

“Jimmy Olsen jokes are pretty much gonna be lost on you”:

The Importance of Xander in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Xander: Excuse me: who, at the crucial moment, distracted the lead demon by allowing her to pummel him about the head? (*The Zeppo* B3013)

[1] Xander Harris is a simple human in a super-human world. The place he occupies in the Buffyverse, however, is vitally important. Viewers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are made to suspend disbelief as vampires and other demons run amok, only to be held in check by Buffy Summers. So separate from the audience’s reality, this sort of genre experience can get confusing, leaving an especially strong need to identify with someone. The viewer can cheer on Buffy as she dusts vampires, marvel as Willow’s magic becomes more and more powerful, and gawk at muscular chest revealed by the vampire Angel’s open shirt. All of these characters are distinctly unique but their superpowers prevent viewers from truly relating. But what about Xander? He acts as a guide of sorts, bringing the viewer through the events of a particular episode while maintaining the important connection to the audiences’ reality.

[2] One of the most important things that Xander brings to the experiences of watching *Buffy* is his distinct use of humor. From the very first time the audience sees him, Xander’s role is clear.

Xander: Willow! You’re so much the person I wanted to see.

Willow: Really?

Xander: Yeah. You know, I kind of had a problem with the math.

Willow: Which part?

Xander: The math. Can you help me tonight? Please? Be my study buddy?

Willow: Well, what's in it for me?

Xander: A shiny nickel... (*Welcome to the Hellmouth* B1001)

The relationship that we can expect to have with Xander is laid out the very first time he is on screen. Humor serves many important functions in the Buffyverse, from cutting tension to giving non-genre fans an access point into the series. The series needs humor and would be quite different without it. Steve Wilson¹ writes, “Without its jokes, jokes finessed just so, *Buffy* would be little more than your average teen melodrama action horror hybrid” (79). While Wilson’s phrasing is tongue-in-cheek, he’s right that without the humor—and the genuine emotion that it brings—*Buffy* could have been just another genre mashup. Various styles of comedy are usually embodied by a specific character. *Buffy* puns with the same acrobatic skill as her martial arts. Oz’s wit is dryer than a desert. Willow stammers, fumbles her words and is so adorable, the audience can’t help but laugh. Diametrically opposed to Willow’s humor is Anya’s. She is blunt with all of her opinions. (Being a centuries-old former vengeance demon does tend to warp one’s perspective on human interactions.) Anya gets away with saying things the audience would never dream of. They laugh at Anya for the same reasons they laugh at Michael Scott on *The Office*; plus her irrational fear of bunnies is funny precisely because it is irrational.

[3] But Xander’s humor stands out. He is the most consistently funny of the bunch. He takes the existence of vampires, the Gentlemen, the Bringers and Clem seriously, but distances himself from the creepy-crawlies with jokes and word play. It is also how he defines himself. Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto’s article, “Staking in Tongues : Speech Act as Weapon in *Buffy*”, defines Xander’s place in the Scooby Gang in this way: “The group is what it is all about for Xander; it is what he lives for. He lacks *Buffy*’s staking skills, and he is not as well versed in book learning as Willow and Giles, so he ‘participates’ in the group dynamic by making them laugh and relieving their psychic

burden” (77).

[4] During the third season, the gang finally gets a lead on something the Mayor needs that will help in his ascension. Wesley implores the group to listen to him by suggesting the Box of Gavrok will have mystical safeguards protecting it. He is ignored out of hand and each character responds in kind.

Buffy: Looks like a job for Wiccan Girl. What do you think, Wil? Big time danger.

Willow: Hey, I eat danger for breakfast.

Xander: But oddly enough, she panics in the face of breakfast foods. (*Choices* B3019)

Xander wasn't an important member of the exchange regarding the Box of Gavrok. In fact, earlier in the conversation he was marginalized as “ingredient-gettin' guy”, but humor is how Xander contributes. He turns outrageous situations, situations that no one in the audience would ever face, into relatable experiences.

