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"Is That Just a Comforting Way of Not Answering the Question?": Willow, Questions, and Affective Response in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

[1] "It's a long important process, and can we just skip it? Can you just be kissing me now?" ("Entropy," 6018). Tara does not phrase her desire for renewed intimacy with Willow in the grammatical imperative; instead, she poses two questions. Yet these questions function as implied imperative statements. As speech acts, they are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary in that they are uttered aloud, propose a desired outcome, and achieve an effect on (and, shortly thereafter, BY) the addressee. Framed within the discourse function of questions, they are "indirect requests," because "the questioner is asking a question to induce the respondent to act" (Athanasiadou 1991, 110). They are, arguably, rhetorical: they imply the desired outcome without requiring a direct verbal response from the listener. Tara's questions elicit from Willow nonverbal action that effectively and affectively reciprocates Tara's desire. Willow (who has been sitting on the bed listening to Tara, watching her as she stands first at the threshold of the room and then just inside), upon hearing the final question, moves immediately to Tara. They kiss, falling again into the silence that initiated their first exchange of desire in "Hush" (4010).[1] Tara knows Willow well enough to speak her language—a language that bridges, through questions, the ineffable gap between question and answer, between spoken word and silent response, between illocutionary intention and perlocutionary effect.

[2] In his article "Bodies That Mutter: Rhetoric and Sexuality," Tim Dean (1994) asks, "Are bodies purely discursive? ... [I]s sexuality purely rhetorical?" (83). Dean frames his argument in the context of psychoanalytic theory, arguing its necessity when considering the rhetoricality of desire. For the purpose of exploring Willow's rhetorical strategies, two of Dean's concepts prove particularly useful. First, he suggests, "We might modify the rhetoricalist notion that all language is performative, productive of effects, by saying that language becomes rhetorical only when it produces affective effects—that is, when it is imbued with desire" (102-103). Second, he acknowledges the effect of the trope "erotema," which he defines, within a discussion of Judith Butler's rhetorical techniques, as "the rhetorical question that implies an answer and so produces an assertion by indirect means" (106). Tara's questions, with which I opened this essay, not only produce the desired "affective effects" in Willow but are also examples of erotema. In their exchange, Willow's emotional (affective) response produces the action (effect) of the kiss, an action and exchange of desire solicited by and already implied in Tara's questions. This rhetorical strategy of questioning, followed by either silent or indirect affective response (rather than direct verbal response) is most acute in conversations between Willow and her partners. It is, moreover, not only a consistent aspect of Willow's rhetorical strategies in the Buffyverse, but the rhetorical mode Buffy herself chooses to adopt in her critical final speech to the Potentials.

[3] This essay investigates the trope of questioning and the affective, perlocutionary effects of questioning primarily in relation to Willow throughout *Buffy*'s seven seasons.[2] Willow is, arguably, *Buffy*'s questioner: the one who, from her first scripted line to her last, poses questions to Buffy and others as a means of establishing and securing her

relationships and a place of power within the Buffyverse. The rhetoric of questioning, especially as seen in early theories of women and language, can be understood as a marker of insecurity or hesitancy in women.[3] This interpretation of the use of questions as a sign of weakness certainly could be applied to Willow's character early in the series. However, questioning can also be praised for its ability to promote and allow mutual exchange: "Instead of interpreting question-asking as the expression of an insecure personality, let us consider the question's interactive attributes. […] Questions are both explicit invitations to the listener to respond and demands that they do so. [...] Questions are stronger forms interactively than declaratives. […] Women ask questions so often because of the conversational power of questions, not because of personality weakness" (Fishman 1988, 255).[4] Rhetorical questions, in particular, have value not only as "persuasive devices" but also in their "communicative effect" (Frank 1990, 726 and 737). As Jane Frank (1990) explains, "This effect is negotiable; it is the hearer as much as the speaker who determines the flow and management of conversational topics, and who, by response, participates in creating total meaning" (737).

[4] Questions, moreover, negotiate power dynamics between speaker and addressee. As Angeliki Athanasiadou (1991) outlines, examination and interrogation questions "imply the dominance of the speaker" in that "the one who asks the question implies the authority to require an appropriate answer" (110) .[5] With indirect requests, on the other hand, "One could argue that acts of this type of questioning express the questioner's dependence on the answerer. The speaker behaves as if he is inferior to the hearer, since he expresses his doubt as to the feasibility of this assumption; the hearer is apparently granted an option because he is induced to make a decision" (111). For Willow, questions and their subsequent affective responses represent not only a linguistic comfort zone but also a source of effective rhetorical power in her relationships—a power which eventually, in connection with her magical powers, defines who she is (both to herself and in relation to others). Questions by, to, or about Willow in the Buffyverse produce affective effects (including not only desire but also anger, sadness, and fear) in both the one who questions and the one who responds—the latter of which, of course, may include the audience. In a show that prioritizes emotions,[6] it is not surprising that Willow is the character with whom many fans sympathize even at her darkest moments; indeed, as Ian Shuttleworth (2004) suggests, "Xander may be the metaphysical heart of the Scoobies, but Willow more regularly commands the hearts of the audience for the majority of the seven seasons" (241). Although she "stutters and stammers through much of her dialogue" (Owen 1999, 26), Willow also continually provides the audience with examples of the power and effects of questioning—the rhetorical mode for which the audience members themselves will become both illocutionary addressees and perlocutionary respondents in the series' final episode.

[5] In the series' premiere episode, "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001), Willow is first introduced to the audience through a series of questions in an exchange with Xander:

> Xander: Willow! You're so very much the person I wanted to see.
> Willow: Oh really?
> Xander: Yeah. You know, I kind of had a problem with the math.
> Willow: Uh, which part?

Xander: The math. Can you help me out tonight, please? Be my study buddy?
Willow: Well, what's in it for me?
Xander: A shiny nickel.

