeds. Focusing on Anya, instead of Buffy, drastically changes the series' ultimate feminist message of female empowerment and, in fact, calls into question whether the message of the series is actually feminist at all.

### **Buffy's Backstory**

*BtVS* begins when "the Chosen One," Buffy Summers, "the only girl in all the world" who can stave off the forces of darkness, moves to the ironically named small town of Sunnydale, California, after being kicked out of her last



school for causing trouble and accidentally burning the gym down. Though Buffy hopes to leave her troubles and her slaying in L.A., she soon learns that Sunnydale, it just so happens, is situated on the Hell Mouth. The Hell Mouth is a mystical center of energy that draws vampires and all sorts of demons and nightmarish creatures to the town, threatening, and often taking, the lives of its residents. In the early seasons, Buffy and her “Scooby gang” including her best friends Willow, computer hacker and budding Wicca; Xander, class clown and lovable loser; and Angel, vampire with a soul and Buffy’s boyfriend, follow the sometimes sage advice of Buffy’s British watcher Giles to save their classmates and the world on multiple occasions. After graduating, and destroying the high school in the process, in the fourth season Buffy and Willow, along with newest Scooby, Oz, move on to U.C. Sunnydale, and Xander enters the workforce, but the battle against evil never ends.<sup>5</sup> In the final four seasons the gang, including additions Anya, Tara, Spike, and Buffy’s sister Dawn, continue to face the show’s characteristic villains but also have to overcome the perils of growing up, including the death of Buffy’s mom, financial difficulties, a marriage failed before it starts and unhealthy sexual relationships. Increasingly, as the series progresses the demons the Scooby gang fight are their own.<sup>6</sup>

### **Contemporary Feminism and *BtVS***

Part of the challenge facing feminist critics trying to claim *Buffy* as a feminist text is that there is no widespread agreement about what feminism is or what it should be—or even what language to use when talking about feminism or post-feminism or third wave feminism or post-third wave feminism. As Michele

Byers asks about contemporary feminism, "Whose feminism is it, anyhow?" (179). The editors of two recent books work to answer that question: *Third Wave Feminism* (2004) and *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2003). A quick look at the title pages of these collections reveals the important role that popular culture in general and *Buffy* specifically have in shaping feminist critics' understanding of contemporary feminism.<sup>7</sup> In the introductions, the editors of each work are hesitant to define contemporary, or what they refer to as "third wave," feminism and risk reducing its complexity, but they make clear that although the third wave works to advance some of the second wave feminists' goals, it is ultimately different from second wave feminism and in more important ways than often noted. They want to dispel the notion that "the third wave is just the second wave with more lip gloss" (Dicker and Piepmeier 3). Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier argue in *Catching a Wave* that third wave feminism is different in part because "we no longer live in the world that feminists of the second wave faced" (10). Part of that change is due to the success of second wave feminism which began in the 1960s when women realized "that neither traditional liberalism nor the politics of the New Left was addressing what equality could mean for modern working women" (Rosen xv). Second wave feminists worked to attain "full human rights for women" through equal opportunity employment and education, legalized abortion and child care, and the end of violence against women (Dicker and Piepmeier 9). Yet, as more women joined the movement and "learned to see the world through their own

eyes, the feminist movement fragmented, and new populations of women—trade unionists, the old, the young, racial and ethnic minorities

[. . .] began to assert different priorities” (Rosen xv). In the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. third world feminists emerged arguing that when second wave feminists used the word “woman” they actually meant white, middle-class, heterosexual woman. Responding to their marginalization by mainstream feminism, U.S. third world feminists focused on difference and diversity and argued that oppression does not occur solely on the basis of gender but also because of ethnicity, class and sexuality (Dicker and Piepmeier 9). U.S. third world feminism, itself greatly influenced by postmodernism and gender theory, “created the space for the emergence of a third wave of feminism” (9).

Jennifer Baumgardner argues that the first and second waves “beat open doors that were firmly closed to women and named injustices that had been invisible” (315). The task, then, facing third wave feminists is “building something new after the barrier is knocked down” (315). What feminist critics find to celebrate in *Buffy* is that it, like third wave feminism, is engaged in “building something new,” something potentially feminist in a post-feminist age. In the essay, “‘Kicking Ass is Comfort Food’: Buffy as Third Wave Feminist Icon,” Pender argues convincingly that *Buffy* is a third wave feminist text. She states, “If one of the primary goals of third wave feminism is to question our inherited models of feminist agency and political efficacy, without acceding to the defeatism implicit in the notion of ‘postfeminism,’ then *Buffy* provides us with modes of oppositional praxis [and] of resistant femininity” (164). The series

addresses one of the central concerns of third wave feminism: the struggle women face in trying to establish identities in a postmodern world that has been influenced by the motives of second wave feminism—namely its message of empowerment and challenge to patriarchy—but has also been influenced by the media perpetuated feminist backlash. This struggle is best illustrated by the female characters' efforts to reconcile their second wave feminist beliefs about empowerment and equality with their desires to be feminine—"girly"—a construct that second wave feminists rejected.<sup>8</sup> In trying to be both feminine and feminist, the female characters in the Buffyverse reject the feminine/feminist binary and in its place engage in Pender's "resistant femininity." Jowett points out that some characters are "more successful in doing so than others, demonstrating that there are still difficulties in constructing a postmodern female identity" (Jowett 14-15). Buffy is one of the "more successful" characters and when making final statements about *Buffy's* feminist message, critics often praise how successfully Buffy responds to being empowered in a postmodern world—how successfully she constructs her own feminine-feminist identity—without examining those characters who struggle to construct acceptable identities like Anya.

### **Feminism and Anya: De-centering the Slayer**

Most feminist critics, because they are focused on Buffy-centered readings of the series, do not address how Anya's struggle to create a feminine-feminist identity for five seasons affects the cultural meaning of the series. Pender in "Kicking Ass is Comfort Food" and "I'm Buffy and You're History" completes two Buffy-centered, positive feminist readings of the series and does

not address that Anya is even a character in the show in either essay. In "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Next Generation of Television*," Michele Byers spends a paragraph on Anya and states that "Anya proves that, feminist or not, our desires do not always align with what we know we should desire" and that her "struggle is provocative" but apparently not provocative enough to warrant more than a few passing remarks (178). In *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel*," in two separate essays, Zoe-Jane Playden and Anne Millard Daughtery complete Buffy-centered, positive feminist critiques without acknowledging Anya's role. In general, *Buffy* scholarship, such as *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, one of the most important collections of essays about the series, Anya is hardly mentioned.<sup>9</sup> In the essay "She Saved the World. A Lot" in *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, Roz Kaveney spends twelve pages summarizing seasons one through five of the series and remarkably manages never to include Anya or any storyline related to Anya.<sup>10</sup> In her concluding section "The Other Scoobies," where Anya should be mentioned, she spends a paragraph on Adam, the villain from season four, yet again does not mention Anya. When Anya *is* mentioned in general criticism in more detailed ways than lists of Scooby members or plot summaries, frequently she is described as filling the role of the "wise-fool" or the truth-teller (Jowett, Money, South). This is the authorized reading of Anya's character. Marti Noxon, a *BtVS* writer and executive producer, stated that although Anya's character was meant to appear in only one episode, the writers realized she could fill an important role left by Cordelia's impending departure for L.A. after graduation (to

appear on *Angel*). Noxon explains in *The Monster Book*, “This disgruntled ex-demon” is quite useful because ‘we [. . .] needed a Cordelia like character around who would tell it like it is, who doesn’t suffer fools gladly and is very opinionated” (qtd. in Money 105). Cordelia had a marginal role in the Scooby gang which was solidified and then complicated by her relationship with and betrayal by Xander. Anya’s character development follows the same general pattern (Jowett 34).

