

Double Trouble:
Gothic Shadows and Self-Discovery in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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Introduction

[1] Much has been written, by both academics and fans, in discussion of Buffy Summers' love life in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Shipping wars¹ have always played a role in the *Buffy* fandom, which may appear to be at odds with the show's purported feminist premise. *Buffy's* empowering origins have been oft quoted as Joss Whedon's attempt to redress the standard horror-flick stereotype of a vulnerable blonde girl walking into a dark alley (Wilcox and Lavery xvii). In the world of *Buffy*, the young blonde proves herself again and again to ultimately be the most powerful creature lurking in the shadows, becoming, in essence, the bogeyman that all the scary things hiding in the dark are taught to fear ("Doomed" 4.11). Yet, however subversive the premise of *Buffy* might be, it also borrows heavily from conventional Gothic tropes that often work to reaffirm societal norms even as it pokes at and questions them. Buffy is the scariest of all the scary creatures, but as the central figure of the series, she is also besieged by a weekly slew of terrors that highlight her vulnerabilities and insecurities. While Buffy does not rely upon her male lovers to rescue her from distress, the personal obstacles, self-discovery, and growth that she faces often tie (symbolically or literally) to the upheaval caused by these men in her life.

[2] *Buffy* often and intentionally reconfigures Gothic tropes to provide a commentary on the Gothic nature of the world that we inhabit

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offscreen.² Vampires often represent concepts that demonstrate the horrors of a non-fictional world: death, illness, war, poverty, sexual power dynamics and imbalances, rape, incest, and more. As Nina Auerbach writes, vampires “matter because, when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable” (9). Buffy’s attempts to conquer these symbols of death parallel her journey to encounter life and all of its growing complexities, reflecting the horror of adolescence and adulthood that are all too Gothic on- and off-screen. Further, the Gothic influence on *Buffy*’s storytelling extends beyond supernatural creatures (vampires, ghosts, zombies) and aesthetic motifs (cemeteries, castles/mansions, dark and stormy nights) and into some of the thematic, narratological choices that parallel early Gothic texts.

[3] One common theme found in Gothic novels is the deconstruction of patriarchal figures and structures, especially those connected to government, church, and family. As Donna Heiland writes in *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction*, the patriarchy “is not only the subject of gothic novels, but is itself a gothic structure” and one which often demands “the outright sacrifice of women” (10-11). If patriarchal authority seeks to sacrifice, manipulate, or otherwise exploit women, then one of the primary interests of Gothic literature in deconstructing that patriarchy would be to give its female characters agency. Of course, not all Gothic novels share this aim, but those belonging to the subcategory of the Female Gothic are of particular interest to this study. The Female Gothic refers to Gothic novels written with the intent to express inherently “female” concerns.³ Whereas domestic Gothic was primarily concerned with “the defilement of purity,” particularly in the form of “a young virgin” (Hazen 35) or “innocent young woman” (Heiland 1), the Female Gothic often takes on a slightly more subversive role, with the heroine actively endeavoring to push back against patriarchal authority and reclaim autonomy. In many Female Gothic texts, the “evil” or “horror” encountered does not come from a villain or monster, but from the heroine’s own psyche, or the psyche of a double who closely (but usually grotesquely) parallels the heroine and reveals some inner conflict she must overcome.⁴ As Juliann E. Fleenor writes in the introduction to *The Female Gothic*, doubles are often used

within the Female Gothic to mirror the journey of the heroine as she “attempts to establish her identity” (16).

[4] Like these Female Gothic texts, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* uses Gothic themes and tropes to reflect the horror of what it is to be a woman in this world. In particular, Buffy’s three main love interests—Angel, Riley, and Spike—often act as both shadows/doubles to Buffy and as physical manifestations of her crises of identity as she journeys into adulthood. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson explain in the preface to *The Cambridge Companion to Jung* how Jung argued that people needed to understand themselves in “a context of meaning . . . larger than their individual identities” (xi). Part of this contextualization comes from understanding the ways in which the self is influenced by “unconscious and unknown desires,” which manifest in the form of the shadow self, described as “an inferior, unadapted, childish, and grandiose aspect of our unconscious life” (xii). In literature, this shadow self has often been interpreted as a manifestation of the darker impulses of the psychoses made manifest, and examples of this run rampant in Gothic literature: Robert Louis Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1886), Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray and his portrait self (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890), and Mary Shelley’s Dr. Frankenstein and his creature (*Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, 1818). Like these classic Gothic doubles, Angel, Riley, and Spike are situated as shadows/doubles of Buffy, intended to give us insight into her personal growth and journey throughout the duration of the series. In addition, each of Buffy’s lovers also takes on a classic Gothic persona who evokes some element of mirroring: Angel and Angelus act much like Robert Louis Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, the good doctor and his monstrous alter ego; Riley as Dr. Frankenstein’s creature, from Mary Shelley’s novel, who is a monstrous version of his namesake; and Spike as a Byronic hero, found in a variety of Gothic tales, who acts as the fusion of both the Gothic hero and the Gothic villain. These dualities of characterization also point to Buffy’s own recurring struggle between Buffy the girl and Buffy the Slayer, which takes place throughout the series.

