

Lisa K. Perdigao

**“I hear it’s best to play along”: The
Poststructuralist Turn in *Buffy the
Vampire Slayer***

Slayage
The Journal
of the Whedon Studies Association

8.4 [32]

[1] Throughout its seven seasons, Joss Whedon’s television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been a veritable playground for critics studying popular culture, narratology, feminist theories, queer theory, and poststructuralist theories. Season Five is a productive site for analysis as it presents a crisis within the series on the level of plot: the end of the season presents Buffy’s death and burial while containing the promise of the series’ resuscitation on a new network. Beyond the narratological crisis introduced by this “sense of an ending,”¹ a linguistic crisis emerges in seasons five and six. The result of this crisis is that the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* of seasons five and six becomes a primer in poststructuralist theories as it questions ideas about the relationship between language and identity, particularly in the realm of performative language. Critical studies of the series have focused on how language performs within the Buffyverse, as evidenced by Michael Adams’ full-length study, Paul Attinello, Janet K. Halfyard, and Vanessa Knights’ edited collection, and essays by Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto, Alice Jenkins and Susan Stuart, and Rhonda Wilcox that study the uses of language in the Buffyverse as well as the function of silence in Season Four’s episode “Hush” (4.10). While Season Six’s musical episode “Once More, with Feeling” (6.7) is read by many critics as illustrating a type of crisis in language that leads the characters to song, I locate the linguistic crisis in the series as occurring in the space between seasons five and six as evidenced by the introduction, maintenance, and destruction of the Buffybot.

[2] Surprisingly, the Buffybot has not received much critical attention although it is a key to unlocking the complicated matrix of language, identity, and meaning in seasons five and six. Bronwen Calvert makes a case for how the Buffybot performs as Baudrillard’s simulacrum and reflects the construction of Buffy’s identity. Calvert writes, “Quite soon after her resurrection, she comes to recognise her own ‘programming’ and the extent to which she is ‘going through the motions’ of her own life—her recognition, in fact, of the performance of slaying (“Once More with Feeling”)” (par. 20). When glitches appear in the Buffybot’s programming and she fails to perform like the “really real” Buffy,² the bot highlights the significance of the Slayer’s role and language. The bot’s introduction in the series is linked to events that challenge the order of the Buffyverse: the death of Joyce Summers, Buffy’s mother; the introduction of Dawn, Buffy’s sister; and the introduction of Glory as the “Big Bad.” While the season hinges on Buffy’s absence and introduces a surrogate-Buffy in the bot, the narratological device in Season Five is exposure—of Joyce’s body, Dawn’s identity as the Key, and Glory’s alter-ego as Ben. A closer examination of Season Five leads to another type of exposure, the presence of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. Although they are less visible than the Gentlemen in “Hush” (4.10) the two theorists serve a similar function: tracing their presence suggests what happens to the language of the inhabitants of Sunnydale.

[3] In “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida’s deconstructionist manifesto, the critic frames the theoretical framework in relation to an “event” that is both a “rupture” and “redoubling” in structuralist thought (89). Before this “rupture,” according to Derrida, “the concept of structure” “must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations at the center”

(90). After this rupture, "it was necessary to being thinking that there was no center" and, in that absence, "everything became discourse," extending "the domain and the play of signification indefinitely" (91). While deconstruction itself becomes a decentered discourse, Derrida's terms cue a visual representation in Season Five of *BtVS*. Dawn, Glory, and the plot of Season Five are born from a place between Derrida and Lacan. Season Five introduces Dawn as the Key that can lead to the rupture between dimensions, and, in many ways, her introduction in the Buffyverse restructures relations. Once the Key, now an angsty teenage girl, Dawn challenges the characters' as well as the viewers' sense of the Buffyverse. While the Key represents rupture, or the possibility of rupture, Buffy's plunge into the abyss, her "gift" at the end of Season Five, is another kind of rupture that, while maintaining the verse and securing the veil between dimensions, leads to a narratological crisis with the threat of the death of the series.

[4] Yet, in the space of Buffy's absence, redoubling is the key (no, not that Key) and the Buffybot plays the part. The gap or lack that the Buffybot attempts to fill is not only applicable to its new role in Season Six with Buffy's "real" (though short-term) absence but also to its first introduction in Season Five. As Buffy struggles with her mother's death, the threat of the Real,³ she is, in Lacanian terms, thrust back into the Imaginary, a place before language. According to Lacan, the child enters the Symbolic, the world of language, through the Mirror Stage. Lacan describes the Mirror Stage as a drama, a fiction, in which the subject goes from "insufficiency to anticipation" and forms a "succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" and ends with the "assumption of the armour of an alienating identity" (4). Severed from the mother, Buffy reenters a type of mirror stage; we see this literally in the series when she encounters the Buffybot, her image. Kelly Kromer writes that in "Hush" (4.10), "Lacan's realm of the Real takes over" (par. 9) and, while the Gentlemen are located in the Real and representative of it, Buffy "can be viewed as a personification of the Symbolic order" (par. 10). According to Kromer, that order is restored by the episode's end. Yet in Season Five, a new Lacanian twist occurs that threatens relationships within the Buffyverse beyond the presence of the Gentlemen.

[5] The plot of Season Five re-introduces the threat of the Real and a pervasive loss —of language and meaning in the Buffyverse. While Dawn can be read as a model for Derrida's rupture, its catalyst is Glory. Glory, the Big Bad of Season Five, is, as Tara says, "something else altogether." After Tara explains to Giles that Glory might be "so old" that she "pre-dates the written word," Giles asks, "Pre-dates language itself?" ("Shadow," 5.8). As the Real, for Lacan, is something beyond language, or, perhaps more precisely, before language, both Dawn and Glory appear to be refugees from the Real, materialized forms that are given new names. They occupy the Symbolic but, as the catalysts to Buffy's leap into the abyss, offer Buffy's and the series' return to the Real, a place of unintelligibility and disarticulation. The Buffybot performs the function of continuing the discourse in the Buffyverse while leading Buffy back through the Mirror Stage to sustain the Symbolic Order. The freeplay of signification that re-stabilizes the verse by recreating slayer slang and style springs from the disruption of the events of Season Five and the introduction of the bot.

[6] Throughout most of its first four seasons, language in the Buffyverse generated certain patterns and meanings. In studies of slayer slang, Buffy is most often identified as the source of linguistic play. She is the character who most often turns language by exchanging proper nouns for adjectives and, in her pop-culturally aware lexicon, creates Buffyspeak.⁴ While the other characters, particularly the Scoobies, construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct Buffy's language, slayer slang is distinctly rooted in Buffy's discourse and performance of speech acts.⁵ Overbey and Preston-Matto describe how playing with language is "tied to Slayage," as they quote Willow saying that the Slayer *always* "says a pun or a witty play on words" (75). Buffy's distinctive play with language is experimented with in episodes that challenge Buffy's place within the verse and narrative itself. For example, "The Wish" (3.9) experiments with a Buffy-less Sunnydale, even, with Cordelia's lines at the end of the episode, a Buffyless world if Buffy were never born. In that

alternate Sunnydale, the Master kills Buffy before the restoration of reality. At the end of Season One, in "Prophecy Girl" (1.12), Buffy's death leads to the introduction of another Slayer, Kendra and, later, Faith. Although alternate Slayers perform slayage in literal acts, they are unable to replicate Buffy's style; as a result, slayage becomes fractured.⁶ The gaps that appear when others attempt to create, recreate, and sustain Buffy's language in her absence become a postmodern source of play for the series and reveal the inextricability of slayer slang and style from the performance of the Buffyverse.

