

## Slaying Stereotypes or Stuck in Stasis? A Study of Heteronormativity and Gender Performativity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins

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[1] Within both popular culture and academic spheres, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) has been lauded as a zealously feminist program. Joss Whedon, its creator, has stated that the premise of *Buffy* was rooted in feminist ideas, as the overall premise was to switch up the typical horror movie clichés. Instead of making this character one of the girls who wanders into a dark place and gets killed—often after having sex—the plan with *Buffy*, especially the main character herself, Buffy Summers, was to “see a scene where a ditzy blonde walks into a dark alley, a monster attacks her, and she kicks its ass” (Gross).

[2] There are many characters in this show that fit a feminist classification, including the Chosen One herself, Buffy. Although her characterization is not without its shortcomings, she presents, for the time period, a step in the right direction regarding female representation in popular culture. She exhibits a variety of characteristics that make her a strong and compelling, as well as a complex, figure, representing the ambiguous binaries of “masculine/feminine... active/passive, strong/weak. . . power/powerlessness” mentioned in Lorna Jowett’s *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan* (12). As is established from the pilot episode “Welcome to the Hellmouth” (1.1) on, Buffy represents a rich, at times seemingly contradictory, mix of elements; for instance, she has heightened fighting abilities, she is an archetypal “girly girl” who patrols Sunnydale for “vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness” in a halter top, and she is always keen to explore the dating scene as a young adult. Buffy presents the balance of a “strong female character,” what I would argue is more aptly named a “well-written female character,” or, as Heather M. Porter avers, a “complete female character,” one that is “just as fleshed out as any male character with a name, backstory, significant speaking role, skills and traits, agency, flaws, and emotional resonance” (McDougall; Porter 26).<sup>1</sup>

[3] However, Joss Whedon’s gender interrogative program somewhat falls flat when the focus is taken off the main character. When one more closely examines some of the other, less prominent, characters one begins to notice regressive characteristics that detract from otherwise potentially progressive traits. The Buffy motif—with the sense of balanced characteristics that are not predicated merely upon “manly” heroism in a female body or “girly” obsessions with men but a blending of both—does not extend to characters like the former vengeance demon Anya Jenkins. Within this character more conventional ideologies take over, and Anya’s identity is, primarily, shaped by her dependency on others in her life, especially multiple male and male-coded characters: an occurrence that echoes tenets of patriarchy. While she may have a fresh outlook on female sexuality, one that is presented through her blunt and unabashed desire for sex

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this is not an absolute definition. Like many other elements of this paper, there is no single definition that fits the term of a “strong” or “complete female character” (McDougall; Porter 24-25).

and the vocalization of those desires, she appears to value her relationships with men more than other elements of her life.

[4] Although *Buff*y is a television series that is meant to promise a more progressive framework in its character representations, those depictions sometimes fall into more traditional, old-fashioned gender roles. Anya, for example, is literally and figuratively old-fashioned: she is hundreds of years old, and she adheres to a traditional, sometimes even retrograde, representation of femininity. The latter is especially apparent in her associations with various male partners, including her former-lover-turned-troll Olaf and her almost-husband Xander. I will also discuss D'Hoffryn's involvement in her life, as he—the Lord of Arashmaharr and the “master” of vengeance demons—plays a crucial role in shaping who Anya becomes. While *Buff*y Summers may present a progressive step in female portrayal, offering a characterization that slays stereotypes on multiple levels, Anya's less dynamic characterization seems stuck in stasis in comparison, taking a regressive turn toward more conventional mores and attuning less fully to contemporary feminist ideologies.

### **Feminism and *Buff*y the Vampire Slayer**

[5] Before I discuss more elements of Anya's problematic characterization, I will delineate some of the terms I will use later in this essay: feminism, heteronormativity, and gender performance/performativity. Each of these concepts relates to Anya in one way or another, and there is significant interplay among them. Two of these terms, feminism and heteronormativity, are oftentimes difficult to define, and so I will examine a few different scholars' takes on these ideas in an attempt to clarify how I will address these concepts.

