

# The Analysis of the Heroine and Feminism in the TV Show Buffy the Vampire Slayer

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2019

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zadar / Sveučilište u Zadru**

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-08**



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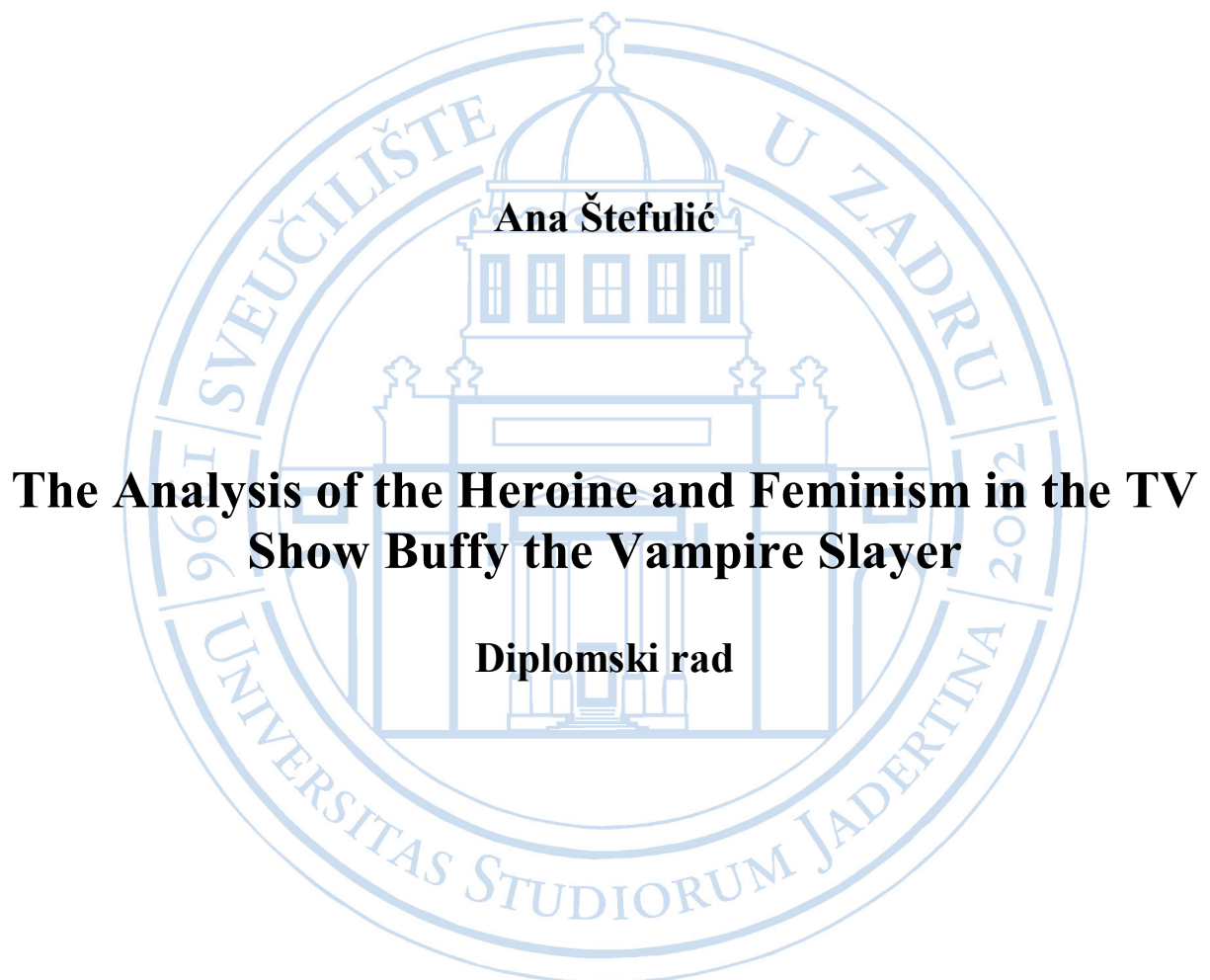
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Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti; smjer: znanstveni  
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**Ana Štefulić**

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The Analysis of the Heroine and Feminism in the TV Show Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Diplomski rad

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Zadar, 2019.



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## INTRODUCTION

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a television show created by Joss Whedon which aired from 1996 to 2003. In that span of seven years, it became a milestone of popular culture. The show revolves around Buffy, young teenager destined to be a vampire slayer and the adventures she goes through with her friends. It is still relevant and discussed, with many books and articles being written about it. The show became a case of study in feminism and LGBTQ community. It is one of the representatives of third wave feminism for popular culture. In this thesis, this influence will be studied, with focus on feminism and heroine, on what makes Buffy a third wave feminist icon. Among other works (such as *Visual and Other Pleasures*, *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane Puts It in a Box*, *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique*, etc) this thesis will use Patricia Pender's *I'm Buffy and You're History: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Contemporary Feminism* in order to analyze the heroine and determine if and how Buffy represents a third wave feminist heroine. The thesis begins with the methodology which explains the scope of the thesis which is the analysis of the feminist influence of the heroine and what it entails. It is followed by a general description of history of feminism, with the focus on the second and third wave. Pender's theory is then presented (which is used for the analysis of Buffy as a third wave feminist and heroine) with each of the theories further expanded in the following chapters. The purpose of this thesis is to see how much feminist influence is there in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and how much of a feminist influence (of the third wave) is the heroine herself.