Despite the lack of scholarly attention to her role, Anya is more than a truth-telling character whose inexperience with human ways is a source of comic relief (i.e. her “scary” bunny suit for her first Halloween). Anya’s character arc serves as a sharp contrast to Buffy’s. Whereas Anya starts out as a powerful demon fighting misogyny in the form of abusive and cheating male lovers, Buffy ends up a powerful demon-imbued slayer fighting misogyny in the form of Caleb and the First Evil with its “patriarchal platform” (Pender 168). However, while Anya has to give up her demonness and power in order to become human and begin the process of rehabilitation, Buffy’s demonness is accepted *because* it gives her power. When Anya regains her power, and her demonness, in the sixth and seventh seasons, she immediately becomes a threat to Buffy. Buffy does not hesitate to try to kill Anya because her power is not sanctioned and Buffy’s power gives her the authority to make such a decision. As Buffy tells Xander who is arguing for Anya’s life, “It’s always complicated. And at some point, someone has to draw the line, and that is always going to be me [. . .] Human rules don’t apply. There’s only me. I am the law” (“Selfless”).

Throughout her time on the show, Anya is not a static character, but a brief scene in the final episode of the sixth season sheds revealing light on her usual subject position in the Buffyverse. In this episode, Willow's girlfriend Tara has been murdered, and Willow is in the process of using dark magic to punish those she holds responsible. Anya, by chanting a powerful counter-curse, is able to protect the two men as Willow tries to kill them. Buffy tries to stop Willow physically, but Willow proves that with magic she has the upper-hand. Just when it looks like Buffy may be defeated and Willow may be lost to the dark side, Giles, Buffy's former watcher, bursts in fresh from England and puts Willow in a binding spell:

Giles looks at Buffy for the first time, pauses. Buffy continues staring at Willow.

Giles: You cut your hair.

Buffy looks at him, gets teary and hugs him.

Anya watches them hugging. She walks up behind them and fidgets for a moment.

Anya: I'm blonde.

Giles and Buffy look at her, still with their arms around each other.

Anya: I, I colored my hair. (pauses) Again. I'm blonde.

Giles: Yes, I noticed.

Giles holds out one arm and Anya joins the hug. ("Grave")

In this scene Anya points out that she, like Buffy, is one of Whedon's heroic blonde characters, but importantly, she admits that her blonde hair color is

not natural.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note here that when she first comes to Sunnydale as a demon her hair is dark brown. Her bleached hair color here can be read as part of her attempt to create an acceptable identity in the Buffyverse by emulating its guiding force, Buffy.<sup>12</sup> Her efforts don't end with her hair color. Like Buffy, in this episode Anya bravely risks her life defending others and fighting evil. In fact, her efforts against Willow were much more effective than Buffy's, and later in the episode she will be pivotal in helping Xander save the world. But as Giles and Buffy embrace, Anya is clearly positioned as an outsider intruding on a private moment. However, she desperately wants to be included. When she asserts herself, Giles recognizes her, and for a brief moment Giles embraces both Anya and Buffy as though they were equals. Immediately, however, a subsequent shot re-establishes Anya as the outsider as she is left out in the shop to begin cleaning up while in the training room Buffy catches Giles up on what has happened since he left Sunnydale. The training room is their sacred space where, as neither slayer nor watcher, Anya doesn't belong.

To understand Anya's role in the series and how her role affects a feminist reading, it is necessary to do what she never manages to —de-center Buffy. Buffy-centered readings praise Buffy's balance of femininity and feminism resulting in "resistant femininity" (Pender 168)—her ability to go patrolling in a halter top and to find time for relationships while successfully battling society's ills. Anya, on the other hand "moves between parodic 'feminism' and exaggerated 'femininity,' making both 'alien' (compared with the way Buffy makes these positions 'normal')" (Jowett 42). Anya-centered readings of the text would



argue that achieving a balance between femininity and feminism is not only difficult but may be impossible for those with only human capabilities and that the punishment for erring on either side of the binary is severe. Buffy-centered readings praise the series' representation of individual then collective female empowerment and look to the final empowerment of young slayers around the world in the series finale as a positive feminist message. Anya-centered readings question what it means *not* to be chosen and argue that in the finale, Anya dies an ignoble death not only because she is too human but also because she is too traditionally feminine. Anya-centered readings question whether the series intentionally or not sends the message that in the postmodern, post-feminist world female empowerment is actually impossible since it can only be achieved by those who can attain "more than human" status.

### **Season Seven: "The Joy of Female Power"**

Though from the show's beginning feminist critics have responded to its "feminist moments" (Byers 171), the seventh season has received a lot of renewed feminist attention because of what Whedon describes as a feminist message "almost didactic in its clarity" ("Angel News" 1). Before the season even aired, in a panel discussion with the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, Whedon made that message clear. Responding to complaints that the sixth season had been unnecessarily dark, he promised that the seventh season would return to the show's "original mission statement" which was "the joy of female power, having it, using it, sharing it" (Whedon Panel). Many feminist critics of the series would readily agree that the show's original mission

statement had been the joy of using and having female power but would question whether this power was shared. Feminist critics have critiqued the show for its celebration of Buffy as “the exceptional woman” reminiscent of the 1980s Superwoman, one of the most common, and arguably detrimental, feminist stereotypes (Rosen 296), and have been concerned that the series’ focus on one strong, empowered, exceptional woman sent the wrong message of individual, not collective, empowerment (Pender 164). For these critics, the seventh season’s celebration of collective female empowerment and “the final showdown with a demon that is overtly misogynist and [ . . . ] an original evil with a clearly patriarchal platform [ . . . ] raises the explicit feminist stakes of the series considerably” (Pender 168).

In the final season, Whedon was true to his word and Buffy, the Chosen One, shared her power with all potential slayers who became the Chosen Many. It is important to explain here briefly the nature of the slayer’s power as revealed in “Get It Done” in the seventh season. Buffy learns that the source of the slayer’s power, which had always previously been unexplained, comes from the essence of a demon. The first slayer was a young girl forcefully imbued with the essence of a demon against her will to make her strong enough to defend the world against evil and to fight the battles the men who chose her didn’t want to have to fight. Though when offered, Buffy rejects becoming more powerful at the cost of becoming less human, she still chooses to share her demonness with all the potentials to turn them into slayers because it is more important for the fate of the world that they become powerful than that they remain fully human. As a

result of this revelation, the show begins to explore and celebrate what it means to be *more than human*. Importantly, in the final battle, it is Spike's soul *and* his vampireness that qualify him to wear the magic amulet "for a champion who is *more than human*" ("Chosen" my italics). This amulet transforms him into a pillar of light that dusts the army of ancient vampires under Sunnydale and saves the world. Because his vampireness gives him power, it no longer makes him subhuman, but like Buffy, his demonness enables him to be a hero. This reveals an important shift in the value system of the Buffyverse from privileging humanness to privileging power—power that is available not to all females but only to those, female and male alike, who are "more than" human.<sup>13</sup> Because of this shift, at the end of the series, to be a hero one must be "more than human."

