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"There Will Never Be a 'Very Special' *Buffy*": *Buffy* and the Monsters of Teen Life

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(1) "I have often said 'There will never be a "Very Special Episode" of *Buffy*'" (Rochlin 19). This comment by Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, repudiates those television series which aim for redeeming social value by focusing episodes on unmediated presentations of social topics such as AIDS or alcoholism. Whedon specifically mentions *Beverly Hills 90210*, but one could add the names of many series—*The Wonder Years*, *Party of Five*, *Seventh Heaven*—to the list of those which over the years have advertised those "very special" episodes. In *Buffy*'s world, by contrast, the problems teenagers face become literal monsters. Internet predators are demons; drink-doctoring frat boys have sold their souls for success in the business world; a girl who has sex with even the nicest-seeming male discovers that he afterwards becomes a monster. And underlying the various threats is a repeated one: the horror of becoming a vampire often correlates with the dread of becoming an adult. Yet even in the face of all these monstrosities, the context of dialogue and interaction makes the characters believable teens.

(2) In fact, *Buffy*'s dialogue establishes a second level of significance directly related to the symbolic social monsters. The striking differentiation of the teen language in *Buffy* has often been commented on. The language of the teens starkly contrasts with that of the adults. This linguistic separateness emphasizes the lack of communication between the generations, as does the series' use of the symbolism of monsters to represent social problems. The teen attitude towards parents' inability to deal with real-world horrors is suggested through Buffy's concerned but naive mother, who throughout two seasons never sees the monsters or knows her daughter is the Slayer. The symbolism recreates the need to bridge generational division which is suggested by the language patterns. Viewers must understand both the language and the symbolism to see the reality of teen life. Life and language are not so simple as problem-of-the-week tv would suggest, and *Buffy* acknowledges that fact.

(3) The situation and relationships in *Buffy* are on the surface mundane. Sixteen-year-old Buffy Summers, a high school junior, has moved from LA to the small California town of Sunnydale with her divorced mother, after having been expelled from her earlier high school. Her looks and conversation at first win her an entree with high school social queen Cordelia Chase. However, she refuses Cordelia's advice to avoid Willow Rosenberg and Xander Harris, who are stigmatized as, respectively, a brain and a geek. Buffy's refusal to scorn the two—in itself a bit of heroism in the teen social world—combined with the discovery of her past leads to her being consigned to "loser" status.

(4) The other side of Buffy's life, however, roots her even more firmly in loser territory. As soon as she enters the school library, librarian Rupert Giles informs her that he knows she is the Slayer: Into every generation a single girl is born—the one chosen to fight the vampires, the demons, the powers of darkness. Giles has moved from a job as curator of a London museum to be Sunnydale High's librarian expressly in order to be Buffy's Watcher—her adult advisor and trainer. While Buffy has exercised social heroism, she has absolutely no desire to be a superhero. "A Watcher," says Giles, "prepares [the Slayer] . . ." "Prepares me for what?" asks Buffy. "For getting kicked out of school? For losing all my friends? For having to spend all my time fighting for my life and never getting to tell anyone because I might endanger them? Go ahead—prepare me" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth"). Buffy Summers' life is considerably more difficult than Clark Kent's.

(5) Her romantic life is even more problematic. Charming but hapless Xander falls for Buffy literally from the moment he crashes his skateboard at first sight of her outside school. Since Willow has been romantically fixed on Xander since their childhood, this is an inconvenience only made worse by the fact that Buffy's affections lie elsewhere. Angel, a dark, handsome, mysterious stranger occasionally appears to warn Buffy of threats from the vampire world. He cites his being older as the reason he is resisting a relationship, but when, inevitably, they kiss, he "sprouts fangs" (McDonald 20). In the *Buffy* variation on vampire lore,[i] vampires have the memories and personalities of humans, but the human soul has been replaced by a demon. The single exception—the single trustworthy vampire—is Angel,

who was cursed by gypsies after he killed one of their teenagers, and who himself appears much younger than the standard first-season vampire in *Buffy*. Rather than stake him, the gypsies decided to expel the demon and restore Angel's human soul so that he would feel the pain of the knowledge of his misdeeds. The gypsies want him to exist only to suffer, and indeed, Angel, who no longer feeds off humans, is a tormented creature who is as much an outsider of the vampire community as Buffy is an outcast in the high school world. The fact that these two fall in love with each other only makes their lives more difficult. As Giles says, "A vampire in love with a slayer. It's rather poetic, really—in a maudlin sort of way" ("Invisible Girl").

