THE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUFFY STUDIES
2.3
Seven

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"Love's Bitch but Man Enough to Admit It": Spike's Hybridized Gender

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[1] The transgression (or lack thereof) of conventional gender roles in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a recurrent theme in *Buffy* criticism. Zoe-Jane Playdon argues that *Buffy* challenges traditionally masculine definitions of autonomy by developing empowering models of community-based action (138). In contrast, Farah Mendlesohn points to the limits of the show's transgressiveness, exploring the mechanisms through which a queer reading of the Buffy/Willow relationship is systematically denied. I take up this theme of gender transgression through the particular instance of Spike. Though Spike initially appears as a strongly masculine character, I argue that he crosses the boundaries of conventional gender identifications, enacting a hybridized identity that is simultaneously coded masculine and feminine. While Spike's feminization becomes a locus of disempowerment for his character at various times, I suggest that it is his very liminality--the impossibility of consigning him to a predetermined gender category--that empowers him in the Buffyverse, enabling him to navigate the complex gender inversions that mark a community oriented around a heroic, female Slayer.

[2] As the field of gender studies increasingly distances itself from essentialism, its focus has shifted to the ideological construction of gender. In the words of Judith Butler, "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender: that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (qtd. in Weir 214). Instead of being a passive category into which one is born, gender becomes a continuous personal activity that can either subvert or reproduce dominant ideologies--and often does both within the sphere of a single individual's actions. In *Buffy*, however, the subversive aspects of the characters' engagement with the ideologies of gender is stressed from the first scene of the first episode, in which the supposedly frightened, teenage girl, Darla, suddenly reveals herself to be a deadly vampire, thereby actively shifting her positioning from typical female victim to transgressively female victimizer ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1001). From the beginning, *Buffy* promises to be a show that will challenge prevailing gender categorizations.

[3] Such transgressive acts of individual construction can be measured against the necessarily patriarchal background of the town of Sunnydale, which for all its fantastical forces, remains a late-twentieth/early twenty-first century American town enmeshed in the power relations that typify that very real historical context, relations that traditionally cast women as inferior and subordinated to men. It is, therefore, not surprising that when male characters on *Buffy* are described as "feminized," the word is often linked to their subordination. A. Susan Owen, for instance, argues for Xander's feminization because he (and Willow) play "les femmes to Buffy's butch performance [. . .]" (26): they subordinate themselves to her dominant role. Likewise, Anne Millard Daugherty suggests that Giles's status as "feminized male" (150) in his first meeting with Buffy is linked to his subordination to her: "His gaze, obviously neither sexual nor objectifying, is rather like that one would give to a new master" (151).

[4] But while the fact of patriarchy is an inescapable element both in Sunnydale and in our readings of *Buffy*, the show's challenge to the patriarchal order is equally inescapable: the title character is a young woman hero who "kicks butt" and saves the world. In a social context of patriarchy, it can be argued that if Xander and Giles are men coded feminine, Buffy is a woman coded masculine. This observation is valid. At the same time, such codings have the potential to lead to the reification of masculine gender as synonymous with power, feminine gender with weakness, a move that undoes much of the transgressive work of placing a woman in an empowered and heroic position in the first place. There is a risk that Buffy, like Elizabeth I, may become reinscribed within the patriarchal order as a hero who is acceptable because she is really a masculine figure in a woman's body.

[5] I know of no one, however, who suggests that *Buffy* is this reductive. Its challenge to gender roles goes beyond a simple assignment of male roles to women and female roles to men. Instead *Buffy* repeatedly depicts a hybridization of conventional gender roles within individual personalities in ways that evade categorization. The traditional tropes of gender persist, but they become so dissociated from their traditional correlations to physical sex that they often interrogate more than support the gender roles they typically define. We may question whether this hybridization of conventional gender positionings is ultimately as challenging to notions of gender as the total dissolution of such positionings would be. But since the Buffyverse is situated in a patriarchal society that utilizes preestablished gender stereotypes, we must acknowledge that it would be difficult for *Buffy* to address issues of gender without engaging with such stereotypes. Whether or not *Buffy* could upset these conventions more than it does is a question for another essay. It is my intention, here, to explore how the highly reductive tropes of gender are rendered subversive through their unconventional utilization within the character of Spike.

