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"I Only Have Eyes For You": A Disobedient Reading of the Buffy/Angel Romance in Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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[1] Epistemic disobedience is the act of re-reading narratives to identify the dominant epistemologies contained therein. Popular culture lends itself particularly well to this application, as the epistemologies that underlie it are often taken for granted by those consuming it. In utilizing epistemic disobedience, viewers recognize and challenge the structures of knowledge implicit within popular media. Feminist disobedient readings of popular culture are a crucial tool for unpacking narratives about and for women, narratives that romanticize abuse, normalize oppressive control and sentimentalize relationship violence. This paper employs epistemic disobedience to facilitate a feminist re-reading of romance in popular culture through an exploration of the Buffy/Angel romance in Joss Whedon's television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—a re-reading that exposes and challenges the patriarchal epistemology of romance that portrays relationship violence, the policing of women's sexuality and adult sex with minors as normal and loving.

[2] Walter Mignolo coined the term "epistemic disobedience" in his 2009 essay, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." Though Mignolo applies the term to geo and body politics, its application in feminist scholarship has proven to be far-reaching and various. Mignolo defines epistemic disobedience as a "delink[ing] from the illusion of the zero point epistemology"—an investigation into "who, when, why is constructing knowledges" (160). Mignolo asserts that euro-centered epistemology has succeeded in concealing the fact that, like all epistemologies, it is a "situated knowledge" (i.e. one originating in a particular time, place and social-political landscape) (160). In doing so, euro-centered epistemology has positioned itself as the original or true epistemology—a position from which it controls our very conversations around knowing. As such, the euro-centered knower is framed as the "universal knower,"—a "detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity"—and therefore a knower in "a privileged position to evaluate and dictate" (162). In order to combat the control and "disciplinary rules" of these dominant epistemologies, Mignolo asserts that one must "change the *terms* of the conversation," not merely the "content of the conversation" (162). For example, as the epistemology of the patriarchy is another instance of a zero-point epistemology, "gender and sexuality" would be the "content of the conversation," while the epistemology of the

patriarchy functions as the "*terms*" (163; 162). Changing the "*terms* of the conversation" is done through epistemic disobedience, the process of re-reading texts against the dominant epistemologies.

[3] The seven seasons of Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* follow the life and adventures of Buffy Summers, the "one girl in all the world" chosen to fight vampires and keep evil forces at bay ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" B1001). Buffy is a powerful, feminist icon in many respects, and Whedon has stated this was his explicit intention in creating her ("The MoJo Interview: Joss Whedon"). However, alongside the empowering, feminist elements of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there can be found a patriarchal epistemology of romance with profoundly disturbing features. Though all aspects of romance in the series merit exploration, this essay focuses on the relationship between Buffy and the vampire often considered to be her true love, Angel.

[4] When read with obedience to the patriarchal epistemology of romance, the Buffy/Angel relationship is a definitive example of star-crossed lovers, described by critics as "classically romantic" and "the romantic ideal" (Beagle 116; Jowett 63). Angel, a 240+-year-old vampire with a soul, is the Byronic ideal—a "mysterious man," "dark, handsome, but with a cool reserve," with a "sense of…destiny which surrounds [his] every appearance," and "frequent flashes of a guilty conscience" (Modleski 59; Thorslev 22). As the series begins, Buffy is a 16-year-old sophomore at Sunnydale High, newly called to her Slayer vocation, and struggling to balance her duties as protector-of-the-world with the duties and desires that accompany adolescence. These aspects make Buffy a perfect Gothic heroine: a "young, innocent girl," "led astray" by her love for a "mysterious," "dark older man" (Jowett 153; 63; Modleski 59; Jowett 153). The two become allies in the fight against evil, and their attraction to one another soon develops into romantic attachment.

