

**Buffy “Spits Out the Apple”:  
Rejecting False Knowledge and “Bad Faith”**

**Victoria Griffin  
Campbell University**

[1] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—the title of the series prepares the viewer for a battle between good and evil. Buffy is not a killer or a murderer; she is a Slayer. She rids the world of evil creatures. The viewer does not initially doubt this premise. Buffy, as the protagonist, is immediately presented as the “good guy.” She sees a clear line between good and evil, and the viewer accepts her division, especially since it coincides with the ideals of the majority—both in the *Buffyverse* and in the viewer’s world. Vampires are defined as evil by their very nature, and Buffy must be “good” due to her role in killing them. However, this clear division quickly becomes blurred, for the viewer and for Buffy, as she encounters beings that do not fit her stereotypes: a vampire with a soul, humans who act immorally, and vampires who seem capable of goodness. She changes her definitions of good and evil in order to accommodate Angel, a vampire with a soul, whose existence convinces her that evil is not inherent in a vampire’s nature, but in the lack of a soul. Her resulting assumption that a soul equates goodness is later challenged by the existence of “good” demons and “bad” humans, and she must question whether the soul could truly be the root of goodness if some who possess one, like Warren, can act in such an evil manner. The viewer recognizes the other slayer Faith’s greatest crime—deciding who should live and who should die—and condemns her for it. But because of Buffy’s status as protagonist and because the show initially leads the viewer to assume vampires are evil, the viewer overlooks the fact that Buffy commits the same crime. Just as Faith does, Buffy believes herself to possess the knowledge of good and evil, equating “good” first with human and then with the possession of a soul, without any personal experience to justify her assumptions. Both Buffy and the viewer question these definitions after encountering beings whose existences defy accepted moral premises. Asking whether characters or viewers truly know the difference between good and evil is the first step in identifying Buffy’s greatest crime to be the same as Faith’s.

[2] As the series progresses, however, it becomes clear that Buffy’s insistence on deciding others’ fates, with the belief that she possesses a priori knowledge of good and evil, is an attempt to free herself of the fear of being “nothing,” as characterized by Sartre’s philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre posits that people have no inherent identities separate from their actions and that fear of being wholly responsible for one’s own moral worth results in attempts to label ourselves and others with identities separate from those determined by personal choice. This fear, which

pushes Buffy to accept the presumption of vampires as evil provided by the Watchers' Council, is the same fear that drives Faith to enact the identities that others impose upon her. Because Buffy's faux responsibility to slay vampires is based on false knowledge, it impedes her from finding balance in her life and in her world until she, like Faith, is able to cast off the false knowledge and accept that her intrinsic self is defined only by her actions. This acceptance, developed through a seven-season evolution, is Buffy's first step in rejecting the black-and-white notion of morality and embracing a more complex and accurate worldview than the slayer-vampire dichotomy.

### Choice as Identity

[3] In the *Buffyverse*, a character's morality depends on his or her choices. Moral worth is not fixed; it changes in accordance with actions and decisions. In her discussion of the paradoxes of Buffy and Spike, Herman writes, "the universe rests in a precarious balance between good and evil, and it is only our free will that determines that balance" (par. 1). Good and evil are ambiguous terms, especially when applied to a person's intrinsic nature. If they are to be discarded as reliable sources, a person's choices are all that remains.

[4] However, Buffy judges good and evil based on what one is, rather than what one does. To invalidate Buffy's assumption that vampires are intrinsically evil and humans are intrinsically good, one must look not to the world of the viewer, but to the moral laws which govern the *Buffyverse*; the most reliable tactic for discerning these laws is deciphering hints as to Joss Whedon's authorial intent. In their discussion of freedom and evil, Richardson and Rabb reference Whedon's claim that "Jean-Paul Sartre's book *Nausea* is the most important book he has ever read" (par. 4). Richardson and Rabb continue to describe Sartre's philosophical notion of "nothing": "We are 'nothing' apart from the free existential choices that we make and we are, further, entirely responsible for those choices and thus for whatever it is that we become" (par. 4). Lavery references the DVD commentary accompanying the *Firefly* episode "Objects in Space," in which Whedon confirms *Nausea* by Sartre to be "the most important book he had ever read" (Lavery 44). One can even find Angel reading the book in "Lovers Walk" (B3008). Sartre's presence in the *Buffyverse* extends beyond the physical book. Whedon implements the philosopher's ideology: the identification of good and evil in the *Buffyverse* relies on actions.

[5] After returning as a non-corporeal being in *Angel*, Spike says, "I can't live like this, Angel. Being useless. Being nothing" ("Just Rewards" A5002). Spike feels he is nothing because he has no power to act or to choose, which are the only things that create a person's identity, and define his or her morality in the *Buffyverse*.

### Buffy's "Bad Faith"

[6] Buffy, for most of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, does not accept this definition. She instead personifies Sartre's concept of Bad Faith, which Richardson and Rabb explain:

To avoid these very strong unpleasant emotions [of being “nothing”], we will do almost anything to conceal from ourselves the kind of existential freedom which Sartre claims human beings exercise in creating themselves through the choices that they make . . . The whole point of Bad Faith is to ignore our freedom of choice, essentially to pretend for as long as possible that a decision is not required, or even possible. (“Buffy, Faith and Bad Faith” par. 5)

This self-imposed lack of freedom is a shelter from the “nothing” Sartre describes. In his view of the human condition, a human being is that “being which is what it is not and which is not what it is” (qtd. in “Buffy, Faith and Bad Faith” par. 4). In other words, a person is defined by his or her actions, without which he or she is “nothing.” Bad Faith allows one to ignore this fact and to feel that one possesses an intrinsic identity or morality. Buffy wants to feel that she can make bad choices and still be intrinsically good.