Xander's initial lines give us explicit details about his character: he is not good at academic work and he has a sense of humor. These qualities are consistent with Xander's character throughout the series. Conversely, Willow's lines do not explicitly give us details about her character; nonetheless, IMPLICITLY the exchange acknowledges her intelligence, and the lines establish her method of communication as question-laden. This rhetorical mode is consistent with Willow's character throughout *Buffy*.[7] However, I quote this passage with Xander mainly to illustrate that his method of response to Willow's questions is different from Buffy's and, as we will see, from that of Willow's lovers. Whereas most of Xander's lines here are direct responses to Willow's questions, other characters initiate a friendship, relationship, or moment of desire with Willow through a mutual exchange of questions and INDIRECT response. More specifically, these indirect responses comprise three categories: silence, another question, or an indirect statement (that is, one that does not provide an explicit answer to the question asked).

[6] This mutual exchange of questions and indirect response is used to establish Willow's relationship with Buffy in "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001):

Buffy: Uh, hi. Willow, right?
Willow: Why? I-I mean hi. Uh, did you want me to move?

Whereas Willow's questions to Xander in the earlier scene imply her comfort and familiarity with him, here her questions function to show her initial tentativeness and insecurity with Buffy. She associates Buffy with the girls at school (Cordelia, in particular) who view her as unworthy of inclusion and attention. In an earlier scene, Cordelia (who is with Buffy at the time and who has run into Willow at the school drinking fountain) ends her condescending conversation with Willow by abruptly asking "Are you done?" In response Willow merely says, "Oh," and walks away. Willow's question to Buffy ("Did you want me to move?") functions as a self-deprecating directive, an imitation both stylistically and emotionally of the way she was questioned by Cordelia. Yet Buffy, who has witnessed this scene between Cordelia and Willow, clearly does not view Willow as unworthy. Indeed, as her conversation with Willow continues, she uses and responds to Willow's questions in a way that reverses (affectively and effectively) the initial negative, self-deprecating effect:

Buffy: Why don't we start with "hi I'm Buffy." And then let's segue directly into me asking you for a favor. It doesn't involve moving, but it does involve you hanging out with me for a while.
Willow: But aren't you hanging with Cordelia?
Buffy: I can't do both?

Although not technically a question (with its lack of a question mark in both the original script and the DVD subtitles), Buffy's "Why don't we ..."

statement is PHRASED as a question and has the effect of a rhetorical question. That is, the answer is implied, and, moreover, she does not allow Willow the chance to reply. Buffy then responds to Willow's question about Cordelia with another question, thus mimicking Willow's rhetorical style. Buffy again implies an answer in her own question (that is, she implies that she will be friends with both Cordelia and Willow) and, in the process, reverses the negative implication of Willow's question. Buffy has gained rhetorical power in doing so and has also taken a progressive step toward securing her friendship with Willow.

[7] Shortly thereafter, Willow (at the end of an overly enthusiastic description of Giles and books) asks, "[A]m I the single dullest person alive?" This too is meant as a rhetorical question—that is, Willow is stating, in the form of another self-deprecating question, that she believes she IS the dullest person alive. She does not expect Buffy to answer. Buffy, however, responds to the question with an emphatic "Not at all!" and thereby, once again, reverses the negative effect and implication of Willow's question. Within this one short scene, Buffy not only adopts Willow's style but also uses and responds to questions for positive ends. If, as J. M. Kertzer (1987) argues, rhetorical questions "play with the notion of authority by locating, shifting, asserting, defying, and testing it in various ways" (244), then arguably Willow and Buffy test one another's authority by posing these questions. And if, moreover, "[a] rhetorical question creates, locates, or searches for authority because posing the question arouses a desire for, and expectation of, an authoritative answer" (250), then in their exchange of rhetorical questions, both Buffy and Willow gain authoritative status with each another. The exchange, therefore, not only establishes their friendship but also introduces the audience to Willow's linguistic potential to establish authority despite her SEEMING insecurity.

[8] Willow, as is well established, becomes one of *Buffy*'s most confident characters in the realm of language and its power. Indeed, by the end of Season Six when Dawn accuses her of being "back on the magics," Willow, having drawn the literal text of volumes of black arts into her body ("Villains," 6020), can state emphatically, "No, honey, I am the magics" ("Two to Go," 6021). This assertion arguably represents the pinnacle of Willow's power—through alchemical conjunction of word and flesh, Willow EMBODIES locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, erasing the distinctions among them. However, this linguistic power—supernatural, if not definitively divine—is a skill that gradually develops along with Willow's character. In "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001), Willow complains that she is linguistically challenged during a conversation with Buffy at the Bronze:

> Willow: I don't actually date a whole lot ... lately.
> Buffy: Why not?
> Willow: Well, when I'm with a boy I like, it's hard for me to say anything cool or witty, or at all ... I can usually make a few vowel sounds, and then I have to go away.
> Buffy: It's not that bad.
> Willow: It is. I think boys are more interested in a girl who can talk.

Willow criticizes herself for her lack of verbal skill and sees silence as a problem rather than a potential asset. However, in Season Two's "Halloween" (2006), Buffy emphasizes the opposite approach to this

linguistic problem when she sees Willow dressed in her "sexy" costume: "I can't wait for the boys to go nonverbal when they see you." Whereas Willow is initially concerned that silence in relationships is a problem, Buffy sees the possibility of silencing potential partners to be advantageous to Willow. Shuttleworth (2004), in regard to Willow's costume in "Halloween" (2006) says, "What is notable [...] is that her clothing beneath the spectral sheet, her original choice of get-up [...] is unwontedly sexy. Whilst the character is plainly uncomfortable with trying to be so openly alluring, this appearance sows the seeds of her next metamorphosis" (238-39). I would argue that Buffy's reference to "nonverbal" as something positive in relation to Willow's sexiness also sows the seeds for a metamorphosis in Willow's understanding of communication. Through her relationships, Willow learns to appreciate both her own rhetorical power of questioning and the power of silence within affective, perlocutionary response to those questions.