[6] To a certain extent, Spike embodies the familiar figure of the strongly masculine man who becomes disempowered (emasculated) through his relegation to feminine roles. At the same time, he troubles the traditional identification of the male with power, the female with disempowerment by choosing to align himself with certain female-coded categories in a way that broadens his

power, the female with disempowerment by choosing to align himself with certain female coded categories in a way that broadens his capacity for agency in a community that defies narrowly defined patriarchal power. The arc of Spike's character development throughout the first six seasons of *Buffy* can be described as a progressive movement away from an ultimately disempowering masculine alignment toward a more empowering hybridization of masculine and feminine gender roles.

[7] The Spike initially introduced in Season Two is in many ways a paragon of masculinity, one half of a symbolic whole completed by his ultra-feminine lover, Drusilla. Their very names establish this division of roles: "Spike" obviously phallic, "Drusilla" flowery and feminine. From their arrival in Sunnydale in "School Hard" (2003), the two vampires present gendered mirror images of each other. Spike is a bleach-blond who wears black (with a touch of red), Drusilla a brunette in white. Spike opts for hardwearing leather and denim, Drusilla for a lacy dress. Like their clothes, their behavior patterns typically fall into binary gender oppositions. Spike is the thinker and planner of the couple: his tactical skills are evident in his sneak attack on the high school in "School Hard." In contrast, Drusilla--who is so much the "irrational woman" that she is literally insane--makes up for her lack of mental clarity with a prophetic second sight, an enhanced version of "woman's intuition." Spike is physically strong: his first attack on Buffy nearly defeats her. Though Drusilla is intrinsically a formidable threat in her own right, when she is introduced, she is severely weakened as a result of an attack by an angry mob ("Lie to Me" 2007). Thus, she is circumstantially, if not essentially, the vulnerable damsel in need of continual care. While Spike delights in violence and mayhem, Drusilla seduces her victims with hypnosis ("Becoming Part 1" 2021): she is a vampire with "feminine wiles."

[8] Spike and Drusilla are introduced as a thoroughly harmonious couple; their roles--delineated by clear gender categories--complement each other ideally. Drusilla needs nurturing and protection; Spike is validated as a lover through his ability to provide them. When this happy arrangement breaks down as Season Two progresses, it is not surprising that it breaks along gender lines. Cracks appear, for instance, when Spike captures Angel, Drusilla's sire, so that they can use his blood in a spell to heal her ("What's My Line Part 2" 2010). In an attempt to anger Spike, Angel mocks him for not satisfying Drusilla sexually. That the gibe succeeds in rankling Spike is evidence of his own insecurity with his masculine role. In the same episode, two other events occur that unsettle Spike and Drusilla's gender dynamic: Drusilla gets her health back, and Spike breaks his back. The episode closes with a reversal of gender roles, showing Drusilla rescuing Spike by physically carrying him to safety. For most of the remainder of Season Two, Spike, confined to a wheelchair, is reduced to being fed puppies ("Passion" 2017) by the woman for whom he used to bring home victims ("School Hard"). That this newly invigorated Drusilla abandons her white outfits in favor of black and red, Spike's signature colors, symbolically intensifies the growing ambiguity of their positions.

[9] The tensions escalate after "Innocence" (2014), which sees the return of a newly unsouled Angel/Angelus to his old family, Spike and Dru. Owen argues that Angel--his name not withstanding--is one of the show's most masculine characters, a "site of perfected masculine appeal" for Xander and Cordelia and enabler of "various cliches of heterosexual romance" for Buffy (27). The extreme masculinity of his gendering is also evident in his relationships with his fellow vampires. Angelus is the progenitor of the other two. [1] Spike's one-time "Yoda" ("School Hard"), he has variously been father, mentor, and leader to the others and slips easily back into his prior role as dominant male. That Spike is wheelchair bound and--to judge from Angelus's jabs--incapable of having sex with Drusilla completes his relegation to emasculated other, substantially excluded from the plans and activities of the new male/female pair of Angelus and Drusilla. Needless to say, Spike is not pleased, and the end of the season finds him recovered from his injuries and making a concerted attempt to regain his old position as Drusilla's "man" by joining forces with Buffy against Angelus ("Becoming Part 2" 2022).

