

**“The Why and the Wherefore:”
Xander, Shakespeare, and the Artificial Fool**

**Jennifer Walsh
Ithaca College**

[1] In a 2013 interview with *Vulture*, Joss Whedon stated, “Some of my best stealing — I mean, *inspiration* — is from Shakespeare” (Vineyard). The influence of Shakespeare on Whedon’s work goes beyond his screen adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Many Shakespearean themes and tropes are present in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In “Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered” (B0216), Xander begins a conversation with Cordelia by saying, “I’ve been thinking a lot about us lately...the why and the wherefore.” Xander’s *Romeo and Juliet* reference suits his angsty teen relationship well, with added comic effect since “why” and “wherefore” mean the same thing. This is not the only way he embodies the connection between *Buffy* and Shakespeare, as his skills of observation and comic role within the Scooby Gang make him similar to the “artificial” fools present in Shakespeare’s royal courts, particularly *Twelfth Night*’s Feste. This role is both a blessing and a burden: it gives them the opportunity to be important to their superiors, but it also means they shoulder the weight of knowledge about everything around them. Just as Feste offers members of Orsino’s and Olivia’s courts valuable insight through his jests and songs, Xander keeps the Scooby Gang grounded in the world of humanity, which is why his presence is necessary and beneficial.

[2] William Kemp was the actor who most likely played earlier fool roles in Shakespeare’s plays, performing parts such as Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. When he departed the group, he was replaced by Robert Armin, who likely played Touchstone in *As You Like It* and Feste in *Twelfth Night* (British Library). Anthony David Nuttall elaborates on the way Armin’s roles as fool differed from Kemp’s characters by citing Armin’s own words on the matter:

Armin, something of an intellectual, was influenced by Erasmus and wrote a book, *Fool Upon Fool* (1600). He drew a distinction that has force still between the “natural” and the “artificial” fool. The “natural fool” is funny before he speaks. He is likely fat, pink, and slow of mind. The “fool artificial” is a “gag man”; he is witty and others become the object of *his* mirth. Armin was himself an artificial fool, and Dogberry clearly is a natural fool. (Nuttall 227)

Armin’s definition of natural and artificial fools is clear and precise. Unlike natural fools, whose humor comes from a perceived lack of intelligence, artificial fools have a level of self-awareness that allows them to play their role as fool for the benefit of the group and serve as a truth-teller.

While Armin's contributions to the changing characteristics of the fool cannot outweigh those made because of Shakespeare's development as a playwright, Armin's acting style still had a major impact on the way fools were portrayed on Shakespeare's stage; his style of foolery is markedly different than that of his predecessors.

[3] In *Twelfth Night*, Viola, a young woman who was recently shipwrecked, disguises herself as a man in order to work in the court of Duke Orsino, following the advice of the sea captain who rescued her. Orsino sends Viola, who has taken on the identity of "Cesario," to woo the countess Olivia, who is refusing suitors while she mourns the deaths of her father and brother. When she meets Cesario, however, she falls in love not knowing he is really Viola, who has herself fallen in love with Orsino. In a subplot, Feste, a fool in Olivia's court, conspires with several other characters to convince Olivia's puritanical and severe steward Malvolio that Olivia is in love with him. This game crosses the line between the comic and the cruel, as the members of Olivia's court convince Malvolio he is possessed and disguise Feste as a priest to exorcise him. In addition to his participation in the ruse, Feste sings songs to different characters throughout the play, spends time in Orsino's court, and delivers the epilogue.

[4] Much of the scholarship focused on Xander has discussed his masculinity and his role as a human in a supernatural world. In an excerpt from *Sex and the Slayer* published in *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, Lorna Jowett identifies Xander as a type of "new man" that represents a feminized masculinity: "That Xander represents emotion, love, and friendship is part of the project of dissociating gender and behavior: more conventionally the 'heart' of the Scooby family would be female. In this way Xander demonstrates typically 'feminine' competencies in relationship management...and a willingness to articulate emotion" (Jowett par. 30). Marc Camron disagrees with Jowett's reading of Xander purely as a feminized male, noting, "Xander the squire embraces his masculinity when he must, and subjectifies[sic] himself to Buffy the rest of the time, because he knows her power trumps his. He is not a woman in man's clothing, but a fully actualized and hybridized male character" (Camron par. 17). Other scholars focus on Xander's humanity in the context of the *Buffyverse*. Katherine E. Whaley argues that Xander, because of his lack of supernatural abilities, is a "metaphoric disabled person who, over the course of the entire series, learns to recognize and accept his disabilities and, finally, value his contributions to the group" (Whaley par. 3). David Kociemba writes about Xander's embodiment of the "extraordinary ordinary" archetype, commenting that he fits into a tradition of human characters in supernatural worlds that "suggest to the reader that a commitment to do good and the capability to change the world is not limited to those with extraordinary gifts: the mutants, the wizards, the sons of kings, the demigods, or the rich" (Kociemba 81). These readings of Xander differ in significant ways, but they all make it clear that he is an atypical adolescent male character, and that his lack of magical powers differentiates him from the rest of the group and carves out a role for him as an ordinary presence in a world of the extraordinary.