[5] Many critics have written about the shadow/double nature of Buffy’s lovers; as Stacey Abbott has previously noted in her article,

“From Madman in the Basement to Self-Sacrificing Champion,” this phenomenon has been “previously recognized by both academic writers and fans” (339-340). Multiple critics, including Rhonda Wilcox and Delores Nurrs,⁵ have connected Buffy’s lovers, and Spike in particular, in the context of Jung’s theory of the shadow self. In *The Existential Joss Whedon: Evil and Human Freedom in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly and Serenity*, authors J. Michael Richardson and J. Douglas Rabb similarly note that “much of Spike’s story arc is really here to tell us something about Buffy” (122). Individually, there are many characters from the series who could be paired against Buffy as potential doubles; as a group, however, Buffy’s three canonical love interests provide the most interesting insight, as each represents a particular struggle Buffy has to face and overcome and thus marks a distinct period in Buffy’s personal growth. Though the problems that Buffy must overcome during her time with each lover may not be Gothic in nature, the use of doubles who mirror Buffy’s psyche in overcoming these fears, doubts, and anxieties reflects a distinctly Female Gothic impulse; as such, these struggles will be termed “Gothic fears,” “Gothic anxieties,” or “Gothic obstacles” to note the particular crisis that Buffy must confront in each of her shadow selves before continuing her journey.

[6-] In addition to the Gothic doubling of selves, the deconstruction of patriarchal authority is one of the major aims of the Female Gothic. Some critics have noted the ways in which Buffy’s warring personas and her relationships with her love interests potentially undermine her power as a Slayer and as a feminist icon. This duality of characterization may be a reflection of what Lorna Jowett notes as a conflict between old and new masculinity (“macho, violent, strong, and monstrous” vs. “feminized, passive, emotion, weak, and human”) which creates “a kind of split personality” (95). Elana Levine agrees that Buffy is “excessively self-aware of her multiply-positioned identities and constantly working to reconcile them” (174). It is partially due to this internal conflict of Slayer vs. girl that Buffy worries about being abandoned by her lovers, which she views as evidence of her failings in mastering these dual roles—and which some, like Jowett, have deemed as being a potentially anti-feminist reading of the show, which “point(s) to the frequency of men leaving women” (126). However, of note is the

fact that these male shadow selves are designed as vehicles to offer insight into our female heroine, a clear deconstruction of traditionally patriarchal narratology, which often does the reverse and uses its women characters as disposable figures who are meant to tell us something about its male heroes. Further, if viewed as extensions of Buffy herself and markers of her character growth, Buffy's abandonment by her lovers may be more representative of her progression beyond her weaknesses rather than a censure of them. Just as she must face a different "Big Bad" every season, Buffy encounters a series of Gothic obstacles throughout the course of the show, which manifest themselves in the forms of her most current lover. Thus, their abandonment of both Buffy the character and *Buffy* the show can be seen not as a condemnation of her failings, but a celebration of her overcoming whatever Gothic fear that lover represents in order to progress forward.

Angel/Angelus: Jekyll/Hyde

[7] Buffy's first great romantic love is Angel, a vampire with two distinct personas: Angel, the ensouled vampire working toward his redemption; and Angelus, the soulless vampire wreaking destruction. No other vampire on the series features this same duality of personas. Most start the series soulless and remain soulless until their respective demises. Even with Spike, who receives his soul at the end of the sixth season, no new persona is created; Spike as a character remains intact.⁶ Thus, we are to understand that there is something remarkable about Angel's goodness when he is in possession of his soul, and something equally remarkable in his monstrosity when he is without it. Even at his most monstrous, Angel is not as far past redemption, kindness, and empathy as Angelus, and nowhere in Angelus's persona is there any suggested goodness, "no humanity in him" ("Innocence" 2.14, 00:08:39-40), to distinguish him from being something monstrous. However disparate, though, these two distinct facets ultimately create one being. As Stacey Abbott writes: "Angelus' identity may be defined by absence—he is an unrepentant monster because he lacks Angel's soul—but the series goes to great pains to demonstrate that Angel's identity, his strength and

power, is defined by the presence of both Angel and Angelus” (331). Angel the vampire is distinct from the human he used to be—an Irish drunkard named Liam—because he is also shaped by Angelus’s history, and the dark impulses he must continually keep at bay; conversely, Angelus’s excesses can be seen as being shaped in reaction to Angel’s goodness, a sort of retribution against his alter-ego.

[8] *Buffy’s* writers draw on Gothic traditions beyond just the vampire to create the dichotomy that is Angel/Angelus. In addition to the traditional “Romantic hero—dark older man drawn to young innocent girl” (Jowett 153), Angel/Angelus also evokes clear parallels to Jekyll/Hyde. This presents itself not only in the form of Angel’s dual natures, forever at war with one another, but also in more explicit nods to the original literature by Robert Louis Stevenson. For example, in episode 3.4 (“Beauty and the Beasts”), the show features a seemingly nice, normal teenage boy named Pete who transforms into a rage-filled abuser when he partakes of a potion that transforms him into a monstrous version of himself, much like Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde. Not coincidentally, this is also the episode in which Buffy first realizes that Angel has returned from Hell after she was forced to kill him for actions performed by Angelus. Much like Pete, and in turn Jekyll/Hyde, Angel similarly underwent a dramatic transformation in the previous season when he became Angelus. In Angel’s case, it is sex—or rather, a pure moment of happiness with the woman he loves—that elicits this transformation, rather than a chemical elixir, although the effects are just as devastating to everyone around him.