[10] Superficially, this attempt meets with some success: while Buffy is battling Angelus, Spike renders Dru unconscious and, in true caveman fashion, carries her off, bound for parts unknown. His triumph, however, is short-lived. In "Lover's Walk" (3008), a miserable Spike returns to Sunnydale, lamenting to anyone who will listen that Drusilla has left him because he "wasn't demon enough [read "man enough"] for the likes of her." Indeed, the fact that he did not get Drusilla away from Angelus on his own but required Buffy's (a woman's) help rendered his masculinity suspect before he ever left Sunnydale. Spike's solution is to win back Drusilla by reaffirming his male power over her: in other words, he will "be the man I was" and "tie her up and torture her until she likes me again" ("Lover's Walk"). There is an implicit contradiction here. Spike is identifying his "old self" with a pattern of behavior (torturing his girlfriend) that we have never seen in him. His interactions with Drusilla have typically been tender; when he punches her in "Becoming Part 2," he claims he does not want to hurt her, and she certainly appears unprepared for the blow. In effect, Spike is not proposing to become his old self at all but rather attempting to remake himself in the image of Angelus, the super-masculine dictator whose success with Dru and penchant for torture are well-documented (for example: "Innocence," "Passion," "Becoming" (parts 1 and 2)). Not only has Spike ceased to represent an image of unadulterated masculine power; judged by the standard of Angelus, he never represented it.

[11] In fact, from his introduction, Spike betrays characteristics that unsettle masculine stereotypes. He slays Slayers, who are all women. On the surface, this vocation can be read as a typical attempt to impose male physical power on the female, denying female agency by eliminating the strongest of female agents: the girls who save the world. This element is clearly present: Spike's gleeful assault on Buffy after a spell has turned her into a helpless eighteenth century princess ("Halloween" 2006) in particular comes to mind. But there is more than misogyny at work here. Spike loves a challenge. His pursuit of a prey whose primary mission in life is to prey on his kind demands a taste for danger. A Slayer is one of the most dangerous perils a vampire can face, and Spike's very interest in confronting them validates them as such. In essence, Spike perpetually chooses a woman to be his sworn nemesis: his approximately equal, opposite match. In placing himself on a level with the Slayer, he collapses the traditional hierarchy that places man above woman, embracing instead a field of battle in which gender becomes substantially irrelevant: the only qualifications that matter are strength and skill.

[12] This problematizing of gender identity is particularly evident in the showdown between Spike and Buffy in his introductory episode, "School Hard." Spike has attacked the high school on parent-teacher night. When Buffy confronts him, she is armed with an axe, he with a pole. She asks, "Do we really need weapons for this?" In reply, he quips, "I just like them. They make me feel all manly," then drops the pole, prompting her to drop the axe. This interchange establishes an unsettling of gender roles in which Spike, with obvious irony, acknowledges his masculine positioning, then immediately undercuts it. He jokes that weapons make him feel "manly," but his rejection of the phallic pole suggests either that his confidence in his masculinity is not, in fact, linked to this traditional symbol of manliness or that he does not have a strong investment in defining himself in "manly" terms. Either way, he

traditional symbol of manliness or that he does not have a strong investment in defining himself in "manly" terms. Either way, he refuses masculine stereotyping just as Buffy, through her identity as the Slayer, refuses feminine stereotyping. Having cast away their weapons, Buffy and Spike engage in a hand-to-hand fight that can be read as a mutual rejection of phallic power--but manifestly not of physical force per se. In other words, their combat can be read as a confrontation in the sphere of feminine physical strength.

