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Queering the Slayer-Text: Reading Possibilities in Buffy the Vampire Slayer - Rebecca Beirne

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Until the mid-1990s, the image of the polluted homosexual dominated the screen. Then there was a striking change: the rise of the “normal gay”. - Steven Seidman, *Beyond the Closet*[\[1\]](#)

Employing the subversive power of the unnatural to unseat the Platonic world view, the queer, unlike the rather polite categories of gay and lesbian, revels in the discourse of the loathsome, the outcast, the idiomatically-proscribed position of same-sex desire.
- Sue-Ellen Case, ‘Tracking the Vampire’[\[2\]](#)

 Of the dominant trends of lesbian representation in the last decade of the twentieth, and early twenty-first century, there are two that stretch in entirely different directions, but which are both pertinent to a discussion of the textual and subtextual lesbianisms in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. There is the normalised gay (and I mean ‘gay’ rather than lesbian), and there is the ‘polymorphously perverse’, uncanny, and monstrous queer. I believe that the portrayal of lesbianism in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, takes both of these trends, and plaits them together to create what is truly a strange, sometimes problematic, sometimes positive, but ultimately unique portrait of lesbianism. For the theorisation of the normal gay, I turn predominantly to Steven Seidman’s recent work *Beyond the Closet*, which identifies the trend in mainstream sources away from characterising the homosexual as polluted, and cites a process whereby homosexuality is ‘normalised’ in order to become palatable for a predominantly heterosexual audience. This process is one in which:

The normal gay is presented as fully human, as the psychological and moral equal of the heterosexual....However, the normal gay also serves as a narrow social norm. This figure is associated with specific personal and social behaviours.... the normal gay is expected to be gender conventional [and] link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship...[\[3\]](#)

While Seidman predominantly writes of this trend in respect to gay men, it seems to me that this is the perfect characterisation of Willow and Tara’s relationship in *Buffy*. At the other end of the spectrum, we have the understanding of the ‘queer’ put forward in the work of Sue-Ellen Case in ‘Tracking the Vampire’, as revelling in the discourse and practices of pollution: as consciously and vigorously desiring to be outside narrow social codes, demonstrating “the subversive power of the unnatural”[\[4\]](#). This is, then, the queer as “the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny”[\[5\]](#) which can be seen in the portrayals of Vampire Willow, Faith, and Willow in her ‘evil’ incarnation at the end of season six. The process within *Buffy* of “constantly opening up new possibilities through its subtext, which at times, as Giles notes, rapidly becomes text”[\[6\]](#) as Linda Rust suggests, also works in reverse. Nowhere does the shift from subtextual, sexual-taboo-breaking queer-possibilities to normalised-safe-gay text occur, than in the advent of the longest example of textual lesbianism on the show - Willow’s relationship with Tara. The writers of *Buffy* do not resort to those mainstays of normalising lesbians on television, weddings and babies, though this may be more due to the age group it both presents and targets than any qualms about such plotlines; Willow and Tara’s relationship is undeniably ‘safe’ and normalised.

 Willow herself is undoubtedly the most flexible character in *Buffy*. Unlike Buffy, whose identity is dual but fixed, Willow possesses immense powers of transformation, and her transitions or ‘becomings’ are relatively smooth and easy. Whether this be from physically weak science nerd to powerful witch who can take on the slayer in a fight, from sidekick to “boss of the group” (‘Bargaining Part One’ 6.1), amateur to pro, from good to evil and back again, or from straight to lesbian, these transitions are marked most by the fact that they seem to occur effortlessly with minimal negotiations, angst or identity crises, except in nightmares. Several critics have pinpointed this ability to transform as a symptom of Willow’s lack of a core personality, or at the very least, as less easily readable as a stable character than anyone else on *Buffy*.

