

Pain as Pleasure: Tough Girls' Love in Fan Fiction

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Abstract

Fan fiction writers use an existing fictional universe to develop scenarios and characters in creative ways within the logic of the original universe. In this chapter, I examine the representations of the erotics of pain in two fan-produced, so-called femslash texts describing romantic and sexual relationships between the two vampire slayers Buffy and Faith from Joss Whedon's TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

In the 'adult' Buffy/Faith femslash analysed here, the authors describe pain as inextricably linked to sexual pleasure and intimacy, especially in BDSM sex scenes. Drawing on intertextual links to the TV series, such as the preternatural resilience of Slayer bodies which can take extreme amounts of pain, the fanfic writers create graphic descriptions of safe, sane and consensual BDSM as key elements in Buffy and Faith's relationship.

I argue that such representations are transgressive in that they break the rules of how sexualities can be represented in the prime-time TV series the two female characters are borrowed from. Furthermore, they subvert stereotypical ideas about female desire and sexual behaviour as 'passive' or 'vanilla'. The potential for transgression may explain fan writers' attraction to Buffy/Faith femslash centring on BDSM relations as well as readers' interest in these stories.

Key Words: Sexualized pain, pornography, BDSM, intertextuality, Buffy/Faith femslash, fan fiction, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

1. Buffy, Faith and fan fiction

Fan fictions (fanfics) are texts written by fans about characters from an existing fictional universe, such as the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Originally circulated in print fanzines, fanfic texts of today are mostly published on the internet, either on general fan fiction sites or sites dedicated to a specific fandom or a specific category of fan fiction, such as femslash texts, which are homoerotic stories about female couples.

The pairing of characters is central in most fan fiction, and *Buffy* fan fiction is no exception. Fan fiction writers develop various aspects of the fictional universe they write about, the *source text*, filling in the gaps in the

story or creating alternative plot developments, for instance. One of the most favoured activities amongst fanfic writers is to develop homoerotic stories about characters who are not couples in the source text. Slash and femslash fan fiction (homoerotic stories about male and female characters respectively)¹ represent forms of resistance to the images of romantic relationships provided in the source texts.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Joss Whedon's cult TV series about the adventures of a teenaged vampire hunter, was first aired in the US between 1997 and 2003. The constantly growing number of fan fictions about Buffy's universe, the *Buffyverse*, shows that *Buffy* continues to fascinate fans around the world. In *Buffyverse* fan fiction, the most popular female pairing consists of the two vampire slayers Buffy and Faith, two super-powered young women who spend their nights patrolling the cemeteries of Sunnydale, California, to round-kick and stake vampires in order to stop the ever impending apocalypse.

As free and creative as fan fiction may be, it is a general rule that good fanfic texts should inscribe themselves within the logic of the fictional universe they take place in, for instance in staying true to the original characters' 'personalities'. Thus, the pairing of two extremely tough and strong girls gives the opportunity to create non-stereotypical or transgressive representations of female characters involved in a love story where BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) plays an important part. In contrast to conventional romantic texts (Mills & Boone or Harlequin novels, for example) where a virile, active hero pursues a passive, inexperienced heroine whose ultimate goal is to find true love, the Buffy/Faith femslash texts analyzed in this chapter focus on graphic descriptions of rough sexual practices rather than on the purportedly feminine themes of love and caring. Such representations challenge stereotypical images of female sexuality as well as of women involved in romantic relationships.²

Eroticized pain is a central component of the sexual practices which are depicted in graphic detail in the two Buffy/Faith fan fictions I will discuss: *Faith's Fantasies* and *New Desires*. Although the pain described in the sex scenes may be excruciating, it is inextricably linked to arousal and pleasure. Pain is a complex sensation and a subjective experience, as Melzack and Wall point out in their medical textbook *The Challenge of Pain*. According to Melzack and Wall, pain

is not simply a function of the amount of bodily damage alone. Rather, the amount and quality of pain we feel are also determined by our previous experiences and how well we remember them, by our ability to understand the cause of the pain and to grasp its consequences.³

Painful sensations are thus intimately linked to the context in which they are experienced. If this context is an erotic situation where the pain is not only expected but also desired, it is understood and experienced differently than if the pain were the result of injury or torture for instance.