## METHODOLOGY

The theme of this thesis is the analysis of the heroine as a third wave feminist popular icon and what makes her a third wave feminist icon. This particular television show was

chosen as it already is a milestone of feminism in popular culture. The protagonist Buffy is a young woman who protects people from evil, a heroine which protects the world, a strong female character which still to this day is a role model to many girls and boys. The television show is filled with references to feminism or the problems connected to feminism (discrimination, violence, injustice). The thesis begins with a description of feminism and its history, with the focus on the second and third wave feminism. Pender's theory is then emphasized as a guiding theory of this thesis, a basis upon which the analysis is done. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is dissected then in terms of feminism. There is also a subtle conflict between the second and the third wave feminism- mothers in conflict with their daughters. There are clear differences between the two waves and examples in the show of distancing from the second wave beliefs in favor of those of the third wave. As Buffy is also the heroine of the show, the concept of heroine will also be discussed in the terms of feminism- Buffy's role as a (third wave) feminist heroine and what it entails, especially in the aspect of the conflict between second and third wave feminism. The analysis also includes transnational feminism, or „sharing power“ across borders with other women. Another subject that will be discussed is sexuality, i.e. the sexuality expressed in the show. The liberty of sexuality and its open expression is one of the key concepts of the third wave feminism and it will be analyzed in the framework of the show and its characters. Finally, chapters about what makes a heroine and Buffy being a third wave feminist heroine give conclusion to this thesis.

## FEMINISM

Feminism is a movement rooted in the late eighteenth century, which developed slowly and gave birth to four distinct types of feminism (four waves). The basis of modern feminism is Mary Wollstonecraft's work *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, one of many writers which were influenced by French revolutionary movements. This publication led to

other feminists distancing themselves from the author, as her situation with an illegitimate daughter and open mind regarding sexuality were far too scandalous. However, it is still an important work important for feminism, which criticised women's position in family and marriage as well as their poor education. (Osborne 7-11)

### First wave feminism

From the second half of the nineteenth century, women both in America and Britain fought for their right to vote which was achieved in 1920 in America and in 1928 in Britain. It was an important battle which was the key to emancipation. The right to vote meant the right to have the same education as men, the same working conditions (salary) which would enable women to gain a financial independence. In the eighteenth century, women were still mostly homeschooled which became a burning question in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century was also marked with a fight for women's right to be given more possibilities when attending universities. In 1848 the American suffrage movement was established within the frame of Seneca Falls convention led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. The suffragists fought for the rights to be educated, to be employed, to be able to vote, and to be able to own properties. Their fight was put on hold during the Civil War as they united with the Union thinking it would help them in their fight for women's right to vote, but with no success. The Nineteenth Amendment was adopted finally in 1920, allowing American women to vote. The British suffrage movement began in 1867 and it was finally in 1928 when they obtained the right to vote. The prominent figures of the British suffrage movement were Emmeline Pankhurst and daughter Cristabel. As the war began in 1914, the suffragists halted their battles to help, which gave them recognition and was a step towards their goal. After the First World War, women were still not recognized as a work force equal to men, as their work was voluntary. When the war ended, men took back their jobs and women once again had no source of income. The focus of the feminist was now on equal work opportunities and



payment as well as the problem of the birth control. In 1928 with the Equal Enfranchisement Act women gained complete voting equality. But after that, there was not much improvement due to Great Depression. The change would come after World War Two. (Osborne 17-24)

### Second wave feminism

As in the First World War, women replaced men at their jobs during Second World War. With the end of the war came an end to an independence women had during it, as men who returned took back their jobs and received higher salaries. Focus was back on family life and on being housewives, postponing the fight for equal rights and opportunities until the late fifties. Only in the mid 1940's could married women take on jobs as their husbands. In the late fifties and sixties the focus shifted on women and their problems as they started taking up space in the newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Times*. These articles reflected the modern woman issues, such as family life, work issues, and inequality of sexes. What amplified the conflict were *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. The second wave feminist did not have a good reputation. They organized discussion groups which focused on the reasons of female oppression. These groups were the basis of the second wave. What fuelled the feministic fight in America were the protests against Vietnam War. There were prominent protests against beauty contests in America, and as well in Britain, which were considered to be the objectification of women. Goals for which second wave feminists fought were equal education, employment opportunities and salary, the right on contraception and abortion, and freedom of sexuality. The movement divided into three ideologies: radical feminism which saw the problem in patriarchy and male domination; Marxist feminism which stated equal rights for men and women do not include poor women; liberal feminism which opted for change that comes within society using positive role models for young women, and creating relationships based

on equality. There are two problems that most of the feminists agree on- legalization of abortion and equal salaries between men and women. (Osborne 24-30)

### Third wave feminism

The third wave begins in the mid nineties in USA. A Third Wave Foundation was established in 1996 and it discussed problems such as women's health, voter's registration and social security reform. Issues that the third wave feminists fight for is representation of women in politics, reproductive rights, inclusion of women of different sexuality, race, creed and life standards. They also pay attention to the representation of women in media and pop culture as body image is still a very present problem for many women. There is a certain beauty ideal which still is very strong and which does not include women of diverse physical aspects. Another important aspect of the fight is the one of sexual harassment and discrimination at the work place, with feminist claiming it is men who should control themselves, and not women controlling what they wear. The change that is noticeable from the second wave feminism is the inclusion of women which are not middle class white American women, but rather women from all around globe, regardless of the social status, physical appearance, religion, sexual orientation, etc. On the other hand, some refer to this period as post-feminism as they believe the goal was achieved, that women became equal to men and there was no longer need to continue this campaign. The media mocked those who thought that the fight was still very much necessary, which led to a lot of women disassociating themselves from feminism. (Osborne 7-33)

### Fourth wave feminism

In the last ten years or so, the fourth wave of feminism emerged which spread through the Internet. They focus on problems such as harassment of women, unequal salaries, inclusion of all women (regardless of their status, sexuality, race, etc.), and inclusion of men

as well. What stimulated this movement are the campaigning and the selection of president Trump and his misogynistic comments, as well as the Me Too Movement (movement against rape and sexual harassment of powerful businessmen in Hollywood). What this movement might be lacking is the focus and agreement about which issues are priority. (Abrahams)