[7] Richardson and Rabb elaborate on the effects of Bad Faith stating, “Whatever we have done, no matter how reprehensible, if we believe we did not do it freely, then we can convince ourselves that we are not to blame. The denial of freedom is, thus, also the denial of responsibility” (“Buffy, Faith and Bad Faith” par. 6). Because of her fear of being “nothing,” Buffy convinces herself that her role and her morality have both been assigned to her, justifying one through the other in a circle of logic. She believes she has no choice but to be a Slayer. If she is to be a Slayer, she must slay—that is, she must kill—and she must decide whom to kill. Because she has accepted the role and surrendered the responsibility for choosing it, she has forced upon herself an even heavier responsibility: deciding who lives and who dies. Just as she shrugged away recognition of her personal choice for fear of being “nothing,” she convinces herself she has not in fact assigned herself the responsibility of determining good and evil. To do so, she parrots the views of the Watchers’ Council, while disobeying it on other grounds, thus assuring herself of her (nonexistent) freedom. She denies her possession of responsibility—for her role, her actions, and the false knowledge she has assumed—but it weighs on her nonetheless. She recognizes the choices she must make, but because she imagines herself locked in the Slayer role and all it entails she does not take ownership of those choices. In “Grave” (B6022), Buffy says, “I’m not just gonna sit here while Willow incinerates what I’m chosen to protect.” Her word choice (“I’m chosen” instead of “I’ve chosen”) illustrates her personal illusion that she has no choice in the matter. She relinquishes her autonomy for fear of “nothingness,” yielding power to the Shadowmen, the Council, and the patriarchal institution which constantly regulates the status quo by upholding social and moral assumptions.

[8] In “Slayer Authenticity,” Richardson and Rabb argue that “from day one Buffy has a very real grasp of her own sense of agency” (53). They cite her relationship with Giles, arguing that Buffy is in complete control of her own choices. However, this interpretation of Buffy’s autonomy is in line, not with her reality, but with the illusion she has created for herself. Buffy emphasizes the choices she makes in order to cover the fact that she adopts others’ perceptions of

who she should be as fact. Richardson and Rabb say, Buffy “does not want to be defined by her Slayerhood” (50). But in fact, she goes to great lengths to identify her Slayer identity as something that chose her, not vice versa. Her illusion of autonomy simply conceals the fact that she uses Bad Faith in response to her fear of being nothing.

[9]She continually cites her Slayer identity to confirm that she must be the one to put herself in danger by hunting vampires. While trying to make her mom understand her Slayer identity, Buffy says, “Do you think I chose to be like this? Do you have any idea how lonely it is? How dangerous?” (B2022) She emphasizes that being the Slayer is not her choice, and therefore she does not choose to slay vampires. Ashford explains that Bad Faith comes “. . . in refusing responsibility for a choice by denying having made it. To deny responsibility for the meanings inevitably imposed on the situation is bad faith” (113). Instead of accepting the truth that—right or wrong—she kills vampires, and chooses to do so of her own volition, Buffy refuses responsibility for those choices by citing her slayer nature. She argues that because she is a Slayer, she is meant to kill vampires. Therefore, the responsibility for, and consequences of those actions do not fall to her.

### **“Bad Faith”: The Slayer Inheritance**

[10] Other Slayers share Buffy’s struggle between the fear of being nothing and the crime of using false knowledge to justify choosing others’ fates. Williams writes, “Kendra is, from the Council’s point of view, the practically perfect Slayer: solemn, respectful, and efficient” (Williams 63). Kendra has conformed completely to the Council’s expectations of her as a Slayer. She seems to be Buffy’s opposite in that she has completely sacrificed her autonomy to her duty as a Slayer, but in reality, Kendra is a reflection of Buffy’s Bad Faith. In “What’s My Line, Part Two,” Kendra tells Buffy, “You talk about slaying like it's a job. It's not. It's who you are” (B2010). When Buffy asks if Kendra got that from her handbook, Kendra says, “From you.”

[11]Kendra has transformed herself into her given identity through her complete assimilation to the Council’s expectations. Although Buffy does not as thoroughly conform to expectations, she binds herself as tightly to the slayer identity as Kendra does. She does not see slaying as a job; she sees it as her intrinsic identity. In doing so, both Kendra and Buffy subscribed to the notion that their intrinsic identities are determined by an entity separate from their actions. They believe that, regardless of their choices, they *are* Slayers, a position with which they associate positive moral worth.

[12] Richardson and Rabb write, “If Kendra is hampered by following external discipline originating from the Watchers’ Council, then Faith is handicapped by the total lack of any discipline whatsoever” (“Buffy, Faith and Bad Faith” par. 3). Kendra and Faith’s self-imposed identities are each responses to external circumstances. Kendra latches on to the Slayer definition provided by the Council, and Faith reacts to the Scoobies’ perspectives. Both Kendra and Faith mold their actions to fit these identities, which points to the fear of being “nothing” described by

Sartre. Their willingness to assume the most convenient identities offered to them hint at underlying distrust of their own intrinsic worth and their desires to be *something* separate from their actions.