Pain does not necessarily entail suffering or feelings of discomfort, then, but may well be linked to various kinds of pleasure. Daria Radchenko discusses other aspects of the oscillations “between pain and pleasure” in her chapter in this volume. In contrast to Radchenko’s study of dancers’ actual bodily experiences, and also to Meghan Neaton’s study of pain in musicians treated for breast cancer, my analysis addresses textual representations of pain in scenes involving two fictional characters engaging in radical forms of sex. For insightful analyses of the intermingling of pain and desire in textual and visual works, see Angela Tumini’s chapter on D’Annunzio and Von Trier in this volume. The fanfic scenes describing sexualized pain which I focus on are more likely to say something about the fan fiction authors’ perceptions of BDSM and about their fantasies concerning two female superheroes involved in such sexual activities, than about real-life BDSM.⁴ However, in order to outline possible understandings of sexualized pain in pornographic texts from my socio-literary perspective, I will draw on studies and recounts of real-life BDSM experiences and the pleasures linked to pain.

The two fan fictions I analyse in this chapter are *Faith’s Fantasies*, by Rebelrsr, and *New Desires*, by Naughti. Both texts are categorized as ‘adult’ since they contain explicit sexual material.⁵ In other words, they are erotic or pornographic, which I take to mean that, besides being sexually explicit, they are intended to arouse. More specifically, *Faith’s Fantasies* is described as “[a] collection of PWP’s containing mild, but consensual, BDSM” and is rated NC-21 (PWP is a fan fiction acronym which reads “Porn Without Plot” or “Plot? What Plot?”). Naughti describes *New Desires* in the following way: “Buffy and Faith dive into a kinky, dark relationship with each other” and provides a number of key words, such as “BDSM,” “D/s,” “Bond,” and “FemDom” which function both as content markers and as warnings to potentially sensitive readers.⁶

New Desires is accessible on AdultFanfiction.net, a site devoted to erotic/pornographic fanfic, as the name indicates. This text is rated Adult++, which means that it belongs to the ‘most adult’ category available on this site. Fan fictions inspired by a number of source texts (books, TV series, cartoons, etc) are accessible on AdultFanfiction.net, where the focus is on adult fanfic rather than on a specific fandom or textual universe. *Faith’s Fantasies*, on the other hand, can be found at two internet sites which both focus specifically on fan productions about Buffy and Faith (including fan art and fan video remixes): BuffynFaith.net and SlayersTime.com. All three sites are moderated, which means, among other things, that a group of administrators

decide which texts to publish on the respective sites. Furthermore, the access to 'adult' texts is restricted on all three sites. In order to access the fan fictions on AdultFanfiction.net and BuffynFaith.net, the users must certify that they are over 18. On SlayersTime.net, the users have to register and participate actively in the forum discussions in order to gain access to the fan fictions rated NC-21. Other fan fictions on this site are open to all users.

2. **Kinky sex in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

Femslash writers queer the relationship between Buffy and Faith, basing their pairing of these two Slayers on the character descriptions and plot developments in the TV series. Hence, the fan fictions contain a number of intertextual references to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I will discuss these intertextual links in order to highlight which features from the series the fanfic writers use to develop Buffy and Faith's collegial relationship into a romantic one where BDSM plays an important part.

The Buffyverse lends itself especially well to so-called kink-fic, not only of the male slash version analyzed by several scholars, but also of the femslash variety pairing Buffy and Faith.⁷ As media scholar Esther Saxey points out,

in *Buffy* fandom, there is an added interest in the sexualization of emotional suffering, which is that suffering is already so much part of the series and the slash. Writers combine these two ejected themes - suffering and kinky sex - and play them against each other.⁸

Saxey's observation on male slash about characters in the Buffyverse is valid for Buffy/Faith femslash as well. Buffy and Faith are women with Slayer powers, which means that they are both preternaturally strong and capable of suffering extreme amounts of pain, not least because they have extraordinary healing capacities. Furthermore, they are the female heroes of a TV show which frequently alludes to, and even to some degree depicts, kinky sex albeit in a veiled manner. (Since *Buffy* is a prime-time show, it is restricted by a number of regulations concerning the ways in which sexuality may be represented). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* abounds with "moments of kink," as Saxey calls them: sexy leather clothes are common in the series, as are half-naked, injured or tortured characters.⁹ There are chains next to beds, sexual scenes in cages, and both Buffy and Faith are seen chained up in erotically charged scenes.¹⁰

There is no doubt, then, that allusions to kinky sex are present in the TV series, if one by 'kinky sex' means "certain items or styles of dress" which are "suggestive of sexual perversion" or "unconventional tastes."¹¹ It is

also true that sexy leather clothes, chains and other kinky attire are depicted in visually pleasurable ways. However, on an explicit level, non-normative sexual practices are presented as morally wrong. The tortured and half-naked characters that are depicted - mostly the male vampires Angel and Spike - are presented as victims of cruel and sadistic treatments, often carried out by villains, and not as sexually pleased 'submissives'. *Buffyscholar* Vivien Burr states that, although "*Buffy* goes some way towards endorsing forms of sexual expression that are commonly seen as lying beyond the pale of the normal and healthy, ultimately it chooses to align these with evil rather than good," for instance in associating BDSM with sadistic sexuality, connected to the evil vampires, in a manner that conflates the two.¹² It should be noted that there is an on-going debate concerning interpretations of the kinky sex depicted in the series, where some *Buffy* scholars argue for a 'kink-positive' reading of *Buffy*.¹³ Regardless of what values kinky sex is associated with on the TV show, its many allusions to such sexual practices form a base for *Buffyverse* fan fiction containing kinky sex.