[5] Even at pivotal life moments that everyone can relate to, Xander stays true to his character. He is about to lose his virginity to Faith, but still gives the audience a laugh.

Faith: Relax. And take off your pants.

Xander: Those two concepts are antithetical. (*The Zeppo*, B3013)

Xander here demonstrates his masterful grasp of the English language, even just to communicate his lack of mastery in other activities. He is quick with a phrase, reference or play on words. As Overbey and Preston-Matto point out, he usually says these things for the benefit of his audience (those in the conversation with him, not the television viewers).

[6] In the seventh season, when Buffy decides to take Caleb on at his base in the vineyard—a plan that most consider suicide—there is backlash. After a small aside where Xander has to talk Andrew down

from having a geek-tantrum over a reference to the *Godzilla* remake, Xander tries to defuse the situation further. One of the Potentials criticizes Buffy's plan.

Rona: Buffy, man. Taking us right into the bad-guy's lair.

Xander: Well, that's where, generally speaking, you find the bad-guy. And I don't think you came here to fight plaque. (*Dirty Girls* B7018)

The situation is tense, there is about to be a mutiny against Buffy, and she is not even there to defend herself, but Xander still twists the events to accommodate a play on words. Even into the Season Eight comic books,ⁱⁱ Xander's character is still identifiable to all the others. After Buffy and Angel have ascended to the higher plane called 'Twilight', Buffy makes a few jokes in an attempt to understand what just happened. Angel tries to explain where they are, but gets frustrated.

Angel: I know why you use the jokes, Buffy. It's the same reason Xander does.

Buffy: That's not true. Xander enjoys his jokes. (*Twilight, Part 4* #35)

This is where Overbey and Preston-Matto's definition of Xander becomes clear. Buffy recognizes how much Xander's jokes mean to him; they are how he defines himself. Xander's humor is such a big part of his personality that without it, he would not be the same Xander. If Buffy no longer puns, she is still the Slayer. If Willow never fumbles another word or stuttered, she would still be a Goddess. But if Xander did not provide the guffaws, he would have a very different relationship with the viewers.

[7] While humor is vital to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Xander brings much more to the viewers' experiences. Xander carries the important role of being the 'heart' of the Scoobies (*Primeval* B4021). He is the human connection, the reminder of what the Slayer is fighting for. His reactions under certain situations guide the viewers as much as his humor.

[8] Xander's actions in *The Body* (B5016) are his actions seemingly out of character, jarring, but doing

so turns the audience into more active viewers. His usual demeanor, his affability, his humor (to a degree), and his power are all stripped away. Xander punching through Willow's dorm room wall is shocking, even though it happens off screen, with only a bang:

Xander: Sorry. Sorry. Just some pent up...

Willow: Xander... Where'd your hand go?

Xander: As I was saying, some frustration, and now... I appear to be stuck.

Anya: Oh my god! Is your hand okay?

Xander: Pretty much. I'm really sorry.

Anya: What if you hit an electrical thing? You... are stupid!

Xander: And once again with the sorry.

Willow: Did it make you feel better?

Xander: For a second there. (*The Body*)

All the Scoobies deal with Joyce's death during this episode in their own way but the individual reactions are expected and characteristic. Xander, on the other hand, lashes out physically. This is unexpected from Xander, and forces the viewer to reexamine not only Xander's character, but their own relationship to him as well. Dealing with a crisis boils a person down to their barest essence. Xander lost the use of language in that moment and all he had left was physical expression of his emotion. This not only holds a mirror up to the audience and the ridiculous reactions that stress can bring forth, but also illustrates a side of Xander that is often overlooked.

[9] Despite his lack of athletic prowess, Xander is a fairly violent individual. While he is able to recognize the danger inherent in keeping Angelus around or notice that Amy is a witch, his solutions to those problems encourage violent. He often wants to point Buffy at something and let her loose. This complicates things with Angel because, while she is the only way to stop him and Xander knows it, the

pair's prior relationship devalues her power. She cannot rationalize it like Xander, making her lose perspective.

