

## Sex, Love and Sadomasochism: Buffy/Spike as a Queer Relationship

[1] Joss Whedon's hit television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS)* is known for its ability to create metaphors using fantasy elements and monsters. The Buffyverse "lends itself to polymorphously perverse subtext," says creator Joss Whedon (Jowett 13), and Buffy and Spike's relationship is one example of that dynamic. Through the play on identity, the use of the monster as a metaphor for the "other", and the sadomasochistic elements, their relationship parallels that of a queer relationship.

[2] Mary Alice Money defines how the 'other' functions in *BtVS* as "marginalized figures who are worthy of inclusion, the nonhumans who are people after all, the strangers who become us" (98). As a vampire who becomes a hero, Spike fits this definition well. Spike is introduced in the second season as a hyper masculine, violent, and reckless villain. Spike's character is developed extensively over the next few seasons until he is more than simply masculine or a feminine, his "gender is hybridized—simultaneously coded both masculine and feminine" (Amy-Chinn 314). Through his otherness, Spike crosses established boundaries of masculine/feminine and hero/villain. It is also through his otherness that he can be seen as a queer character.

[3] Dee Amy-Chinn describes Spike's status as a queer character by placing emphasis not on the fact that he is a vampire, "but because of the way that he transgresses the boundaries of the acceptable gender and sexual behavior" (Amy-Chinn 314). For Amy-Chinn, Spike's queerness comes from his behavior and personality rather than being undead, but vampires have often been used to represent the "other." Terry L. Spaise, in

his essay “Necrophilia and SM: The Deviant Side of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*”, describes vampires as “[reflecting] the angst of not fitting in and the desire to be unconventional, powerful, and in control” (746). Therefore, to read Spike as a queer character, none of his traits can be ignored. Amy-Chinn’s reading of his personality and behavior can be paired with his status as a vampire and Spike becomes the kind of supernatural metaphor Joss Whedon is known for.

[4] It is Spike’s personality that makes him a character that defies convention and plays with the idea of gender. The combination of personality and being a vampire creates the code for a queer identity. Amy-Chinn writes, “the possibilities offered by challenging binary constructions of gender are articulated most completely through... Spike” (281). Amy-Chinn’s reading is limited to Spike’s character as one who challenges cultural norms but her reading can be expanded to include Buffy. If Spike’s personality makes him a character that defies gender norms then, by being placed in a relationship with Buffy, her character takes on the same reading. By reading both characters as challenging cultural norms they are cast as the “other” and their relationship can be read as a queer relationship.

[5] Queerness is one way of being an “other.” Although Spike and Buffy appear on the surface to be a straight pairing, their relationship, like most things in *BtVS*, is more complicated. Joss Whedon created the character of Buffy Summers to defy the stereotype of the helpless blonde female featured in so many horror films. Whedon wanted to create a character that was female but not helpless, someone who was a hero and a warrior

rather than a victim. Just as Buffy was created to defy a stereotype, Spike's character crosses many boundaries and together they "[act] out erotic desire in a manner that undermines heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine binaries" (Amy-Chinn 281).

[6] "[Buffy] needs a little monster in her man," says Spike to Riley (*Into the Woods* B5010). Riley is portrayed as the "normal" boyfriend in opposition to Spike who "blurs boundaries between good and bad, "masculine" and "feminine", hetero- and homosexual, man and monster" (Jowett 158). When Spike says that Buffy "needs a little monster in her man" he is implying that Riley is lacking the otherness and queerness that Spike possesses. During the fifth season, the series shows viewers the first signs that Buffy is fighting the growing tension between herself and Spike. In comparison to Buffy's denial, Spike accepts his feelings for Buffy quickly and easily. Through a series of dreams and fantasies, Spike comes to face the unconscious desire and love he is developing for Buffy. If Spike is our out and proud character, then Buffy is in the closet.

[7] Buffy questions the truth of Spike's emotional confession because she still sees him as a monster and cannot believe that he is capable of love. Spike's attempts to prove his love means nothing to Buffy, but shows the audience his vulnerability. The truth behind his feelings is seen at the end of the fifth season. Buffy has sacrificed herself to keep the world from ending and we see a shot of the Scoobies gathered around her body. They all look tired and injured, both from the fight they were just in as well as the shock of Buffy's death. Spike's reaction to Buffy's death is the most powerful because it answers

the question of the truth of his feelings for her. Spike, who prides himself on his edge and calls himself “the big bad”, falls to the ground and cries at the sight of Buffy’s dead body.

