

**Harmony: The Lonely Life of a
Modern Woman**

Editors' note: This is the third of three parts of Gert Magnusson's discussion of vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Part one appeared in the preceding issue of *Slayage*; part two appears in this issue.

[1] Vampires are not just monsters; there is a link between them and us because they once were us. Elsewhere I have argued that the anonymous vampires in the Buffyverse stand far from humans, and that they could well be regarded as a different species, while at least Angelus and Spike of the well-known vampires often can be mistaken for humans, though they also may be said to represent ideal types that humans never personify.¹ In this essay I make the point that humans and vampires, despite all differences, have some common features. A demon may have claimed the body but it will never escape the memories of what it was to be human, and once in a while, even if it happens very rarely, may wish that human self back.

[2] One of the most consistent statements among vampires is that they are happy with their condition. This has been a recurring theme starting as early as Xander's best friend Jesse in the first episode. Xander is devastated to see that Jesse has become a vampire, but Jesse assure him that he feels good, strong, and connected to everything.² The same assurances meet Buffy and Angel whenever they confront a newborn vampire and express their regrets as to the transformation. The answer is always that it's nothing to be sorry for; on the contrary, the vampires feel more alive than they ever did during their real life. They have been given something extra by becoming vampires (they have a point; the alternative would be to be dead). In short, vampires want to remain vampires.³ (Within parenthesis the addendum has to be made that the presence of a soul changes the situation completely. Angel longs to become human sometime in the future, Angelus definitely doesn't.)⁴ But apart from vampires with a soul, vampires enjoy being vampires. This rule has one exception: Harmony.⁵

[3] Harmony is a most peculiar vampire.⁶ Before she became a vampire, life was a song, she was popular, she belonged to the in crowd of the high school (the Cordettes, the group that surrounded Cordelia), and she had loads of buddies who did anything to be in her radiance. Then comes graduation day and in the blink of an eye, or rather, the sinking of a tooth, everything changes.⁷ No friends to hang with, no place to call home. It is easy to imagine her view on being forced to live in crypts bereft of all traces of modern comfort.⁸ She tries to adapt to her new circumstances and when she and Spike becomes an item, life seem not too bad for a while. He appears to be a catch, and she may have been happy at the start of their relationship. But as the egoist Spike is, he doesn't care one bit about her but treats her like garbage as soon as he has had sex with her. It takes her a while, but kudos to her for breaking up with him.⁹ But I rush ahead; let's linger a bit in season four. During her time with Spike (and probably even before that), she has learned a bit about what it means to be a vampire. Now that she is standing on her own two feet, she has to do something for herself. To be a vampire entails of course to be evil, to kill people, drink their blood and all other stuff that comes with her new status.¹⁰ But even an evil creature may long for fulfilment, and in an undertaking similar to a *Women Can* project she creates her own band of minions.¹¹ Unfortunately, she has no idea how to run such a scheme, and it all comes to a disastrous end. As Buffy concisely puts it:

Harmony, when you tried to be head cheerleader, you were bad. When you tried to chair the homecoming committee, you were really bad. But when you try to be bad... you suck.¹²

In the last statement we have an excellent clue as to what has become of Harmony after graduation. She's not suited for a life as a vampire, and she knows it.¹³ All the things that Harmony longs for are things not bound to being a vampire: to go to France and go shopping, to sit and gossip with other girls, to be an independent and modern woman. As a vampire she has no friends at all, no other female vampire to chat with—she's all alone. No wonder she says: "Being a vampire sucks."¹⁴ The difference between her and other vampires is that her preferences haven't changed because she's developed fangs, but her opportunities of living a full and worthy life have almost been quenched.

[4] With her life with Spike behind her, Harmony makes her way to Los Angeles. The only one she knows there is Cordelia, her best friend from the past, and of course she pays her a visit as soon as she arrives. Now, one would assume that an evil vampire without friends wouldn't hesitate to make herself a vampire friend, but she doesn't.¹⁵ Instead she fights every urge to harm Cordelia and in spite of hunger almost succeeds in letting her be. That something isn't right with Harmony is soon clear to Cordelia, but she misinterprets the situation. When she at last learns the truth, there is however no fight to the death but their friendship remains intact, and when Wesley and Angel come to the "rescue," Harmony is occupied painting Cordy's toenails. Angel warns Cordelia and tells her that Harmony is going to turn against her, and he is correct. Harmony soon chooses to try the vampire life one more time and tricks the others into a trap. When everything has gone to pieces and Harmony has survived only thanks to Cordelia's hesitation to kill her, she still wonders if they will remain friends. Harmony doesn't quite grasp the seriousness of her actions.¹⁶