Xander: I'm perspective guy! Angel is a killer.

Buffy: It's not that simple. (*Becoming, Part 1* B2021)

In the past, at least for Buffy, it has been that simple. Spike was a killer and she tried to slay him several times. During those times, Xander was right behind her cheering her on. He finds comfort in her violence. *The Body* is one of the rare times we see Xander embody the violence, rather than just be a party to it.

[10] This simple act forces the audience to read Xander's character differently. What this accomplishes for the viewer is far more important than the actual highlighting of a minute part of an already three-dimensional character. Xander punching a wall accomplishes something very rare in television; it turns the viewer into an active viewer, giving meaning and purpose to what has come before. The best example of Xander's previous penchant for violence comes in *Becoming, Part 2* (B2022). Buffy has finally made up her mind and is en route to fight Angel (not to mention save the world). Xander runs after her, sent by the rest of the Scoobies to tell Buffy that Willow has discovered a way to restore his soul.

Xander: Willow... she said to tell you...

Buffy: Tell me what?

Xander: ...kick his ass.

Buffy: I'm gonna do a lot more than that.

Xander doesn't deliver the message in favor of disseminating more violence. Buffy's plan was risky from the start. Angelus was very powerful, but Xander decided that Angel's death was more important than Buffy's safety. How does this relate to Xander punching through a dorm room wall three years

later?

[11] With Xander's simple, physical act, the audience can reinterpret the narrative in light of this additional psychological complexity and gain a new perspective on the series. Many scholars tend to disregard Xander's penchant for violence and his power of perspective to reduce his character to a female counterpoint to Buffy's masculine character. For example, Marc Camron, in his article "The Importance of Being the Zeppo", shows how Xander is feminine even before the opening title sequence to *The Zeppo* (B3013) rolls. The audience sees "Xander as the weakling of the group; the first one out of the battle and the only one who needs help getting up at the end" (Camron para. 6). After the battle in that episode's teaser, Faith says to Xander: "Yeah, that was real manly, how you shrieked and all." Camron insists that,

Xander is immediately marginalized by his group, both physically – not appearing in the portion of the fight we, the audience, are privy to – and verbally – as Faith, one of the text's most powerful characters, categorizes him as less than a man.... He does not seem to comprehend why his confidantes, when faced with a life or death battle, will not rely on him. He is not lacking in bravery or willingness to place himself in harm's way, so why is he being pushed aside?

The simple fact is Xander is pretty useless in a fight, and one need only look at his slap battle with Harmony for proof of that (*The Initiative* B4007). The Scoobies are not entirely unjustified in keeping Xander out of the fray. What is Xander good for then? Xander compensates for his feminine qualities in *The Zeppo* by choosing the most obvious (and penis-like) of all metaphors, a car. This categorization is problematic for a number of reasons. Xander shows real strength and power by the end of the episode. While sexually, his gender role is reversed, this is the first time Xander has a major role in saving his friends.

[12] Lorna Jowett in the “Tough Guys” chapter of her book, *Sex and the Slayer*,ⁱⁱⁱ makes a similar argument to Camron, but more specifically that Xander is less of a man than the zombies he faces in *The Zeppo*. Jowett observes, “The second scene with Jack plays on similar elements: Xander runs into the back of a car Jack is sitting in outside The Bronze. While Xander is keen to ‘work this out’, Jack pulls out a large Bowie knife and Xander’s reference to ‘frontiersmen’ brings another connotation of rugged masculinity into play” (101). Despite his car and a girl on his arm (who is only there for the car anyway), Xander still fails to be dominant in masculine relationships. Jowett continues, “Jack’s threats are here loaded with a sexual subtext (‘Where do you want it?’ and ‘I’m fairly certain I don’t want it at all’), played into with the subsequent ‘rasslin’, but not in a gay way’ comment from Xander” (101). The “rasslin” comment comes when Xander covers for Jack with a police officer, which causes Jack to admire Xander enough to eventually make him a member of the gang. This act, as Jowett explains, is another example of Xander being complicit towards violence. He doesn’t turn in the aggressor of the fight, he simply explains it away as masculine horseplay. “Thus although Xander is positively contrasted with Jack, he is still complicit in preserving both tough-guy masculinity and its structures of domination through violence” (Jowett 101).