[8] The sixth season is when the metaphor of the vampire or monster as outcast/ queer is explored most overtly and given more depth, because Buffy’s death and resurrection have placed her in the same othered space as Spike. Buffy believes that she was in a kind of heaven before Willow’s spell brings her back to life. Buffy does not tell her friends or family about her experiences or feelings of detachment, she chooses to talk to Spike instead. “She confides her secret because she feels closer to the dead than she does to the living; unconsciously she knows that he has experienced death himself and can identify with her feelings and what it means to be reanimated” (Spaise 756). Not only can Spike identify with death he can identify with feeling like an outcast.

[9] Buffy’s identification with Spike is something that bothers Buffy. She reminds him every chance she gets that he is a monster. It is as if she is trying to remind herself that there is a difference between them so that she can continue to deny their connection and her feelings for him. Buffy’s fear in season six is that she does not have a place in her world anymore, that, as a result of her resurrection, she has lost some of her humanity. This fear parallels the fear that someone who is gay might feel as they are coming to terms with feelings they do not want and do not understand. Buffy fears that she is not the person her friends and family expect her to be and that, if they knew the truth, they would abandon her.

[10] Buffy understands Spike as a monster and, therefore, as an outcast and because she feels like an outcast she fears that she is also a monster. *Smashed* (B6009) opens with Buffy patrolling, a very normal thing for her to do. After her resurrection, Buffy tries her best to go back to her old life and to deny any feelings that would place her as the “other”. Buffy is fighting two muggers in an alley when Spike comes to help. The attackers are human, so when Spike hits them it activates the chip in his head. Buffy tries to stop him before this happens, knowing that hitting the men will hurt him. Her protective instincts are very brief and once the two attackers are gone she goes back to being annoyed with him.

[11] After one of their typical exchanges, Spike says “It’s only a matter of time before you realize I’m the only one here for you, pet. You got no one else,” as Buffy walks away (*Smashed*). This line sets up the rest of the episode, which plays on Buffy’s contradictory fears that she is alone and that there might be a connection between Spike and herself. The next time they meet Buffy points out, “You really seem awfully fixated on a couple of kisses, Spike.” Spike replies, “And you seem awfully quick to forget about ‘em.” The conversation continues with Buffy explaining her motivation for kissing Spike, she tells him that he has to “let it go.” Spike gives her a smug smile as asks, “Did it work? You convince yourself?” Spike’s comments draw attention to Buffy’s denial.

[12] Instead of answering the question, Buffy asks Spike to “please stop,” her response sounds pleading, as if Spike is coming too close to the truth and she can no longer defend herself against him. Spike does not back down. Seeing Buffy’s hesitation, Spike says “a

man can change.” Buffy’s automatic response is “you’re not a man. You’re a thing.”

Buffy’s response is a common manifestation of her denial; she cannot accept how she truly feels when Spike questions her so she responds by projecting her fear onto Spike (*Smashed*).

[13] We see this denial again when Buffy turns to walk away from Spike: he tries to stop her and she hits him. Spike hits her back despite the threat of pain from the behavior modification chip in his head. When it doesn’t go off, Spike pauses in shock, allowing Buffy the chance to hit him again. Spike falls to his knees and Buffy says “you’re a thing. An evil, disgusting thing” and walks away (*Smashed*). Buffy’s last words are a repetition of her tendency to call Spike a monster. This moment reinforces her fear of becoming the “other” and shows the connection between her and Spike.

[14] Spike, believing that the chip is malfunctioning, immediately goes in search of a victim. He corners a girl in an alley, but he doesn’t try to bite her right away. Instead he talks about Buffy, the most telling part of his speech is when he says “Just ‘cause she’s confused about where she fits in, I’m supposed to be too? Cause I’m not. I know what I am” (*Smashed*). In this moment Spike shows his acceptance of his role as outcast as well as Buffy’s denial of her own place as outcast. Buffy’s confusion is based on the fear that she is not human. She believes that there is something wrong with her because of her feelings for Spike. This parallels the fear and confusion someone might feel when they realize they are attracted to someone of the same sex. Someone who is gay may feel like their attraction is wrong just as Buffy feels her attraction to Spike is wrong.

