

## Fantatising Masculinity in *Buffiverse* Slash Fiction: Sexuality, Violence, and the Vampire

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“Relax, Spike,” [Angel] murmured, the feel of cool skin beneath his hands calming and exciting him at the same time. “I’m not going to bite – oh, wait. Yeah. I probably am.” (Jane Davitt, *Final Score*)

Spike: “Cause Angel and me have never been intimate – except that one...” (*Angel* “Power Play”, 5.21)

No aspect of fan culture has received as much academic attention as the infamous genre of “slash”, a form of fan-generated erotic literature which centres on the relationship between two or more same-sex (usually male) characters appropriated from the realm of popular television. Scholarly criticism surrounding slash fandom has made significant inroads into explaining the persistence and popularity of this predominantly female-authored literary practice (Penley 1991, Bacon-Smith 1992).<sup>1</sup> However, the enormously varied and changeable nature of these fictions (which surround a multitude of popular texts) has meant that much scholarly work still remains to be done on the subject. This article examines online fan authored slash fictions inspired by Joss Whedon’s cult television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and its spin-off *Angel: The Series* (1999-2004). My chief concern here is to examine the multivalent ways in which slash authors or ‘shippers’ (derived from the word ‘relationship’) articulate discourses of aggressive or violent (homo)sexualised masculinity in *Buffiverse* slash, and to

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<sup>1</sup> In the mid-1980s Camille Bacon-Smith estimated that 90 percent of all fan stories were authored by women (referenced in Jenkins 1992: 191). Recent scholarship on slash reveals that while some men do participate in slash fandom, it is still considered to have an overwhelmingly (heterosexual) female authorship and readership (Somogyi 2002, Mendlesohn 2002, Alexander 2004, Woledge 2005).

explore how this masculinity is constituted at a textual level through the trope of the vampiric. In doing so, my examination of “Buffyverse” or “Whedonverse” slash (fan terminology for the fictional universe shared by *Buffy* and *Angel*) entails not only a revision of earlier theoretical models of the genre of slash, but also involves a consideration of the generic conventions of vampire fiction. As this article will show, previous work in the area of slash fiction has tended to avoid addressing fandoms which have increasingly dealt with aggressive or violent sexual content. In particular, Buffyverse slash borrows extensively from the realm of BDSM (bondage, domination, sadism and masochism).<sup>2</sup> In redressing this relative absence in the critical discussions on slash fiction, I also expose some of the textual strategies by which shippers simultaneously encode contradictory versions of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. They do so, I argue, by employing the figure of the vampire to explore the socially proscribed pleasures of the female gaze on the male homosexual body. Not only do the female authors of slash graphically describe homosexual intercourse in pornographic detail, but they also employ the dominant cultural mythologies surrounding domineering and aggressive masculinity in order to explore intricacies of the male characters’ relationships that are not made explicit in the source shows of *Buffy* and *Angel*. In slash fiction the fantasy of homosexual sex generally, and of aggressive homosexual sex specifically, is exemplified by the figure of the vampire; a figure which, in a number of ways, traditionally operates outside hegemonic discourse of sexuality, offering a vehicle through which to encode subversive pleasures of sexuality and desire.

In order to clarify the particular potency of the male vampire as a symbol of dangerous yet desirable sexuality, my analysis focuses on Buffyverse slash fictions which foreground the representation of sexual violence, in particular the act of male/male rape. It is extremely common to find Buffyverse stories featuring acts of sexual violence and rape

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<sup>2</sup> While BDSM and violence in slash fandom is by no means limited to Buffyverse slash, it is far more prevalent in the Buffyverse than in other fanfiction universes (Alexander 2007: 5). One possible explanation for this pervasiveness in Buffyverse fiction is that Buffy and Angel are both heavily coded with themes of BDSM as well as sexual violence (Spaise 2005: 744).

between the characters especially between the two central male vampires in the series', Angel (David Boreanaz) and Spike (James Marsters).<sup>3</sup> While Buffyverse slash frequently presents Angel and Spike engaged in scenarios of forced sex (Angel usually perpetrates an attack on Spike), the rape scene is decidedly distanced from any realistic representation of the shame, trauma, and sense of violation that is implicit in the act of rape. Rather, the depiction of rape in these fictions is subsumed into the realm of BDSM and fantasy. Paradoxically, while sexual consent is absolutely integral to the practices of BDSM (Taylor & Ussher 2001: 297) Buffyverse slash fictions often reveal a slippage between the non-consensual sexual violence of rape and the consensual practices of BDSM. Moreover, the sex act itself is often secondary to the author's articulation of the characters' feelings and sense of ambiguity about what is happening to them. The rape scene then, functions as a kind of textual strategy through which the female authors of slash fiction experiment with erotically charged constructions of domineering masculinity – and submission to that masculinity – through the lenses of both homosexuality and the vampiric.

Significantly, my focus on the construction of aggressive masculinity in homosexual vampire narratives means moving away from the questions that have dominated previous work on the subject, such as *why* women write male/male (m/m) slash (Bacon-Smith 1992, Penley 1997, Somogyi 2002, Kustritz 2003, Salmon & Symons 2004) and concentrates rather on *how* they write erotic relationships between men, men that is, who are also vampires. Moreover, my discussion also departs from the academic tendency to read slash fanfic as largely coextensive with the conventions of the traditional romance genre (Somogyi 2002, Kustritz 2003), instead opting to explore the ways in which the writers of *Buffy* and *Angel* slash reject the generic conventions of romance fiction to discursively conceptualise the complex relationships between homosociality, sexual desire, and male-to-male violence. In order to elaborate upon this shift away from narratives of romance, as well as to suggest some alternative ways in which to read the violence of vampire

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<sup>3</sup> While slash fictions create romantic and sexual pairings between almost all the characters in *Buffy* and *Angel*, this article concentrates specifically on the pervasive slash representations of Angel and Spike.

masculinity, it is necessary to first detail the theoretical underpinnings of the genre of slash.