(6) It might come as a surprise to some that when the magazine *George* published its September 1998 list of "20 Most Fascinating Women in Politics," Sarah Michelle Gellar's Buffy was the second in the list (right after Elizabeth Dole, but with a much bigger picture). *George* contrasts Buffy's healthy strength with the teenage girls discussed in Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, and notes "what she's really taking on is the regular assortment of challenges that threaten to suck the lifeblood out of teenage girls, like a suffocating high school hierarchy and a sexual double standard" (Stoller 113). Kathleen Tracy's 1998 guide to the series includes, with every episode synopsis, a brief description of the "Real Horror" to which the plot correlates. In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Nina Auerbach provides a larger symbolic context when she notes that "every age embraces the vampire it needs" (145)—or, one might add, the slayer it needs. And while Auerbach's use of the term "age" refers to cultural period, her statement could be extended to apply to stage of life—in this case, adolescence. Instead of a patriarchal Van Helsing, *Buffy* provides a short, slight, teenage girl. It is nothing new for the science fiction and fantasy category of television series to symbolically represent teen difficulties: Harvey Greenberg's essay "In Search of Spock" explains how in the 1960s *Star Trek* represented teens' alienation in the famous half-Vulcan character. *Buffy* is especially successful at that symbolic representation.

(7) The pilot, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," establishes the series' mapping of the high school social mine field and the series' satirical stance. The show starts with a role reversal: a series of shots of the darkened high school explore the building after hours, and we are then shown two teens breaking in—a pretty, stammering, demure little blonde named Darla following a teenage boy who clearly hopes to "take advantage" of her. When she gets his assurance that they really are alone, her face changes to the demonic feeding visage of the undead. It is the little pleat-skirted cutie who will eat the boy alive. Their images descend from the frame, leaving only a school trash can in the distance of the shot. This is the teaser.

(8) After the credits and theme song, enter Buffy—in nightmares, dreaming of the demons she has to fight. (It was her fighting of vampires at her old school that resulted in her expulsion.) She is awakened by her mom to tackle instead the difficulties of the first day at a new school. The ironically named and very un-Shakespearean Cordelia warns her, "You want to fit in here, the first rule is know your losers. Once you can identify them all by sight they're a lot easier to avoid." At this stage of events Xander and Willow have another friend, Jesse, a slightly taller, geekier version of Xander who internalizes the high school code. At the local teen hangout, the Bronze, Jesse is humiliated by Cordelia's rejection. Chatting with her girlfriends, she later classes him among "children" and says he's like a "puppy dog—you just want to put him to sleep." In fact, Jesse is put into the sleep of death when he is taken by the vampires. When the vampire Jesse shows up at the Bronze, he is immediately able to make Cordelia dance with him, and dismayingly he embraces the change. Confronted by his old friend, Jesse says, "I feel good, Xander; I feel strong" and later, again speaking of himself, adds, "Jesse was an excruciating loser who couldn't get a date."

(9) Harvey Greenberg, in his psychoanalytic discussion of teens and Spock, suggests that Spock's half-alien body reflects the physical changes adolescents sense taking place in themselves. The physical changes in this series' vampires' faces, along with their greater bodily strength, might be said to perform the same function (not to mention the fact that they stay up late). In the first season, the series focuses on confronting adulthood through confronting distinctly older vampires. "The Old Ones," both Giles and the Vampire Master call them—and both their physical traits and their language (of which, more later) suggest adulthood. And as Brian Aldiss says, aside from its sexual qualities, the typical vampire's most notable characteristic is that "It is ancient" (x). Of course, vampire feeding has long been paralleled to sexual activity,[ii] a rite of passage to adulthood which none of the teen protagonists of *Buffy* have undergone (in the first season, at least). When Jesse becomes a vampire, his sexual maturation is clearly suggested. But it is his rejection of "loser" status that really damns Jesse—his willingness to do anything to be accepted in high school, whether it is embracing vampirism or losing his virginity. At the moment he makes his declaration—"I'm a new man!"—he is destroyed, staked, turned to dust, the stake held in the unwilling hand of his best friend Xander ("Welcome").