[15] After his speech Spike tries to bite the woman and the chip activates, sending Spike looking for answers. After realizing the chip functions normally, Spike says, “it’s about the rules having changed. Everything’s different now. Nothing wrong with me. Something wrong with her” (*Smashed*). This line recontextualizes Spike’s position as an outcast. There is nothing wrong with Spike because he has accepted his identity in a way that Buffy cannot.

[16] When the chip fails to hurt Spike, a space for Spike and Buffy’s sexual relationship is opened up. He soon goes in search of her. The next scene we get is of Buffy, Xander and Anya doing research in the magic shop. They are sitting around the table and the conversation turns to Willow’s recent use of magic and the fear that it is becoming out of control:

Xander: It’s gotta be seductive just giving in to it going totally wild.

Buffy: We can’t assume that everybody’s getting seduced. You know, sometimes- (Buffy is interrupted by the phone ringing, it doesn’t take long for her to realize it’s Spike telling her to meet him in one hour)

Buffy: Spike?

Spike: Bloody Hell. Yes, it’s me.

Buffy: You’re calling me on the phone?

Spike: Just be there.

Buffy: Why? Are you helping again? You have a lead on this frost monster thingie?

Spike: Something like that, yeah. Thought you might be up for a little grunt work.

Buffy: What? No. No-no grunting.

Spike: I was talking shop, love but if you got other ideas, you, me, cozy little tomb with a view—(Buffy hangs up on him)

Xander: So what did Captain Peroxide want?

Buffy: Nothing. He just, you know, wanted to see if I—I wanted to patrol for the- the monster. But I-I told him that I... would not (*Smashed*).

Buffy agrees that Willow's use of magic may be becoming a problem but when Xander talks about seduction Buffy looks guilty and shifts uncomfortably in her chair. She identifies with Willow when Xander talks about magic as if it were sex, implying that there is something wrong with the change in Willow's behavior. Buffy is trying to keep her relationship with Spike about work; he has helped fight evil in the past. His role as a fighter is one that Buffy knows her friends understand and have accepted so when she asks if he is helping again, loud enough to be sure her friends can hear, she is trying to justify her interaction with Spike. She fears that if they knew that, like Willow, she was being seduced, they would turn on her. Immediately Buffy looks uncomfortable when Spike asks if she would "be up for a little grunt work." At this point Buffy glances at her friends as if she is worried they can hear and lowers her voice when she replies. At the end of their conversation a terrified look Buffy hangs up on him and can not keep the guilt out of her exaggerated answer to Xander's question.

[17] When Buffy does not meet Spike, he goes to her as she is leaving the Magic Box. Their exchange takes place in an alley and it shows both Buffy's fears as well as Spike ability to understand those fears:

Spike: I'm just saying things might be a little different. You oughta be careful.

Buffy: Enough. (Spike stand in front of her, blocking her path) Get out of my way.

Spike: Or what? (Buffy shrugs and punches him, he punches her back) Oh, the pain, the pain...is gone. Guess what I just found out?

Buffy: How?

Spike: Don't you get it? Don't you see? You came back wrong.

Buffy: It's a trick. You did something to the chip, it's a trick.

Spike: It's no trick. It's not me, it's you. Just you in fact, that's the funny part (Spike punches her) cause you're the one that's changed...Came back a little less human than you were.

Buffy: You're wrong.

Spike: Then how come you're so spooked, luv? (*Smashed*)

Ever since her resurrection, Buffy has felt like something was wrong with her, due in large part of her feelings for Spike. Spike may not believe that being the "other" is a bad thing, but he knows that it is Buffy's fear. Spike plays on Buffy's fear that she has lost some of her humanity. Based on Spike's own position as outcast, he is able to understand and voice Buffy's fears. He tells her all the things she is afraid are true as a way of

forcing her to face it rather than ignore it. He can see how much it is hurting Buffy to living with feelings she doesn't understand, like someone who is gay and in such deep denial that the strain is causing them emotional harm.