[5] Their love is shattered in Season Two when Angel loses his soul after experiencing one true moment of happiness as he and Buffy make love for the first time ("Surprise" B2013; "Innocence" B2014). Angelus, Angel's soulless alter ego, torments Buffy by threatening her family and friends, ultimately killing her friend and teacher, Jenny Calendar ("Passion" B2017). Buffy is forced to send Angelus to a hell dimension, effectively killing him ("Becoming Part 2" B2022). Reunited in Season Three when Angel is returned to Sunnydale by an unknown power with his soul restored ("Faith, Hope and Trick" B3003), Angel and Buffy cannot resume their romance without putting the entire world at risk—a twist that some critics have described as catapulting their relationship to "a level of genuinely courtly love achieved by no other episodic drama" (Beagle 116). Finally, Angel chooses to leave Sunnydale at the end of Season Three, "for [Buffy's] own good," in order to give her a chance at a normal life (Diehl paragraph 26; "Graduation Day Part 2" B3022). Despite their separation, they remain attached to one another, as evidenced by several crossover episodes between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the spinoff

series, *Angel* ("I Will Remember You" A1008; "The Yoko Factor" B4020; "Forever" B5017; etc.). In the *Buffy* finale, it is made clear that there is a chance Buffy and Angel may reunite romantically at a future time ("End of Days" B7021; "Chosen" B7022). The tragedy of the Buffy/Angel relationship seems to only heighten the romance of it, intensifying the popular opinion that Angel is Buffy's one true love.

[6] A feminist disobedient reading of this relationship, however, reveals jarring examples of abuse and oppressive paternalism that remain invisible when utilizing the epistemology of patriarchal romance. In the following, I explore these elements through the lens of a single-episode, abusive relationship that is positioned as an allegorical representation of the Buffy/Angel relationship: the James Stanley and Grace Newman relationship in the episode, "I Only Have Eyes for You" (B2019).

[7] "I Only Have Eyes for You" paints a particularly unsettling picture of relationship violence. The abusive and paternalistic aspects of the Buffy/Angel relationship are put into sharp contrast with its romantic elements when this episode is used as a lens through which to view it. Though the episode ostensibly presents Buffy's struggle to find "redemption" and "forgiveness" for having sex with Angel—thereby causing him to lose his soul and revert to his former, monstrous self—it explores relationship violence, abuse and guilt with disquieting results (Whedon, "Interview with Joss Whedon").

[8] The opening scene shows Buffy and Willow at the local club, the Bronze, though Buffy has separated herself from her friend and is standing on the balcony above the dance floor, observing the scene rather than participating in it. After rejecting the advances of a male classmate, she turns to leave the club and is stopped by Willow, who encourages her to "get in date mode" by being more "impulsive" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). Buffy's dismissal of this suggestion is quick and total: "Impulsive? Do you remember my ex-boyfriend, the vampire? I slept with him, he lost his soul—now my boyfriend is gone forever and the demon that wears his face is killing my friends. The next impulsive decision I make will involve my choice of dentures" (B2019). Buffy's statements reveal her sense of culpability for the loss of Angel's soul and her lack of self-forgiveness for her actions that led to it. The scene ends with Willow attempting to encourage Buffy, saying: "Love isn't always like that. Love can be nice" (B2019). Her reassurance is abruptly cut short, however, by a change in scene, and the sweet sentimentality of her words juxtaposed against the violence now on screen: a young man attempting to prevent his lover from leaving him by threatening her with a gun. Buffy arrives just in time to stop the boy from killing his lover, knocking the weapon from his hand. After the skirmish, it is nowhere to be found, and the two students seem at a loss to explain how they came to be fighting.