[6] Scholars who try to define feminism often struggle with doing so, as there is no single meaning for the word. As Jessica Noelle Gibson-James posits in *The Aud One Out in the Final Battle: An Anya-Centered Feminist Analysis of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, “Part of the challenge facing feminist critics trying to claim *Buff*y as a feminist text is that there is no widespread agreement about what feminism is or what it should be” (Gibson-James 4). Because activists cannot reach a consensus about an overall meaning of the term, feminism is a confusing and sometimes problematic idea, but the form of feminist criticism that I will primarily use attunes to third-wave ideologies. The third wave of feminism focuses on intersectionality, such as a “feminine-feminist identity” (Gibson-James 7). To simplify, females should be allowed to have both a feminine or “girly” disposition while exhibiting agency over their own lives, meaning that they should be able to choose between traditional representations of gender as well as more contemporary ones. Moreover, third wave feminism “rejects grand narratives,” focusing more on the individual and the complexities contained therein (Snyder 176). When discussing the notions of choice and agency, it is important for scholars to focus on individuals rather than generalizing “grand narratives” for everyone, thereby painting everyone as the same. As such, there is no outstanding, monolithic meaning for feminism, but, essentially, it is about equality among the sexes (Dastagir). As bell hooks explains in *Feminism Is For Everybody*, feminism is “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (viii). Regarding popular culture like *Buff*y, feminist analysis can be accomplished by evaluating characters through both

qualitative and quantitative means,<sup>2</sup> considering how the female characters measure up to the males in a patriarchal society: one that values the latter sex over the former. Like many other women in media, Anya suffers from patriarchy's dominance in her life, including through an adherence to heteronormativity in her various romantic, as well as platonic and employment-based, entanglements.

[7] In one way, analyzing the heteronormative motifs found within a program's environment can help reveal the motivations and inclinations of female characters and whether or not they fit into contemporary feminist standards. According to Chrys Ingraham, heteronormativity is the "view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements" (204). Similarly, Michael Warner posits that heteronormativity repeatedly goes unnoticed because the idea is taken for granted and is deemed "normal" the same way that "white" is continually considered the central and most powerful—yet invisible—race in Western society (3). By questioning these "normed" ideologies, gender studies scholars unsettle the status quo, refusing to define the world in inaccurate, gendered polarities and thus defining the world and people in it through a rather dichotomous lens (Jowett 12). Some of the questions that often help evaluate societal norms in pop culture include: How much choice and control does a female have over her own life? Is her narrative primarily about pursuing a man? How does the pursuit of romantic entanglement help or hinder character development? Commonly in pop culture narratives, especially those in the superhero genre/form, creators often relegate female characters to peripheral roles, such as "love interest[s], sidekick[s], [and] damsel[s] to be rescued" (Ginn 4). In these narratives, female characters are ultimately present to support males, and feminist cultural studies is devoted to analyzing this lack of equality in such representations and steadily, through varying means, achieving equality onscreen and off.

[8] Along with an examination of issues in regard to heteronormativity, gender performativity is an equally important part of analyzing Anya's characterization because she is often seen performing in ways similar to those around her, whether through fashion, hair styles, or other behaviors. As mentioned in Judith Butler's 1990 text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, gender performance relates to the acts—the "doing"—of gender, whereas gender performativity refers to a series of acts being produced (Butler 25). Gender is not tangible; rather, it is a "process by which patterns of language and action come to repeat themselves" (Fraker). I will use a simple, real-world example to explain. As a human female, I am *always* performing gender, whether intentional or not. The way that I dress may reflect a feminine disposition. For instance, I can wear a pink shirt, something dubbed as "girly" due to contemporary societal influence; this is a common example, as, from childhood, girls and boys are socially conditioned to dress and act differently, an idea that reflects another problematic binary of blue/pink for male/female. However, gender is *performative* because of that social conditioning. The repeated usage of such ideologies as this create "real" conventions, ones to which our society adheres (Felluga). By believing that pink is "girly," I am partaking in gender performativity in today's society.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most common being the Bechdel-Wallace test. Others include the "Sexy Lamp," "Mako Mori," and "Crystal Gem" critiques, among others.