[13] Faith consistently provokes others to reinforce her assumed identity. Durand writes, “By bragging about her slaying exploits to the Scoobies, Faith is reinforcing her identity as a Slayer since she no longer has a Watcher to do so and feels guilty about letting her Watcher get killed. ‘Slayer’ is an outside identity for her” (par. 9). Faith wants to feel trapped in her identity. She is terrified of the responsibility of being “nothing,” of choosing her own identity through her actions, so she asks others to choose for her and plays her assigned parts. After her Watcher dies, she is forced to face the “nothingness” as she questions her identity as a Slayer. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Buffy and the Scoobies soon provide her with a new identity: evil. Buffy’s jealousy leads to her telling Giles in “Faith, Hope and Trick,” “The girl’s not playing with a full deck . . . She needs help” (B3003). This jealousy soon evolves into disdain, and when Faith accidentally kills a human in “Bad Girls” (B3014), Faith tries to convince Buffy and herself that she feels no remorse: “No, *you* don’t get it. I don’t *care*.” Faith is willing to deny her emotions to adhere to the external perception of herself as evil, perpetuated by Buffy and the Scoobies. This desire to substantiate an intrinsic identity drives Faith to seek out the Mayor, who will reinforce the identity Buffy has given Faith (“Consequences” B3015). Faith tells Buffy, “I come to Sunnydale, I’m a slayer, I do my job kicking ass better than anyone . . . I slay, I behave. I do the good little girl routine, and who does everybody thank? Buffy.” When Buffy says, “I never knew you had so much rage in you,” Faith responds, “What can I say? I’m the world’s best actor” (“Enemies” B3017). She is referring to acting the part of the “good” Slayer, but what even Faith herself does not realize is that she is still acting. She acts out the external identity presented to her. She acted the part of Slayer, and when that identity was stripped away from her, she turned to the Mayor, who reinforced the identity of “bad” Slayer, which she acted out as well. Parke writes, “Faith represents the darker side of the slayer” (par. 1). But Faith’s darkness is not intrinsic. It is learned. Faith responds to the same fear as Buffy. The differences in their responses result from differences in external stimuli. Pateman notes the aesthetics of Faith’s character: “She enjoys sexually alluring clothes, and she has long, dark hair and dark eyes . . . Her openness, sexual excitement, sense of adventure and fun in killing all mark her out as being Buffy’s opposite” (99). Pateman, like many audience members, assumes Faith’s visual aesthetic to be a result of her personality and character. However, Faith’s constant struggle to embody others’ perception of her makes the opposite more likely—Faith’s appearance is a persona adopted in response to external perceptions of her, beginning with her mother, who was busy “enjoying the drinking and passing out parts of life,” and ending with Buffy and the Mayor (“Enemies” B3017). Jowett distinguishes between “good” and “bad” girls in the context of ideal femininity as characterized by societal expectations: “The good girl is the female constructed in relation to others, a construction encompassing emotion and communication, sexual behavior, nurturing, and familial caring” (44). Faith is presented as a “bad girl”; she rejects the stereotypical female identity, but she clings to the identity of Slayer.

[14] Like Buffy, Faith assumes the responsibility of deciding who should live and who should die. She merely uses different criteria. Rather than accepting the Council's definition of evil, Faith judges based on strength. In response to Buffy's assertion that being Slayers "does not mean that we get to pass judgment on people like we're better than everybody else," Faith says, "We are better . . . people need us to survive" ("Consequences" B3015). This exchange illustrates that Buffy and Faith are two sides of the same coin. They both operate using the fallacy that they know who should live and who should die, but they disagree on specifics. While Buffy parrots the Council's notion that humans deserve to live, while soulless demons and vampires deserve to die, Faith commits the naturalistic fallacy in mistaking what is for what should be. Because the strong live and the weak die, she assumes the strong are somehow morally superior. This provides both criteria for determining who should die and justification for identifying herself as worthy of making such decisions. It also contributes to her joining the Mayor. She sees him as the strongest, as well as the one most willing to reinforce the identity given by Buffy. After Faith wakes from her coma to find the Mayor gone, she watches the video he left, in which he says, "The problem, Faith, is that there won't be a place for you in the world anymore. Right now I bet you're feeling very much alone" ("This Year's Girl" B4015). She is alone after him, just as she was alone before him. The Mayor is able to give her an identity and to free her from the fear of being "nothing," but it is only temporary. The identity he gives her evaporates with his death, and she is again left with the fear and isolation.

[15] While in a coma, Faith dreams of herself and the Mayor having a picnic in an idyllic setting akin to the Garden of Eden. In response to Faith's concern of rain, the Mayor says, "You're too young and too pretty a girl to start wearing worry lines on your face." The Mayor then picks up a snake and says, "Hey there, little fella. I dunno where you belong, but it's not here with us" ("This Year's Girl" B4015). The snake does not belong with them in the garden because the Mayor is the snake. He tempts Faith to eat the fruit and *believe* she knows the difference between good and evil. He provides her with criteria for determining who should live and who should die, and because of her fear of being "nothing," Faith accepts his word as the truth. The correlation between the Mayor and the snake is furthered by his transformation into a snake in "Graduation Day, Part 2" (B3022), a fact unknown to Faith.