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

The phenomenon of homoerotic fan fiction known as slash emerged during the 1970s when fans of the popular television show *Star Trek* began to write stories in which the deep friendship shared between the show's protagonists – Captain Kirk and his First Officer Spock – developed into a sexual relationship. The term 'slash' was coined as a result of the practice of placing the mark "/", between the names of the two male characters, indicating to the reader the romantic or sexually explicit nature of their relationship. These stories were originally published only in small press "fanzines" (or fan magazines), and even within the *Star Trek* subculture had a relatively marginal following (Jenkins 1992: 187). Today, however, slash fiction or "fanfic" as it is often called, is not only a pervasive aspect of televisual fan culture generally, with slash produced around numerous cult-popular television series, but also extends to include other types of media texts such as films, video games, and novels.<sup>4</sup>

By the mid-1990s the Internet had become central to the increasing popularity and dissemination of slash fanfic. Indeed, a single search on the internet search engine *Google* with the terms "slash fan fiction" returns approximately 1,180,000 hits. As a result of this new visibility, the genre developed an abundance of new "pairings" with the inclusion of heterosexual (*het*), lesbian (*femmeslash*), and bisexual pairings, as well as multiple partner scenarios. Additionally, various sub-genres appeared within slash such as "first time" (the protagonists first sexual encounter), "PWP" ("Plot, what Plot?" signalling graphic sexual

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<sup>4</sup> Some examples of slash fanfic that currently flourishes on the internet includes, but is certainly not limited to, that inspired by *Starsky and Hutch*, *The X-Files*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and more recently *Smallville*, *CSI*, and *The West Wing*. Other slashed texts include blockbuster films such as *Star Wars*, *Fight Club*, *Titanic*, and *Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, as well as video games such as *Tomb Raider*, and novels such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*.

content), “fluffy” (romantic narratives), “angst” (emphasises anxieties related to the protagonists relationship), “hurt-comfort” (one protagonist is injured then comforted by the other), and more recently “BDSM” and “kink” as well as “non-con” (non-consensual sex such as rape, incest). The emergence of the last two of these sub-genres exposes the gaps in earlier formulations of the genre which, although clearly demonstrate slash’s representation of homosexual sex, nevertheless emphasise that the sexual fantasies found in slash are generally developed within the paradigm of romantic love.

Early scholars of fan fiction, such as Joanna Russ (1985), Patricia Frazier Lamb and Diana Veith (1986), and Constance Penley (1991) argued that women writing m/m slash had a feminist agenda whereby they attempted to challenge the heterosexual gender inequalities inherent in conventional romance literatures that were predominantly informed by patriarchal relations of power. Russ, for example, saw slash as a kind of “feminized” pornography which rejects anonymous, emotionless sexual encounters in favour of the portrayal of men in intimate caring relationships based on friendship, mutual love, and trust (1985: 89). Lamb and Veith argued that slash enabled a refiguration of the romance genre whereby slash constituted a “play with androgyny” (Jenkins 1992: 193). In this formulation, fans mixed and blended the traditionally masculine and feminine coding of the characters in order to avoid the traditional role of passivity and subordination of the heroine in conventional romance (Lamb and Veith 1986: 242). Optimistically perhaps, they claimed that the representation of romantic love in Kirk/Spock slash is “free of the culture’s whole discourse of gender and sex roles” (1986: 89). As these commentators show, earlier fandoms were organised around the refusal of dominant social constructions of femininity implicit in the generic conventions of traditional romance narratives, in order to express “utopian visions of romantic bliss” (Jenkins 1992: 198). Although such “utopian” visions of homosexual romantic love may in some ways enable a revision of the unequal power relations embedded in heterosexual romance narratives, they do, however, leave unquestioned the supposedly inherent ‘feminine’ desire for romantic narratives to depict unmitigated idealisations of romantic love as necessarily tender, trusting, and monogamous.

For example, in 1985 Joanna Russ wrote that slash emphasises “the lovers’ personal interest in each other’s minds, not only each other’s

bodies, the tenderness, the refusal to rush into a relationship, the exclusive commitment to one another” (1985: 85). This notion of men in committed relationships is supported by Jenkins when he writes that “what matters [is] the growing intimacy and trust between the two protagonists” (1992: 174). Lamb and Veith, in their discussion of Kirk/Spock slash, foreground the customary attention of authors to the equality of the relationship between the men: “theirs is a union of strengths, a partnership rarely possible between men and women today and just as unlikely – if not more so – between men and women in the [*Star Trek*] television universe”. Moreover, “the basis for Kirk’s and Spock’s mutual commitment is the unquestioning reliance on one another’s courage, strength and wits” (1986: 238). While these theorists do highlight the importance of the place of sexual relations in their criticism of the genre, the sexual aspects of slash are usually bound up with the discussion of romantic love. In this way earlier commentators on slash reveal not only an unswerving focus on the romantic aspects of the men’s relationship, but they actively resist reading their union as informed by anything but ‘vanilla’ sexual relations. Bacon-Smith, for example argues in relation to ‘hurt-comfort’ slash, that “at no point is the abuse written as sexually exciting to the hurt characters, nor does either hero take pleasure in the abuse of the other” (1992: 259). Recent work by Salmon and Symons broadly states that slash typically has a “happily-ever-after ending, namely the establishment of a permanent, monogamous romantic and sexual union” (2004: 98). Likewise, Mirna Cicioni argues that “far from representing degrading behaviour, [slash is] usually set in contexts of deep emotional closeness” (1998: 168). While these accounts are, without a doubt, valuable explorations of the resistive and counter-hegemonic discourses present in the genre of slash, they have nonetheless tended to sidestep the existence of vast amounts of slash fiction which deals with the issues of aggressive sexuality, as well as the pleasures associated with it.

Fans have, I suggest, increasingly broken with the interests of such ‘utopian’ same-sex romances to articulate a much broader – and perhaps, less acceptably ‘feminine’ – range of narratives which include explicit sexual practices, including the graphic representation of rape, bondage,

as well as themes of incest.<sup>5</sup> With the exception of scholars such as Jenny Alexander (2004), Esther Saxey (2002) and Kristina Busse, who all explore the particularly “excessive use of violence and brutality” (Busse 212) in Buffyverse slash, few commentators move beyond rather simplistic assessments of the genre. Milly Williamson, for example, writes

It seems that many of the slash stories based on *Buffy* characters are primarily intended to sexually arouse the reader through the depiction of forbidden and polymorphous sexual encounters. [...] I am not suggesting that this makes slash unacceptable politically [...] But neither is slash to be simply celebrated; it is hard to celebrate erotically depicted rape and torture sequences even if they are only fantasy. (2005: 173-174)

While I concur with Williamson that much Buffyverse slash has a clear erotic function and that it is often unsettling, her dismissive stance is typical of many critical treatments on the subject. The overwhelming body of violent slash on the internet confirms the necessity for further critical discourse on the subject, and these discussions need not be celebratory. The following discussion takes up this gap in the critical commentary surrounding slash literature – especially in relation to the rapidly growing sub-genre ‘non-con’ (non-consensual sex) within slash, which often depicts extreme power imbalances between the two partners. If pornography is about sex for sex’s sake, then Buffyverse slash – despite its explicit and often violent nature – does not qualify. On the contrary, Buffyverse slash is organised around the articulation of the intricacies of the male character’s identities, feelings, desires, fears, and flaws. Crucial to the articulation of these issues is the co-dependency of sex and violence, neither of which *Buffy* or *Angel* shies away from. Buffyverse slash acutely mirrors and develops the series’ complex foci on sexuality, violence, empowerment, and disempowerment which traverse discursive constructions of gender.

