

# The Forces of Darkness: Exploring *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” Through Shirley Jackson’s “The Missing Girl”

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**The Forces of Darkness:  
Exploring *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s "Out of Mind, Out of Sight"  
Through Shirley Jackson's "The Missing Girl"**

Savannah Bly Richardson

On December 1, 1946, Paula Welden, a sophomore at Bennington College, went missing. A posse was put together to search the area, and a reward was offered for any information leading to her whereabouts. Another in a stream of missing coeds, Welden was never found. For 76 years, Paula Welden's case has remained cold. As John Breunig states in a *Stamford Advocate* anniversary article, "The Girl Who Got Lost in the Woods will never be found, leaving behind a perpetual trail of terrors for those haunted by contemplation of her fate" (2020). As Breunig writes, the open-ended nature of this story is inevitably "haunting." As an expert in reworking the concept of hauntings and the haunted, Shirley Jackson, wife to Bennington College professor Stanley Edgar Hyman, drew inspiration from Paula Welden's story to write her 1951 novel, *Hangsaman*. However, it also served as inspiration for one of her lesser-known short stories, "The Missing Girl" (1957). In this story, a young woman named Martha Alexander goes missing at the Phillips Education Camp for Girls Twelve to Sixteen. Martha's case, much like Welden's, goes cold. Eventually, Martha's uncle decides to give up the investigation. He justifies this decision by reasoning that her mother has other children, and the missing girl is quietly swept from existence. Effectively, what is out of sight is placed out of mind.

Fast-forward fifty-one years, to the airing of the eleventh episode of season one of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, titled "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1997), on The WB Network. The show, now a hugely influential model for the teen-horror monster-of-the-week series, features Buffy Summers, a typical teenage girl with a supernatural secret: she is the Slayer, the one person on Earth who can prevent the forces of darkness from annihilating humanity. Buffy's home of Sunnydale, California, sits on a Hellmouth that attracts a seemingly endless variety of evil that goes beyond the titular bloodsuckers the Slayer is preordained to battle. To guide her on this journey and help her parse through a whole host of parapsychological demons is her Watcher, Giles, who also takes on the form of the high school librarian. Together, Buffy, Giles, and her two best friends, Willow and Xander, band together to combat the monstrosity of teenagedom

made literal. Along the way, Buffy wrestles with her own morality, a large part of which occurs through her romantic relationship with Angel, a vampire cursed with the burden of a human soul.

“Out of Mind, Out of Sight” includes several “firsts” for the series. For instance, Buffy’s mentor Giles and Angel meet for the first time, the reference to Buffy’s close friends as the “Scooby Gang” emerges through strategic costuming and dialogue choices, and Cordelia—the most popular girl at Sunnydale High—starts to express conflicting sentiments about her status as Sunnydale’s queen bee. However, this episode is largely outshined by its follow-up, “Prophesy Girl.” That is, the reason Giles and Angel meet in this episode is to exchange the *Pergamum Codex*, a document that prophesies Buffy’s death at the hands of the Master. This episode is critical to the series because Buffy *does* die, and is brought back by Xander, an act that disrupts the Slayer cycle. But “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” is just as important for explorations of teenage anxieties that resonate through all seven seasons of the series. In some ways a standalone episode, “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” treats the degree to which the stability of teenage identity relies on one’s degree of popularity—one’s degree of visibility. It is in ultimately turning invisible that Marcie Ross becomes the episode’s monster-of-the-week, overshadowed by literally everyone around her.