[16] Faith's turnaround begins in *Buffy* and is finalized in *Angel*. Her change is initiated when she and Buffy switch bodies. In "Who Are You?" Faith (in Buffy's body) says, "You're nothing!" while she is punching her own face (B4016). This represents her recognition of Sarte's concept. She finally recognizes that her actions, rather than others' imposed identities, define her, and her assertion, "You're disgusting!" make clear that she is not happy with whom she has become. Later, in *Angel*, Faith "spits out the fruit" and sacrifices her responsibility for deciding who should live and who should die when she willingly goes to prison. By literally imprisoning herself and sacrificing her freedom, she regains her autonomy. Since no prison can hold a Slayer against her will, it is entirely her choice to remain behind bars. She chooses her own fate, but not the fates of others. Similarly, by figuratively chaining herself to the idea that she is "nothing" and

by accepting sole responsibility for her morality and her identity, she releases herself from others' grasps.

### Buffy's "Apple"

[17] In his philosophical novel, *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*, Daniel Quinn explores the biblical fall story, characterizing the forbidden fruit as imparting the *belief* that one possesses the knowledge of good and evil:

“You know very well that the fruit of this tree nourishes only the gods. It can no more nourish Adam than the grasses of the oxen. He might take it into his mouth and swallow it, but it would pass through his body without benefit. Surely you don't imagine that he might actually gain our knowledge by eating of this tree?”

“Of course not,” the other replied. “The danger is not that he would gain our knowledge but rather that he might *imagine* that he'd gained it. Having tasted the fruit of the tree, he might say to himself, ‘I have eaten at the gods' own tree of knowledge and therefore know as well as they how to rule the world. I may do as I will do.’” (162)

According to Quinn's interpretation of the story, eating the fruit produces a placebo effect, causing Adam (or mankind) to believe he possesses the knowledge of the gods, while in truth knowing nothing of the nature of good and evil. This dangerous conviction develops in the *Buffyverse*. In her assumption of the Slayer role and all it entails, Buffy has eaten the apple. She believes she alone knows the difference between good and evil, and she therefore assumes responsibility for acting upon her knowledge. In “Buffy, Faith and Bad Faith,” Richardson and Rabb state in regards to Buffy's relationship with the Watchers' Council, Buffy “chooses to follow only those ‘commands’ she herself judges worthy” (par. 1). Regardless of the merit of the Council's orders, Buffy's tendency to use her position as slayer to elevate her personal judgment above others' creates a cyclical pattern in which her past leadership reinforces her belief that she alone possesses the knowledge of good and evil. Even the Council, from whom she derived her knowledge, becomes lesser in her mind. She judges those around her based on her personal understanding of morality. This in itself is not destructive; the fact that she acts on these judgments, deciding who lives and who dies, creates an imbalance in Buffy's life and in the lives with which she intersects. After Buffy tries to kill Anya in “Selfless,” D'Hoffryn says, “Isn't that just like a slayer? Solving all her problems by sticking things with sharp objects” (B7005). From the subsequent conversation, during which Anya tries to sacrifice her life and soul to undo the damage she's done, it is clear that Buffy's decision to kill her was based on Buffy's own judgment of when Anya's actions had gone too far, not because Anya was or had become inherently evil.

[18] Buffy assumes her role as the Slayer provides her with a knowledge of good and evil not available to others, and she forms her first definition of “good” based on the Council’s perspective, assuming “good” to be synonymous with human. In Geller’s postmodern analysis of *Buffy*, he argues against Buffy’s possession of priori knowledge: “Buffy does not get her superior reasoning powers from her slayer nature, nor does she have any Cartesian innate ideas or special faculty that give her a priori knowledge or knowledge not derived from experience” (par. 16). Geller does admit Buffy’s prophetic dreams to fall outside this category, but argues their cryptic and limited nature to prevent them from being classified as priori knowledge. Furthermore, these dreams focus solely on future events, not what *should* be done. Those decisions are left wholly to Buffy.

[19] If her slayer nature does not provide insight into the nature of good and evil, then one must examine the sources which Buffy employs to define good and evil. Although, as Richardson and Rabb note, she often defies its commands, the Watchers’ Council provides her first working definition of evil. From the time of her realization of her slayer nature, the Council instills its values in Buffy: vampire equals evil. Along with the basic definition acquired from the Council, Buffy takes her moral assumptions from textual evidence. Geller writes of the Scoobies’ reliance on knowledge from Giles’s texts:

The knowledge that Giles is transmitting to the Scoobies is knowledge that has been transmitted to him through various esoteric and authoritative texts. Moreover, since these texts are the property of the Watchers’ Council and Giles is using them as part of his job as Buffy’s watcher, this knowledge is also institutional . . . Buffy and the gang also accept this authority, so that research always involves searching for but never questioning the evident in the texts. (par. 19)

Initially, Buffy and the Scoobies accept this textual evidence as definitive, without employing their own research or evaluations based on experience or sources outside the authority of the Council. As the viewer learns, much of this information is incomplete at best, such as the Codex, which offers a partial truth in the case of Buffy’s death (“Prophecy Girl” B1012).

