

BY ELIZABETH A. ALLEN

We need some super-heroines now more than ever. We need witches, mutants, slayers and freaks to fight for us and along side us. Maybe *Girls Who Bite Back*, edited by Emily Pohl-Weary (Sumach Press, 2004), will help us find some.

Half the authors in *GWBB* think *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* epitomizes girl power. Let's ask her. Hey, skinny blonde teenager, you star in your own TV show. You karate-chop through vamps and demons the way that a chef juliennes carrots! You're strong, smart and always witty. You're the coolest thing since Wonder Bread, right?

On second thought, maybe not. You see, Buffy, you ARE Wonder Bread. You're perfectly white, just like all your friends. As Candra Gill points out in her essay "Cuz the Black Chick Always Gets It First: Dynamics of Race in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," any characters of color on the show are either subservient, dead, minor, or several of the above. Buffy, you're supposed to be an Everygirl, but you aren't. Your bourgeois, homogenous world isn't as rich and as multi-colored as ours. You can't be our superhero. You're too boring.

We'll get off the tube, then, and look into fiction. *GWBB* enthusiastically turns the pages of classics, looking for feminist inspiration. Catherine Stinson's essay "Red-Headed Orphans Rule" directs us to a trio of feisty literary carrot-tops: Annie, Anne of Green Gables, and Pippi Longstocking. They might be what we're looking for.

Hi there, Annie, cute comic-strip orphan. You overcome the squalor of an alcohol-soaked orphanage to win love and parental guidance in the form of Daddy Warbucks. That's

kick-ass. Could you be our hero?

Wait a minute. Stinson points out that you ARE just playing out the ol' Cinderella myth, Annie. You get rescued by this prince/daddy figure, who, disturbingly enough, capitalizes on war bucks. We don't want to say this, Annie, but you have this unnerving passivity. You're, like, colluding with the patriarchy.

And Anne of Green Gables ... unfortunately, you're pretty much the same. You're smart and imaginative; you show independence in attending college and becoming a teacher. But then you settle with childhood crush Gilbert. Sorry, Anne,

but you're clinging to that man and breakin' our heart.

Our superhero could be Pippi Longstocking, from Astrid Lindgren's children's books. How about it, Pippi? You lift circus strongmen over your head, laugh at policemen and merrily shock squares everywhere. To Stinson, you're a perfect feminist icon. But not to us, not really. You're amusing and entertaining, but you're too far-out, with your pet monkey and your

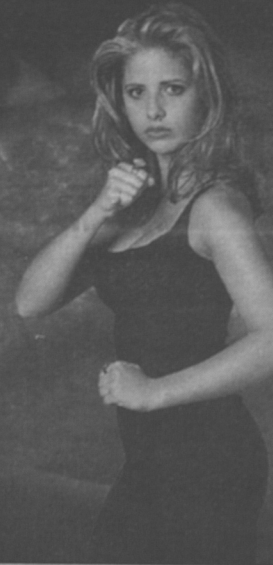
cannibal-king father, to be relevant. We like you, but, like Buffy, you're not a superhero for us in *this* world.

If we can't find a superhero among current examples, *GWBB* gives us another option. We can make our own! We'll create a superhero of color: Gilla in Nalo Hopkinson's "The Smile on the Face." She's just an average teenaged girl who says no to the sexual harassment of one guy and yes to her gentle boyfriend wannabe. Gilla, we know how hard it is to speak one word, to spell out what you want. In this world, THAT'S a superpower.

We'll make superheroes that we can identify with, like

Super Women

Superheroism sounds an awful lot like finding what you're good at and what makes you happy, then striving, no matter what, to do good. We can do that!



Sherwin Tija's rounded, asymmetrical "Slumpyheroes." We'll have agoraphobic, fragile abuse survivors, like in Rose Bianchini's "Everyday Superhero." For her, each day's living takes strength and exemplary courage. Once you think about it, the ordinary acts of surviving and thriving are true superpowers.

Our superheroes exist beyond the bounds of revisionist feminist fiction. They're all around us. In fact, they wrote *GWBB*! Marc Ngui and Magda Wojtyra, you shall be our superheroes. In your clever comic "Crisis Girl in Spring Rolls!" you point out that making nifty hors d'oeuvres quickly should be considered a superpower. And Sophie Levy, you're super too. With your trenchant essay, "Manifesto for the Bitten," you analyze our ambivalence toward the seductive and threatening figures of aliens, vampires and cyborgs. You *GWBB* contributors, you're heroic, pushing forward your power, showing us how we can do it too.

So the superheroes aren't out there. They're in here — inside us, even. Carly Stasko's essay, the best and truest of the lot, tells you "How to Be Your Own Superhero." In her words, superheroism sounds an awful lot like finding what you're good at and what makes you happy, then striving, no matter what, to do good. We can do that! I mean, God knows it ain't easy. You have to be super. You have to be heroic. But if you look everywhere and can't find superheroes, then you must rise to the challenge yourself. ▼

Super woman Elizabeth A. Allen finds herself surrounded by super women in Somerville, MA.

Girls Who Bite Back: Witches, Mutants, Slayers and Freaks
edited by Emily Pohl-Weary
Sumach Press, 2004.