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“Selfless”: Locating Female Identity in Anya/Anyanka Through Prostitution

Anya: Crap! Look at this. Now I’m burdened with a husband, and several tiny pink children, more cash than I can reasonably manage.

Xander: That means you’re winning.

Anya: Really?

Xander: Yes, cash equals good.

Anya: Ooh, I’m so pleased! Can I trade in the children for more cash?

– “Real Me” *BtVS* 5.2

Buffy Summers may have “saved the world alot,” but one character has lived in it and other dimensions for over a millennium. Some call this character “Aud,” others “Anyanka.” Throughout her elongated life and namesakes – Anya Emerson, vengeance demon, Mrs. Xander Harris, Mrs. Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins Harris, Mrs. Anya lame-ass made up maiden name Harris – we have come to know her simply as Anya. Since her first appearance in “The Wish” *BtVS* 3.9, these are all the names that have come to be associated with Emma Caulfied’s character on the show. This is a character who came from the shadows of episodic appearances to become one of the central players (somewhat a Scooby) in the fight between good and evil. Although she was not one of the original characters when the show first debuted, Anya’s staying power through the final five seasons of the series

provides us with someone as complex as the title character.

As many of the female characters on *BtVS* each had their own time of growth and development, Anya proves to be one of the most underrated in studies or commentary of self identification. The aim of this essay is to illustrate the various ways in which Anya's identity is created, destroyed and recreated by men. This marketing of her body among men is conducted through naming and personal relationships. Anya's identity, and the circulation of her self through men, is primarily a result of prostitution, thereby making her existence as a traded commodity a reality throughout the series. Working in a nonlinear fashion from the series' progression of seasons, it is important to start with "Selfless" *BtVS* 7.5 to understand how this character's understanding of herself was formed in the beginning and how it was altered until her demise in the series finale.

DOMESTIC AUD

In the first flashback sequence of "Selfless," the origin, or at least the closest we'll ever know, of Caulfield's character is revealed. She is shown carrying a rabbit and nuzzling it at the face. When Olaf (her mate) enters the home, the first thing he says is "Aud!" At this moment, we are given a name for this character and the name has been issued by a man, her domestic partner. Everything about this introductory flashback is patriarchal and domestic. Aud hangs up Olaf's

weapon, prepares him a stein of mead and tells him how she feels about him by saying, "I could not live without you." Also in this scene, after Olaf notices the abundance of rabbits about the home, Aud says that she would like to give some of them away to townspeople in a show of goodwill and selflessness. The bunnies, more than charitable offerings, are representative of a fertile future filled with children for Aud and Olaf; his comments on breeding help to establish this sentiment even further. Aud is clearly a domestic woman, faithful to her Olaf.

Next, however, we see Olaf has been turned into a troll, and the townspeople are running scared. Aud watches the scene play out as a demon approaches and asks how she accomplished her spell. Seemingly impressed by her skills, the demon introduces himself as D'Hoffryn, "a patron of a family of sorts." After Aud presents herself in return, there is a small play on words because her name sounds like the word "odd." Of course the relevance here plays throughout all the seasons for this character in never finding a true, even balance for herself. D'Hoffryn informs Aud that she does not "see her true self" and names her Anyanka. She fights to continually say that her name is Aud, but D'Hoffryn dismisses her comments by saying "perhaps, but Anyanka is who you are." After this, he invites her to join a group of vengeance demons and so starts her foray into the field. D'Hoffryn

takes the newly-named Anyanka under his wing to manage her efforts, the same way a pimp solicits the employ of a prostitute working on her own. Anyanka hereby becomes the “new girl” in D’Hoffryn’s solicited prostitute harem.. This scene sets up a distinction between naming and being, but Aud the domestic and Anyanka the vengeance demon have been created by male figures to inhabit specific personae, as designated by their names.

ANYANKA

Another flashback of early life depicts Anyanka with her vengeance demon friend, Halfrek, sipping wine at the remains of a massacre in 1905 St. Petersburg, Russia. We see Anyanka and Halfrek living quite elegantly. Their lifestyle suggests a financial prosperity that vengeance can provide, a mirror to the monetary gain that can come from prostitution. Although Halfrek seems to desire relaxation and a possible break, Anyanka is already planning another outing for vengeance, noting that there’s “no better spot for vengeance than a brothel.” During this exchange of conversation among dead bodies and fires burning outside, both women are covered in blood but give it not a second glance. Anyanka and Halfrek sip their wine and converse, but they are stained by their profession; the blood seeps deep into the fabric of their clothing like the ingraining of vengeance and prostitution, making less-than-ordinary actions seem innate. This life

seems so natural to Anyanka that she comments, "Vengeance is what I do, Halfrek. I don't need anything else. Vengeance is what I am."