[9] It is revealed that, in 1955, a Sunnydale High student named James Stanley shot and killed his teacher/lover, Grace Newman, when she attempted to end their affair in order to give him a chance at a "normal life" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). He then committed suicide. As a ghost, James is forcing people to reenact the murder he committed and his subsequent suicide in an attempt to find forgiveness. He ultimately possesses Buffy, with Angelus playing the part of Grace. Buffy learns through reenacting the tragedy that James did not intend to pull the trigger. Forgiveness is possible through the possession of Buffy and Angelus because Angelus, as a vampire, is already dead, and cannot be killed with bullets, allowing the ghost of Grace (in Angelus' body) to stop the ghost of James (in Buffy's body) from going through with his suicide. In the final scene, as Buffy and Angelus share a passionate kiss, the fact that it is actually Grace and James kissing fades momentarily, offering Buffy/Angel fans a brief reprieve from the tragedy of Buffy's loss of Angel. Through her possession, Buffy begins to come to terms with her own choices and their consequences, allowing her to begin to forgive herself and heal. When read obediently, this episode presents a comforting depiction of romantic love overcoming death and the loss of a soul and the hope that forgiveness is possible, no matter the crime. A disobedient reading, however, reveals the exploitation and control inherent in both relationships.

[10] The episode strongly compares Buffy and James. The fact that James possesses Buffy implies a connection between the two, especially when considered in light of the fact that she is the only woman James possesses (all his other victims are men). After her possession, she states that James must have "picked [her]…[because she] was the only one he could relate to," implying that the two have something in common or some shared experience ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). Buffy is also the only person James reveals himself to, sending visions to her both of his past love story with Grace and of his current state of physical and spiritual decay. This episode implies a strong connection between the two cinematically as well, such as in a scene in the music room when Buffy looks in the mirror and sees only James.

[11] Buffy reacts strongly to James' actions, stating several times that he does not "deserve" to be forgiven for "destroy[ing] the one person he loved most in the world in a moment of blind passion" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). It becomes clear that her judgment of James stems from her judgment of herself, as well as her perception of James' actions and her own as comparable. The other characters see this parallel between James and Buffy as well, explicitly highlighted by Cordelia's comment that Buffy is "over-identifying" with James (B2019). This implied comparability raises several disturbing points.

[12] Buffy being compared to a high school student having an affair with a teacher emphasizes the age disparity between her and Angel. Grace's attempt to end her affair with James, specifically her reason for doing so, mirrors the reality of Buffy's relationship with Angel: through their respective relationships, Grace and Angel are robbing their younger lovers

of the chance "to have some kind of normal life" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). This is the exact reasoning behind Angel's ultimate departure from Sunnydale in Season Three, furthering the parallels between these two relationships ("Graduation Day Part 2" B3022). Just as James is being taken advantage of by his much older teacher, who is in a position of power over him and has a professional responsibility to protect his well-being, Buffy is a minor in a relationship with a man/monster very much her senior. Not only is Angel significantly older than Buffy, but the role he plays in her life is that of the "paternal" figure, "the patriarch," and the "mentor" (Frankel 129; Jowett 153; Frankel 62).

[13] Though the relationship between James and Grace is clearly portrayed as "passion[ate]" and could be read obediently as loving, it is also represented as a taboo relationship that carries with it severe consequences ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). Similarly, though the relationship between Angel and Buffy is considered "classically romantic" and can be read obediently as true love, it is as much an abuse of power as that between James and his teacher (Beagle 116). The multiplicity of these readings could indicate an invitation to the viewers on the part of Whedon and Co. to read the James/Grace relationship disobediently, and even to reconsider the entirety of the Buffy/Angel relationship in the context of their comparison to James and Grace. However, while some disturbing elements of the James/Grace relationship may invite a disobedient reading, the show utilizes elements in the framing of these relationships (such as lighting, camera angle and music, as discussed specifically in paragraph 27) that support a romantic (obedient) reading of the text. In this way, the show engages with the viewers in both an obedient and a disobedient sense. While it depicts these relationships as problematic, it utilizes production elements associated with romance to portray them.