[7] While earlier episodes introduce the problem of replicating and sustaining slayer slang and style, Season Five highlights a crisis in language and representation for the series. As critics have noted, *a* if not *the* crisis in Season Five can be traced to the death of Joyce Summers. After seeing her mother's dead body, Buffy becomes mute, almost catatonic.⁷ As "The Body" (5.16) emphasizes Buffy's inability to speak, to find a language to represent loss, it is analogous to Buffy's struggle with language throughout seasons five and six. After Buffy struggles with the loss of her mother in Season Five, dies, and is reanimated in Season Six, the plot hinges on the reconstruction of her identity, the verse, and slayer slang. The series begins to experiment with how Buffy functions within the narrative, through not only her appearance in Sunnydale but through her performance as Slayer in linguistic terms. While the series is defined, at least in part, by its play with language, it is almost ironic that the introduction of death into the narrative leads to a loss of that play. It is, after all, a series about a Slayer who dusts vampires and kills demons. Yet it is not merely the introduction of the deaths of humans—"real" deaths—that changes the verse. As Wilcox notes, "*Buffy* engages in another major realistic confrontation with death in Season Three, in the arc in which Faith, the second Slayer, accidentally kills a human being" (187) yet the death is used to a different end: "The third-season arc deals with the death of the Other, while Season Five deals with the death of the mother and thus, metonymically, the self" (187).⁸ Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen write,

Death is thus necessarily constructed by a culture; it grounds the many ways a culture stabilizes and represents itself, and yet it always does so as a signifier with an incessantly receding, ungraspable signified, always pointing to other signifiers, other means of representing what is finally just absent. (4)

As death is made present in "The Body," and the body's materialized presence resists representation, Buffy, and the series encounters the Real in a different form. The spectacle of Joyce's body leads to a loss of control over language.

[8] Faced with her mother's death and then returning from her own, Buffy reconsiders her function as Slayer. In the process, she works away from the playfulness of slayer slang to focus on the literality of the physical acts, divorcing herself from the linguistic possibilities of slayage. During her absence, the Buffybot becomes an object for Spike and the audience to play with Buffy's identity as its performances range from comical to convincing. While the doubling at play with the bot reminds us of the displacements and replacements of Buffy made throughout the series, it goes further to function as a type of metacommentary on how language functions within the series. The appearance of the Buffybot underscores how the Buffyverse is dependent upon figurative play; without it, the plot, like the bot, stalls out.

[9] While the Buffybot had been introduced as merely a source of Spike's play and reflection of his desire for Buffy, a replacement of the inanimate Buffy "doll," the bot becomes central to the plots of seasons five and six as it almost fills the gap left by the absent Slayer. The introduction of the bot threatens the order of the Buffyverse that centers on Buffy's role as Slayer. As a creation for Spike,⁹ the Buffybot's language is directed at pleasing him. The bot is animated with a "little walk" and a "little talk," but its language is a poor imitation not only of Buffy's language but also the language of romance novels. Its first lines are "I wanna hurt you, but I can't resist the sinister attraction of your cold and muscular body" and "I want you to bite me and devour me until there's no more" ("Intervention," 5.18). Yet, despite the awkwardness of its clichéd language, the bot represents Buffy to Spike who wants it to become "really real." When the bot asks if it

should start the program over, Spike responds, "Shh! No programs. Don't use that word. Just be Buffy" ("Intervention"). Although the play with the bot begins innocently enough with Spike's idea, when it is reprogrammed and used to new ends, in new plots, it restructures both language and identities within the Buffyverse.

[10] By playing with absent presences and decentering centers, Season Five offers an exercise in deconstruction. Derrida, in a familiar deconstructive turn, writes:

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. (102)

The Buffyverse is structured, or unstructured, by such relations. Derrida's statement that "the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality" (90) suggests Buffy's role and position. At the center of the Buffyverse, Buffy and her language are the source of linguistic play, the freeplay of signification in her slaying (as speech act and action). When Buffy is absent and later "really" gone (at least for the summer between seasons five and six), the bot fails to perform as an adequate substitution.

[11] Failing to "just be Buffy," the Buffybot illustrates the gap between signifier and signified and parallels Buffy's struggles with her language. In "Intervention" (5.18), Buffy is absent for most of the episode; she is mourning the loss of her mother and has left Sunnydale to embark on a quest. At the beginning of the episode, Buffy says that she desires to leave Sunnydale not only because of her grief but also because of her fear of a loss of meaning. While "The Body" (5.16) depicts a mute and almost catatonic Buffy, her struggle with language continues in this episode as she attempts to deal with the loss of her mother. After questioning if she can say the word love, if she can find a language to connect with others, Buffy turns to the past, to the First Slayer who is beyond slayer slang. At the end of Season Four, in the episode "Restless" (4.22), Buffy is able to survive the threat of the First Slayer as a result of her glib language. In "Restless," Buffy tells the First Slayer,

I am not alone. I walk. I talk. I shop. I sneeze. I'm gonna be a fireman when the floods roll back. There's trees in the desert since you moved out. And I don't sleep on a bed of bones. . . . Are you quite finished? You're really gonna have to get over the whole primal power thing. You're not the source of me. Also, in terms of hair care, you really wanna say, what kind of impression am I making in the workplace? 'Cause . . .

Buffy survives the threat of the First Slayer by a series of linguistic acts.¹⁰ According to Overbey and Preston-Matto, in contrast to the First Slayer, "Buffy is able to survive longer than other Slayers because she is embedded in language and because she embodies language" (83). When the First Slayer is attacking her, Buffy tells her that she is waking up, that she is not the "source" of the Slayer, and, we can infer, of language. Buffy is able to survive while the Scoobies and even Giles had been (albeit temporarily) destroyed by that primal power. Yet, when faced with the loss of her mother, and the thought that she is losing her humanity, Buffy returns to the First Slayer to find meaning beyond simple words like "love."