[9] Even more so, Angel’s actions while under the influence of the Angelus persona are devastating to himself. Early on in the series, he explains to Buffy: “When you become a vampire, the demon takes your body. But it doesn’t get the soul. That’s gone. No conscience, no remorse . . . it’s an easy way to live” (“Angel” 1.7, 00:34:37-46). Diane DeKelb-Rittenhouse expounds in her essay “Sex and the Single Vampire: The Evolution of the Vampire Lothario and Its Representation in *Buffy*”: “Angel’s demon is intrinsically evil. It is only when he is in possession of his soul that he is remorseful for his demon’s actions, abstains from evil, and chooses to do good” (149). It should seem, then, that Angel should not be held culpable for the actions of Angelus, since

he is not in control of himself or his actions; rather, the demon inside him should be to blame. However, although the two entities are distinct, they are perhaps not quite as separate as Angel's initial description would suggest. Gregory Stevenson explains:

Angel . . . has within him both a demon and a soul. He is both devil and angel. He desires to be part of the human world but can never fully fit in. The vampire Darla warns Angel that his desire to live in the human world is futile because, "You can only suppress your real nature for so long" (1.7). The question for Angel is which of his natures is more "real"? (82)

Angel's true struggle, then, does not stem entirely from remorse over his past actions, but from the continuing struggle to keep his own personal Hyde at bay. No matter how intensely Angel fights to maintain his restraint, Angelus always lurks just underneath, waiting to seize control, and, no matter how much Angel might abhor his alter-ego, a part of him wants to give in.

[10] It is this continuing struggle that acts as a reflection of Buffy's Gothic fear of a loss of control. As the series begins, Buffy arrives at Sunnydale having just been expelled from her former school and with her life completely uprooted. She has only recently learned of her powers as the Slayer and is not entirely sure of herself in this role, or how she can balance this new persona with her "real" life. As such, she is forced to keep things secret from her parents; the series even hints various times—particularly in the first season of the series—that Buffy's new role as the Slayer and the subsequent trouble it caused contributed to their divorce (or at the very least, she feels as though it did). It is no coincidence that as Buffy herself navigates through a chaotic new school, town, family dynamic, and supernatural capabilities, she is most romantically drawn to a man who is similarly struggling to regain control in his life: of his impulses, his hunger, and his emotions. It is also no coincidence that the duration of Buffy's romantic involvement with Angel—engaged in an ongoing battle to keep his dual natures at bay—is also the time period in which Buffy struggles most to navigate what it means to be Buffy the Slayer and what it means to be Buffy the girl.

[11] Ironically, entering into a relationship with Angel presents one more area in her life in which Buffy suffers a loss of control. Much of this is explained in large part in a pivotal episode of the series, “Angel” (1.7), in which Buffy first learns of Angel’s demonic nature and of his internal struggle that so closely mirrors her own. Angel inadvertently reveals his vampiric nature to Buffy when they engage in a heated kiss that brings out his primal side. Richardson and Rabb write:

The eruption of Angel’s vampire face here can be read on many levels. He has certainly lost, at least momentarily, control of the monster within. . . . The inconvenient emergence of Angel’s vampire face here certainly invokes the show’s central theme about controlling our inner demons and how difficult that sometimes is. (124)

This lack of control on Angel’s part perfectly mirrors Buffy’s own fears, repeatedly echoed throughout the first season in particular, as she struggles to continue to be a “normal” girl, all the while aware that she cannot be who she once was. One example of this difficulty can be found in her relationship with her mother, to whom Buffy must repeatedly lie, and to whom she often feels she is a disappointment. Aside from her role as Buffy’s mother, Joyce also represents a unique schism in the show between Buffy’s two personas. Unlike any of the other central characters, she knew Buffy the girl before there was a Buffy the Slayer and creates a continuous point of friction for Buffy as she attempts to find the balance between these two roles. It is notable, then, that in the same episode, Angel also faces a moment of identity crisis centering around Joyce. Attempting to goad Angelus into re-emerging, Darla attacks Joyce, then taunts Angel with her blood. The shooting script reads: “Angel MORPHS into a vampire . . . he is staring at the pinpricks of blood on Joyce’s neck Angel shuts his eyes, *trying to control himself*” (Richardson and Rabb 132, emphasis added). Angel’s struggle may be a heightened one—Buffy is never tempted to kill her mother, no matter how fraught their relationship might be—but it nonetheless parallels Buffy’s own.