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<sup>5</sup> Whether or not slash is pornographic has been the subject of some debate. The terms of this debate are, however, outside the scope of this article. For more on this topic, see for example, Bacon-Smith (1992), Lamb and Veith (1986), and Cicioni (1998).

### *Buffyverse Slash and Violence*

Slash fiction usually focuses on television shows that do not openly admit the possibility of a sexual relationship between same-sex characters. The genre of slash fiction conventionally exposes what is at least thinly veiled, and often deeply repressed within the universe of popular television shows. *Buffy* and *Angel*, however, differ from many popularly slashed shows in that the subtexts in Whedon's Buffyverse continually simmer just below the surface – always threatening to emerge. As Buffy's watcher, Rupert Giles, pointedly comments "I believe the subtext here is rapidly becoming the text" ("Ted" 2.11). The overt visual and verbal play with the conventional codes of BDSM in *Buffy* and *Angel* is essential to the erotico-politics of the Buffyverse. Indeed, the *mise-en-scène* of both *Buffy* and *Angel* is invested with a veritable excess of imagery associated with certain aspects of BDSM, or "kink", as it is often called by fans. Both shows commonly feature the vampires (and sometimes the humans) bound, gagged, and chained. The bodies of Angel and Spike in particular, are variously whipped, stabbed, bashed to a pulp, cut with glass and knives, staked through the body with various objects, and burnt with fire, holy water and crucifixes. The majority of this violence is often handled with humour and is also, especially in relation to the depiction of torture, unambiguously eroticised. Esther Saxey aptly observes, "Angel spends a ludicrous amount of time in chains, shirtless" (2002: 203).

Both series persistently imply a strong relationship between sexual pleasure and pain. In season five of *Buffy*, Spike's plan to get his vampire lover, Drusilla, to come back to him after leaving him for a Chaos Demon, is to find her, tie her up, and torture her till she loves him again ("Fool for Love" 5.7). Likewise, when the dominatrix-style, leather-clad vampire-doppelganger of the normally bookish Willow becomes trapped outside of her own dimension she laments, "In my world there are people in chains, and we can ride them like ponies" ("Doppelgangland" 3.16). Moreover, both series conflate sexual desire with pain through constant references to the eroticism of aggressive sexuality. For example, in season one of *Buffy*, when Angel grabs his vampire ex-lover Darla she tells him, "You're hurting me", and then says with a smile, "That's good" ("Angel" 1.7). In "Something Blue" Buffy asserts: "real love and passion have to go hand in hand with pain and fighting" (4.9). Spike and

Buffy's sexual relationship is characterised by pain; in "Get it Done" Buffy tells Spike "What I want is the Spike who's dangerous" (7.15), and in "Smashed" when Spike tells Buffy "I'm in love with you" she replies, "You're in love with pain" (6.9). In "Lie to Me" Drusilla takes delight in teasing Angel by reminding him of how he used to "hurt" her when he was 'Angelus', Angel's evil vampire self (2.7). These are just some of the many occurrences in Whedon's series where both human and demon characters articulate the close relationship between love, desire, and pain. The overabundance of subtextual references to sadomasochism in *Buffy* and *Angel* illustrates that the appearance of these elements in Buffyverse fanfic did not appear in a vacuum.

While elements of BDSM are overtly explored within both Whedon's series, the homoerotic implications of relationships between the male characters are less blatant but nonetheless discernible. The complexity of onscreen tensions between Angel and Spike with their constant bickering, brawling, and hostility toward one another provides, for many viewers, the necessary fodder for a queer reading. Accordingly, the gamut of slash fictions that pair Spike and Angel – affectionately termed 'Spangel' by fans – is indeed evidence of the productiveness of such a reading. The sexual tension between the two characters is so potent that by the last episode of *Buffy* in season seven, Buffy's comments reflect the undercurrent of homoeroticism in the relationship of the two vampires:

*Buffy*: One of these days, I'm just gonna put you two in a room and let you rattle it out.

*Spike*: No problem at this end.

*Buffy*: [pauses] There could maybe be oil of some kind involved... ("Chosen" 7.22)

Likewise in the series finale of *Angel*, when Spike misunderstands another character's use of the word "intimate" in relation to himself and Angel, he responds: "Cause Angel and me have never been intimate – except that one..." ("Power Play" 5.21). This line, left hanging in the very last episode of the series, is no doubt intended as a knowing wink in the direction of fans who have long seen the homoeroticism in the relationship. Despite the clearly erotic implications of both scenes described here, I agree with Rictor Norton's suggestion that within queer studies, "the critic of 'homosexual literature' is under no special obligation to be an expert sleuth in detecting erotic innuendo" (1974:

127). What does interest me however, is the ways in which slash writers flesh out, so to speak, those elements of sex and pain that are already implicit within the show.

While it is certainly true that beatings, torture, and the representation of heterosexual intercourse (within the bounds of the shows' PG rating) between vampires, and vampires and humans, are fundamental to the fictional logic of the show, slash fiction transgresses this logic in a range of complex ways. Particularly common in the case of Spangel fanfic is the scenario in which (usually) Angel brutally rapes and/or tortures Spike. Oftentimes this depiction of rape is figured as a violent violation with no remorse on the part of the attacker. This kind of portrayal of rape is typically figured in Angelus/William fics which draw on Buffyverse canon<sup>6</sup> and assumes an earlier period in time when Angel was known as Angelus and had no soul, and William (Spike's name when he was human) was newly turned into a vampire:

“Come here, boy I've a lesson for you”

William stiffens, every muscle and nerve on instant alert. He has learned to dread those words [...]. And he aches yet from the last lesson learned at Angelus' hands, his hips creaky in their sockets. (Willa, *Not So Bright as Gold*)

This story by Willa, like many of the Buffyverse historical flashbacks, attests to the non-consensual nature of Angelus' sexual abuse of William, a foppish and insecure poet living in England in the late 1800s. In Whedon's version of vampire lore, all vampires are unreservedly evil – except, that is, when the vampire has a soul. After committing unconscionable evil as 'Angelus' during his first century as a vampire, Angel's soul was eventually restored in the late 1800s when he was cursed by Gypsies. In season one of *Buffy* Angel explains “when you become a vampire the demon takes your body, but it doesn't get your soul. That's just gone. No conscience, no remorse. It's an easy way to live” (“Angel” 1.7). Thus for Angelus – unlike for his alter-ego Angel

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<sup>6</sup> Fans often embellish or alter the Buffyverse 'canon', the fan terminology for the events, plotlines, characters, and conventions of the original source text. When these embellishments or extrapolations become widespread within the fan community it is generally accepted as 'fanon' (<http://whedonesque.com/comments/1875>)

who is burdened with a soul and therefore a conscience – rape may be committed without consequence or remorse. Within the moral framework of the Buffyverse, then, this kind of violent masculinity is textually arbitrated in two main ways: firstly, Angelus is evil and therefore unaccountable, and secondly, he is a vampire – a figure traditionally associated with sex and moral corruption.