The "moments of kink" in the show which femslash authors draw on can be specific scenes from the series, as well as more general, recurring allusions to kinky sex, but also the characterizations of the two Slayers. Faith is undisputedly familiar with BDSM practices; in a sexual banter scene with the vampire Spike, she talks about her experiences as a "top" in sexual relations with "a guy with a bull whip."¹⁴ She also displays sexually violent behaviour towards Buffy's friend Xander, as she initiates a kind of foreplay so rough that she nearly strangles him. Her behaviour in this scene is explicitly connected to BDSM, since Buffy's boyfriend Angel asks Faith, as he saves Xander, if she forgot about the "safety word." Her reply suggests that such mutual agreements matter little to her: "Safety words are for wusses."¹⁵ Buffy is depicted as more conventional and less expressive when it comes to sexuality, especially in the first three seasons of the series during which she is still in high school. However, she is not always portrayed as 'vanilla'.¹⁶ In season six, Buffy is the one who initiates sex with the no longer evil vampire Spike in what will become a clearly BDSM-influenced relationship. *Buffy* scholar Jenny Alexander notes that

Their relationship is depicted as 'unhealthy' by the story arc. Buffy is portrayed as continually ashamed and disgusted with herself for enjoying these assignations. However, the camera tells a different story. It continually lingers on the unzipping and re-buckling of black leather.¹⁷

This ambiguity between overt moral messages and visually pleasurable and/or eroticized scenes reflects the way kinky sex is represented

in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: “morally wrong yet illicitly delicious,” to quote Jenny Alexander.¹⁸

3. Kinky sex in Buffy/Faith fan fiction

The fan fiction *Faith's Fantasies* takes place in a so-called alternative universe set after the seventh and last season of the TV series. In this text, Buffy and Faith no longer function as the vampire slayers of Sunnydale, but live in “domestic bliss” in Cleveland (which is the town Buffy and her friends are leaving for in the final episode of the TV series, and also Faith's home town in the comic book sequel to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).¹⁹ *Faith's Fantasies* is written as Faith's story about how BDSM enters into her and Buffy's relationship, with Buffy as the dominating partner. Initially, this kind of sexual power play starts as Buffy's Valentine's gift to her lover, but “the Game,” as she and Faith call it, becomes an integrated part of their love life.

In the beginning of *Faith's Fantasies*, kinky sex is presented as shameful and deviant in the sense that it is a practice that turns away from the norm. This echoes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* since non-normative sexual practices are marked as unhealthy in the series. In the opening lines of the fanfic, Faith recounts how she declared her feelings to Buffy. Faith's thoughts, directed at Buffy, make clear that she perceives her own sexual preferences as shameful:

See, when I finally got up the ovaries to admit what I felt for you on the trip to Cleveland, I wanted to do it right. Nothing hidden. Not one secret. I thought my face was going to burst into flames I was blushing so hard. I explained about leatherdykes, femme tops, and Daddies. Somehow I even admitted to having this stupid list of requirements for my eventual mate. Number Six always made you laugh: Likes to be called Sir or Ma'am. Even though you didn't get it, you stuck around. And, over the years, you even tried to fulfil my fantasies (including Number Six). It didn't work.²⁰

The fact that Faith needs courage to confess her true feelings for Buffy can be read as the sense of vulnerability any lover may feel as s/he is about to admit her/his romantic feelings for someone without knowing if these are mutual. Moreover, Faith is about to ‘come out’ and declare her love for another woman, which may be even more problematic, especially if the other woman is not known to be a lesbian. In the TV series, Buffy is portrayed as straight, and homosexual relationships, although present, are

presented as different. However, it is not the coming out that causes problems, but rather Faith's favoured sexual practices. They are not explicitly called 'deviant,' but they are apparently unusual enough to require explanation. Furthermore, admitting her secret dreams provokes feelings of shame, which emphasizes that such desires are considered out of the ordinary. The fact that Buffy doesn't "get it," but rather laughs at Faith's wish to have a partner who "[l]ikes to be called Sir or Ma'am," stresses its non-normative character.