[14] The show does present adolescents in romantic relationships with adults as problematic, as is most clearly illustrated by the James/Grace relationship. However, no explicit reference is ever made to the fact that both Buffy and James are *minors*—in the eyes of the law and society, they are still children. As such, they have neither the cognitive, social and emotional skills, nor the life experience to successfully navigate a romantic relationship with an adult, which makes their respective romantic relationships abusive. As Lorna Jowett states in her book, *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*: "Angel's age brings into question his motives in pursuing a relationship with Buffy, as Levine and Schneider note: 'Angel is at one and the same time a Prince Charming catering to a young girl's fantasies, a forbidden object, and also a 'dirty old man'' (2003: 307)" (154).

[15] The episode emphasized the immaturity of teenagers when Giles, referring to the then-unidentified ghost, states, "Unfortunately, it doesn't know what it wants. That's the trouble...So it lashes out, growing ever more confused, ever more angry" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). Buffy replies, "So it's a normal teenager. Only, dead" (B2019). This reveals even Buffy's awareness of teenagers' state of transition and vulnerability. As minors, Buffy and James

cannot "know what [they] want," and are in a constant state of flux, "confus[ion]," and "ang[er]" (B2019). The disparities in age and maturity level in relation to their intimate partners place Buffy and James in vulnerable and precarious positions in their respective relationships. Buffy's "childishness" is often jarringly revealed in her interactions with Angel, as is his consciousness of it (Frankel 63; Jowett 62). Early on, she reveals her immaturity when she attempts to get the upper hand in their relationship by "play[ing] it cool" (Jowett 62). Later, she "covers a notebook in doodled hearts," while Angel refers to her throughout their relationship as "'school girl,' 'my girl,' even 'brat'" (Jowett 62).

[16] Angel is aware that he is the only adult in the relationship, as is evidenced by his paternalistic behavior throughout the series. He repeatedly makes decisions that he determines to be in Buffy's best interests, ranging from stalking her without her knowledge or consent, to teaming up with her friends in secret ("Angel" B1007; "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" B1011; "Passion" B2017; "The Prom" B3020; "Graduation Day Parts 1 & 2" B3021-22; "Pangs" B4008; etc.). The culmination of his paternalism comes in the form of him ending their relationship "for [Buffy's] own good" by leaving Sunnydale "despite [Buffy's] protests," emphasizing her "lack of agency" ("Graduation Day Parts 1 & 2" B3021-22; Diehl paragraph 26; Jowett 63).

[17] These instances of control are depicted as examples of Angel's intense love for Buffy—he must do these things, because he cannot stand the thought that something might happen to her. This romanticizing of control constitutes a "collaps[ing] [of the] categories of love and male domination," and a "confounding of aggression and romance" (Phillips 60-61). Though Angel's "hyper-vigilance" and "monitoring" of Buffy, is, in actuality, a form of intimate partner abuse referred to as "direct guarding" (one employed to "control a person's autonomy and prevent access to other potential relationship partners"), his actions are instead "used to convey [his] love" (Franiuk and Scherr 21; Shackelford et al. 448; Franiuk and Scherr 21). When utilizing the patriarchal epistemology of romance, domination and control from an intimate partner are read as loving, romantic and even desirable.

[18] The comparison of Buffy and James also suggests comparability in their actions—James killing Grace and Buffy having sex with Angel—which creates disturbing implications. James seems to be acting out of a need to assert control in a relationship in which he is clearly the less powerful party. His violent reaction to Grace ending their relationship reveals his sense of powerlessness, and his conduct can be seen as an attempt to gain equal footing with his older, more experienced and more powerful lover. Comparing his actions to Buffy's raises the question: why did Buffy have sex with Angel? The possible answers to this question are as varied and complex as adolescent sexuality itself. It is highly possible, and from the context of their relationship it seems likely, that at least part of Buffy's decision to have sex with Angel is due to her sexual desire. After all, sexual desire and experimentation are important (and much