[9] Gender performance and performativity are intimately meshed together because while one physically acts in a manner related to one's gender, that act itself is involved in a variegated tapestry of personal traits reflecting myriad sources: family, school, self-exploration, etc. The more we attune to what is "socially acceptable" or "normal," the more performative our genders are, as these repeated actions form conventions. This idea arises when discussing the hegemonic—or dominant—ideas of heteronormativity and patriarchy, especially when demarcating issues in pop culture. If relationships with male characters are repeatedly the main source for character development in a female character, then female viewers may begin to believe that that is the only way to develop as a social being, thus partaking in performativity and perpetuating controversial conventions.<sup>3</sup>

### A "Feminist Model of Positive Female Sexuality"

[10] When Anya first appears in the show, she is a less prominent character—in fact, it is not until season five that she even appears in the title sequence—but she does represent an unorthodox and rather innovative exemplification of female sexuality. As Tamy Burnett explains, Anya offers a "feminist model of positive female sexuality," emphasizing recognition of sex-positive feminism in a female character (119). By this, I mean that Anya is overtly verbal and explicit in voicing her sexual and romantic desires, and she acts on them, indicating a sense of active rather than passive characterization. In fact, one of the most apt scenes for conveying this idea arises in "The Harsh Light of Day" (4.3), when Anya wishes to "get over" Xander Harris, and she can only come up with one way of doing so: partaking in sexual intercourse with him.

ANYA, STANDING COMPLETELY NAKED IN XANDER'S ROOM: At which point the matter is brought to a conclusion with both parties satisfied and able to move on with their separate lives and interests. To sum up, I think it's a workable plan.

XANDER: So, the crux of this plan is...

ANYA: Sexual intercourse. I've said it like a dozen times.

XANDER: Uh-huh. Just working through a little hysterical deafness here.

ANYA: It's the secret to getting you out of my mind. Putting you behind me. Behind me, figuratively. I'm thinking face-to-face for the event itself.

XANDER: Ah, right. But see, we hardly know each other. I mean, I like you. More than other ex-demons. And you have a certain...directness that I admire...

ANYA: I amuse you. I can tell. Sometimes you laugh.

XANDER: I do. I show my teeth and make repeated "ha" noises. But sexual inter- what you're talking about, well—and I am actually turning into a woman as I say this—but it's about expressing something, and accepting consequences.

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<sup>3</sup> This is also why evaluating pop culture is so important. By observing and understanding the undergirding messages of something that is seemingly meant as "pure entertainment," we can better understand the politics governing our culture (Zeisler 7).

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ANYA: I like you. You're funny and you're nicely shaped. And frankly, it's ludicrous to have these interlocking bodies and not interlock. (00:18:19–00:19:31)

This exchange gives us insight into multiple aspects of Anya's blunt honesty relative to female desire and sexuality, and for pop culture characters this overt display is generally not the norm. Usually, it is the man who asserts dominance, unnerving the woman with a "certain directness," as Xander relays about Anya above. In fact, for Xander such candor throws him off-kilter, especially in the previous scene when he turns around and sees that Anya's dress has fallen to the floor, revealing her naked body (00:15:35–40).<sup>4</sup> His sexually charged reaction is reflected through visual rhetoric via his crushing the juice box in his hand, causing it to squirt, correlating with his sexual arousal at the sight of her (Burnett 135). Anya is frank in her description, clearly having thought out her desire to have sex with Xander. Moreover, she is not afraid to actually voice those desires aloud. She claims to have said the words "sexual intercourse" a dozen times, whereas Xander cannot even bring himself to complete the phrase once; she has thought through how she wants the event to take place, as in "face-to-face for the event itself," and, as Xander vacillates, uncertain of how to proceed, she insists that their "interlocking bodies" should, indeed, "interlock."

[11] Anya's overt and assertive sexuality contrasts significantly with other female characters in the show, including the titular character. Buffy, according to Tamy Burnett, "is one of the most traditional when it comes to the rhetorical constructions of her sexuality" (121). She "displays a reluctance to talk about her sexual desire or choices" (121). In the episode "Surprise" (2.13), when the Slayer is about to lose her virginity to the vampire Angel, Buffy does not explicitly claim that they should have sex, as Anya does above. Instead, when Angel grows anxious at how far they have progressed physically and expresses a concern about moving any further, Buffy replies with, "Don't. Just kiss me" (00:42:50–57). This is very different from Anya's expression of desire. Instead of saying exactly what she wants in graphic detail, Buffy suggests, through a more passive manner, that Angel should proceed. In doing so, she is giving Angel permission to continue, but in a less assertive manner of deferring to another's power, unlike Anya with Xander. Buffy's answer also suggests that Angel should be the one primarily responsible for the sexual progression, whereas Anya instigates the activities herself. The occurrences in Angel and Buffy's dynamic are reflective of conventional sexual dichotomies, whereas Anya presents a more contemporary, and thereby unconventional, depiction. Traditionally, the man is the one to take charge and the woman is meant to go along with him, and Buffy's behavior reflects such ideas, while Anya's does not.