Indeed, the vampiric link with rape is seen most clearly in the sexualised nature of the penetrative teeth of the vampire's bite (Auerbach 1995, Hughes 2000). The following passage is from a slash story by Wiseacress, and demonstrates the complexities of the vampiric rape scene:

“Stop it,” he said again, a little louder. He was slurring. He pushed again at Angel's shoulder, and tried to twist free. There was a tearing pain in his neck. Angel growled and fumbled his hand over Spike's face to his chin, then pulled his head farther to the side and bit again. Spike tried to wrench his head free and couldn't [...] Angel's fingers were cold and slippery with blood. His growl was a deep long vibration between their bodies.

“Bastard,” Spike said faintly, trying to hold his eyes open. Angel shifted and bit again [...]. The teeth knifed out and in again, and he lay with his head pinned to the side, the growl shaking his guts, a thin string of white lights sliding silently by in the dark. He was warm and tired and afraid. (Wiseacress, *Beggars Would Ride*)

The sexual violence in this scene is not only underscored by the metaphoric link between bloodsucking and sex, but is also highlighted by the metaphoric association of the vampire's bite with rape. It is significant that in this particular story, it is Angel – not Angelus – who is performing this act of violence: the brutality of rape is canonically out of character for the heroic vampire with a soul. Soon after the initial non-consensual penetration of the rape/bite, Angel finalises the act of sexual violence with forced anal penetration. While non-con narratives such as this one abound in Buffyverse slash, the majority of these stories figure the sexual act as a kind of rape-cum-seduction. In a typical story, sexual violence is initiated by Angel as forced and non-consensual in nature, but then in the course of the narrative Spike actively plays the role of 'victim' or submissive, and then typically begins to enjoy the domination. In Wiseacress's story for example, while neither vampire speaks very much during the story, the omniscient narrator conveys the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of Spike so that we learn that he has enjoyed the feeling of sexual domination. However, we are also told that

Spike “wanted so much to close his eyes and believe it was Angelus. Open his eyes and see that hard cruel beautiful face in the darkness over him. Mocking him, and owning him” (Wiseacress). Angel, it seems, is far too gentle for Spike. Wiseacress establishes the initial fantasy of rape and then successfully sidesteps from the violence of the image by communicating Spike’s pleasure in the masochistic role of sexual submissive. In this sense, then, rape – which, by definition is a non-consensual sexual violation – morphs uneasily into the realm of BDSM and sexual role-play. According to Gary Taylor and Jane Ussher, there are four basic elements of BDSM: “(i) consensuality, (ii) an unequal balance of power, (iii) sexual arousal, and (iv) compatibility of definition” (2001: 297). Thus, while many slash narratives incorporate all four elements in their stories they often blur the distinctions between non-consensual sexual violence and the normally consensual practices of BDSM. At the end of Wiseacress’s story, the author reinstates the initial emphasis on a more aggressive sexuality by stating that Spike’s real desire was to have the evil Angelus (and not Angel) “Mocking him, and owning him” (Wiseacress). Importantly, what is being represented in many slash rape and non-con narratives is not a depiction of the actual rape of the character but a seductively aestheticised fantasy of it – a fantasy moreover, that is discursively constructed through the literary tropes of the vampiric.

In an interesting twist on the rape narrative in a story by Saber ShadowKitten, Spike and Angel engage in aggressive yet consensual sex until Spike tries to leave, but Angel holds him down:

“Let go!” I exclaim, shoving at the arm around my waist, holding me down.

“No,” he states, pulling me back against him.

“Damn it! Let me go!” I yell again. When did he get so bloody strong?

He tightens his arm around me. “No.”

And then his fangs pierce the side of my neck, and I stop moving. Tears prickle my eyes. It’s the alcohol. I don’t cry anymore. I’m not a nancyboy.

(ShadowKitten, *I Hate the Holidays*)

ShadowKitten’s story reveals a focussed connection between the pain of the piercing bite and the violation of rape. Only after Angel bites him does Spike begin to feel “rage, humiliation, hurt, sadness” (ibid.). Significantly, the source of Spike’s “rage” and “humiliation” is not just that Angel violated him by biting and drinking his blood but also that,

during their sadomasochistic sex, Angel calls him “William”, Spike’s human name:

Then his eyes turn gold for a brief instant as his face flickers, and he buries himself with a hard thrust into my arse.

“William,” he growls, and I’m stunned.

He called me William. My Sire called me William. (ibid.)

The moment that Angel calls Spike his real name he feels “burning humiliation” which hits him “like a sledgehammer” (ibid.). The implication here is that Spike experiences rape twice over: he feels betrayed when the rough and emotionally detached sex (that he is enjoying) is disrupted by the sudden emotional connection engendered by Angel’s use of Spike’s human name, as well as the unwanted penetration of the bite.

ShadowKitten’s construction of the rape narrative might be interpreted here as exemplifying what Pia Livia Hekanaho has called “textual female masculinity.” According to Hekanaho, “textual female masculinity is offered as a concept for dealing with the inevitably gendered aspects of any text.” It “refers not only to a presence of masculine characters and experiences in the fiction of female authors, but also to characteristics that in our culture are linked to the masculine style or bearing” (2006: 10). Importantly, Hekanaho’s concept of textual female masculinity does not seek to attribute any sort of essentialist masculine style to the writing, but rather to explore the constructedness of masculinity in those texts. In relation to ShadowKitten’s story, the depiction of rape forms a strategy through which the author can elaborate on the unequal relations of power between the two male vampires, as well as the sexual tensions, and reactions of one male character to the unwanted actions of the other. For example, Spike’s abhorrence of intimacy implies a clear rejection of characteristics that would deem him feminine – a “nancyboy” – just at the very moment that he is feminised through the penetration of Angel’s bite. The author raises the prospect of the kind of romantic sex that might foreground an emotional connection between the two men, but, when Spike actively rejects Angel’s gesture of romantic love, the author reinstates the focus on a more corporeal approach to the vampire’s sexual relationship. For Spike, the physical pain inflicted on him at the hands of Angel is preferable to an emotional commitment that is suggested by Angel’s familiar use of his name.