[12] In Buffy's absence, the Scoobies discover the Buffybot and mistake it for the "really real" Buffy, despite its poor imitations of Buffy's language and appearance. The Buffybot has been programmed with signifiers of the real Buffy, as its files contain information on "Slaying" as well as the characteristics of those in the Buffyverse. While Xander is identified as "friend, carpenter, dates Anya," Anya is associated with the terms "dates Xander," "likes money," and "ex-demon" ("Intervention"). Yet the bot's program also marks it as an object, as a source of Spike's play, as its files under the category

"Make Spike Happy" are "kissing01," "kissing02," "positions" 1-5 and "More." When the bot greets the two, it asks, "How is your money? . . . Isn't it a beautiful night for killing evil things?" in awkward, forced language. When Xander asks the bot about Buffy's vision quest, the bot replies, very formally, "I don't understand that question. But thank you for asking." Instead of answering Xander's confusion, the bot tells him, "You're my friend, and a carpenter." Although Xander is perplexed by Buffy's behavior, asking, "Are you all right?" and telling Anya, "I think she's still a little spacy," he never suspects that it is not Buffy. He only concludes that something is wrong because "she never asked about Dawn." Because she "fought okay," and performed like Buffy, Xander and Anya fail to recognize that a substitution has occurred. Although the bot's language is off (the bot is too literal, as seen in the comment "How is your money?" that makes the extremely literal and formal Anya laugh), the other characters are duped by the double. In contrast, the viewers recognize the irony in the situation, as they have seen the initial substitution and have heard Warren's claim that the bot is "better than the real thing" and Spike's response that "she'll do" ("Intervention"). The irony is that the audience is clued into the realization and catches the failed speech transactions, the gaps.

[13] The Buffybot's performance as Buffy, although extremely awkward and, for the viewers, amusing, is accepted by the Scoobies. When Willow encounters the bot, she asks it, "Did Xander find you? He—he was looking for you" ("Intervention"). The bot, identifying Willow as "recently gay," focuses on Spike and ignores Willow's question. Willow, concerned for her friend, asks it, "Buffy, this thing with Spike, i-i-it isn't true, is it? You didn't, you know, sleep with Spike?" The bot, rejecting the colloquialism, replies, "I had sex with Spike. I'm sorry if it bothers you. You're my best friend." Willow responds to the bot as if it were the "really real Buffy," telling the bot that it "always will be" her best friend and theorizing why this has occurred. Suggesting that, because of her mom "and everything," Buffy might be feeling "weak," Willow concludes that Buffy is not herself and is instead "kinda crazy." Yet again the bot rejects Willow's suggestions, saying, "It wasn't one time. It was lots of times. And lots of different ways. I could make sketches." This moment demonstrates the gap between Willow and the bot, and Willow's attempts to fill in the gaps left by the bot's clipped comments. Willow acknowledges that "Okay, yeah, you've been with a vampire before, but Angel had a soul" but, again, the bot, reflecting Spike's programming, says, "Angel's lame. His hair grows straight up, and he's bloody stupid." In this scene, Buffyspeak becomes nonsensical in that it runs counter to all of the associations of the Buffyverse. Buffy's love for Angel has been a consistent center for the series; in one quick phrase, the bot negates it. And Willow fails to read the bot as the "other Buffy," even when it reflects not only Spike's program but also his dialect, "bloody stupid."

[14] The Scoobies, struggling with Buffy's absence and facing the substitution, work to fill the gaps left by the "really real" slayer. When the Buffybot asks the others, "Why are you all looking at me?" Xander replies, "Okay, Buff, it's okay, you're right, you shouldn't have to know everything" ("Intervention"). Anya even attempts to recreate slayer slang, telling the bot to change its clothes to better imitate Buffy, to look more "fighty." The bot replies, "I can do that. I'll be right back," asserting that she can imitate the absent Slayer. The Scoobies refuse to admit that the Slayer has disappeared from the verse, as Willow says, "Whatever we do, we're gonna need Buffy's help." Thus, the irony of the title "Intervention" signifies not only that they are going to rescue Buffy and make her a "sane Buffy" but also the realization that the entire Buffyverse is dependent upon these structured relations. As the Buffybot performs (and is accepted) as Buffy, it suggests that mediation is necessary in Buffy's absence.

[15] "Intervention" depicts misreadings and substitutions that recall earlier episodes.¹¹ In "Who Are You?" (4.16), after the body-switch, Faith, now in Buffy's body, attempts to perfect Buffy's speech, saying, "Why, yes, I would be Buffy. May I help you? . . . You can't do that. It's wrong. You can't do that because it's naughty. Because it's wrong. . . . I'll kick your ass. I'm gonna kill you." As she experiments with her volume and tone, Faith, although originally trying to sound like Buffy, ends up sounding more like

Faith with the violent line "I'm gonna kill you." Here, the performance fails and Faith is as transparent in Buffy's body as when she tells Joyce that she's "five by five." When Spike asks Faith/Buffy if she knows why he hates her, Faith/Buffy replies, "'Cause I'm a stuck-up tight-ass with no sense of fun?" Although Faith ridicules Buffy, Spike does not notice the switch and retorts, "Well, yeah, that covers a lot of it." Because the audience has seen the switch take place, it is clued into these staged performances, even the subtle clues that Buffy's mother and friends miss.

[16] Examining such "narrative topological transformations" in the series, Ian Shuttleworth argues that "Gellar succeeds in playing Faith *pretending* to be Buffy, and pretending plausibly enough for those around her not to notice, but with enough discreet signals for the audience to be clear about the imposture; indeed, the body-swap is not even made verbally explicit when it takes place" (212, 213). Shuttleworth links Gellar's performances as Faith and the Buffybot to "imposture," writing that "Gellar can take on board the entire body language of another person, whether as the Buffybot in 'Intervention' or as Faith-in-Buffy's body in 'Who Are You?' (4.16), without veering into gross parody" (230). He distinguishes Buffy/Faith's performance from that of Faith/Buffy, arguing that "Eliza Dushku is almost as impressive as Buffy-in-Faith" (230).

[17] Yet perhaps it is not the actress' command of her character but rather the ways in which Buffy is coded and recoded in the Buffyverse that drive the performances in the body-switch episode. Slayer style, as perpetuated in/by Buffy herself, is so distinctive that the viewers catch the slips in the Faith/Buffy performance, even if the other characters fail to notice them. As Faith's style is less distinctive, it is the Buffy/Faith performance that reasserts Buffy's "real" identity. Even though Buffy/Faith tells Giles that she was "all intuitive" when he turned into a demon and expects him to be the same, it is both Buffy's command of the plot and her Buffyspeak that reassert her identity. When Giles asks Buffy, "How did I turn into a demon?" Buffy replies,

Oh, cause, uh, Ethan Rayne. And—and you have a girlfriend named Olivia, and you haven't had a job since we blew up the school, which is valid lifestyle-wise. I mean, it's not like you're a slacker type, but . . . Oh, oh! When I had psychic power, I heard my mom think that you were like a stevedore during sex. What? Do you want me to continue? ("Who Are You?" 4.16)

Giles acknowledges that she is Buffy, and he even reflects slayer style, saying, "Actually, I beg you to stop."