[5] When we next meet Harmony she has, at least to a degree, got a hold on her life. She has taken an office course and gets handpicked to become Angel's secretary (or rather assistant, as she calls herself), i.e. secretary to the most powerful man at Wolfram & Hart—not bad for a not-too-bright vampire. She still has no friends. Angel doesn't seem to share any warm feelings toward her and threatens to kill her the first time they meet. To Wesley, Gunn, and Fred she doesn't even register on the radar screen.¹⁷ The exception is Lorne, who is as warm towards her as he is to everyone else. Spike too doesn't give her a single thought, except when he finally turns corporeal again after living as a sort of ghost for too long and sleeps with her first thing.¹⁸ And she doesn't have it any easier with her co-workers. Despite the fact that she as the boss's secretary is top ranked among them, she is as despised as she was among the vampires in Sunnydale. When she at last gets some recognition it is out of jealousy (as Spike points out, it does prove that she mattered to someone).¹⁹

[6] What's remarkable about her situation is clearly shown when she makes her excuses to Angel because of the mess she made when she had her showdown with the vampire who tried to take her place within the company. She tells him that everything is hard and that it is extra hard because she doesn't have a soul. This statement gives cause for thought. Here we have a vampire without a soul (i.e. without a moral compass) who struggles to blend in in a difficult environment. She does her job (with some screw-ups, that's true, but that hardly has anything to do with her being a vampire); she follows the rule not to drink human blood and instead she drinks pig's blood although she thinks it tastes bad (though a smidge of otter makes it quite nice); and again she tries to do what she can to live her life as an independent woman.²⁰

[7] Let's compare this picture of a soulless vampire with what characterizes Angel and Spike. When he has his chip buried deep into his brain, Spike is, despite still being somewhat evil, not dangerous.²¹ Physically he is less of a threat to humans than Harmony. Nevertheless, it is clear that if Spike were to lose his chip in seasons four and parts of five of *Buffy* he would have been the same person as before he got his chip. Love then alters the whole scenario and we may not know with any certainty what might have happened had he become himself again at the end of season five, when his newfound love was not just a novelty but was firmly grounded. Perhaps he would have ended them all if he hadn't been stopped, but on the other hand, maybe not—love is strong. When he gets his soul, other rules apply, and he manages in season seven to control himself without a chip. If we turn to Angel the difference becomes even clearer. Angel without a soul equals Angelus (try to picture Angelus as an office clerk at Wolfram

& Hart). It is obvious that Angelus is evil, mega evil. As soon as Angel loses his soul, hell breaks loose.

[8] Harmony doesn't have a soul but may in comparison to other evil creatures in the Buffyverse (vampires, demons, and humans) with a pun be characterized as rather harmless. She is something as unusual as a vampire who wishes she had never got bitten.²² Those who like to think in metaphors may see Harmony as a woman thinking back on a rather miserable life. High school was, just as she says, the golden years; after that followed failed relationships and an unsuccessful career; and ultimately she has to settle for a lonely job with a grumpy boss who doesn't value her (neither as a person nor for her work), colleagues who hate her, and no one to come home to at night. On top of that, she gets fired (though she's lucky to be able to leave before the company goes bankrupt). There are probably many who would recognize parts of their life in hers. What makes Harmony stand out in the Buffyverse is that she isn't a strong woman; instead, she can be described as an uncharacteristic creation by Whedon. All other women he has made are strong in one way or another. If they aren't slayers they are witches, former demons, a blob of green light, a hell god, owner of a gallery, college graduates, a brilliant scientist, have an impressive career (lawyer), are a former higher being, or mighty vampires. All these women are in addition to their external occupations strong as persons; they are all highly intelligent, have a strong will, and wouldn't dream of letting anyone treat them like dirt, and if nothing else, they have each other. Harmony isn't like that. She becomes a vampire but it isn't her vampire strength that defines her, on the contrary, it seems to make her weaker. She isn't smart, she hasn't got any skills, she has no friends, and she can't stop others from treating her badly.²³

[9] But she tries. All the time, she tries to live her own life.²⁴ This, of course, doesn't mean that she is good. That she betrays everyone to the Senior Partners is no surprise.²⁵ She is evil, but she is an evil creature who fights her innate evil every day. Sometimes she succeeds, sometimes her urges take over. In that respect she most of all resembles a human.²⁶ As a vampire she is unique.

