

“You’re not the source of me”:

Adoptive Identity and Child-Heroes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

[1] The arrival of Dawn Summers in the fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was anticipated early on within the narrative of the series. Fans were first clued in by Buffy’s prophetic dreams that hinted at the arrival of a “little sister” (*Graduation Day Pt 2* 3022) and in the season that followed, we along with Buffy were reminded to “be back before dawn” (*Restless* 4022). Yet when the abrupt introduction of Buffy’s little sister finally came to pass, audiences didn’t readily accept this drastic re-write of the Buffyverse. For nearly five episodes, fans waited patiently for this universe without shrimp to somehow right itself, but Dawn was here to stay. To fans, Dawn proved more Scrappy than Scooby, but narrative echoes of Buffy’s seminal years underscore Dawn’s three-season journey from adolescence to adulthood, and these thematic and aesthetic cues serve as a basis for a different reading of Dawn altogether. As the chosen one, Buffy’s journey evolves throughout seven seasons, and over time she comes to embody the hero of Joseph Campbell’s monomyth narrative. Buffy answers the call to adventure, leaving the normal world and battling the supernatural, becoming further entrenched in the struggle to fulfill her destiny and understand the source of her power. Dawn’s story finds its roots in 19th century coming-of-age novels about children who embark on a journey of self-discovery, leaving behind all that they know to bravely face the perils of the adult world. Unlike monomyth protagonists, these child-heroes are ordinary kids who embark on a hero-journey of their own making, leaving behind the comforts and certainties of childhood. Dawn discovers that she is a mystical key—

that her human memories are false and that Buffy has been tasked with protecting her. She is, in essence, an adopted child that has undergone a traumatic revelation, burdened with doubt, mourning an immeasurable loss of self. Dawn is not chosen, she is not extraordinary, and no one expects her to save the world, but she is forced to leave her sheltered childhood existence and establish her identity in the midst of extraordinary circumstances, proving herself a hero in her own right.

[2] Through the use of fairy tale themes emphasizing generational conflicts, Buffy's high school years were marked by a separation between the adult world and the world of Buffy and her friends. As the Scoobies crossed the threshold into adulthood, demon-of-the-week battles gave way to characters' inner-demons. By the fifth season, Buffy was no longer a child and no longer an innocent—she was a Campbellian warrior devoted to understanding the origins of her power, battling a powerful god, and undergoing daily trials on her hero's journey. The introduction of fourteen-year-old Dawn allowed the series to re-visit fertile narrative ground by exploring the transitional period from childhood to adulthood which defined *Buffy's* early seasons. In Sarah Skwire's essay on the use of fairy tale narratives in *Buffy*, she notes that the episodes *Killed by Death* (B2018) and *Gingerbread* (B3011) invert the traditional top-down model of tale telling, emphasizing children's wisdom in the face of adult ignorance (196). The childhood anxieties negotiated in fairy tale narratives of the European folkloric tradition were reconstituted in classic American children's literature in much the same way. The golden age of the children's novel during the 19th century saw a rise in the popularity of coming-of-age stories about children who, by virtue of their innocence or optimism were able to triumph over hard-hearted adults and assert their independence in the face of abandonment and displacement.

[3] Literary critic and scholar Jerome Griswold sought to further explore the similarities between classic coming of age stories of the pre-WWI era. In his book, *Audacious Kids*, he examines twelve classic childhood novels, discerning a narrative pattern that he deems “The Three Lives of the Child-Hero” wherein an orphaned child is displaced from their home and adopted by a surrogate family. Once there, the child struggles to adjust in their new environment, coming into conflict with an adult same-sex antagonist. Through an act of sacrifice or by nature of their virtue alone, the child is able to overcome the antagonist and is recognized as a savior. After the child has “achieved a definition of itself as an independent person” they can return to their old life, or begin to integrate their two lives in a healthy way (Griswold 12). At its core, the child-hero tale is about growing up and establishing one’s self, independent of familial ties. It takes the child away from the known comforts or blissful ignorance of their first lives, and into the struggles of the second life, where they must overcome conflicts and assert themselves in order to find happiness. As the Slayer’s supernaturally-adopted sister, Dawn’s adoptive identity and relative inexperience lead her down the path of the child-hero rather than that of Joseph Campbell’s “Hero with a Thousand Faces”. Dawn’s narrative arc over the course of three seasons adheres closely to the narrative progression of “The Three Lives of the Child-Hero”: she is a virtual orphan adopted into a surrogate family, suffers the loss of a “vanished happy time,” must overcome a powerful antagonist in order to emerge as a savior, and returns home to reconcile her fragmented identity from her first and second life (Griswold 5-9).