This flexibility of character is extremely pertinent to a discussion of queer sexuality, as it is so very directly a reflection of key elements of lesbian representation in both mainstream and queer discourse in the years surrounding the Millennium. Seidman makes a highly cogent and appropriate statement regarding the manner in which lesbianism is presented in films of the late 1990s, and this is just as true of television:

[A]s polluting representations are less tolerated, another strategy is prominent: the homosexuality of women is, if not denied, then depicted as not stable or fundamental. The lesbian is imagined as a transitional status – an immature phase or a case of gender maladjustment.^[7]

This instability is epitomised in the manner in which Willow ‘becomes’ a lesbian. ‘New Moon Rising’ (4.19) is highly ambiguous as a ‘coming out’ episode, and in fact strangely unclear as to whether or not this is what Willow is actually doing, unlike other instances of coming out in the series. When Buffy came out as a vampire slayer to her mother, her mother asks her the prototypical questions asked by parents upon their child’s coming out as queer, such as “have you tried *not* being a slayer?” and “It’s ‘cause you didn’t have a strong father figure isn’t it?” (‘Becoming Part Two’, 2.22). This line of questioning seemed utterly ridiculous for many reasons, but most simply because it is understood by the audience that a slayer is something she just *is*, as Buffy responds “It’s just fate Mom. I’m the slayer. Accept it.” and “Do you think I chose to be like this?” Being a slayer is not a choice, but an integral facet of the identity that is Buffy Summers. Similarly, Larry, a bullying jock at Sunnydale High, is given the opportunity to come out unambiguously, for although he feels the need to stay in the closet (or maybe more clearly, because he does), his sexuality is not portrayed as a choice, it just *is*.

When Willow comes out, it is an entirely different situation. She does so in the relational sense of being with Tara, rather than making any statement regarding her own sexual preferences. Even within her coming out episode, Willow lacks a delineated transference, or even really one at all, of her affections from men to women, or even Oz to Tara specifically, as she expresses not only residual feelings for Oz, but also the fact that she is still sexually attracted to him. Although in this episode she does say to Tara that: “I mean, I know what he meant to me. But he left. And everything changed. I changed. And then we...” she also says to Buffy that “I could feel everything coming back. He’s Oz, you know.” Despite Willow’s ‘choice’ of Tara over Oz in this episode, it is not made entirely clear that this was wholly her choice to make in light of Oz’s reversion to his werewolf self and consequent journey back out of town. The retainment of her desire for a man would, of course, have been totally understandable had the writers allowed her to come out as a bisexual woman. However, as “Noxon and Whedon are adamant that Willow won’t suddenly turn bisexual”^[8], we can assume that this is not the reason for her continued attraction to Oz, or her subsequent susceptibility to the magic of RJ’s jacket in season seven. Rather, this is more likely a product of the representational definitions of ‘lesbian’ in late 1990s and early 2000s film and television - as potentially, and in fact frequently, attracted to men. Batts observes that Willow’s “hybridity [and] her ability to choose, comes with the loss of any meaningful sense of belonging, intimacy or certainty.”^[9] His observation could have been made either about Willow in particular or more generally about ‘lesbian’ characters on television and in mainstream film and encapsulates what I believe to be one of the central features of both. She can and does ‘choose’ between Oz and Tara. She may be able to choose to be a lesbian, but it is thereby also the case that she can choose to be straight. This, together with the lack of any clear definition between the straight Willow and the lesbian Willow, lends a high level of inauthenticity to her sexuality.

This is additionally accented by the fact that ‘the L word’ is not used at all in this episode. The lack of a speech act to define her sexuality beyond her relationship with Tara is perhaps an effort to ‘normalise’ her choice of a female sexual partner, by making her sexuality irrelevant to such a choice. Or perhaps it is simply emblematic of the awkwardness and uncertainty of Willow as a character. Either way, the absence is palpable, and remains so for many more episodes. The importance of language in the series has frequently been noted^[10], and this absence of *saying*, replaced as it is with the trailing off of “there’s something between us...”, seems to act further to destabilise her identity. Indeed Willow’s direct statement fourteen episodes and a season later “Hello, gay now” (‘Triangle’ 5.11) still contains an element of this sense of lesbianism as being a transitional, relational state. The *now* of “Hello, gay now”, holds within it the crux of this statement, for it implies that her gayness is merely her current state, without indication of the past or future. In the next episode Willow, undergoing questioning by the watcher’s council, once again makes a declaration of this type when she states that she and Tara are “lesbian gay-type lovers” with defiance but yet characteristic awkwardness and discomfort (‘Checkpoint’ 5.12).