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Notes

¹ See my essays "Being a Vampire Sucks: Regarding the Anonymous Vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," *Slayage* 9.1, and "Are Vampires Evil?: Angelus and Spike as the Immoral and the Amoral" in this issue.

² *Buffy* "The Harvest" 1.2.

³ See Jesse in "The Harvest" (*Buffy* 1.2), Eddie in "The Freshman" (*Buffy* 4.1) and Webster Holden in "Conversations With Dead People" (*Buffy* 7.7). This also applies to Angelus when he reduces humanity to "going through a phase" (*Buffy* "Innocence" 2.14) and Angel impersonating Angelus: "Had a soul, now I'm free" (*Buffy* "Enemies" 3.17). Spike says in "Fool for Love" that [b]ecoming a vampire is a profound and powerful experience" (*Buffy* 5.7). Also compare how Ford acts in "Lie to Me" (*Buffy* 2.7) to what Darla attempts to do in "The Trial" (*Angel* 2.9). They both want to cheat death by trying to become vampires. Ford makes a deal with Spike to deliver Buffy into Spike's hands and in return he gets turned into a vampire so that he doesn't have to die from a brain tumour. Darla tries to convince a vampire to turn her instead of just killing her, so that she doesn't have to die from syphilis. One of the most clearly advocated defenses of the life as a vampire is made by Gunn's sister Alonna when they meet after she has been sired:

"Gunn: They killed you.

Alonna: Do I look dead to you?—I am stronger, faster and better than ever. [. . .] All that rage and hatred that we got? We get to keep all that, only on this side there is no guilt, no grief—just the hunt and the kill—and the fun! And come on, how often did we go out in the daylight anyway? [. . .] Look at you. You're running and hiding, cold and hungry. You call that living? You're the one that's falling now. Let me catch you.—Don't you want to stop falling? I'm gonna fix it." (*Angel* "War Zone" 1.20)

⁴ There is no question that Angel wants to be human; the question is if he ever will be prepared to make the transition. He chooses to go back to his vampire status after trying the life as a human in "I Will Remember You" (*Angel* 1.8), not because he was abhorred at having taste buds again, or to be able to have sex without concern about the survival of his dear ones, but because he was removed from the opportunity to effectively continue the fight against evil. But that consequence will never go away whenever he gets the chance again. To become human means to lose his super powers. I am doubtful that he in season five of *Angel* was prepared to become human, perhaps it was all for the best that he wrote off the prophecy, he would never have been able to settle with a human existence. Angel is and remains a vampire as long as he's got something to say about it. *Angel* "Not Fade Away" 5.22.

⁵ One could add Lawson. He too wasn't satisfied with being a vampire, but as he became a vampire by drinking blood from a vampire with a soul, it is possible that it was that circumstance that made it hard for him to be content with what he had become. The vampire soul (demon soul) had been forced to reside with a human soul, which led to conflict. This is also the conclusion Lawson draws when he confronts Angel on why he isn't content with his existence. Angel however doesn't believe that he's got a human soul (*Angel* "Why We Fight" 5.13). McLaren in his excellent analysis of how the concept of *soul* is treated throughout the Buffyverse agrees with Angel (par. 25). I, however, side with Lawson. Lawson's view gives a satisfactory explanation of Lawson's discomfort with his life. If one instead follows Angel and McLaren, and concludes that Lawson hasn't got a soul, i.e. that he is like any other vampire, it is difficult to explain why the blood is "drying in [his] throat like ashes" (Lawson in *Angel* "Why We Fight" 5.13).

⁶ In the academic literature Harmony is almost without exception neglected. When she is mentioned it is mostly in passing. Even Ian Shuttleworth, who has provided a brief discussion of all the more significant (and many of the not-so-significant) characters in the Buffyverse, passes her by in almost total silence (she's briefly mentioned on page 247). Lorna Jowett has made Harmony the subject of "Biting Humor: Harmony, Parody, and the Female Vampire," where she is described as a dumb blonde truth-sayer fool, rather than the typical sexually aggressive and seductive vampire. But that much attention is an exception. She's not totally uninteresting, though, and may be worth a few more words.