In the series finale, Willow completes the necessary spell to empower all potential slayers. During a touching montage, a girl being abused in a trailer suddenly has the strength to stand up for herself, a girl at bat in a little league game smiles with confidence knowing she now has the strength to hit a homer, and the slayerettes fighting with Buffy and Faith become slayers and start enjoying their battle against the ancient vampires (though some still die, they die as slayers). Pender argues that this empowerment represents "collective feminist activism that is unparalleled in mainstream television" (163) and is in part what makes the series a third wave text (173). Yet, importantly, Pender does not acknowledge that these empowered slayers fighting together do not *win* the battle against the vampires. They merely succeed in holding them back. In the final battle against evil, although Buffy leads the fight and her fellow slayers fight

and die bravely, it is ultimately Spike, the male vampire with a soul, who saves the world by sacrificing his life.

Spike's sacrifice is problematic for a feminist reading of the series for several reasons. First, it seems contradictory that in a season and a series dedicated to celebrating collective female empowerment, it is man who saves the day in the final, most important battle Buffy ever faced.<sup>14</sup> Also, contrasting Spike's heroic death by being transformed into a pillar of light with Anya's violent and meaningless death calls into question aspects of the series' "didactically clear" feminist message. As a former vengeance demon, Anya is, like Spike, a rehabilitated character. She is the only fully human character to die in the final battle, and her death by being sliced in two from behind is decidedly un-heroic. On the DVD commentary to the final episode, "Chosen," Whedon, the writer/director of the episode, specifically describes his goal for Anya's death scene: "to make it as un-heroic as possible" because that "just felt really real." In *Sex and the Slayer*, Lorna Jowett argues that the "message" of *Buffy* "is that women can be and do anything only if they are young, white, middle class and conventionally attractive" (195). Anya, despite being young, white, middle-class and conventionally attractive, and fighting on the same side as Buffy, does not benefit from "the joy of female power" and does not receive power when it is shared—she is not "chosen." Jowett argues that her death "underlines her status as a minor (disposable) character as well as her powerlessness"(37). But Anya was not always disposable and powerless, and examining how she becomes so

seriously complicates the series' feminist message and calls into question what "vision" of feminism *BtVS* actually endorses.

### **Anya's Backstory**

Anya first appears in the third season episode "The Wish" as the vengeance demon Anyanka, "the patron saint of scorned women," who for a thousand years has wreaked vengeance by granting the often cruel and bloody wishes of women hurt by men. She disguises her demon identity and seems to be an attractive, stylish new student at Sunnydale High. She immediately befriends Cordelia, who has not only had her heart broken by her ex-boyfriend Xander but has had her reputation ruined by dating him as well.<sup>15</sup> Anya eagerly listens to Cordelia's complaints about Xander, and when Cordelia decides that Buffy's arrival in Sunnydale was the beginning of all her problems, she wishes Buffy had never come to Sunnydale. Anya's gives Cordelia a "good luck charm" that is actually a powerful magic amulet thereby immediately granting Cordelia's wish—unbeknownst to Cordelia. Cordelia finds herself in an alternate reality, a Sunnydale without Buffy. Entering this dystopia, Cordelia at first thinks Anya "was, like . . . a good fairy. A scary, veiny . . . good fairy" but quickly realizes her mistake as people are afraid to leave their houses or to wear bright colors that attract the attention of vampires ("The Wish"). Cordelia survives only long enough to find Giles who, with Oz and his team of "White-hats," tries to save as many humans as possible and to tell him to find Buffy (who had never come to Sunnydale). In this reality, Willow and Xander are vampires who serve the Master, Angel is their prisoner, and Buffy, when she arrives at Giles' request from

Cleveland, is little more than a cold, business-like killer. In the final battle of the episode, Willow and Xander are killed by Buffy and Oz, Angel dies trying to save Buffy, and Buffy's neck is broken by the Master. It is important to note here that in this episode, though Anya has no direct contact with Buffy, she is characterized as a direct threat to Buffy's authority. Anya, as a vengeance demon, has the power to create a world where Buffy isn't a super-hero—where she fails to save the lives of those around her, and she gets her neck snapped by the Master instead of turning him to dust. Obviously in the Buffyverse, this much power can't go unchallenged, and the episode ends when Giles smashes the amulet Anya had given Cordelia telling Anya, "your only power lies in the wishing." This effectively restores reality and coincidentally destroys Anya's powers. Back in Buffy-protected Sunnydale, Cordelia has no memory of what happened and neither does Anya. Cordelia continues making wishes that Anya tries to grant but cannot. Each wish becomes more and more silly until Cordelia walks away smiling and laughing, proving that she did not need or want the feminist vengeance Anya tried unsuccessfully to provide.<sup>16</sup> At the end of episode, stripped of her powers, Anya unwillingly begins the process of becoming human.

Through Anyanka, extreme feminism is literally demonized. She is what Dicker and Piepimeier identify as a "backlash [image] that demonize[s] feminism as threatening, deviant, and irrelevant" (23). Anya's gleeful use of over-the-top violence against men—as she tells Xander at the prom she once made a man cannibalize himself—makes her threatening and not only deviant but also repulsive. As to being irrelevant, Cordelia's reaction to her granted wish sets the

pattern for every other wish Anya grants. Every time, the woman Anya is trying to avenge is appalled by what happens or asks for the wish to be undone implying that extreme anti-male feminism is not actually what women want. Even Anya, in the sixth season when she gets the chance to use vengeance on her own behalf against Xander after he leaves her at the altar, chooses not to take it (“Entropy”). In “Selfless,” in the seventh season, she chooses to undo an over-the-top wish she had granted even though she thinks the cost will be her life.

In one of the few detailed treatments of Anya’s character, Jowett correctly identifies Anya’s early function in the show as being a “parody of the second-wave man hating feminist who only needs the love of a good man to bring her round” (34).<sup>17</sup> This is played out in Anya’s developing feelings for Xander and her confusion about these feelings. In the third season when she is still “newly human,” she is obviously conflicted when she asks Xander, who refers to her as “Anya, punisher of evil males,” to the prom by stating, “I have witnessed a millennium of treachery and oppression from the male of the species, and I have nothing but contempt for the whole libidinous lot of them” but “I don’t have a date for the prom” (“The Prom”). She continues, “Men are evil. Will you go with me?” Anya’s negative characterization makes clear how the series does not support stereotypical man-hating second-wave feminism—as Anya’s demon boss D’Hoffryn tells her when she asks for her powers back, “Your time is passed” (“Dopplegangland”). This assertion aligns the series with third wave feminism’s eagerness to show how it is different from second wave feminism. Buffy may be fulfilling second wave feminists’ desires to take back the night and fight

patriarchy, but she can do it without rejecting men or denying her femininity. Anya's early characterization shows that in the Buffyverse not only is radical second wave feminism no longer tenable—it's actually so extreme as to be laughable.

