

## ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Dichotomy of Self: A Study in the Shadow Selves of Buffy and Spike***

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“Buffy, shame on you. Why does a man do what he mustn't? For her. To be hers. To be the kind of man who would nev - to be a kind of man. She shall look on him with forgiveness, and everybody will forgive and love. He will be loved. So everything's OK, right? Can - can we rest now? Buffy...can we rest?” (Petrie, "Beneath You")

[1] To attempt to describe the intricacies of the Buffyverse to the unconverted is as fruitless as attempting to recite poetry to your goldfish. It logically follows, then, that an attempt to relate to an outsider the philosophical complexities of Spike or the psychological implications of Buffy is utterly hopeless. At its core, *Buffy* is a study in the conundrum that is the human condition. It is creator Joss Whedon's fearless exploration into this dichotomy of self and his constant emphasis on the war between our good and evil impulses that lends the show its almost brutal poignancy. And it is the characters of Buffy and Spike that vacillate most often between this innate darkness and light. These two paradoxes, the Vampire Slayer and the Vampire with a Soul, dictate the show's overarching theme - the universe rests in a precarious balance between good and evil, and it is only our free will that determines that balance. It is in this duality that I will focus this essay - in the discrepancy between the soulless and the soulful, in the ambiguity of good and evil, and in the paradoxes of Buffy and Spike.

[2] This leads us, then, to first contemplate the concept of the Slayer. Buffy's struggle with her identity begins as a metaphor for the angst of teenage life, just as the vampires begin as metaphors for the trials adolescents encounter. Buffy's identity and power is rooted in the darkness which simultaneously attracts and repels her, as well as provides the source of her strength and will to fight. Though we've seen Buffy flirt with darkness in Season Three's *Bad Girls* (3014), it is not until Season Four's *Restless* (4022) that we encounter the possibility that Buffy knows very little of what it means to be the Slayer. We hear the prophetic dream-Tara (a wise and earthy character reminiscent of the mother-goddess Jungian manifestation of the Self) tell Buffy: “You think you know . . . what's to come . . . what you are. You haven't even begun.” (Whedon, "Restless") Then, in the beginning of Season Five, we see Dracula, a penetrating (clearly phallic) and aggressive representation of Buffy's animus, repeat this phrase while evoking the Slayer's darkness: “You think you know . . . what you are . . . what's to come. You haven't even begun. . . Find it. The darkness. Find your true nature.” (Noxon). It is exactly this - Buffy's elusive,

metaphysical “true nature” that is questioned in seasons five through seven. Season Five’s *Intervention* (5018) shows Buffy’s spiritual guide telling her that she is “. . . full of love. You love with all your soul. It's brighter than the fire, blinding. That's why you pull away from it. . . Love is pain and the slayer forges strength from pain. Love. Give. Forgive. Risk the pain. It is your nature. For it will bring you to your gift.” (Espenson, "Intervention"). As seen in *The Gift* (5022), Buffy sacrifices her life at the end of Season Five to close the portal and save Dawn. Seemingly resolved, Buffy’s identity was that of martyr and redeemer - undeniably good.

[3] Thus begins Season Six, perhaps the most powerful and disturbing philosophically of all the seasons. Buffy, resurrected by Willow and the Scoobies, was ripped out of heaven, a place which was, as James Lawler says in his essay “Between Heavens and Hells,” “. . . simply a direct experience of her true self, her essence, her soul, unencumbered by the complexities of physical existence in the middle world of our earth” (112). Buffy describes her current perception of earth in a resonating monologue which Spike silently witnesses: “Everything here is . . . hard, and bright, and violent. Everything I feel, everything I touch . . . this is Hell. Just getting through the next moment, and the one after that . . . knowing what I've lost . . .” (Espenson, "Afterlife"). Buffy now suffers an isolationist approach to life - a place where she believes she no longer belongs. It is no surprise that she first confides to Spike, who, dead himself, can empathize with her loneliness. Buffy actually admits to Spike in *Afterlife* (6003) that “I can be alone with you here.” This is an interesting commentary on Spike’s nature as intimately related to her own; he is part of her, a part she has fought, hated, ignored, and finally, accepted.

[4] Spike is drastically different from every other person connected with Buffy. He tells it like it is, regardless of what Buffy wants or needs. We see the beginning of this pattern most obviously in Season Five’s *Fool for Love* (5007). Spike strips away all pretenses and attacks Buffy’s greatest vulnerability - the fear and desires she voices to none but him:

“Every day you wake up, it's the same bloody question that haunts you: is today the day I die? Death is on your heels, baby, and sooner or later it's gonna catch you. And part of you wants it... not only to stop the fear and uncertainty, but because you're just a little bit in love with it. Death is your art. You make it with your hands, day after day. That final gasp. That look of peace. Part of you is desperate to know: What's it like? Where does it lead you? And now you see, that's the secret. Not the punch you didn't throw or the kicks you didn't land. Every Slayer . . . has a death wish. Even you.” (Petrie, "Fool for Love")