[9] Willow initially expresses concern about her rhetorical skills directly in relation to her first partner—Oz—when she asks Buffy, "What if the talking thing becomes the awkward silence thing?" ("Surprise," 2013). Oz, however, is known for his "mastery of laconicism" (Shuttleworth 2004, 243) or, as Xander puts it in "Gingerbread" (3011), his "verbal nonverbal" communication.[8] Silence does not bother Oz. Indeed, silence (left in the wake of unanswered questions) becomes the very thing that allows space for Willow and Oz to communicate their desire. When Oz sees Willow near the end of "Halloween" (out of her ghost costume and, therefore, visible in her sexy clothing), he asks aloud to no one in particular, "Who *is* that girl?" This is the same question he asks when he sees her (two episodes earlier, in "Inca Mummy Girl," 2004) dressed as "the Eskimo." The question is arguably rhetorical in that no answer is expected immediately following its utterance. Indeed, because the question is asked and then left unanswered, a gap is opened for the possibility of discovering an answer and potential relationship. When Oz and Willow finally do meet (without costumes a few episodes later), Oz's first comment to Willow is a single word, intoned as a question: "Canapé?" ("What's My Line? Part One," 2009). This is the only word he can muster when he realizes "that girl" is sitting beside him. Willow, in response, merely looks at him and does not speak.

[10] However, a while later with another question similar in both structure and situation (posed in "What's My Line? Part Two," 2010), Oz again offers food to Willow, saying "Oh, hey ... animal cracker?" This time Willow responds directly with "No, thank you," but then immediately follows this response with a question: "How's your arm?" Oz answers, "Suddenly painless," and Willow then asks, "You can still play the guitar okay?" Willow communicates her concern for (and interest in) Oz through questions and, thereby, assures interaction/response. Oz then reciprocates this interest by mimicking her rhetorical mode as the conversation continues. That is, when Willow attempts to thank Oz for saving her life, he avoids direct response to her gratitude. Instead, he asks questions about the animal crackers: "The monkey's the only cookie animal that gets to wear clothes. You know that? You have the sweetest smile I've ever seen. So I'm wondering, do the other cookie animals feel sort of ripped?" He frames his compliment about her smile with rhetorical questions about the animal crackers. The attraction Willow feels for Oz is evident in her eyes and facial expression when she responds—nonverbally—to his questions and comments. Oz communicates his desire to engage with Willow through questions; his illocutionary acts of questioning anticipate

her perlocutionary effects. As Kent Bach explains, "As an act of communication, a speech act succeeds if the audience identifies, in accordance with the speaker's intention, the attitude being expressed" (*Routledge* [2005], para. 3). Willow understands the intention within Oz's illocution; her nonverbal response is clearly affective, and their friendship is thereby established.

[11] One of the more humorous yet endearing scenes between Willow and Oz also involves Willow's penchant for questions. The conversation takes place in "Innocence" (2014), while Willow and Oz wait in Oz's van for Xander and Cordy to return from the armory:

Willow: Do you want to make out with me?
Oz: What?
Willow: Forget it. I'm sorry. Well, do you?

Certainly these are not rhetorical questions—Willow asks a direct yes/no question and expects Oz to respond. Oz, however, does not answer the question with a simple yes or no; instead he first responds with a question ("What?") and then (in response to "Well, do you?") describes the way he has dreamt about kissing Willow in what Judith Tabron (2004) calls "possibly the world's most romantic speech ever purported to come out of the mouth of a teenager" (para. 65). Their exchange, punctuated by questions, though not producing an actual kiss, certainly produces an affective effect in both Willow and Oz. Their desire for one another is established here. The two finally do kiss immediately after an exchange that, though it does not involve questions, does involve an implied question and silence. Having apologized for shooting him (in his werewolf form), Willow says, "So, I'd still if you still—"; Oz responds, "I'd very still—" ("Phases," 2016); Willow then walks away but returns and kisses Oz. Michael Adams (2003) discusses this verbal exchange within his discussion of elliptical expressions in *Buffy*: "Slayer slang, like all slang, is notable for a sort of casual efficiency, what many language purists decry as verbal laziness. [...] Willow and Oz sometimes employ elliptical items, like *still*, that also participate in the general tendency to abbreviate forms" (32-33). What is significant here is that, although Willow's elliptical statement is not technically a question (in that it is not completed with a question mark), the ellipsis nonetheless functions in the same way as a question. In the silence, she is IMPLYING a question in that she leaves space for perlocutionary effect, waiting to know whether or not Oz STILL wants to be involved with her. In response, Oz again mimics Willow's language and style by repeating *still* and the elliptical construction, thereby engaging with her in a way that leads to their first physical exchange of desire.

[12] This is the identical method of communication Willow uses in a conversation with Tara just before they kiss for the first time:

Willow: Tara, I have to tell you—
Tara: No, I-I understand. You have to be with the person you l-love.
Willow: I am.
Tara: You mean—
Willow: I mean. Okay?
Tara: Oh, yes.
Willow: I feel horrible about everything I put you through, and I'm gonna make it up to you starting right now.

Tara: Right now?

This scene occurs at the end of "New Moon Rising" (4019), the episode in which Willow must choose between Oz and Tara; their kiss occurs (or is implied to have occurred) in the darkness left after Tara blows out the "extra flamey" candle Willow has brought to her. Tara's "You mean—" (despite the ellipsis) is an illocutionary act, a directive that functions in the same way as Willow's "I'd still if you still—." It is an elliptical statement that intones a question waiting for a response. In both cases, the conversation ends with a first kiss, the perlocutionary effect enacted within the silence left in the wake of the ellipsis and, in this case, the final question ("Right now?"). Significantly, the first on-air kiss that the audience witnesses between Willow and Tara also occurs in response to questions. Willow, distraught in her attempts to find clothing appropriate to meet Buffy after Joyce's death, asks Tara, "Why can't I just dress like a grown-up? Can't I be a grown-up?" ("The Body," 5016). Tara comforts her and then kisses her—an act of intimacy that effectively and affectively (rather than verbally) responds to Willow's rhetorical questions spoken in an affective moment of despair.