Drawing on anthropologist Gayle Rubin's discussions of what she calls the "sexual value system" (that is, the socio-cultural conceptions of what is considered "good" or "normal" sex as opposed to "bad" or "unnatural" sex), I would argue that the norm in this case refers to heterosexual, relational and non-violent sexual activities between two consenting partners (or, to use a term frequently employed by femslash writers, 'vanilla' sex).²¹ Non-normative and thus, in Rubin's terminology, "bad" sex, on the other hand, "may be casual, may cross generational lines, and may take place in 'public,' or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles." The rough sex that Buffy and Faith enjoy in the fanfic texts would then fall into the latter category, as the description of Faith "blushing so hard" suggests.²²

The infliction of sexualized pain is the main obstacle to the erotic scenarios that Faith dreams of in *Faith's Fantasies*: "You never could get passed [sic] the idea that I really wanted you to hurt me," she thinks.²³ However, once Buffy passes the initially rather high threshold to BDSM games, she does not hesitate to let the blows fall on Faith's body. The sexual role play is Buffy's surprise gift to Faith who is described as astonished, and even frightened, at the beginning of the role play because she is uncertain of what is going on. As Buffy without warning or explanation grabs Faith from behind and blindfolds her, Faith feels "creeped out," until Buffy grabs her breasts and whispers in her ear, which makes clear that the situation is erotic. Faith responds to these moves in a very physical manner: "I nearly moaned at the deep, husky sound of your voice, and moisture gathered between my legs."²⁴ The mix of insecurity and sexual excitement that characterizes the beginning of the sex scene turns into a blend of excitement and pain as Faith receives a series of blows: "I lost count of the times you painted my ass with fire. [...] Each time the paddle landed, I could feel my wetness increase and my nipples ached under my shirt."²⁵ The mention of the countless blows is an intertextual reference to the supernatural resilience of the Slayers' bodies, a feature which is often brought up in BDSM fan fiction involving Buffy and Faith. Faith's physical reactions to this treatment make clear that pain is linked to arousal in this fan fiction.

This sex scene in *Faith's Fantasies* highlights the connection between the interpretation of the context and the experience of pain. Faith's initial reaction, fear, transforms into arousal as soon as she understands that Buffy's actions are erotically motivated. The description of her mood change is in line with Melzack and Wall's idea that the "quality" of the pain experienced is related to what is perceived to be its cause and consequences.²⁶ One might add that in cases where bodily pain is inflicted by another person, her/his intent is another important factor for the person "interpret[ing]" the pain received, which "involves acts of attribution, explanation," according to Sara Ahmed.²⁷ In the fanfic text, Faith attributes Buffy's rough acts to her wish to give Faith sexual pleasure and reacts correspondingly, by feeling aroused.

The representation of kinky sex in the fan fiction *New Desires* turns away from the TV series since 'kink' is something that Buffy here is more than comfortable with. In the TV series, she feels undecided about her BDSM-influenced relationship with Spike. In *New Desires*, by contrast, Buffy's preference for kinky sex is unproblematic, even if the title of the fan fiction stresses the novelty of the various kinky sexual practices performed by Buffy and Faith in 24 short chapters with descriptive titles like: "Spanking," "Handcuffs," "Blood play," "Clamps," "Leather" and "Voyeur."

In *New Desires*, in contrast to *Faith's Fantasies*, Faith takes for granted that Buffy is not 'vanilla' in bed: "[...] couldn't be, she had dated a vampire after all."²⁸ The vampire referred to here is not Buffy's BDSM partner Spike, but Angel, the ensouled vampire who is Buffy's first and true love in the TV series. The TV scenes displaying Angel and Buffy in intimate situations tend to emphasize the romantic aspects of their relationship rather than the 'purely' sexual attraction between them, and there are no explicit signs of them engaging in kinky sex. In Naughti's fan fiction, however, Faith's supposition is that sex with a vampire includes some degree of 'kink,' which is confirmed by Buffy's thoughts at the end of the same fanfic chapter. As she lets Faith be "on top" after some struggle about this dominating position, Buffy thinks: "She was thrilled with the power Faith was having over her. It reminded her of the nights she had spent with Angel. He had control over her and it wasn't until now that she was reminded of just how much she missed it."²⁹ Although Buffy's reference to Angel's "control over her" does not explicitly mention BDSM-like control, the connection between her memories of Angel and Faith's physical and psychological "power" over her suggests that his control also had to do with sexual domination.