theorized) parts of teenage girl maturation (e.g. Bay-Cheng, Fine, Lamb, Tolman, etc.). It is also possible that Buffy, like many young women, views sex as a "rite of passage," one which has the power to "open a door" to adulthood (Thompson 348, 343; see also Phillips). Also entirely conceivable is that Buffy views sex as means to seal her and Angel's love or progress their relationship to a new level of commitment (Baumeister and Vohs 340). Due to the fact that her decision to sleep with Angel in Season Two comes directly after Angel is nearly required to leave Sunnydale indefinitely, in order to keep a deadly weapon from falling into the wrong hands, it is also a reasonable possibility that Buffy considers this her only chance to have sex with the man she loves.

[19] While each of these potential reasons is plausible, as the James/Grace relationship in "I Only Have Eyes For You" is presented as an allegorical representation of the Buffy/Angel relationship, this warrants an examination of Buffy's actions in the context of James'. Just as James does through violence, it is credible that by having sex with Angel, Buffy attempts to equalize the power balance in a relationship where she is the more vulnerable and less powerful partner as a result of her younger age and lack of experience. Lynn M. Phillips, in her book, *Flirting with Danger: Young Women's Reflections on Sexuality and Domination*, explores the discourses that influence young women's sexuality, and the way they cope with these discourses. Phillips asserts that young women often use sex itself as a method for navigating imbalances of power in their relationships, writing: "it makes sense that sexuality would emerge as a primary vehicle for negotiating among these discourses as young women struggle with gendered power and adult identity" (83). As "power is intrinsic to sexuality," and as women often experience "their sexuality…in terms of gaining power over men," it makes sense that, in conjunction with one or more of the above reasons, Buffy has sex with Angel in order to gain equal footing in a relationship where the power imbalance is skewed against her (Brickell 57; Erchull and Liss 40).

[20] What power could Buffy be attempting to gain? As stated above, she could be attempting to progress their love to a level of deeper commitment, essentially tying Angel to her to prevent him from leaving her, or Sunnydale (Baumeister and Vohs 340). It could also be an attempt to lessen the experience gap between them, making her more of an equal to him in her own eyes. Buffy indicates some awareness of the motives driving her decisions when she describes James' actions, and implicitly her own, as "wrong and selfish and stupid" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). It is noteworthy that Buffy uses the word "selfish" to describe her actions. This betrays her own sense that she made a conscious decision to have sex with Angel for (what she deems to be) a "selfish" purpose, such as her own sexual desire, her initiation into adulthood, an attempt to gain power in the relationship and/or to prevent him from leaving.

[21] The conflation of James' and Buffy's actions is also disturbing when considering the literal reality of them. James murders his lover, albeit "accidental[ly]" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). He brings a loaded gun to school in order to force Grace into a choice: she can

remain his lover, or she can die. He screams at her as she attempts to flee from him that "if [he] can't be with [her]…" the assumed ending of which is "then no one can" (B2019). His actions, though framed as "passion[ate]" and even somewhat permissible, indicate an intention to harm (B2019).

[22] James' violent actions are then compared to Buffy's decision to have sex with Angel, implying some equivalency between a young woman having sex, or losing her virginity, and waving a loaded gun with apparent intent to harm. This frames the sexuality of young women as something dangerous, something that can harm, even kill. Buffy's sexuality is shown as having the ability to "destroy" a man, to rob him of his humanity and to turn him into a monster (or, at least, unleash the monster within) ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). This is a perpetuation and recreation of the patriarchal fear of female sexuality—a replaying of the Adam and Eve story. The evil woman with her sinful body "destroys" man, and has the potential to cause "the whole world [to come] to an end" (B2019; Udovitch cited in Leon paragraph 16). Also, as in the Adam and Eve myth, it frames Buffy as the perpetrator of her sex with Angel—instead of as one of two willing participants.