It is again through language that the countering of this conception of Willow’s lesbian sexuality as transitional and flexible occurs. This threat of returned heterosexuality is also directly addressed, and thereby somewhat defused, by the writers giving Willow lines such as “When...I change back? Yeah, this is a college thing, just a little experimentation before I get over the thrill and head back to boys’ town” (‘Tough Love’ 5.19) during a fight with Tara over ‘lesbo street cred’. The presentation of her as a hybrid character who can inhabit all subjectivities, and be none of them, diminishes this statement, for we have seen Willow ‘change’ so many times that another such change would not come as a surprise. However, this hybridity itself is also undercut at various points, particularly in the repetition of the phrases “I think I’m kinda gay” and “bored now” in ‘Doppelgangland’ (3.16), ‘Tabula Rasa’ (6.8) and ‘Villains’ (6.20) respectively.

The repetition of the phrase “I think I’m kinda gay” in ‘Tabula Rasa’ when a spell gone awry causes Willow to lose her memory also demonstrates a more essentialist approach to sexuality, indicating that Willow’s queer feelings run more deeply than a conscious decision. The first time this phrase is uttered by Willow in ‘Doppelgangland’ likewise functions as an indication of Willow’s sexual preferences, long before we as viewers, or it appears Willow herself, have any knowledge thereof. It is thus through a violent, strong and hypersexual ‘bad girl’ that we see the first inklings of Willow’s queer self. And thus, the queer enters once again upon the side of the forces of darkness rather than that of the ‘crew of light’. The sexual, queer element of Willow’s personality manifests most prominently in her ‘evil’ doppelganger who curiously demonstrated no such tendencies in her earlier incarnation in ‘The Wish’ (3.9). Vampire Willow is “strong, assertive, and aggressively sexual” and is “especially lecherous with pretty girls”^[11], an eroticism demonstrated aptly when she ‘takes’ a girl in the Bronze. This alternate-reality-Willow is particularly attracted to her mirror image (perhaps because she has none?), articulating conceptions of the stereotypical femme narcissistic lesbian, together with the camp possibilities of being with one’s double: an apex of ‘polymorphously perverse’ sexuality indeed!



Willow’s overly horrified reaction to Vampire Willow’s advances, can be read, particularly in light of her later feelings, as an unconscious recognition of her own

queerness in her vampire self. Indeed as Bartlem has purported:

Vampire-Willow is not simply Willow's externalised other, rather she appears to be a reflection of a different aspect of Willow's character. This episode hints at what is to come for Willow later in the series, implying that Willow has the potential to be queer, seductive, powerful and evil. [\[12\]](#)

When Vampire Willow licks Willow's neck, Willow is completely unnerved, stammering: "this just can't get more disturbing". It is clear that it is not fear of being bitten that unnerves her, but rather the eroticism behind that lick, and the fact that it comes from, not only a woman, but her mirror image. It is not only covering up her potential desire for women, but also her awareness of her own body, and acknowledgement of herself as a sexy and desirable woman (a confidence that she does not gain for another four seasons, in the third last episode of the series, when Kennedy also licks her neck in this manner.) Here Willow can finally respond with pure pleasure, not only to her own queer desires, but also to being actively desired by another woman. The declaration: "I think I'm kinda gay" in this episode is a fascinating one, particularly when viewed retrospectively, as while she is talking about her vampire self, the 'I' can also be taken as her 'good' self, indicating an awakening self-awareness long before Tara arrives on the scene. The fact that Willow does not allow Buffy to kill Vampire Willow is further emblematic of her identification with her, rather than the 'othering' approach to her taken by the other characters. Even though upon her return to her own reality, she is immediately dusted with a resounding "Oh fuck", elements of this version of Willow are retained by the series, though it takes a while for them to come to the fore.