(10) It is a distinct element of the heroism of *Buffy*'s teen protagonists that they will not go to any lengths to avoid "loser" status. Buffy, Willow, and Xander endure regular

mockery, but pursue what they see as right. Buffy and Xander, both of whom are considered irresponsible by adults, both take responsibility for their friends time and again. Auerbach notes that early, pre-Stoker nineteenth-century incarnations of vampires seemed to stress, in their relationships with chosen humans, the intimacy of friendship (14). In Buffy the most notable bond of friendship is among the teenage vampire-fighters.[iii] "Jesse's my responsibility," says Buffy, and, as they skip school to go looking for him, Xander says, "Jesse's my bud, OK? If I can help him out, that's what I gotta do. It's that or chem class" (“Welcome”). For her part, Willow declares, "I'm not anxious to go into a dark place full of monsters—but I do want to help. I need to" (“Welcome”). The result of this heroism is not praise, but the painfully realistic irritation of those whom it inconveniences. When Buffy's mom gets a call from the principal about her skipping class, the mother grounds the Slayer just as she is about to go out to face the demons. "Mom, this is really, really important," Buffy pleads. And mother answers, "I know—if you don't go out it'll be the end of the world." In fact, it may be exactly that; according to Giles the Watcher, hundreds of vampires are making a concerted attempt to release the vampire Master, open the mouth of hell, and end the world as we know it—unless the reluctant Slayer saves the day. As the mom says, "Everything is life or death when you're a sixteen-year-old girl" (“Welcome”).

(11) Buffy does succeed in her life and death struggle; though she, Willow, and Xander can't save Jesse, they do save the world; they do make it possible for life to go on. And so Xander says, the morning after the vampire battle has been witnessed by a nightclub full of teens, "One thing's for sure; nothing's ever gonna be the same." Perhaps the most important moment of the pilot, and one of the most important in the series, comes in the sunshine of the next morning at Sunnydale High, when absolutely nothing has changed. Almost all the adults and the vast majority of teens have managed to deny what they saw. "The dead rose," says Xander; "we should at least have an assembly." But, led by Cordelia, the students have decided it was "rival gangs." Giles, the Watcher, one of those rare adults who really sees what is going on, explains: "People have a tendency to rationalize what they can and forget what they can't." And of course his words apply to the social problems of the real world just as emphatically as they do to monsters.

(12) Even the socially heroic are sometimes vulnerable to peer pressure. The first season episode "The Pack" is ostensibly about Masai stories of possession by animal spirits—in this case, unusually vicious hyenas imported to the local zoo. But the humans the laughing hyenas possess are a clique of mocking high school students who take Xander into their fold. The episode opens with the four students teasing Buffy for having been kicked out of her earlier school. When they shift to weaker prey, the timid young man ironically named Lance, Xander pursues them into the off-limits hyena house to protect Lance, and so happens to be present when the possession takes place. In most episodes, most of Xander's lines are jokes; but in this episode, after he is possessed, for the first time his jokes pass over into cruelty. Buffy can't believe that Xander would act this way, and so she consults Giles about possible supernatural explanations. "Xander's taken to teasing the less fortunate?" asks Giles. "Uh huh," says Buffy. "And there's a noticeable change in both clothing and demeanor?" "Yes!" "And—well—otherwise all his spare time is spent lounging about with imbeciles?" Buffy says,"It's bad, isn't it?" and Giles replies, "Devastating. He's turned into a sixteen-year-old boy. Of course you'll have to kill him." Since this is the world of *Buffy*, it is not merely hormones at work, but possession. The result is different only in degree, however, not in kind. Xander finds it impossible to study; is cruelly rude to the adoring Willow; and lustfully leaps on Buffy. The latter activity is rather fortunate than not, since, while Buffy subdues Xander, he is separated from the pack long enough so that he misses their attack on kindly principal Flutie. In some schools, a teacher or administrator may be stabbed or shot by students. In Buffy's school, the students eat him. In the end, with the help of Giles and Willow, Buffy is able to return Xander to himself—and the instant after he comes to himself, he saves Willow from the knife-wielding animal-worshipping bad-guy zookeeper who arranged the possession. But the upshot of the whole episode is that Xander is left deeply embarrassed by his own animalistic/adolescent behavior. "Shoot me, stuff me, mount me," he says to Giles, the only other male regular in the first season.