[13] So is it possible for Xander to propagate a tough-guy masculine structure and still not be coded as male in the series? Examining Xander’s sexual encounter with Faith is vital to understand where much of the female coding comes from. It is Faith who initiates the contact; she is ready to “pop” after a fight that didn’t end in a kill. Faith takes both Xander’s and her own shirt off, pushes Xander onto the bed, and climbs on top of him. This position pretty clearly demonstrates who is in control in the situation. After the event, the two are shown on relatively equal footing: on their backs, with Xander lightly touching her arm. Faith quickly takes control back, however, after a jump cut to her closing the door on

Xander holding his clothes in his arms. Faith is one of the stronger characters in the series and this encounter only magnifies this fact. But the moment isn't lost on Xander. To Faith, he is just a one-time conquest in this situation, but how Xander is changed by the event is significant.

[14] It is only after Xander has sex that he is able to realize what Jack and his buddies are planning (to make a bomb). He is no longer hindered by the very male hang-up of never having had sex. In his final confrontation with Jack, Xander reverses the power dynamic from the scene Jowett described. In the basement of the school, with a bomb about to go off, Xander 'out-mans' Jack, using one of his earlier statements of masculinity against him. Jowett breaks down the power dynamic between Jack and Xander (read: who is more masculine) with something Jack says: "Who has more fear?" In the basement, Xander gets Jack to defuse the bomb by insisting that he has less fear of dying than Jack (even though Jack is already dead). The definition of masculinity does change, but suddenly, Xander embodies what he lacked earlier.

[15] What does this mean for the audience? Even only halfway through the third season, the viewer has to reexamine Xander. It is a confidence the viewer had never seen before that allowed Xander to escape the school basement. It is a side that quickly disappears in the next episode. When talking to Willow about her college future, he says, "M.I.T., Barnard, some German Polytechnical Institute whose name I can't pronounce... Is anyone else intimidated? Because I'm just expecting paper-thin slips with the words "no way" written on them in crayon" (*Bad Girls* B3014). Seeing Xander act this way so shortly after seeing him 'without fear' further iterates what a complicated character he is for the audience. Xander is a situational character and his reactions are very often defined by the situation he finds himself in. In *The Body*, he is quiet, angry, punchy Xander; in *Becoming, Part I*, he is violence-encouraging Xander; and in *The Zeppo*, he is simultaneously both scared Xander and a Xander without

fear. In any given episode, the viewer can find some truth to how Xander acts when put under stress, he might even offer a wishful thinking of sorts (who wouldn't love to come out on top in a "who has more fear" situation?). Xander is that human element that carries the viewer along for the ride.

[16] Humor and a love affair with violence isn't all Xander brings to the Scoobies and the viewers, however. Many times, his thoughts can be quite pointed and direct. In the early seasons, his comments about Angelus (and Angel, as he rarely acknowledges there is a difference) are particularly harsh, especially considering he voices his opinion directly to Buffy, whose own opinions are colored by personal feelings. Xander voices the unpopular view that, as a vampire, soul or not, Angel is dangerous and should be dealt with accordingly. In *Becoming, Part I*, Xander states his position more clearly than he has before:

Xander: HI! For those of you who have just tuned in, everyone here is a crazy person.

This spell might restore Angel's humanity? Well, here's an interesting angle: Who cares?

Buffy: I care.

Xander: Is that right?

Giles: Xander, let's not lose perspective here --

Xander: I'm perspective guy! Angel is a killer.