Willow reacts in a similar way to another woman who is subtextually coded as queer, and, like vampire Willow, is voracious, promiscuous and utterly sexually confident - I am, of course, talking about Faith. Indeed one of our first encounters with female queerness in *Buffy* appears with our first encounter with Faith, the third slayer character in the series, and Willow's intense jealousy of, and animosity towards Faith, acts as another indication of her incipient lesbianism. Unlike the second slayer Kendra, Faith is unmistakably coded as a 'dark' character in the series - even as she fights against 'the forces of darkness'. She is the deviant sexual slayer who counters Buffy's righteous childlike slayer. Faith finds sexual pleasure in the act of slaying itself, as we find out almost immediately, slaying makes her "hungry and horny" ('Faith, Hope and Trick' 3.3), and she is very willing to share these details with anyone who will listen. In many ways, she functions as an epitome of the unruly woman, without borders or limits upon her many and diverse appetites or her deliciously sexual, and sexually perverse, nature. While at first Buffy herself demonstrates jealousy towards Faith, she comes to accept her, and is happy to have another slayer around, Faith in turn, exhibits, though never states, the fact that she finds Buffy desirable (and no, not in the sense of wanting to *be* her). Willow sees this as a threat to her friendship with Buffy, and considering the fact that they are not an inseparable duo, but rather part of a circle that has always expanded with each new person, there is no reason for Willow to see Faith as such a direct threat to her 'friendship' with Buffy, anymore than Xander is. It seems it is quite something else that makes Willow hate Faith. Willow's intense dislike of Faith is perhaps an indication not only of her unknowing incipient lesbianism, but her desire for Buffy - as Larry said in 'Phases' (2.15) when he mistakenly believes that Xander is also gay: "It's ironic. All those times I beat the crap out of you, it must have been because I recognised something in you that I didn't want to believe about myself."

These erotic women, with their highly charged physicality, are at odds with the representation of good Willow, who is not only "very seldom naughty" ('Doppelgangland'), but is also the most childlike and desexualised character in *Buffy*. This self-confidence and knowledge of exactly what to do without hesitation, does not again manifest in Willow's personality until after her first 'loss' of Tara, and the subsequent repetitions thereof. Erotic physicality is even further removed in Willow's relationship with Tara, which is situated in an ethereal, desexualised, magical realm, and whose "very openness and innocence desexualises and removes the erotic tension crucial to a queer reading of the text." [\[13\]](#) Although Tara is, or is at least made out to be, the catalyst for there being a lesbian relationship at all on *Buffy*, and she is a character remarkable mainly for her present absence.

As a character, Tara primarily functions as an extension or highlighting of Willow, whether this is by acting as a check upon or catalyst for Willow's various 'behaviours'. The first time we see them in an eroticised context occurs within Xander's dream in 'Restless' (4.22), and yet even in this instance of lesbianism for and via the male gaze, their kissing is only present in sound - we do not actually see anything happening visually. Although this is undoubtedly done in order to avoid the sexploitation syndrome so commonly associated with lesbian or bisexual characters on television, it operates to locate lesbian sex once again as mysterious and un-depictable. Perhaps the most telling aspect of this sense of absent presence and extension of Willow is the fact that Amber Benson, the actress who plays Tara, appears a great deal in the 'Willow' section of the opening credits, but unlike other partners of the Scoobies, such as Anya, Riley or Spike, who are for a large part of their time permanent fixtures, she herself only receives a space in the opening credits once - in the episode in which her character is killed. To Willow's character, however, Tara is supremely important. Willow, at least on a conscious level, believes that Tara gives her her sense of self-worth, as seen in her statement:

The only thing Willow was ever good for...the only thing I had going for me...were the moments, just moments, when Tara would look at me and I was wonderful. ('Villains' 6.20)

Willow also believes that Tara gives her her sexuality, demonstrating this when questioned by Kennedy as to when she knew she was attracted to women, she replies: "Three years ago. That's when I knew. And it wasn't women. It was woman. Just one." ('The Killer in Me' 7.13)