Moreover, ShadowKitten's narrative, along with the Buffyverse in general, tends to code the erotics of physical pain as masculine while emotional/psychic pain is feminised. In this way, much fanfic's treatment of BDSM and sexual violence allow the continuing reclamation and consolidation of masculine hegemony. This reinforcement of discursive constructions of dominant masculinity through the gendering of pain and sexual violence cannot be profitably studied outside of the discursive complexities of the representation of the hurt male body as object of the female erotic gaze.

### *The Erotics of the Hurt Male Body*

The bodies of both Masters (Spike) and Boreanaz (Angel) are arguably the most eroticised male bodies in *Buffy* and *Angel*. And these bodies are most highly sexualised when they are tortured, wounded, or in pain. Lorna Jowett observes that in *Buffy*, the masculine body of Spike is frequently "displayed in scenes of violence and torture making him the feminized, passive victim as well as the erotic object of the gaze" (2005: 164). Both Angel and Spike are repeatedly strung up – physically, in chains – and displayed for the female viewer's erotic look.<sup>7</sup> This "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1975) of the male bodies of Angel and Spike produces a tension that is twofold: firstly, it is the male body, and not, as traditionally, the female body, that is subjected to an objectifying gaze. Secondly, the voyeuristic pleasure derived from the display of Angel and Spike's semi-naked bodies is problematised by the fact that they are injured and battered. This image of the wounded yet eroticised male vampiric body forms the foundation of the many slash fictions which pair Angel and Spike. Steve Neale has argued that the image of the tortured and marked male body has often functioned to displace and/or repress the positioning of the male body as an object of erotic desire (1983: 8). As Neale writes, "mutilation and sadism" of the male body function "as a means by which the male body may be disqualified, so to

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<sup>7</sup> While there is much to be said about the ways in which masculine bodies are positioned within *Buffy* and *Angel* for a gay male audience, this is outside the scope of this paper.

speak, as an object of erotic contemplation and desire” (1983: 8). Yet, tortured – and torturing – male bodies are repeatedly figured in *Buffy* and *Angel* as desirable; a position made clear when Buffy (pretending to be the ‘Buffy-bot’ robot) tells Spike he is “covered in sexy wounds” (“Intervention” 5.18).

The kinky display of the beautiful battered male body of the Buffyverse canon commonly appears in Spangel fanfiction. In a fic by Wyoluvr, Spike’s body is beaten during aggressive yet consensual sex at the hands of Angel and is represented as a thing of beauty: “He was so damn beautiful when he hurt. [Angel’s] fists made repeated contact with Spike’s torso. Again and again, tenderizing the flesh, sweet purple bruises that would not last long, but would be a beauty mark for a moment” (Wyoluvr, *By Her Side*). Wyoluvr’s juxtaposition of the image of the bruise with the traditionally feminine ‘beauty mark’ highlights the aesthetics of the beaten male body while simultaneously undercutting the brutality of the image by suggesting the briefness of the bruises. In Whedon’s Buffyverse, vampires can be killed by fire, sun, decapitation, and a wooden stake through the heart. They cannot, however, as we see over and over again in *Buffy* and *Angel*, die from a severe beating. Specifically, it is the eroticisation of the hurt yet endlessly restorative undead body of the vampire that enables the violence of the representation to transcend the pure brutality of the act by distancing it to the realm of the supernatural. Bacon-Smith argues in a similar vein that m/m slash allows heterosexual women to engage in sexual fantasies they would not want to experience in reality. Moreover, in Bacon-Smith’s formulation, slash writers use gay sex – an “oppressed sexuality” (1992: 147) – to articulate their desires and wishes about their own relationships with men. Following Bacon-Smith’s argument then, the representation of violent sexual scenarios between men in slash fictions may operate to create a sense of distance from the direct (and unwanted) real-life experience of sexual violence toward women, and place it at the safe distance of sexual fantasy. The highly sexualised un-hurttable male vampire body further distances women’s fantasies involving BDSM – as well as non-consensual sex – outside of their direct psycho-sexual reality.

The vampire body can sustain endless amounts of damage before healing at a supernatural rate. In a story by Donna, told from Angel’s

point of view, the vampire's indestructible body equals an intensely sexual one:

There was a bond Angel had shared with Spike no one else had ever touched, not even Buffy [...] For all her strength and prowess, Buffy was still a human. And she had a righteous and well founded hatred of his demon. [...] But Spike, Spike revelled in the demon they hosted, in the savage pleasure of the flesh only kindred could share. There was nothing Angel could do that would horrify Spike, nothing that would make him recoil in fear or disgust. There was nothing he could do that would harm Spike permanently physically, and ... well, that left numerous possibilities. (Donna, *Ronin: Under the Sun*)

The erotic possibilities in Donna's story are located in the matched strength of the lovers and in a sense of acceptance of the others 'monstrous' male body. Barbara Creed's analysis of monstrous male bodies in horror film is useful here in exploring the particular appeal of the vampire's body: "they assume characteristics usually associated with the female body: they experience a blood cycle, change shape, bleed, give birth, become penetrable" (1993: 118). In many slash fictions, including Donna's story, the penetrable male body is emphasised alongside the 'monstrous' processes of the vampiric body. According to Sharon Stockton, women in contemporary literature and culture continue to be "defined through the general attribution of passivity, productivity (without agency), and penetrability – qualities that reflexively delimit the nature of man as other than [this]" (2006: 2). Donna's story though, constructs the male vampire body as savage, penetrable, and monstrous in such a way that it seems to disqualify Buffy's female body as erotically desirable – she is human and female. As I suggested earlier, Buffy's and Spike's relationship throughout season six of *Buffy* was organised around sex and violence. Importantly, the possibilities of their sexual-gymnastics – the two actually bring the building down around them during sex in the episode "Smashed" (6.9) – are heightened by the fact that they are matched in strength (a vampire and the Slayer). Likewise, Angel and Spike are also matched, not only because they are both men, but because they are both vampires. In the passage from Donna's story, the sexual bond shared by Angel and Spike is based on the familial bonds of the vampiric (a point to which I will return) and on the monstrous 'male-ness' of their embodiment.