He twists language, prefacing his comment with something a television host would say, but he is still deadly serious. It is clearly the unpopular opinion in the group, especially with Buffy (and those viewers invested in her romance with Angel):

Buffy: It's not that simple.

Xander: What, come back home, all is forgiven? I can't believe you people!

Cordelia: Xander has a point --

Xander: You know just once I wish you would support me and I realize right now that you were and I'm embarrassed so I'm gonna get back to the point which is that Angel needs to die.

Xander, for whom the group is everything, immediately goes on the defensive after voicing the unpopular opinion, simply assuming Cordelia will fall in with Giles and the others. After another short comedic break, Xander says as pointedly as ever, "Angel needs to die."

[17] In the first excerpt, Xander's point is that Angel is a killer, something everyone can agree with, and is basically a fact. What Xander really means by "Angel is a killer" is that "Angel needs to die". His truth usually can be summed up by a quick statement of fact, but this time, the facts can not be disputed; however, the recourse those actions present are in debate. What Xander is forced to do is lose all the double-speak, all the quipping, all the word play, and expose his position with a forthright attitude and in plain language. This can alienate him from the rest of the group, but eventually Buffy comes around to his line of thinking.

[18] The problem for Xander is that he isn't credited for acknowledging the grave threat Angelus poses. Buffy remains indignant and only comes to the conclusion that Angel must die when she is ready to admit it, not taking Xander's words into consideration. His willingness to put his position on the line and state it plainly makes Xander the voice of reason or even the conscience of the Scoobies.

[19] Xander is by no means infallible or possessing a higher moral compass than anyone else in Sunnydale though. In *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered* (B2016), Xander demonstrates moral ambiguity. After being dumped by Cordelia on Valentine's Day to seemingly the entire school's amusement, Xander reaches his limit, unable to be passive any longer. He confronts Amy moments

after witnessing Amy use ‘mojo’ on a teacher to get out of a homework assignment:

Xander: Blackmail is such an ugly word.

Amy: I didn’t say blackmail.

Xander: Yeah, well I’m about to blackmail you so I thought I’d bring it up.

This is a side of Xander the viewer and the other Scoobies haven’t seen before. And while he brings up his desire in typical Xander fashion (humor and doublespeak), his true intentions are indeed sinister.

Amy: What do you want?

Xander: What do I want? I want a little respect around here. I want – for once – to come out ahead. I want the hellmouth working for me. You and me, Amy... We’re gonna cast a little spell.

The whole impetus for this transformation of Xander is Cordelia. For the first time in his life, Xander got attention from a female (not Willow) and now that the attention has gone away, he doesn’t know how to handle it. He is surrounded by demons and magic and finally wants to be more than a bystander. His duality in this episode iterates a very important part of his character. While Xander was never the pinnacle of good, he held a simple philosophy, basically that monsters equal bad and slayer equals good. For the first time, the viewer is shown a Xander that could exist in a slightly altered ‘verse. Xander isn’t perfect, but neither are any of the viewers witnessing his exploits.

[20] One of the most important similarities between Xander and the audience is his, and their, relationship with the media. Xander’s humor (and other reactions) are observational and situational, but he also makes copious pop culture references in his everyday speaking. After Buffy loses her power in *Helpless* (B3012), the Scoobies go into research mode to try and figure out why this is happening.

Willow assumes a curse, but Xander has a different theory.

Xander: Maybe we’re on the wrong track with the spells, curses and whammies. Maybe

what we should be looking for is something like slayer kryptonite.

Oz: Faulty metaphor. Kryptonite kills.

Xander: You're assuming I meant green kryptonite. I was referring, of course, to red kryptonite which drains Superman of his powers.