## PENDER'S APPROACH

The goal of this thesis is to determine what makes Buffy a third wave feminism heroine and/or if she deviates from this role in some manner. For this purpose, Patricia Pender's book *I'm Buffy and You're History: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Contemporary Feminism* is used. This work is a feministic approach to the show, dissection of the feministic aspects of the show and its analysis. The chapters are divided according to the aspects of the third wave feminism and analyzed as such. The chapters used in this thesis for analysis will be those that analyze the television show in regards to the diverse feminist aspects, third wave feminism, and transnational feminism. These theories will help in determining the posed question about the television show and its heroine. However, a chapter on sexuality will also be included in the thesis, which is also based on the authors theory but expanded and including different ideas, as the aspect of sexuality is an important one for the analysis of the feminism itself and the television show as well. The author poses important questions, such as if the heroine is a true feminist hero or just a mass media product; the comparison between the second and third wave ideas in the show; the analysis of Buffy as a third wave feminist icon; and the exploration of sexuality (homosexuality). These theories will be basis for the analysis made in this thesis and will be explained in each of the following chapters.

### Buffy the Vampire Slayer and feminism

There are many works and papers to be found on the subject of Buffy and her being a third wave icon. But what is it that makes her a third wave feminist? Is she a third wave

feminist or a political mass media product? Buffy is a pretty blonde cheerleader who is always dressed well and has perfect make up. She seems to be a typical teenager, but the second part of her identity is being a vampire slayer. These opposing polarities of her identity make it complicated to dissect her and to put in a certain category. She is a petite American white girl who fights the demons and patriarchy with her physical strength, sarcasm and sassiness. Many critics (e.g. Ostow and Fudge), as well as second wave feminists make the division themselves in Buffy's character, claiming if she is a girly girl, she cannot be a feminist. Buffy is determined to have a normal life, even if she is a Slayer and perceives her femininity as strength instead of a weakness. The question that poses itself is whether she is created to give criticism to popular culture of the twentieth century or is she its product that celebrates it? According to the binary theory, she cannot be both- American Barbie doll and a kick-ass feminist. But of course, a lot of feminists and critics (e.g. Rachel Fudge, Rhonda Wilcox) praised the Buffy's character for being a feminist comfortable in her own skin, significant of the girl-power period. Her fight against the demons represents the fight second wave feminists led against patriarchy, sexual assault and the attempt to juggle professional and personal life. The downside of the show is the fact she is a white, heterosexual privileged girl whose economic issues are represented several times in the show but were quickly resolved with a positive attitude and help from others. (Pender 9-31)

Buffy is third wave's (or post-feminist) final girl. She is a typical teenager who did not choose to be a Slayer, but it was destined for her. She did not have a matter of say in it, but she chose to be both strong and beautiful, and to not to be put in category. By choosing her own identity instead of accepting the one dimension given to her, she represents the third wave feminism. Other aspects of Buffy were presented in other two slayers. As Buffy died for a few minutes in the first season, another Slayer was called. Her name is Kendra and she arrives to Sunnydale as her Watcher learns evil energy rises there. In a sense, she is a

complete opposite to Buffy- focused, technique-oriented, and detached from every day “interferences” such as friends, family and dating. But as Buffy, she has a strong sense for duty and is a “good girl”. She carries a valuable lesson to Buffy- to stop trying to reject a core part of her identity as a nuisance or something preventing her from living a normal life, instead to accept it as a gift and accept who she is. A new Slayer arrives in season three- Faith. She immediately stands out as she arrives- she is wild, uninhibited, a bad girl until she actually turns bad. An immediate parallel is drawn between her and Buffy. Buffy is a good girl who always wants to do the right thing. Faith believes certain rules do not apply as they are the Slayers and are granted with powers which are above other human beings. Buffy has some respect for rules and institution while Faith completely rejects them and lives by her own rules. Buffy is cautious, and Faith is sexually experienced and casual. Her whole life was unstable, starting from home, again let down by an institution (the Watcher’s council) which causes her to turn to the antagonist and works as his hitman. Their relationship develops into that of a father and a daughter, and even though Mayor Wilkins is evil, their relationship is true. Buffy’s darker side is reflected in the character of Faith; it is someone Buffy could have been if the social/economic conditions of her life were different.

The second and third wave feminism reflected in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

When talking about feminism, the second wave agendas and feminists are the first association that comes to mind. One of second wave’s arguments is that power is shared; it does not only belong to men but women as well. In this case, Buffy is a perfect representative of this idea, having power and fighting. The second wave is also focused on fighting the oppressive structure. Buffy fights the patriarchy in the form of the Watcher’s council, whom she abandons in season three. (Pender 34-35) Karas argues that the strain between the two waves can be seen in Buffy’s relationship with the Council and her mother Joyce (where her mother represents the second wave). Buffy also represents the third wave in the terms of

femininity- she does not shy away from her nature; in fact it makes her stronger. Her power is not masculine; rather it derives from her feminine side. But the aspect of the third wave lacking in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is the representation of economic status and racial diversity. It is an aspect that is only tackled in the final season. (qtd. in Pender)

The protagonist Buffy is often seen as a third-wave heroine. The show tackles many issues regarding feminism and its fight against injustice. Many argue that show encompasses both second and third wave issues, but there is clearly an inclination toward the third wave feminism. Some of the problems presented in the show that the second wave feminists fight against are “the battle against sexual violence, the negotiation of personal and professional life, and girl’s attempts to establish their sexual and social autonomy.” (Munford and Waters 113) On the other hand, some of the third wave feminism ideas focused on the female identity are presented in the show, like self-assertion and coexistence of polarities such as femininity and harshness. (Siegel 58) Third wave feminism also encourages women to express their sexuality freely and to enjoy it, something that the television show welcomes but also includes warning as this kind of behaviour is regularly punished in today’s society. (86) The television show also includes differences and discrepancies between the second and the third wave feminism. In season three, episode “*Graduation Day*” Buffy says: “You know, what I imagine sixties would be like- without the war and hairy armpits” (Buffy, 00:02:43-48) She reflects the thoughts of third wave feminism- incomprehension of the second wave idea that girly and feminine cannot also be feminist and strong. While the second wave feminism fights against imposed beauty ideals and sexual exploitation, maybe even perceives open femininity as a weakness, the acceptance of such femininity as a virtue by the third wave feminism is obvious in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Buffy is stylish, glamorous, and feminine. (Munford and Waters 113)