[20] If some information provided by the Council is incomplete, it stands to reason that its assumptions concerning good and evil would be similarly lacking—such as a specific understanding of the effects of a soul and the innate differences between humans and vampires, which is the basis for the entire moral framework Buffy adopts from the Council’s teachings.

Buffy begins to amend the Council’s major assumptions after meeting Angel, a vampire with a soul. She maintains her belief in a hard line between human and nonhuman and that line’s correspondence with the division between good and evil. But instead of equating good with human, she begins to equate good with the possession of a soul, which itself represents humanity. Buffy applies this definition of good to friends and foes throughout most of the series,



from the introduction of Angel in the first season to her transition to “spitting out the fruit,” which begins in the fifth season. However, the presentation of the soul in the *Buffy*verse is inconsistent with Buffy’s interpretation of the soul as the feature that makes someone good, or human. The only consistent effect of the soul, in fact, is the ability to feel true remorse.

### What’s in a Soul?

[21] The simplest way to analyze the effects of a soul is to explore the changes in Spike and Angel’s characters after each was ensouled. Geller notes Spike’s “empathy, compassion, loyalty, and sense of duty” in “Fool for Love” (B5007), before he gains a soul (par. 26). These traits encapsulate Buffy’s understanding of the soul. If one considers humanity to be a separate entity from these traits, the soul once again plays little role, as observed in the Judge’s classification of Spike and Drusilla: “You two stink of humanity” (“Surprise” B2013). The final characteristic Buffy associates with the soul is the capacity for love. The necessity of possessing a soul in order to love is disproven multiple times—for example, by Spike’s love for Buffy and by Drusilla’s response to Buffy’s assertion, “You can’t love without a soul.”: “Oh, we can, you know. We can love quite well. If not wisely” (“Crush” B5014). Compared to the changes in Spike’s character once he is ensouled, the contrast between Angel and Angelus is stark and seems to suggest an inconsistency in the effects of souls. However, when the only effect of the possession of a soul is considered to be true remorse for one’s actions, the difference between Spike and Angel is revealed to be in the characters’ motivations. The massive difference between the personalities of Angel and Angelus suggests that Spike, both with and without a soul, possesses greater emotional capacity than Angel/Angelus and that Angel’s good actions are motivated wholly by remorse and the desire for redemption. If the single effect of ensoulment is the capacity for remorse, the stark difference between Angel and Angelus reveals remorse to be the major, if not the only, motivation behind Angel’s actions. By contrast, Spike is motivated by a range of emotions, such as those described by Geller. The difference between the two motivations is encapsulated in the two characters’ exchange in “Damage,” as they discuss their soulless selves:

SPIKE: I never did think that much about the nature of evil. No. Just threw myself in. Thought it was a party. I liked the rush. I liked the crunch. Never did look back at the victims.

ANGEL: I couldn't take my eyes off them. I was only in it for the evil. It was everything to me. It was art. The destruction of a human being. (A5011)

Because Angel is motivated by remorse, the lack of a soul strips him of his desire to do good and replaces it with a penchant for creating chaos and reveling in others’ misery, while Spike’s emotional complexity drives him to good actions—such as protecting Dawn’s secret in “Intervention” (B5018) and attempting to comfort Buffy in “Fool for Love” (B5007)—even when he cannot feel remorse for his bad ones.

[22] Apart from the human-nonhuman distinction, the soul is repeatedly emphasized as the only objective, distinguishing factor in the *Buffyverse*. If the possession of a soul does not indicate whether a character is good or evil, the viewer must assume that the *Buffyverse* does, indeed, adhere to a Sartrean philosophy, in which characters possess no intrinsic morality separate from their actions. This invalidates Buffy's entire moral framework. She cannot possibly possess the knowledge of good and evil, because a person's morality is constantly in flux in response to his or her actions and decisions. Buffy denies this throughout most of the series. If a person's morality (including that of vampires) is not fixed, then she must face the fact that those she has killed—even for good reason—were not necessarily evil, or at the very least, had the capacity to change for the better. And if she killed potentially good people and morality is not fixed, she must accept that her own "goodness" is not as complete as she would like to believe.

### **Spitting Out the Fruit**

[23] Buffy's process of change begins in the fifth season, with Buffy questioning her humanity. She asks the First Slayer in "Intervention" (B5018) whether being the Slayer means losing her humanity, to which the First Slayer responds, "You are full of love. You love with all of your soul. It's brighter than the fire . . . Blinding. That's why you pull away from it." Buffy continues to question her humanity throughout the rest of the series. The struggle between her Slayer identity and her "normal" identity manifests itself in questions regarding her humanity after being resurrected, doubt as to whether she could ever leave Sunnydale, and uncertainty as to whether she could ever be emotionally accessible enough to have a meaningful romantic relationship. These questions and the larger struggle between two seemingly irreconcilable aspects of her character lead to her ultimate transition: spitting out the fruit. The First Slayer's answer hints to the revelation Buffy must make in order to complete her transition. Buffy asks about her humanity, and the First Slayer answers about her capacity for love. Therefore, "humanity" in this sense does not necessarily mean human, since Angel, Spike, and Drusilla have all proven vampires to have the capacity for love.