### **Feminism and Patterns of Rehabilitation in the Buffyverse**

Yet, that is not the end of Anya's story—if the Buffyverse is a place where vampires can get souls, it is also a place where ex-demons (and extreme feminists) can get hearts. Mary Alice Money points out in her essay "The Undemonization of Supporting Characters" that because of the series' focus on vampires, it is naturally about transformation (98). In the first two seasons this transformation follows a predictable pattern. In episode after episode, characters that first appear to be human turn out to be vampires, demon worshippers ("Reptile Boy"), a life-sucking mummy ("Inca Mummy Girl"), or even a robot ("Ted") (Money 98). Even Angel, who is good for more than a season and a half, follows this pattern when he loses his soul and turns out to be completely and sadistically evil. While this was the pattern for the first two seasons, as Money points out, starting in the third season, *BtVS* introduces a more complex, and compelling, pattern of transformation which is "the undemonization and rehabilitation of supporting characters who had first become known to the audience as annoyingly obnoxious or thoroughly evil creations" (98). Instead of focusing on how humans become the Other, the show began to explore how the Other becomes human. Money points to Anya's introduction in "The Wish" as important to the rehabilitation theme of the series (99). This episode came



immediately after “Lover’s Walk,” which re-introduced Spike to the series, and together these episodes “set the rehabilitation theme of the series in motion” (99). If Anya can be seen as representing second wave feminism, albeit at its most extreme, her rehabilitation is important to the feminist message of the series because it seemingly argues that second wave feminists can shape new identities for themselves in the postmodern world. Yet a closer reading of what Anya actually goes through, and the strategies she uses in trying to find the sanctioned (Buffy-like) feminine-feminist balance, prove that it may not be that easy—or even possible—to construct an empowered female identity in the postmodern world.

In the beginning of Anya’s character arc, her powerlessness and loss of identity are mostly played for laughs. In “Doppelgangland,” after her plan to retrieve her necklace and thus her power has failed, she states, “For a thousand years I wielded the power of the Wish. I was feared and worshipped across the mortal globe. Now I’m stuck in Sunnydale High. Mortal. A Child. And I’m flunking math.” Later in the same episode she tries to order a beer and when asked for ID she says, “I’m eleven hundred and twenty years old! Just gimme a friggin’ beer,” but in the end, defeated, she has to settle for a coke. Though Anya is always used as a comic character, her role in the series changes when Xander mentions the impending apocalypse to her. As a vengeance demon, Anya’s identity and authority came directly from her work. As she explains in a flashback to her heyday as a vengeance demon in “Selfless,” “Vengeance is what I am.” Without vengeance, she loses her authority until Xander realizes the role she can play in

aiding the Scooby gang in saving the world. He drags her unwillingly to the library where he establishes her authority for her by stating, "You guys want to know about the Ascension? Well meet the only living person who's ever been to one" ("Graduation Day Part 1"). Suddenly, Anya, who has been the dangerous outsider, is in the center of the group with everyone eagerly listening to her story about the ascension she had witnessed in the Kastka Valleys, when a sorcerer became the embodiment of the demon Lo-Hash. Her authority is further established by the following exchange:

Wesley: Ahem, I'm sorry, but Lo-Hash was a four-winged soul killer, am I right? (Giles nods.) I was given to understand that they're not that fierce. Of all the demons that we've faced . . .

Anya: You've never seen a demon.

Buffy: (raises her hand) Uh, excuse me? Kind of professionally, four years running.

Anya: All the demons that walk the earth are tainted, are human hybrids like vampires. The Ascension means that a human becomes pure demon. They're different.

Giles: Different?

Buffy: How?

Anya: Well, for one thing, they're bigger. ("Graduation Day Part 1")

Because she has more subject area knowledge than the Chosen Buffy or even Giles, who as a watcher has studied the supernatural his entire adult life, Anya is no longer an out-of-place ex-demon. When Willow enters the meeting late she

does not know that Anya's value within the group has changed and asks, "How come evil girl's in the mix?" Giles replies, "Anya witnessed an Ascension." Willow immediately understands and accepts Anya's new role stating, "Oh, okay then."

Anya is not immediately accepted as a member of the Scooby gang after this exchange, but she has clearly established that she has value. Repeatedly in later seasons she is able to help the group identify a demon or to help Willow know what spell to use for what purpose. But it is not her knowledge that brings her into close contact with the Scooby group—it is her relationship with Xander. Mary Alice Money argues that one way Anya is rehabilitated is "her vulnerability through lust, then love for Xander" (105). Her love for Xander is presented as the cure for her overly zealous feminist beliefs. As Jowett points out, "[Anya] is both normalized and redeemed by her relationship with Xander, the very 'man' she was called to curse with vengeance" (34). Through her feelings for and interactions with Xander, Anya learns what it means to be a human, and her growth is revealed most clearly when the Scooby gang faces an apocalypse. In the third season Anya's behavior indicates that she still has a lot to learn. She helps the gang with her knowledge of ascensions, but when it comes time to fight the Mayor and save the world, Anya leaves town—but not before trying to get Xander to go with her:

Anya: Come with me.

Xander: I can't.

Anya: Why not?

Xander: I got friends on the line.

Anya: So?

Xander: That humanity thing's still a work in progress, isn't it?

("Graduation Day Part 2")

In this scene, Xander presents the correct, human response of caring for one's friends while Anya's concern for herself is characterized as being still demon-like behavior. By the time the gang faces the fifth season apocalypse, however, Anya, because of her love for Xander, has become more fully human. She tells Xander:

No, you see, usually when there's an apocalypse, I skedaddle. But now I love you so much that instead I have inappropriately timed sex and try to think of ways to fight a god . . . and worry terribly that something might happen to you. And also worry that something'll happen to me. And then I have guilt that I'm not more worried about everyone else, but I just don't have enough! ("The Gift")

In this speech, Anya is aware that she is not completely done learning what it means to be human because she does not care enough about others, but she also realizes that she is more human than she used to be.

At this point in the series, Anya appears to be constructing a successful feminine-feminist identity as revealed by her characterization throughout the fifth season. During this season, she and Xander form "the most entirely committed relationship the shows offers" (Saxey 206), and besides obviously enjoying each other's company, they have a healthy and active sex life. As Esther Saxey notes, they are the only couple in the series "to engage in kink unproblematically" (206),

and usually Anya initiates their sexual encounters demonstrating both “assertiveness and agency” (Jowett 35). Anya also discovers that she is good with money, and this earns her a position at the Magic Box assisting Giles—a job she does well and truly enjoys. Of course, it must be noted that these situations, Anya’s frank and inappropriately timed comments about her sex life with Xander and her awkward interactions with customers in the shop, are often used as comic relief, but Anya’s subject position is by far at its most positive in the fifth season as made apparent in the season finale.

The fifth season finale is important because when Joss Whedon wrote the episode, he believed it might be the series finale as well because of contract disputes with the WB. When Whedon discusses the season seven finale, he describes it as the second series finale, counting the fifth as the first (DVD commentary “Chosen.”) Anya’s role in the fifth season finale differs drastically and in important ways from her role in the seventh. The over-arching storyline of the fifth season is that an evil goddess named Glory is tired of being trapped on earth in a mortal body and wants to return to her own dimension. In order to do this, she must use the key to open an inter-dimensional portal which requires the blood of Buffy’s sister. This portal, when opened, will cause the end of the world. In the final battle everyone in the Scooby gang plays an important role, including Anya. Facing the seemingly impossible task of defeating a goddess, while worried about the fast-approaching ritual sacrifice of Buffy’s sister Dawn, the entire group sits in the Magic Box unable to decide what to do.<sup>18</sup> Anya is the one who gets the group on the right track. At first the discussion doesn’t go well, and

Giles challenges Anya stating, “Anya, apart from your incredibly un-infectious enthusiasm, have you anything else to contribu-,” and she cuts him off with her own idea that is better than anything other members had previously suggested (“The Gift”). Anya, in fact, has two suggestions that end up being part of the strategy against Glory. It is her suggestion that Buffy use a troll’s hammer to defeat Glory because, as Anya explains, “You wanna fight a god, use the weapon of a god.” In the final battle, this hammer allows Buffy to defeat Glory physically—something she had not been able to do on her own for the entire season. While Buffy battles Glory, she is not able to rescue Dawn and stop the ritual sacrifice. This task falls to Spike, but he fails. He does not save Dawn, and to save the world and Dawn with it, Buffy has to give her own life in place of her sister’s.