Halfrek, who understands that vengeance is a job, cannot separate the lines for Anyanka who blends her own identity with the actions of her employment. As Anyanka, the act of vengeance overpowers the self in a loss of control. Again, Anyanka is relegated to submission under the desire to exact harm upon men; her job is her existence and her existence is through men.

When the story returns to present, D'Hoffryn and Xander have a slight issue over calling Caulfield's character Anya or Anyanka.

D'Hoffryn mentions the "funny historical sidebar" about her original name, but is interrupted by her words, "I wanna take it back." Here, Anya wants to recover the lives of the fraternity members whom she had killed, but this is also a move to reclaim the self. In returning life to the fraternity members, an original name and self may be possible to obtain for Anya, specifically because the desire is her own. The length of time that Anya has spent going from domesticity to vengeance and back, however, removes that possibility. Her wish to give back life is of goodwill, but in order to do so, it is understood that she must give her own life. Although the life of Halfrek is taken instead, Anya was prepared to have no existence in order for the men she punished to regain theirs. The death that D'Hoffryn inflicts upon

Halfrek is just another stereotypical facet of prostitution whereby the pimp is able to construe psychological abuse upon a woman by hurting someone close to her. His manipulation of Anya's wish works to his advantage in retaining power and not succumbing to the will of someone he maintained control over. Anya's release from the vengeance fold is like that of a gang member being initiated or removed; violence has to occur to secure release. With the death of Halfrek and D'Hoffryn's exit, Anya is a free woman. But where does she go from here?

Before that can be addressed, there has to be a step back in seasons, but forward in the series timeline of story, where Anyanka appears with Harmony and friends as Anya Emerson, new girl to Sunnydale High, in "The Wish" *BtVS* 3.9. In this episode, Anyanka is wearing the guise of Anya, just your average high school girl who is drawn to people with good material tastes, like Cordelia. Cordy asks if Anya's necklace is made by Gucci, but she replies that it's an antique given to her by her dad as a good luck charm. This power center for vengeance could only have been given to her by D'Hoffryn, and to call him dad perpetuates the association that prostitutes have to their pimps as father figures. After Cordy makes a wish that Buffy had never come to Sunnydale, Anya turns to look at her, but her facial features and voice have changed drastically – she is revealed to be a

demon. Later in the episode, Giles summons Anyanka, the patron saint of scorned women, to obtain her power source and destroy it.

Although Anyanka harbors demon strength, Giles manages to destroy the amulet, thus reversing the wish and removing Anyanka's power, rendering her a mortal girl in Sunnydale. Giles names Anyanka when he calls her before him, and moments later, he is the one who destroys that existence. Once again, a male figure has been allowed to create and eliminate an identity for this character. She was selected into vengeance through a male figure and removed from it by another male, not of her own accord. At this point, the lifespan for this character has gone from the domestic Aud to the demon Anyanka to the mortal Anya. Her names traffic through the mouths of men like her identities pass through associations with them.

ANYA

Anya's existence embodies a prostitute who has been rejected by street life. Now disconnected from D'Hoffryn and vengeance, she must find her way back into society. Roaming the halls of Sunnydale High, Anya attempts to adjust as a teenager, although she's over one-thousand-years old. Through seasons four, five, and six we see Anya attempting to regain her power center, seducing Xander in her quirky mannerisms, becoming a Scooby and working in the magic shop.

Anya's pursuit of Xander throughout these seasons represents a return

to domestic life. Her overt sexual desires seem to ease somewhat and the plans for a future wedding should solidify her new domesticity. The wedding falls through, however, and Anya's rush to leave behind vengeance fails. As most of her wedding attendees were all some shape or form of demon, this illustrates how her push toward a domestic mortal life cannot be achieved without her past being considered. In "The Wish," Anyanka made a comment about the "brave new world" she provided to Cordelia, but Huxley's view of an ideal society was far from ideal. As Anya, she discovers that there is no perfect world for women and her wish for a perfect life with Xander can never be.

The idea that a woman becomes fallen after going into prostitution holds true here, as Anya is continually associated with vengeance. The wedding debacle and tensions thereafter lead to a chance drunken, sexual encounter with Spike; both characters at low points in their emotional states. From here, Anya decides to go back into vengeance. Things are a bit different for her in the arena, however, as all of her past names and identities battle with one another, not allowing a direct transformation back to Anyanka. The trouble with the new Anyanka is that she's a demon with a longing for Xander; she harbors a residual desire for domesticity, with a previously-established connection to humankind. Here, she is Aud,

Anyanka and Anya all at once.