The conflict between the second and the third wave feminism is also depicted in the relationship between mother Joyce and daughter Buffy. This is obvious in the episode “*Gingerbread*” in which there is a conflict between daughter Buffy and mother Joyce, or between third and second wave feminism. Mothers feel daughters should be punished for their deviated ways and their exploration of sexuality and otherness, and as their mothers they should guide them to the right path. (Munford and Waters 114) This everlasting conflict is dissolved when in episode “*Body*” Joyce dies. It is Buffy’s turn to take the role of the mother and is now an autonomous woman. (Munford and Waters 116) However, there is another aspect of the mother- the gothic monster mother. The gothic stands out for its competence to revive itself and to be a part of contemporary expressions but at the same time related to the past. (Hanson 34-35) Maggie Walsh who is a professor of psychology is also a scientist for the military who creates hybrids (or abominations) of men and demons. She creates Adam who she calls his son but who goes rogue and kills her. She is a bad Frankenstein mother and she was punished. (Munford and Waters 117)

In the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the concepts of the second wave feminism are defied for the third wave feminism audience. Buffy is beautiful and strong, an idea that is opposed to the second wave: the form and the content must be separated so if Buffy is beautiful, has short skirts or a cleavage, she cannot be feminist; or if she is fierce and fights she cannot be femme. The third wave offers sanctuary for those who believe feminist and femme can be put in the same category. The heroic aspect of Buffy is not only partly feminine but it is dominated by it. She is the target of gazes of others but also she can gaze back and her strength is beyond any gender (even the demonic one). (Pender 2-38) Even though Buffy looks conventionally feminine does not mean she is a victim. (Jackson 22)

## Mother-daughter relationship

An episode that stands out in season three is "*Gingerbread*" in which Joyce starts an organization which wants to cleanse the city of the occult and witches after occult murder of two children. Madness takes over adults and parents, and it is not clear whether it is because they are under a demon's spell or they truly want to punish their children. There is a clear opposition between children (teenagers) that experiment whether it is with magic, sex, alcohol, drugs, and parents who must punish them in order to cleanse them from their dirty desires. As always, makers of the show use metaphors such as magic, occult, and demons to draw parallels with issues such as growing up, anxiety, insecurity, experimentation, etc.

What stands out in season five is Joyce's death which was not caused by supernatural factors but by "mere" aneurism. Joyce's death marked Buffy's transition from girlhood to womanhood. She lost her mother but at the same time was left with a sister who was made from her own meat and blood. In a sense she lost a mother but also became a mother, Dawn is not Joyce's but Buffy's, as she is made from her flesh and blood. The role of Joyce became redundant- Buffy is the one that takes care of others and Joyce loses her role. We can also establish a parallel in which Joyce represents the second wave which with time becomes outdated, and a new wave takes place with more strength and different idea and approaches- Buffy/third wave. She has to protect Dawn now and goes to fight the monster in the final episode, the antagonist that is the monstrous version of Buffy- beautiful, strong, evil, above humans, and crazy. Glory was stopped but the ritual began and Buffy realizes a life has to be given in order to stop the hell from destroying Earth and in a motherly manner she gives Dawn the lesson of life and sacrifices herself so Dawn can live her life.



## Sharing power

In terms of third wave feminism the television show's seventh season stands out. Buffy transfers her powers via magic and a scythe to all the other Potentials and that way they become Slayers as well. Buffy sharing her power as a white, privileged American teenager to girls across the globe with different backgrounds is representative of the third wave's main issue of the cultural diversity, even though some argue it comes late in the show. Her gesture is at the same time metaphor for globalization and the actualization. (Pender 58-61) This inclusion of all girls or women is a step forward from the fight for the rights of a white and privileged girl to the "emancipated global girlhood militarised in the service of feminism". (Pender 83)

But season seven is not only third wave oriented- it includes the second wave's battle to end misogynistic violence and the fight for empowerment (both individual and collective). The third wave feminism stands out in the rejection of patriarchal institutions and the beginning of the global feminist inclusion which in the television show are explored and represented in a simple, yet gratifying complexity. (Pender 2-10)

Season seven branches out and includes women of different origins, religions etc in the storyline. However, some may argue it is just a tip of the iceberg and their stories are not represented enough, but it was a beginning. Season seven includes the representation of more racially diverse characters: an ally- principal Wood and a Potential Rona are both African American, and there are Potentials of Asian and Hispanic origin. There were diverse characters earlier in the show, but they were all short-lived. The Slayer that came after Buffy-Kendra was supposedly Jamaican, but it was only a few episodes before she was killed. In season four when the Gang calls upon the previous Slayers, they meet the first Slayer- a tribal African woman who was only a fighting tool against the forces of evil. However, the

Potentials gathering in Buffy's home and awakening their true powers is uniting women of different stories to fight the corruption of the world. The First's (antagonist of season seven) representative- Caleb is a preacher who often spoke of women as prone to sin and inferior. At one point, Caleb calls Buffy a whore, to which she replies: "You know, you really should watch your language. If someone didn't know you, they might think you were a woman-hating jerk." ("Buffy" 00:38:56-00:39:01) It is symbolic that he was a representative of the original evil, the biggest bad that appeared on this television show. Caleb mentions woman's first sin and how she is corrupt and easily corrupted. The myth of the first sin is still very active and held against women as a reason to put some kind of "blame" onto them. However, Buffy deals with him by slicing him in two, significantly starting from his testicles. In episode "Get It Done", Buffy goes to a shadow world using magic where she meets shamans who created the first slayer. They did it by inserting the essence of a demon into her, violating her while she was chained. Buffy refuses this "gift" as she does not want to lose her humanity. She does not see herself as only a tool in fight against demons, but a wholesome person, and slaying is only a part of her, though an important part. She gathers the Potentials around her and decides to share that power and lessen the burden. She is no longer under patriarchal rules of those shamans and the Watcher's Council. It gives her liberty to create her own future with more possibilities.