In the Buffyverse, because of the patterns of rehabilitation, demons can not only become human, they can become heroic (Money 107). It is necessary to point out an important difference between the two finales here: Spike fails to be a hero in the fifth season, but Anya does not. During the battle, she sacrifices herself to push Xander out of the way of a pile of falling bricks. While the act does not cost her life, it is clearly heroic. In the seventh season, after the final battle, Andrew lies to Xander and tells him that Anya died to protect him when she did not. But if she had died in the fifth season, it *would* have been to protect Xander. So the question then is what differed in Anya’s and Spike’s storylines in the sixth and seventh seasons to reverse their positions—why does Anya lose

the right to be a hero and Spike earn it, and does this have an impact on the series' feminist message?

### **Anya and Spike: Two Case Studies in Rehabilitation through Love**

In the third, fourth, and fifth seasons, as stated above, Anya is rehabilitated through her love for Xander. This strategy works well at first but is complicated after Xander proposes to her in the fifth season finale. Xander's proposal and Anya's eager acceptance prove that she is rehabilitated from her former man-hating ways. Anya rejects that extreme feminist position because it had proven untenable, but in the sixth and seventh seasons, by wanting to devote herself to being a traditional, domestic wife, she moves from one untenable position to another. As a demon, Anyanka was too feminist, but as Anya she fails to model resistant femininity and becomes too *traditionally* feminine as most clearly revealed in a flashback in the seventh season episode "Selfless." Anya, dressed as a 1950s housewife, happily straightens up after Xander, covers him with a blanket, and looks forward to their marriage when she will "be his Missis. Mrs. Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins Harris." But in the seventh season, the audience already knows that Anya never became "Mrs. Harris" because Xander left her at the altar after seeing false, nightmarish visions of their future. Importantly, it is one of Anya's former victims that shows Xander the visions of their unhappy and abusive life together that convince him not to marry her. Xander's choice to leave her not only denies her agency but also is depicted as a consequence of her former power (Jowett 36).<sup>19</sup> At the end of the episode, Anya, still wearing her wedding dress, is with her former demon boss,

D'Hoffryn. She tells him that she's "so tired of crying," and he sympathetically responds, "Oh, Anyanka. I'm sorry. (pause) But you let him domesticate you. When you were a vengeance demon, you were powerful, at the top of your game. You crushed men like him . . . It's time you got back to what you do best . . . don't you think?" ("Hell's Bells"). Though Anya doesn't respond, when she next returns to the show two episodes later, it's as a vengeance demon.

As a vengeance demon and without her connection to Xander, Anya is again positioned as an outsider to the Scooby gang. Yet, this is not enough to render her ineffective in the final showdown of the sixth season. In fact, Anya is able to help what is left of the Scooby gang *because* of her demonness. When Buffy and Dawn are trapped underground in the cemetery, Anya is able to teleport from the Magic Box to tell them Giles' message that Willow is going to destroy the world. Once Xander has this information, he knows where to find Willow and what to do to stop her before it's too late. At the beginning of the seventh season, Anya continues to help the Scooby gang despite no longer being an active part of the group. In "Beneath You," one of her vengeance spells has unexpected, potentially deadly consequences for the rest of Sunnydale, and when confronted by Xander and Buffy, she agrees to undo the spell. In the next episode, "Same Time, Same Place," she helps rescue Willow from a demon who is slowly devouring her alive. In this episode she connects with the recently evil Willow saying, "The vengeance itself, it's not as fulfilling as I remember." In fact, since returning to the vengeance fold, Anya has failed to extract the bloody and



gruesome punishments that she had once enjoyed. She attempts to remedy this in “Selfless” when she tries to be the extreme feminist she once was.

“Selfless” is an episode entirely devoted to Anya’s character. It is important to a feminist reading of the series because it makes clear how neither extreme feminism nor extreme traditional femininity is acceptable in the Buffyverse. The first shot of Anya in the present day is of her covered in blood desperately trying to wash the blood off her hands. Her hair is now dark brown again, signaling that she is no longer trying to construct her identity by emulating Buffy—a method that did not work—and that she has fully returned to feminist vengeance. She looks in the mirror above the sink and asks herself, “What have I done?” She washes and washes but can’t escape the truth—she has summoned a grimslaw spider demon to teach a bunch of frat boys a lesson about heartlessness by having their hearts torn out. One of the fraternity members had brought his girlfriend to the house to break up with her in front of his friends. As she stood there crying, she wished they would all know what it’s like to have their hearts ripped out—Anya made it happen in a punishment so gruesome that, as Halfrek, her vengeance demon best friend, tells her, the other vengeance demons plan a ceremony in her honor to welcome her back. Willow discovers what Anya’s done when she runs into her outside the house and sees the telltale blood on her arm. Inside the house Willow finds the girl in the closet saying repeatedly, “I take it back,” again reinforcing that women do not want this kind of vengeance. Willow goes to Anya to get her to take back what she’s done but Anya keeps repeating, “They deserved it,” as though she’s trying to convince

herself. But obviously this punishment did not fit the crime. This act of extreme feminist vengeance is so over the top that the audience has to turn against Anya.

Once Buffy finds out, she tells Xander she's sorry, but she doesn't hesitate in saying "I have to kill Anya." This isn't entirely true. Even if Anya, as a frat-boy-murdering vengeance demon, is a threat, she does not have to be killed. All Buffy actually has to do to stop her is to destroy her power center, her necklace, but Buffy does not entertain this option and no one suggests it. When Xander, who still loves Anya, asks Buffy why she has to kill Anya when she never thought of killing Willow when she became evil and started killing humans, Buffy replies, "Willow was different. She's human. Anya's a demon." Even though Anya's demonness had once helped to save the world and only a few episodes before had helped save Willow, now it is what allows Buffy to kill her without guilt. Anya's demonness makes her less than human whereas later in the season, Buffy's demonness is revealed to be what makes her more than human (as is Spike's).