(13) Some episodes of *Buffy* deal with more specific external threats. In "I Robot, You Jane," shy, sweet Willow is drawn into the clutches of an internet predator. When Buffy notices that Willow, an outstanding student, is missing classes, she is concerned to find that Willow is skipping school to chat online with the mysterious Malcolm. Willow, who is attractive but far from glamorous and even farther from popular, is indignant at Buffy 's concern over her online relationship. "Why does everything have to be about looks?" she wonders. And Buffy replies, "Not everything, but some stuff is. What if you guys get really intense and then you find out he has a hairy back?" From worrying about the fact that Willow has not met Malcolm, Buffy and Xander soon move to worrying that she will meet him. As Xander says, "Sure he can say he's a high school student. . . . I can . . . say I'm an elderly Dutchwoman. Get me? And who's to say I'm not if I'm in the Elderly Dutch Chat Room?" As Buffy observes in alarm, "This guy could be anybody. He could be weird, or crazy, or *old* . . . ." The series implicitly calls attention to generational conflict and the horror of facing adults/adulthood as well as the particular horror of the internet predator. As viewers would have known since the

beginning of the episode, Malcolm is downright ancient: he is in fact the demon Moloch, the corrupter. Once again, the friends put themselves on the line, and this time it is Willow who is saved—from one of the diabolical corrupters who are indeed out there on the internet.

(14) In the second season episode "Reptile Boy," Cordelia, who is only gradually and unwillingly drawn into the circle of friends with knowledge of the supernatural (read: adult) world, puts herself and Buffy in jeopardy when they go to a college fraternity party. One of the frat boys has decided he wants the good-looking Buffy to come, and to Cordelia's irritation her invitation is conditional on her bringing Buffy along. Buffy and Angel have been fighting over his reluctance to enter into a relationship with her; as he says, "This isn't some fairy tale. When I kiss you, you don't wake up from a deep sleep and live happily ever after." "No," says Buffy to her vampire, "When I kiss you I want to die," the death/sex metaphor echoing through the scene. As a result of their argument and Giles's insistently overworking her, Buffy decides—to the dismay of Xander and Willow—to lie to Giles and attend the party with Cordelia. Buffy and Cordelia end up easy prey at the party: "God, I love high school girls," says one of the frat boys. Each of them accepts a drink which turns out to be drugged, and each ends up out cold in an upstairs bedroom.

(15) But the fraternity's humiliations are not limited to the females. One of the most interesting elements in the episode is the display of damage done to outsider males—in the shape of Xander, who crashes the party because he is worried about Buffy. (They repeatedly just miss seeing each other.) In a truly painful scene, the party crasher is forced—under the guise of his being treated as a pledge (an element of the story which suggests issues of its own)—to dress up in a blonde wig, half-slip, and giant stuffed bra, and made to dance in the center of a hooting crowd. After he is paddled and kicked out of the building, Xander mutters, "One day I'll have money—prestige—power—and on that day they'll still have more." Indeed, this is an unusually powerful fraternity—in large part because its members have sold themselves to the service of a snake-shaped white demon. The leader chants, "We have no wealth, no possession except that which you give us. We have no place in the world—and no power—except that which you give us." A Marxist would find a broad field to plow in this segment. If the patriarchal power structure has not been made clear enough, when the frat boys prepare to sacrifice Buffy and Cordelia to their demon lord, the leader tells Buffy that "no woman speaks to him." (One can hardly wonder why.) However, Buffy—with the help of Willow and the three outsider males Xander, Angel, and Giles—is able to win. Once again, friendship defeats the monster. But the moral about fraternities could hardly be clearer if Camille Paglia had preached it. As Buffy says, "I told one lie. I had one drink." And Giles replies, "Yes, and you were very nearly devoured by a giant demon snake. The words 'let that be a lesson' are a tad redundant."