[12] While Buffy slowly learns to gain control of her Slayer abilities, governing the other part of her own dual persona as Buffy the girl often proves to be far more difficult—a struggle which Angel, in particular, exacerbates. In fact, it is Buffy’s indulging in her human wants and desires over her Slayer duties which unleashes Angelus (“Surprise” 2.13; “Innocence” 2.14). The remainder of Angel’s time on the show is an exercise in control for Buffy. She must learn to school her own emotions first to keep Angelus from manipulating her, then to kill Angel in order to save the world. Richardson and Rabb write, “Buffy knows what she has to do, she knows where her duty lies, and she knows what she must choose to give up” (128). Buffy the Slayer takes precedence over Buffy the girl, and she sends Angel to hell; but in doing so, the Buffy-the-girl persona is temporarily suffocated. Buffy leaves Sunnydale, abandoning the friends and family who make up her human persona outside of her Slayer duties. She even takes on a different name, Anne, to distinguish this new persona.⁷ It is only through suffering a symbolic death and rebirth—by traveling to Hell and back (“Anne” 3.1)—that Buffy the Slayer is awakened again. A demon in the hell dimension attempts to break Buffy’s spirit and force her to admit she is “no one” (00:34:21) only for her to firmly assert, “I’m Buffy, the Vampire Slayer” (00:34:54-56) before calling on her Slayer strength to rescue herself and the other prisoners. Realizing that the other part of her persona is still missing, Buffy travels back to her mother and the Scooby Gang (the relationships that help to keep her the most balanced and human) in order to reclaim Buffy the girl.

[13] In Season Three, replete with various factors in Buffy’s life that threaten to put her role as Slayer and girl into imbalance once more—such as Joyce’s new knowledge of her role as Slayer and the arrival of “bad girl” Slayer Faith—Angel once again returns, attempting to reclaim the progress that was lost during his slippage into Angelus. The season culminates in an attempted attack on Buffy’s classmates during graduation, which essentially forces her to “out” herself to her community and combine her roles as Slayer and daughter, classmate, and friend for the first time publicly (“Graduation Day: Part 2” 3.22). The worst has happened: her secret has been revealed, the entire school knows about both of her personas, and she has not only survived, but

emerged with a stronger sense of self, a moment symbolically marked by receiving her diploma from Giles, a common visual metaphor for growth. Tellingly, it is at this point in Buffy's journey that Angel parts ways with her. Buffy has conquered her first Gothic fear, and proven to herself that she can not only exercise control over both dualities of her persona, but allow them to peacefully co-exist. Thus, Angel's continuing struggle with Angelus can no longer act as her shadow, and he literally and metaphorically leaves her to continue the rest of her journey.

Riley Finn: Frankenstein's Monster

[14] Angel's departure marks a shift in the narrative, not only because Buffy has left high school and moved on to university, thus transitioning from the teen of the earlier series into a young adult, but also because she must face and overcome a new Gothic obstacle, represented in the form of her new love interest on the show: Riley Finn. While Riley is not written about as frequently as Angel or Buffy's later paramour, Spike, the writings that do center around him seem to focus on his wholesome, blond, boy-next-door persona, and as such, his anti-Angel-ness. Stevenson writes, "Buffy begins to date . . . Riley Finn, because she thinks the All-American Iowa boy can provide her the stable relationship she never had with Angel—like being able to go out together in daylight" (53). Commented on by fans, critics, and the show itself, Riley does not possess the same darkness as Angel, without which it is posited that Buffy cannot truly love somebody. As such, he can be termed as Buffy's experiment to see whether she can love without all the angst and the pain. Wilcox writes: "Buffy's subconscious calls Riley a good boy, the kind she plans to focus on romantically. Buffy may think she's over the bad boy thing, but when she contemplates the good boy thing, that's really scary" (152).

[15] A closer exploration of the Riley Finn character suggests he may also be a reflection of Buffy's fear of not belonging—in school, within the shifting roles within the Scooby Gang, within a loving relationship, within her family,⁸ and within her new role as an adult. In popular adaptations of *Frankenstein*, the monster is often associated with

science, technology, super strength, and an unnatural connection with its creator; all of these aspects can be found, in part, in Shelley's original novel, but just as important to her tale is the monster's status as an outcast. Though the monster desperately desires acceptance and love, because of his strength and monstrosity, he is shunned by society, forever on the outside looking in. While Riley may represent the former traits associated with the Frankenstein monster as a scientifically modified super soldier, Buffy in many ways embodies the monster's inability to conform. In choosing Riley, she is perhaps subconsciously choosing someone who naturally fits in, and who in fact proves to adapt too well to the structures of not just the Initiative, but society and the patriarchy as a whole. Describing Riley, Stevenson writes, "He is a follower of orders, taught never to question his superiors. Riley represents the individual whose identity is defined by an external power structure" (92). Jowett terms Riley as representative of the "tough guy" persona, which she describes as, "defined in relation to patriarchal groups or institutions" (96). In addition to being a devotee to the government and university, it is also revealed in episode 4.16 ("Who Are You") that Riley is a regular church-goer, thus completing his trifecta of patriarchal structures.