[4] Central to Griswold’s analysis of the “three-lives” narrative pattern was the changing significance of the child in American culture during that period:

“[By the mid-nineteenth century] the child became a public figure, seized on as a vehicle for nostalgia or as a symbol for the future’s promise, brought from the shadows as original sinner and put on center stage as original innocent” (Griswold 24).

In the midst of the apocalyptic threat of season five, Dawn was to Buffy what characters like Jo Marsh, Pollyana, or Hans Brinker were to America after witnessing the horrors of the Civil War—“the symbol of a hopeful future” (Griswold 21). Buffy protects Dawn not because she is bound by duty, but because Dawn represents both a better future, and a carefree past. Dawn serves as a shadow of Buffy’s former childhood self, a connection affirmed by Buffy, and alluded to through narrative and aesthetic decisions linking the sisters. By inscribing Dawn’s personality, her appearance, and her room with elements that link her to Buffy, the series creators subtly remind the audience that Dawn is a part of Buffy, but also, and perhaps more significantly, that Dawn belongs. In *Blood Relations*, Jes Battis notes that “Dawn is in so many ways the person who Buffy used to be, and the person who Buffy—in her darkest moments—wishes she might be again” (76). This understanding of the relationship between Buffy and Dawn is further complicated by the fact that Buffy serves as Dawn’s same-sex antagonist. Buffy is a failed surrogate mother to Dawn. Hardened by loss and disillusioned throughout season six, her attempts at providing for Dawn are ineffectual and half-hearted. Yet even after losing Joyce, Buffy, and Tara (all of whom served as mother figures), Dawn is able to grow into an independent young woman and emerge as a hero.

[5] Griswold’s study uses a psychological frame to discern Freudian themes in the child-hero’s struggle for independence. He notes that during the mid-19th century the perception of the child

as society's "tabula rasa" led to an increased concern for child-raising practices, the creation of orphanages, and a new emphasis on the "formative years" of child development. "If the child was father to the man, then parents had to be particularly careful not to sully a child's original innocence and had to be cautious about what they wrote on that tabula rasa" (Griswold 23). Freudian analysis of child development focused on the child-parent relationships and Griswold draws heavily from Freud's work, tracing Oedipal patterns in child-hero narratives. Griswold finds Freudian archetypes within female child-hero novels, such as the "Spinster Aunt, the Sugar Daddy, and the Child-Woman", but this psychoanalytical approach does little to address how a child's *adoptive status* effects them developmentally. Why does it matter that these child-heroes embark on their journey after the loss of their parental figures? Why is it significant that they have to struggle in their new accommodations? A simple answer might be that, in order to gain a true understanding of ones self, you must do so independently. So much of who we are as people is determined by how we are raised and it is only by separating ourselves from the comforts of childhood, the family home, and parental protection, that we can begin to transition into adulthood. In Dawn's case, "in order to come into her own as a person, she will have to surrender the safety of thinking she doesn't matter much, so not much is to be expected of her" (Koontz 15).