The pleasant flash-back to Angel's control over her enhances the intensity of Buffy's feelings in the erotic situation depicted in *New Desires*. As Faith declares her preference for domination, Buffy feels "a shiver rush down her spine," which is linked both to her present state of arousal and the much missed 'control' Angel once had over her.³⁰ Erotic body memories,

philosopher Katarina Elam states, distinguish themselves from other kinds of body memories (such as “the habitual” and “the traumatic”) in that they are not limited to the past, but “also bridge what *might* happen. This fact reinforces the feeling of pleasure as it allows something new to appear, namely feelings of hope and desire.”³¹ Buffy’s shiver of pleasure suggests such a connection between her past experiences and the ones she hopes and desires to have in the (close) future with Faith as the controlling partner.

4. Therapeutic pain

The fan fiction authors describe sexualized pain not only as arousing, but also as psychologically satisfying. This mirrors the TV series, where both Buffy and Faith are seen needing physical pain in order to deal with their personal problems. In the series, Faith is depicted as a psychologically unstable character who is in need of redemption after she has turned to the dark side and left Sunnydale for Los Angeles (which makes her briefly enter *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s spin-off series *Angel*). Faith’s way to redemption is closely linked to physical punishment, which is highlighted by a question posed by Angel: “still looking for someone to help beat the bad out of you?”³² In the TV series, Faith’s need for punishment is presented as mentally unstable behaviour. Angel eventually manages to make Faith realize this and turn herself in to the police instead of acting out her traumas in a destructive manner.

Although one should not confuse fictive characters with real people, I would like to point out thematic similarities between my analyses and Hans Sternudd’s study presented in this section of the volume, namely the ambiguities and complexities of handling psychological problems through bodily pain. Sternudd addresses these complex questions in his analyses of discourses linked to the pictures of self-inflicted cuts which are circulated in internet communities of so-called cutters.

In the fan fiction *Faith’s Fantasies*, handling psychological trauma through corporal punishment is played out in the sexual setting of a dominance-submission scene. Buffy, acting as the dominating “Mistress,” helps Faith struggle against her “evil twin” by “beat[ing] the bad out of [her],” only in a sexually pleasurable way.³³ Faith explains to Buffy what submission means to her: “Part of the scene was giving up control, letting you lead. [...] ‘I want to show you I’m yours, Buffy. Heart, soul, the whole scarred package’.” Handing over the control to the dominating partner, is in this context a sign of affection and commitment which underscores the emotional intimacy of the sexual “scene.” By following Mistress Buffy’s directives and receiving corporal punishment - some fifty swats of a leather whip and a paddle - Faith manages to deal with her dark side, her “evil twin.” In contrast to the destructive beatings in the TV series, the pain inflicted is

sexually stimulating which is emphasized through the descriptions of Faith's physical reactions to Buffy's treatment. In addition to the pleasures of pain, there is psychological satisfaction. By the end of the whipping session, Faith thinks: "Despite the flaring pain and the arousal, my mind was floating, and I was relaxed." Rebelrsr thematizes the therapeutic gains of pain in a positive manner rather than depicting the need for corporal punishment as unstable and destructive behaviour, as the TV series does.

In a similar manner, fanfic author Naughti describes, in *New Desires*, how a spanking session based on mutual love and care releases both sexual and psychological tension for the partner who receives the punishment. Moreover, it enhances the emotional intimacy between the two lovers. In this fan fiction, it is Buffy rather than Faith who is struggling with problems that she is unable to verbalize. This characterization alludes to the traumatized Buffy depicted in season six of the series, where she is depressed but chooses to keep her problems to herself; the only - temporary - release she finds is through rough sex with Spike. Whereas their violent sexual encounters in the TV series are presented as unhealthy, especially since they do not lead to healing but only to self-hatred, the blows distributed in *New Desires* are based on love and care. In a chapter appropriately titled "Spanking," Buffy and Faith argue about Buffy's reluctance to share her problems with Faith. Naughti describes how Buffy needs a spanking to let her feelings out and emphasizes Faith's concern with Buffy's unhealthy silence:

Faith [...] wanted her lover to be able to confide in her. She didn't mind the fights; they happened. What she did mind was that there was clearly something on Buffy's mind and she wasn't sharing it with her. Faith had worked hard to provide them both with a safe environment since they began dabbling in BDSM. She didn't want it all to come crumbling down because Buffy refused to share with her.³⁴

Buffy's tendency to keep her problems to herself is described as unhealthy in this fan fiction, as it is in the TV show. However, in the fanfic text, the rough sex results in Buffy "allowing herself to cry and let it all out" in her lovers' arms, which then enhances their intimacy.