[18] As the fight moves from the alley to a nearby condemned house, they both draw on the other's fears that reflect their own. Spike says "Oh, poor, little, lost girl. She doesn't fit in anywhere. She's got no one to love" (*Smashed*). Buffy retaliates by saying, "Me? I'm lost? Look at you, you idiot. Poor Spikey. Can't be a human, can't be a vampire. Where the hell do you fit in?" These lines show their underlying connection as outsiders and their emotional insight into the other. Later in their fight, Spike says, "Hello. Vampire. I'm supposed to be treading on the dark side. What's your excuse?" Spike uses Buffy's argument against her; he has accepted that identity, but Buffy is too afraid. Spike's love for Buffy has begun to ennoble him, so that his place as outsider is an asset rather than the source of emotional pain it is for Buffy. Buffy's inability to accept certain aspects of herself parallels the identity crisis someone who is gay might go through. This is not the first time Buffy has denied that parts of herself she considers tainted or dark; she is always arguing that she is "just a girl" (*The Gift* B5022).

[19] Buffy can't accept her feelings for Spike because it would mean that she is accepting a queer identity in ways that she (and viewers) never faced in her relationship with Angel. Buffy is afraid that she will be less than she is. Her projection of her anger, pain, and fear of being queer for wanting her men to be monsters, suggests a similar psychological dynamic to someone who finds themselves attracted to someone of the same sex and

cannot accept their feelings because they would have to admit to themselves that their sexual identity was more complicated than they had believed. After Buffy has thrown him into a wall, Spike, with Buffy pressed very close to him, says “afraid to give me the chance? You afraid I’m gonna....” Buffy’s passionate kiss stops him from saying any more. The timing changes the connotation of Spike’s question to being more about giving him the chance to show Buffy that her feelings are not wrong. Buffy kissing him is her first step to admitting her own identity as an outcast, an other, queer. The episode ends with Buffy and Spike having sex, pulling the house down around them in the process. This act, when combined with Willow’s relationship with Tara, definitively moves the series outside the heteronormative assumptions that positioned their relationships with Angel and Oz as exceptions.

[20] The next morning Buffy is disgusted with herself and what she did. She threatens to kill Spike if he tells anyone what happened... but she keeps going back to him. By *Dead Things* (B6013), their sexual relationship has become a regular occurrence and their interactions reflects a level of comfort. This comfort has been seen in other episodes in which Buffy has let her guard down and allowed herself to relax around Spike. The episode opens with the camera panning through the destruction their sexual relations have caused and finally showing them, obviously naked, under a rug on the floor:

Buffy: We missed the bed again.

Spike: Lucky for the bed.

Buffy: Is this a new rug?

Spike: No. Just looks different when you’re under it. (chuckles)

Buffy: (laughs at Spike's joke) You know, this place is okay for a hole in the ground. You fixed it up.

Spike: Well, I ate a decorator once. Maybe something stuck.

Buffy: I've been thinking about doing something to my room.

Spike: Yeah (he smiles and leans closer to listen)

Buffy: Yeah I think the New Kids on the Block posters are starting to date me.

Spike: (chuckles) Well, if you want, I can—(stops and looks at Buffy) Are we having a conversation?

Buffy: What? No. No. Maybe.

Spike. Hmm.

Buffy: What?

Spike: Well isn't this usually the part where you kick me in the head and run out, virtue fluttering?

Spike's face shows surprise and pleasure at realizing they're having a conversation that suggests a relationship. Although Buffy tries to deny the fact, she cannot ignore the way their interactions have changed. This conversation shows that Buffy has begun to accept how she feels about Spike and in this moment is it not just about sex. They are just talking, rather than fighting or trying to play mind games. Spike draws attention to the fact that Buffy is treating him more like a person rather than the monster she once so adamantly labeled him.

[21] Their moment is destroyed when Spike says “the way you make it hurt in all the wrong places. I’ve never been with such an animal,” causing Buffy to flinch away from him, a look of disgust on her face, Buffy replies, “I’m not an animal.” Although they are having sex, Buffy still fears that transgressing the boundaries of traditional sexual and gender behavior makes her less than human, so she tries to reestablish the boundaries between them by starting to leave. At this point, Spike questions Buffy about their relationship:

Spike: What is this to you—this thing we have?

Buffy: We don’t have a *thing*. We have “this”. That’s all.

Spike: Do you even like me?

Buffy: Sometimes

Spike: But you like what I do to you. (Spike pulls out a pair of handcuffs)

Do you trust me?

Buffy: Never. (*Dead Things*)

Her lack of trust stems from her own fears. Buffy cannot trust Spike because she cannot trust her own feelings. She cannot admit that her feelings are real because she believes that it makes her a monster. She has yet to figure out how she will understand what it means to be a monster, be an other, or be queer.