### Sexuality

Throughout the whole first season (as well as the rest of them) there are undercurrent topics that present themselves in each episode, such as feminism, sexuality, femininity, puberty, anxiety, depression, hardships of relationships. Of course this is not to say the show only focuses on "negative" or "difficult" aspects of life, but shows both sides to it. What also stands out is the desire for romantic relationship, not only on Buffy's behalf, but everyone's. The show quickly immerses into the hardships of romantic and sexual relationships, e.g.

episode 4 of season 1, "*Teacher's Pet*", where there is a predatory sexual act, but with a spin as the predator is female (a large praying mantis demon) and victims are male virgins on who she prowls in order to use them for fertilization, killing them after she is done. Usually, males are the ones represented as predators and females as victims, but this turn shows the reality which to this day is hushed- men can also be victims. This season also reflects on modern difficulties of dating, e.g. episode 8 "*I Robot, You Jane*" Willow starts to date a boy online, which turns out to be a demon and it serves as maybe an obvious metaphor for the perils of online dating. Buffy as well tries to date, but she is almost immediately drawn to Angel which is also not without difficulty as he is a vampire.

In season two, Buffy has her first sexual relation, with Angel. It opened a new topic of sexuality and the repercussions it may bring. Third wave feminism focuses, among other thing, on enjoying own sexuality without being mocked, ridiculed, or shamed. By using the metaphor of Angel losing his soul, the director showed one of the issues woman might face by enjoying their sexuality: "If I'd known how easily you'd give it up, I wouldn't even have bothered." ("Angel" 00:37:10-14). It was as she was being punished for enjoying herself, but Angel also suffered for being her first sexual experience by losing his soul.

In third wave feminism, sexuality or the liberty of it is an important aspect. Third wave feminist agree that women as well as men should be able to freely explore their sexuality. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a television show which took a step forward in terms of exploring homosexuality on primetime television. It also explored heterosexuality and hints of "controversial" sexual acts. As the title of the series says, Buffy slays vampires. There are other demons appearing in the show, but her main fight is against vampires. Vampires are nightly creatures, hiding in the shadows, killing by inserting teeth into flesh and drinking blood (the essence of life). This insertion of the fangs has a rather symbolic expression to it,

such as a phallic insertion. Maybe it is not wonder most of the vampires on the show are male (usually) going after a human woman. On the other hand, Buffy kills vampires by shoving a stake through their heart. It is like a countermeasure, using a phallic shaped object and piercing them through the heart (organ that pumps blood, organ of life). It is interesting that a female character is the one staking the vampires, as her lack of phallus indicates the danger of castration in psychoanalytic premise, or in this case of death. (Mulvey 811) In season seven episode “*Lessons*”, Buffy is teaching Dawn how to fight the vampires. Dawn holds the stake (the phallic object) but still she is not in control, the vampire is. She can feel secure with having a stake (phallus) but she is still overpowered by the vampire (man). It is a never-ending game of tag and a woman must always be wary of the situations around her. Buffy points out to Dawn that to a vampire she is just a helpless woman. (Pender 72) Throughout the television show, the viewers mostly see female vampires biting human males or male vampires biting human females. There is certain amount of eroticism in that act and even though vampires are not creatures of strict morals, twenty years ago it might have been provocative to display too many same-sex teeth insertions. It is apparent that vampires are highly sexualized creatures even since from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and then followed by examples such as Ann Rice’s *Conversation with a Vampire*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *True Blood*, etc. A vampire’s sexuality is a deviant one, focused on most types of sexuality but “typical love-making”. (Brown 187)

Season two of the show stands out because it has a first gay coming out story. In episode 15 “*Phases*” a student from Sunnydale high named Larry is chauvinistic jerk. In a typical confusion comedy scene, Xander confronts him because he thinks he is a werewolf that has been attacking people, he confesses his dark secret: he is gay. This brings peace to him and in scenes afterwards we see him kind and helpful. Besides television show like *Will and Grace* at the time which was mostly focused on homosexuality, there were fewer

instances than today's television characters declaring themselves gay. It was a step forward by the show's maker which fortified *Buffy* as a feminist icon.

The fourth season is important as one of the main characters- Willow develops a romantic relationship with a woman named Tara. Tara is a student at university and is also a witch, something that the two of them practice together. This pushed the whole show as progressive, feminist and LGBTQ oriented and is still hailed as one of the landmarks of television shows for the community. Their relationship is not forced with talk about lesbianism, disdain for men or frustrations about inequality, rather is it presented as two persons simply falling in love. Willow's sexuality is something that is discussed in length and her relationship with Tara in season four and on is a televised milestone for LGBTQ community. It is often praised not as a gay character and gay relationship, but a person with many layers who has a relationship with another woman. It is a crucial component of third's wave television show. It was not the main heroine who was gay, but it was one of the main characters and she demonstrated sexual liberation as a part of her identity and continued to develop as a character, rather than be just a homosexual sidekick. She also developed as a witch but that showed another part of her character as she became an addict to magic. Her downfall and recovery were represented as a painful metaphor for all those struggling with some kind of addiction.