[13] In "Fear Itself" (4004), Willow asks, "What is college for if not experimenting? I know when I've reached my limit." Oz, who has just arrived on the scene, asks, "Wine coolers?" Buffy responds, "Magic," and Oz asks, "Ooh ... didn't encourage her did you?" Willow then responds with the question "Where's supportive boyfriend guy?" At this point, Oz and Willow are still involved, still exchanging questions (rhetorical and otherwise). By the end of this season, however, "supportive boyfriend guy" will be replaced by supportive Wiccan girlfriend. Willow's rhetorical exchange with Oz, like her sexual orientation, takes a turn. Questions are asked and answered but not with the reciprocal questions or silences she desires as response (or with which their relationship was initially established). Thus, in "Wild at Heart" (4006), when Willow questions Oz's decision to leave town, she receives direct verbal responses rather than reciprocal questions or silence from him:

Willow: Don't I get a say in this?
Oz: No.
[...]
Willow: Oz, don't you love me?
Oz: My whole life I've never loved anything else.

Willow may intend her question ("Don't I get a say in this?") to be rhetorical, an assertive illocutionary act. After all, "a speaker using a rhetorical question anticipates ratification by the hearer, and thus, also anticipates consensus between himself and the hearer" (Athanasiadou 1991, 117). Oz, however, treats her statement as a simple yes/no question, inhibiting the intended perlocutionary effect. Willow may expect a simple yes/no answer to her second question ("Oz, don't you love me?); however, Oz instead makes an assertive statement that elaborates on the intensity of his love. As the relationship between Willow and Oz changes, their method of communication changes with it.

[14] In comparison, a rhetorically and emotionally similar scene between Willow and Tara ends with reunion rather than separation. This occurs in "Family" (5006), when Willow questions Tara after Tara's father claims that his daughter has a demon side:

Willow: Tara, look at me. I trusted you more than anyone in my life. Was all that just a lie?
Tara: No.
[...]
Willow: Do you wanna leave?

In the first instance, Willow asks a yes/no question and receives a yes/no response. ("No," of course, is the response Willow desires in this instance.) In response to Willow's second question, Tara merely shakes her head; she does not respond verbally. But Tara's silence in the gap left by Willow's question (unlike Oz's verbal response in "Wild at Heart") gives Willow the affective answer and perlocutionary effect that she needs. In the final scene of this episode, when Tara says, "Even when I'm at my worst you always make me feel special. How do you do that?" Willow responds, "Magic." Unlike Buffy's response of "Magic" to Oz in "Fear Itself" (as noted above), Willow's answer is metaphorical here—that is, she has not consciously used her magical powers on Tara as she does in Season Six. The shot then pulls back and we see that Willow and Tara are suspended in the air, dancing together. For now, their communication and relationship are still on solid ground.

[15] One of the early intimate moments of conversation between Willow and Tara occurs in "Who Are You?" (4016). The two women sit together on Tara's bed talking. In response to Tara's concern (phrased as a question) that Willow's friends do not know she exists, Willow attempts to explain her perspective on this:

Willow: Tara, it's not like I don't want my friends to know you ... and-and I really want you to meet them. But I-I just kind of like having something that's just, you know, mine .... And I usually don't use so many words to say stuff that little, but do you get it at all?
Tara: I am you know.
Willow: What?
Tara: Yours.

Here Tara does not answer the yes/no question "Do you get it at all?" with a direct yes or no. Instead, by saying, "I am you know," she refers back to an earlier comment of Willow's, which simultaneously elicits another question from Willow. Tara's lines in this scene acknowledge to both Willow and the audience her attraction to Willow. The perlocutionary effect on Willow (based on her facial expression) certainly is affective. Thus, once again, an exchange of desire occurs within the framework of questions and indirect response. This exchange is also interesting for the fact that Willow is aware of her language and its possible effect on Tara (in that she says she doesn't usually "use so many words to say stuff that little").

[16] This linguistic self-awareness amidst Willow's questions and her partner's response also occurs in an earlier episode, immediately after Willow has sex with Oz for the first time in "Graduation Day, Part One" (3021). Lying in bed with Oz, apparently naked, Willow discusses their lovemaking (which has taken place off-screen):

Willow: I feel different now, you know. But I guess that makes sense. Do you feel different? Oh, no, you've already—

probably no big change for you. I-I-it was nice. Was it nice? Should this be a quiet moment?
Oz: I know exactly what you mean.
Willow: Which part?
Oz: Everything feels different.

This conversation is very similar in structure (grammatically and rhetorically) to the one she has with Tara in "Who Are You?" That is, rather than directly answering the question(s) posed, Oz responds to Willow's question(s) by making reference to something else she has said; this, in turn, causes Willow to ask another question. In both conversations, Willow's questioning SEEMINGLY emphasizes her tentativeness and insecurity with the relationship, yet it also illustrates a method of communication that fosters Willow's affective and effective relationships. In both, moreover, Willow acknowledges the attention she pays to her use of language ("I usually don't use so many words" and "Should this be a quiet moment?"). Willow's use of language is not as naive as her tentative questions may initially suggest. As she matures sexually, she also matures rhetorically—she comes to understand her desires and her language for expressing those desires.

[17] The technique of making a statement ("I feel different"/"It was nice") followed by a question that echoes the statement ("Do you feel different?"/"Was it nice?") is also a familiar pattern of Willow's rhetoric and structure of questioning. For example, in "Lie to Me" (2007), when Willow learns that Ford knows Buffy is the Slayer, she says to Buffy, "Wow! It's neat! Is it neat?" Buffy responds, "Yeah, I guess it is." Similarly, in "Becoming, Part Two" (2022), coming out of unconsciousness in the hospital, Willow says to Oz, "My head ... feels big. Is it big?" Oz responds, "No, it's head-sized." Likewise, in "The Harsh Light of Day" (4003), during a discussion between Willow and Buffy about Parker (with whom Buffy had sex the night before), Willow says, "Oh, I love this part. Don't you love this part?" These questions (similar in form and function to tag questions) show Willow's hesitancy on the one hand.[9] On the other, they show that turning a statement into a question (in this case as an immediate echo of the statement) is a distinct part of her rhetorical style. She APPEARS to be seeking the opinion of a respondent (and Oz and Buffy do, in fact, respond), but her rhetorical mode not only implies an answer to each question, it actually states an answer immediately before each question. As a speech act this type of tag questioning establishes "an inversion of the prescribed status relationship" (Athanasiadou 1991, 113). That is, Willow asserts her power despite her apparent submission to the authority of Buffy and Oz. Her questions, though they may appear to show Willow's lack of confidence, arguably show her to be in complete rhetorical control—she not only initiates interaction with her respondents but also ensures the response she desires.