[6] Dawn's realization that she is the Key is an apt metaphor for adoption. While she has a shared history and memories with her adoptive family, "the family narrative may come into question in several ways. If the child were not told of the adoption, the discovery could be very traumatic" (Fisher qtd. in Grotevant). Dawn's case is no exception. Upon discovering that she is the Key, Dawn becomes self-destructive. She cuts herself and destroys her room, burning the

diaries that housed intimate details of her entire life. While children and adolescents display numerous and varied responses to revelations about adoption—from those who show little interest in their adoptive identities to those who are consumed by it—Dawn’s devastated reaction to her adoptive identity and the changed demeanor of the Scoobies towards Dawn, indicates the inherent societal stigmas about adoption. Dawn’s identity crisis leads her to seek answers about her origins. For some, this means seeking out birth parents. For Dawn, this means learning what the Key is. Dawn repeatedly tells Joyce and Buffy that they are not her *real* family, that she herself is not *real*, and the Scoobies struggle with the notion that their memories of Dawn are not *real* (*Blood Ties* B5013). The emphasis on blood ties and legitimacy in American society leads an adoptee to “feel disconnected from others because others define them as ‘different’ based on their adoptive status” (Grotevant). Indeed, this is emphasized when Xander and Giles in particular begin to refer to Dawn as the Key and Dawn begins to question whether she is a person or a “thing.” At school, Dawn struggles to fit in, her grades decline, and she is forced to defend herself from cruel rumors that she is suicidal (*The Body* B5016).

[7] One psychological survey of a group of adolescent adoptees found that “adoption [played] a major role in the emotional disturbance of 33 of the 50 [subjects]” and that “adopted children [were] referred for psychological treatment two to five times as frequently as their nonadopted peers,” with behaviors characterized as “impulsive, provocative, aggressive, and antisocial” (Brodzinsky & Schechter 167). This negative emotional response can lead to a compromised sense of worth and “feelings of abandonment or not being wanted” (Grotevant). Dawn makes her anxieties about abandonment clear when she accuses Buffy of wanting to protect her because it is her job and not because of genuine love (*Blood Ties*). Dawn also accuses Buffy of not wanting

her around after Joyce's death (*Forever* B5017). As one parental figure after another leaves Dawn, she becomes increasingly disillusioned. Just as adoptive identity requires a coherent self-definition, so too is it important for an adoptee to feel a "sense of continuity over time, linking past, present, and future, and, across place, linking multiple contexts and relationships" (Grotevant). In Dawn's case, this proves particularly difficult. Almost immediately after discovering she is the Key, the rest of Dawn's world falls apart. Her mother dies and her sister is tasked with protecting her from a powerful god. Dawn's blood opens a portal to hell that can only be closed by Buffy's death. There is no stability and—despite Buffy's best efforts to convince Dawn and her friends that nothing has changed, that the happy memories are legitimate—Dawn cannot go back to that innocent belief. Her relationships are forever tainted by insecurities, so much so that she earnestly makes a wish for people to stop leaving her (*Older and Far Way* B6014). Dawn's most consistent and healthy matriarchal surrogate is Tara. Unlike Buffy, Tara treats Dawn as an equal; she is nurturing but never dismissive. Tara often places herself on the outside of the core group with Dawn, and the two bond over their shared outsider status (*Real Me* B5002). Willow and Tara become a surrogate parental unit in Dawn's eyes, and when Willow's addiction drives Tara to move out, Dawn goes out of her way to try and bring them back together. Dawn is overjoyed when the couple reconciles, but her loss is rendered permanent by Tara's death (*Tabula Rasa* B6008; *Seeing Red* B6019).

[8] If Dawn hadn't ventured out to steal Giles' diaries, she might have never known that she was anything besides a normal girl. Her life, her memories, her family would've remained real to her, and in the early years of adoption in America, this was the ideal:

Confidential adoptions were built around the principle of “matching,” the notion that the success of an adoption is enhanced when children are like their adoptive parents in terms of appearance, interests, intelligence, personality, or other traits (Modell & Dambacher, 1997). The underlying goal of matching was for the child to be able to “pass” as a biologically-related member of the adoptive family (Grotevant).

Indeed, this is exactly what the Monks of Dagon attempt to do by using Buffy’s blood, memories, and personality to create Dawn. Dawn’s story represents a broader developmental vision of childhood, and brings to light the issues of adopted children, who struggle to maintain their worth, “self-definition, coherence of personality, and sense of continuity over time” in the midst of abandonment and societal stigmas (Grotevant). When applying studies on adopted children to the “Three Lives of the Child-Hero” emphasis on Oedipal conflicts of gender become less significant, and issues of identity and self-worth become essential.