[16] Buffy's transition to college represents the shift from her inner conflict against herself to an outer war against the world around her. By the end of her high school career, she is recognized by her peers as a hero, and even given a parasol in honor of her role as class protector. In episode 4.1 "The Freshman," this parasol is destroyed as a metaphoric representation of the hostility of this new environment against her. Buffy is not a hero at the university; she is not even remarkable. She shows up to the wrong classes, is unable to follow the material, and in fact is rendered so invisible that Riley notices Willow first (and, in fact, refers to Buffy as "Willow's friend") ("The Freshman" 4.1, 00.13.24). On the opposite end of the spectrum is Riley, who is completely within his element in this environment that is so openly hostile to Buffy. He is not invisible at U.C. Sunnydale; known and beloved around campus by various groups, including the UC Sunnydale Lesbian Alliance ("Something Blue" 4.9), Riley works as the teaching assistant for the renowned professor Maggie Walsh, and for the

governmental infrastructure—the Initiative—put in place to keep campus safe.

[17] Yet it is because he fits so well within this structured society that Riley ultimately proves to be just as monstrous and just as reflective of Buffy's Gothic anxieties as Angel was. Season Four is rife with allusions to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in what Anita Rose terms as "a modern reimagining of Romantic ideology that Mary Shelley herself would likely have appreciated" in her article "Of Creatures and Creators: *Buffy* does *Frankenstein*" (133). At first, it seems as though the sub-human creature named "Adam," kept in secret by the Initiative, will prove to be the postmodern Frankenstein's monster figure. However, over the course the season, it is revealed that Riley acts as the true embodiment of the Frankenstein creature. Not only is he one of the Initiative's top soldiers, but he has also been genetically modified by Maggie Walsh to be a super-soldier. Though Riley eventually rebels against Walsh, he continues to perform as a reflection of her slavish loyalty to governmental order and fear of unregimented supernaturalism. Richardson and Rabb write:

We . . . learn from Riley's example how the Initiative as a whole conceptualizes the world it works in; that is, how it thinks through problems and implements "solutions." Riley, at least at the outset, seems to use a fairly limited binary logic and value system. . . . He has trouble getting his mind around Buffy's revelation that there just might be some good demons and vampires. (64)

Riley's difficulty in overcoming binaries exists not only with supernatural entities, but also in viewing Buffy as a true equal. Though Riley's gentlemanly, solicitous behavior is in keeping with his wholesome farm-boy persona, it also exhibits his difficulty in overcoming conventions. This conservatism is reflected even in the costuming choices between Riley and Buffy at the onset of their relationship. Wilcox notes that in the pivotal episode "Hush" (4.10), in which Buffy and Riley learn the truth about each other's identities, costumer Cynthia Bergstrom dresses Buffy and Riley in binaried pink and blue (161). Ultimately, though Riley claims to be a supporter of Buffy's strength, he is unable to function in a

subordinate role that counteracts the societal roles between men and women that have shaped his understanding. No matter how much he attempts to be progressive and open-minded, Riley inevitably “acts always with awareness of society in mind” (Wilcox 153). Buffy’s inability to conform (to the Initiative, to her gendered role) ultimately prove her incompatibility with Riley. It is not so much his lack of darkness that severs their relationship, but his need for structure and discipline as opposed to her innate individuality.

[18] While Riley may seem to be an odd romantic pairing for a character originally written to mark a subversive femininity, in many ways he reflects what Buffy wishes she could be. Like many superhero stories, *Buffy* plays with the “desire to be normal” trope; even more so than most, Buffy does not just wish to be normal, but to conform to the sort of patriarchal structures into which Riley blends so seamlessly. As early as Season One, Buffy struggles with not being accepted onto the cheerleading team, a position whose structure she craves despite the fact that it will put her at the beck and call of girls to whom even reigning-bitch Cordelia bows and caters (“The Witch” 1.3). Just as when she first moved to Sunnydale, Buffy’s first instinct upon transitioning into college life is to adapt to a ready-made organization; part of what most attracts her to Riley is not just his goodness, but that he can plug her straight into the most structured of structures on the college campus, the Initiative. At first, Buffy gleefully kowtows to the group’s infrastructure, running drills, strapping on a microphone and camera, and taking orders just like the other soldiers. However, by now we as an audience know this obedience will be short-lived. For example, in the Season Two episode “What’s My Line?: Part 2” (2.10), Buffy mocks new Slayer Kendra for being so deferential to her Watcher, but also expresses distress when she learns there is a Slayer’s handbook—with rules and regulations—to which she does not have access. Giles quickly retaliates, “After meeting you, Buffy, I realized that the handbook would be of no use in your case” (00:13:18-22). Buffy may desire structure and regulation, but she is not built for it, as she quickly makes clear by questioning orders and even the dress code (“The I In Team” 4.13). Through her association with the Initiative and subsequent betrayal by

Maggie Walsh, Buffy finally begins to learn the importance of standing on her own.