Oz: Wrong, gold kryptonite's the power-sucker. Red kryptonite's the one that mutates Superman into weird –

Xander and Oz go back and forth about the different power properties of an imaginary rock that only exists in comic books. But for the purposes of the conversation, kryptonite is very real and very important. It is the importance placed on kryptonite in the context of Buffy's powerlessness that makes this reference exemplary for the audience. Debates about what kind of demon Giles turned into in *A New Man* (B4012) can be more real and important to a fan of *Buffy* than the current state of the financial markets or the political climate. The point is media has a way of overtaking everyday aspects of a person's life and can cloud priorities. So what purpose does it serve for the audience to make Xander a "fanboy"? Xander is actually set up to demonstrate the moderation model. He can have the kryptonite conversation with Oz, but it doesn't consume his life.

[21] This fact is made crystal clear when the Trio are introduced^{iv}. Andrew, Warren and Jonathan form a loose coalition of evil and try to bring down Buffy in the sixth season. Their weakness is their media addiction. They hatch schemes that would make a James Bond villain scratch his head. Their goal (other than to bring down the Slayer) is to demonstrate their superior knowledge of plots of movies, television and comic books and to use that knowledge to gain power. The Trio's biggest downfall is what they perceive as their strength. They know exactly what happens in every James Bond movie, from *Dr. No* to *Die Another Day*, but they don't understand what they mean. At the end of the sixth season, Andrew and Jonathan are on the run after Willow killed Warren^v. Andrew is obviously terrified

but can only express himself with pop culture references.

Andrew: Then what? You think your Li'l Witch buddy's gonna stop with us? You saw her! She's a truck driving Magic Mamma. We've got maybe seconds before Darth Rosenberg grinds everybody into Jawa-burgers, and not one of you bunch has the midiclorians to stop her.

Xander: You've never had any tiny bit of sex, have you? (*Two To Go* B6021)

That's three fast and furious *Star Wars* references in a single sentence. All of it makes perfect sense to Andrew (and Xander too), but it is totally inappropriate based on the circumstances. It is important to note that it is Xander who rebuffs Andrew after the panic induced geek-out. The "annoying virgin", as Anya calls Andrew, can only express his emotions based on something he has seen or heard before. All of his originality has been lost due to his media addiction. Xander on the other hand, strikes the balance.

[22] Kryptonite was funny in context, if not wholly appropriate (much like the midiclorians remark), but the difference comes from when Xander said it and how frequently he references pop culture. Xander was still in high school at the time of the inappropriate Superman reference, a time for males that is nothing but inappropriate. Andrew, on the other hand, would nearly be graduating college (had he been in school), a time when everyone is supposed to grow up. It would also seem that while all Andrew thinks about is pop culture, Xander uses it as a comic diversion to often point out the ridiculousness of situations. Andrew's use shows a lack of understanding of the true meaning of a piece of media. Xander understands that kryptonite is a perfectly acceptable reference due to the fact that kryptonite is a metaphor for weakness, something Buffy is experiencing in spades. Andrew's use of midiclorians doesn't make sense. He doesn't mean it as a metaphor for bravery or courage, he says the word and literally means the 'organism that gives a Jedi his power'. This isn't always a bad thing, as

David Kociemba^{vi} points out, “One is, of course, free not to participate in the double codes of foreshadowing and subtext. Commercially successful television is always multi-layered and accommodates those who do not wish to be challenged by their media.” But what Xander shows is that one can enjoy the silliness of Superman but understand the subtext, a lesson the viewer must learn in order to avoid true media addiction and dependence on *Buffy*.

[23] Andrew takes his love affair with media one step further than just referencing pop culture in everyday conversation. In the seventh season, when Sunnydale is literally falling down around them, Andrew takes out his video camera and begins filming Buffy and the Potentials’ life as a television show/documentary which he dubs “Buffy, A Slayer of the Vampyres” (*Storyteller* B7016). Andrew refers to the “gentle viewers” and introduces the ‘characters’ (often adding his own editorial spin). This is a wholly unnecessary exercise, since the actual viewing audience is familiar with everyone Andrew introduces (he even points out that Xander is the ‘heart’ of the group), but this is a way for Andrew to feel detached from the events as they unfold. Even when he is tricked into thinking he is facing his death at Buffy’s hand, he personifies himself as a film hero:

Andrew: How... how much blood are you gonna...?