The importance of verbally sharing psychological problems is explicitly linked to the "safe environment" that is required in BDSM, according to the standpoint Faith expresses in *New Desires*. The concern about safety reflects what BDSM scholars and practitioners refer to as the ethics of care, that is the importance of a "safe, sane and consensual" basis for sexual power play.³⁵ Faith's line underscores that it is important for the dominating partner to make sure the sexual games stay within the limits of what her lover enjoys. Buffy's response to the spanking shows that the scene

is both sane and consensual: “She enjoyed the control Faith had over her and she knew everything the other girl did to her was out of love and respect.”³⁶ The focus on mutual consent underscores that the handing over of control to the dominating partner is an active choice made by the submissive character. The sexual submission described in these fanfic texts is thus linked to agency, which stands in stark contrast to the complete slavery depicted in Pauline Réage’s classical S/M novel *The Story of O*, in which the female protagonist hands over her free will, including her right to object to anything whatsoever, to her master and lover (who makes her suffer a series of cruel and humiliating treatments before assigning her to another master, abandoning her for another female slave). Rather, the BDSM scenes in the femslash texts mirror what Taylor and Ussher, based on their interviews with BDSM practitioners, identify as a cornerstone in sado-masochist activities, namely that the power imbalance between the two partners is symbolic, temporary and ultimately dependent on the submissive partner’s decision.³⁷ Furthermore, the psychological healing linked to sexualized pain in the femslash texts echoes Pat Califia who states, in her essay based on personal experiences of sexual domination: “A good scene doesn’t end with orgasm - it ends with catharsis.”³⁸ Sexualized pain is described as both sexually gratifying and psychologically healing in the fanfic texts, then, because it is based on love and respect, and also because both partners know the limits of their games. In these respects, the femslash texts mirror aspects of BDSM that real-life practitioners find crucial.

Faith’s Fantasies and *New Desires* are, however, fan fiction stories about fictional characters involved in sexual power play. Given their ‘adult’ label, they are meant to be sexually arousing in some sense, and this pornographic function is clearly linked to the descriptions of sexualized pain. Focus in the consecutive sex scenes which constitute both fanfic texts is on the sexually pleasurable aspects of pain, especially from the point of view of the submissive partner. The characters’ moans, gasps, husky voices, bodily fluids, orgasmic cramps and other physical reactions that bear witness to sexual excitement and satisfaction are represented in graphic detail. The pain that causes the graphically described pleasures is also depicted in vivid detail. Even when the pain is extreme, it provokes sexual arousal. In *Faith’s Fantasies*, Faith “screamed and jerked at the bonds holding [her] arms” when Buffy puts clamps on her nipples; “everything exploded in a haze of pain” and Faith “swallowed hard against a surge of nausea.”³⁹ Alongside the details about this excruciating pain, a couple of brief notes regarding Faith’s arousal are inserted, such as the following sentence which describes Faith’s feelings at the end of the clamp session: “My world narrowed to the burning in my chest and the desire dripping from my body.” Such sparseness of details about the submissive character’s pleasure give the impression that the sexually gratifying aspects of pain literally go without saying. Considering

that the text is a pornographic account of consensual BDSM (rather than 'non-con,' which is another fan fiction variety), it is reasonable to suppose that pain is inextricably linked to sexual pleasure, rather than to suffering. In other words, the detailed descriptions of painful sensations may appear as pornographic as the portrayal of sexual arousal and release.

The sexually arousing corporal punishment used in the BDSM sex scenes highlight the centrality of the submissive partner's skin both as a contact zone of sorts and as an erogenous zone. When Buffy uses a "braided leather flogger" on her partner's back, buttocks and thighs, in *Faith's Fantasies*, Faith thinks: "It wasn't pain, pain. [...] It stung, a bit. Like a really bad sunburn. The skin all tight and hot."⁴⁰ The sensation first experienced on the skin - the surface - "travel[s]" to other body parts, as Naughti phrases it, in *New Desires*: "The first slap [of the paddle] caught [Faith] off guard. The warm sting traveled to the deepest pits of her body."⁴¹ The skin is the privileged point of interaction between the two lovers in scenes of spanking, whipping and cutting. The skin then functions as what Sara Ahmed describes as a "surface" both between the inside and the outside (of the body) and between self and others; a "surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others."⁴² The slaps with a paddle which are "impressed upon" Faith's skin in this scene allow Buffy to control not only her partner's sexual arousal, but also her mental focus: "Buffy varied the pace and intensity of the spansks to keep Faith's focus on the situation at hand."⁴³ Again, sexual as well as psychological satisfaction are inextricably linked, and conveyed by the combination of control and infliction of pain on certain areas of, primarily, the skin. Elizabeth Grosz states that when a body is exposed to pain, "[t]he effected zones of the body become enlarged and magnified in the body image."⁴⁴ In the quoted sex scenes, the "effected zones" of Faith's body are the zones of which she is made acutely aware, as Buffy whips or spansks her with varying "pace and intensity." In the sexual encounters depicted, the dominating partner distributes different kinds of painful "impressions" on her partner's skin, thus making her "focus" on the pain-effected zones, which, in these representations of BDSM sex scenes, equal erogenous zones.