[19] During her relationship with Riley, Buffy's struggle to fit in ultimately transitions into an understanding that she must be very selective with what groups she chooses to conform. Her faith in her core group of friends, which has often been remarked upon as one of her greatest strengths as a Slayer (despite being against Council regulations), is solidified even further when they perform a spell uniting them in order to defeat Adam; this unity is also symbolic of the group's support of each individual member's decision to break from patriarchal structures and conventions: Willow coming out of the closet, Xander choosing to work instead of attend university, and an unemployed Giles transitioning into less of a leadership role to pursue his own interests and relationships. Rather ironically, the only group that Riley seems to have difficulty in conforming to is Buffy's Scooby Gang. Jowett writes, "The post-Initiative Riley does become individualist: on patrol with the Scoobies he is unreliable, taking on situations alone or not showing up at all" (104). During the same time period that Buffy leaves U.C. Sunnydale, loses the safe haven of her home life and family, and has to take on a god (again, that patriarchal trifecta of education, home/family, and religion), Riley finds himself drawn back to the structure provided by government life. Stevenson writes, "His desertion of the Initiative is a reaction against its corrupt practices and not a rejection of governmental institution, for his desertion ultimately does not take. When the opportunity arises, Riley joins with another government-connected demon hunting agency" (132). As Buffy moves further and further away from patriarchal structures and limitations, Riley proves that he does not know how to exist without them.

[20] Unlike Angel, whose character arc paralleled Buffy's throughout their run on the series as lovers, Riley's acts as more of a mirror that ultimately sends him on an opposite trajectory. In the end, he is still too much Maggie Walsh's creature and unable to truly function in a world outside of the one in which she has equipped him to survive. As such, his leaving marks Buffy's conquering of her fear of not fitting in and learning the necessity of standing on her own.

Spike: Byronic Hero

[21] More than any of her other lovers, Buffy and Spike overlap one another so often that at times their character arcs become nearly indistinguishable. With Angel, Buffy traveled a parallel path in attempting to master self-control. With Riley, her journey ultimately took her in the opposite direction. With Spike, Buffy's journey is most closely shadowed, in that her interactions with him in many ways can be seen as metaphors for her feelings about herself. In doing so, *Buffy* draws upon the motif of the Byronic hero in Spike's representation. In her essay "Spike, Sex and Subtext," Milly Williamson notes Spike's Byronic origins: "The character of Spike draws directly on the image of the vampire as Byronic outcast with the revelation of his own (human) history as a (failed) Romantic poet and, after Season Five, his unrequited love for Buffy" (295). The Byronic hero combines the Gothic hero and Gothic villain, in a way that is meant to blur the lines between the two. It is no coincidence, then, that Buffy should forge a relationship with the most Byronic figure on the show just as she begins to encounter her own fears about being both Slayer and monster.

[22] Buffy's return from the dead in Season Six marks a drastic shift in the series in tone, content, and in Buffy's character arc. Her death in Season Five, in which she sacrifices herself to save the world, can be viewed as Buffy's transition into adulthood, and to the complicated moral ambiguity that viewing life through this new, grown-up lens can bring. There is perhaps no greater example of this than Buffy's beginning a sexual relationship with Spike, a vampire whom she previously deemed (on multiple occasions) disgusting, pathetic, and "beneath" her ("Fool for Love" 5.7, 00:35:06-07). At this point in the series, the writers make little effort to rehabilitate Spike to explain Buffy's newfound attraction. While Spike clearly cares for Buffy, he continues to cavort with other underworld demons, essentially blackmails Buffy into maintaining a relationship with him, and as mentioned above, attempts to rape her when she ends things with him. Rather, Buffy's relationship with Spike can be explained by her inability to connect with her old life after having been inadvertently dragged from

a heaven-like dimension by her friends (“After Life” 6.3) and by her fear that she has “c[o]me back wrong” (“Smashed” 6.9, 00:35:26-28).

[23] It is this fracturing of self that allows this post-death Buffy to enter into a relationship that pre-death Buffy would have found reprehensible. In facing her fears of a loss of her old self and the monstrosity of the new self she has become, Buffy’s arc begins to parallel what Spike’s has always been. Various writers have commented on Spike’s fractured persona. Jowett claims, “Spike blurs the boundaries between good and bad, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine,’ hetero- and homosexual, man and monster, comic and tragic, villain and hero” (158); Dee Amy-Chinn and Milly Williamson agree, “Spike is polymorphous: he is both man and monster, both masculine and feminine” (275). Later, they further argue, “He embod[ies] most fully the predicaments of a fractured subjectivity: the idea that we have not one, but multiple identities, which contend for dominance and that our subjectivities are neither fixed nor stable over the course of our lives” (281). Unlike Angel, who exhibits a clear duality between Angel/Angelus, Spike is a blurred mixture of many selves, including the human persona he was supposed to have shed once he became a vampire. Richardson and Rabb write:

William, the bloody awful poet, though known to the Watcher’s Council as William the Bloody, actually becomes the very conflicted vampire who stinks of humanity and takes the name Spike. It would seem that the person that one was has an influence on the kind of vampire one turns into once bitten. (110-111)

It is this very conflict between monster and man—Spike’s humanity and his monstrosity—which marks Spike as “different” from other vampires and pays homage to his Byronic ancestry.

[24] From Spike’s first introduction to the show, he is meant to provide a clear contrast to the old regime of vampire. The Master represented old-school, black-and-white monstrosity. He lives in an underground cavern, bathes in blood, and never shows his human face, remaining in vamp-mode throughout the duration of the series; little to no reference is ever made to the kind of human he must have been.