Buffy's dark side is represented by Faith, and later on Spike. Faith is another Slayer with less inhibitions and looser morals. (Wilcox 81) Her upbringing was different than Buffy's; even though Buffy's parents were divorced, she still had a solid support system, unlike Faith. In season three she accidentally kills a human being and loses herself in that trauma. She then begins to work for Mayor Wilkins with whom she develops a father-daughter relationship and works as his hitman. But it is her overt sexuality that separates her

from Buffy. She speaks of her past lovers, how men only want one thing and they are in fact animals. In season three, episode “*Zeppo*” she has sex with Xander who is a virgin and she has no problem taking charge and later on throwing him out after she is done with him. When she goes rogue, Xander tries to help her thinking they have a special bond because of their past but it turns into something completely different as she almost rapes him. Her openness and ease towards sex is opposed to Buffy as she has a safer and conservative approach towards it. Faith is a bad girl because she has an insatiable hunger for sex, power, and violence and like a man she does not seek intimacy, but pure physical satisfaction. (Brown 191-192)

Buffy’s first relationship on the show was with Angel, a vampire with a soul. A curse was put on him, which gave him his soul back (to feel remorse for all the crimes he committed) and all it takes is a moment of true happiness for him to lose his soul. In season two Buffy and Angel have their first sexual relation, for Buffy first time ever and first with Angel. In the middle of the night, after it happened Angel wakes up like something is torturing him and he loses his soul, turning to the cruel vampire he used to be. It is the paranormal penalty for taking away Buffy’s “innocence”. (Pender 89) The show toys with the concept of virginity as something precious and pure for women. When in episode “*Innocence*” of season two Giles finds out Buffy had sex with Angel, the only thing he is able to say is “Oh.” (“Giles” 00:27:15) and then takes off his glasses and looks away, as if he was looking at the deed itself or the act itself caused him for a moment to see Buffy differently or not recognize her. Later on, in season three he was poisoned and the cure was a Slayer’s blood. Buffy was determined to make him drink Faith as she poisoned him, but that did not work out so she made him drink her. Once again, he inserted himself into her and took away her life energy. Soon afterwards he leaves her and the town, knowing his presence is dangerous for her (and him).

Buffy's second serious relationship is with Riley, who most of the fans deemed as just boring and nothing special. But in fact he was used as just the opposite of Angel- someone with whom Buffy can have a safe and steady relationship. He is strong and a part of a military operation and can almost be her equal but he is a good boy that plays according to the rules of patriarchy while Buffy does not take orders. What the two of them lack in communication, they compensate with being physical. In episode "*Where the Wild Things Are*" of season four, they are under a spell because of which they cannot stop having intercourse and the ones to save them are Xander and Anya, to who they respond not with gratitude but offense for invading personal space. Another example of invading their personal space is when Professor Walsh monitored them through hidden camera and watched them have sex. That way scopophilic tendency is revealed in this season, not just by professor Walsh being a silent and observing third member in Riley and Buffy's sex but also by the Initiative's constant monitoring of everyone. (Pender 97-98) The issue with Riley is that he is a representative of hegemonic masculinity, willing to "share" power when he is secure he is at least equal, if not stronger. As Professor Walsh "created" him and made him a cyborg brother to Adam, the fourth season's Big Bad, he is merely a unit in the patriarchal beehive that is the Initiative. As he grows weaker, and Buffy strong as ever he feels like she is pulling away. Finally he decides to leave her and Sunnydale and go back to a familiar place - military with all its structure, orders, and patriarchy. (Pender 114-115)

In season six after Buffy comes back from the afterlife she begins a relationship with Spike. At that point, Spike was infatuated with her for a while and is still a soulless vampire but with a chip in his brain that prevents him from injuring humans. However, this does not make him a "good" vampire such as Angel, but just one on a leash. Buffy rejected him for a while, but upon returning from the other side she is different. In a relationship with Spike which she kept hidden from others she explored another part of

herself, her dark side. She kept it hidden as she felt shame and disgust, not understanding why she does it when he represents everything she stands against. She does not trust that he loves her as he has no soul and points out every time that he does not feel anything when in fact it is her that does not feel anything. After coming back from the dead her body came to life but her soul yearns to go back from where she was ripped out. She feels empty and the only thing making her feel alive is doing something “wrong”. Now the only thing she craves as much as death is Spike. (Wilcox 84) Their relationship is focused mostly on the physical aspect because in fact Buffy does not allow Spike emotionally to come near. Their sexual encounters are a mix of sex and violence, an exploration of sadomasochistic world and Buffy’s bad side. However, Buffy ends her flirtations with deviant sexuality and returns to being a good girl. Even though Buffy only scratches the surface of sexuality and stays in the realm of conservative feminism, her sexual endeavours (and of other characters) can easily be understood through queer and sadomasochistic lens. (Brown 191-200)

Villains of the sixth season are hilariously pathetic, but at the same time are frightening because they are real. The Trio or more specifically Warren is a misogynistic creep who hates being rejected or overpowered by women. In episode “*Dead Things*” Warren puts a spell on his ex-girlfriend so she would be his willing sex slave. The spell ends and she realises she is in dangerous situation where she was almost raped. She struggles to leave but gets murdered by her ex-boyfriend. This situation serves as a metaphor for everyday occurrence- women and men being drugged and raped. This is not the only episode which includes rape; in “*Seeing Red*” Spike tries to rape Buffy as he is convinced: “I’m gonna make you feel it.” (“Spike” 00:25:02-05). She manages to stop him, and both the characters and the viewers are left shocked after just what happened. Everyone is shocked because it was a relationship in which there was a certain degree of trust, and yet it happened (after all Spike was still evil regardless of the chip in his head). Since Buffy returned she felt hopeless and



lost and to feel something, she started having sexual relations with Spike. It is a relationship which disgusted her and attracted her at the same time. She needed to feel “alive” and yet it was so wrong she was ashamed and disgusted. She breaks down to Tara in episode “*Dead Things*” and begs her to tell her something is wrong with as she does not understand why else would she be so intimate with someone who stands against everything she believes in and fights for. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* stands out as a television show which allows psychological growth of its characters, which includes all the virtues and flaws. Buffy is not a heroine who just saves people and stands as a role model- she is a person with heavy burden who reacts and acts according to the situations happening around her, sometimes dealing with it better, sometimes worse.