[22] The main plot of “Dead Things” centers on Buffy’s belief that she accidentally killed a human girl while fighting demons. She does not know that she was set up by the Trio. She fears that, by killing a human girl, it proves that she came back wrong. It seems as if

Buffy is trying to make up for her moment of weakness with Spike by turning herself into the police for the murder she believes she committed. Spike stops her outside of the police station and tries to keep her from turning herself in. Buffy tries to reason with Spike, begging him to let her go but he refuses, once again telling Buffy that he loves her. Buffy's reaction to Spike is both violent and very telling.

[23] She projects her self-hatred onto him, hitting him repeatedly. Spike's reaction shows he understands that it is not just about the girl but about Buffy's fear of her own identity, saying, "That's it. Put it on me. Put it all on me. That's my girl." Spike seems to know exactly what to say to get Buffy to react, and she screams "I am not your girl! ... You don't have a soul! There is nothing good or clean in you! You are dead inside! You can't feel anything real. I could never be your girl!" She only stops hitting Spike when he is covered in blood and bruises. She looks horrified at what she has done. After letting Buffy beat him, Spike says, "You always hurt the ones you love, pet." This line plays on the idea that Buffy's actions are not motivated by her hatred of Spike but her self-hatred, which is motivated by her fear of her own identity.

[24] *Dead Things* ends with Buffy confessing to Tara about her relationship with Spike. It begins when Tara tells Buffy that she didn't come back wrong, that the spell "altered [her] on a basic, molecular level... probably just enough to confuse the sensors or whatever in Spike's chip" but as Tara explains "it's all just surfacey, physical stuff. It wouldn't have any more effect than a bad sunburn." Buffy cannot accept that there is nothing wrong with her. Insisting that there must be something, Buffy says, "this can't be

me. It isn't me. Why do I feel like this? Why do I let Spike do those things to me?" Buffy says this line almost to herself, tears in her eyes and when Tara asks "You mean hit you?" Buffy cannot look at her. She cannot admit that she is having sex with Spike, saying instead, "He's everything I hate. He's everything that I'm supposed to be against...but the only time that I ever feel anything is when..." She trails off unable to finish her sentence and begs Tara not to tell anyone. Confessing to Tara is a form of "coming out." Buffy can only see the monstrous side of Spike because she can only see the negative side of herself. Tara can see past the surface appearances that are the source of Buffy's fears. When Tara asks Buffy if she loves Spike, Buffy does not answer. Tara tells her it's okay to admit how she feels, whether she loves him or not. Buffy does not admit that she loves Spike but she cannot admit that she is using him either, prompting Tara to point out that the situation is more complicated than Buffy loving or not loving Spike.

[25] When Buffy begs Tara not to say anything to anyone Tara says, "I won't tell anyone. I wouldn't do that", the underlining message of Tara's promise is that Tara can see the parallel between Buffy's situation and her own position as a lesbian and a witch. In response to Tara's understanding Buffy breaks down saying "It's wrong. I'm wrong. Tell me that I'm wrong, please." When Buffy says "It's wrong" it could be interpreted as her using Spike is wrong, but she also says "I'm wrong", which means this line could be interpreted as meaning she sees her feelings for Spike as wrong and the only way she would feel that way is if there is something wrong with her. The source of her anxiety over her relationship with Spike is not about the truth of her feelings for him but how those feelings affect her identity.

[26] Buffy's breakdown to Tara does not end her relationship with Spike; if anything it continues the evolution of it, and she slowly accepts that she has feelings for him.

Although she cannot admit that she loves him, she cannot deny that she feels *something* for him. Spike remains a part of Buffy's life even after their sexual relationship ends.

This shows that their connection and Buffy's feelings for Spike are more than just sexual.

If their connection was just about Buffy using Spike for sex, or as a way of coping with her emotional turmoil, then he would have disappeared from her life after their sexual relationship ended. If anything they become more intimate, like their conversation under the rug in Spike's crypt at the beginning of *Dead Things*.