The First Life

[9] The second episode of season five, *Real Me*, is narrated by Dawn as she sits cross-legged on her bed and writes a diary entry detailing her resentment towards Buffy, her adoration of Xander, and the general angst of being the slayer’s little sister. Through a deliberately slow reveal, the audience is able to glimpse clues of settled-in history from all of Dawn’s knick-knacks, paperbacks, posters, stuffed animals, and bejeweled belongings. A tropical motif established by a fish mobile, flamingos, and palm tree figurines gives way to a purple lava lamp that illuminates a framed piece of childhood artwork, sharing the same wall as a “Third Eye Blind” poster. All of

these elements combined give the sense of a girl in the midst of puberty; straddling the line between childhood treasures and adolescent trends. As Dawn recounts her feelings and impressions of the world around her, the audience is drawn into the protective bubble of Dawn's room, with its abundance of all shades of purple (on the walls, lamps, drapes). Dawn sits on her bed, not alone, but with a cadre of stuffed animals and decorative pillows filling the frame around her. The overall sensation of this space is both comforting and suffocating. In one shot, we know that Dawn is a young girl in a transitional state who is extremely sheltered. As Dawn writes in the safety and solitude of her bedroom, inter-cut scenes of Dawn interacting with her family and various Scooby members during a run-of-the-mill day in Sunnydale serve to reveal Dawn's established relationships. While the narration favors Dawn's point of view, it becomes clear that Dawn is oblivious to much of the goings on in the adult world and that she lacks self-awareness despite her strong opinions about those around her. This sets the scene of Dawn's first life within the child-hero narrative.

[10] When we first meet Dawn, she is 14 years old—only two years shy of the age that Buffy was in season one. Dawn is incredibly sheltered; she is often characterized as innocent, clumsy, and naïve. She is babied by Joyce and the Scoobies, who affectionately call her 'Dawnie' or 'Pumpkin-belly' and deliberately censor themselves when she is within earshot. Buffy in particular paints Dawn as nothing more than a bratty little sister, regarding her as an incessant annoyance. The infantilization of Dawn's character codes her as a child, and her status as the Key makes her the ultimate innocent. Her first life is marked by fabricated memories of a normal little girl unaware of her mystical origins. Griswold writes, "The American childhood story is almost always the story of an orphan. Even when this is not quite so, the hero is a 'virtual

orphan' who has only one living parent and is soon separated from that guardian" (5). Buffy and Dawn have been raised primarily by their mother, Joyce, and have had little to no interaction with their absentee father, Hank. When Dawn learns that she has been "adopted" via magic into the Summer's family, her first life ends. Her short time as Buffy's little sister has been supplanted with happy memories. These memories equate to what Griswold describes as the "vanished happy time" that often takes place before the opening of the coming of age novel (5). Dawn begins by living in the shadow of her sister, and Dawn's feelings of neglect deepen when, after Joyce's death, Buffy becomes increasingly withdrawn and struggles in her role as parent, leading Dawn to feel unwanted. In all of these child-hero tales, the protagonist goes on a journey, large or small, which transitions them into their new life. After finding out the truth about what she is, Dawn is completely distraught. She leaves her home and wanders the streets of Sunnydale, passing a park and recalling an implanted memory of Buffy pushing her on the swing set. She resolves to go to the hospital to seek answers about her identity from a group of mental patients who are attuned to the mystical energy surrounding her, but she's quickly captured by Glory. Buffy saves Dawn, and reaffirms their bond as sisters by making a blood oath, insisting that "It doesn't matter how you got here or where you came from. You are my sister" (*Blood Ties*). In that moment, Dawn lets her defenses down and allows Buffy to embrace her. Dawn returns home with Buffy but does not return to her old life. She is going home to a surrogate family, and a house full of falsified memories that she must somehow come to terms with.

The Second Life

BUFFY: Is Sunnydale any better than when I first came here? Okay, so I battle evil. But don't really win. The bad keeps coming back and getting stronger. Like that kid in the story, the boy that stuck his finger in the duck.