[23] Buffy is consistently portrayed as the culpable party in her sex with Angel. Giles, after learning of their actions, though explicitly stating that he is not "disappointed" in Buffy, says that she acted "rashly" ("Innocence" B2014). This comment implies that Buffy made the decision to sleep with Angel suddenly, or that her actions are in some way irresponsible. However, Buffy's decision to sleep with Angel was not rash—it was thought out and premeditated, as evidenced by an earlier conversation with Willow in which Buffy states that she intends to have sex with Angel ("Surprise" B2013). So why are Buffy's actions irresponsible? What was Buffy responsible for doing that she failed to do? Did she fail to "resist mal[e] advances," and in so doing fail to safeguard her value (read: virginity) (Phillips 46)? Phillips writes:

> Young women develop their hetero-relational subjectivities with an awareness that it is they who are held responsible for representing morality and sexual "purity"; that it is they who are held accountable for controlling men's sexual behaviors; that it is they who are expected to be pleasing caretakers and desirable objects for the other gender; and that it is they who are criticized whether they attract the wrong men, too many men, or no man at all. (107)

The practice of holding women responsible for not only their own behavior, but also that of men, is reproduced in the treatment of Buffy's sexuality in these instances. Going back to Buffy's own assessment of her actions as "wrong," and "stupid," one can assume that having sex with Angel was "wrong" because she failed to "repre[sent] morality and sexual 'purity,'" and "stupid" for not understanding that "[o]nce you cross that line, you can't control what happens to you" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019; Phillips 107; 63). Though some critics asserted that the

"symbolic implications of having Buffy's first sexual encounter be with a vampire…emphasize the dangers of sexual encounters, especially with an adult," the fact that Buffy's loss of virginity becomes a "stultifying traumatic event," and that Buffy is held responsible for the event and her own trauma, reveals a reproduction of the patriarchal assertion that "the only way [for women] to maintain their physical and psychological integrity is to deny, avoid and resist" sexual encounters (Wilcox paragraph 17; Diehl paragraph 26; Phillips 63). Buffy does not escape the blame society places on women who choose to have sex, nor the consequences which police women's decisions to have sex. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reveals through its treatment of Buffy's sexuality that, like the culture it represents, the show is "conflicted about sex, and particularly about adolescent female desire" (Phillips 82).

[24] No mention is made of the irresponsibility of Angel's actions, or the fact that their sex constitutes statutory rape. Contra Giles' judgment, it is clear through Buffy's actions that she makes a conscious decision to have sex with Angel. However, Buffy's willingness, or even initiation of the act does not negate Angel's responsibility in the situation. Angel, as the much older partner, is responsible for what occurs between the two, especially in an area where he has lifetimes of experience, and Buffy has none. Angel, with his age and experience, should understand that regardless of the circumstances, a 240+-year-old vampire having sex with a 17-year-old girl will have severe consequences. Nevertheless, their sex, as well as its consequences, is repeatedly framed solely in terms of Buffy's culpability.

[25] The issue of culpability in these two relationships, however, is far more complex than merely that. In the representation of both relationships, the line between perpetrator and victim is blurred. James, after murdering Grace, commits suicide while listening to their song. When Grace (in the form of Angelus) is finally able to stop him from killing himself (in the form of Buffy) by forgiving him, the issue of culpability again arises ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019):

> Grace/Angelus: "Don't do this."
> James/Buffy: "But I killed you!"
> Grace/Angelus: "It was an accident. It wasn't your fault."
> James/Buffy: "It *is* my fault! How could I…?"
> Grace/Angelus: "I'm the one who should be sorry, James. You thought I stopped loving you, but I never did. I loved you with my last breath."