#### WHAT MAKES A HEROINE?

Heroine is a term which lately became popular in literature and media (television shows and films). For a long time the focus was on the hero, as the male was the one that was capable of taking brave actions and saving people and/or damsels in distress. With the influence of feminism, many writers turned to female heroes as their beloved protagonists. Many popular heroines today from fiction are Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*, Katniss Everdeen from *Hunger Games*, Sookie Waterhouse from *True Blood*, Arya Stark from *Game of Thrones*, of course Buffy Summers from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and many more. Our protagonist Buffy is “the Chosen one”, gifted with superpower and superhuman abilities and is cherished by her group of friends i.e. “the Scoobies” who help her save the world from ending multiple times.

In her book *From Girl to Goddess*, Valerie Estelle Frankel divides heroines, or as she calls them warrior women, into several categories. The first is the warrior maiden who identifies more with the hero and not the heroine as she is dressed as a man, has a male figure

that guides her, and is often in combat with weapon against an evil character. She maybe lacks many features of femininity, but in fact is not so different from other heroines. She protects women from rapists and murderers. (Frankel 199) The second is the warrior lover who is in search for an equal, a condemned search since it is hard maintaining a position of an independent person and a lover, especially in a relation where two individuals provide the same desires and skills. In the end, the heroine must defend her lover every time, which leads to her letting him die so she can be free. (Frankel 207) There are also so-called other warriors who find a partner and “this man is less of a completing animus and more of a soul twin: a mirror reflection of the heroine with the same desire for action.” (Frankel 208) The destiny of this couple lies in separation and death. Their similarities do not allow them growth or change, and even the male counterpart may feel jealous of her achievements, and the relationship ends tragically as “neither brings the melding of opposites who join in a perfect relationship as animus and anima.” (Frankel 208)

### THIRD WAVE HEROINE

The heroine of the show is Buffy Summers and her destiny is to slay vampires and demons and protect human kind. It is an ongoing struggle as each season there is a new villain she must face and defeat, and because she can never slay and kill all the evil demons; there will always be someone new. However, she never stops fighting and carrying on the fight and the viewers can be a part of that journey with her. She is strong and determined, an obvious leader and the viewers want to be in her group or even be her. She is a role model for girls and boys as her fight for the good is not focused solely on the female gender, rather it can encompass any issue that strikes both female and male persons.

On one hand, Buffy is a young girl turning woman who finds out she is the Chosen one to fight and slay the vampires and other demons from hurting people as well as stopping

the world from ending. This is an enormous burden for a young sixteen year old girl already fighting the usual problems of puberty. She has a support system of her male mentor, a Watcher named Rupert Giles who was sent to her by the Watcher's council, an organization (of mostly men) which has existed as long as the Slayer has, which gave itself the right to shape and guide the Slayer. As it is discovered later, the Slayer became to exist when a group of men chained a young woman and penetrated her with the spirit of a demon which mixed with her essence. This is also the origin of the Watcher's council which in fact is a group of men with no real power dictating the one with power what to do. Rupert Giles, her Watcher and a member of Watcher's council is her guide in the fight against evil. He develops into her father figure, as her own father is absent. In season three, episode "*Helpless*", the Watcher's Council fires him for developing paternal feelings for her. She leaves this toxic relationship with the Watcher's Council which is in possession of knowledge but no actual power. They try to dictate who she should and should not save and how she should fight. She stops being "their" Slayer after they refuse to help her save Angel from dying of poisoning.

Buffy has the gift of super strength, agility, and even clairvoyance at times. By night she is a thing demons fear, but during the day she is a high school girl and she does not reject her femininity as we can often see her wearing "girly" clothes, accessories and makeup, although at times she feels as if her night time routines make her less feminine: "But who am I kidding? Dates are things normal girls have. Girls who have time to think about nail polish and facials. You know what I think about? Ambush tactics. Beheading. Not exactly the stuff dreams are made of." ("Buffy" 00:03:47-00:04:01)

Throughout the series she has three important relationships: with Angel, Riley, and Spike. Angel is a vampire with a soul, her first true love and first sexual experience. He is the one for her but it was not meant to be. A curse on him that turns him evil if he feels a moment

of happiness only emphasises the differences that should keep them apart- him being a vampire, and her being the Slayer. However, their love grows until they realize it is best if they keep apart because they cannot grow together, as they are star-crossed lovers. The key difference between them is also what makes them similar, as they both have the strength to fight the evil, usually with someone's help, but essentially alone. The second important love affair in the series is with Riley from Iowa, psychology assistant by day, military demon hunter by night. Their romance is the opposite from Buffy-Angel romance; they learn with time each other's true identities, their relationship develops slowly and it is safe, but it lacks the passion of the first one, which can never be forgotten. As Riley leaves the military and is no longer given drugs that made him stronger, he feels extremely weak in comparison to Buffy. At the beginning he is a feminist, but it shows later it is something he feels comfortable with as long as he feels like "a man enough" by patriarchal standards. As he grows weaker, he also grows further away from Buffy and he cannot understand her connection with the darkness and vampires, threatened by her relationship with Angel. What he does not understand is that slaying vampires and demons is not an activity they can do together, but an essential part of her identity, much more than it was his. He, as Angel, breaks up with Buffy and leaves the town. He goes back to military, to a familiar place, where he can reinstate his manhood, sense of belonging and a feeling of being needed and wanted. Her third romantic interest is vampire Spike, bad boy that turned good. From Buffy's perspective, that relationship was something devious and wrong and was only a part of it because she felt empty. However, her attitude and emotions towards Spike do change, she does care for him, but it is not love in conventional sense. Once again she goes back to darkness in a relationship with a vampire as only a vampire can pair with her, to be almost equal in her strength, to understand a part of her that her closest friends and family members cannot comprehend. Still, it is a relationship not meant to last even though at the end they both care for each other.