(16) For any viewers who might not have caught on to the overall pattern yet, the second season two-parter "Surprise"/"Innocence" makes the social symbolism eloquently clear. In the second season, Buffy's confrontation of the shift from adolescence to adulthood focuses on sexuality. Like the pilot, "Surprise" begins with Buffy having nightmares, this time before she wakes up on her seventeenth birthday. In one of the nightmare images, her mother asks, "Do you really think you're ready, Buffy?" and drops and breaks a cup and saucer. Buffy's dreams are sometimes prophetic, and later in her waking hours this cup-dropping scene is played out in the context of her asking permission to get her driver's license, but the question of her readiness also relates to her having sex with Angel. The nightmare image most important to Buffy is the vision of Angel's being killed by Drusilla, a vampire he sired (and with whom he has in his demonic past had a relationship which is in effect incestuous [Appelo 25]). In her alarm, she goes to Angel's apartment, where he reminds her that not all her dreams come true, and they passionately embrace, parting with difficulty. At school, Buffy discusses the situation with Willow. (One might contrast this behavior with the failure to talk to each other of "most women in vampire movies" [Auerbach 57].) Willow notes that Angel is "cool" because "he would never push," and asks what Buffy wants to do. Buffy replies, "Want isn't always the right thing to do. But what if I never feel this way again?" This very believable teenage concern leads her to accept Willow's advice to "seize the day"; as Buffy says, "Once you get past a certain point, the seizing is sort of inevitable." Later in the day, when they face yet another encounter with a demon threatening Armageddon and Buffy worries that they can't know how long either of them will survive, Angel reminds her, "Nobody can. That's just the deal." But when they are actually attacked and barely escape, making their way to Angel's nearby apartment, they do—after one last "maybe we shouldn't" from Angel—go to bed together. The episode ends with Angel rushing from the sleeping Buffy out into the alley in the pouring rain, pain apparent on his face.

(17) The symbolic implications of having Buffy's first sexual encounter be with a vampire of course emphasize the dangers of sexual encounters, especially with an adult. Angel claims to be around 240; he appears to be about 24 as compared to Buffy's 17 years. In terms of the plot, the serious problem with their encounter is that the gypsy curse which restored Angel's soul did so for the sake of his unremitting pain. When he finds a moment's true happiness, his soul is once again exiled and the demon takes its place. Angel becomes Angelus, who now notes, "the pain is gone," and—immediately after making love with Buffy—

seizes and feeds off a hooker. Afterwards, heated by feeding on the woman's blood, he lifts his head and blows steam out his pursed lips in a gesture that suggests a post-coital smoke. (The gesture is clarified when, later in the episode, Angelus smokes a real cigarette with the same motion. Angel does not smoke.) Buffy is left frantic with concern because Angel is missing; she is the girl waiting for a call after a sexual encounter, as another conversation with Willow makes clear. When she does finally find Angelus, he tells her, "You have a lot to learn about men, kiddo—but I guess you proved that last night." "I'll call you," he says, as he walks out on the weeping Buffy. Even then, Buffy cannot understand why her boyfriend would act that way. Angel originally introduced himself as "a friend" ("Welcome") and has repeatedly acted as one in a series which often focuses on friendship. But Buffy gradually discovers that having sex with her has literally turned Angel into a devil (who writes in blood over a dead body he knows she'll find, "Was it good for you, too?") Understanding now that he is not the man she thought he was, Buffy is able to endure his sneers in a later scene when he says, "You know what the worst part was? Pretending I loved you. If I'da known how easily you'd give it up, I wouldn't even have bothered." They fight ferociously and she wins. When she threatens him with a stake, he gloats that she is unable to kill him, and he is right. But Buffy being Our Heroine, she manages to draw on some inner reserve of strength and give him a good hard Slayer kick in the balls.