It is here that we come across one of the great oddities of the queer aspect of *Buffy*. Tara has, as we have seen, been the catalyst for introducing Willow to her lesbian self, and guiding her magical development. Their sexual relationship, or at least the part of it we see onscreen, is all but once presented as magic, whether this be through Willow levitating Tara instead of going down on her or Willow being thrown back in an orgasmic spell, or them both magically 'deflowering' a rose. And yet, in season six, Tara

gets angry at Willow and eventually leaves her *precisely because she is “doing too much magic”* (“Tabula Rasa”, 6.8). Here I must respond with a resounding huh? What can this possibly mean?

While Willow’s addiction to magic begins while she is still with Tara, her first loss of Tara through their break up prompts her visits to Rack the magic-dealer, and her deepest descent into magic-addiction occurs immediately after Tara’s death. This can be seen as purely due to Tara being a stabilizing influence on her and her magic more specifically, or a response to grief, but it seems to run deeper than that. When Willow loses Tara, she loses not only her lover and companion, her sense of self or her will to live, but is seen to quite literally lose herself until she is a being beyond the recognition of some of the other characters on the show, such as Buffy and Jonathon. She is not unrecognisable to Xander, who has known her longest, nor is she entirely illegible to the audience. Here we see Buffy’s recurring inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to recognize good and evil within the one person, and desire to spilt both the world and people’s personalities into binaries of good and bad. This is ultimately why, in this peril, Xander can ‘save the world’ and Buffy cannot. For Xander, both good “crayon-breaky” Willow and bad “scary-veiny” Willow are integrated and inseparable elements of the one being. This is also perhaps, beyond the clear jealousy element, the reason why Xander cannot accept Angel after he has spent time as Angelus. For he, unlike Buffy, does not see Angel/Angelus as a split being who can alternate between good and evil, but recognizes that there are many aspects of personality that are shared between the two.

Despite the generally held conception of Willow and Tara’s magical partnership as one of mutual reinforcement and benefit, it seems that somehow, as Mendlesohn suggests:

Willow’s relationship with Tara, in addition to undercutting a queer reading of the Buffy/Willow relationship, actually undercuts a queer reading of Willow at all, first by neutralising her sexuality and then by re-channelling thoughts of lesbian relationships in a safe direction.[\[14\]](#)

Willow’s relationship with Tara is one which moderates her behaviour, mediating her not only into a ‘safe’ normalised gay character, but taking away her potential to be confident, dangerous, powerful and seductively queer - qualities that she demonstrates only in times of absence from Tara. In other words, is it really “Tara’s death that fragments Willow’s already-compromised identity beyond repair”[\[15\]](#), or is it Tara’s presence that fragments Willow’s identity, and her absences that allow her to follow her desires, journey away from her crippling hybridity, and form a stable identity?

All these ideas of hybridity and transition function as part of the insecure, awkward, under confident character we have come to identify as Willow. There are, however, times when this insecurity transforms itself into confidence and power, and in these moments one can identify a change in perceptions of Willow’s sexuality. Willow leaves behind the normalised gay with all its attendant desexualization (and, as it has been rather amusingly put, the “romantic scenes” where “you actually expect to see bluebirds and small animals come out of the forest to sit at their knees”[\[16\]](#)), and becomes a powerfully deviant, unmistakably queer character, whose desires are wholly unnatural, and whose will must be obeyed. I am of course, talking about Willow going ‘evil’ at the end of season six, and the lead up to this point.

The transformation of Willow into a vengeance wreaking super-witch in ‘Villains’ (6.2) is perhaps the most complex and yet seemingly straight forward interaction of the forces that often intersect in *Buffy*: lesbianism, magic, evil and death. For here we have the ‘dead-evil lesbian cliché’ at its best, occurring moments after Tara and Willow’s most directly sexual onscreen appearance: one half of the couple dead, the other turned into the big bad of the series. While the temptation is always to dismiss these problematic associations as simply homophobic, I find myself taking up Pender’s construction of “neither and both”[\[17\]](#), for *Buffy* is neither homophobic, nor is it lesbian-positive, and yet it is both in some ways, and sometimes at the same time, for it does not take up a single portrayal, but instead develops slowly an ever-evolving and complex vision of Willow’s sexuality.