[13] It is only when Spike takes up a weapon again that he is able to get the upper hand, a move that seems to reassert traditional masculine dominance as well as reinscribing Spike as the traditional "manly man." Victory eludes him, however, for Buffy's mother, Joyce, comes to her daughter's rescue by hitting him over the head with the axe Buffy has dropped. Unable to fight off both Summers women, Spike beats a retreat with the final exasperated exclamation: "Women!"--perhaps in reference to the commonplaces of mother love and female solidarity as opposed to solitary male action. On one level, in keeping with Buffy's mission statement, female empowerment has triumphed over masculine power structures. Yet the scene's problematizing of gender runs deeper than a simple reversal that empowers the feminine and disempowers the masculine. It is through a hybridization of "feminine" family values and "masculine" physical force that Buffy and Joyce achieve their victory. Similarly, Spike's parting shot both disparages women as perennial irritations to men and acknowledges their (here quite literally physical) power to defend themselves and their communities against aggressive men. Even while he is regendered as conventionally masculine, Spike's (albeit tacit and grudging) regard for feminine power suggests that he retains his ability to question traditional gender alignments.

[14] In "Fool for Love" (5007), Spike's own account of killing his second Slayer makes his crossing of gender borders more explicit. We learn that his signature black coat is a trophy (or at least symbol of the original trophy) taken from this dead Slayer. One of his most enduringly masculine accouterments is, figuratively if not literally, an article of female clothing. In a sense, Spike is cross-dressing his way into the same gender positioning as the women he fights. This assumption of a feminine positioning is, in this instance, synonymous with his ability to kill Slayers. If Spike's ultimately too masculine gendering contributes to his failure to kill Buffy in "School Hard," his act of feminine self-gendering at the death of his second Slayer is linked to his formidability as a villain. The unalloyed power of patriarchy is not equipped to contend with a female Slayer, but Spike, in choosing to transcend simplistic masculine coding, becomes a contender.

[15] Spike's challenging of traditional gender dichotomies is an increasingly pronounced aspect of his character in Seasons Four through Six. In Season Four, the demon-fighting Initiative places a microchip in his head that causes him excruciating pain whenever he tries to hurt a human, effectively terminating his tenure as the "Big Bad." The chip, likewise, brands him as emasculated: his chipped state is likened to impotence in "The Initiative" (4007) and "Pangs" (4008) and to castration in "Villains" (6020). Thus neutered, Spike finds himself increasingly aligned with Buffy's Scooby Gang, particularly when he discovers he can still beat up demons and, therefore, indulge his taste for violence by helping the good guys. The end result, as Spike himself observes in a bit of metanarrative from "Normal Again" (6017), is to "make me soft so I'd fall in love with [Buffy], and then turn me into her sodding sex slave." Chipped Spike provides numerous opportunities for character exploration that would be denied to an unambiguous villain. The Spike who emerges is increasingly coded feminine. To be sure, he retains numerous stereotypically male traits: his name, his wardrobe, his fondness for smoking, drinking, poker, punk rock, cars, and motorcycles, to say nothing of his continuing delight in violence. He remains, at least overtly, vigorously--sometimes violently--heterosexual: toward the end of Season Six, he nearly rapes Buffy ("Seeing Red" 6019). At the same time, he acquires a growing number of female-coded characteristics, both new developments and revelations about his past.

[16] It becomes increasingly clear, for instance, that Spike eschews homosociality as a framework for his relationships. His most intensely emotional ties have been to Cecily, Drusilla, Buffy, and Angelus: three women and one man. The women are all romantic interests, which I will discuss further in due course. Here, it is enough to observe that each woman is presented as a primary focus of Spike's attention in her own right. In no case does homosocial male rivalry play a determining role in his attachment. Moreover, his only significant relationship with a man, Angelus, is problematized by the suggestion of a sexual component. While the relationship presents no overt homosexuality, the two vampires share a physical closeness unusual in male-male relationships on *Buffy*. When Spike and Angel first encounter each other in Season Two, they unhesitatingly embrace ("School Hard"). (Compare this scene with Xander and Giles's awkward handshake-turned-hug in "Bargaining Part 1" (6001).) When Angelus rejoins Spike and Dru in "Innocence," one of his first acts is to kiss Spike on the forehead, a move that Kristina Busse observes is often read by fans as evidence of an emotional and physical involvement between the two vampires (210). If we read this relationship as homosexual, it fits a dominance-submission paradigm in which Spike is coded as submissive female; Angelus's dictatorship over the group does not readily admit another possibility. Thus, Spike's only close male-male relationship, far from following the "normal" pattern of homosocial bonding, implies his feminization, this time, in a typically disempowering light.