[18] Judith Tabron (2004), in her discussion of Willow's relationships, argues that both Oz and Tara court Willow through "romantic speech" (para. 65). In her exploration of this, Tabron cites both Oz's explanation of his dream to kiss Willow (in "Innocence," as discussed above) and Tara's "I am you know .... Yours" speech (in "Who Are You?"). Tabron, however, believes that Willow's third partner—Kennedy—does not have this skill: "Kennedy, on the other hand, gets Willow's attention by asking her how long she, Willow, has been gay, or rather how long she's known that she enjoys having sex with women. Kennedy has *no* courting technique" (para. 66). However, I contend that if Kennedy's courting

technique is viewed rhetorically, looking specifically at the mode of questioning and response that occurs at the beginning of her relationship with Willow, the opposite argument can be made. That is, Kennedy and Willow's early conversations comprise similar question/response strategies used in the courting techniques of both Oz with Willow and Tara with Willow.

[19] Willow's first exchange of questions involving Kennedy does not take place with Kennedy herself but with Dawn in a discussion about Kennedy. This occurs immediately after an initial disconcerting moment between Willow and Kennedy in "Bring on the Night" (7010):

> Kennedy: You, uh, better not hog the covers.
> Willow: (appears surprised and does not respond verbally)
> Dawn: Does she want to eat?
> Willow: What? Huh? Oh, she's—oh, she's new."

Willow's response to Dawn uses two rhetorical silencing techniques already discussed in this paper. First she responds with a question, and then she responds with a statement that adds something new to the discussion (rather than directly answering Dawn's question about Kennedy's desire for food). Kennedy's illocutionary directive not to hog the covers causes an obvious affective effect on Willow—she is initially unnerved by the possibility that Kennedy is flirting with her. Kennedy's far more obvious flirtation, however, occurs in the long conversation she has with Willow at the Bronze in "The Killer in Me" (7013). This is the conversation that Tabron uses as evidence of Kennedy's lack of courting technique; it is, however, replete with questions (only a few of which are quoted here):

> Willow: All right. I'll stay for one drink. Then I'm going home.
> Kennedy: Okay. One drink. I can work with that. Let's start with the easy stuff. How long have you known? That you were gay?
> Willow: Wait. That's easy? And, what, you just assume that I'm—I'm gay? I mean, presume much?
> Kennedy: Okay, sorry. How long have you enjoyed having sex with women?
> Willow: Hey! And what, you think you have some sort of special "lesbidar" or something?
> Kennedy: Okay, you know there's a better word for that, right?
> [...]
> Willow: Can you always tell—just by looking at someone?
> Kennedy: No, no of course not. That wouldn't be any fun. The fun part is the process of getting to know a girl. It's like—it's like flirting in code. It's using body language and laughing at the right jokes and—and looking into her eyes and knowing she's still whispering to you, even when she's not saying a word.

Kennedy knows how to "flirt in code" with Willow. Notice that many of the questions in this scene are not answered directly—they are answered indirectly either with a change of topic or, in most cases, another question. Kennedy's questions are generally straightforward, directive requests for information ("How long have you known?"). Willow's response questions, on the other hand, are generally rhetorical ("I mean, presume much?"). As speech acts, requests for information are set in opposition to

rhetorical questions: "[I]n contradistinction with the requesting information questions, [rhetorical questions] minimize the emphasis on the information channel and stress the social relationships involved"; rhetorical questions are "opposites to information questions, since the former minimize the emphasis on information, while the latter stress the securing of information" (Athanasiadou 1991, 109). Kennedy IS courting Willow. She wants information about Willow, and she uses Willow's linguistic comfort zone to get it. She asks questions, is asked questions, and arguably illustrates that even within same-sex unions (or grammatically mimetic elements), opposites can attract. The only question answered directly is Willow's final one, in response to which Kennedy acknowledges the necessity of silence within flirting. Kennedy speaks aloud what Willow has known all along.

[20] Notably, a while later when the episode returns again to the two women at the Bronze, Kennedy says to Willow, "I like the way you speak. It's interesting." It is interesting, perhaps, BECAUSE of its inherent questions. Willow's early concern that she can barely make vowel sounds around boys has been completely reversed by this point in the series. Not surprisingly, the first kiss between Willow and Kennedy occurs after a few more questions asked by Willow. In this scene, the two women have returned home from the Bronze:

Willow: Glad we talked.
Kennedy: Yes. Kind of cleared the air, huh?
Willow: Yeah, totally. Air cleared. Check.
Kennedy: You know, in the spirit of air clearing ...
Willow: Yeah?
Kennedy: I feel like I need to be honest about something.
Willow: Is something wrong?
Kennedy: No. No. It's just ... I think you should know ...

Kennedy then stops speaking and kisses Willow, thus moving from affect (desire) to effect (kiss). Willow's yes/no question is answered; however, Kennedy's illocutionary act falls into elliptical silence, clarifying its intention with the kiss. As in conversations with both Oz and Tara, Willow's initial conversations with Kennedy, leading first to affective response and then a physical expression of desire, involve exchanges of questions. This *is* a method of courting, one that by this point Willow understands all too well.

[21] Of course, Willow changes into Warren during her first kiss with Kennedy, and the episode moves temporarily away from their budding relationship while they search for a cure for Willow's transformation. Notably, however, in the final scene of this episode, Willow is brought back to herself after another exchange of questions and affective responses with Kennedy:

Kennedy: Willow, what did you make happen?
Willow: You were there, bitch. You saw it. I killed her.
[...]
Kennedy: Who did you kill, Willow?
Willow: It was your fault, slut! You tricked me. You got me to forget.
Kennedy: Tara—

Willow: Shut up! Shut up! You do not get to say her name. Offering it up to whoever's there. Tricking me into kissing you. [...] Kennedy?
[...]
Kennedy: This is just magic. And I think I'm figuring the whole magic thing out. It's just like fairy tales. (She leans in to kiss Willow.)
Willow: What are you doing?
Kennedy: Bringing you back to life. (They kiss, and Willow turns back into herself.)
Kennedy: Hmm. I *am* good.
Willow: It's me? I'm back? Oh, God.
Kennedy: Are you all right?
Willow: I have no idea. I'm so tired.
Kennedy: Yeah. I'll make you some tea.