ANYA'S SONG

The final flashback in "Selfless" takes place in Sunnydale, 01. For this rewind, Joss Whedon provides Anya with a song as an extension to "Once More with Feeling," *BtVS* 6.7.. More so than the duet with Xander from the season six musical, a personal reflection of Anya's life and where she would like it to go is depicted. A close look at the lyrics of Anya's Song shows a woman searching for self and finding it in marriage. The search, however, is incomplete and the identity is never realized; the words speak for themselves. The opening to the song is "Mr. Xander Harris." These introductory lyrics immediately remove the agency of self for Anya, and her own personal song is given a meaning through a man. Anya's personal accomplishments and life experiences tell us that she's "boned a troll," "wreaked some wrath," "like[s] to bowl," and is "good with math," but the self-referencing "I" of this second lyrical grouping soon disappears. After singing the central "who am I?" question, Anya answers her own inquiry with a voice not her own. She replies that she is "the Missis...*his* Misses...Mrs. Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins Harris" (emphasis mine). As the lyrics progress, the more Anya develops an identity, the more it's not an identity for herself but through Xander.

The doubt in Anya's words, however, let us know that she

herself is not so sure about the marriage institution and being a loving support to her desired mate. Her repetition of the word "maybe" contradicts the idea that "being a pair makes you twice as tall," and *maybe* giving your heart and whole being to another might not be the best idea for her (emphasis mine). Her self-doubt begs the question: Is love smart for Anya? Is it the right thing to do or is it just good that she finds a male figure to remove her from the streets in attempt to erase past doings in life? Questions like these cannot be fully answered by her lyrics, as the only things Anya seem sure of are the financial benefits of marriage and the sexual enjoyment one receives from having a mate.

In the penultimate lyric group, Anya sings "Just stand aside / Here comes the bride." The bride terminology designates a binary for groom, so it's easy to pin another male-issued identity upon Anya, but the line that precedes is a bit troubling. "Just stand aside" is taken as a command to others in Anya announcing her presence before she exits the apartment doors. At a deeper reading, however, it can also be taken as the position she would assume in marriage, a siderole to her male counterpart. This second reading seems more applicable to Anya's thought process if we recall her singing the lines, "But I'm out of the biz / The name I made I'll trade for his" in "Once More with Feeling." Anya's final line to declare her existence is shortened to "I

will be—" as the story flashes back to the present where Buffy has run a sword through her chest. In what could have been the defining line of Anya's song, her declaration of who she will be is never expressed. Again, in an attempt to claim selfhood, her existence remains uncertain.

UNNAMED

At the end of "Selfless," identity is unclear. Anya now represents a prostitute who leaves the profession, but only through permission granted by her pimp. She is disconnected from D'Hoffryn and the vengeance (prostitution) fold. In her turn from vengeance again, this time through her own will, Anya is now also removed from her domestic connection to Xander. She walks the campus unnamed, pondering the question, "What if I'm really nobody?" This is not to say that Anya has no existence, but it is to point to the ways in which her existence is defined by or through men. As Aud, domesticity rules her world. She takes care of Olaf and maintains the homefront with ease, but this nature is established because of Olaf. As Anya, her personality and character are lovable, quirky and human in an innocent child manner. This is a return to mortality, an embrace of the domestic life that was left behind when she became a vengeance demon. But when she takes the name of Anyanka, embracing her inner vengeance demon, she is physically altered; facial features turn from society's

version of prettiness and her demeanor changes from pre-conceived ditsy blonde to streetwise avenger. Anyanka is a possession of D'Hoffryn, just as he states "I've got plenty of girls" and the way in which he attempts to recruit Willow to work for him, as well.

Although her names and actions may be analyzed, Anya has never been one to follow a straight line of anything. In "Fear Itself" *BtVS* 4.4, she dresses up as a bunny when Xander tells her to get a scary costume for Halloween. Anya doesn't dress up as something that scares others, but something that scares herself. The series finale of *BtVs* claimed the life of Anya, leaving her body among fallen slayers, bringers, and ubervamps. Her death on the battlefield situates her existence with demons and humans, a fitting end to her betwixt life. Amidst her quirks and literal interpretations, Anya was a woman who stood the tests of time. From an environment that would have claimed her as the Angel of the House to a revenge-exacting profession supervised by a demonic pimp to a mixture of past and present selves, Anya was much more than a name and could not be defined in simplistic terms. Her existence and its multiple creations and destructions may have had ties to men, but her being was all her own.

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