Xander and Buffy look for Anya and find her at the scene of the crime. Though Xander tries to intervene, Buffy and Anya fight—importantly, with Anya in her demon face—and though at first Anya is able to match Buffy blow for blow, Buffy eventually stabs Anya through the chest. The screen fades to black and then flashes back to the time during the sixth season musical episode "Once More With Feeling" when everyone in Sunnydale behaved as though they were in a musical. During this flashback as mentioned earlier, Anya, dressed as a traditional 1950s housewife, twirls around Xander's apartment doing housework

while singing a song that was not part of the original musical but is important in revealing why she has been condemned as “selfless.” It is worth quoting almost all of it at length here:

(singing) Mr. Xander Harris. (walks to him)  
 That’s what he is to the world outside.  
 That’s the name he carries with pride. (puts away his hard hat and tool box)  
 I’m just lately Anya.  
 Not very much to the world, I know.  
 All these years with nothing to show. (puts away his shoes)  
 I’ve boned a troll, I’ve wreaked some wrath,  
 But on the whole, I’ve had no path. (twirling)  
 I like to bowl, I’m good with math,  
 But who am I? (kneeling)  
 Now I reply that  
 I’m the Missis (looks at engagement ring)  
 I will be his Missis.  
 Mrs. Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins Harris.  
 (twirling, dancing) [ . . . ]  
 We’ll never part (walks into the kitchen)  
 Not if we can  
 And if we start  
 Then here’s my plan  
 I’ll show him what bliss is  
 Welcome him with kisses  
 ‘Cause this is a Missis who misses her man [ . . . ]  
 Just stand aside  
 Here comes the bride (goes through balcony door, and is suddenly in wedding gown)  
 I’ll be Missis.  
 I will be his Missis  
 I will be—

This is the last of three flashbacks. The first is from 880 A.D. when Anya was the human Aud living with Olaf to whom she was selflessly devoted. Aud bears little resemblance to Anya except that, according to Olaf, the other villagers think her questions are annoying and that she speaks her mind too freely. Obviously, Anya’s original human name being a homonym with the word odd (besides being

funny) represents the fact that when she was originally human, she didn't belong anymore than in Sunnydale. Her oddness made her an outsider even in her own village. This flashback reveals that Aud became the vengeance demon Anyanka after performing a spell to turn the philandering Olaf into a troll and attracting the attention of D'Hoffryn, the patron of the vengeance demons. He says to her, "I'm afraid you don't see your true self. You are Anyanka." Anya accepts his proposal "to help wronged women punish evil men" and then dedicates herself to her work as revealed by the second flashback to St. Petersburg in 1905. She and her friend Halfrek sit at a fancy dining room table drinking wine wearing bloodstained satin gloves while the city burns around them. Halfrek praises Anya's accomplishment but when Anya wants to find another woman to avenge, says "Oh, it's always work, work, work with you." She encourages Anya to find something besides vengeance that interests her, to build a life outside of work, but Anya replies, "I'm talking about life. Vengeance is what I do, Halfrek. I don't need anything else. Vengeance is what I am."<sup>20</sup>

The three flashbacks together paint a picture of Anya as having moved from one selfless devotion to another—Olaf, vengeance, Xander—without ever having figured out who she was as an individual. After the musical flashback, Anya wakes up with the sword in her chest, but importantly, her demon face is gone and she now looks like Anya, with a tear running down her cheek. She pulls the sword out of her chest and reminds Buffy that it isn't that easy to kill a vengeance demon. Anya, without returning to her demon face, and Buffy continue to fight until D'Hoffryn, having been summoned by Willow, appears. He

assesses the scene and praises Anya's work before stating, "Look, Miss Rosenberg seems to think Anyanka would be better suited outside the vengeance fold. I think we already know what Lady HacksAway wants. And the young man, he sees with the eyeballs of love. But I'm not sure if anyone's bothered to find out what Anyanka herself really wants." Anya, to D'Hoffryn's surprise, and though she knows it will cost the life and the soul of a vengeance demon, asks to take back what she had done thinking she is sacrificing her life. Xander tries to intervene but Anya says, "Xander, you can't help me. I'm not even sure there's a me to help. (to D'Hoffryn) I understand the price. Do it." D'Hoffryn then summons Anya's best friend Halfrek and kills her because the life of a vengeance demon did not have to be Anya's, and he knew this would hurt Anya more. At the end of the episode, Xander tries to comfort Anya, but she rejects his help because she wants to figure out who she is on her own. For the rest of the seventh season, Anya struggles with her identity and her position in the Scooby gang, especially in her relationships to Xander and Buffy.

"Selfless" is supposed to explain why Anya loses her ability to be empowered in the Buffyverse; she has failed to create her own identity, choosing instead "to cling" to whatever comes along whether it be the man in her life or her work. As early as the second season, Buffy proves that this is not the acceptable way for a woman (girl) to live her life. In this season, Buffy's vampire boyfriend Angel loses his soul after they have sex for the first time.<sup>21</sup> Angel becomes Angelus and torments Buffy and her friends and kills Giles' girlfriend before capturing and torturing Giles, all while designing a plan to end the world. For

Buffy, dealing with the loss of her first love is overwhelming. She struggles to accept that Angel is gone and that she will have to kill Angelus. In the final showdown between Buffy and Angelus, they exchange blows evenly until Angelus seems to get the upper hand:

Cut to the atrium. Angelus plays with his sword, idly pointing it at Buffy. She looks up at him, frightened.

Angelus: Now that's everything, huh? No weapons . . . No friends . . . No hope.

Buffy closes her eyes and steels herself for whatever's coming.

Angelus: Take all that away . . . and what's left?

He draws the sword back and thrusts it directly at her face. With lightning-fast reflexes she swings up with both arms and catches the blade between the palms of her hands. She opens her eyes and meets his.

Buffy: Me. ("Becoming Part 2")

Here Buffy models empowerment that is contingent only on herself and not her reliance on others or even her usual symbol of empowerment, her phallic-shaped weapon. To become empowered against Angelus, Buffy just has to realize that she is all she needs. Yet this route to empowerment is not available to Anya. Anya is not empowered because unlike Buffy, who can confidently answer "me" to Angelus' question, Anya admits "I'm not even sure there is a me . . ." ("Selfless"). However, for Buffy, in this instance, relying on herself is relying on her slayer identity. It is her slayer-given abilities that allow her to stop

the sword and to defeat Angelus. For Anya, who is not and cannot be the slayer, achieving this type of empowerment is impossible.

This does not mean, however, that Anya has failed to form *any* identity as implied by her fear that “there is no me.” A closer examination of Anya’s character reveals that she hasn’t failed to create an identity—she has failed to create an *acceptable, Buffy-like* identity. As the extreme feminist Anyanka, she was guilty of thinking “they [men] all deserve [punishment],” and as traditionally feminine Anya she is guilty of letting her relationship with Xander define her (“Selfless”). Yet this relationship obviously makes her happy and fully human. Anya clearly desires to be married to Xander and to be a devoted wife, even in the episodes after “Selfless” when she rejects Xander in order to figure herself out.<sup>22</sup> This desire should be acceptable within the confines of third wave feminism because the third wave is supposed to be about women “getting in touch with [their] true desires” (Baumgardner 317). However, Anya’s desires are clearly judged as being inappropriate because they make her selfless. If *BtVS* represents third wave feminism, it seems that women’s “true desires” are acceptable only as far as those desires don’t require women to give up agency—even if they consciously make the choice to do so. Importantly, this standard—that to achieve empowerment, characters must truly desire to be independent and self-reliant—is applied only to females. A closer look at the series’ ultimate hero Spike’s identity reveals that he is as “guilty” of being selfless as Anya, but whereas Anya is *condemned* for it, Spike is *redeemed* by it. It is important to note here that until their deaths, Anya’s and Spike’s arcs on the show are remarkably

similar from their introductions as villains intent on killing Buffy (or in Anya's case more accurately erasing Buffy's existence) to their unwilling loss of their demonic powers and reluctant joining of Buffy's inner circle.<sup>23</sup> Each falls in love with and has a relationship with a central member of the Scooby gang and actively helps the gang in the fight against evil. In the seventh season, both struggle to understand the changing nature of their relationships and with their roles within the Scooby gang. Both must also reconcile their demonic pasts with their human presents.<sup>24</sup>