[18] Barbara Johnson's argument about the function of poetry as being not "some idea and statuesque Concept" but rather "a function of a specific interlocutory situation: an *act of speech*" (142) suggests what is at stake in the identity politics and linguistic play in the Buffyverse. Johnson draws on J. L. Austin's definition of performative utterances, utterances that break from description and become actions (144). Using these terms, Buffy's language can be read as performative, creating slayer slang and reflecting slayer style, whereas the others' language consists of imitation, even parody. According to Johnson:

Thus, if a performative utterance is originally a self-referential speech act, its production is simultaneously the production of a new referent into the world. This, however, is tantamount to a radical transformation of the notion of a referent, since, instead of pointing to an external object, language would then refer only to its own referring to itself in the act of referring, and the signifying loop would end in an infinitely self-duplicating loop. The performative utterance is thus the *mise en abyme* of reference itself. (147)

In contrast to Buffy's playful language, Faith/Buffy relies on the literal, the conventionality of language, saying, "I'm gonna kill you" and telling Spike that Buffy is a "stuck-up tight-ass with no sense of fun" ("Who Are You?" 4.16). Her language, in contrast to Buffy's, is not playful, even as she is playing at being Buffy. In contrast, Buffy's language is constituted by self-referential speech acts and marks the "production" of "new referent[s]"

into the world" through slayer slang as discourse (147). Buffy's language, which refers to its "own referring to itself in the act of referring" (147), can be read as a signifying loop, yet, ultimately, since Buffy is positioned at the center of such a looping (and loopy?) discourse, her absence from the Buffyverse causes the language to spin out of control—into nonsensical repeated lines and failed signification.¹² As Buffy can only be "five by five" when she is possessed by Faith, Faith fails to perpetuate slayer slang because she lacks the Slayer's style.

[19] Although Faith claims, in "Enemies" (3.17), "What can I say? I'm the world's best actor" and Angel replies "Second best," referring to his own performance, Buffy (or, as Shuttleworth argues, Gellar) is the "best actor"; Buffy is misidentified when she switches bodies with Faith and later when she performs as the Buffybot. In these instances, Johnson's (and Austin's) notion of performative language is intricately rooted in the body. Even though most of the characters (for example, Willow, Xander, Riley, and Giles) fail to recognize that a body-switch has occurred, through an awareness of metaphysical energy, Tara is able to distinguish that Buffy is not "really Buffy" (although she has never met her until that moment) because "a person's energy has a flow, a unity" and Buffy's was "fragmented" ("Who Are You?" 4.16). Extending Tara's description of Faith/Buffy could easily lead to the conclusion that slayer style is unified and must be stabilized. And it is not only Faith/Buffy's energy, for Tara, that marks her as "other" but her crude references to Tara, an un-Buffyspeak that even Tara recognizes (perhaps through Willow's representation of it). And even though Spike failed to detect the body-switch with Faith, in "Intervention," he recognizes, through Buffy's touch, that a substitution has been made. While he had been duped by Buffy's performance as the bot (as even the viewers are at that moment), Spike recognizes the "real" Buffy in the act.

[20] Similar to "Who Are You?" (4.16) when Buffy must reaffirm her identity to Giles in "Intervention," Buffy finally returns from the quest to affirm her "real" identity and stabilize the Buffyverse. The first concern of the "real" Buffy is Dawn, as Buffy almost immediately asks, "What's wrong? Is Dawn okay?" Although this question should placate Xander, he tells Buffy that "The way you're acting, the things you're doing—" are "wrong." When Willow tells Xander and Anya that it shouldn't be about "blame," Buffy, in her trademark style, asks, "Blame? There's blame now?" When the Scoobies mention Buffy's intimacy with Spike, Buffy replies, "The . . . who whating how with huh?," demonstrating a breakdown in language yet assertion of meaning in the turning of the term "whating." While the bot's language is literal and nonsensical, Buffy's turning of phrases generates meaning in its play. While the characters had attempted to animate the bot, their discourse with Buffy is almost naturally playful. Buffy's retort, "I am not having sex with Spike!" is met by Anya's response "Anger." When Xander attempts to excuse Buffy's behavior, saying that "Spike is strong and mysterious and sort of compact but well-muscled," Buffy informs him, "I am not having sex with Spike! But I'm starting to think that you might be." Although Buffy's conversation with the Scoobies demonstrates what had been missing in their conversations with the bot—a type of call and response, a matching of style with style—it is not until the bot literally appears in the conversation that the characters start to realize what had happened. After hearing Xander refer to Buffy "straddling" Spike, the bot replies, "Spike's mine. Who's straddling Spike?" Buffy, seeing the substitution, says, "Oh my god!" and Xander retorts, "And so say all of us." But it is the bot that, in its imitation of Xander's language, acknowledges the substitution, saying, "Say, look at you. You look just like me! We're very pretty."

[21] While Willow exclaims, "Two of them!" and Xander concludes, "Hey, I know this! They're both Buffy!" it is only the "really real Buffy" who is able to deduce what had happened ("Intervention"). Buffy informs them, "No, she's a robot. She acts just like that girlfriend-bot that Warren guy made. You guys couldn't tell me apart from a robot?" Buffy, able to decipher the double's presence, recognizes the artificiality of the substitution by not only its appearance but also by its language, as it is after the bot speaks directly to Buffy that Buffy identifies it. She "acts just like" the robot while she looks just like Buffy. When the bot tells Buffy, "Oh, I don't think I'm a robot," Anya is still convinced by the

substitution (and language), concluding that "She's very well done." Xander's comment that "Hey, I know this! They're both Buffy!" makes sense in the Buffyverse, as he had been doubled in Season Five ("The Replacement" 5.3). Yet, more importantly, the stabilizing force in the destabilizing verse is the characters' language. While the first apocalypse threatens the continuity of the series and the world itself, the characters effortlessly discuss their plans for the weekend, encouraging Giles's line that "the Earth is doomed" ("The Harvest" 1.2). By focusing on the physicality of the bot, its performance in terms of fighting "like Buffy," the Scoobies fail to acknowledge the significance of language in the Buffyverse, a problem that is reintroduced after Buffy dies and they reprogram the bot to perform as the Slayer.

[22] In "Intervention," the substitution of Buffy with the bot demonstrates the problems of imitating slayer style. Even when Giles, Buffy's trainer, affirms that the bot is "quite extraordinary really" (in response to Buffy's statement that "It's all we got"), the bot rejects the comparison, saying, "Thank you. But I really think we should be listening to the other Buffy, Giles. She's very smart and she's gonna help us save Spike." Even in its misidentification of its Watcher (as it mispronounces his name), Giles asserts its ability to perform like Buffy. While Giles is upset that Spike failed to program the bot "properly," Buffy recognizes the bot's artificiality, dubbing it "skirt girl." But then Buffy imitates the bot, mispronouncing Giles's name. As Buffy struggles with her relationship to the bot, she struggles with her language, telling Giles, "you can watch . . . it."