(18) One of the rare moments during the first two seasons when Buffy's mom seems to be almost aware of what is going on comes in this episode. The morning after Buffy has had sex for the first time, her mom asks if something is wrong and says "you just look . . .," trailing off, shaking her head. Adults in general and Buffy's mom in particular consistently misinterpret what is happening in the teens' world. Encounters with vampires, demons, and assorted other monsters get translated into more palatable problems: attacks by gangs on PCP, a gas leak, even an out-of-control scavenger hunt. This need for translation is emphasized throughout the series by the linguistic patterns of the different groups. Teen language is so clearly marked as separate in *Buffy* that *Entertainment Weekly* gave it the special name "Slayerspeak" (Howard; cf. Wyman). The bridge of symbolism needed between literal monsters and social problems is recapitulated by the bridge needed between teen and adult language in *Buffy*.

(19) The fact that many of the cross-generational conversations are between Buffy and Giles, the British librarian, accentuates the separation. As Buffy says to him in the pilot, "You're like a textbook with arms." When Giles considers asking computer-whiz Willow for help in a crisis, for instance, he says, "I've been researching this Harvest affair. It seems to be some sort of pre-ordained massacre. Rivers of blood—hell on earth—quite charmless. I'm a bit fuzzy, however. It may be that you can wrest some information from that dread machine." At the students' blank looks, he translates, "I want you to go on the net" ("Welcome"). Buffy voices a common response when she says in another episode, "I think I speak for everyone here when I say, 'Huh?'" ("Invisible Girl").

(20) Interestingly enough, most of the first-season vampires are placed on the side of the adults linguistically. The Master emits comments such as, "Tonight I shall walk the earth and the stars themselves will hide" ("Welcome") and "Here endeth the lesson" ("Never Kill"); other vampires make similarly pompous, quasi-religious remarks: "And like a plague of boils the race of man covered the earth. But on the third day will come the Harvest [. . .]" ("Welcome"). In the episode "Nightmares," there is a cut from Buffy's nightmare of the vampire Master's hand around her neck to her awakening to find her mother's hand in approximately the same spot, shaking her awake. The symbolic identification of the two adult characters is disturbing: vampire and mother, both, it seems, moving Buffy towards some sort of awakening. Later in that episode, the Master says, "We are defined by the things we fear"; both vampirism and adulthood seem to be frightening experiences in *Buffy*. There could hardly be a nastier incarnation of the patriarchy than the ancient, ugly vampire Master. The Master compares his vampire group to a "family" which is "work[ing] together for the common good" in an ugly parallel to a standard adult line ("Angel"). As Nicola Nixon points out in her discussion of the 1987 films *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*, vampire groups can sometimes be seen as "dysfunctional families" (120). Buffy's mother's desire for her to work hard and fit in is curiously echoed in the Master's chastisement of his disciples, which sounds alternately like the reaction of a disappointed father or a coldly dissatisfied CEO. While the darkly beautiful Angel (who speaks neither marked slang nor overly erudite archaisms) suggests the dangerously attractive sexual aspect of adulthood, the Master is associated with work and family. As Buffy moves closer to adulthood in later seasons, the vampire opponents are not just adults, but distorted reflections of herself—vampires such as the young-appearing leather-clad Spike and Drusilla, who speak in contemporary slang. But in the first season almost all of the vampires and the adults are clearly tied together linguistically, among other ways.