[17] More positively depicted, however, is his similarly feminine tendency to form platonic friendships with women. His only typically masculine friendship is with the sweet-tempered, floppy-eared demon, Clem, who becomes a minor recurrent character in Season Six: the two play cards ("Life Serial" 6005), watch TV, and munch buffalo wings together ("Seeing Red"). Although Spike spends part of Season Four living first with Giles and then Xander, his relations with both of them remain distant, becoming emotionally (and always negatively) intense only when mediated by the stronger connections each has to one of the female characters: typically Buffy or Anya. In contrast, Spike is surprisingly successful at maintaining friendships with women. He is emotionally attached to both Buffy's mother, Joyce, and younger-sister-who-is-really-the-mystical-Key, Dawn. Despite Joyce and Spike's rocky first encounter in "School Hard," they quickly settle into an amiable relationship. Over the years, we see them discuss his break-up with Drusilla ("Lover's Walk"), debate the soap opera, *Passions*, ("Checkpoint" 5012), and chat about Joyce's job ("Crush" 5014). When Joyce dies, Spike's genuine grief at least partly motivates his decision to help Dawn resurrect her: "I liked the lady," he says explicitly ("Forever" 5017). Spike and Dawn, meanwhile, become something of a duo in Season Five as Buffy entrusts him with the task of protecting her sister from the deadly god, Glory. Though Spike is primarily invested in Dawn because he wants to please Buffy, his solicitude toward her cannot be dismissed as solely an attempt to win points with the woman he loves. After Buffy's Season Five death, Spike continues to act as Dawn's "baby-sitter." The beginning of Season Six suggests that the two have developed a sincere friendship: they chat about Dawn's disaffection with school and play cards ("Bargaining Part 1"). Later, Spike not only attempts to defend her from invading demons but addresses her fears in a fashion that shows a certain degree of insight into her mental state: "Dawn, I get that you're scared. But I'm your sitter. So mind me. . . I'm not going to let any o' those buggers lay so much as a warty finger on you" ("Bargaining Part 2" 6002).

[18] Even in his peripheral relationships, Spike is more apt to seek companionship with women than men. In two episodes, "Where the Wild Things Are" (4018) and "Entropy" (6018), Spike and Anya commiserate over their love lives (and, by implication, their exclusion from the core of the Scooby Gang). Although they eventually have sex in the latter encounter, their primary interaction is not sexual. Rather they offer each other mutual support based on the common experience of rejection. Perhaps Spike's most unlikely companion, however, is his ditzy vampire girlfriend of Seasons Four and Five, Harmony. There is no question that this relationship, at least for Spike, is based on sex. His primary feeling for Harmony as a person appears to be annoyance: "I love syphilis more than I love you," he tells her in "The Harsh Light of Day" (4003). Yet though Harmony is the partner more invested in the relationship, she is the one who ultimately walks out on him ("Crush"). In fact, despite his irritation with her, Spike chooses to spend a great deal of time with her, even playing twenty questions with her at one point ("Out of My Mind" 5004). These various connections to the women on *Buffy* go a long way toward humanizing Spike's character. Through these relationships, he gets the chance to engage in normal, human conversations (or what pass for such in the Buffyverse); to be drawn into doing good deeds; and sometimes even to share the angst of the other characters. In as much as such occurrences are designed to make Spike a more sympathetic character, they make him more sympathetic to the other characters as well as the viewers. To a significant degree, it is Spike's ability to relate on friendly terms with women that wins him a place in Buffy's substantially female community. In this community, an ability to form ties with women in much the same way as other women might is clearly an instance of social empowerment. If Spike's pronounced sociality is a strength, however, it also suggests the weakness of a fear of solitude; he would rather even be with Harmony than be alone.