Kennedy is able to bring Willow back to herself and her mode of speaking ("It's me? I'm back?") by sharing the intimacy of the kiss. Though it may seem that the kiss is the key to transformation here, Kennedy's questions are equally as important in Willow's transformation. Kennedy uses interrogation questions ("What did you make happen?" and "Who did you kill?") and, thereby, "implies the authority to require an appropriate answer" (Athanasiadou 1991, 110). She establishes her authority over Warren/Willow, and the perlocutionary effect is literally transformative. In this scene, more so perhaps than anywhere else thus far in the series, rhetorical mode is inextricably linked with physical action.

[22] Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto (2002) discuss Willow's language in "Staking in Tongues: Speech Act as Weapon in *Buffy*." They convincingly posit "the materiality of language in *Buffy*," outlining the ways in which "[w]ords and utterances have palpable power" within the Buffyverse (73). They call Willow's language "foundational," justifiably claiming "she builds a base of operation for the crew, establishing context from text, providing a sort of local landscape for the group's actions" (80). Overbey and Preston-Matto, though they quote an exchange between Willow and Tara that includes a question, do not discuss Willow's penchant for questioning. The lines that Overbey and Preston-Matto quote are from "Primeval" (4021):

Willow: I think I'm onto something. I've been assuming the cipher-text was encrypted with an asymmetric algorithm. Then it hit me: a hexagonic key pattern. It's—I'm scaring you now, huh?
Tara: A little. In a good way. It's like a different kind of magic.

Overbey and Preston-Matto, in their discussion of these lines, connect magic and language, claiming "there is magic in linguistic force. And Willow, with her command of text and of magic, functions as a kind of linguist herself, exploring and exposing the systems of magical logic that give *Buffy* rhetorical potency" (80). Although this exchange between Tara and Willow may not seem significant in terms of a connection between questioning and desire, the affective effect of Tara's fear (or potential fear) in response to Willow's question and in relation to Willow's power with magic does indeed become a significant component of their relationship (leading to its demise in Season Six). Here Tara's fear is

minimal; the phrase “in a good way” suggests that she is enticed by or attracted to Willow’s knowledge and power. Willow’s question, on its surface, is evidence of her concern for Tara’s emotional reaction; yet simultaneously the question asserts the possibility of Willow’s potential to cause fear and thus opens a gap that provides space for her power (rhetorical and otherwise) and, later, for the emergence of Dark Willow.

[23] Thus along with allowing space for desire, Willow’s questions and questioning also leave space for other affects, such as fear and anger. Indeed, the first major argument between Tara and Willow in Season Five (“Tough Love,” 5019) is full of questions, one of which picks up the thread left by the “I’m scaring you” question of Season Four:

Tara:	[...] I mean, it frightens me how powerful you’re getting.
Willow:	That’s a weird word.
Tara:	“Getting”?
Willow:	It *frightens* you? I frighten you?
Tara:	That is so not what I meant. I mean it impresses—impressive.
Willow:	[...] D-Don’t you trust me?
Tara:	With my life.
Willow:	That’s not what I mean.
[...]	
Willow:	What is it about me that you don’t trust?
Tara:	It’s not that. I worry sometimes. You’re changing so much, so fast. I don’t know where you’re heading.
Willow:	Where I’m heading?
Tara:	I’m saying everything wrong.
Willow:	No, I think you’re being pretty clear. This isn’t about the witch thing. It’s about the other changes in my life.
Tara:	I trust you, I just-I don’t know where I’m gonna fit in your life when—
Willow:	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. You think that?
Tara:	Should I?
Willow:	I’m really sorry that I didn’t establish my lesbo street cred before I got into this relationship. You’re the only woman I’ve ever fallen in love with so how on earth could you ever take me seriously?

In this scene, the question “I frighten you?” echoes Willow’s assertive question to Tara from “Primeval,” “I’m scaring you now, huh?”; likewise, the Willow/Tara “Don’t you trust me?/With my life” exchange echoes the Willow/Oz “Don’t you love me?/My whole life” exchange from “Wild at Heart” (discussed above). The scene revolves around questions, but the questions do not incite desire. They do, nonetheless, produce emotion—anger mainly—and thus again elicit an affective effect, engaging both speaker and respondent. Notice, too, that both women are aware that they are struggling with language here (Tara says, “That is so not what I meant” and “I’m saying everything wrong”; Willow says, “That’s not what I mean”). Their ability to communicate—to ask questions that imply and elicit desired response—breaks down and allows the possibility for a breakdown of the entire relationship.

[24] Another argument that involves questions and emotional response occurs in “Tabula Rasa” (6008). Here, Tara confronts Willow on her use of magic to erase memory:

Tara:	What is wrong with you? [...] Do you think I’m stupid? I know you used that spell on me.
Willow:	Tara, I’m sorry. I—
Tara:	Don’t. Just ... don’t. There’s nothing you can say.
Willow:	Tara, I didn’t mean to—
Tara:	To what? Violate my mind like that? How could you, Willow? How could you after what Glory did to me?
Willow:	Violate you? I-I didn’t mean anything like that. I-I just wanted us not to fight anymore. I love you.

In this scene, Tara holds the linguistic and ethical power in that she not only asks but answers her own interrogation questions (“To what? Violate my mind like that?”). Each question is assertive in its accusation. By asking one after the next, Tara does not allow time for Willow to respond. Tara’s technique blurs the boundary between interrogation questions and rhetorical questions and, finally, forces Willow to question, through rhetorical echo, her own unethical behaviour. The argument continues, ending with a final question from Willow: “Are you saying you’re gonna leave me?” As in response to Willow’s question to Tara in “Family,” (“Are you gonna leave?” discussed above) Tara does not respond directly. In this case, however, the scene cuts immediately to Giles who says to Buffy “I have to.” (They, the cut suggests, have been having a similar conversation in regard to Giles leaving Buffy.) Thus, although the audience does not see Tara’s response to Willow, whether verbally or otherwise, the implication is clear—if Willow does not stop abusing magic, Tara will have to leave her (as, indeed, is what happens shortly thereafter). Thus we see in this scene of questions and ellipsis, words and silences, the affective effect not of desire but of anger, sadness, and fear.