[23] While both Faith and the Buffybot fail to perform like Buffy, Buffy is able to imitate the bot in Season Five. In the earlier episode "I Was Made to Love You" (5.15), Buffy sits on the swings with the dying April, the girlfriend-bot and, in effect, enters the bot's discourse.¹³ When April says, "Maybe this is a girlfriend test. If I wait here patiently this time, he'll come back," Buffy responds, in fragmented and clipped phrases, "I'm sure he will. And he'll . . . he'll tell you how sorry he is. You know, he told me . . . how proud he was of you and . . . how impressed he was with how much you loved him and how you tried to help him. He didn't mean to hurt you." April tells Buffy that "When things are sad . . . you just have to be patient. Because . . . because every . . . cloud has a silver lining. And . . . when life . . . gives you lemons . . . make . . . lemonade." Buffy, listening to and learning the bot's language, replies, "Clouds and lemonade, huh?" Buffy's imitation of botspeak in "Intervention" reflects her mastery of April's language. Throughout the episode, the "really real" Buffy maintains control over language in the verse.

[24] Buffy's imitation of the bot in this moment foreshadows the episode's end, when the bot returns to Spike. In perfect botspeak, it asks Spike, "Do you wanna ravage me now?" ("Intervention"). When the conversation turns to Glory and the identity of the Key, Spike tells the bot that they can never reveal it to Glory. Referring to "the other, not so pleasant Buffy," Spike tells the bot that the real Buffy needs to be protected. After the bot kisses him, Spike starts to kiss it back, but then stops and asks, "And my robot?" The "really real Buffy" replies, "The robot is gone. The robot was gross and obscene." Describing it as a "thing" that "wasn't even real," Buffy severs her connection to it. And yet it is Buffy's abandonment of her own slayer style and imitation of the bot's language that facilitates the return of the "real." Buffy describes Spike's actions as real only after he accepts her performance as the bot. And Buffy so successfully impersonates the bot that it takes a non-speech act to reveal her real identity. While the Scoobies are unable to recognize the bot as an imitation, and work to fill in the gaps left by the bot's discourse, Spike recognizes that a substitution had been made. Yet because he can only identify Buffy's performance through a non-speech act, in this scene, the real Buffy is revealed as the "world's best actor" in her play with language.

[25] While "Intervention" marks Buffy's return to the subject position of slayer and control over language, "The Gift" (5.22) demonstrates a key moment in Buffy's play with these relations. Struggling to save Dawn, Buffy emerges to fight Glory, telling her to "Come and get it" ("The Gift," 5.22). She is not afraid of Glory; instead, Buffy demonstrates her play with language in the midst of slayage, the connection between the physicality of fighting and the figurative nature of reconstructing language. Buffy seems to

have control over the situation with the demi-god, telling Glory, "You don't seem very well" and then "I noticed you're talking, whereas in your position, I would attack me." When Glory wonders at Buffy's power, saying, "The witch," Buffy replies that "It's not her" and that it "might be this," producing the Dagon sphere. As Buffy persistently attacks Glory, the minions launch a defense, saying, "This will be our day of Glory!" When one of Glory's henchmen replies, "Well punned," it could be inferred that he is directing his comment at Buffy as well, as her verbal sparring complements her physical attack on Glory. While Buffy dominates the fight, Glory does regain control over the situation, and Buffy. And after she kicks the Slayer, Buffy is dismembered. Glory's comment that "Hey, wow, the Slayer's a robot" and question "Did everybody else know the Slayer was a robot?" metafictionally represent the viewers' position as well.

[26] Until Glory dismembers the Buffybot, the bot's performance had been undistinguishable from the Slayer's own routines. Calvert writes, "Willow's reprogramming appears to lend conviction to the Buffybot's impersonation, and it is evident from the fight with Glory that the Buffybot *can* successfully masquerade as Buffy, with a serious expression, ironic tone of voice, level stare, and effective fighting" (par. 13). Shuttleworth notes that "It is also telling that, even when her body is inhabited by someone else, the outward figure of Buffy Summers cannot escape the ineluctable role of the Slayer: the Buffybot also engages in Slaying combat, most gloriously (no pun intended) in 'The Gift' (5.22), when she engages in the kind of banter which the fleshly Buffy is now too tired and burdened to maintain" (230). Although Shuttleworth argues that, at this moment, Buffy cannot maintain slayer discourse, when the "real" Buffy emerges (again), she reestablishes her control over the situation and language, knocking Glory down and saying, "You're not the brightest god in the heavens, are you?" ("The Gift," 5.22).

[27] Buffy is able to save Dawn, and the key to survival is Buffy's manipulation of language. Recognizing that the blood that will close the gap is metonymically rooted in her own body, Buffy performs a final substitution, plunging into the abyss. And although she dies, Buffy's words to Dawn are replayed through voice-over to reassert meaning in the midst of loss. While "The Gift" (5.22) ends with Buffy's death, it does not mark the death of slayer slang, as the final image in the episode and Season Five as a whole is Buffy's headstone and the inscription "SHE SAVED THE WORLD / A LOT." Although language is (at least tentatively) restored at the end of the episode and season, Buffy's departure from the verse at the end of Season Five marks a crisis for the series. While the series itself returns on UPN (and the entire cast is slated to return), in Season Six, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* struggles with not only the absence of the protagonist but also with language.

[28] Almost ironically, "Bargaining, Part I" (6.1), rather than signifying Buffy's death, offers a model of repression, an avoidance of the reality of her death. The characters are actively involved in acts of slaying, performing like the Slayer. And Buffy is re-presented, as the camera slowly reveals her standing in the graveyard, ready to fight. The substitution in this first episode suggests the crisis and tentative resolution offered by the series—the bot, resurrected and re-membered, can perform as Buffy. Yet, in Buffy's absence, as evidenced by its behavior in the first part of "Intervention," the bot is a poor imitator when compared to Buffy. It was only when Buffy constructs the plan that the bot is able to successfully "pass" for Buffy in "The Gift" (5.22). In Buffy's absence, the Buffybot bears the burden of bridging the divide left by Buffy's death, of filling the gaps.

[29] Although the Buffybot can slay, she cannot imitate slayer slang and style. When the bot stakes the vamp in the beginning sequence of "Bargaining, Part I" (6.1), its statement reflects the problem of the substitution. When the bot says, "That'll put marizpan in your pie plate, bingo," Spike asks Willow, "What's with the Dadaism, Red?" Willow replies that she was "trying to program in some new puns" and "ended up with the word salad." Assuring everyone that although "It's a glitch," and she will "fix it," Willow attempts to (re)stabilize the Buffyverse. Giles, although he had called the bot extraordinary, asserts the necessity of perfecting the bot's imitation of Buffy, saying, "We just can't have her messing up in front of the wrong person. Or the wrong thing. We, we need the . . . the world and the underworld to believe that Buffy is alive and well." Willow

says that she can make the bot perform like Buffy, equating her ability to reassemble the physical body with perfecting the speech acts: "And I will therefore fix it. I got her head back on, didn't I? And I got her off those knock-knock jokes." Yet, immediately, indicating Willow's failure to order the system in Buffy's absence, the bot replies, "Ooh, who's there?" The bot is not "off those knock-knock jokes" and cannot perform like Buffy or perform slayer style.