5. Contextualized and transgressive BDSM

The 'adult' femslash texts discussed in this chapter provide explicit, graphic representations of sexualized pain utilized in BDSM scenes involving two familiar female characters from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The fact that the characters' background and previous relationship are known to the readers is important, as Anne Kustritz has demonstrated in an analysis of male BDSM slash fiction.⁴⁵ In relation to Buffy/Faith femslash, knowledge of their strength, their healing capacities and the erotic tension that exists

between them in the TV show makes a BDSM-influenced relationship seem like a natural development. Furthermore, the sexualized pain described in fan fiction can be extreme and yet remain 'safe and sane'. Given the emphasis on the ethics of care in the fanfic texts analyzed, the authors apparently consider it important to show that Buffy and Faith's rough sex is based on mutual consent, love and respect.

The transgressive nature of the fan fiction texts discussed here is another possible explanation to their interest. As a matter of fact, both texts have received positive reviews from readers, and *New Desires* is mentioned as one of the most read texts on AdultFanfiction.net. Creating BDSM femslash about the two Slayers may seem logical, considering Buffy and Faith's 'personalities' and relationship in the TV series. However, it also entails a transgression of the rules that govern *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a heteronormative prime-time show. Here, sex scenes are never explicit, lesbian love is clearly 'different,' and kinky sex is presented as unhealthy. The fanfic texts, on their part, abound with graphic and explicit BDSM (or other kinky) sex scenes which may be labelled hard-core pornography. In both texts it is clear that BDSM is a practice that turns away from the norm, since the narratives underscore that the characters are crossing a boundary as they initiate these kinds of sexual activities.

With their focus on kinky and rough sex, the fanfic depictions of Buffy and Faith furthermore transgress stereotypical ideas about female desire and sexual behaviour as 'passive' or 'vanilla'. These ideas remain pervasive in our culture, including within academic scholarship, as Clarissa Smith states in her recent reader-response study of women's pornography, even as representations of strong women as well as of 'alternative' sexualities are no longer unusual.⁴⁶ What is titillating about pornography, according to Laura Kipnis, is "its theatrics of transgression, its dedication to crossing boundaries and violating social strictures."⁴⁷ Perhaps the mix of the pre-existing/restricted - two powerful Slayers from a 'tamed' TV series - and the new/challenging stories about these two female superheroes inflicting sexually gratifying pain on each other is a key to making sense of the pain in BDSM femslash about Buffy and Faith.

Notes

¹ From the sign '/' which is used to indicate which characters are paired.

² This argument is further developed in Isaksson, 'Buffy/Faith Adult Femslash: Queer Porn With a Plot'. *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffystudies*, no 28, Summer 2009.

³ R Melzac and P.D. Wall, *The Challenge of Pain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996, p. 15, quoted by S Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 23.

⁴ In her article 'Deconstructing Myths: The Social Construction of "Sadomasochism" Versus "Subjugated Knowledges" of Practitioners of Consensual "SM"', Andrea Beckmann shows that filmic or textual representations of BDSM in general have very little to do with real-life practices. BDSM in film or text tends to be seen as sexual violence and/or pathological sadism, whereas real-life practitioners emphasize the importance of safe, sane and consensual BDSM.

⁵ The content and type of a fan fiction is signalled next to its title; the pairing and the story-type (e.g. femslash, alternative universe, kink-fic, romance) are usually provided, as well as a rating such as 'adult' or R (for 'restricted'), often accompanied by an explanation of the reason for the rating (sexual content, language, violence).

⁶ 'D/s' stands for dominance/submission, 'Bond' for bondage and 'FemDom' for female domination or female dominatrix.

⁷ For instance V Keft-Kennedy, 'Fantasising Masculinity in *Buffyverse* Slash Fiction: Sexuality, Violence, and the Vampire'. *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 7:1, 2008.

⁸ E Saxey, 'Staking a Claim: The Series and Its Slash Fan-fiction', in *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel*, Roz Kaveney (ed), New York: Tauris Park, 2001, p. 206.