[25] Another disturbing affective response in the wake of rhetorical questions occurs in “New Moon Rising” (4019) in a discussion between Oz and Tara. Oz, thanks to his keen werewolf senses, notices Willow’s scent on Tara and begins to question her about this:

Oz:	Is that her sweater?
Tara:	I just-I just hope that you guys’ll be very happy.
Oz:	You smell like her. She’s all over you. Do you know that?
Tara:	I can’t. I-I can’t talk about this.
Oz:	But there’s something to talk about? Are you two involved?
Tara:	I have-I have to go.
Oz:	Because she never said anything to me like that. We talked all night and she never— (Tara begins to walk away.) No, stop! Is she in love with you? Tell me! Is she?

Although Willow is not physically present in this scene, she is the point of contention. Each of Oz’s questions is a simple, assertive yes/no question. Tara, however, responds with neither yes nor no. Indeed, in an effort to bring the conversation to a close, she avoids direct response to Oz’s questions. However, Tara’s lack of a yes/no assertion nonetheless

constitutes a perlocutionary act in response to the intention of each question; her implied response is what causes Oz to lose emotional control and revert to his werewolf state. Willow's relationship with Tara is vocalized by Oz not as a statement but as an assertive interrogation question ("Is she in love with you?")—the implied answer to which causes in Oz an undesirable affective effect.

[26] The affective effects of questions, then, can be both positive and negative. Notably, one of the most disturbing yet unique emotionally charged scenes involving this rhetorical mode occurs when Willow exchanges questions with her double, Vamp Willow, in "Doppelgängland" (3016). In this episode, Vamp Willow first seductively approaches and then kills a young woman named Sandy; afterward, she says to everyone at the Bronze: "Questions? Comments?" Her actions produce the desired affective effect—fear—and her questions are, in effect, rhetorical: she expects no questions or comments from her audience. She thus holds power, rhetorically and physically, over the crowd. But Willow herself questions Vamp Willow later in the episode:

Vamp Willow:	I kind of like the idea of the two of us .... We could be quite the team if you came around to my way of thinking.
Willow:	Would that mean we have to snuggle?
Vamp Willow:	What do you say? (licks Willow's neck) Want to be bad?
Willow:	This just can't get more disturbing.

Of course, an argument can be made that Willow eventually does come around to Vamp Willow's way of thinking, both in terms of her sexual orientation and in the emergence of Dark Willow. Indeed, Lorna Jowett discusses this in *Sex and the Slayer*: "Vamp Willow at first seems to be Willow's dark shadow but with hindsight acts more as a *fore*shadowing of her internal contradictions, brought out subsequently in Dark Willow. Thus Vamp Willow, in dress, speech, and action appears to be everything Willow is not" (2005, 81). Although I agree with most of Jowett's argument here, I disagree on the reference to speech. That is, Vamp Willow's choice of rhetorical mode—questions—*mirrors* Willow's speech rather than reflecting its opposite.

[27] In regard to this scene, Rebecca Beirne (2004) argues that "when Vampire Willow licks Willow's neck, Willow is completely unnerved [...]. 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" (n.p.). As I've stated, the rhetorical strategy also provides a mirror image: both Willow and Vamp Willow ask questions that the other does not answer. Thus, Willow may be unnerved, not only by Vamp Willow's sexuality, but also by her method of communication—both of which, as the series establishes, are aspects of Willow herself. She does not know what to do when confronted with her double's rhetorical questions. Elsewhere, as we have seen, an exchange of questions can lead to a positive exchange of desire. Here, when confronted with the double, the exchange of questions, followed by the sexually explicit act of neck-licking, leads (from Willow's perspective) to a disturbing moment of desire enacted by Vamp Willow.[10] Later, when the two meet again in the episode's final battle scene, Willow says to Vamp Willow, "No more snuggles?" Her tone is one of uncertainty, and Vamp Willow responds by knocking her across the face, a nonverbal response

that sends Willow crashing into a drum set. Willow, whether or not tentative in tone, teases Vamp Willow with "No more snuggles?"—playing not only with sexuality but also with rhetoricality in response to her double. Willow is, one could say, playing at her own game. Thus, as in other episodes, in "Doppelgängland," the exchange of questions results in affective effects. These effects are disturbing only in that the moment of desire occurs between two aspects of the same character.

[28] Having outlined the connection between questions and affective response, I return now to a point I made early in this paper: the connection between the audience and the choice of rhetorical questions. In a pivotal scene from "Chosen" (7022) (one that links Buffy not only with the Potentials but with Willow and the audience), Buffy chooses not statements but rhetorical questions to deliver her message. The scene (chapter twelve on the DVD) moves in a series of cuts, linking Willow's final spell with Buffy's final speech to the Potentials (chronologically earlier). After Buffy exclaims as a question, "Willow?", the scene cuts to Willow who, experiencing the power of the spell with the scythe, says, "Oh ... my ... Goddess." The scene then cuts again, in flashback, to Buffy's earlier speech: "So here's the part where you make a choice. What if you could have that power? Now? [...] Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?" Buffy, in one of the most pivotal speeches of the entire series, uses rhetorical questions as illocutionary directives. The answers to the questions are implied, but each individual must nonetheless make the choice as perlocutionary act. Thus, Buffy is speaking here not only to the Potentials but to an entire audience of women (fans and viewers). Given that Buffy is merging her power, directly through Willow, with women around the world, the choice of rhetorical questions as speech act is both logical and powerful. No one responds verbally. The questions are left, along with their inherent silent gap, to be answered by every Potential and every viewer. Thus the audience participates in the language of the Buffyverse by entering the silence, the gap created by the rhetorical questions.