[5] Robert H. Bell writes in *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools*, "Shakespeare's fools attract meaning and disseminate it" (23). Like Feste, Xander's role is that of a seer and a source of comic relief. In "Teacher's Pet" (B0104), Xander explains his contributions to the group through a joke: "Those that can, do. Those that can't, laugh at those who can do." Xander is able to hold a mirror up to the other members of the Scooby Gang and point out their flaws. He is speaking from a position of safety because his jokes are accepted as harmless by the Scoobies – they can choose to listen to what Xander says, or dismiss him with laughter. In "Go Fish" (B0220), he questions the privileges afforded to Sunnydale's championship swim team:

Cordelia: Xander, I know you take pride in being the voice of the common wuss, but the truth is, certain people are entitled to special privileges. They're called winners. That's the way the world works.

Xander: And what about that nutty "all men are created equal" thing?

Cordelia: Propaganda spouted by the ugly and less deserving...

Xander: You know what really grates my cheese? That Buffy's not here to share my moral outrage about swim team perks. She's too busy being one of them ("Go Fish").

Xander is clearly joking, but his qualms about the swim team's treatment are valid, especially since it may mean his best friend Willow has to do the athletes' homework for them. He reminds Cordelia about the historical value of equality, and also points out that Buffy is benefitting from this hierarchical system as well. This final point emphasizes his loyalty towards her but also his willingness to honestly acknowledge her higher social rank and all that comes with it, good and bad.

[6] Viola comments on how Feste accomplishes the same sort of task after their verbal sparring match:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
 And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
 He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
 The quality of persons, and the time,
 And like the haggard, check at every feather
 That comes before his eye. This is a practice
 As full of labour as a wise man's art,
 For folly that he wisely shows is fit,
 But wise men, folly-fall'n quite taint their wit. (III.i.59-67)

Viola recognizes Feste's ability to play the fool "as full of labour as a wise man's art," a comment that similarly applies to Xander. While his friends all have supernatural abilities that clearly define their role in the group – Willow's witchcraft, Buffy's slaying, Giles's role as Watcher and a source of information – Xander's purpose is often left unclear. However, his ability to provide laughter and emotional support is just as demanding as the tasks assigned to other Scoobies. Xander must be an attentive observer in order to contribute to the group, even if he is not always involved in physical battles. In "Dirty Girls" (B0719), Xander rallies the Potentials by vouching for Buffy's leadership abilities, explaining:

Xander: This girl has died two times and is still standing. You're scared? That's smart. You got questions? You should. But you doubt her motives, you think Buffy's all about the kill, then you take the little bus to battle. I've seen her heart, and this time not literally, and I'm telling you, right now, she cares more about your lives than you will ever know.

This rousing speech is heartfelt and honest, acknowledging the feelings of the Potentials while providing a strong argument on Buffy's behalf. Xander's comments force the Potentials to not only reflect on their relative inexperience compared to Buffy, but also the amount of courage and strength required to fight evil as successfully as she does. Here Xander employs the methodology of which Viola speaks, "observing the mood" of the Potentials and responding with an appropriate speech. It is not a comical moment, but it beautifully portrays Xander's loyalty to Buffy and displays his ability to read people's emotions.

