

Joss's Jesus: Christ-figures in the Whedonverses

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Abstract

In the fifth season finale of Buffy the Vampire Slayer (2001), Buffy sacrifices herself to save her sister (and the world) by leaping into a portal with her arms outstretched. In the final scenes of The Cabin in the Woods (2012), Marty refuses to die in order to save the world, instead watching as it crumbles around him. In the former, Buffy is an obvious Christ-figure, while in the latter Marty subverts the trope in his refusal to be a sacrifice. This paper explores the prevalence, meaning, and evolution of the Christ-figure trope in the works of Joss Whedon. Drawing from research in the fields of both Whedon studies and religion and popular culture, I define and set parameters for identifying Christ-figures before exploring the use of the Christ-figure in Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Finally, I briefly reflect on the question, what can we learn from the conflicted religiosity of the Whedonverses?.

The field of Whedon Studies is dedicated to the academic study of the films, television series, and comic books written, directed, produced, and/or created by Joss Whedon, including such works as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, and *Marvel's The Avengers*. A significant number of books, articles, and conference papers focus on the works of Whedon. Whedon Studies scholar Rhonda Wilcox has coined the term “Whedonverses” to describe Whedon’s variety of works. There have been a small number of pieces written on religion in the Whedonverses, including multiple pieces on the themes of redemption and heroism in Whedon’s works, but none specifically examining the use of Christ-figures. Though scholars recognize the Christ-figure as a recurring trope in the Whedonverses, no one to date has interrogated the use of Christ-figures or their evolution over the course of Whedon’s career. This paper offers a solution to this oversight. Specifically, I will borrow the Christ-figure concept and the methodological framework for identifying cinematic Christ-figures developed by Anton Karl Kozlovic before applying said framework to Whedon’s television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The titular character of the series is a prime example of a Christ-figure, as are other characters in the series. Continuing with Kozlovic’s framework, a brief examination of other Christ-figures in the Whedonverses follows the *Buffy* case study. I then complicate Kozlovic’s framework, which focuses on “the textual world *inside* the frame” and ignores “the world *outside* the frame,” by questioning the connections between Whedon’s atheistic worldview and his employment of Christ-figures throughout his works.

The Christ-figure

Scholars of religion and popular culture have for some time been discussing the cinematic Christ-figure. Matthew McEver traces the lineage of the “Messianic figure” to the biblical epics popular in 1950s Hollywood. Anton Karl Kozlovic, in his article “The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-figure,” defines “Christ-figure” in opposition to the “Jesus-figure” often found in biblical epics:

“Jesus-figure” refers to any representation of Jesus himself.
“Christ-figure” describes any figure in the arts who resembles Jesus. The personal name of Jesus . . . is used for the Jesus-figure. The title “Christ”—the “Messiah,” or the “Anointed One”—is used for those who are seen to reflect his mission. In cinema, writers and directors present both Jesus-figures and Christ-figures. (par. 1)

In other words, Christ-figures covertly rather than overtly symbolize Jesus. This subtlety is what arguably makes Christ-figures more interesting to audiences (and scholars).¹ Kozlovic names twenty-five characteristics of Christ-figures, which are determined through his use of “humanist film criticism,” that is, “examining the textual world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame” (par. 18, emphasis original). Kozlovic emphasizes that often, though certainly not always, a significant number of characteristics will apply to the character in question. The characteristics include:

1. Tangible
ungrateful, others
2. Central
3. Outsider
4. Divinely sourced and tasked
5. Alter egos
6. Special normal
7. Twelve associates
8. The holy age
9. A betrayer associate
spiritual)
10. A sexually-identified woman
11. Pointing prophet, baptism rites
12. A decisive death and resurrection
references
13. Triumphalism
14. Service to “lesser,” even
15. A willing sacrifice
16. Innocent
17. A cruciform pose
18. Cross associations
19. Miracles and signs
20. Simplicity
21. Poverty
22. Jesus’s garb (physical and
23. Blue eyes
24. Holy exclamations
25. “J.C.” initials and “Chris”

Additionally, as Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir notes, most scholars “would agree that a Christ-figure has to stand independently without an explicit reference to Christ in the film” (28). Accepting the parameters set forth

1. Guðmundsdóttir writes, “Female Christ-figures in films are intriguing *theologically* because they raise issues about the theological significance of Jesus’ historical maleness and especially how Christ may be viewed or incarnate among us today” (27, emphasis added).

by Kozlovic along with Guðmundsdóttir's suggestion, I will now explore Whedon's first created television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as a case study.