### **Spike's Backstory**

Spike's backstory is told in several different episodes including the fifth season episode "Fool for Love" and the seventh season's "Lies My Parents Told Me." These episodes reveal that before he became Spike "the bloody," a vampire who has successfully killed two slayers, he was just William, a "bloody awful" Victorian poet desperately in love with a woman named Cecily who cruelly rejects him and his poetry. William is mocked mercilessly when one of his love poems is read at a party. That same night, William, sired by the vampire Drusilla, becomes Spike, and he turns his devoted love from Cecily to Dru and to the power being a vampire gives him. Just as Anya threw herself into her work to become the best vengeance demon, Spike sets out to be the most powerful vampire and succeeds where many vampires fail—by killing two slayers, the ultimate vampire trophy. His desire to be the most feared vampire is what brings him to Sunnydale in the first place to kill the next slayer, Buffy. Just as Anya defines herself by her demonness or her relationships to Olaf and then Xander, Spike defines himself



by his vampireness and his love first for Cecily, then Dru, and finally Buffy. Just as Anya becomes more human through her love of Xander, Spike obtains a soul because of his love for Buffy. He tells her, “I did this for you. The soul, the changes—it’s what you wanted” (“Get It Done”). Spike’s willingness to change to become acceptable to Buffy is what enables him in his final heroic act of saving the world because he is “ensouled” and “more than human.” Jowett points out that in *BtVS*, “ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are more strict for female characters than for male” (14). In this situation, Anya is judged as bad for letting her love for a man change her—even though those changes make her more human and happy—while Spike, doing the same action and letting his love of a woman change him perhaps even more drastically, is judged as good. Anya, in her role as truth-teller, points out this double standard for female behavior when she tells the potentials, “Spike’s got some sort of “Get Out of Jail Free” card that doesn’t apply to the rest of us” (“Lies My Parents Told Me”).

### **Anya: The One Not Chosen**

In the fifth season finale when Anya gets to be heroic and Spike fails to be so, the pattern of rehabilitation in the series privileges humanness. Anya had become human enough to be a hero. But Spike, with only the chip in his head and his recent tryst with the Buffy-bot in everyone’s memory, was not rehabilitated—not human—enough to be heroic.<sup>25</sup> In the season seven finale, Anya fails to be heroic, not because she is less human than the fifth season, but because humanness is no longer valued. Importantly, in fact, Anya is *more* human in the seventh season than she was in the fifth as made clear by a

conversation she has with Andrew in the second-to-last episode, "End of Days." As stated earlier, Anya's reaction to every apocalypse since the third season is used to gauge her humanness. In the seventh season, her humanness is in question because she begins the season as a vengeance demon; after becoming human again at the end of "Selfless," she frequently makes anti-human comments such as, "I'm a bright girl, good education, quick on the uptake. So, tell me, why in the name of almighty Grothnar would I let myself become human again?" ("Get It Done"). But in this conversation with Andrew, another marginal member of the Scooby gang with whom Anya most frequently associates in the final few episodes, Anya states her true feelings about humanity and her place in it. Andrew asks Anya why she is fighting in the battle when she could leave. She explains why she left once and why she is now staying:

Anya: Well . . . I guess I was . . . kinda new to bein' around humans before. But now I've . . . seen a lot more, gotten to know people . . . seen what they're capable of, and . . . (shrugs) I guess I just realized...how amazingly screwed-up they all are . . . And they have no purpose that unites them, so they just drift around, blundering through life until they die . . . which they . . . they know is coming, yet every single one of them is surprised when it happens to them. They're incapable of thinking about what they want beyond the moment. They kill each other, which is clearly insane. And yet, here's the thing. When it's something that really matters, they fight.

I mean, they're lame morons for fighting, but they do. They never, never quit. So I guess I will keep fighting, too. ("End of Days")

Importantly, Anya proves that she has attained full humanity because she is no longer concerned for herself or Xander but wants to fight because it is the right thing to do. By choosing to fight in the battle, Anya is declaring that she is fully rehabilitated—that she has truly chosen to be a human, something she had not done either time she lost her demon powers.

Yet, as a human, Anya is unable to help in the fight against the First Evil because this battle, as Buffy states, is "about power," and as a human Anya has none ("Lessons"). In the fifth season finale, Anya is able to contribute to the gang's efforts to defeat Glory. When Giles' challenges Anya to contribute, she immediately comes up with two helpful ideas. In the seventh season episode "Get It Done," in what Anya calls Buffy's "Everybody Sucks but Me Speech," Buffy asks Anya what she is doing to help in the fight against the First, and Anya can only reply, "I provide much-needed . . . sarcasm" to which Xander immediately adds "Um, that would kinda be my job, actually." Anya later tries to be helpful by using her former demon connections to find out information about the uber-vampires Buffy and the potentials will have to face because as she says, "I'm doing what I can do, contributing any way I can" ("Empty Places"). Yet, unlike in earlier seasons when Anya's demon knowledge is vital in planning the gang's battle strategy, her information now only serves to terrify the potentials more. And when they question her about the information they really need, how to defeat Caleb, Anya is unable to tell them anything. Even before her "disposable"

death, it is clear that Anya no longer has any authority or value to the group. To re-establish her place, she tries the strategies that she had used before—rekindling her romance with Xander, providing information, embracing humanity—but these strategies are no longer even mildly effective. Though feminist critics praise the empowered characterization of the chosen one Buffy and her fellow chosen slayers, Anya's role is equally important because her failure to create an acceptable identity reveals what it means *not* to be chosen.

### **Conclusion: Third Wave Implications**

Importantly, it is Anya herself who makes clear that Buffy's position as the slayer is a privileged, unearned position unavailable to most women. When Buffy tries to lead the gang and the potentials into another battle with Caleb, everyone, en masse, turns on her, questioning her right to lead them when so many have already been killed or injured by blindly following her. Buffy tries to convince them that they have to have a leader, and Anya, in her truth-teller role, makes an argument that is vital to understanding Anya's and Buffy's differing fates and the series' ultimate feminist message:

Anya: (calmly) And it's automatically you. (looks at Buffy) You really do think you're better than we are.

Buffy: No, I—

Anya: But we don't know. We don't know if you're actually better. I mean, you came into the world with certain advantages, sure. I mean, that's the legacy . . . But you didn't earn it. You didn't work for it. You've never had anybody come up to you and say you

deserve these things more than anyone else. They were just handed to you. So that doesn't make you better than us. It makes you luckier than us. ("Empty Places")

Buffy, and the other chosen slayers, are the series' empowered, heroic females who feminist critics point to as role models for third wave feminists to celebrate. Yet, these lucky slayers don't have to "work" for their empowerment or "earn it." Buffy tells them in the final episode that instead of passively waiting to be chosen to become slayers when the slayers before them die, they can make a choice to become slayers now. Buffy says, "So here's the part where you make a choice [. . .] I say that we change the rule. I say my power should be our power" ("Chosen"). This is the moment of collective female empowerment that feminist critics praise. Yet, despite how passionate Buffy's speech is, these potentials really have no choice to make. If one of them had rejected Buffy's offer, they would still have been activated as slayers. Once Willow performs the spell, in addition to the potentials fighting with Buffy, young girls all around the world become slayers without even knowing what a slayer is. They are still passively "chosen" without doing anything to earn the privilege or making any choice. Like Buffy, they are just "luckier" because by being chosen, they are given advantages not available to most females. Not even Dawn, Buffy's sister, gets to share in the empowerment.<sup>26</sup>

Empowerment, then, in the Buffyverse—and by extension the third wave— is arbitrary and unattainable unless one is chosen, and few are. Anya's characterization shows that for those who are not chosen there is no successful

alternative strategy to obtain empowerment. For Anyanka, being too feminist failed. For Anya, trying to balance femininity and feminism worked briefly in the fourth and fifth seasons, but the balance was too difficult to maintain, and soon she found that being too feminine also failed to lead to empowerment. Finally, she embraced humanity and fought for the right side, but this too failed—not because she died in the final battle but because of *how* she died. In the Buffyverse, heroism is the ultimate symbol of empowerment, and Anya, who is not chosen and cannot choose to be so, by being denied a heroic death, is ultimately denied empowerment. Her death, unlike Spike's, does not save the world. Her death doesn't even save Andrew who only lies about her death to spare Xander's feelings (Whedon DVD Commentary "Chosen").