[7] In "Once More, with Feeling" (B0607), Xander participates in the musical tradition of the fool by summoning a demon he hopes will liven up Sunnydale with singing and dancing. Though the resulting musical numbers result in the involuntary revelation of the Scoobies' secrets, Xander's attempt to make mischief with music fits with the behavior of an artificial fool. "I'll Never Tell" uses Xander's personal troubles for comic effect, focusing on his fears and frustrations about his relationship with Anya. During the song, they both make direct eye contact with the camera. This breaking of the fourth wall sets Xander and Anya's relationship apart from those of other *Buffy* characters and connects them more directly to the audience. "It was like we were being watched, like there was a wall missing from our apartment, like there were only three walls and not a fourth wall," Anya says to Giles of the experience. She appears more perplexed by this than Xander does, as he does not comment on the fourth wall at all. His silence on the matter suggests that he is aware of something Anya is not – she is focused more on the meta narrative aspects of the number, whereas Xander seeks a solution to their newfound relationship troubles ("Once More With Feeling" B0607). Robert H. Bell writes of Feste, "He is simultaneously actor and role, spectator and spectacle, observer and observed...A fool like Feste

often addresses two audiences, within and without the fiction” (28). “Once More, with Feeling” features Xander actively communicate with both viewers and characters; throughout the series he is an audience surrogate who exists not only in Sunnydale but also somewhere beyond the reach of the other Scoobies. While Xander cannot control what he is singing, a notable difference from Feste’s ability to adapt his music to different situations, this episode connects him to viewers much like Feste connects to a theatrical audience.

[8] Xander’s wit is quick and clever, but he often uses ordinary language, euphemisms and pop culture references – all commonplace forms of humor – instead of the more elaborate wordplay exhibited by other characters, like Buffy. His humor is arguably the most lowbrow of all the Scoobies, yet it is not easily imitated. As Michael Hindle points out in his essay, “‘Jimmy Olsen jokes are pretty much gonna be lost on you’: The Importance of Xander in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” Xander’s use of pop culture is skillful and deliberate, much like Feste’s jests, while other characters, such as Andrew Wells, do not have the same masterful comic timing as Xander:

It would also seem that while all Andrew thinks about is pop culture, Xander uses it as a comic diversion to often point out the ridiculousness of situations. Andrew’s use shows a lack of understanding of the true meaning of a piece of media. Xander understands that kryptonite is a perfectly acceptable reference due to the fact that kryptonite is a metaphor for weakness, something Buffy is experiencing in spades. (Hindle par. 22)

Andrew Wells serves as a natural fool in *Buffy* – he is awkward, clumsy, and his constant pop culture references exemplify the dichotomy between his role as fool and Xander’s. Xander displays a masterful control of language when he references the cultural lexicon, whereas Andrew’s references are akin to a misappropriation of language, one of a natural fool’s signature traits. His interjections are often ill-timed, inappropriate given the severity of a situation, and separate him from the Scooby Gang. Andrew’s home videos of the Scoobies in “Storyteller” (B0716) show him attempting to fill an observational role similar to Xander’s. The episode’s lavish, overly affected introduction to the tale of “Buffy, the slayer of Vampyres” shows Andrew’s lack of self-awareness – the scene is funny only because his fantasy is sincere (“Storyteller”). He admires Xander, calling him “extraordinary” and “the man who is the heart of the Slayer machine,” a far cry from his own relationship to the Scoobies (“Storyteller” B0716). From the time we meet him as part of Warren’s gang in season six, Andrew is seen as someone incapable of individual thought in the way Xander is. He is a follower, not a leader, which, paired with his cowardice, earns him no respect from the Scoobies. These qualities and his proximity to Xander place him in a position similar to that of Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*. Maria describes Aguecheek as a “foolish knight” (1.3.15), and he is more passive than Feste in the torture of Malvolio. Maria also speaks to Sir Toby about Aguecheek’s cowardice, arguing that it is the only reason he is alive:

Maria: He hath indeed, almost natural; for besides that he's a fool, he's a great quareller; and but that he hath the gift of a coward to allay the gust he hath in quarrelling, 'tis thought among the prudent he would quickly have the gift of a grave. (1.3.28-32).

This insulting description echoes Buffy's negative view of Andrew, whom she sees as a coward and traitor. This tension comes to a head during the climax of "Storyteller," where Buffy tricks Andrew into thinking she's going to kill him so he'll cry, as his tears will close the Seal of Danzalthar. Before Andrew begins to pathetically beg for his life, Buffy calls him out for his inability to accept the stark reality of the world they live in: "You make everything into a story so no one's responsible for anything because they're just following a script" ("Storyteller"). Andrew is not capable of artificial foolery in the way Xander is because his inability to read social cues and awkward nature make him someone to laugh at, not with. He projects tropes and narratives lifted from film and television onto the people he interacts with because he cannot comprehend their individual depth and complexity in the same way Xander can.