⁷ During the fight with the Mayor she is attacked by a vampire on the stairs. Her sire is never mentioned, although we can see him on screen. Perhaps he didn't survive the fight. As he broke the Mayor's explicit order not to drink, only kill ("No snacking. I see blood on your lips, it's a visit to the wood shed for you boys. Kill. Don't feed"), one may argue that he was fairly warned (*Buffy* "Graduation Day Part 2" 3.22).

⁸ As Buffy bluntly puts it: "Harmony. A vampire? She must be dying without a reflection" (*Buffy* "The Harsh Light of Day" 4.3). It turns out her visible reflection doesn't matter that much to her. In "Harm's Way" (*Angel* 5.9) she happily brushes her teeth in front of the blank mirror.

⁹ Technically it's he who breaks up with her when Drusilla pays a visit (Spike: "It's been fun while it lasted, Harm, but I think it'd be best now if you hit the road"), but as he has a tendency to come skulking back to her whenever he feels lonely, it's important that she finally leaves him (*Buffy* "Crush" 5.14).

¹⁰ Whedon presents Buffy as an apparent "dumb blonde" only to turn the concept on its head: she is not the innocent, stupid girl who in every horror movie enters a dark alley and gets killed by the monster. Sure, she enters the alley, but it is she who walks out of it, and with the blood of the monster on her hands. Buffy may at first sight seem to be a bimbo (ex-cheerleader, fashion conscious, not one of the better students), but anyone who spends time with her soon learns different. Compare her to Harmony who really is a bimbo, body and soul (the last before her transformation): she is good-looking, blonde, shallow, and stupid. But in this case too Whedon turns the stereotype on its head, and from season four it is Harmony who waits in the alley to prey on her next victim.

¹¹ *KvinnorKan* is a Swedish network promoting women's confidence to start their own companies and work together toward a society of equality. <http://www.kvinnorkan.se/>

¹² *Buffy* "The Real Me" 5.2. This is also a beautiful example of the exquisite language that has become one of the Buffyverse's traits: bad, bad, bad—suck.

¹³ In the car with the rest of the gang in "Disharmony" (*Angel* 2.17) she comes up with the idea that she's supposed to fight evil, and draws the conclusion that "[t]hat's why I suck at being evil." Much later she confesses to Fred that "I tried being out on my own, all independent and evil. I'm just no good at it" (*Angel* "Harm's Way" 5.9).

¹⁴ *Buffy* "The Harsh Light of Day" 4.3.

¹⁵ Maybe the idea of making Cordelia a vampire didn't even occur to her. Harmony isn't very smart, and perhaps the choice for her stood between killing and not killing Cordelia. Compare her to the vampire that Darla tried to persuade to be her new sire. It had never entered his mind that he could make himself a friend, and he didn't have any clear idea of how it was done (*Angel* "The Trial" 2.9). Harmony, however, knows exactly how to do it. In "The Real Me" (*Buffy* 5.2) Brad claims to have been sired by her, and during her time with Spike she pondered the idea of making Antonio Banderas a vampire (*Buffy* "The Harsh Light of Day" 4.3).

¹⁶ *Angel* "Disharmony" 2.17.

¹⁷ Harmony and Fred had one single night out together. In Harmony's view this makes them gal pals, which says something about Harmony's social life. This perception is perhaps not very surprising from what we know of her. More interesting is what the event tells us about Fred's life at Wolfram & Hart. Despite the fact that their girls' night out was a failure to Fred (who was left behind as soon as Harmony saw the possibility of getting a date), it is Fred who afterwards is most enthusiastic about it and who tries to get them to do it again. How desperate to make a connection are you if you choose to go out with Harmony... again? (*Angel* "Harm's Way" 5.9).

¹⁸ She falls victim to his flattering right away. But because Spike is getting tangible, the world begins to fall apart and one of the consequences is that the superegos of many of the employees at Wolfram & Hart cease to work, and among them Harmony's. Her uncontrolled feelings pour forth in terms of anger at how Spike treats her (he has neglected her completely until he felt amorous), and jealousy of his love for Buffy. The office staff becomes more or less like the anonymous vampires in the sense that they too lose control of their desires and feelings. Small irritating obstacles that normally are subdued, like the fact that someone has neglected to add toner to the copy machine, now take on huge proportions (*Angel* "Destiny" 5.8). The transition from anonymous vampires to the ones we know could thereby be given a psychoanalytical explanation where development becomes synonymous to creating a superego. See also Rhonda V. Wilcox, "'Every Night I Save You': Buffy, Spike, Sex and Redemption," par. 1.