[27] As the seventh season draws to a close, we see the evolution of Buffy and Spike's relationship also drawing to a close. Spike had always been the monster, the outsider. His acceptance of this status made him the openly queer character, but that changes briefly in the seventh season. Spike goes in search of his soul, trying to be the kind of man he believes Buffy deserves. He no longer wears his signature long black coat, which symbolizes the loss of a part of his identity. (Notably, Buffy insists mid-season that he go back to wearing it.) With the final battle getting closer, Buffy's inability to connect with people forces Buffy to leave her friends, family, and home behind. She wanders through an almost deserted Sunnydale, ending up in an empty house. Spike finds her there and they share a moment of intimacy. When Spike goes to find Buffy, he is once again wearing his long leather coat, tight black t-shirt and dark jeans. His costuming suggests that he has returned to his role as a queer character and it lends a queer significance to the

intimate scene between him and Buffy. Buffy and Spike discusses their relationship and Buffy's fear that she cannot connect to anyone:

Buffy: People are always trying to connect to me. And I just... slip away.

You should know.

Spike: I seem to recall a certain amount of connecting.

Buffy: Oh please, we were never close. You just wanted me because I was...unattainable. (*Touched* B7020)

Angered by Buffy's claim that Spike's feelings were driven by Buffy's distance and not real love Spike says to her:

I'm not asking you for anything. When I say I love you, it's not because I want you. Or because I can't have you. It has nothing to do with me. I love what you *are*. What you do. How you try. I've seen your kindness, and your strength. I've seen the best and the worst of you. And I understand, with perfect clarity, exactly what you are. You're a *hell* of a woman.

You're the one, Buffy."

After this speech Spike goes to leave, but Buffy stops him saying, "Could you...stay here? Will you just hold me?" Spike and Buffy share a bed all night without having sex. Their moment of emotional intimacy is paired with the other couples of the show having sex. For the other characters, the act of sex makes their moments intimate, but, for Spike and Buffy, the physical and emotional connection is not just about sex anymore. Their relationship has evolved and Buffy finally asked for something she needs more than sex. This evolution mimics the evolution of a real queer relationship. Buffy has to accept her identity as an outsider before she can accept the connection she feels for Spike. By asking

Spike to stay with her and comfort her on a real emotional level Buffy finally steps out of the closet. She is no longer punishing herself for what she feels but she is embracing that connection in a moment of intimacy.

[28] The relationship between Buffy and Spike is marginalized by the otherness of both Buffy and Spike's characterization and, as a result, their relationship can be read as a queer relationship. Elana Levine states "the word "queer" more appropriately describes the kinds of transgressive fantasy spaces *Buffy* opens up, since the term encompasses a variety of non-normative sexual activities, from homoeroticism...to sadomasochism" and it is the non-normative sexual activities involved in sadomasochism that further turn Buffy and Spike's relationship into a queer relationship (Levine, 118). Their relationship is one based on violence. In the beginning, it was the rivalry of Slayer versus vampire, and this violence does not disappear as their connection changes over the seasons. The violence is part of their connection. As a non-normative couple, their sex also occupies a space outside the norm.

[29] The episode *Fool for Love* (B5007) shows the beginnings of the sadomasochistic elements of their relationship by pairing both sex and violence in their interactions. Buffy is injured by a vampire she is fighting and she begins to contemplate her own death. Buffy knows that "every Slayer comes with an expiration mark on the package" and in a desperate attempt to understand how her predecessors lost their last battle she turns Spike for the answers. Spike killed two Slayers in his past, one in China during the Boxer Rebellion and one in New York. Spike gladly tells Buffy the story, starting with him

becoming a vampire all the way to 1977 when he killed a Slayer named Nikki in New York.

[30] It is clear from the way Spike tells the story of how he killed the Slayer in China that he gets off on it. When a disgusted Buffy points this out, Spike's reply is "I suppose you're telling me you don't?" (*Fool for Love*). While telling Buffy the story of Nikki, the two of them end up in the alley outside the Bronze. Spike demonstrates the movements of his fight with Nikki as he tells the story. When describing Nikki, Spike says "she had a touch of your style. She was cunning, resourceful... oh, did I mention? Hot. I could have danced all night with that one." When Buffy asks, "You think we're dancing?" Spike replies "That's all we've ever done."

[31] Both of these exchanges show the thread of sex that runs through Spike's story and it creates the sexual tension between the two characters. The question of Buffy's sexual desire for Spike becomes more obvious at the end of this episode. Spike tells Buffy that the real reason the Slayers lost was because every Slayer has a death wish, even Buffy. Spike tells her "you're gonna want it" and although they are talking about death is it easy to interpret this exchange as sexual. Spike continues talking about Buffy's death by saying "And the second—the second—that happens... I'll slip in... have myself a real good day." ("Fool for Love"). Like many of their interactions, on the surface these lines are about violence or death but they are also about sex and their growing sexual tension.