[19] This need for companionship--in both its empowering and disempowering lights--can be read as another of Spike's feminine characteristics. Traditionally, masculinity implies being solitary and independent, a "lonely hero," in the words of Rhonda Wilcox (4). [2] Following this paradigm, Angel once again emerges as a traditionally masculine figure. He spends the better part of a century wandering by himself and, even in his later, more social, years has a tendency to insist on facing his troubles alone: he goes so far as to fire his team rather than accept to their criticism and their worry for him in "Reunion" (*Angel* 2010). In contrast, "femininity," as Playdon has discussed, is aligned with defining oneself in terms of relationships with others. [3] It is this means of self-definition that Spike principally practices. He spends most of the twentieth century taking care of Drusilla. Yet in spite of his acute pain at losing her, he attaches himself to Harmony just a year later. While still involved with Harmony, he finds himself desperately in love with Buffy, and throughout much of Season Five and all of Season Six methodically constructs his behavior around (often misguided) attempts to win her favor, be it through protecting her sister, patrolling with her, or being sexually available.

[20] While this drive to seek personal meaning through other people clearly has its pathological overtones, it is also one of the chief factors that win Spike a place, albeit peripheral, in the Scooby Gang. Playdon argues that the power structure endorsed by Buffy is oriented not around authority figures but around participatory citizenship in which each person's active contributions are valued: "The Scoobies' contingent, contextualised, functional form of participatory management is in strong contrast to the enforced, patriarchal, hierarchical structures which typify the series' evil leaders" (138). Among these leaders, Playdon cites the Master, Principal Snyder, and the Mayor (138). Interestingly, she does not include Spike, though his entrance in Season Two places him, to some extent, in this paradigm of the patriarchal leader deploying his minions. Even in the beginning, however, Spike troubles the hierarchical model. In "School Hard," he rejects the authority of the Annointed One, while simultaneously limiting his own authority through cooperation with Drusilla. In later seasons, his ability to construct non-hierarchical relationships with several of the people who make up the Scooby Gang enables him to participate in the diffused power relations of that community.

[21] But if his tendency for relational self-definition wins him provisional acceptance among the Scoobies, it likewise heightens his suffering over his failed romances. Unhappily for Spike, it is these romantic relationships that are most constitutive for his sense of self. I have already mentioned that three of his four primary relationships are explicitly romantic; each one ends in his rejection. Cecily, the unrequited love of Spike's pre-vampire life, describes him as "beneath me" ("Fool for Love"); Drusilla leaves him for a chaos demon; Buffy at first rejects him outright, then, in Season Six, has a brief sexual relationship with him but continues to refuse an emotional connection. In "Lover's Walk," Spike remarks famously, "I may be love's bitch, but at least I'm man enough to admit it." In this explicit exercise in hybridizing gender, Spike casts his identity as a forlorn lover in the feminine and the courage required to confront that identity in the masculine. His assignment of these specific genderings is conventional. His feminizing of the heartbroken lover, in particular, follows the current pop culture notion that in romantic relationships, "men are from Mars; women are from Venus." In other words, men are substantially motivated by desire for sex, women by desire for love or companionship. [4] Though it goes without saying that Spike has a vigorous libido, "love's bitch" clearly inhabits the Venus side of the equation: he is a feminine lover.

[22] This gender inversion is most plain in Spike and Buffy's Season Six liaison: he is in love with her; she is using him for sex. Indeed, Buffy repeatedly denies any emotional attachment, asserting that he is merely a "convenient" object ("Wrecked" 6010). Though her incessant dismissal of him as an evil, soulless thing has a touch of protesting too much, her declarations that she is not finally in love appear sincere. Once she is sufficiently recovered from the trauma of her death and resurrection to no longer need Spike in order to "feel," she seems content with her decision to break the relationship off. Spike, on the other hand, as much as he enjoys sex with Buffy, is continually pushing for a deeper emotional tie. He avows at various points that he loves her and that she will love him ("Wrecked") or does love him ("Seeing Red"). In "Dead Things" (6013), he asks her sincerely, "What is this to you? This thing we have?" suggesting a need to understand her own view of her connection to him: sex without an interpersonal relationship is not enough.