[12] Furthermore, Anya's sexuality is more explorative than Buffy's in that she is more willing to explore and express her desire in a wide-ranging, non-vanilla, more daring manner. After realizing that she cannot "get over" Xander through a simple fling and instead begins dating him, Anya starts to voice kinkier sexual desires that are not mentioned or utilized in other sexual relationships on the show unless in a primarily "bad," or villainous, couple, such as Spike and

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<sup>4</sup> While it is certainly humorous for the male to be thrown by the female behavior here, it is interesting to note that Xander and Anya's sexual progression in the series repeatedly upsets conventional ideas about intimate desire and comfort. This is just one of those moments.

Drusilla. Anya's relationship with Xander is hinted to involve "roleplaying" and "spanking," uncommon activities in a "completely vanilla" relationship (Jowett 35). On that same notion, in the season seven episode "Storyteller" (7.16) she even voices a slight disappointment at the disappearance of Spike's chains (00:33:38-46), signifying that Xander and Anya are interested in BDSM practices (Call 14).

### **The Patriarchy's Shaping of Aud, Anyanka, and Anya**

[13] While Anya may express her sexuality in an uncommonly frank manner for a pop culture woman, her identity is repeatedly shaped by the men in her life, starting with Olaf, as seen in a few flashback portions of "Selfless" (7.5). Anya, who was first known as Aud and lived in Sjornjost, 880 AD, was Olaf's lover. It is interesting to note that viewers learn her real name only because Olaf voices it. As he comes into their shared hut, he shouts, "Aud! Sweet, beautiful Aud! I am so hungry I could eat a small child" (00:3:28-36). Audiences thus learn of Anya's identity only because of the then current man in her life (Francis 1). While this version of Anya may have been allowed a peculiar and unique personality as Aud—Olaf says that the bar matrons dislike her because she "speaks her mind" and is "annoying" (00:05:02)—her behavior revolves around tending to Olaf; these occurrences reflect a patriarchal mindset (Francis 2). When Olaf later walks in from dispatching a band of trolls, he smells of "blood and musk" (00:03:40). Anya, as a dutiful Viking woman, immediately begins to tend to him, fetching him a large mug of mead. While these particular activities sound archaic, the implications behind the tasks are clear. She is like a housewife doing the laundry and learning to cook to please the man in her life, a life fixed on the domestic fold, a life that reflects traditional roles and Anya's deference to Olaf. Later in their exchange, Aud states that she cannot live without Olaf because of the happy life they have together, one predicated on heteronormative ideologies.

[14] The scene is quite domestic, and Aud is devoted wholeheartedly to pleasing Olaf. Even their future is predicated on "breeding," an idea that is only heightened through the appearance of a dozen or so rabbits hopping about their hut (00:04:09-22). This indicates fertility, as rabbits reproduce quickly, along with an ideology that permeates a household predicated upon traditional representations of heterosexuality: a couple must have children and start a family to be considered "normal." However, this happy Viking life does not last for Aud, because Olaf sleeps with another woman, and, by way of revenge, Aud turns him into a troll.

[15] Impressed with her abilities, the leader of the vengeance demons, D'Hoffryn, appears and offers Anya the role of "Patron Saint of the Women Scorned" ("Anya Jenkins"). She becomes a vengeance demon, but again her entire sense of self is related to a male figure, and James Francis Jr.'s essay "Selfless: Locating Female Identity in Anya/Anyanka through Prostitution" suggests that upon her acceptance of his offer, D'Hoffryn becomes her "pimp" and she his prostitute (3). Even as they are discussing D'Hoffryn's proposition, Aud's identity again changes relative to a male or male-coded figure's influence, especially when D'Hoffryn insists on giving her a new name. While it may seem like Anya is making a choice in who she wants to be in accepting the proposed role of vengeance demon, D'Hoffryn insists that he knows who she really is, thereby taking away Anya's agency in choosing her own identity.