ANGEL: Dike...It's another word for dam.

BUFFY: Oh. Okay, that story makes a lot more sense now.

(*Gingerbread*)

[11] The story referenced here is that of “The Hero of Haarlem”, an anecdote first told in Mary Mapes Dodge’s classic children’s tale *Hans Brinker*. It is a piece of invented folklore told within the novel as a means of instructing school children. The little Dutch boy makes a sacrifice in order to suppress the powerful tides from spilling through the barrier and destroying his town. In *Hans Brinker*, this little boy is considered “the spirit of the whole country” (Griswold 191). Dodge describes Holland as a place in a constant “state of alarm [where] the greatest care is taken to prevent accidents. Engineers and workmen are stationed all along [the dikes] in threatened places and a close watch is kept up night and day” (21). The Holland depicted here is not unlike the post-9/11 climate of America that contextualized the dark turn of *Buffy*’s sixth season narrative. Within the frame of the novel, this story is meant to be an allegory about the controlling ones’ own “flood of emotions” which, unchecked, can lead to a loss of self-control. The sacrifice of “The Hero of Haarlem” is important because of the virtue it signifies. The little Dutch boy is mirrored in other child-heroes, whose power lies in their ability to temper the cynicism of the adult world, and remind us of the redemptive power of youth and the possibility of a brighter future.

[12] The second life of the child-hero begins when they reach their destination oftentimes categorized as either “the Big House [or] the Great Outdoors”(Griswold 6). Dorothy Gale travels to the land of Oz, Rebecca leaves Sunnybrook farm for the Brick House, Pollyanna goes to live with her Aunt, and Tom Sawyer leaves his Aunt’s house and travels in the wilderness. Dawn returns to the Summers’ home, where everything familiar has been called into question and her once beloved family has been revealed as a surrogate family. Likewise, Dawn journeys to the top of a massive metal tower during a blood ritual (*The Gift*) and down into a cavernous earthen crypt (*Grave* B6022). These destinations become important sights of maturation. Once in the Big House, or the Great Outdoors, the child-hero finds helpers (usually of the opposite sex or with outsider status) to aid them in their journey (Griswold 7). While the Scoobies serve as a band of outsider helpers to Dawn, Spike serves as particularly important aid in Dawn’s heroic journey. In the fifth season, Spike becomes uncharacteristically protective of Dawn. He helps her break into the Magic Box to obtain Giles’ diaries, even going so far as to risk his life stealing a demon egg so that Dawn can attempt to resurrect Joyce by casting a spell (*Blood Ties*; *Forever*). Spike risks his life, climbing the metal tower to save Dawn, and he continues to look after Dawn even after Buffy’s death (*The Gift*; *Bargaining Part 1* B6001).

[13] The second life is fraught with social problems, and the child-hero is “frequently persecuted by an adult antagonist of the same sex” (Griswold 7). In Dawn’s second life, which begins with *Blood Ties* and culminates 32 episodes later with *Grave*, Buffy serves as the antagonist; the hard-hearted adult who the child must either defeat or change in order to come into their own. The three significant locales of Dawn’s journey—the tower, the grave, and the Summer’s house—also serve as sites of confrontation between Buffy and Dawn. In *The Gift*, Dawn is willing to

sacrifice her life to save the world. She offers her blood as a means of sealing the hole that, left untapped, would let loose hell on Earth. Like the little Dutch boy, Dawn understands the importance of protecting the barriers between worlds. She sees what Buffy has lost sight of—the greater good. Buffy is unwilling to sacrifice Dawn, no matter what the cost may be. She tells Giles “I don’t understand. I don’t know how to live in this world if these are the choices. If everything just gets stripped away. I don’t see the point... if Dawn dies I’m done with it. I’m quitting” (*The Gift*). Dawn’s willingness to die in order to save the world displays a grace far beyond her years. But Buffy refuses to lose her sister, and she chooses to make the sacrifice in Dawn’s place.