Buffy: A Case Study

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997–2003) narrates the life of Buffy Summers, a teenager living in Sunnydale, California. The pilot reveals that Sunnydale is a “Hellmouth,” a portal of mystical energy that draws all manner of the supernatural, and Buffy is the Slayer, a young woman chosen to be the sole fighter against evil in the world. Buffy, along with her friends Willow and Xander and her Watcher Rupert Giles, fights vampires and demons and stops a good many apocalypses while traversing life as a young (straight white) woman in America. Before entering into a detailed discussion of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (hereafter *BtVS*), it should be noted that, “with much popular culture, *Buffy* is less interested in faithfully adhering to biblical or Christian traditions than in drawing on particular motifs at regular points to serve its (secular) themes of Buffy as a savior for humanity” (Weaver 69–70). Thus, *BtVS* is a classic example of the covert symbolism characteristic of Christ-figures.

There are multiple examples of Christ-figures in *BtVS*, but the most obvious is undoubtedly Buffy herself. She fits a significant number of the characteristics suggested by Kozlovic, including #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #11, #12, #13, #14, #15, #16, #17, #18, and #22.

In addition to obvious qualities such as being tangible [#1] and being central [#2], Buffy also certainly fits the Christ-figure characteristic of being an “outsider” [#3]. She is not shown to be particularly popular at school, nor are her friends. Willow, a lesbian “Wicca,” and Xander, a clumsy goofball based loosely on Whedon himself, especially are outcasts at Sunnydale High School, ridiculed by the beautiful and popular Cordelia. Buffy appears to be a typical teenager, and her classmates do not initially suspect her secret life, allowing her to live what appears to the average Sunnydale resident the normal life of a young woman working at the Doublemeat Palace [#5, #6]. Buffy is clearly “divinely sourced and tasked” [#4]; consider, for example, the opening voiceover heard at the beginnings of the earliest episodes of *BtVS*: “In every generation, there is a chosen one: one girl in all the world. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer.” In the final season, it is revealed that the Slayer line began when a group of shamanic men infused a young girl from their village with demon blood and tasked her with fighting off evil.

Regarding the “pointing prophet” [#11], Giles is a possible choice for the John-the-Baptist role, as he trains and teaches Buffy and guides her friends, and he quickly becomes a father figure to the group. The second half of [#11], “baptism rites,” might be found in the first season finale in which Buffy falls into a pool of water and dies; Xander later revives her so she can go on to kill the Master (the season’s “Big Bad”) and stop the impending apocalypse. Admittedly, these are loose interpretations of Kozlovic’s description of the pointing prophet and baptism rites. In fact, there are a number Kozlovic’s characteristics that could, with a bit of stretching of the imagination, fit Buffy. These include:

- [#9] “A betrayer associate”—if we accept that Buffy’s associates parallel Jesus’ disciples, then it could be argued that Willow’s transition into “Dark Willow” at the end of the sixth season could be read as an example of betrayal, especially as Willow seems to disavow Buffy’s morality.
- [#24] “Holy exclamations”—this reading of BtVS does not account for all holy exclamations. Exclamations involving “god” and “lord” are numerous and varied. However, the only time a holy exclamation other than these occurs is when Xander finds out that Tara has been murdered and he directs his exclamation to Willow, who has already transitioned to Dark Willow: “Christ, Wil . . .” (“Villains”).
- [#20] “Simplicity”—Buffy does not fit the description of “nerds, klutzes, bumbling simpletons, mentally unbalanced, or fools” (Kozlovic par. 59). However, she does struggle academically throughout the series, both in high school and in college. Notably, she unexpectedly scores well on the SAT.
- [#21] “Poverty”—Buffy by no means experiences poverty. However, she finds herself in need of money to pay the mortgage following her mother’s death in the fifth season. In “Life Serial,” she seeks a loan, which provides one of the episode’s conflicts.
- [#25] “J. C. initials”—Buffy Anne Summers, the given name of Buffy, is obviously not an example of the J. C. initials. However, “Buffy” is a diminutive of “Elizabeth” (from the way a child pronounces the last syllabus), and Elizabeth was the name of the so-called Virgin Queen, leading to a possible connection from Buffy to the Virgin Mary.