ANYA: I am “Aud.”<sup>5</sup>

D’HOFFRYN: Are you? Hm, I’m afraid you don’t see your true self. (a beat) You are Anyanka. (00:14:18–32)

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D’HOFFRYN: I get the sense that your talents are not fully appreciated here, Anyanka. We’d like to help you realize your full self....

ANYA: Why do you keep calling me that? My name is “Aud.”

D’HOFFRYN: Perhaps. But Anyanka is who you are. (00:14:49–00:15:11).

Not only does D’Hoffryn give Anya a new name and, therefore, a new identity, but he insists on repeatedly using it to cajole her into accepting his proposal for a new life. Anya agrees, and she spends the next one thousand or so years exacting revenge upon men. That is, she “[waited] to pounce on the words ‘I wish’” (Holder 107) from a scorned woman and would then reveal her true form—with an often wrinkly or rotting visage—and wrought mystical havoc on the man responsible for the woman’s misery. The vengeance lifestyle consumes her very being, and her livelihood is predicated upon being one of D’Hoffryn’s demons. She tells her demon friend Halfrek, “Vengeance is what I do, Halfrek. I don’t need anything else. Vengeance is what I am” (“Selfless” 7.5 00:22:33–40). This quote can convey one reading of Anya enjoying her occupation, but this identity of exacting revenge is still fixed on and continues to revolve around innumerable men and seemingly male figures like D’Hoffryn.<sup>6</sup> While she expresses a level of independence in exacting vengeance for scorned women, she is still, ultimately, under D’Hoffryn’s guidance, so that independence becomes somewhat inauthentic.

[16] Anya goes on like this for much of her life, but when she comes to Sunnydale, California, in season three to retaliate on an unfaithful Xander Harris on behalf of Cordelia Chase, she ultimately winds up losing her powers and is forced to alter herself into a human teenager (“The Wish” 3.9). She tries to get her powers back seven episodes later (“Doppelgangland” 3.16), but D’Hoffryn denies her request, leaving her stranded in California (00:00:00–40). At this point, she begins to take on considerably more conventional gender roles in the sense of less independence, especially when she starts, in an ironic turn of fate, a relationship with Xander.

[17] As Xander’s love interest, Anya becomes more involved with the Scooby Gang, but she is still alienated, labeled as an outsider because of her just-turned-human status and strange behavior. To compensate, Anya begins emulating a typical female teenager. To impress the gang and Xander, Anya starts looking to the society around her for how to dress and act. To discuss this, let us examine Anya’s hair. It changes constantly throughout the show—38 times according to the Buffyverse wiki (“Anya Jenkins”). For the most part, it ends up long and blonde, reminiscent of the titular character. It is, as Gibson-James posits, “part of her attempt to create an acceptable identity in the Buffyverse by emulating its guiding force, Buffy” (10). Anya wants to

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<sup>5</sup> Note the homonymic play on words that occurs with Anya’s real name. “Aud” sounds like “odd,” further limning her as a pariah.

<sup>6</sup> Ideas of multiple readings, even in just one scene, reflect Jowett’s holistic finding of *Buffy* as polysemic, meaning that there are multiple interpretations of this show.

fit in, and she knows that Buffy is the perfect example to copy, but because this appearance is not natural to the former demon, who was, in fact, darker-haired originally, it highlights one element of her gender performance, one small piece of the character's overall act; it also helps exemplify gender performance within the series as a whole. Her clothes also reflect such ideas, as she tends to copy the rest of the female characters in the ensemble in an attempt to appear more human, and, therefore, more feminine.