Although in these episodes diverse readings of her morality are undertaken by various characters, Willow is unmistakably at least coded as an evil character, and this has opened the writers to charges of resorting to dead/evil lesbian serial killer clichés so favoured by crime shows such as *Law & Order*. I would like, however, to argue that there are mitigating factors in this portrayal. Seemingly unlike the other characters in these episodes, an audience who has watched even semi-regularly is aware that several of the main sympathetic characters have killed, or have attempted to kill, humans in the past. Giles, Spike, Anya, Angel, Faith and even Buffy herself have all killed, or attempted to kill, humans. These murders and attempted murders, far from having ‘changed’ them in the manner Buffy suggests, have barely registered upon the moral fabric of the series.

The characterisation of Willow in these episodes is further complicated by the fact that she is given a great deal of extremely pertinent dialogue that directly encapsulates the annoyances expressed by *Buffy* fans towards, for example, both Dawn and Buffy’s continuous whining throughout season six. She may be coded as evil, but she is also undoubtedly sympathetic – even her attempt to end the world is due to a combination of nihilism and a desire to end the suffering of humanity. She is in fact the first ‘big bad’ to attempt to actually *end* the world, with all the darkness that we have seen in the camp gothic world of the Buffyverse, rather than suck it into hell, or hell into it.

Willow is not only finally confident in these episodes, but she is able to define herself. Firstly through giving voice to her image of herself as a geeky schoolgirl, which has haunted her (as we have particularly seen in her dream sequence in ‘Restless’) and secondly by incorporating previous experimentations or performances of roles into embodied parts of her selfhood. She can be whatever she wants to be, whether this is a powerful witch, a vengeance demon, a slayer, or even a murderer. She is no longer a hybrid figure, nor journeying between these roles, but being them all at once in a manner that is entirely unnatural. So when Dawn says: “You’re back on the magicks,” Willow can truthfully answer her: “No, honey. I am the magicks.” (“Two to Go” 6.21) And if we take ‘the magicks’ as, if not necessarily contiguous with her sexuality, at least emblematic thereof, it seems that she has reached a point where she is wholly comfortable with who she is, and unlike the earlier Willow, who, while extremely

comfortable with data, is uncomfortable with speech, she can now quip like Xander, pun like Buffy, and be more sarcastic than Cordelia or Spike at their best. [18]

This sensation of Willow as a figure on the crossroads of good and bad in *Buffy* is emphasised even before these episodes, though particularly during them, by her usage of blood, generally taken to be the domain of vampires in the series. Like Angel or Spike would have done, though with magic instead of smell, Willow tracks Warren by using Tara's blood upon her shirt. Prior to this, in 'Bargaining Part One', she kills a very cute and innocent looking baby deer, which to anyone who grew up with *Bambi* is especially disturbing, and smears its blood over her face. Unlike Tara, who follows a pseudo-Gardnerian Wiccan code of consequences and not interfering in the natural order of things [19], Willow has never been concerned with such things. Even in the face of that supreme instance of natural order, death, she does not flinch, as she does not see it as an obstacle, and demonstrates this by repeatedly having no concern or respect for the 'natural laws' of life and death. This is first seen when she secretly points Dawn in the direction of resurrection spells after Joyce's death, continues into her resurrection and re-birthing of Buffy and culminates in her attempted resurrection of Tara, which can be seen as endemic of queer desire and "punctures the life/death and generative/destructive bipolarities that enclose the heterosexist notion of being." [20]