[29] Arwen Spicer (2004), in a critique of *Buffy*'s "long-standing commitment to dialogic multivocality" (para. 18) discusses a conflict between multivocal and univocal communication in Season Seven that, I would argue, is resolved by Buffy's choice to offer the Potentials directive questions rather than statements. Spicer rightly notes that "Buffy is ousted for her intransigent univocality" (para. 21) and that, furthermore, this rejection "spurs one of Buffy's most profound revelations: that she cannot be an autocratic leader; she must interact with others as equals" (para. 21). However, Spicer also acknowledges, shortly thereafter, that "dialogue is no panacea: it is convoluted, messy, far from foolproof as a means of strategizing. Diverse voices can become a cacophony" (para. 21). In Spicer's view, multivocal communication not only breaks down in Season Seven but is abandoned completely by Buffy in her final speech to the Potentials:

> Ironically, we never see or hear them make a choice. As Buffy speaks, the Potentials watch her attentively like children in a schoolroom. Their visual representation suggests that they are receiving wisdom, not participating in its construction. [...] There is no sign of any Potential offering an opinion during any part of this exposition. The nominal dialogue of the Scoobies' discussion gives way to the literal monologue of Buffy's oratory. para. 25)

Spicer argues, moreover, that "being denied the free expression of one's individual identity is not empowering. Being silenced is not empowering" (para. 28). I would agree with this interpretation if not for the presence of the rhetorical questions in Buffy's speech. The necessity of silencing individual response in this scene does not negate participation; instead, as illustrated in Willow's rhetorical strategy throughout the series, questions promote participation in that they promote affective effects. Here, each Potential responds with physical rather than verbal action. The audience, moreover, has come to understand the affects and effects of questions, through Willow in particular. Now the audience is invited into the rhetoric of the Buffyverse—"participates in creating total meaning" (Frank 1990, 737)—in the wake of the crucial rhetorical questions. Far more than direct verbal response by the teenaged Potentials could ever have been, here silence is empowering for the audience.

[30] The audience can also participate in response to the show's final questions—that is, those asked by Willow, Faith, and Dawn as the final lines of the entire series. Although these final questions of the series are not technically erotema (in that they do not imply an answer), they nonetheless function as rhetorical questions in that they remain unanswered except in the imaginations of the audience members:

> Willow: What do you think we should do, Buffy?
> Faith: Yeah, you're not the one and only Chosen anymore. Just gotta live like a person. How's that feel?
> Dawn: Yeah, Buffy. What are we gonna do now?

In response, Buffy merely looks out at the landscape and smiles. She does not directly respond to any of these questions. Her lack of verbal response allows the characters, along with the audience, to answer the questions for themselves.[11] Thus, as the series draws to a close, the final questions open infinite possibilities for a continuation of the Buffyverse. Back in Season Three (in "Graduation Day, Part Two," 3022), Willow talks with Oz about whether or not they will make it through the upcoming battle. Oz believes they will, and the conversation progresses as follows:

> Willow: Are you sure?
> Oz: I sound pretty sure, don't I?
> Willow: Yeah.
> Oz: Well, then, I must be sure.
> Willow: Is that just a comforting way of not answering the question?

As Willow suggests in the form of a question here, NOT answering the question is, perhaps, the most comforting and empowering response of all.

Notes

1. I refer here to the moment in "Hush" (4010) when Willow and Tara join hands and perform their first moment of magic together. For further exploration of the juxtaposition of voice and silence in this episode, see Alice Jenkins and Susan Stuart (2003), who argue that "'Hush' is perhaps the most important single episode in the *Buffy* canon in terms of dealing with the operations of this textual/conversational economy" (para. 5).

2. I am working on a longer study of Buffy and the rhetoric of questioning in general; space limitations require that I focus this paper mainly on Willow.

3. As Robin Lakoff (1976) argues, for example, "One makes a statement when one has confidence in his knowledge and is pretty certain that his statement will be believed; one asks a question when one lacks knowledge on some point and has reason to believe that this gap can and will be remedied by an answer by the addressee" (15).

4. Jane Gallop (1982) (in regard to Lacan's use of questions) argues that "This may be a truly feminist gesture, to end with questions, not to conclude, but to open" (32). Gallop sees feminist theorist Luce Irigaray as "am impertinent questioner" (65); she analyzes Irigaray's questioning in the chapter "The Father's Seduction" (56-79). For another interesting (and more recent) discussion of the trope of questioning as potentially feminist, see Bradley W. Buchanan's (2003) "Armed with Questions: Mary Butts's Sacred Interrogative." Buchanan compares Butts's use of questions with that of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, claiming that "the interrogative themes in Stein's writing may have a powerful feminist agenda" (367).

5. Angeliki Athanasiadou (1991) contends that "questioning is a speech act which affects the way information is organized" (107). He outlines four categories of questions: [1] requests for information, [2] rhetorical questions, [3] examination and interrogation questions, and [4] indirect questions. Examination questions are asked when "the questioner is testing the knowledge of the respondent" (109); interrogation questions are asked when "questioning aims at establishing a fact and pinning down responsibilities" (110).

6. Consider, for example, Buffy's much quoted line, "My emotions give me power" ("What's My Line, Part Two," 2010).

7. Indeed, as I will point out again at the end of this paper, Willow's final line of the series, in "Chosen" (7022), is also a question: "What do you think we should do, Buffy?"

8. As Overbey and Preston-Matto (2002) point out, Willow's "partners, too, seem uncomfortable in speech and body—monosyllabic Oz, tentative Tara. But with text, Willow is, well, a wunderkind" (79).

9. In structure and intent, each of these examples is a type of tag question. According to Robin Lakoff (1976), "A tag, in its usage as well as its syntactic shape (in English) is midway between an outright statement and a yes-no question: it is less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter" (15). A tag question, moreover, "might be thought of as a declarative statement without the assumption that the statement is to be believed by the addressee: one has an out, as with a question. […] These sentence types provide a means whereby a speaker can avoid committing himself, and thereby avoid coming into conflict with the addressee" (16-17).

10. Beirne (2004), in regard to this scene and episode, notes that "Willow can finally respond with pure pleasure, not only to her own queer desires, but also to being actively desired by another woman" (n.p.). This is an interesting reading that suggests that Willow finds some pleasure in seeing herself reflected in this powerful double.

11. Rhonda Wilcox (2005), in *Why Buffy Matters* (published after this article was written), likewise argues that "Buffy's lack of an answer means that we get to answer the question" (106).

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