Obviously, with a bit of imagination, Buffy (indeed, many characters from many films and television shows) can be read to fit a significant number of Kozlovic's characteristics of the Christ-figure. In order to explore even further Buffy's status as a Christ-figure within *BtVS*, it is necessary to examine *both* of her deaths.

Buffy first dies in the first season finale, "Prophecy Girl." In this episode, Giles uncovers a prophecy that Buffy "must die" in order to stop the Master, the ancient vampire who plans to usher in the apocalypse. Upon overhearing Giles and the vampire Angel discussing the prophecy, Buffy displays a range of emotions, beginning with ecstatic laughter and ending with desperate fury as she "quits" being the Slayer: "I quit. I resign. I'm fired. You can find someone else." She then rips off her crucifix, given to her by Angel. Already, the viewer must acknowledge the presence of the cross; despite the lack of an omniscient god in the series,² cross imagery is omnipresent in *BtVS*. Gregory Erickson notes,

In current American culture as well, as present as the cross is, what it signifies is ambiguous. No longer the space of Christ's suffering, or a sign of religious opulence, the American cross, as Harold Bloom says, is the empty cross from which "Jesus has already risen." As Bloom interprets it, American religion quests for the forty days when the disciples were with Christ. . . . Buffy's cross, as well, is a simulacrum—a copy with no original—a sacred and powerful sign, signifying nothing. (115)

Viewers perhaps accept without difficulty the presence of the cross around Buffy's neck, as well as the use of holy water against vampires, due to the connection of such relics to vampire mythology, especially as explained in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The cross, as Erickson has noted, signifies nothing, and its presence is never acknowledged as anything other than vampire repellent.

Buffy then appeals to Giles, her father figure:

GILES: Buffy, if the Master rises—
BUFFY: I don't care. . . . I don't care. Giles, I'm sixteen years old.
I—I don't wanna die.

2. In "Conversations With Dead People," an episode of the final season of *BtVS*, a former classmate-turned-vampire asks Buffy if God exists: "Is there any word on that, by the way?" She responds, "Nothing solid."

This moment recalls Jesus praying in Gethsemane: "And going a little farther, [Jesus] threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want'" (*NRSV*, Matt. 26:39). While Jesus' words are certainly more eloquent than Buffy's simple "I don't wanna die," Jesus—similar to the weeping Buffy—displays an intense emotion when he throws himself on the ground.

Later in the episode, Buffy is seen wearing a white dress, the crucifix returned to her neck, walking through underground tunnels toward her death at the hands of the Master. As Kozlovic notes regarding the "spiritual garb" [#22] of Christ-figures, "Many cinematic Christ-figures are clothed to look like popular images of Jesus in his iconic white robes (i.e., the [color] of purity and holiness)" (par. 63). Buffy, after fervently denying her role as the Slayer, quietly accepts her fate. She is killed, and Xander resuscitates her, after which she succeeds in staking the Master and staving off the apocalypse. Undoubtedly, her pleas, her appearance, and her willing sacrifice create a passing argument for Buffy as a Christ-figure in "Prophecy Girl."

The second time Buffy dies, she is older and has gained a sister. Dawn Summers appears suddenly at the beginning of the fifth season; it is quickly revealed that she is actually the "Key," a sort of amalgam of mystical energy sent to Buffy in the form of a sister by a group of monks trying to keep the Key from a demon god called Glorificus, who plans to use it to dissolve the barriers between the various hells and the earthly dimension. Over the course of the fifth season, Buffy embraces Dawn as her sister despite her unorthodox origins and, in the season finale, dies in Dawn's place. This willing sacrifice [#15] is made despite her sister's objections as they stand atop a creaking tower beneath which a dimensional rift has opened: as Dawn pleads, "Blood starts it, and until the blood stops flowing, it'll never stop," Buffy quietly assures her, "This is the work that I have to do." The episode, titled "The Gift," centers around Buffy's anxiety regarding an earlier revelation, received via vision quest: "Death is your gift." Roslyn Weaver writes that such a remark "may recall for some viewers Christian ideas about the 'gift' of eternal life brought about by Christ's death" (70). Buffy's choice to die in "The Gift" perfectly exemplifies Kozlovic's description of the "willing sacrifice":