⁹ E Saxey, op. cit., p. 203.

¹⁰ The 'rogue' Faith is chained up by Angel after nearly having strangled Xander during rough foreplay ('The Zeppo', *Buffy* 3.13); Buffy is seen in the same chains watching Faith and fake Angelus (Angel's evil alter ego) tease each other sexually ('Enemies', *Buffy* 3.17). All references to the TV series *Buffy* indicate the number of the season, followed by the episode's number.

¹¹ The definitions of 'kinky' are found in *The Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (both on-line).

¹² V Burr, 'Bad Girls Like It Rough (-And Good Girls Don't?): Representations of BDSM in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'. *Phoebe* 18:1, Spring 2006, pp. 47-9. As an example of this linking of BDSM and evil, Buffy's friend Willow is seen torturing Angel in an episode that depicts an alternative universe (a 'what-if' scenario where Buffy would never have arrived in Sunnydale) where Willow is an evil vampire and Angel her chained 'puppy' which she cuts and burns for her sexual excitement ('The Wish', *Buffy* 3.09).

¹³ See, for example, J Crusie, 'Dating Death', in *Seven Seasons of Buffy: Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Discuss Their Favorite Television Show*, Glenn Yeffeth (ed), BenBella Books, 2003.

- ¹⁴ 'Dirty Girls', *Buffy* 7.18.
- ¹⁵ 'The Zeppo', *Buffy* 3.13.
- ¹⁶ When used in a sexual context, 'vanilla' refers to standard and conventional sexual practices, which exclude BDSM. 'Vanilla' is often used as the opposite of 'kink'.
- ¹⁷ J Alexander, 'A Vampire Is Being Beaten: De Sade through the Looking Glass in *Buffy* and *Angel*'. *Slayage* 15, December 2004, par. 20.
- ¹⁸ J Alexander, op. cit., par. 8.
- ¹⁹ 'No Future For You, Part 1', in *No Future For You, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season 8, Brian K. Vaughan, Georges Jeanty and Joss Whedon, Milwaukee: Dark Horse Books, 2008.
- ²⁰ Rebelrsr, *Faith's Fantasies*, 'Valentine's Surprise'.
- ²¹ G Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality' [1984], in *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, 2nd edition, Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (eds), London & New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 159-160.
- ²² Rebelrsr, *Faith's Fantasies*, 'Valentine's Surprise'.
- ²³ Rebelrsr, *Faith's Fantasies*, 'Valentine's Surprise'.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*
- ²⁵ *ibid.*
- ²⁶ R Melzac and P.D. Wall, op. cit., p. 15.
- ²⁷ S Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 25.
- ²⁸ Naughti, *New Desires*, 'Virgins'.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*
- ³⁰ *ibid.*
- ³¹ K Elam, *Emotions as a Mode of Understanding: An Essay in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Uppsala University, 2001, p. 87, my emphasis.
- ³² 'Five by Five', *Angel* 1.18.
- ³³ Rebelrsr, *Faith's Fantasies*, 'Making it Clear'.
- ³⁴ Naughti, *New Desires*, 'Spanking'.
- ³⁵ N Rambukkana, 'Taking the Leather Out of Leathersex: The Internet, Identity, and the Sadomasochistic Public Sphere' in *Queer Online*, K O'Riordan and D J. Phillips (eds), New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 77.
- ³⁶ Naughti, *New Desires*, 'Spanking'.
- ³⁷ G Taylor and J M. Ussher, 'Making Sense of S&M: A Discourse Analytic Account'. *Sexualities* 4.3, 2001, p. 301.
- ³⁸ P Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000, p. 165.
- ³⁹ Rebelrsr, *Faith's Fantasies*, 'Let's Start at the Beginning'.
- ⁴⁰ Rebelrsr, *Faith's Fantasies*, 'The Worst Sin'.

⁴¹ Naughti, *New Desires*, 'Whips/Paddles'.

⁴² S Ahmed, op. cit., p. 24-25.

⁴³ Naughti, *New Desires*, 'Whips/Paddles'.

⁴⁴ E Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 76.

⁴⁵ A Kustritz, 'Painful pleasures: Sacrifice, consent, and the resignification of BDSM symbolism in *The Story of O* and *The Story of Obi*'. *Transformative Works and Cultures* no. 1, 2008.

⁴⁶ C Smith, *One for the Girls!: The Pleasures and Practices of Reading Women's Porn*, Bristol & Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007, p. 47.

⁴⁷ L Kipnis, 'How to Look at Pornography', in *Pornography: Film and Culture*, Peter Lehman (ed.), New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers U P, 2006, p. 119.

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