¹⁹ *Angel* "Harm's Way" 5.9.

²⁰ Harmony talks about the improved taste of the blood in "Conviction" (*Angel* 5.1). Apparently Angel likes it better than the cinnamon that Cordelia experimented with in "Are You Now, Or Have You Ever Been" (*Angel* 2.2).

²¹ I discuss Spike's possible evilness in "Are Vampires Evil?: Angelus and Spike as the Immoral and the Amoral" in this issue of *Slayage*.

²² She seems to be a bit ambivalent about her former life. On the one hand, she tells Cordelia that the only time she was really happy was with her back in high school, and she doesn't seem very content with her life as undead (*Angel* "Disharmony" 2.17). On the other hand, she doesn't seem to value her previous life much either. She describes it to Angel as "[n]ot so great. Zits. Dandruff. Mortality. Although I do remember... my heart. And the way it would thump when I kissed a really hot boy for the first time. That was cool" (*Angel* "Not Fade Away" 5.22). Her earlier fascination with her unbeating heart has in time passed away (*Buffy* "The Harsh Light of Day" 4.3). Perhaps she expressed her opinion of being human in a negative way in an attempt to comfort her boss, who seemed to be in need of some pro-vampire talk. One may wonder why a soulless vampire would care about how Angel feels, but this is not the first time that Harmony has shown uncharacteristic vampire behavior in terms of care. In "Shells" (*Angel* 5.16), she surprisingly is the one who has the heartfelt talk with Gunn about betrayal. What does a soulless vampire care about betrayal?

²³ The vampire worshipers in "Lie to Me" (*Buffy* 2.7) may be deluded when it comes to their understanding of vampires, but their catch phrase seems to describe Harmony in an accurate way. She is the lonely one.

²⁴ She's confirmation that individuals are not always strong despite their presumed ability to choose their own path in life and shape their world to their will. Harmony would certainly gain a lot if her own words could be realized: "Creatures of the night, unite!" (*Angel* "Conviction" 5.1).

²⁵ *Angel* "Not Fade Away" 5.22. When Angel accuses her of betraying them to the Senior Partners, her defense is that it has happened because he never shows any confidence in her. Harmony wants to belong, but ever since she became a vampire she has always been on the outside. She is almost certainly right in that Angel is in part to blame, but never forgets that she lacks moral standards and that she is evil. She would probably have let them down in some way no matter how he had treated her. See also Roz Kaveney, "A Sense of the Ending: Schrödinger's *Angel*," p. 69f.

²⁶ The often religious question of whether man at the core is good or evil is in my opinion not a very interesting one when we deal with reality, as it is impossible to test empirically. The problem I see with such an essentialistic approach is not only or primarily philosophical (conceptual), but it is even more disturbing when it is applied to how we relate to people. A core belief may change how we judge ourselves and others, though it shouldn't. In case I should regard myself (and all other humans) as an intrinsically good person (regardless of my actions), this conviction should give me no leeway in how I treat others ("Okay, I didn't treat her the way I should, but I'm still a good guy"). Should I instead regard myself (and everyone else) as evil at the core, I still can't use this conviction as an excuse ("Okay, I didn't treat her the way I should, but what's to expect, I'm evil?"). No matter how I regard myself at the core (evil, good, or no core at all), I am still obliged to treat other people fairly, and to judge myself critically on the basis of my actions and thoughts. The division between good and evil as defining our essence is also problematic when we judge others. If I come to regard someone as a terrible person, a veritable troll or monster, I would like to be able to form my opinion of that person without any distractions in the form of preconceived ideas as to what she really is. (Editor's note: The author informs us that "In Swedish the word for human is feminine.") The same goes when I meet someone who immediately appeals to me, or someone I think is a decent human being. In these cases too I would like to be able to make my own judgment. Of course I know that my opinions to a large extent are a consequence of my socialization into my society. But that factor doesn't diminish if on top of that I add the thought that my opinions should be filtered through a preconceived idea that people are basically good or evil.

In fiction however, a core belief can be an interesting road to follow as it gives opportunity to explore concepts in ways that are useless or meaningless to us in our world, but that work perfectly well in the fictitious universe.