This canonical subtext of the vampire's relatively indestructible body provides for shippers the psycho-sexual ground on which Buffyverse

kink slash is constructed. Moreover, the fantasy of the eroticised and ‘Othered’ vampire body helps to further relegate women’s fantasies about BDSM practices to the realm of the vampiric supernatural. Vampire narratives have always coalesced around anxieties about the vampire’s capacity to transgress socially, sexually and culturally constructed boundaries (Gelder 1994). After all, as we are told in season four of *Buffy*, “Vampires are a paradox [...] demon in a human body. [They] walk in both worlds and belong to neither” (“Who Are You?” 4.16). Unlike humans, vampires are not constrained by the limitations of time and aging, they are eternal and, as such, they contravene normative categories in their ability to straddle the schisms between life and death, old and young. The vampire moreover, has the ability to ‘pass’ as human. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger write that the vampire produces anxieties in us because it is a

monster that *looks like us*. For this reason, the figure of the vampire always has the potential to jeopardize conventional distinctions between human and monster, between life and death, between ourselves and the other. (1997: 201)

The vampire troubles the discursively constructed boundaries that define sexuality and gender, as well as socio-cultural notions of what is beautiful or ugly, feminine or masculine, heroic or villainous. Literary mythologies of the vampire unswervingly highlight the profound otherness and sexual perversion suggested by vampirism; an otherness which allows for the articulation of cultural fears and tensions surrounding sexual taboos, particularly of sexual excess and perversity, as well as the incest taboo, homosexuality, and lesbianism (Dijkstra 1986, Dyer 1988, Case 1991, Gelder 1994). In Rosemary Jackson’s words, vampirism is “perhaps the highest symbolic representation of eroticism” (1981: 26). Buffyverse slash draws extensively on the historico-cultural tensions produced around the mythologies of the vampiric and illustrate that the literary trope of the vampire continues to operate as a critical site for the exploration of textual constructions of violent masculinity.

At one and the same time Angel and Spike reflect the anxieties of the outsider; they are potential predators who long to be part of the world of humans but are inexorably caught between two worlds: that of the living and of the dead. Williamson argues that “much of the vampire’s pain is to be found in the pathos of its misrecognised identity [...] a reluctant

symbol of evil whose innocence is hidden by the very fact that its body is seen to be the essence of evil” (2005: 2). Many Buffyverse narratives explore the contradictory drives of the vampire to be accepted and understood by humans on the one hand, and to satisfy the vampiric desire for human blood on the other. Buffyverse slash, for example, is infused with the themes and conventions of the vampire genre: supernatural strength, heightened sensory awareness, skin that is pale and cold, the vampire’s bite, and the drinking of blood or ‘bloodplay’. The infusion of the tropes of the vampiric into many slash narratives also functions to defuse the violence in them. For instance, in a particularly violent and angst-ridden story by Tinkerbelle and Kita, called “Binding Angel/Binding Spike”, the violence described is continually undercut at various points by injecting into the narrative the conventional tropes of the vampire genre: “lashings and kisses. Fangs at wounds that heal too goddammed fast for this work. Rend. Chew. Swallow” (Tinkerbelle and Kita). In this story, Angel and Spike embody prevailing codes of aggressive masculinity in a highly sexualised representation of the vampire. The male vampire body is graphically described as a body that cannot be broken. Tenderness and violence unite in the image of “lashings and kisses”, and the wounds inflicted on the vampire body are transitory, healing faster than they can be made.

This focus on the desirable hurt male body is not, however, unique to Buffyverse slash and first came about in the form of a sub-genre within slash called ‘hurt-comfort’ (Bacon-Smith 255). In these fictions one of the male protagonists, after being injured or hurt is comforted physically, emotionally, and/or sexually by another male character. For many slash writers, particularly in *Star Trek* fandom, it is an important convention of the hurt-comfort genre that the source of the injury is placed “outside of the dyad of sufferer and comforter” (Bacon-Smith 1992: 255). In other words, neither character is responsible for the suffering of the other. However, Buffyverse slash departs from the conventions of this popular sub-genre significantly by positing the ‘hurt’ as a direct result of aggression or violence which comes directly from one or both of the characters. Indeed, this violence is often constructed as a perfunctory, consensual, and enjoyable prelude to sex in many Spangel fictions. The conflation of sex and pain is demonstrated in a story by Avarice, which is told from Spike’s point of view: “Hell, for me, a good beating is pretty much foreplay. Don’t really matter whether I’m giving or receiving. All

the same outcome” (*Voyeur*). In a story by Zyre, Angel “growls” with his hand around Spike’s throat “squeezing painfully”; for Spike the pain is simultaneously “excruciating and intoxicating” (*Everything He Needs*). Again, in another story, this one by Estepheia, Angel and Spike are engaged in a violent battle before Angel grabs Spike “by his neck”, hurls him face down on the bonnet of a car, and pins him down, and then rapes him – which Spike eventually enjoys (*Closer*). Significantly, unlike many hurt-comfort stories, where the notion of sexual comfort is offered by one male to another to help ease the pain of the physical or emotional hurt, Buffyverse slash stories often posit the ‘hurt’ as the ‘comfort’. In a story entitled *Cold Comfort* by Kbk, Spike feels alone and insecure and comes to Angel for help but finds Angel is cold and unwilling to talk to him. Eventually Angel seizes Spike and pins him to the wall:

What is it that’s pinning me to the wall this time? Is it anger? [...] I’m comfortable here. It’s sick and twisted and totally wrong, but it’s comfortable. I’m safe here, [...] Unyielding comfort. Wall. Sire. Rock and a hard place. [...] He presses back into me and it just feels wrong [...] but as soon as he bites into my shoulder it’s right again, because it’s him. [...] I didn’t come here looking for flowers and romance.

(Kbk, *Cold Comfort*)

The notion of romantic solace normally integral to hurt-comfort is usurped by the sadomasochistic pleasure of physical pain to help mitigate Spike’s feelings of emotional helplessness. Kbk’s recurring emphasis on the feelings of ‘wrongness’ when Angel restrains Spike and bites him illustrates the importance of pain to alleviate his anxieties; it is not sex with Angel that feels wrong, but sex without the dominance and pain inflicted by his “sire” that feels wrong.

Kbk’s narrative, as well as others discussed throughout this article, reveals that Buffyverse slash cannot be simplified as merely pornographic representations of violent or aggressive sex. On the contrary, Buffyverse slash fictions problematise the seemingly straightforward constructions of sexual violence in slash fandom by revealing that the interrelations of homosexuality, violence, friendship and love found in Buffyverse slash fictions, are much more complexly integrated with sociocultural anxieties about masculinity, as well as social anxieties about homosociality, than they would first appear. For example, in a story by ‘Killa’ called *One Time Thing*, the scene begins from Angel’s point of view and utilises the conventional language of

pornographic representation. However, the author then reveals an interesting shift:

Rough was good, too. Rough and hard and fast was what he needed, what Spike gave him, hands all over him, jerking him and holding him steady, bracing him so he could let the vertigo and the hot darkness sweep over him. That was when Spike changed the game, stopped [...] and started stroking him, kissing the back of his neck. Angel stiffened up immediately, shuddering to a halt, jerking away from that unexpected intimacy [...]. "What the hell are you doing?" Spike's head lifted, but he didn't stop the steady stroking.