As the above exchange reveals, the episode holds Grace as culpable for that for which she is not to blame—namely, her own murder. The shot is a very close one, framing Buffy's and Angelus' faces in the center and very near to one another. The lighting is intimate, and though James' and Grace's song, "I Only Have Eyes for You," is playing initially, the music fades then swells into a soaring, sentimental score. These elements depict this as a passionate and romantic scene, a declaration of Grace's/Angelus' love for James/Buffy. However, the transcript reveals its more

disturbing characteristics—a woman who was murdered by her lover is taking the blame for his actions, essentially saying that she is responsible for her own murder. This seems to be an even more blatant example of the same victim blaming that frames Buffy as the perpetrator of the sex she and Angel have. Grace taking the blame for James' actions illustrates what Phillips refers to as the "love hurts discourse" (70). Phillips writes that the "love hurts discourse condones *men's* irresponsibility while holding *women* accountable for coping with this" (70). Though James is responsible for his decision to bring a loaded firearm to school in order to either force Grace to stay in their relationship or murder her, Grace is portrayed as being responsible for his actions because she made him "[think she] stopped loving [him]" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). This reading seems to indicate that if a man truly loves a woman, when confronted with the possibility of her leaving him, he will kill her. This represents an extremely harmful portrayal of relationship violence and victim blaming.

[26] However, the episode does not hold Grace accountable for that for which she is to blame—her role as an abuser in her relationship with James. As a legal adult romantically involved with a minor, Grace is abusing James simply by being in relationship with him. He is not emotionally capable of dealing with the situation. He is painfully aware of his immaturity and vulnerability in the relationship, as is revealed when he confronts Grace with the gun. Grace attempts to calm him, saying: "You know you don't want to do this. Let's both just calm down. Now, give me the gun" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" B2019). James screams in reply, "Don't! Don't do that, damn it! Don't talk to me like I'm some stupid [kid]" (B2019). He clearly feels driven to his actions by a deep sense of powerlessness and helplessness. His actions are reprehensible, but they are also the actions of a teenager in a very difficult situation. The only person who can be fully held accountable for her actions is Grace, as she is the only fully developed, adult person in the relationship. I also argue that, as a fully formed adult who is abusing her position of power over an impressionable and susceptible younger person, Grace is at least partially responsible for James' actions as well.

[27] These readings taken together reveal that the episode frames Grace as guilty for her own murder, as she excuses James' actions due to her making him believe "[she] stopped loving [him]," but fails to reveal her true responsibility in the relationship as a whole, and the fact that within it, she functions as an abuser. James, similarly, is not held accountable for murdering his lover, but is held to blame for the emotional instability brought on by his abusive relationship. In this way, the culpability of these characters is muddled, as James and Grace are, at once, both abusers and victims.

[28] This situation offers an interesting comparison to the one that Buffy and Angel have created. Buffy, like James, seems to be attempting to take some control in her relationship through drastic action. On the surface, it appears that Buffy is the instigator of her sexual encounter with Angel. After a close call with the latest Big Bad summoned by Spike and

Drusilla, Buffy and Angel barely escape with their lives and take refuge in Angel's apartment ("Surprise" B2013). Seated on Angel's bed while Angel checks the severity of Buffy's wounds, Buffy says, "You almost went away today," after which they share a passionate kiss (B2013). Sensing where they are headed, Angel protests weakly: "Buffy, maybe we shouldn't" (B2013). Buffy shushes him, and they "seize the day" (B2013). This exchange shows Buffy to be the initiator, and reveals she is fully willing to participate in their lovemaking. However, a further examination reveals Angel's culpability, as the older partner abusing a position of power.

[29] Buffy repeatedly references the fact that she is dating a much older man, revealing her sense of her own immaturity and vulnerability. She discloses several times that she feels she must change herself or her behavior in order to satisfy Angel, such as in the episode "Halloween" in which Buffy dresses like a woman from Angel's era in an attempt to impress him (B2006). She says to Willow in "Surprise": "I think [Angel and I are] going to [have sex]. Once you get to a certain point, [having sex] is sort of inevitable" (B2013). This comment indicates Buffy's feeling of pressure to become sexually intimate with Angel, despite the fact she insists that Angel is "cool about it" and doesn't "push" (B2013). This sense of pressure, coupled with her desire to balance the scales in a relationship where she is clearly the less powerful party, push Buffy into initiating sex with Angel. Like James, though Buffy should be held responsible for her decisions, Angel, like Grace, is in more control of the situation and therefore is partly responsible for Buffy's decisions as well. The fact that sex with a minor is considered statutory rape emphasizes the fact that Buffy, as such a young person, is not *able* to give consent to have sex with Angel. Angel is responsible for understanding that, regardless of Buffy initiating the act, Buffy is not in a position to make that decision for herself.