[24] By using Bad Faith to free herself from the burden of defining her own morality through her actions, Buffy ultimately imprisons herself—and projects the same prison onto those around her. Just as she views herself as intrinsically good, she passes value judgments on others, defining their morality by what they are rather than what they do, using the standards determined by the Council, texts, and prevalent social assumptions instead of experiential knowledge. For example, she protects Spike from the Initiative because she sees him as the victim. But she does not admit that his good actions will eventually come to define him. She still views him as evil, without the capacity for moral growth. She says in "Crush" (B5017), "What, that chip in your head? That's not change. Tha-that's just ... holding you back. You're like a serial killer in prison!" Buffy's feelings for Spike and her relationship with him provide her strongest catalyst for personal change.

[25] In “Dead Things” (B6013) Buffy and Tara discuss Buffy’s relationship with Spike, a defining moment in Buffy’s process of abandoning Bad Faith. Upon hearing Buffy’s fears regarding Spike, Tara doesn’t rebuke her relationship simply because of Spike’s nature:

BUFFY: (whispers) Why can't I stop? Why do I keep letting him in?

TARA: (concerned) Do you love him? (Buffy just stares at her tearfully.)

TARA: I-It's okay if you do. He's done a lot of good, and, and he does love you. A-and Buffy, it's okay if you don't. You're going through a really hard time, and you're...

Tara’s response leads Buffy to admit that she is using Spike:

BUFFY: Please don't forgive me, please... (sobbing) Please don't... (She slides off the table onto the floor, kneeling, putting her head in Tara's lap. Tara looks uncertain, puts her hands comfortingly on Buffy's head.)

BUFFY: (sobbing, muffled) Please don't forgive me...

Buffy’s relationship with Spike is crucial to her eventual abandonment of Bad Faith and her decision to spit out the fruit. During the conversation, Buffy recognizes that her prejudice against Spike is derived from her awareness of others’ perceptions of her: “The way they would look at me . . .” Her concern is not that she thinks her feelings for Spike are wrong, but that others will think they are wrong, and will think less of her. Her fears and conflicts result from her appropriation of an outside sense of morality: “He’s everything that . . . I’m supposed to be against.” Buffy’s fear that her feelings for Spike undermine all of her moral assumptions is reinforced by Tara’s response: “I-it’s okay if you do. He’s done a lot of good, and, and he does love you.” Tara recognizes Spike’s capacity for love and his ability to define his own morality through his actions. She is not chained, as Buffy is, to the black-and-white interpretation of good and evil endorsed by the Council. As she works through her emotions, Buffy realizes her notions of Spike and of morality are changing. She says, “Using him? What’s okay about that?” She understands the immorality of injuring Spike—whether or not he possesses a soul.

[26] Buffy’s feelings for Spike cause her to question the definition of good and evil she has adopted from the Council and from other cultural assumptions. In questioning that definition, she is forced to question her decisions as Slayer, as well as her Bad Faith. If she has feelings for Spike, and those feelings are not wrong in the ethical sense because of what he is, then everything she has assumed about what constitutes right and wrong is false—good and evil are not tied to one’s nature, but to one’s decisions. And if that is true, Buffy must confront her own decisions and recognize that *she* is responsible for those choices; they were not forced on her. Buffy says, “Please don’t forgive me, please . . .” because she recognizes, against all she has

been told and believed, that Spike's vampire nature does not define him and that her hesitation in admitting her feelings for him is merely a result of her awareness of external perceptions of herself. She needs someone to defy the black-and-white division of good and evil, and she needs someone to tell her exactly what Tara does, that Spike can be good because his actions are good. She needs someone to *not* say, "It's all right that you hurt him because he's just a vampire." Tara's reinforcement of Buffy's ongoing revelation that people's actions are more important than their species is a pivotal step in the process of spitting out the fruit and taking control of and responsibility for her role and her decisions.

### **Rejecting Bad Faith: Step One**

[27] Not until the seventh season does Buffy recognize she has eaten the fruit (accepted the belief that she knows the difference between good and evil and taken it upon herself to decide who should live and who should die, as in Quinn's interpretation of the fall story). While Faith is typically the character who is reproached for being selfish, it is important to note that Buffy only changes her ideology when she learns of the demonic origins of her own power, while Faith changes of her own accord. Buffy's process of spitting out the fruit is in large part catalyzed by her consideration of her own humanity and morality in relation to that of her enemies. Throughout the series, parallels are drawn between Buffy and those she fights. Geller writes, "the Initiative is committed to a neo-Cartesian ideology that regards all demons as irrational beings without language and an interior life ('The I in Team' 4.13) and would dismiss as nonsense the understanding of demonic reality shared by Giles and the Scoobies" (par. 22). The Initiative is, in fact, an exaggerated version of the Scoobies, representing their own prejudices. Just as the Initiative would never accept a demon like Clem as harmless and potentially good, Buffy cannot believe vampires to be anything but unequivocally evil. Seeing the faults in the Initiative's perspective forces Buffy to confront her own assumptions and question the ideology she accepts as fact.