[5] From that moment, we understand that Spike knows Buffy’s depth, her darkness, in a way that Giles,

the Scoobies, even Angel never could. In that episode, strumming with sexual overtones, Spike blatantly tells both Buffy and the audience that he is simultaneously the shadow reflection of Buffy and the fulfillment of her darkest wishes both sexually and mortally: "Sooner or later, you're gonna want it. And the second- the second- that happens. . . You know I'll be there. I'll slip in... have myself a real good day." Spike immediately evolves into Buffy's other half, the part that understands, embraces, drives, and punishes her darkness - a function that transforms Spike into both Buffy's animus and her shadow. As Rhonda Wilcox says in her enlightened essay "'Every Night I Save You': Buffy, Spike, Sex, and Redemption": "[...] it seems hardly Spike-like at all. But using another emphasis in the definition of the animus, Spike (not William) as quintessential masculine seems quite appropriate. (Wilcox)

[6] And it is precisely this danger that first drew the naïve Buffy to Angel (a vampire too righteous to be Buffy's shadow). In later seasons, it is this same obsession with danger that drives Buffy to want Spike, sexually, psychologically. It is clear, as evidenced by Buffy's repeated visits to Spike after her resurrection, that she finds a unique solace in the vampire. Spike has never hidden what he is; his darkness is blatant and sexual. Perhaps this lack of pretense draws Buffy during a time when her friends are treating her with exaggerated gentleness and attempted normalcy. Buffy craves the candor of Spike; lost and brutally alone, Buffy chooses to give into the part of herself so long denied.

[7] It is hard to miss the metaphor behind Buffy-and Spike's sadomasochistic relationship, as it begins in the midst of a building falling to ruin. As Lawler continues, "Only her explosive sexual connection with Spike ignites the vital flow of physical energy that ultimately makes it possible for her to realize her duty, while temporarily pulling her away from it" (113). Buffy has never given into her darkness until now, and it liberates her only because she has the comfort of denial; in believing she came back wrong, she's able to think that this is not who she really is. Buffy releases her id, using Spike to feel, to access her inner shadow. Spike touches Buffy in ways she needs to be touched, in ways that feed her pain and isolate it for a time. As Spike says in an erotic scene entitled "Voyeur" in *Dead Things* (6013),

"You see . . . you try to be with them . . . but you always end up in the dark . . . with me. What would they think of you . . . if they found out . . . all the things you've done? If they knew . . . who you really were? [. . .] No . . . don't close your eyes. Look at them. That's not your world. You belong in the shadows . . . with me. Look at your friends . . . and tell me . . . you don't love getting away with this . . . right under their noses."  
(DeKnight)

[8] It is in this same episode, that we see Buffy both take out her hatred of herself on Spike and admit that she's using him. While beating Spike brutally, Buffy lashes him verbally: "I am not your girl! You

don't . . . have a soul! There is nothing good or clean in you. You are dead inside! You can't feel anything real! I could never . . . be your girl!" (DeKnight). Spike takes the beating, metaphorically becoming the half of Buffy that she has given into and loathes because of it. Buffy's words, however, are rather incongruous when we consider Spike's past actions.

[9] We know the 150-year old Spike to be a failed Victorian poet (called William the Bloody because of his "bloody awful poetry) (Petrie, "Fool For Love") turned punk vampire. However, for a mass-murdering demon, Spike is strangely humanlike even before he earns his soul, thus becoming a playground of moral uncertainty for Buffy - a trait which allows her to somewhat justify her relationship with him. Spike consistently exhibits an almost childlike tendency towards emotion. He truly loved Druscilla, and he, soulless, is able to not only fall in love with a human, but with the Slayer - the physical manifestation of all of his fears and desires. To Spike, Buffy represents death, sex, light, dark, redemption, purpose, choice, and beauty. It would be easy to believe Spike is more in love with the idea of who and what Buffy is, rather than with Buffy herself. It is much harder to believe that a vampire, almost as legendary as Angelus himself and equally as soulless, can actually love anything.

[10] But he does, becoming an anomaly among vampires. Some may say this is understandable when his chip is taken into account; Spike can't hurt humans, so he kills demons to sate his need for violence. So why does he protect Dawn? Why does he choose torture and near-death to conceal her identity as the key from Glory? Why does he weep bitterly at Buffy's death? Buffy is the fullest manifestation of everything that he never had as a human, never desired as a vampire. As Gregory J. Sakal, author of "No Big Win: Themes of Sacrifice, Salvation, and Redemption" states, "For Spike, Buffy has become a kind of Beatrice to his Dante - a feminine ideal to be worshipped but, of whose affections he is not completely worthy . . . it is this love that moves him along the path to redemption." (248). We've seen that redemption is possible, but brutal, in Angel, whose soul was forced on him. What then, do we make of Spike, who not only chooses to regain his soul, but undergoes trials and torment to earn it?