[30] The impossibility of replacing the "real" Buffy is articulated through the acts of/in "Bargaining." When Xander says, "You know, if we want her to be exactly—," it is Spike who retorts, "She'll never be exactly" ("Bargaining, Part I"). While Spike is the creator of the Buffybot, he understands that it is all play, all manipulation. Although he had initially been duped by Buffy's performance as the bot, he now stresses the impossibility of a successful imitation. When Tara says, "The only really real Buffy is really Buffy," she articulates the crisis of Season Six. Giles's conclusion "And she's gone" suggests its finality. The characters, despite (or as a result of) their slayage, recognize that the bot can never be "really Buffy" or even "real." The Buffybot's statement that "'If we want her to be exactly she'll never be exactly I know the only really real Buffy is really Buffy and she's gone' who?" is like Buffy's earlier question "The . . . who whating how with huh?" ("Intervention"), a deconstructed sentence that almost loses all referents. Yet while Buffy's question plays with associations, the relationships between nouns and verbs, the Buffybot's language falls apart in a series of repetitions of others' lines. The end of the opening sequence of Season Six marks the loss of Buffy and the need for slayerspeak, an animated discourse.

[31] While, in Season Five, the possibility of imitating the slayer's language is introduced with the Buffybot, in Season Six, the Buffybot, doubling as the Slayer, is a mechanism that deconstructs slayer slang. The bot's impersonation of Buffy demonstrates how much the Buffyverse is dependent upon the freeplay of signification. While the entire series is dependent upon substitutions (the exchange of living for dead bodies in vampiric ritual and possession as well as the doubling of main characters), the Buffybot demonstrates what is at stake in the construction of slayer slang and slayer style. The gap left by Buffy's death cannot be filled by the others' speech acts. Willow, though entirely familiar with Buffy's language and even a participant in the perpetuation of slayer slang, is unable to "fix the glitch" in the program. When Spike asks Willow, "What's with the Dadaism, Red?" ("Bargaining, Part I"), he enforces the failed signification of the bot's language.

[32] And yet rather than sever the bot's connection to the "really real Buffy," what Spike and the "Bargaining" episodes enforce is that language in the Buffyverse is marked by incongruity. While the characters first acknowledge the bot as a Buffy who had gone insane with grief, here, they struggle with the recognition that the Buffybot can never "really" be Buffy. The Buffybot is a substitution for Buffy—it had been perfected not only in "The Gift" (5.22) duping Glory and the viewers, but it is also performing as Buffy in the opening sequence of images that open Season Six. As the final image of "Buffy" is the "other Buffy," the relationships between signs and signifiers become undone. Rainer Emig's description of the function of metonymy suggests how the Buffybot performs as a substitution for Buffy:

Metonymy either describes the relation of fragmented parts of an image or a figure of speech that appear in various parts of a text or a fragmented image representing something more complex than itself . . . The effect of the metonymy can be twofold. A consistent metonymic structure creates the impression of a tightly knit argumentative unit, a kind of organic coherence of the text, whereas incoherent, far-fetched, or too drastically reduced metonymies produce ambiguity, obscurity, or even illegibility. In all cases, the reader is forced to supplement the missing syntagmatic links. In the case of the coherent metonymy, this supplementation results in a near-perfect simulation of coherence. In all other cases, there are either semantic overlappings creating ambiguity, gaps in the semantic network producing

obscurity, or even doubts concerning the adequacy of the applied code of interpretation leading to the illegibility of the text. (69)

The threat to stability in the Buffyverse, of coherent systems of signification, is analogous to the ways in which the characters (and viewers) struggle with the loss of Buffy. The resignification of Buffy, as the bot and on a new network, working along the axis of deconstruction, tests these relations, offering moments of perfect performance and ridiculous play.¹⁴ Ultimately, the Buffybot's line "That'll put marzipan in your pie plate, bingo" ("Bargaining, Part 1") and Spike's question about Dadaism suggests that, when Buffy is absent, the language in the verse falls apart so that, conversely, in place of meaningful slayer slang, we have "Dadaism" and incoherency. What we find at the beginning of "Bargaining, Part I" and Season Six is that there is a gap left by Buffy's absence, figuratively represented as the abyss she leaps into at the end of "The Gift," a rift in the entire structure of language in the Buffyverse.

[33] When the Buffybot emerges in "Intervention," the gaps in its language are filled by the Scoobies. For example, each of the bot's seemingly nonsensical lines is given meaning by the Scoobies who believe that it is the "really real Buffy." While this model of speech has potential—as the Scoobies were able to find meaning by associations and Buffy is able to "program" the Buffybot's language to reflect her own in "The Gift" (5.22)—after Buffy dies, when the bot stands for Buffy in the Slayer's absence, its language falls apart. In "Intervention" and "The Gift," Buffy was not truly absent; she had been on a quest and, later, she had been concealed from Glory's (and the audience's) view. When the characters are in mourning, faced with the loss of the "really real Buffy," the substitution cannot bridge the gap. As a metonym for Buffy, the Buffybot represents her, even occupies her subject position as it appears identical to the Slayer (hence, the bot's line "We're very pretty"). In Season Six, the metonym fails because the "organic coherence of the text" (Emig 69) falls apart with Buffy's death. When the characters (and viewers) acknowledge that Buffy is missing (whether on a quest or dead), the semantic overlappings create ambiguity and obscurity, even "Dadaism."¹⁵

[34] Buffy sees the bot as her double after she is severed from the mother and that system of identification, and, in identifying with this "other," she is thus alienated from the self, and stalled before the Symbolic and language itself. Buffy is able to articulate the self in relation to the "other Buffy," saying, "she's a robot. She acts just like that girlfriend-bot that Warren guy made," and asking incredulously, "You guys couldn't tell me apart from a robot?" ("Intervention"). But as Buffy imitates the bot she reenters the Mirror Stage through the lens of the Symbolic, perfecting her imitation of its language. In this performance, Buffy reasserts her "reality" through her mastery of discourse. When Buffy dies, and the bot occupies Buffy's place in the Symbolic Order, it (lacking control and mastery) falls apart. Lacan's notion of a "'metonymy of desire,' which reveals our lack of wholeness and sufficiency even while it tries to hide this lack" (Emig 79) can be applied to the relationship between Buffy and the bot. Each tries to imitate the other yet, in death, despite the characters' desire to re-present Buffy, the bot fails and is relegated back to the Mirror Stage, a site of fragmentation and dismemberment as well as silence.