(21) Occasionally the teens will display their ability to speak the foreign language of adulthood. In "The Pack," for instance, Buffy speaks with kindly Principal Flutie about the little pig mascot he has bought for the school's team. To placate the principal, she shifts from "He's so cute" to "He's a fine mascot and will engender school spirit." Similarly, Giles displays

the ability to use teen language. When Buffy proves him wrong about the supernatural element in Xander's behavior, he promises to go to his volumes of paranormal lore and "Look stuff up" (“The Pack”). (Of course it must be noted that he is merely quoting an earlier line of Buffy's, rather than creating teenspeak himself.) Even the Master vampire occasionally displays consciousness of the other language, though he does so with scornful intent—as when he remarks preparatory to temporarily killing Buffy, "Oh good—the feeble banter portion of the fight" ("Prophecy Girl").

(22) More often than not, however, the difference is accentuated. And the difference is not simply that adults use big words and know more, but rather that teens know different things. When Buffy says, "My spider sense is tingling," she has to apologize to Giles: "Pop culture reference—sorry" ("I, Robot"). When she complains in another episode that Giles is refusing for once to consider a supernatural explanation, she says, "I can't believe that you of all people would Scully me," ("The Pack"), assuming knowledge of *The X-Files* television character famous for stretching rational explanations to cover unusual events. When Xander asks, "Does anyone else feel like they've been Kaiser Sozhed?" he counts on knowledge of the popular film *The Usual Suspects*, in which one of the characters assumes multiple false identities ("The Puppet Show"). And Cordelia translates Shakespeare by declaring that Shylock uses a "Twinkie defense," referring to recent and popularly discussed jurisprudence (“Invisible Girl”).

(23) Furthermore, the students show their willingness to work outside the rules by their comfort in re-casting the language. Barbara Bell has commented on this change of word form and function regarding the series *My So-Called Life*. Sometimes the changes come in word order, as when Buffy says, "We so don't have time" (“Welcome”). Sometimes they come in word form, as when another character refers to "Willow kissage" ("Innocence") or when Willow and Buffy admire a boy for his "Owenosity" ("Never Kill") or when Buffy asks, "What's the sitch [situation]?" (“Welcome”). Parts of speech may be varied, with an adverb becoming an adjective: "You're acting a little overly, aren't you?" (“Never Kill”). Or an adjective may become a noun: "Love makes you do the wacky" ("Some Assembly Required"). Sometimes the words are metaphorical or metonymic substitutions, as in "You're that amped about hell?Go there" ("Prophecy Girl"), wherein amped = excited, from audio amplification; or "I'll talk to you later, when you've visited Decaf Land" ("The Dark Age"). Students who are willing to operate outside the high school code are certainly not afraid of coloring outside the lines of language. Their use of the language is, in fact, daring. In the third season opener, with Buffy missing,Willow points out that "The Slayer always says a pun or a witty play on words, and I think it throws off the vampires" and Xander responds, "I've always been amazed with how Buffy fights, but in a way I feel like we took her punning for granted" (“Anne”). And the use of language is highly conscious, to the point of adding to series continuity. When Buffy finally conquers her nemesis the Master, her last word to his disintegrating corpse recalls the social stigma she, Willow, and Xander have endured: "Loser," she calls him (“Prophecy Girl”).

(24) In sum, the use of language in *Buffy* reinforces the theme of adult ignorance—and the grace and wit of the language embody one element of the heroism of the teen characters. One might even recall E. M. Forster's definition of the purpose of art—that human creation of order in a chaotic world—to understand the power of the ludic elements of *Buffy's* symbolism and language. Buffy confronts the vampires of adulthood not only with weapons, but with words of her own. It is part of the grace and wit of the series that the courage of these adolescents in fighting social problems is translated into symbolism—a mediation of meaning which parallels the mediation of the teen language. Through both symbolism and language, in *Buffy*, the mediation is the message.

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[i] Auerbach comments on the multiplicity of vampire types through the ages and places: "There is no such creature as 'the Vampire'; there are only vampires" (5).

[ii] Note, e.g., Philip Martin's "The Vampire in the Looking Glass: Reflection and Projection on Bram Stoker's Dracula," 84, 90.

[iii] The interrelationship of the supportive outsider friends in *Buffy* is quite different from the group interaction of those who hunt Stoker's Dracula with, as Auerbach describes it, a "corporate ethos" and the guidance of the "overbearing patriarch" Van Helsing (78).