Kennedy, Willow's girlfriend in season seven, is an entirely different character to Tara, and has a very different effect on perceptions of Willow's in-process sexuality. Undoubtedly at some level this is a response on the part of the writers to the charges of homophobia laid against them by fans angry at the death of Tara. Kennedy's self confidence and security in regards to her sexuality, together with her seemingly single-minded pursuit of her desires, is in distinct contrast to Tara's shyness, Willow's awkwardness and both of their apparent discomfort with discussing their relationship, or even sexual preferences. Kennedy's open discussion of her sexuality with Willow in 'The Killer in Me' (7.13) demonstrates a move towards a more essentialist notion of sexuality, and, I will argue, creates a more stable, fixed manner in which Willow's sexuality, and indeed her personality, can be viewed. The following exchange, and Willow's incredulity regarding it, are emblematic of the differences in the pair's understandings of their sexuality:

Kennedy: It was *Gone with the Wind*. I saw that, and I knew I wanted to sweep Scarlett off her feet.

Willow: You were five.

Kennedy: I'm not saying the sweeping would have been easy.

Willow begins this attempted seduction with overt discomfort and indeed makes the incredible statement that she is not attracted to women in general, but Tara in particular, which is consequently undermined by her relationship with Kennedy. When the 'standard penance malediction' spell cast upon her by Amy in a fit of jealousy is triggered by her kiss with Kennedy, we realise more than ever the extent to which Willow is highly uncomfortable with her sexuality, and how much guilt surrounds sexual pleasure for her, particularly after the death of Tara. Kennedy's attempt to seduce her also sexualises Willow. Her statement that "I like...your freckles. Lickable" is reminiscent of Vampire Willow's erotic lick up her neck, but it also combines this with freckles, an emblem of the childlikeness of Willow's personality, and tangles them together to reveal an integrated Willow, who can embrace all aspects of herself into a single whole, and become, in Kennedy's words, a "goddess" ('Chosen' 7.22).

Kennedy is not only open about her sexuality, but, like Faith and Vampire Willow, appears to be a character in firm possession of a high level of sexual energy, and a degree of kink. She brings a strong physicality to their relationship, encouraging 'good' Willow away from her ethereal, transient sexuality towards the more animal, physical eroticism seen in her Vampire self, and to a lesser degree, her 'evil' self, and further relocates lesbian sex from the realm of magic to the more realist realm in which heterosexual sex is located in the show. Indeed, the previous equation of spells with lesbian sex in Willow and Tara's relationship is removed prior to their very first kiss when Kennedy says: "I'm not so into the magic stuff. Seems like fairy tale crap to me. But it matters to you. You care about it. So it's cool." ('The Killer in Me')

In the third last episode of the series, 'Touched', the show's portrayal of lesbianism, has finally evolved to a point where they can show two lesbian characters actually having sex, and indeed on such a level that it can be intercut with shots of three heterosexual couples having sex, and therefore set up as their equivalent, rather than as some mysterious unknowable magic well off-screen, as it had previously been portrayed. Willow's feelings of guilt and fear of losing control immediately prior to this encounter are allayed by Kennedy. Willow later refers to this "total loss of control...in a nice, wholesome, my girlfriend has a pierced tongue kind of way" ('End of Days' 7.21), and we can therein see not only the degree to which she has become comfortable with discussing sex beyond calling it 'snuggles', but see that this embracing of sex is a relinquishing of control, and opening oneself up to possibilities of pleasure, which has enabled her to play the pivotal role in the finale of the series. For Willow uses this experience, together with a stabilised sense of herself, to go 'beyond anything' she has ever done, and access and channel enormous amounts of power without disappearing into it, and she can only do this because she has previously allowed herself to lose that control during sex with Kennedy.

Willow now has Kennedy as her kite string, to tether her more ethereal side on the physical plane, but the sexuality that Kennedy has allowed her to experience and accept has prepared her for this moment, and she can understand loss of control as potentially pleasurable and powerful as well as potentially evil. It seems that through her experiences of intense power at the end of season six, together with her relationship with Kennedy, Willow who at "the end of the sixth season...[had] not yet found her place in the world" [21], has been enabled to integrate her physical queer self and her ethereal normalised gay self into the one being. Though the many averted apocalypses, slayings and love affairs in the series generally focussed on Buffy, the development of Willow as a character has remained a constant evolution throughout the series, and at the very end of *Buffy*, Willow is finally, all grown up.

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