[9] Nevertheless, Xander's pop culture knowledge is established long before Andrew comes along. For instance, in "The Puppet Show" (B0109), Xander picks up puppet Sid and quips, "Bye-bye now. I'm completely inanimate. Redrum! Redrum!" as Buffy leaves the room. Xander's reference to "redrum," a term from *The Shining* by Stephen King, is used to mock Buffy's concern that Sid is in fact possessed. The reference allows Xander to approach Sid without fear because he sees the idea of a possessed toy as a trope that only exists in the fictional worlds of horror movies, and by taking away its power in his "reality" it is no longer a threat to him.

[10] Xander also employs pop culture references in the pep talk he gives to Buffy during "The Freshman" (B0401):

Xander: Buffy, this is all about fear. It's understandable, but you can't let it control you. 'Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to anger.' No wait, hold on. 'Fear leads to hate. Hate leads to the dark side.' Hold on, no, umm, 'First you get the women, then you get the money, then you...' okay, can we forget that? ("The Freshman" B0401).

Here, Xander combines a quote by Yoda in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* with one from *Scarface*. Though he misquotes Yoda's lines and doesn't finish the *Scarface* quote, his meaning is understood – what initially was meant to be an inspirational pep talk full of sage advice instead becomes a joke to lighten the mood. Just as Xander's "redrum" joke allowed him

dismiss any fears related to Sid, the references in “The Freshman” give him a way to start a meaningful conversation with Buffy about her emotional state. Xander’s use of pop culture for comic effect draws on knowledge that the audience shares with the characters on *Buffy*. The humor is plebian and keeps the action grounded in the audience’s reality. In the *Buffy* universe, vampires and demons exist, but so do *Star Wars* and *Scarface*.

[11] While it may appear that these references are a purely modern phenomenon, there is some precedent for them in Shakespeare’s text. Modern mass media did not exist in the seventeenth century, but Feste plays with common phrases and, perhaps most notably, parodies a ballad by Robert Adler with Sir Toby, as noted in the 1994 Oxford edition of the play (II.iii.95-105). When Sir Toby begins to sing a ballad in response to Malvolio saying Olivia is displeased with his behavior, Feste replies with darkly funny lines about Sir Toby’s mortality. In many ways this is a contemporary equivalent of what Xander accomplishes with his pop culture jokes, making a story about upper-class aristocrats accessible for Shakespeare’s audiences.

[12] Despite the fact that Xander makes frequent use of more plebian forms of humor, there are many times when he speaks with surprising eloquence throughout the show, demonstrating his intelligence. For example, in “Innocence” (B0214), Xander quickly crafts a plan in order to gain access to an armory, and explains how he was able to move so swiftly to Cordelia:

Xander: Remember Halloween, I got turned into a soldier?

Cordelia: Yeah.

Xander: Well, I still remember all of it. I know procedure, ordnance, access codes, everything. I know the whole layout for this base, and I’m pretty sure I can put together an M-16 in 57 seconds. (“Innocence” B0214).

While he doesn’t regularly display his military knowledge, this is only one of several times throughout the series that Xander uses it to help the group. His intellectual capacity is hidden under his disguise as the funnyman, only revealing itself at crucial, serious moments. Xander’s performance as an ordinary civilian is convincing – it allows him to step back and observe the Scoobies without suspicion, as he is not usually involved with the strategic planning of battles.

[13] This level of intelligence is necessary for Xander to be seen, like Feste, as a “corrupter of words” (III.i.34-35). Earlier in the scene, Feste exhibits his linguistic prowess during an exchange with Viola:

Feste: You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but

a chev'rel glove to a good wit, how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward.

Viola: Nay, that's certain. They that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.

Feste: I would therefore my sister had had no name sir.

Viola: Why, man?

Feste: Why sir, her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But indeed, words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them. (III.i.11-20).