"Doin' what you told me to, mate. Thought we were on the same page, here." "With my – on my neck. You kissed me." "Did not" "Did so!" "Oh, for –" Spike broke off. "And so what if I did? You smell good, all right? Sue me. It's not gonna kill you, oh extremely manly one." (Killa, *One Time Thing*)

The use of humour in Killa's story is worth noting here. Although, as I have shown, the representation of aggressive sexuality in slash fictions is pervasive, the use of humour functions as a way in which to deflect the brutality of the sexual acts described. As Wilcox and Lavery have suggested "[h]umour suspends pain. And humour spins perspective" (2005: 228). The particular 'spin' on perspective here is that the reader is positioned to read the story as a stereotypical rehearsal of the conventions of domineering masculinity. Although ready for the familiar description of angry sex and violation, the reader is instead presented with an unexpected image of tenderness. Moreover, humour is brought to the scene through the author's accurate depiction of the bickering that is typical to the relationship of Angel and Spike in Whedon's series. Furthermore, the use of the word 'mate' – also characteristic of Spike's speech – draws attention to the slippage made explicit in slash, between homosociality and homosexuality.

Male bonding, in Whedon's series' and in the slash fiction produced around the shows, is frequently facilitated through joking, fighting, rivalry, and through the bonds of the vampire family structure. Indeed, one possible explanation for the gap in the current scholarship dealing with the violence found in some slash fandoms is the early emphasis of critical commentaries on fandom surrounding Star Trek. In the original series of Star Trek, Kirk and Spock are best friends, and thus a sense of their mutual respect is an important part of the show's positive representation of homosocial bonds. Jenkins has called this the "'great friendship' theme" (1992: 203) that fans locate within the Star Trek

universe. Conversely, Whedon's construction of the relationship between Angel and Spike reveals a mutually reciprocated animosity as well as a sense of fierce competition, which is played out in Buffy and Angel through a constant string of violent – yet humorous – demonstrations of hostility toward one another. The source of their rivalry is usually Buffy, the teenaged Vampire Slayer, who, despite her calling to fight vampires, becomes romantically and sexually involved with both Angel and Spike at various points throughout both series. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reworking of René Girard's notion of the "erotic triangle" is useful in looking at the ways in which fans conceptualise the relationship between Angel and Spike in slash fiction, and the tangential relationship the two vampires share with Buffy.

In her book *Between Men*, Sedgwick writes that the "bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (1985: 21). This notion of the erotic triangle – with Buffy at the apex – is both played out on screen in *Buffy* and *Angel*, and explicitly enacted in many slash fictions. In Whedon's series, before Angelus was 're-ensouled' he epitomised vampire cruelty with a bloodlust rivalled only by Spike, otherwise known as 'William the Bloody'. Angel and Spike shared a taste for the blood of the innocent, cutting a trail of violence and mayhem through Europe for over two centuries with their respective female paramours Darla (Julie Benz) and Drusilla (Juliet Landau). Angel and Spike, however, were never really friends. Even during their reign of terror their relationship was a tenuous one, marked by competition, jealousy, and violence. This emphasis on violence and on the homoerotic bonds of shared hostility, are themes that are constantly highlighted in Angel/Spike fanfic. These tensions form the foundation of many of the stories. With Angel and Spike pitted against one another, sex and violence become the sites at which masculinity, homosociality, and the vampiric are negotiated. For example, in a story called *Long December* by Evette, Spike is drunk and angry at Angel for the close relationship he shares with Buffy. The story ends with a short description of the two vampires engaging in frustrated sexual relations: "Angel lies down next to him in the grass and holding Spike's face, he kisses him hard and hungry. They kiss until Spike tastes blood, and they fuck until they can both feel the sunrise coming" (Evette). This hurt-comfort narrative by Evette demonstrates that sex itself is not the primary purpose of the story but takes second place to the conflicts

produced around the two vampire's 'erotic triangle' with Buffy. In Sedgwick's formulation of the erotic triangle the men's intense desire for the woman acts like a conduit for the intense homosocial relations between the men. Interestingly, Evette's story demonstrates an inversion of Sedgwick's concept whereby sex with each other functions as a means through which the men can express their sexual rivalry over Buffy. The short description of sex at the conclusion of the story does not constitute a sexual catharsis, but offers instead a kind of comfort to the frustrations felt by the protagonists, even if those frustrations and anxieties are suspended till their next encounter. The bond between the vampires begins as a homosocial one rather than a homosexual one, but shifts in the course of their growing angst to become, in the words of Sedgwick, "some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two" (1985: 25).

The bond that Angel and Spike share in their rivalry over Buffy is further complicated by the complex bond of the vampiric. In a story by Circe, Buffy inadvertently sees Angel and Spike together engaged in a "primal" scene of sexual intercourse:

It's primal possession, and in that instant Buffy knows that this passion is one of the parts of Angel that she'll never have, can never understand [...] His lovemaking [to her] was simple, deliberate, careful, sweet. This is bubbling fury and raw sex, two male creatures writhing against each other, dark and light, heavy and lithe, blood calling to blood. (Circe, *Cotton Candy*)

In Circe's story, Buffy is inevitably disconnected from Angel, not just because she is female, but because she is human. Busse, in her discussion of Buffyverse fan fiction, describes the vampire bond as an incestuous one – both familial and deeply sexualised at the same time. She argues that the vampire bond collapses "the role of parent and lover" and in doing so, "challenges the most fundamental prohibition that defines culture at its very core: the incest taboo" (2002: 208). Busse goes on to explain that:

The vampire can never grow up and leave the nest with an ultimate reversal of caregiving in old age as we see in human families. Instead, he is caught in an eternal, repetitive circle of sex, violence, and submission to his sire. (2002: 210)

This circular enactment of incestuous desire and violence is played out in *Buffy* and *Angel* through the complex dynamics of the vampire family

structure. In both series it is understood that Darla sired Angel, who in turn sired Drusilla, who then sired Spike. Drusilla calls Angel “Daddy” on numerous occasions, and she also calls Darla “Grandmother”. The role of the sire as both sexual predator and as parent is made clear in the moment when Darla turns Angel into a vampire. After luring him into an alley, Darla cuts herself across her breast and forces her victim to suckle (“Becoming Part 1” 2.21). It is noteworthy that the family line of these four key vampires of the series maintains a heterosexual genealogy: female-male-female-male. Yet, in Buffyverse slashdom, fans frequently imagine that it was not Drusilla who sired Spike, but Angel. In rewriting this particular aspect of the Buffyverse canon, fans open up the possibility of same-sex desire between the two vampires; a desire which is implicit in the sexualised act of siring. Moreover, in figuring Angel as Spike’s father/lover shippers are free to explore the dynamics of the sire/“childe”, or even master/slave relationship; a relationship that explicitly enacts Spike’s “eternal, repetitive circle of sex, violence, and submission” (Busse 2002: 210) to his sire Angel/us. Busse notes that while “many different vampire contexts describe the parent-vampire as *sire*, [Buffyverse] fanfic is singular in describing the offspring as *childe*” (2002: 214). In a hurt-comfort story from Spike’s point of view, shipper Abhainn Realta explores the particular bond of the sire/childe relationship:

Time was I could have pinpointed his location from several miles away; just closed my eyes and reached with my mind, and there he was, arrogant self assurance flaring like a flame in my blood-tranced brain. For that’s what it is: the blood, calling to me, to him, bonding us, and he could sense me too, could sense all of his Childer and tell them apart. [...] He’ll know that I need him. [...] I want him to know it, [...] take me into his arms again, take me to his bed and his chains and his love and his pain. But I also want to keep it from him, keep it from him forever because \*he\* doesn’t need \*me\*. (Realta, *Be Still*)

Realta’s story reveals the sire/childe relationship to be a site of angst, hostility, and vulnerability, and demonstrates the particularly sexualised nature of this bond. The bond they share is a ‘blood bond’, which can be seen as a metaphoric expression of their sexual union, with Spike always submissive to Angel. Spike’s emotional vulnerability in this story is made all the more poignant by the first person narration of the story – Angel is never aware of his “childe’s” true feelings of love, desire and submission to him.

Buffyverse slash can be seen as a medium through which women have explored gender – to use Judith Butler’s (1990) terms – as a performative category. The authors of slash fiction can, and do, perform the gender scripts of brutal masculinity, masculine rivalry, as well as homosexuality in their fanfic. In their collection of fan responses to questions about the popularity of slash, Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins and Henry Jenkins quote A. Morgan, who believes that slash scenarios “confront and transgress our nicely constructed ideas of the ‘norm’”. She goes on to explain that “in slash, we do what is unthinkable, we put the ‘wrong’ people in bed, in the ‘wrong’ situations. In a world that creates the individual’s identity in terms of sexuality, we respond by challenging, rearranging, that sexuality, that identity” (quoted in Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 1998: 36). The Buffyverse fan fictions expose the fluidity between the boundaries of homosociality and homosexuality. In many of the stories Angel and Spike move easily, and at other times anxiously, between homosocial desire and homosexual desire; they reside in a place of inbetweenness that is acutely mirrored by the inbetweenness of the vampiric state of undead.

### *Conclusions*

The postmodern pastiche of vampire lore created by Joss Whedon in his series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* offers fans and academic scholars alike a rich palimpsest through which to read the trope of the vampire as marker of contemporary cultural anxieties and social conflict. Both of Whedon’s series, with their interlocking plots and characters, have now ceased production after seven seasons of *Buffy* and five seasons of *Angel*. Despite the termination of both shows, the fandom surrounding the Buffyverse continues to thrive as does an increasing body of scholarly work dedicated to the study of the social and critical issues in *Buffy* and *Angel* (Wilcox & Lavery 2002, Jowett 2005). Likewise, the internet has become crucial to the circulation and dissemination of Buffyverse slash fictions and has allowed many fans greater access to a broad range of non-heteronormative figurations of desire. The fans of Whedon’s series are active participants in a complex process of collective creative reading and writing, as well as questioning, and even subverting the meanings offered them by the original series.

The slash fictions produced around these shows demonstrate an even broader range of complex and multivalent constructions of masculinity, homosociality, and sexuality than the television series openly allows. It is through the dangerous and transgressive qualities of the figure of the vampire that scenarios of sexual brutality are safely played out in literary constructions which highlight the conventions of homosocial behaviour as well as the constructedness of aggressive masculine sexuality.

Even though the study of slash fandom has successfully established an institutional grounding in literary and cultural studies, there remains a sizeable gap in critical perspectives of slash which deal with the more radical aspects of sexual violence present in the Buffyverse fan community. Buffyverse slash fictions challenge the premise of earlier commentators on the subject who argue that slash's chief function is to allow women to imagine loving, equal, and romantic relations that are seemingly impossible in heterosexual relationships. Not only do many slash writers reject the representation of romantic love in their depictions of Angel and Spike, but they actively construct a fantasy involving homosexual men involved in aggressive sexual practices. These violent representations present a challenge to previous understandings of the meanings generated by slash fictions. However, while these texts may enact a subversive renegotiation of the generic conventions of slash by rejecting the romance plots of earlier slash writing, they also leave unquestioned cultural stereotypes and assumptions about hegemonic masculinity as necessarily aggressive, and always with the potential for rape.

Whether these narratives of sexual violence carry with them the potential for a feminist revision of the meanings associated with conventional notions of patriarchal and domineering masculinity is debatable. I tend to agree with Jenkin's assertion that while "slash confronts the most repressive forms of sexual identity", it does not, "however, provide a politically stable or even consistently coherent response to these concerns" (1992: 189-190). Yet, the constructions of these violent, yet often strangely tender, representations of masculine characters by female authors, do tend to suggest a threat to traditional conceptions of female desire. In particular, the Buffyverse slash fictions I have analysed here register a clear shift away from themes of romantic love that have dominated earlier fandoms, and move instead toward the representation of polymorphous sexual identities that include the fantasy

of violent sexual practices between men. This shift raises some important questions about the particular meanings these narratives generate in relation to discursive constructions of male sexuality. In particular, these fictions shift past and current concepts about the production of a female desiring gaze. Crucially, I suggest that Buffyverse slash engenders a gaze that fetishises the male homosexual body; a gaze that explicitly enacts a cooptation of male homosexuality into women's socio-sexual economy of desire. The enactment of this gaze highlights an ideological double-standard that exists within Western culture: on the one hand, the 'girl-on-girl' fantasy of lesbian sexuality has long been a staple of the heterosexual male porn industry (this particular fantasy is frequently expressed by *Buffy's* Xander Harris). On the other hand, the notion that a heterosexual woman might engage in fantasies concerning male homosexual sex that is outside the paradigms of romantic love has been traditionally believed unthinkable.

As I have argued, slash fan fiction is a highly varied and changeable practice within the online fan communities and not only functions to actively rework the traditional romance narratives of earlier slash writing, but also to rework the mythology of the vampire. Despite the growing prevalence of slash with themes of BDSM, academics and scholars remain reluctant to address the explicitly pornographic imagination of slash fandom. My intention has been to broaden the theoretical paradigms for analysing slash, and while the often-disturbing conflation of sex and violence in the slash texts examined here is undoubtable, this sub-genre continues to grow within slash fandom and, as such, warrants serious academic consideration. The slash fan fictions surrounding Whedon's Buffyverse represent a conspicuous example of how female fans have radically reworked and recoded the existing meta-texts to create new works that add to the cultural production of ideas surrounding gender, and that explore the complexity of female representations of male sexuality.

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