Buffy: I don’t know. Maybe not enough to kill you.

Andrew: I could cleanse myself with a small amount of my own blood. A man who buys back his own bruised soul with the blood of his heart--

Buffy: Stop that! Stop telling stories! Life is not a story! ... You’re not a tragic hero!

Andrew has to contextualize events in a manner that is easily identifiable to him. Xander, most often in the early seasons, would use humor and pop culture to break the tension or point out the outrageous aspects of certain situations. Andrew, on the other hand, uses humor and pop culture to recognize his place in things; Andrew is an observer, a viewer. Andrew doesn’t take an active role in situations; he

doesn't want to, he would rather sit back and watch, and have an account that he could go back and watch in reruns. Xander, however, cracks his jokes as a form of contribution, so his friends know he is there and eager to help.

[24] Andrew is clearly addicted to media and the constructs of storytelling. He even manages to rope in Xander as a participant in the video, until the topic gets real for Xander; then he quickly drops the pretense of being interviewed for a reality show and has an honest conversation. Xander sits down for the interview; he is even excited for it, as he loves his media too. But Andrew can't separate a storyline from personal problems.

Andrew: This is Xander and Anya interview number one for "Buffy: A Slayer of the Vampyres."

Anya: That's what you're calling it?

Andrew: Either that or "Buffy: The Slayer Who Knew No Fear."

Xander: I like that one.

Andrew: Thank you, Xander. That's sweet of you. I understand that exactly one year ago today you left Anya at the altar. Any comment on that?

Xander: Whoa. What the hell?

Andrew considers this documentary a way to escape (or at least distance himself from) the events that affect everyone's real lives and Xander was willing to go along with it. The media lover in him sees the value in doing something like this, even preserving the Slayer's struggle for posterity's sake. But Xander is also quick to realize when certain things are more important and need to be dealt with seriously.

[25] Andrew stares down death. Death is serious. Death is coming in the form of Buffy, someone who

he admires for her ability to protect, but he can't snap out of his reliance on media long enough to recognize the real danger. He views his death as a tragic sacrifice for the greater good. He doesn't fight for his life like anyone else in his situation would. He resigns himself to that fate because that is the fate of the burdened tragic hero. Xander doesn't face death during the interview with Andrew, but he separates what is actually important. Even though Xander left Anya at the altar a year ago (*Hell's Bells* B6016), it is still an important issue in their relationship. They haven't had a frank discussion about it since they came back together as friends. Xander puts aside the silly interview and for the remainder of the episode, he and Anya have a serious interaction and resolve the relationship once and for all. When contrasted to Andrew, the balance Xander strikes between taking things seriously and relishing in media is highlighted in an admirable way.

[26] Xander Harris is one of the most important characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. He guides the viewer through the experience of watching the series while offering all-important humor, a moral guide during immoral situations and a model for enjoying and understanding media while avoiding reliance on it. His fascination with violence accentuates his innate masculine qualities, even though he is often coded by scholars as distinctly feminine. The physically and mystically powerless Xander is the most relatable character of the series for precisely the reason that he is the most human.

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- i Consult "Laugh, Spawn of Hell, Laugh" for much more on comedy in the Buffyverse.
 - ii Whether the comic books should be considered cannon is still up for academic debate. Until it is decided, because it is subtitled "Season Eight" and Joss Whedon serves as writer and Executive Producer as he did for the series, issues of the comics should be treated like episodes that aired on television.
 - iii Consult *Sex and the Slayer* for more on gender relations in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
 - iv The Trio, a group of males who refused to grow up, were the villains of season six when life, or at least Buffy's life, was the big bad.
 - v Warren killed Tara and sent Willow down a dark path of black magic and revenge.
 - vi Consult David Kociemba's article "“Over-identify much?": Passion, 'Passion,' and the Author-Audience Feedback Loop in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" for more on the audience's relationship with the series.