[18] One of the best examples to discuss Anya's continued gender performance and performativity, this time regarding relationships, is found in "The Prom" (3.20), when both Anya and Xander lack a date to the annual dance. So Anya decides to fix this, albeit in her own way. After briefly discussing her feelings about losing her powers and hoping for their restoration, Anya explains to Xander, "You can laugh, but I have witnessed a millennium of treachery and oppression from the males of the species. I have nothing but contempt for the whole libidinous lot of them." Confused, Xander questions why she is even talking to him, to which Anya replies, downcast, "I don't have a date for the prom" (00:03:20–47). This final statement is uttered in a way uncharacteristic to Anya. She is commonly outright and confident in her expression, but here she takes a turn toward the traditional teenage girl—shy and passive—submitting to a man and hoping that his decision will work out for the both of them. Xander is perplexed by her "sales pitch" (00:03:50), wondering why she would want to go out with him in the first place. Anya further goes on to tell him that she "just know[s] [she] really wants to be at this dance" (00:04:15). She does not want to be "excluded from the norm," and for a stereotypical high school senior girl nothing is more important than a date to the senior promenade. This is just one of the instances in Anya and Xander's courtship that reflects heteronormative romantic entanglement along with Anya's lack of independence. It also relates to Anya's belief that she must be in a relationship for fulfillment. She thinks that to be human part of the performance of her gender means showing up to the dance on the arm of an "alpha male" (00:04:25), an epithet that Anya gives Xander—who normally would not be classified this way—because Anya, perhaps, sees something more in him that others may not.

[19] More and more throughout their relationship, Anya comes to rely on Xander for a sense of self-worth, especially after they become engaged. In "Once More With Feeling" (6.7), the renowned musical episode, Anya's lyrics reveal her lack of complex characterization, as her identity is once again focused through a man. In the opening verse of "I'll Never Tell," which is a duet with Xander that is presented as a 1950s duet, she sings, "My claim to fame was to maim / and to mangle—vengeance was mine / but I'm out of the biz / the name I made I'll trade for his" (00:13:20–35). Through these words, Anya shows that she is again changing her identity for a man. In deciding to become Xander's wife, Anya is also trading away her fame and power, and, by extension, her independence. She may have been a vicious aide to scorned women, but she ultimately wishes to "trade" her name for Xander's. The season seven episode "Selfless" (7.5) further adds to this notion through a flashback to this moment that serves to exemplify Anya's dependence on Xander for a sense of self.

[20] In this callback to "Once More with Feeling," Xander lies asleep in a chair, and Anya begins singing about him and her desire to be his wife. She also performs various household tasks while dressed like a 1950s housewife, twirling about the domestic sphere and singing about becoming "his Missus" and "Mrs. Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins Harris," or, more befitting



her uncertainty regarding her identity, “Mrs. Anya Lame-Ass Made-Up Maiden Name Harris” (00:31:13–00:33:43). To Anya, the power and independence she spent millennia building does not matter now that she has met and intends to marry Xander. All she cares about, as indicated in this song, is becoming his bride and tending to him, just as she did with Olaf. This song, as referenced in Gibson-James’s thesis *The Aud One Out in the Final Battle*, explains how Anya has been “condemned as ‘selfless’” (30). Throughout her time living with Olaf, working with D’Hoffryn, and courting Xander, Anya has never had a sense of self that was not based upon a male influence. She still lacks a true sense of herself as an independent entity, emphasizing that women characters are often present just for the sake of male characters; just as Ginn mentioned in her article, females are usually love interests, sidekicks, and damsels, there just to boost a male-centered narrative (4).

[21] Anya’s particularly dependent type of identity reflects more patriarchal values that keep the former demon in check. Clearly, in each of these situations, a male figure is in control of her life. She may exhibit some agency in how she expresses herself, but ultimately she depends on a male figure to show her the way, and that dependence is powerful. Just as Anya says to Olaf that she cannot live without him, she likewise tells Xander in a state of post-coital bliss that should he leave her, she wants a huge warning, one involving “big flashing red lights and one of those clocks that counts down like a bomb in a movie” (“Triangle” 5.11 00:00:41–52). She expresses that she cannot imagine the pain she would feel if he left, again relying on him for the happiness in her life.

[22] On a similarly dependent note, in order to keep Anya in line, D’Hoffryn offers one of the most problematic examples of male control. Even after Xander has left Anya at the altar and she has again reverted to vengeance—in a way a woman might return to an ex-lover—she has become too human, too “soft serve” to really dish out revenge, according to Halfrek’s relaying of other demons’ rumors (“Lessons” 7.1 00:16:34–00:17:53). So, when Anya wishes to reverse a Grimsaw demon’s brutalizing of twelve UC-Sunnydale fraternity boys, D’Hoffryn states that a vengeance demon must give its life and soul for her wish to be granted. Anya accepts that she must die to save the boys, but D’Hoffryn actually kills her friend Halfrek as a lesson to Anya for not following through on her fulfillment of the scorned woman’s wish earlier in the episode (“Selfless” 7.5 00:36:36–00:38:18).