[28] Similarly, Buffy's god complex is represented in Caleb, who, as noted by Durand, "elevates himself to the level of deity, opining in 'Dirty Girls' (7.18) that, 'I work in mysterious ways'" (par. 6). The danger of Caleb and Buffy's god complexes is revealed by the line repeated throughout Season Seven: "From beneath you, it devours." The first permutation of the line is spoken to Spike in "Fool for Love" (B5007), first by Cecily (London, 1880) and then by Buffy. Two seasons later, in "Beneath You" (B7002), the line, "From beneath you, it devours," is spoken by a girl in Buffy's dream. Although the line literally references the Hellmouth, its metaphorical implication relates back to Spike; Buffy's god complex is dangerous. Setting herself above others only brings destruction, evidenced by her repeatedly injuring Spike because she feels herself to be superior to him. Buffy certainly has reason to distrust, or even hate, Spike—he injured her and attempted to rape her—but her animosity toward him and feelings of superiority are not in response to his actions, but to his very nature. However Spike behaves,

Buffy's reaction is always the same; in her eyes, no amount of good actions can ever counterbalance his vampire nature.

[29] Caleb possesses the same flaw as Buffy: the belief that he knows the difference between good and evil. However, like Faith's, Caleb's definition of morality does not align with that of the viewer. Caleb says in "Dirty Girls" (B7018), "There once was a woman, and she was foul, like all women, for Adam's rib was dirty—just like Adam himself—for what was he, but human." Caleb believes humans are intrinsically "dirty" and acts on that assumption, just as Buffy acts on the assumption that non-humans are evil. Buffy's connection to her enemies is further emphasized by the revelation that the source of her slayer power is demonic in nature ("Get It Done" B7015).

[30] Only when Buffy recognizes, through the revelation of the source of her power, that her assumptions regarding good and evil are insufficient, is she able to "spit out the fruit," recognize her lack of knowledge, relinquish the responsibility of acting upon that assumed knowledge, and accept the responsibility of determining her own identity. Durand notes, "Only by participating in a sharing of power that radically turns the hierarchical patriarchal power on its head, does Buffy, the Scoobies, and the newly minted Slayers thwart the First" (par. 27). When Buffy "spits out the fruit" and recognizes that she does not have the knowledge of good and evil, who should live and who should die, she is able to relinquish her responsibility as the sole decision-maker. This moment is necessary for her to participate in the sharing of power Durand describes and to bring balance into the world and into her own life. Fritts writes, "I believe [Buffy's] smile at the end of the series represents her achievement, not only of the ultimate boon, but of her own personal balance" (43). Such balance is only achieved by realizing she is not a god and has no *a priori* knowledge of who should live and who should die and that she has evil inside her, just as all creatures do. In this realization—in "spitting out the fruit"—she accepts that her identity is not inherent—it is not dependent on her status as human or slayer—and that she has the opportunity to determine her own identity: "I'm cookie dough. I'm not done baking. I'm not finished becoming whoever the hell it is I'm gonna turn out to be" ("Chosen" B7022). She has not entirely relinquished her Bad Faith; she still believes that she will eventually achieve some fixed identity. But she has accepted responsibility for choosing that identity and rejected the notion that her identity and morality have been chosen for her. She accepts responsibility for choosing her own identity through her actions, and should viewers continue with Buffy on her journey, they would likely see her progress toward entirely rejecting Bad Faith and accepting her "nothingness" to continue. By spitting out the fruit, Buffy rejects personal responsibility for judging others' morality, and by admitting that her own identity is not fully formed, she accepts responsibility for determining her own morality through her actions. Although she has not yet embraced Sartre's concept of "nothing" or the fluctuating morality displayed by characters in the *Buffyverse*, Buffy steps free of her self-imposed imprisonment by shifting her responsibilities from others to herself—continuing her life with the burden of determining whom she will become, but without the responsibility of judging others.

©Victoria Griffin, 2017.

Published Online in *Watcher Junior* 10.1 (Spring 2017).

ISSN: 1555-7863

<http://www.whedonstudies.tv/watcher-junior-the-undergraduate-journal-of-whedon-studies.html>

### Works Cited

- Ashworth, Peter. *Psychology and 'Human Nature.'* Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis Inc, 2000. Web. *Google Books*. 17 Apr. 2017.
- “Bad Girls.” By Douglas Petrie. Dir. Michael Lange. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Three. Episode 14. 1999. Netflix. Web. 23 Apr. 2016.
- “Becoming, Part Two.” By Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Two. Episode 22. 1998. YouTube. Web. 17 Apr. 2017.
- “Benediction.” By Tim Minear. Dir. Tim Minear. *Angel*. Season Three. Episode 21. 2002. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- “Blind Date.” By Jeannine Renshaw. Dir. Thomas J. Wright. *Angel*. Season One. Episode 21. 2000. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- “Chosen.” By Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Seven. Episode 22. 2003. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- “Consequences.” By Marti Noxon. Dir. Michael Gershman. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Three. Episode 15. 1999. Netflix. Web. 23 Apr. 2016.
- “Conviction.” By Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. *Angel*. Season Five. Episode 1. 2003. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- “Crush.” By David Fury. Dir. Daniel Attias. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Five. Episode 14. 2001. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- “Damage.” By Stephen S. DeKnight and Drew Goddard. Dir. Jefferson Kibbee. *Angel*. Season Five. Episode 11. 2004. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- “Dead Things.” By Steven S. DeKnight. Dir. James A. Contner. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Six. Episode 13. 2002. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- “Dirty Girls.” By Drew Goddard. Dir. Michael Gershman. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Seven. Episode 18. 2003. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- “Disharmony.” By David Fury. Dir. Fred Keller. *Angel*. Season Two. Episode 17. 2001. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- Durand, Kevin K. “‘Are You Ready to Finish This?’: The Battle Against the Patriarchal Forces of Darkness.” *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* 7.4 (2009): n. pag. Web. 5 March 2016.