[35] Although Giles asserts that they must perfect the bot's performance to retain order in the Buffyverse, in "Bargaining, Part II," Razor and his gang, like Glory, recognize that the Slayer is nothing but a "pretty toy." When the vampire sees the sparks flying from the broken bot's head, he says, "You're . . . you're . . . you're a machine," to which the bot replies, "Thank you." The Buffybot's machinations are emphasized not only in the presence of its inner parts—Spike's replacement of wiring and the exposure of recharging batteries—but also in the comments about returning to Willow for "service." When the bot is initially injured, it tells Willow, "I think my feet are broken," indicating that its body is falling apart. The Buffybot's statement "I am programmed to go to you" suggests the relativistic nature of the bot; it is dependent upon, its presence is contingent upon, stable relations within the Buffyverse. It is not a source of order but needs to be reprogrammed, stabilized. Razor's capture and dismemberment of the Buffybot is marked by his statement

that he is conducting "A symbolic act commemorating the new order around here," in an attempt to rid Sunnydale of "any not-so pleasant reminders of the old" ("Bargaining, Part II").¹⁶ Yet, ironically, his destruction of the Buffybot is linked to the reanimation of the "real" Buffy, the "not-so pleasant Buffy," as Spike had called her, and the "old order."

[36] As Willow's spell reanimates Buffy, Buffy's resurrection is paralleled by the deconstruction of the Buffybot. Because the urn breaks into fragments, the characters believe that the spell had failed. Here, in poststructuralist domain, the fragments fail to signify and Buffy is restored to the center of the narrative. As Buffy watches the dismemberment of the Buffybot, it mouths Buffy's name. While the bot had referred to Buffy as "the other Buffy" in "Intervention," in "Bargaining," after being introduced to the concept of the "really real Buffy," the bot, without language but by gesture, signifies the return of the Real... Buffy. The "symbolic act" that Razor and his gang perform to commemorate the "new order" is a reestablishment of the symbolic order, an exchange of the "other Buffy" for the "really real."

[37] As Dawn witnesses the destruction in Sunnydale, she tells Spike that she is worried about Buffy but then she corrects herself and refers to the Buffybot. Yet it is the Buffybot's words to Dawn that recognize the old order and the possibility of Buffy's return. When the Buffybot sees Dawn, it asks, "Where did I go?" ("Bargaining, Part II"), and then alludes to "the other Buffy." The Buffy that returns from the dead is like the Buffybot, as Anya and the others now misidentify the reanimated Buffy for the bot in a reversal of the plot of "Intervention." And this Buffy is the "really real Buffy" as she has been thrust back into the Real, a place of no separation and no language. Yet this "really real" Buffy recognizes lack. When Buffy returns, she is struggling with the loss of her mother, the loss of her own life, and what she later identifies in Season Six as the loss of peace in what she later identifies as heaven ("Once More, with Feeling").

[38] The "other Buffy" that the bot refers to is the Other—a mute Buffy—who is crossing into the Imaginary and, with language (perhaps even song, as in "Once More, with Feeling," into the Symbolic.¹⁷ When Buffy returns from the dead, she successfully fights against Razor and his gang, yet she cannot speak. Although she literally performs acts of slaying, her performance lacks slayer style, the verbal quips and play that are complementary to the slayer's actions. In the first episodes in Season Six, Buffy struggles with her discourse. When she is first reunited with Dawn, she speaks like the Buffybot, telling her sister, "It was so clear . . . on this spot. I remember . . . how . . . shiny . . . and clear everything was. But . . . now . . . now . . ." ("Bargaining, Part II").¹⁸ And when Buffy returns to her house, to her friends, she struggles with language. Her speech then changes; while her initial phrases in "After Life" (6.3) are signified by fragments, at the episode's end, she's able to somewhat convincingly perform for her friends. But Buffy's performance is only that. Spike and the viewers soon learn that she feels she is in hell and is concealing that fact from the others. Yet Buffy need not worry about such imposture; as the Scoobies have demonstrated in the prior episodes, they readily accept the substitution of the "real" Buffy. This "other" Buffy faces the burden of working through language in relationship to her experiences throughout Season Six and into Season Seven. While she had been to hell in Season Three, and returned, her return from heaven, a place she identifies as peaceful, leads her into the gap. Over the course of Season Six, Buffy must gradually relearn slayer slang and reconstruct slayer style. Although when Buffy returns she is initially "going through the motions" ("Once More, with Feeling"), she is ultimately able to reclaim a slayer language by the series' end.

[39] While "Hush" (4.10) experiments with the loss of language in the verse and the re-empowerment of the Slayer as the chosen "princess" who breaks the spell and reintroduces language into the Buffyverse, seasons five and six mark the vexed relationship between identity and discourse. "Hush" equates the loss of spoken language with the loss of power, yet Buffy remains at the center of the narrative, positioned within the narrative as the princess who can, and will, regain her voice. "Hush" demonstrates the "materiality of language," how language is tangible, stolen (Overbey and Preston-Matto

73), but, when the Slayer dies (and even when she returns), the loss of Buffy's slayer slang demonstrates how tenuous the construction of the Buffyverse is.¹⁹ Without slayer slang, without Buffy's performance of slayage as physical and linguistic acts, meaning falters in the Buffyverse.

[40] Ultimately, when Buffy faces another double in Season Seven, in the form of the First, she tells the First, as she nears death (again), "I want you to get out of my face" ("Chosen," 7.22), punning again, reclaiming slayer style, slang, and her own identity as now not the only Slayer but as part of a heteroglossic Buffyverse. In effect, after Joyce's death, with the introduction of the Buffybot and her own death and rebirth, Buffy recreates the language of the Buffyverse so that the gaps in discourse and plot are covered and order is recovered. The postmodernist and poststructuralist dimensions of the Buffyverse are complemented by structuralist principles: the body-switching episode with Faith is connected to the introduction of the Buffybot and, later, the threat of the First.

[41] Bridging the divide between structuralism and poststructuralism, Buffyspeak calls attention to the gaps inherent in discourse yet continues the chain of signification. Ironically, at the end of "Chosen" (7.22), Buffy does not speak, but rather listens as the other characters continue to conjure slayer slang. While the end of "The Harvest" (1.2) (and first apocalypse) is marked by the characters' playful banter, the beginning of "Chosen" repeats that discourse as Buffy, Willow, and Xander again face the end. And it is Buffy who echoes the earlier lines, asking Willow and Xander, "So. . . what do you guys want to do tomorrow?" ("Chosen"). Hearing this, Giles returns to the beginning of the series, concluding (again), "The Earth is definitely doomed." Rather than emphasize a return to structure and the insistence on a chain of metonyms, the ending places the characters over an abyss, the sunken hole that was Sunnydale. Conversely, as the sign topples into the hole, signification continues. Surviving the threat of the First and those Gentlemen, Derrida and Lacan, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* leaves its characters poised at the edge of an abyss, troubling the line between language and action. Although at the end of "Chosen," and the series itself, Buffy is silent, Buffyspeak surrounds her, not only in the characters' words but also online, in conversations, and in critical essays that reconstruct the Buffyverse over and over again.