Having assumed the mantle of Christhood, Christ-figures are frequently empowered to choose sacrifice out of their newfound knowledge, status, position, mission requirements, etc. . . . Fre-

quently, dying is the *best* thing they can do, and they really *want* to do it, usually against the loving protests of others. (par. 51)

When Buffy leaps into the rift in order to close it, she does so of her own free will and knowing that her blood will cause it to close. Despite the fact that Dawn's blood opened the rift (meaning the rest of Dawn's blood must be used to close the rift), Buffy understands that her blood is the same as Dawn's. The sisters share "Summers blood," as Buffy tells Dawn early in season five as they kneel on the ground, their hands visibly pierced and paralleling the stigmata ("Blood Ties"). Blood is also central to "The Gift." Early in the episode, as all Buffy and her friends sit around a table discussing how to save Dawn, the following exchange occurs:

XANDER: Why blood? Why Dawn's blood? I mean, why couldn't it be, like, a lymph ritual?

SPIKE: 'Cause it's always got to be blood. . . . Blood is life, lack-brain. Why do you think we [vampires] eat it? It's what keeps you going, makes you warm, makes you hard, makes you other than dead. 'Course it's her blood.

While Kozlovic does not require bloodflow in any element of his characteristics of the Christ-figure, the trope certainly does not suffer from the presence of blood. Indeed, when taking into consideration Buffy's gender, bloodflow seems quite appropriate, bringing to mind the flow of menstrual blood that often signals the reproductive power of a biological woman. Blood is sexual; after all, Spike, undoubtedly the most sexualized male vampire in *BtVS*, says that blood is what "makes you hard." The connections between blood and women are numerous and certainly bring new meaning to the Christ-figure in female form.

When Buffy leaps into the rift in order to close it, she spreads her arms so that she appears in the classic "cruciform pose" [17]. (See image.)



This is perhaps one of the most blatant examples of a Christ-figure in the Whedonverses. The voiceover played during the scene is given by Buffy, presumably her last words: “[Giles,] give my love to my friends. You have to take care of them now. You have to take care of each other. You have to be strong.” This, according to Weaver, “can be read as echoing Christ’s words to his mother and John that ensure John will take care of Mary” (70).

There are other examples of Christ-figures throughout *BtVS*. A notable example is Xander in the sixth season finale, “Grave.” In this episode, Xander, who has been employed as a carpenter since graduating high school (obviously an allusion to Jesus, traditionally a carpenter, although Kozlovic does not specifically mention job-type as one of his characteristics), stops Willow from ushering in the apocalypse following the death of her girlfriend, Tara. Because Xander, unlike Buffy and Willow, has no supernatural powers—that is, he is completely ordinary—he is forced to stop Willow using only his words. While Buffy is trapped underground with Dawn and Giles is incapacitated with Xander’s girlfriend Anya, Xander begs Willow to stop. Blogger Kristin Rawls writes, “This might be the most explicitly Christian moment in the show, and it’s surprising in a secular series with a humanist impulse that dabbles primarily in other spiritual mythologies.”³ As Xander recounts a story from when he and Willow were both five-years-old and she broke a yellow crayon, the viewer understands that Xander’s purpose is to remind Willow that love exists in the world. Earlier in the episode, Willow experiences a surge of power via Giles and decides that the only way to end the pain and suffering in the world, which she now feels, is to end it. The following exchange occurs:

XANDER: I love crayon-breaky Willow. I love scary, veiny Willow. So if I’m going out, it’s here. If you wanna kill the world, well, then start with me. I’ve earned that.

WILLOW: Think I won’t?

XANDER: It doesn’t matter. I’ll still love you.

WILLOW: Shut up. [She sends a bolt of energy towards him, resulting in a gash on his cheek.]

XANDER: I love you.

WILLOW: [She hurls another bolt, sending Xander to his knees in pain. A tear slides down her cheek.]

XANDER: [Stands, his shirt ripped open and chest bleeding.]