[14] In the season that follows, Buffy falls from grace. Her emotional turmoil after being resurrected from the grave makes her an ineffectual surrogate mother for Dawn. She is equal parts controlling and negligent, trying to keep Dawn safe at the expense of her sister’s emotional needs. Buffy’s negligence comes to a head in season six when it is revealed that Dawn has been shoplifting and her grades have declined, causing child services to question Buffy’s abilities as a parent (*Gone* B6011; *Older and Far Away* B6014). Just as Willow gives herself over to rage, Buffy is crippled by self-loathing, and her joylessness leaves Dawn starved for affection. In the culmination of the sixth season, Buffy and Dawn once again find themselves facing apocalypse. Dawn proves her worth by fighting alongside Buffy and the threat of losing her sister and friends leads Buffy to realize that she need not protect Dawn from the world anymore, instead she must *show* the world to Dawn (*Grave*). In the following season, this sentiment gives way to a larger mission of protecting and teaching the potential Slayers. The pressures of leadership, and the threat of a final battle cause Buffy to lose sight of the relationships which once gave her strength.

She distances herself from her friends and from the Potentials in order to protect herself from emotional ties. Buffy becomes a general, and when her troops turn from her, Dawn is the one who must confront Buffy and tell her to stand down (*Empty Places* 7019).

The Third Life

“When Aunt Em came to live there she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray, they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt and never smiled now. Aunt Em had been so startled by the child’s laughter that she would scream and press her hand upon her heart whenever Dorothy’s merry voice reached her ears; and she still looked at the little girl with wonder that she could find anything to laugh at” (*The Wizard of Oz*).

BUFFY: I can’t watch you just throw away everything that—I know I’m right about this. I just need a little— I can’t stay here and watch her lead you into some disaster.

DAWN: Then you can’t stay here. Buffy, I love you, but you were right. We have to be together on this. You can’t be a part of it. So I need you to leave. I’m sorry, but this is my house, too.

RONA: Ding-dong, the witch is dead.

DAWN: Shut your mouth. (*Empty Places* B7019)

[15] Most epic tales end where they begin. In the child-hero narrative, the third life is essentially a return to the first life, but in some cases it is an “accommodation of two lives” where the child must find a way to integrate their past and present selves and resolve their issues of identity (Griswold 7). Dawn goes from believing she is a normal girl, to learning that she is the Key, and by the end her true struggle emerges as she tries to find purpose in a normal girl’s existence. Like Dorothy Gale, Dawn must return home to a surrogate mother who has become a joyless shell after years of hardship. Just as Aunt Em suffers the bleakness of life on a farm, Buffy has been worn down after years of battling evil with no end in sight. L. Frank Baum’s description of Aunt Em’s weatherworn grayness closely parallels the dispassionate numbness of Buffy during the sixth season. Dorothy must triumph over a female antagonist in the land of Oz in order to get home, and she reluctantly does so by melting the wicked Witch. So too must Dawn stand up against Buffy in order to unify the Potentials (*Empty Places*). When the First Evil threatens to destroy the Slayer line, Dawn takes a back seat, helping where she can, and fighting the good fight as a normal girl. Dawn overcomes feelings of inadequacy, and accepts that her sister must devote herself to protecting the Potentials. When a spell goes awry and Dawn is mistaken for a potential slayer, she is the first to discover the truth. She puts her own disappointment aside and does all she can to help protect the true potential. Xander recognizes her quiet heroism when he says:

They’ll never know how tough it is, Dawnie. To be the one who isn’t chosen; to live so near the spotlight and never step in it. But I know. I see more than

anybody realizes, 'cause nobody's watching me. I saw you last night, I see you working here today... You're not special. You're extraordinary. (*Potential* B7012)