Byers argues that it is impossible not to recognize "a vision of feminism" in *BtVS*. Perhaps from Buffy's perspective at the end of the series, standing at the edge of the sinkhole that used to be Sunnydale and turning to look to the open road ahead of her, that vision is positive. But from Anya's perspective from the bottom of the sinkhole, the view is much different and much less positive. If *BtVS* is "a quintessentially third wave cultural production" as Pender so convincingly argues, and its feminist message is representative of third wave feminist beliefs, the larger implication of its depiction of female empowerment is that empowerment isn't actually a choice for most women in the postmodern, post-feminist world. And importantly, even when those who do manage to become empowered fight together, it won't be enough to win the war. Ultimately, in the Buffyverse, even empowered women still need a male savior. Feminist critics

have been quick to argue that *Buffy's* representation of female empowerment exemplifies a new wave of feminism. But as an Anya-centered reading of the text makes clear, if the series' feminist message defines third wave feminism, then, what defines third wave feminism is that it isn't really feminist at all.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> By using the term post-feminist I simply want to signify feminism after the second wave and its backlash that has been influenced by postmodernism and gender theory. Also, throughout this paper I will use the terms contemporary feminism and third wave feminism interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> But not, it should be noted, without a little help from her friends, both male and female. Also, the "saved the world a lot" is a reference to the inscription on Buffy's tombstone after she died at the end of the fifth season in "The Gift."

<sup>3</sup> I use the term movement here loosely. Marketing campaign would perhaps be a more accurate label.

<sup>4</sup> In the sixth season, she even sings and dances while wearing cute outfits.

<sup>5</sup> At this point, the actors who played Angel, Cordelia and Wesley left *Buffy* to star in the spin-off series *Angel*.

<sup>6</sup> This is a minor but interesting point. The shift from battling society's demons to battling personal demons mirrors the shift between the focuses of the second and third feminist waves.

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<sup>7</sup> For examples, see Patricia Pender's "Kicking Ass is Comfort Food" in *Third Wave Feminism* and Michelle Byers' "Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Next Generation of Television" in *Catching a Wave*.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, the degree to which second wave feminists really rejected traditional femininity is debatable, but the second wave feminist stereotype available to most third wavers is of the bra-burning, hairy legged, make-up less man-hating feminist.

<sup>9</sup> She gets analytic coverage in Mary Alice Money's essay, but in the few other references to her, she's just mentioned in a list of other characters or in plot summaries (see pps. 4, 48, 57, 82, 229, 237)

<sup>10</sup> This means Xander gets short shrift as well since most of his storylines are connected to his relationship with Anya.

<sup>11</sup> Though Sarah Michelle Gellar is not a natural blonde, Buffy is supposed to be.

<sup>12</sup> Anya's hair is not only the same color as Buffy's in this episode, it is in a ponytail, an uncommon hairstyle for Anya but normal for Buffy.

<sup>13</sup> The shift between privileging humanness and privileging power was not made explicit in *Buffy* until the seventh season, but the beginnings of the shift can be traced back to the *Buffy-Angel* crossover episode "I Will Remember You" in the first season of *Angel*, which was *Buffy's* fourth season when Angel gets what he most desires—to be human—but rejects humanness after realizing that as a human he could not help in the fight against evil because he was powerless.



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As a demon, Angel has *more than* human strength and that power is currency more valuable than humanness.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that at the end of the sixth season, Xander saved the world (with words), so the male hero is not unprecedented in the Buffyverse. In fact, there are enough examples of male heroics throughout the life of the series that Whedon's claim not to have a male savior every five minutes becomes questionable. For a more thorough explanation of why Spike's death is problematic for a feminist reading, see Arwin Spicer.

<sup>15</sup> Cordelia is an important character from the beginning of the series. She begins as the popular, bitchy cheerleader stereotype. Buffy rejects her friendship to befriend Willow and Xander. In the second and third seasons Cordelia slowly becomes involved with the Scooby gang and eventually dates Xander, though it ruins her reputation with the in-crowd.

<sup>16</sup> For example, she says, "And I wish that Xander Harris never again knows the touch of a woman. (smiles, starts to walk away) \*And\* that Willow wakes up tomorrow covered in monkey hair."

<sup>17</sup> And to be clear, by detailed I mean Jowett spends four pages on Anya as compared to the sentence or two she usually gets.

<sup>18</sup> The Magic Box is Giles' magic shop and is used as the Scooby gathering place in the fifth and sixth seasons.

<sup>19</sup> The other reason given is that Xander was raised in a home with an alcoholic father who degrades and abuses Xander's mother and that he fears that will be his fate.

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that Anya's dedication to vengeance is similar to Buffy's dedication to slaying. Both characters define themselves by their work. Throughout the series but especially in the seventh season, Buffy repeatedly says "I'm the slayer."

<sup>21</sup> Gypsies cursed the vampire Angelus with a soul after he killed a young gypsy girl to make him feel remorse for the lives he had taken. However, the ensoulment curse had a qualifier—if Angel ever experienced true happiness, he'd lose his soul and revert back to Angelus. This happens in *Buffy* episode "Surprise."

<sup>22</sup> In "Never Leave Me," Anya and Xander interact similarly to when they were dating. See "Storyteller" for the most important conversations between Anya and Xander in the remaining episodes. They discuss their relationship on the year anniversary of when they were supposed to be married and tell each other that they still love each other and "still spark." Though their reunion is mostly sexual, it is obvious that they are both happier when they are together.

<sup>23</sup> In one of *Buffy's* odder storylines, in the fourth season a secret government demon-hunting military unit comes to Sunnydale and forms the Initiative. They hunt, kill and perform experiments on demons such as the vampire Spike. Spike loses his power when they place a chip in his brain that gives him mind-splitting headaches when he tries to harm a human. After Spike is made harmless, Buffy can't kill him, and mostly from boredom, Spike slowly joins the gang where he comes to realize that he is in love with Buffy.

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<sup>24</sup> Although as stated earlier, Spike isn't human. He's still a vampire even with his soul. Revealingly though Joss Whedon refers to him as "a man" in his commentary to the final episode.

<sup>25</sup> Spike had Warren build him a Buffy sex-bot which he then used to fulfill his sexual fantasies.

<sup>26</sup> Dawn, the other human female in the final battle, is not empowered but she is privileged over Anya because of her relationship to Buffy. Importantly, Dawn gets to fight next to Xander, a place that arguably should have been Anya's who is sent to fight with the useless Andrew instead.

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