3. I would disagree with Rawls that *BtVS* “dabbles primarily in other mythologies.” See Erickson for an analysis of the influence of American Christianity on *BtVS*.

I—I love you.
WILLOW: Shut up!

Xander continues to repeat “I love you” as he walks toward Willow and her power drains from her. The scene ends with Willow weeping in Xander’s arms. Xander is credited with saving the world, and most viewers understand his actions as representative of a Christ-figure. As Giles tells Anya of Xander in the final minutes of the episode, “He saved us all.”⁴

So, what about Willow? This question naturally follows any discussion of both Buffy’s and Xander’s statuses as Christ-figures. The three friends, often called the “Scooby Gang,” make up a trio, and, along with Giles, the dynamics of this are explored in the penultimate episode of the fourth season, “Primeval,” in which the four combine their strengths to defeat the Frankenstein-esque Big Bad: Giles’ knowledge (*sophus*), Willow’s magic (*spiritus*), Xander’s bravery (*animus*), and Buffy’s strength (*manus*). While Buffy never claims any religious affiliation and Xander’s family is only once described as Episcopalian (“Hell’s Bells”), Willow is the only member of the trio who multiple times mentions her religion—Judaism. It is certainly interesting that the only Jewish member of the Scooby Gang is never portrayed as a Christ-figure. Was Jesus not, after all, himself Jewish?

Elsewhere in the Whedonverses

The Christ-figure trope is not only found in *BtVS*. In fact, Christ-figures may be found in each of the television shows that make up the Whedonverses: e.g., Angel, Doyle, and Cordelia in *Angel*; River in *Firefly*; Echo/Caroline in *Dollhouse*; and Agent Coulson in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Christ-figures are also found in a number of Whedon’s films, including *The Cabin in the Woods* and *Marvel’s The Avengers*. In *The Cabin in the Woods*, a 2012 horror film co-written by Whedon, the Christ-figure is Marty Mikalski, a stoner who joins his friends on a weekend trip to an isolated cabin deep in the woods. Unbeknownst to the group of friends, they are under surveillance by an underground facility who execute them systematically—indeed, ritualistically—in order to stave off the apocalypse and appease the Ancient Ones. Marty, the archetypal fool, undoes the formula when he does not die. The Director of the underground facility tells him

4. It is worth mentioning that this is the only season finale with which Whedon had no direct involvement; he wrote and/or directed all other season finales for *BtVS*. During the sixth season of *BtVS*, Whedon was busy with his newest television series, *Firefly*. Many fans credit the season’s showrunner, Marti Noxon, with the Christianized direction “Grave” took.

that he must die to save humanity, and Marty refuses, choosing to let the world end. He tells the Director, "If you've gotta kill all my friends, maybe it's time for a change," and Dana, the only other survivor, comments as they share one final joint, "You were right. Humanity . . . it's time to give someone else a chance." While Marty sets in motion a change that almost seems to reflect what Kozlovic calls "triumphalism," a victory in the face of seeming defeat (such as the triumphal victory initiated by Christ's death), Marty does so at the expense of humanity. This may be, in a way, a subversion of the Christ-figure found in Buffy and Xander. While his first television series featured classic examples of Christ-figures, Whedon seems to have turned the trope on its head with Marty's refusal to fulfill his role as a savior for humanity. Flowing blood represents salvific power in *BtVS*'s "The Gift," but bloodflow is hardly atoning in *The Cabin in the Woods*. Theologian J. Ryan Parker contrasts the annual sacrifice by the facility with the penal substitutionary atonement theory, the idea that Christ's death on the cross served as a substitution for all sinners:

A key difference between the rite in *The Cabin in the Woods* and [penal substitutionary atonement theory] is certainly the number of deaths required to appease angry gods. The former is an ongoing sacrifice, whereas the latter only required one death, that of Jesus. (202)

The re-appropriation of bloodflow and the Christ-figure seems to be a rejection of the Jesus story, of the Christ-figure and the theme of redemption so characteristic of the Whedonverses. In *The Cabin in the Woods*, bloodflow must repeat in an annual ritualistic series of deaths, rather than Christ's single death, a single event that saved all of humanity at once.