[16] While the film adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz* portrays Dorothy's adventures in the Emerald city as an elaborate dream, in L. Frank Baum's book "Oz is a real place, not a land created by Dorothy's fertile imagination" (Griswold 29). Dawn's existence is proved legitimate in the Buffyverse in much the same way. In a series where alternate realities are commonly explored, usually to violent and tragic ends, the arrival of Dawn could easily have been explained away as the result of some misguided wish or incantation, and indeed the audience is taken down that path in the aptly titled episode *No Place Like Home* (B5005) as Buffy goes into a trance state which reveals that everything in Dawn's room has been fabricated and that Dawn herself is not real. Buffy's vision flickers from the soft warm glow of Dawn's room, which is filled with possessions, to a vision of an unfamiliar, dark, cluttered storage room occupying the same space. The color contrast between these two shots is rather stark, from soft rosy hues to dark, stylized, blue moonlight, yet it is the altered reality of Dawn's bedroom and not Buffy's vision of the true room that gives the viewer a sense of ease and familiarity. The emptiness of the shadowy storage space is what seems out of place. In a house that is suffused with warmth and depth, the storage room, with its rejected artwork strewn about, feels out of place. Dawn's room is the one that actually fits. And indeed it turns out that this altered reality differs from that of Jonathan's in *Superstar* (B4017) or Cordelia's in *The Wish* (B3009) because no one, not even Dawn, is aware that she does not belong.

Dawn as an Alternate Version of Buffy

[17] Dawn Summers was inserted into a pre-established universe with a rich narrative history of characters that fans had come to know inside and out. So the series' creators took advantage of fans' encyclopedic knowledge of the show to help form Dawn's identity while simultaneously re-writing the Buffyverse. Buffy and her friends are supplanted with memories of Dawn but viewers had to rely on visual clues and allusions to try and puzzle together an understanding of Dawn. By closely examining representations of Dawn over the course of three seasons, it becomes clear that her presence echoes past depictions of Buffy. Dawn signifies the childhood innocence that Buffy has lost—an innocence that Buffy wants to preserve and protect. As Dawn matures, and enters high school, we begin to see throwbacks to season one episodes. Dawn seems primed to follow in Buffy's footsteps and the melding of these two characters has many uses. First, it reminds the audience of where we began. It calls back themes explored during Buffy's high school years. Second, it shows the legitimacy of the bond between Buffy and Dawn, which goes much deeper than sisterhood. Finally, these depictions of Dawn operate under the collective assumption that Dawn belongs.

[18] The physical space and decoration of Dawn's bedroom is used to communicate her connection to Buffy. The purple trunk that sits on the floor beside Dawn's desk matches the blue trunk that Buffy pulls out of her closet in *The Harvest* (B1002) to access her stash of weapons. In *Blood Ties*, when Dawn climbs out of her bedroom window and down a wooden trellis, we are subtly reminded of Buffy's old window escape route. Beds are the centerpieces for both Dawn and Buffy's rooms, and the orientation of the bed within the space is significant and telling. Buffy's bed is on the wall opposite the door, she is withdrawn from the rest of the house, and

moments in her bed are considered to be moments of solitude. Buffy's slayer dreams, her sexual activities, and her moments of emotional devastation are all kept out of earshot of her mother. Dawn's bed is situated next to a door that adjoins her mother's room, further evidencing her sheltered lifestyle. These decorative details form an almost subliminal link between Buffy and Dawn—Buffy does not just influence Dawn as a big sister influences their younger sibling, rather, Dawn's identity is partially derived from Buffy.

[19] This bond is further explored as Dawn enters High School. Elements of Buffy's personality before moving to Sunnydale have been hinted at throughout the series, and Dawn's struggle to become popular (by trying out for the cheerleading team no less), and her acts of rebellion (shoplifting), even her taste in men (vampire) echoes the slightly more carefree years of Buffy's adolescence. We know that Buffy was part of the popular crowd at her old school, and that she may have accidentally forgotten to pay for a lipstick once, and of course that her taste in men is rather tragic. Episodes like *All the Way* (B6006) and *Him* (B7006) are clearly reminiscent of season one episodes and as Dawn grows up, she becomes less like the whiney, self-absorbed pre-Sunnydale Buffy, and more like the self-assured, heroic young Buffy of earlier seasons.