[32] Spike ends his story with the comment “just wonder if you’ll like it as much as she did.” The obvious sexual undertone of this line prompts a disgusted Buffy to tell Spike to leave. Spike continues to goad Buffy, trying to get her to hit him by saying things like “One good swing. You know you want to” and “Give it me good, Buffy. Do it!” When Buffy won’t retaliate with violence, Spike leans in to kiss her, a movement that also resembles a vampire leaning in close to bite a victim. The similarity of these movements is not lost on Buffy, who looks confused and horrified as she pulls away from him and asks, “What the hell are you doing?” Spike grabs Buffy by the shoulders and says “Come on. I can feel it, Slayer. You know you want to dance.” This line, like when Spike leans in to Buffy, takes on the dual interpretation of sex and violence. The word “dance” could mean either, and in this case it means both.

[33] Buffy’s reply to Spike is “Say it’s true. Say I do want to.” On the surface, this line is about wanting to die, but it is also about sex. The statement opens up the possibility that she desires Spike, a desire that she feels is wrong. So, although the desire might be there Buffy’s fear keeps her from admitting in any real way, in the same way someone in the closet might half admit desires they cannot yet accept. Buffy tries to deny some of the power of her previous statement by telling Spike, “It wouldn’t be you, Spike. It would never be you.” In this line, we see the Buffy’s denial; she becomes the closeted one in the relationship. Buffy feels the need to make it more than clear that she would never choose Spike, that Spike is a monster and because of that he is “beneath her” (*Fool for Love*).

[34] The dual tension of sex and violence is seen more and more in their interaction as the season goes. At the same time, their violent and sexual tension is building they are also beginning to trust each other more. The combination of violence, sex and growing trust parallels elements of sadomasochism. Sadomasochism is about sex and pain, but it is centrally about trusting another person. All three elements are seen in *Fool for Love* and their presence aids a queer reading of this relationship. Although their interactions go back and forth between Buffy and Spike working together and Buffy hating his very presence, these sadomasochist elements never leave their interactions.

[35] Spike and Buffy's sex is rough, leaving both of them with the marks to prove it as well as damaging the physical space around them. For example, when they first have sex in *Smashed*, they break walls and crash through the floor. In the first scene of *Dead Things*, before the camera shows them under the rug, it pans through Spike's crypt, showing broken furniture and off camera the audience can hear moans and the crash of breaking furniture. This scene further establishes the idea of sadomasochism when Spike pulls out a pair of handcuffs. "While these scenes are heterosexual," because they are between a man and a woman, "they are not heteronormative" because of the sadomasochistic elements (McCracken 127). Sadomasochism is a sexual practice that is considered outside of the norm and its presence in Buffy and Spike's relationship, while seeming totally normal for their characters, places their relationship in a queer space.

[36] The evolution of their queer relationship ends with the last episode when Buffy finally tells Spike that she loves him. She tells him as he is sacrificing himself to save the

world. This last scene holds all the elements of their queer relationship. There is fire and destruction all around them, but they are alone in their moment. Buffy takes Spike's hand as he burns, flames engulfing their intertwined hands. There is both pleasure and pain in this moment, like the sadomasochistic elements of their relationship. Buffy has accepted her feelings and can now say it out loud. They are both outsiders: Spike as self-sacrificing vampire and Buffy as the Slayer who defied the rules and shared her power. Their connection is clear and Buffy stays with him until that last minute. This moment symbolizes the sexual aspect of their relationship through the shared moments of pleasure and pain and it also symbolizes the evolution of their queer relationship when Buffy finally admits that she loves Spike and moves from closeted to openly queer.

[37] On the surface, the relationship between Buffy and Spike appears to be a straight pairing but their relationship, like their characters, are anything but hetero-normative and this places their relationship in a queer space. As characters they both occupy the space of the other: Spike accepts his role as the other and becomes the openly queer character, while Buffy struggles with her identity the way a closeted gay would struggle with feelings they cannot accept. Buffy's slow acceptance of her identity allows her to move from a space of self-hatred and fear to a space of self-acceptance, which allows her to admit her feelings for Spike rather than punishing herself for those feelings. All of the elements of their relationship from their position as other, to the sadomasochism, to Buffy's self-hatred and eventual acceptance play into the reading of their relationship as a queer relationship.

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