[11] This, of course, occurs at the end of the very dark Season Six, immediately after Spike tries to rape Buffy. With Buffy injured, he could have completed the act, but again, chose not to. It haunts him, and he leaves "so Buffy can get what she deserves." (Fury). So, then, are we to think that earning his soul is simply vengeance? A soulless demon, lacking free will, would never choose to regain his soul to win the woman he loves. Angelus certainly never would. What does that say about Spike, as a demon, as a vampire, as a man?

[12] We know that Angel moped for about a century before choosing to atone, to make amends. Season Seven's Spike exhibits a drastic departure from this. In one of the most powerful episodes of the series, *Beneath You* (7002), Buffy learns that Spike earned his soul. Spike has vacillated between sanity and madness throughout the episode, but in the haunting final scene, he strips away all pretenses, literally, as his torso is bare and covered with cuts. He refers to his soul as "the spark . . . the piece that fit." When Buffy realizes what he's saying, she begins to cry, and Spike responds, "It's what you wanted, right? (looking at the ceiling) It's what you wanted, right? And--and now everybody's in here, talking. Everything I did . . . everyone I-- and him . . . and it . . . the other, the thing beneath--beneath you. It's here too. Everybody. They all just tell me go . . . go . . . to hell." (Petrie, "Beneath You"). We first heard the phrase "You're beneath me" when William's love interest rejects him in *Fool for Love* (5007) and again at the end of the episode when Buffy repeats it to Spike. Season Seven continues the *Beneath You* theme in references to The First, to the Slugoff demon, and, of course, to Spike's inferiority to the women he loved. While William's life was a study in rejection, Spike's was a masculine overcompensation for the rejection he never quite escaped. He has done the ultimate to win Buffy's love; he has sacrificed life as a demon to become worthy for her, to seek redemption. Melissa M. Milavec and Sharon M. Kaye in their "Buffy in the Buff: A Slayer's Solution to Aristotle's Love Paradox", raise an interesting point about Spike's innate goodness: "Spike, motivated by his erotic love for Buffy, has cultivated a soul, suggesting a materialist rather than metaphysical conception of human ethics: his goodness is built, not given." (179). Beaten, insane, and vulnerable, Spike becomes childlike in his desire for forgiveness:

"Why does a man do what he mustn't? For her. To be hers. To be the kind of man who would nev-- (chokes up) to be a kind of man. (approaching the alter & a giant cross) She shall look on him with forgiveness, and everybody will forgive and love. He will be loved. So everything's OK, right? (rests on the cross, his flesh starts to smoke) Can--can we rest now? Buffy...can we rest?" (Petrie, "Beneath You")

If we return for a second to Season Five's *Intervention* (5018), we will remember that Buffy's spirit guide advised her to "Love. Give. Forgive. Risk the pain. It is your nature." (Espenson, "Intervention") Does this mean, then, that in forgiving Spike, Buffy has at last accessed and come to peace with her true nature? Spike, then, is the part of Buffy that she must forgive to become whole, to become the self-actualized being we see in *Chosen* (7022).

[13] So the question is, does Buffy ever love Spike? Can she, considering that Spike is the part of herself

she so long fought against and loathed? We learn in *Touched* (7020) that Spike has finally come to understand what it means to love Buffy. In his monologue to her, he says:

“Hey, look at me. I’m not asking you for anything. When I say I love you, it’s not because I want you, or because I can’t have you. It has nothing to do with me. I love what you are, what you do, how you try. I’ve seen your kindness and your strength. I’ve seen the best and the worst of you and I understand with perfect clarity exactly what you are. You are a hell of a woman. You’re the one, Buffy.” (Kirshner)

It is not until Spike chooses the ultimate redemption - in sacrificing his body and newly gained soul to save the world - that Buffy tells him she loves him. He responds “No, you don’t. But thanks for saying it.” (Whedon, "Chosen") Spike burns to death, rather ironically dying a vampiric death that nevertheless has religious overtones - fire, light that overcomes, consumes, and purges Spike (and thus Buffy) of his darkness.

[14] The deaths of Buffy and Spike provide the philosophical basis for the series; can darkness and light, evil and good, originate from the same source? Does not the one thrive on the existence of the other?

Gregory Sakal describes the basic problem of Buffy and Spike’s existence in the following:

“good and evil must be held in tension with one another. . .Without this struggle, there would be no choices to make, no exercise of free will, no path to redemption. . .what distinguishes humanity from many of the others creatures we meet in Buffy’s world is the ability to choose. . .Without the darkness, the light would go unrecognized. Without evil, there would be no struggle, no sacrifice, and hence no possibility of or need for redemption.” (251)

Buffy and Spike hold one another in tension for five seasons (2, then 4-7). Buffy allows herself to be seduced into Spike’s darkness, then draws him into her light. They are intimately related, obstinately apart, able to mutually understand the vast spectrum of pain that exclusively theirs. As Spike says in *The Gift* (5022), “I know you’ll never love me. I know that I’m a monster. But you treat me like a man.” (Whedon, "The Gift")

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