Marvel's The Avengers, released a mere month after *The Cabin in the Woods*, also features a sort of Christ-figure in Tony Stark/Iron Man, who takes the missile meant to destroy Manhattan into a portal that has been opened and is rapidly closing. As he flies with the missile into the portal, he believes that he will die; he does not, but he is a willing sacrifice nonetheless. Given this classic example of a sacrifice, why does Whedon, along with his co-writer Drew Goddard, write a subversion of the willing sacrifice for a film released at the same time?

Why Christ-figures?

A number of questions stemming from the use of Christ-figures in the

Whedonverses arise. Whedon himself is a well-documented atheist,⁵ but his writing is filled with allusions to various religions, most often Christianity. As K. Dale Koontz asks in the introduction to *Joss Whedon and Religion: Essays on an Angry Atheist's Explorations of the Sacred*:

Why would someone who so adamantly professed himself to be an atheist spend so much time grappling with issues that are often associated with faith in the unseen and unknown? After all, you can't watch three hours of Whedon's work without rubbing up against questions of redemption and grace, examining an expansive definition of family, or confronting the perils of blind zealotry. (2)

Though an argument for the “secularization” of Whedon's work and the Whedonverses certainly exists (consider Mal's aversion to religion in *Firefly*: “You're welcome on my boat. God ain't” [“The Train Job”]), the use of Christ-figures results from Hollywood culture. Kozlovic notes, “Hollywood films are frequently created within a Judaeo-Christian [sic] context. Therefore, it is almost a natural response for Western scriptwriters” like Whedon, raised in the United States and educated briefly in England, “to tap into this familiar religious heritage when creating their new heroes,” drawing “consciously or unconsciously from their own [socialization], enculturation, and professional education” (par. 10). Numerous scholars have written about the influence of Joseph Campbell on Whedon.⁶ As Kozlovic explains, “Christ-figures sometimes result because filmmakers have been influenced by the Hero Cycle theories of [Campbell]. . . . Some of his famous adherents are George Lucas with his *Star Wars* trilogy and George Miller with his apocalyptic *Mad Max* trilogy” (par. 9). The Hero Cycle appears with Buffy, as does the Christ-figure trope, but what about Marty? Perhaps the use of Christ-figures merely stems from Whedon's socialization in the United States, England, and Hollywood; after all, both his father and grandfather were screenwriters. Perhaps the Christ-figure allows Whedon to wax philosophical (and symbolic) on Western culture and Christianity. The simultaneous sudden subversion of the Christ-figure trope by Whedon in *The Cabin in the Woods* alongside the willing sacrifice of Tony Stark/Iron Man in *Marvel's The Avengers* proves especially interesting. While Marty refuses to sacrifice himself for humanity, Tony Stark/Iron Man appears determined to save the day even if it costs his life.

5. E.g., see Baillou2.

6. E.g., see Wilcox 31.

Certainly, Christ-figures in the Whedonverses function in the creation of heroes and to serve Whedon's recurring theme of redemption. However, Marty emerges as a sort of hero at the end of *The Cabin in the Woods*, even as the world crumbles around him. It appears that Whedon, in his subversive work on *The Cabin in the Woods*, is writing *through* the Christ-figure trope so beloved by Hollywood in order to find new ways to create heroes.

Conclusion

While the future of the Christ-figure trope in the Whedonverses remains in question—will Whedon or won't Whedon continue to configure heroes according to Christ-figures, or might he write through and past the Christ-figure trope to find new ways for creating heroes?—we may be certain that the Whedonverses contain a wealth of Christ-figures from which to choose. Buffy is perhaps the strongest example through her calling as the Slayer, while Xander in *BtVS*'s sixth season finale remains one of the more blatant Christ-figures. Other Christ-figures in the Whedonverses exist, including Tony Stark/Iron Man in *Marvel's The Avengers*; however, it is interesting to note the presence of a character whose role subverts that of the typical Christ-figure: Marty in *The Cabin in the Woods*. Marty and his refusal to be a “willing sacrifice” (i.e., to conform to the Christ-figure trope) reveals a new path for the creation of heroes in the Whedonverses. While Whedon's work will undoubtedly continue to wrestle with themes of redemption and heroism, the exact configuration of these themes—how will redemption occur and how will heroes be created?—remains to be seen.

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