Spike, on the other hand, smokes cigarettes, wears a trademark leather coat, bleaches his hair blond, loves his girlfriend, and displays petty jealousy toward his grand-sire Angel. In essence, the audience is meant to understand from the very beginning that unlike other vampires, Spike firmly straddles humanity and monstrosity. Perhaps the largest part of Spike's humanity—beyond the superficialities of his hair, wardrobe, and musical choices—is the pain and vulnerability that he has retained from his days as William the Poet. Williamson writes, “The text overtly encourages a sympathetic subtextual reading of Spike by linking his glamour, sex appeal and rebellion to a hinted-at unseen suffering” (289). This suffering, Williamson later asserts, is caused by “enforced outsiderdom” (291). In fact, Spike's disconnect from traditional vampiric behavior marks him as an Other. His long-time love, Drusilla, reportedly leaves him because he is not “demon enough” (“Lovers Walk” 3.8, 00:19:58-59). As referenced above, Spike vocalizes Buffy's fears post-death by telling her that she “came back wrong” (“Smashed” 6.9, 00:35:26-28), yet it is in fact Spike who has come back wrong. He is not the heartless vampire who can massacre his entire family “with a song in his heart,” like Angelus (“Angel” 1.7, 00:34:13-15). In fact, Spike chooses to turn his beloved mother into a vampire to keep her at his side, and only kills her under duress (“Lies My Parents Told Me” 7.17). As early as Season Two, the Judge further marks Spike as an Other due to his affection for Drusilla which makes them “stink of humanity” (“Surprise” 2.13, 00:35:21-23). Spike's love for Buffy further proves him an oddity, as does his remorse after his attempted rape of her. Yet, in true Byronic fashion, while he may not be fully villain, he is also not fully hero. As Amy-Chinn and Williamson note, “even members of the Scooby Gang generally want nothing to do with him. He is, in effect, the outcast's outcast” (280). Not quite monster, not quite man, Spike uncomfortably vacillates between both spheres.

[25] In Seasons Six and Seven, Buffy finds herself in a similar position. No longer the uncompromising, “always brave and kind of righteous” hero as the pre-death Buffy (“Once More, with Feeling” 6.7, 00:02:35-37), Buffy learns things about herself, her desires, and her powers that alienate her from her friends and in many ways from herself. For instance, before her death, even knowing it might mean the end of

the world, Buffy refuses to sacrifice her sister Dawn. In Season Seven, she acknowledges that, though she still loves Dawn, she might now be willing to make that compromise (“Lies My Parents Told Me” 7.17). Similarly, earlier in the series, Buffy’s powers were generally viewed as a frightening but empowering gift. In Season Seven, Buffy discovers that the Slayer’s powers actually stem from demonic roots, and were enforced upon the first Slayer as a brutal sacrifice/rape which impregnates her with a demonic strength (“Get It Done” 7.15), thus forcing Buffy to acknowledge that she is not entirely a force of goodness and right as Season One to Three Buffy might have believed.

[26] Buffy’s role as Slayer has always marked her as an outcast from society, and the show is replete with references to her being a different kind of Slayer than the Watcher’s Council has ever been used to dealing with, thus making her an even further outcast from her own kind. However, this social ostracization is generally balanced for Buffy by her connections to her friends, the Scooby Gang. Yet in Season Six and Seven, the fissures between Buffy and her friends become more pronounced than ever before, with Buffy fighting (and losing to) Dark Willow (“Grave” 6.22); Buffy attempting to kill Xander’s ex-fiancé Anya (“Selfless” 7.5); Buffy ordering around her friends and the potentials (multiple episodes); and Buffy eventually being removed from her role as the leader of the Scooby Gang and kicked out of her house (“Empty Places” 7.19). More than ever before, Buffy is forced to be on her own, severing the connections to humanity that have always been her saving grace as the Slayer.

[27] Buffy’s relationship with Spike during the course of these seasons charts her complicated relationship with herself and the fractured personalities she must embrace. No longer is Buffy torn between the simple dichotomy of Buffy the girl vs. Buffy the Slayer; in addition, she must now reconcile Buffy pre-death, Buffy post-death, Buffy the monster, and Buffy the woman. This transition proves difficult for Buffy, whose loathing for Spike reflects her self-loathing of these new dimensions to her personality. Spike also in many ways embodies Buffy’s self-destructive behaviors, which she has felt too morally uncertain to overcome. This self-doubt can be seen symbolically in Spike’s attempted rape of Buffy; unlike the perpetual reminders of

Spike's monstrosity that occur throughout the series, this moment points to Spike's humanity, both in the nature of the crime itself (not a supernatural attack, no stylized violence, but something that can and does occur in everyday life) and in Spike's remorse for it (even as a vampire without a soul). This moment also notably shows us a demonstrably human Buffy, as she is in a weakened state due to an injury post-battle and cannot fight off Spike with her usual Slayer strength. The scene is unusual in the *Buffy* canon, since Buffy is generally shown as being at least equal to, if not much stronger than, her male lovers. After she finally manages to push Spike away, she lets him know in no uncertain terms that his behavior is unacceptable. In turn, this marks her self-recognition that her own behavior must change. She is fighting off not only Spike the physical being, but Spike as the embodiment of her self-destructive self.