[23] Ironically, it is this feminized status as the used and rejected lover that substantially prompts Spike's near rape of Buffy, an assault which is a desperate attempt to get her to acknowledge that she does "feel" something for him ("Seeing Red"). Here, the conjunction in Spike's character of the feminine convention of the clingy lover and the masculine convention of violent lover results in a violation of the woman he loves that horrifies even him. Yet out of this horror comes Spike's determination to transform himself by embarking on a journey that eventually leads to the restoration of his soul. The same hybrid identity that brings out some of his worst characteristics gives him the ability to surpass them.

[24] I have attempted to demonstrate that the incorporation of certain feminine positionings into Spike's character works to empower him as well as disempower him. Significantly, instances of disempowerment are correlated with passivity, instances of

empower him as well as disempower him. Significantly, instances of disempowerment are correlated with passivity, instances of empowerment with active agency. Thus, when Spike is feminized by others, such as Angelus and Drusilla, he loses power. When he codes himself as feminine in his battles with Slayers, he typically gains power. The message, as one would expect from *Buffy*, is that self-authorization is vital to personal empowerment. To be constrained to enact any given set of gender constructs is to be reduced to a readily manipulable stereotype. To reject or claim such constructs according to one's own proclivities, however, is to establish an identity that cannot be categorized, and therefore readily controlled, by external ideological forces. Like every enduring character on *Buffy*, Spike slips through the fingers of definition, continually recreating himself through whatever codes, masculine or feminine, best suit his individuality. This ability to claim the prerogatives of both masculine and feminine conventions allows him to adapt and persist in the Buffyverse, where the characters' performance of their individual gender identities is constantly challenging the validity of reductive gender roles.

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Notes

[1] Angel's familial relationship to Spike has become an infamous example of a changed premise: In "School Hard," Spike identifies Angel as his sire, while in "Fool for Love," (5007) his sire is Drusilla. One could argue that the latter choice intensifies Spike's feminine alignment, placing him closer to a female than male line of succession. Whether Angel is Spike's sire or grandsire, however, he remains a potent male authority figure for the younger vampire.

[2] Wilcox argues that *Buffy* pointedly links the turmoil and alienation Buffy suffers at the end of Season Two and the start of Season Three to her positioning herself in this role of lonely hero (7). The message, Wilcox suggests, is that "when you go it alone, you go to hell"(7): through Buffy's misery, the show interrogates the valorization of the solitary masculine hero.

[3] Playdon describes feminism as a system of thought that "places community and the organization of ideas in webs of relationship in the foreground" (126). She contrasts this community emphasis with the traditions of patriarchy that stress hierarchical leadership, "ranking ideas in strict layers of importance [. . .]" (126). Both Playdon and *Buffy* advance the feminist model as a more productive, participatory means of social organization than the patriarchal model based on discipline and obedience. At the same time, the pre-feminist tradition that requires women to define themselves solely in terms of their relationships with others is itself an aspect of the patriarchal order that subordinates women to male authority. Playdon cites the robot April as an example of relational definition taken to a pathological extreme: constructed by Warren purely to fill his own needs, April can find no reason to exist outside of him ("I Was Made to Love You" 5015; Playdon 143). What *Buffy* finally advocates is a balance, what Playdon calls "autonomy within relationality" (143), in which the traditionally masculine emphasis on a strong individual identity is put into the service of a system that values individuals as unique contributors within a social web.

[4] Victoria Spah has discussed how Spike and Buffy's Season Five relationship corresponds to the courtly romance tradition. According to this paradigm, Spike's obsessive devotion to Buffy in the face of her consistent rejection recalls the devotion of the knight to his lady, gendering Spike as masculine. Spah's reading of this relationship is undoubtedly valid, and there is no reason it cannot coexist with the more modern popular tradition that casts the "romantic" lover as feminine. Indeed, the fact that in this single plot line, Spike can be read as either masculine or feminine underscores the extent to which gender categories are socially constructed.