[20] Despite her similarity to Buffy, Dawn was heavily criticized by the fandom. In a 2002 panel discussion, actress Michelle Trachtenberg revealed that the "Kill Dawn" emails she'd received had taken a toll and promised there would be "no more whining" from Dawn. Even series creator Joss Whedon was put on the defensive admitting in an interview with IGN that fans were right, Dawn had "ran the same note for a while" (IGN.com). As a result of this backlash, both the author and audience became preoccupied with fixing Dawn. If we examine fifth season Dawn

with the narrative expectation that she must be as dynamic, self-aware, and engaging as Buffy was in season one, we are bound for disappointment. But if we read Dawn as an earlier incarnation of Buffy, as a child, before the weight of duty is upon her, we might be less critical. By understanding Dawn as a child-hero, whose struggle is as much about establishing her identity as Buffy's was prior to accepting her fate as the Slayer, then it is easier to see Dawn's merits. When Dawn discovers that she is essentially an adopted child, everything she knows about herself is called into question (not unlike Buffy's revelation that she is the Slayer), and Dawn must struggle to establish a sense of self in the midst of chaotic circumstance. As is the case of many child protagonists, Dawn acts out, is temperamental, and difficult to empathize with, but, by the end of her journey, she matures into a heroic individual. Dawn as a child-hero fights the social stigmas associated with adopted children (that they are illegitimate or unwanted), and although the narrative emphasizes "blood" as a link between Buffy and Dawn, a closer analysis of these two characters implies that true sisterhood transcends blood ties.

[21] The fannish devotion to narratives of the golden age of children's literature is not unlike the fannish practices surrounding *BtVS*. Children's novels were by and large the best selling books of the era, and the mid-nineteenth century became recognized as a period in which "the majors wrote for minors" (Griswold viii). Griswold writes, "One measure of their influence is the way these books have leaped from the printed page and been incarnated in a thousand different forms... there are gift stores filled with Oz coffee cups and ashtrays and objects of all kinds" (ix). These novels have become representative of American culture, and the metaphor of America as a child seeking independence is infused in the narrative tradition of this time. Today, the Oedipal constructs used to explore the transition to adulthood in Griswold's study can be

further informed by psychological analysis of a child's adoptive identity. While the child may have lost prominence in American culture, it is clear that within the Buffyverse the fight to protect future generations, represented first by Dawn and later by the Potentials, remains a just one. Youth represents the hope for the future, while simultaneously reminding us of where we came from. Just as children's books of the golden age offered an escape to simpler times, and adults hoped to amend their own childhood anxieties by providing better care for future generations, Dawn motivates Buffy to not only save the world, but to make the world better.

Works Cited

Battis, Jes. *Blood Relations: Chosen families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2005. Print.

Baum, L. Frank, Mauro Evangelista, and Alison Kelly. *Wizard of Oz*. London: Usborne, 2006. Print.

Brodzinsky, David, and Marshall D. Schechter. *The Psychology of Adoption*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968. Print.

Dodge, Mary Mapes. *Hans Brinker or, The Silver Skates*. Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg,

n.d. Web. 27 June 2012.

Griswold, Jerome. *Audacious kids: coming of age in America's classic children's books*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

Harold D Grotevant, Nora Dunbar, Julie K Kohler, and Amy M Lash Esau. "Adoptive identity: How contexts within and beyond the family shape developmental pathways." *Family Relations* 49.4 (2000): 379-387. Research Library, ProQuest. Web. 10 Nov. 2010.

"IGN: An Interview with Joss Whedon." *IGN Movies: Trailers, Movie Reviews, Pictures, Celebrities, and Interviews*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.

K. Dale Koontz, "What's a Key without a Lock?: Dawn and the Promise of Purpose." *Faith and Choice in the Works of Joss Whedon*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008. Print.

Rebaza, Claudia. "The Problematic Definition of 'Fan': A Survey of Fannish Involvement in the Buffyverse." *Buffy and Angel Conquer the Internet*. Ed. Mary-Kirby Diaz. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009. 147-171. Print.

Skwire, Sarah. "Whose Side Are You on Anyway?": Children, Adults, and the Use of Fairytales in *Buffy*." *Fighting the Forces*. Eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002. 195-206. Print.