[23] While it is interesting to note that Anya reverted back to her demon ways, D’Hoffryn notices that she has changed. This is significant because it shows that Anya has failed to create her own identity despite her newfound efforts. She tries to break away from past traditions of being controlled by others, but viewers never get to see her continued evolution, as indicated in the final episode of the series. Anya wants to begin exploring who she really is in the final season, but viewers never really learn who that is. Like her final lyrics in her “Missus” verse, any major potential identity exploration is cut off with her death. She gets as far as “I will be—” before one of the First Evil’s Bringers very nearly slices her in half during the final battle in “Chosen” (7.22 00:32:48), cutting away any potential of what could have been a progressive character.

## A Genuine Critique or a Faulty Characterization?

[24] Of course, Anya's characterization can be argued as a critique of the heteronormative mythos of the Buffyverse through an extreme representation of femininity and dependence, but her status as comic relief somewhat undercuts the ability to offer such a critique. Her inane, often otherworldly, comments can contradict the series' undergirding messages in gender and sexuality. She offers an amusing take on the human condition as she struggles to differentiate between public and private spheres, but by placing Anya as a comic character and, at times, as the butt of the joke, she appears less than effective as a voice of critique about gender and sexuality within the Buffyverse and the real world. Viewers may get too tied up in the humor of her representation, and this makes it difficult to tell whether or not the creators are being sincere in their construction of her persona, especially as her scenes can be read in multiple ways due to her peculiar coding as both demon and female.

[25] As a former demon, Anya is alienated, othered because she does not know how to behave as a human. However, by making her a *female* former demon, the creators further heighten the sense of her as othered. As females are commonly known as the othered "second" sex, such conventional treatment of the character—like garbing her in 1950s housewife attire, to name just one instance—is problematic, painting a more traditional picture amidst a progressive series. It is also interesting to note that Anya, even though she may be trying to be an independent entity and express herself in her own way, still has to rely on other characters, particularly males. Her focus on male dependence is ubiquitous in the series. For example, as she twirls around Xander's and her apartment in the "Selfless" callback to the musical episode, she fixates on Xander's surname, wanting to take it for her own and be his missus (00:31:13–00:33:43). Viewers who see Anya treated this way may deem it acceptable to treat real-world women in this way, so it is difficult to ascertain just how effective Anya actually is in challenging stereotypes of women as a whole. Like Jowett explains, the "show attempts to destabilize binaries through ambivalence and ambiguity" (Jowett 12), and in the case of Anya as a critique, these conflicting traits of unabashed sexuality alongside a strong, male-centered dependence make it difficult to discern how genuine the character's overall critique of gender roles and representations really is. Anya as a character serves the heightened ambiguity to which Jowett refers, thereby making the show's commentary on gender and sexuality a bit more confusing and somewhat less convincing.

## Conclusions

[26] Whereas the character of Buffy Summers offers a balanced, complex characterization that largely befits a contemporary feminist pop culture model, the character of Anya Jenkins gives audiences a more traditional, male-centered persona that complicates the potentially progressive nature of the other characters and the series as a whole. Anya spends much of her narrative arc depending on men, letting them decide who she should be and how she should live her long, complicated life. Anya may offer a "feminist model of positive female sexuality," in that she unabashedly voices her sexual desires and participates in less "vanilla" activity, but her identity is repeatedly formed by other characters, whether through romance or employment (Burnett; Jowett; Call). By analyzing her character arcs as a dutiful Viking woman with Olaf, a quasi-

prostitute for D'Hoffryn, and a stereotypical patriarchal romantic relationship with Xander, one can better understand the complicated nature of her "selfless" characterization.

[27] Although Anya offers some problematic characteristics, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been heralded as a key pop culture text in feminist cultural studies, giving Western media some fantastic exemplars for female representation. Many characters befit these notions of critique, but others do not do so as fully. As Jowett says in her comprehensive analysis of gender in the Buffyverse, "*Buffy* presents neither a 'subversive' nor a 'conservative' view of gender, but, rather, a contradictory mixture of both" (1). Either way, *Buffy* continues to provide a substantial foundation for understanding the feminist complexities found within the Whedonverse.

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