She knows he is not the person with whom she wants to be with and understands she does not need to know now and she does not need to be with anyone to feel complete. When Angel visits her at the end of season seven and asks her about Spike and whether she knows with who she will be or wants to be, she explains: “Okay, I’m cookie dough. I’m not done baking yet. I’m not finished becoming... whoever the hell it is I’m gonna turn out to be. I make it through this and the next thing and the next thing, and maybe one day I turn around and realize I’m ready, I’m cookies. And then, y’know, if I want someone to eat m- or, enjoy warm delicious cookies-me, then that’s fine. That’ll be then. When I’m done.” (“Buffy” 00:06:58-00:07:41) She understands that having a partner does not mean being fulfilled; instead she decides to grow as a person and make commitments to herself before making commitments to someone else.

Buffy begins as a young girl forced into this dark world, perceiving her legacy as a night-job, but as time passes she accepts it is not only a job, it is her identity and her destiny. At the beginning she struggles with not being able to enjoy her teenage years as the rest of the teenagers or to plan her life like a normal person. In season two, episode 9 “*What’s my line*”, Buffy feels frustrated as everyone in her school gladly take evaluation tests to see which career is best suited for them- Buffy cannot even begin to plan anything as she cannot know if the next fight might be her last. But her mind changes and realizes with time it is not something that she was just pushed into, but who she is. In season three, episode 12 “*Helpless*” due to being drugged without her knowing as a part of the Council’s test, she loses her powers and must deal with everything as an ordinary girl. She starts to realize that once she knows what happens in the dark, she cannot go back to being a girl or a woman living normal life and worrying about “simple” problems. Her encounters with a rogue Slayer Faith also teach her something about accepting the identity of the Slayer as a core one. Faith might have been bad for a while, but she fully accepted her Slayer identity as a gift- to have power

to face any problem, knowing she will be victorious. It is not something that is a nuisance or in a way of having a normal life, rather an empowerment she deserves.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a TV show that started airing mid-nineties until 2003. Around that time, other TV shows that focused on heroines were airing, such as *La Femme Nikita* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. What stood out in contrast with the televised heroines from eighties is the acceptance of own femininity. Heroines were not so “masculine” but were sexualized and girly. Buffy is often referred to as “‘post-feminist heroine’ . . . and ‘the third wave’s final girl’ . . . glamorous, fashion conscious and always girly, she is a Girlie feminist in the Gothic mode.” (Munford and Waters 113) What Buffy brought along other female protagonists of the television shows of that period is being girly and feminine and still being able to be their own and everyone else’s heroine. (Munford and Waters 111-113)

## CONCLUSION

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a television show which made a boom in the western popular culture. From its influence on third-wave feminism culture, representations of members of LGBTQ community, imaginative storyline, to incredible depiction of psychological development of characters, it is certainly a show that will be discussed for a long while. Buffy’s role as a heroine is dominated by a trait of girly feminist, and she represents the idea of the third wave: that a person can both be girly and feminist; sweet and strong. Buffy and other characters are marked by realistic psychological development which made it easier for the audience to connect with the protagonist and her friends. The audience follows her ups and downs and grows with her. The audience has many choices from the show to identify with- struggles with sexuality, with loneliness, uncertainty of life, love problems, addiction, adulthood, and fight against injustice. After all her endeavours and hardships, Buffy remains the strong female figure for all young girls, women (as well as boys

and men) to look up to, proudly claiming her strong as well as her soft side: “Okay, yes, date, and shop, and hangout, and go to school, and save the world from unspeakable demons. You know, I wanna do girly stuff.” (“Buffy” 00:02:36-44)

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## SUMMARY

The Analysis of the Heroine and Feminism in the TV Show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

This thesis is focused on the analysis of the heroine Buffy from the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the feminist aspect of the show. The thesis begins with an introduction and methodology. It then includes a description of the history of feminism, with focus on the second and third wave feminism, and its reflection in the television show. Pender's feminist theory is then explained and expanded in the following chapters: *Buffy the vampire Slayer* and feminism, The second and third wave feminism reflected in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Mother-daughter relationship, Sharing power), Sexuality. The final chapters of the thesis are What makes a heroine? and Third wave heroine which help elaborate the analysis further. The thesis ends with a conclusion of the entire analysis.

Key words: feminism, Buffy, second wave feminism, third wave feminism, heroine, Patricia Pender

## SAŽETAK

Analiza Heroine i Feminizma u Televizijskoj Seriji *Buffy Ubojica Vampira*

Ovaj rad se fokusira na analizi feminizma i heroine Buffy iz serije *Buffy Ubojica Vampira*. Ovaj rad započinje s uvodom i metodologijom. Zatim slijedi opis prošlosti feminizma, s naglaskom na feminizam drugog i trećeg vala te odraz istih u seriji. Zatim je objašnjena feministička teorija autorice Pender, te je proširena u slijedećim poglavljima: *Buffy Ubojica Vampira* i feminizam, Drugi i treći val feminizma reflektiran u *Buffy Ubojici Vampira* (Odnos majke-kćeri, Dijeliti moć), Seksualnost. Konačna poglavlja rada su Što čini heroinu? i Heroina trećeg vala koji pomažu u daljnoj razradi analize. Rad završava s zaključkom o čitavoj analizi.

Ključne riječi: feminizam, Buffy, drugi val feminizma, treći val feminizma, heroína, Patricia Pender