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¹ Drawing on Frank Kermode's term, David Lavery writes that only two episodes "can justifiably be called closure (at the level of expectation), resolving major, multiple plot entanglements" (par. 36). The first is "The Gift" (5022) that puts "an end simultaneously to Buffy herself, Season Five, and *BtVS*'s tenure on the WB" and the second is "Chosen"(7022) that ends the war with The First, Buffy's role as the solitary Slayer, and "seven years of narrative" (par. 36).

² In "Bargaining, Part I" (6.1) Tara says, "The only really real Buffy is really Buffy," indicating the falsity of the bot's performance.

³ Lacan is careful to distinguish the Real as that which is before the Imaginary and Symbolic, the impossible and unknowable, from reality.

⁴ Michael Adams examines how "Buffy is the original -age and -y suffixer, the one who establishes those tendencies within slayer slang" and he argues that, although she "sets the example" for the others, "Buffy's Slayer style is more persistently individual in other types of slayer slang" (42).

⁵ Yet this function of language is not relegated to the Slayer but Buffy as Slayer. In contrast to the Buffy, Kendra is "deferential, formal, and clearly uncomfortable" (Overbey and Preston-Matto 83).

⁶ For Adams, "slang and style, though not the same thing, are two sides of the same coin and, at every

toss, each has an even chance of turning up. One could view this as a paradox, but it isn't really, because slang does originate in a sense of style, someone's decision to dissent from convention at a certain moment in a certain way, only to discover that, sometimes, individuating style is the source of a new convention; the more conventional a style of speech becomes, the less useful it is as slang" (41). Here, and throughout this essay, I, following Adams's lead, link slang and style and argue that Buffy is at the source of both, in the creation of a type of Buffyspeak that the others (both the other slayers and the "other Buffy") are unable to successfully imitate.

[7](#) After Buffy discovers her mother's dead body, she calls Giles and tells him, "You have to come." After Giles attempts to identify her, saying, "Buffy?," she replies, "She's at the house," failing to identify what has occurred, or even who the "she" is.

[8](#) Jesse James Stommel writes, "The show isn't afraid to kill off its favorite characters, and it's not afraid to let us see" (par. 1), citing the deaths of Buffy, Jenny Calendar, Buffy's mother, Tara, and Anya. Stommel's analysis of the treatment of "the body" links ideas about performance, spectatorship, and the loss of language that I argue are embodied in Season Five.

[9](#) After Spike learns about his robotic creation April, Spike forces Warren to create the Buffybot.

[10](#) J. P. Williams writes, "The Spirit, who has no language of her own, is indeed vanquished by Buffy's pointed language—language specifically mocking the Spirit's appearance" (63).

[11](#) Ian Shuttleworth states that, as "characters own and /or disown various aspects of their personalities, seek to create and /or destroy identities for themselves, to resolve and /or accommodate contradictions within their composition," we see that "each transformation, literal or figurative, makes matters ever more complex" in relation to this "integral flux of character, role and identity" (236).

[12](#) While many critics have argued that the Scoobies take part in slayer slang, and even create it, I locate Buffy at the source. Without her presence, her style and performance, slayer slang falls apart. For example, while Overbey and Preston-Matto argue that Buffy is "neither a solitary Speaker nor a solitary Slayer," a reality that "makes Buffy-combat, and Buffy-speak, efficacious" (76), their argument that "Buffy is the speech act," the "utterance that communicates meaning, drawing on the linguistic capabilities of her companions: invention, playfulness, contextualization, archival knowledge, compilation, and translation" (83) is more in line with my argument here. Buffy does not only draw on the linguistic capabilities of these others; she encourages them to engage in a slayer speak that translates into their own discourse communities (i.e., Willow's computer language and Wiccan groups, as well as Giles's bibliophilic discourse). Rather than reading the structure of the relationships on the basis that "Buffy is able to access this language only with the help of her friends" (Overbey and Preston-Matto 84), I argue that Buffy translates this discourse to her friends, enabling their usage, as Buffy (as character and series) encourages the viewers to incorporate slayer slang, imitate slayer style, in their own worlds.

[13](#) Calvert argues that both April and the Buffybot represent Buffy's role in Season Six. As simulations, they reflect Buffy's fear that she is just "going through the motions."

[14](#) This notion of poor imitation, bad acting, could be read in relation to "The Puppet Show" (1.9), in which Buffy, Xander, and Willow are engaged in a pained performance of *Oedipus Rex*. Janet K. Halfyard links the performances in "The Puppet Show" to those in "Once More, with Feeling" (6007) to argue that "the positioning of singing and the games that are played with musical diegesis serve to reinforce the credibility of the Buffyverse" (par. 43).

[15](#) And yet, in "Bargaining, Part I," the bot successfully performs as Buffy at Dawn's school (although Dawn calls her "wacky Buffy"). At Sunnydale High School, the teachers and parents fill in the gaps in the bot's discourse, as the Scoobies had done in "Intervention." For example, when the bot says, "I helped make lunch today," another parent replies, "Tell me about it. My kid's been brown-bagging it even though I pay for the lunch program" ("Bargaining, Part I").

[16](#) Lacan's reference to the formation of the I as symbolized in dreams by a fortress or a stadium (5) can be read in relation to this scene, as the gang surrounds the Buffybot as if they were at a stadium, cheering. Buffy, as a witness/participant to this scene, sees the dismemberment of the bot in terms of this ritualized performance.

[17](#) Again, Lacan's notion of the Law of the Father in relation to the symbolic order is a fitting model for reading Buffy's return. Following her mother's death (and a loss of connection), the father (Giles) leaves. Order (and Buffy's language) is restored upon Giles's return to Sunnydale. When Giles takes over the role as parent to Buffy, Buffy even compares him to her mother. In Lacanian terms, where the father displaces the connection to the mother, here, in Buffy's case, Giles performs a dual role to re-connect Buffy to language and reintroduce her to her role as Slayer.

[18](#) In "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," Lacan asks, "Is what thinks in my place then another I?" (82). In this essay, Lacan's question of "Then who is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my own identity it is still he who wags me?" (83) reads like the Buffybot's attempts at sorting through who the "really real" Buffy is, in contrast to its own role in the verse. Similarly (and yet conversely), Buffy's imitations of the bot signify a questioning of her role—as simulated, artificial.

[19](#) Consider Alice Jenkins and Susan Stuart's argument in "Extending Your Mind" that "Hush" demonstrates the translation of speech acts into writing. They write, "Throughout its silent portion, 'Hush' pits the authority of writing against the immediacy of speech, questioning the value of the associations the characters and audience make with each kind of interaction" (Jenkins and Stuart 2). As Jenkins and Stuart examine how writing performs a non-standard perlocutionary function, they offer a model for reading how the Buffybot's language deconstructs these relations, how it stalls the translation of speech into action. As the Buffybot's language straddles the divide between locutionary and perlocutionary functions, it performs at the site where slayer slang falls apart.