[28] The return of Spike's soul runs parallel to the return of Buffy's sense of self and purpose. As such, Buffy's relationship with Spike shifts dramatically, not only because of the changes associated with Spike's soul, but because she no longer feels a need to punish herself, and thus their interactions no longer need to revolve around violent sex. Indeed, a relationship that has previously always been incredibly fraught and charged turns into one of mutual admiration and respect. Stevenson notes one such moment in episode 7.20 ("Touched"), in which "Spike and Buffy [are] together in bed, fully clothed, with Buffy sleeping gently in Spike's arms" (200). This scene is notable not only for its marked contrast to the other romantic encounters which occur juxtaposed with it in a montage—between Xander and Anya, Willow and Kennedy, and Faith and Robin, all highly sexual—but as a contrast to the graphic sexuality of Buffy's and Spike's previous relationship. Indeed, as Buffy becomes an outcast from her friends and family throughout the course of the season, Spike—her shadow and fellow-outcast—is the only one to never abandon her. As Wilcox notes, "His belief in her saves her when she has cut herself off from all others; her connection with him allows her to find herself, to be whole again" (89).

[29] With Spike so intimately connected to Buffy's sense of self, their final conversation, and her proclamation of love for him, takes on a new meaning. In Season Six, Spike repeatedly tries to coerce Buffy into

admitting that she loves him, only to be rebuffed repeatedly; when she finally does so at the end of Season Seven (“Chosen” 7.22), Spike no longer believes it, though fans and scholars have debated this point. In looking at this conversation through the lens of Spike as Buffy’s double, this proclamation seems sincere. Buffy’s sense of self is intimately entwined with her connection to Spike. Even before their romantic entanglement, when Buffy begins to lose a sense of herself, this loss is often addressed in comparison to Spike. For instance, when Jonathan casts a spell to make himself the hero of Sunnydale and Buffy his sidekick, Spike is one of the few characters to continue to single her out as a physical (and perhaps sexual) threat (“Superstar” 4.17). As Buffy herself notes in the episode “Lovers Walk,” “I can fool Giles, and I can fool my friends, but I can't fool myself. Or Spike, for some reason” (3.8, 00:41:13-24). Spike can often see the truth of Buffy better than her other friends, and sometimes even better than herself. Buffy does not claim that she has *always* loved Spike, because both he and the audience would know this was a lie, particularly because of Season Six, in which it became clear that Spike was intimately connected with Buffy’s dark, self-destructive tendencies. However, part of Season Seven’s journey for Buffy’s character arc is to reconcile all sides of herself, including the darkness. In telling Spike she loves him, she is also recognizing that she can love all of these aspects of herself, the good and the bad, the monster, the Slayer, and the girl.

Conclusion

[30] Spike has thus fulfilled his role as the vehicle for her Gothic fears, and leaves Buffy, just as her previous two lovers ultimately did. This time, however, no new paramour appears to take his place⁹. The last shot of Buffy shows her standing slightly in front of her friends, battle-worn, but smiling as she faces the future ahead of her. With its usual subversive spirit, *Buffy* chooses not to close with its heroine heading off to domestic bliss with her Gothic hero of choice. Buffy’s Gothic obstacles have all been conquered as she has at last been enabled to embrace all versions of herself, and so she no longer has need for a lover-as-shadow. Instead, for the first time, she will be able to experience

the world as a woman in full understanding of herself, her world, and her place in it—a truly formidable force to be reckoned with, and far more threatening to a patriarchal world than even the most Gothic of monsters.

Notes

¹ The term “shipping wars” refers to debates amongst fans regarding the romantic pairings/relationships (“ships”) of the characters within the text. Fans with differing opinions on these pairings may argue the merits of their respective ships (generally via online platforms), through discussion or through fan art (artwork, videos, fiction, and so forth).

² Editor’s note: On *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Gothic, see also Michelle Callendar, Claire Knowles, and Ananya Mukherjea, among others.

³ For example, Ellen Moers, one of the pioneers of the term, uses Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an example of the Female Gothic, which she reads as a metaphor for the horrors of childbirth and motherhood (92-93).

⁴ Such as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (e.g. with Jane and Bertha) or Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (e.g. with Cathy and Heathcliff).

⁵ Nurss’s “Spike as Shadow,” published online in 2001 in *Fists and Fangs*, is apparently no longer available, but is cited in Wilcox, among other places.

⁶ Spike does have other nicknames given to him as a vampire, such as William the Bloody, but this is not a separate entity from the persona of Spike. There are also references made to Spike as a human—William—and indeed Buffy eventually calls Spike “William” as more of his humanity begins to emerge, but again this does not suggest that he has taken on a completely new persona, such as is the case with Angel/Angelus.

⁷ It is perhaps worth noting that Buffy, like Angel and Spike, adopts a separate name to distinguish this “normal girl” personality from her supernatural identity as the Slayer; further, when she takes back her Slayer identity, she does so by first asserting that her name is once again “Buffy” (“Anne” 3.01—00:34:54-56).

⁸ It is during the Riley era that Dawn arrives on the scene and Joyce becomes sick with the illness that will eventually take her life.

⁹ At least in the context of the series, although the continuation of the story within the comics features Buffy pursuing new love interests.

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