[30] Contemplation of Buffy's comments revealing the sense of pressure she feels to have sex with Angel brings interesting questions to light, especially when considered in the context of her statement that this pressure does *not* come from Angel. If not from Angel, from where does Buffy's sense of pressure come? It could be it comes from the very narrative of romance itself, a narrative that teaches that sex is a woman's most viable form of power within a romantic relationship. It is interesting to note that both James and Buffy are facing the termination of their respective relationships, and though these relationships and their terminations are not equivalent—Grace is explicitly and permanently ending her relationship with James for his own good, while Angel is only leaving Sunnydale to keep a deadly weapon safe—it is worthwhile to compare them in the context of the narrative of romance. James and Buffy have extremely different reactions to their lovers' actions. James turns to violence, arguably in an attempt to gain the dominance and control that, as a man, according to the narrative of romance, he is owed. Buffy, also in accordance with the narrative of romance, turns to sex instead of inward or outward violence. Walsh, Fursich and Jefferson note: "Patriarchal ideology is so embedded in everyday discourse that it becomes normal…and its presence easily goes unnoticed" (126). The internalization of the romance narrative which holds men as the

aggressors and women as the passive receivers of romance informs women that, in order to have power, they must "endeavor to become…good sexual object[s]" (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson; Phillips 125). In short, Buffy could feel pressured into having sex with Angel for the same reason that a disobedient reading of the Buffy/Angel relationship is necessary—because the patriarchal narrative of romance robs women of autonomy and power.

[31] Overall, "I Only Have Eyes For You" presents a complex and compelling depiction of intimate relationships, exploring issues of adult sex with minors, the use of violence and sex for power, adolescent female sexuality, culpability and paternalism. The treatment of these issues is intricate, as Whedon and Co. seem to invite a disobedient reading of the Buffy/Angel and James/Grace relationships, while simultaneously using conventions to portray them that reproduce and support the patriarchal romance narrative. Epistemic disobedience assists the invitation to read these relationships against the epistemology of patriarchal romance, while also exposing and countering the elements that seem to offer these relationships as romantic ideals. A disobedient investigation of the treatment of the Buffy/Angel and James/Grace relationships in "I Only Have Eyes For You" offers insight into the implicit messages being taught about and to women about romance and their roles in it. As shown by this investigation, the patriarchal epistemology of romance, which we use to interpret the romance narratives we encounter every day, is a destructive force, one that validates and justifies relationship violence and control.

[32] The narrative of romance depicted in "I Only Have Eyes For You," and in the Buffy/Angel relationship as a whole, is not an anomaly. It is one of many in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in Whedon's works as a whole and in the wider sphere of popular culture. Scholars have begun to utilize epistemic disobedience to re-read these narratives, especially within the massively popular vampire romance genre (e.g. Franiuk and Scherr, Taylor). These re-readings are necessary for a critical analysis of the messages we are both creating and receiving through popular culture, and are a vital step in recognizing, negotiating and mitigating the devastating effects of these narratives. As Jowett states, the narratives of "heterosexual love, romance, and sex can be a site of simultaneous complicity in and resistance to patriarchal structures…[and]…can offer a recognition of how women negotiate problems of romance" (30). Readings of popular culture that employ epistemic disobedience to facilitate feminist re-readings are a first step toward changing the narratives we encounter and the epistemologies we utilize to interpret them.

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