- “Enemies.” By Douglas Petrie. Dir. David Grossman. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Three. Episode 17. 1999. Netflix. Web. 23 Apr. 2016.
- “Faith, Hope and Trick.” By David Greenwalt. Dir. James A. Contner. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Three. Episode 3. 1998. Netflix. Web. 23 Apr. 2016.
- “Fool for Love.” By Douglas Petrie. Dir. Nick Marck. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Five. Episode 7. 2000. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- Fritts, David. “Buffy’s Seven-Season Initiation.” *Buffy Meets the Academy: Essays on the Episodes and Scripts as Texts*. Ed. Kevin K. Durand. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009. 32-44. Print.
- Geller, Len. “‘Normal Again’ and ‘The Harvest’: The Subversion and Triumph of Realism in Buffy.” *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* 8.4 (2011): n. pag. Web. Slayage Online. 3 March 2016.
- “Get It Done.” By Douglas Petrie. Dir. Douglas Petrie. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Seven. Episode 15. 2003. Netflix. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.
- “Graduation Day, Part 2.” By Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Three. Episode 22. 1999. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- “Grave.” By David Fury. Dir. James A. Contner. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Six. Episode 22. 2002. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- Guffey, Ensley F. “‘We Just Declared War’: Buffy as General.” *Watcher Junior* 5.1: (2011): n. pag. Web. *The Whedon Studies Association*. 24 Apr. 2016.
- Herman, Caroline. “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Dichotomy of Self: A Study in the Shadow Selves of Buffy and Spike.” *Watcher Junior* 1.1: (2005): n. pag. Web. *The Whedon Studies Association*. 24 Apr. 2016.
- “Inside Out.” By Stephen S. DeKnight. Dir. Stephen S. DeKnight. *Angel*. Season Four. Episode 17. 2003. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- “Intervention.” By Jane Espenson. Dir. Michael Gershman. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Five. Episode 18. 2001. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.
- Jowett, Lorna. *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. Web. *Google Books*. 17 Apr. 2017.
- “Judgment.” By David Greenwalt. Dir. Michael Lange. *Angel*. Season Two. Episode 1. 2000. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.



“Just Rewards.” By David Fury and Ben Edlund. Dir. James A. Contner. *Angel*. Season Five. Episode 2. 2003. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

Lavery, David. *Joss Whedon, a Creative Portrait: From Buffy the Vampire Slayer to Marvel's The Avengers*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014. Web. EBSCOhost. 29 Apr. 2016.

“Lover’s Walk.” By Dan Vebber. Dir. David Semel. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Three. Episode 8. 1998. Netflix. Web. 29 Apr. 2016.

Parke, Faith. “I Hope Evil Takes MasterCard’: Faith the Vampire Slayer and the Image of the Bad Girl in Society.” *Watcher Junior* 5.1: (2011): n. pag. Web. *The Whedon Studies Association*. 24 Apr. 2016.

Pateman, Matthew. *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006. Web. *Google Books*. 24 Apr. 2016.

“Prophecy Girl.” By Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season One. Episode 12. 1997. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.

Quinn, Daniel. *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995. Print.

Richardson, J. Michael and J. Douglas Rabb. “Buffy, Faith and Bad Faith: Choosing to be the Chosen One.” *The Existential Joss Whedon: Evil and Human Freedom in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly and Serenity*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006. 26-47. Web. *Google Books*. 15 July. 2016.

Richardson, J. Michael and J. Douglas Rabb. “Slayer Authenticity: Constructing Reality Through Existential Choice.” *The Existential Joss Whedon: Evil and Human Freedom in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly, and Serenity*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers (2006): 48-62. Web. *Google Books*. 25 Apr. 2016.

“Selfless.” By Drew Goddard. Dir. David Solomon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Seven. Episode 5. 2002. YouTube. Web. 17 Apr. 2017.

“Slouching Toward Bethelhem.” By Jeffrey Bell. Dir. Skip Schoolnik. *Angel*. Season Four. Episode 4. 2002. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

“Surprise.” By Douglas Petrie. Dir. Michael Gershman. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Four. Episode 15. Year. 2000. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

“The Trial.” By Douglas Petrie and Tim Minear. Dir. Bruce Seth Green. *Angel*. Season Two. Episode 9. 2000. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

“This Year’s Girl.” By Marti Noxon. Dir. Michael Lange. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Four. Episode 15. Year. 1998. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.

“Villains.” By Marti Noxon. Dir. David Solomon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Six. Episode 20. 2002. Netflix. Web. 22 Apr. 2016.

“What’s My Line, Part Two.” By Marti Noxon. Dir. David Semel. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Two. Episode 10. 1997. YouTube. Web. 17 Apr. 2017.

“Who Are You?.” By Joss Whedon. Dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Season Four. Episode 16. 2000. Netflix. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

Williams, J. P. “Choosing Your Own Mother: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in *Buffy*.” *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (2002): 61-72. Print.