In this conversation, Feste demonstrates his ability to manipulate meaning like “a chev'rel glove,” changing the meaning “wanton” in context from ambiguous to sexually promiscuous for comic effect. In “The Zeppo” (B0313), Xander's ability to twist words for humorous effect is seen again. Early in the episode, he rents a vintage car from his uncle, a move which prompts Buffy to ask, “Is this a penis metaphor?” Soon after the exchange, a woman approaches Xander to ask how the car handles, to which he replies, “Like a dream about warm, sticky things.” Picking up the metaphor in an obvious way demonstrates Xander's quick – if often boyish – wit. Later in the episode, when Faith tells Xander to take off his pants and relax before they have sex, he says, “Those two concepts are antithetical” (B0313 “The Zeppo”). Rhonda Wilcox writes about this moment in “Laughter: For Those of Us in the Audience Who Are Me,” stating that “Xander's crafted, intellectually well-formed phrase...is itself antithetical to the simple sex Faith is offering” (Wilcox 141). Xander's ability to respond swiftly and cleverly, even in situations that are unusual for him, is a hallmark of his personality. He can diffuse tension with a joke, and that talent is central to how the audience views him – his power comes from laughter, not magic.

[14] Both Xander and Feste have dark sides, and while they don't overshadow their ability to make people laugh, they add layers of complexity to each character. In Season Seven, Xander's role is more explicitly acknowledged in “Potential” (B0712):

Xander: They'll never know how tough it is, Dawnie, to be the one who isn't chosen. To live so near to the spotlight and never step in it. But I know. I see more than anybody realizes because nobody's watching me. (“Potential” B0712)

Xander reveals the loneliness hidden behind his guise as fool, and the insecurity that comes with it. Xander sees everything, but it is a world in which he cannot fully participate. He is not the

hero of the story, but he can never rest. Viola's description of Feste as a keen haggard aptly describes the way Xander functions, and adds depth and power to his role. Similarly, Feste is left alone to deliver the epilogue of *Twelfth Night* after the lovers meet, singing a song that may or may not be a reflection of his life. The song ends with verses that show Feste acknowledging the audience in a more direct way than Xander does in "Once More With Feeling."

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day (V.i.398).

Since the lovers have gone off to their happily-ever-after, Feste is no longer able to play fool for them. He cannot hold a mirror up to them any longer, and now he must reflect on life in general, for better or worse. Feste concedes to the audience that the story they've just watched is "all one," that none of it matters now because the play is over. The acknowledgement of the audience in the epilogue is a common Shakespearean convention, but here it also further demonstrates Feste's connection to the audience. Feste's role as fool means he must stay vigilant until the end of the play, when he watches the audience watching him. Even in group settings, observing others requires a degree of isolation, a trait present in Feste and Xander that is evidence of their foolery's artifice. They are capable of exhibiting genuine emotion, and there is depth to them beyond their roles as comic relief. Their self-awareness allows them to use humor as a shield, something that disguises the vulnerability that comes with being ordinary.

[15] Xander and Feste are also constant reminders of mortality to the other characters in their respective worlds, albeit in different ways. Xander is the most vulnerable Scooby, and is often kept "fray-adjacent" so he is not harmed ("The Zeppo" B0313). However, he is subject to one of the most sickening acts of violence in the entire series when his eye is gouged out by Caleb in "Dirty Girls" (B0718). Right before gouging Xander's eye out, Caleb remarks, "Why you're the one who sees everything, aren't you? Let's see what we can't do about that," which adds poetic sting to the injury ("Dirty Girls" B0718). Xander's partial blinding is tragic because it marks a major defeat for Buffy – she has failed to protect Xander, a friend and confidante. Their symbiotic relationship, with Buffy offering Xander physical protection in exchange for his mirth and insight, has failed. Unlike injuries suffered by the other Scoobies, Xander's blinding is permanent, and no magic will heal it. Feste ends "O Mistress Mine" with "Youth's a stuff will not endure," commenting on the fleeting nature of youthful vigor (II.iii.50). The song emphasizes the need for the lovers to act now because they won't be young forever, and that same sense of urgency is present throughout *Buffy*, as there is no guarantee that these characters will live to see another day.

[16] Additional evidence of the similar roles played by Feste and Xander can be found in Feste's song in Act 4, Scene 2, during the torture of Malvolio. The other characters try to

convince Malvolio he has gone mad and is possessed, and Feste actively participates in the game. To end the scene and mark his exit, he sings:

I am gone sir,
 And anon, sir,
 I'll be with you again,
 In a trice,
 Like to the old Vice,
 Your need to sustain,
 Who with dagger of lath
 In his rage and his wrath
 Cries 'Aha' to the devil,
 Like a mad lad,
 'Pare thy nails, dad,'
 Adieu, goodman devil (IV.ii.121-131).

While in context the song refers to Feste's performance as Sir Topaz and Malvolio's hellish mental state, the characters in *Buffy* experience similar emotional turmoil, and the presence of an actual Hellmouth adds depth to the connection between fools and the supernatural. Xander does not share the malice that sometimes marks Feste's humor, but he is loyal to Buffy, who fights demons with a "dagger of lath," or wood. The oxymoronic "goodman devil" at the end shows that humor is present even when fighting otherworldly evil. In "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (B0101), Xander is the first one – besides Giles, who already knows because of his role as Watcher – to discover that Buffy is the Slayer and he picks up her stake after she drops her books, later handing it back to her with the skeptical remark, "I only know that you *think* that you're the Slayer" ("Welcome" B0101). While initially doubtful, Xander accepts the supernatural as a part of his life and agrees to fight alongside Buffy. Bell notes, "Feste's pretense that he is exorcising the 'hyperbolic fiend' or 'dishonest Sathan' (IV.ii.25, IV.ii.31) who inhabits the mad Malvolio reminds us that foolery is associated with ungodly spirits and destructive forces" (27). Both fools and the supernatural are known for causing mischief and disrupting the social order. While the demons Feste claims to exorcise are imaginary, Xander's are real, and the link between foolery and the paranormal is even more evident for him. In order to make sense of things that he cannot explain, Xander jokes his way through encounters with vampires, demons, and spirits. In "Buffy vs. Dracula" (B0501), before learning of Dracula's identity, Xander quips, "Where'd you get that accent, Sesame Street? Vun, two, three, three victims!" The statement is bold even when it's not addressed to the most famous vampire of all time – here, Xander mocks a predator who could easily kill him, emboldened by Buffy's protection.

[17] Xander's role in the Scooby Gang does not arise out of the mystical traditions which support characters like Buffy and Willow, but instead is derived from his humanity. His ability to view situations through mortal, human eyes gives him a perspective unlike anyone else on *Buffy*. In "Grave" (B0622), Xander is the only one able to reach Willow as she lashes out in destructive grief and ultimately, this allows him to save the world:

Xander: I'm not joking. I know you're in pain. I can't imagine the pain you're in. And I know you're about to do something apocalyptically evil and stupid and hey, still want to hang. You're Willow.

Willow: Don't call me that!

Xander: The first day of kindergarten you cried 'cause you broke the yellow crayon and you were too afraid to tell anyone. You've come pretty far, ending the world, not a terrific notion... but the thing is, yeah. I love you. I love crayon-breaky Willow and I love scary veiny Willow. So if I'm going out, it's here. If you wanna kill the world, well then start with me. I've earned that.

Willow: You think I won't?

Xander: It doesn't matter. I'll still love you. ("Grave" B0622).

Xander doesn't tell the anecdote about "crayon-breaky Willow" because he wants to joke around, but because he wants to remind Willow of her humanity. Xander functions as a seer here – he can look past the darkness Willow is projecting outwards to see his vulnerable, heartbroken best friend. Reminding her of such an innocent story about the person she used to be is a testament to how well Xander and Willow know each other and how long they've been major parts of each other's lives. Unlike all the other Scoobies, Xander does not try to fight Willow. He is honest with her and reminds her of the real cost of her actions – if Willow really wants to "kill the world," she must kill Xander, which would mean killing off a very large, very human part of her world. Xander's role in "Grave" resembles his confrontation with Jack in "The Zeppo," since both require him to face the most human of all fears: death. However, the stakes are raised in this situation because this Big Bad is not a forgettable face, it is Willow Rosenberg, Xander's best friend. Xander shows tremendous bravery in his willingness to sacrifice himself and in his selfless love for Willow. His victories are won with his loyal heart and agile tongue rather than superpowers.

[18] "Grave" shows Xander diverging from the Shakespearean tradition, as he is placed in a position of power that Shakespeare's fools are not. Xander's saving Willow from herself is one of the most important moments in the series, providing a cathartic end to the dark sixth

season. The fool's becoming the ultimate the hero subverts expectations in the same way that Buffy's role as the little blonde girl chasing monsters does. *Buffy* is a television show that questions the normal order, so it makes sense that its source of comic relief is also able to wield tremendous power and save the world. *Buffy* empowers a variety of disenfranchised individuals: the nerds, the queers, and the socially awkward, and it creates opportunities for its artificial fool in ways Shakespeare does not. Xander is allowed to be a dynamic figure known as much for his courage as he is for his jests. He sees things that no one else can, including the audience, simultaneously existing within and outside the tradition of the artificial fool.

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