A comparative study between the Jackson story and the episode reveals striking similarities in the explorations of female subjectivity despite the ostensibly disparate eras of the 1950s and 1990s. Jackson’s short story, “The Missing Girl,” and season one, episode eleven of *Buffy*, “Out of Mind, Out of Sight,” center the stories of young women who experience tangible and psychic erasure at the hands of others. To further uncover how this resemblance emerges, I look at the concept of naming and how this relates to the kinds of invisibility being explored in each piece. This investigation is accompanied by an examination of the role of adults in these narratives. Specifically, I look at how figures of authority contribute to the disappearance of both Martha and Marcie. This analysis concludes by looking at each narrative’s ending as this is where a discernible dialogue emerges. While Jackson’s work is more concerned with the ambiguous end of Martha Alexander (and the real-life Paula Weldon), “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” leans on *Buffy*’s third-wave feminist attitude to question false manifestations of empowerment and the exploitation of trauma. Ultimately, Marcie and Martha’s stories mirror one another, but *Buffy* imagines a reality where missing women become something else.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a show of exaggeration where the mundanity of life is encapsulated in monstrosity. As a female viewer, it is easy to lean into the seemingly empowering narrative of the Slayer. But, as we watch Buffy struggle

with the mandates of her position, the control and often-deceptive manipulation of male authority figures (embodied by institutional forces such as the Watchers Council), and the trauma of being both a teenager and a superhero, the show pushes viewers to ask why the Slayer is always a high school-aged girl. From the outset, it seems like the role of the Slayer is meant to subvert the male superhero. But, in many ways, the Slayer role reads as one of exaggerated female domesticity. Like so many of Jackson's women protagonists, Buffy is expected to assume this role without question, silently serving society in the shadows. What is more, the Slayer is a predestined position. This inevitably invokes feelings of imprisonment, and negotiating the pressure of this destiny is a large component of the show.

In essence, the Slayer echoes many of Jackson's female characters. These are women driven to highly intangible and emotionally complex breakdowns by society's expectations. In Jackson's world, both historically and literarily, women are meant to be wives, mothers, caregivers, housecleaners, and entertainers. Like Buffy, the predestined aspects of these roles leave no room for women to voice their opinions or concerns. This is the identity women are *destined* to have, so why would they ever challenge that understanding? Even if they do not want those responsibilities, it is understood that they will still step into the position and obey. While Jackson's work is more interested in the psychological impact of this complete loss of identity and pushes this sense of predestination until it festers, the character of Buffy Summers challenges the expectations of the Slayer by becoming the defiant center of a community fighting against the forces of evil. And while Marcie's fading from sight feels closer to characters in Jackson's world, such as the titular character of "Louisa, Please Come Home," a sense of defiance is mirrored in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" when Marcie is ultimately recruited by the FBI for the advantage invisibility gives her as an assassin. Marcie is taken by anonymous men in black suits to a secret classroom at FBI headquarters where, it turns out, other teenagers have experienced the same phenomenon. Like any typical high school classroom, a teacher asks them to open their textbooks to a specific page. The camera zooms in on the cover of their chapter, "Assassination and Infiltration," and together the audience and Marcie have the same realization. Rather than the total erasure that Martha experiences, *Buffy* is answering that unending question of potential and personhood in Jackson's short story by giving Marcie a new identity, serviceable and in-service.

Naming is intrinsically connected to identity, and Jackson uses this association to achieve her social critique in several ways. Her seemingly dismissive title "The Missing Girl" becomes very important after Martha's

disappearance is reported to the police. The story starts with Martha's roommate, Betsy, recounting the final night she saw her. Betsy, much like *Buffy's* Cordelia, seems to be more concerned with status. While explaining to police Chief Hook why she does not know very much about her roommate, Betsy elevates her popularity by insinuating that she is only friends with older campers: "I mean, most of my friends are senior huntsman" (Jackson 2018, 7). While Martha's disappearance is not Betsy's fault, she seems to be motivated by a similar kind of social desperation for visibility as Cordelia. This need makes both characters seem cruel and self-absorbed to the point of supernatural ignorance, but it is just one of many ways that we see teenagers cope with the trauma of puberty and peer pressure. And, despite the apparent gulf in their social standing, it highlights the fact that characters like Martha/Marcie and Betsy/Cordelia are fighting the same battle: to be noticed. Nevertheless, after two summers of rooming together, Betsy cannot offer the investigation *any* information about Martha other than vague assumptions about her camp activities.

Eventually, everyone stops referring to Martha by her name. Even though Betsy clearly names Martha Alexander when reporting her missing, she is simply called "the girl" or "the missing girl" up until the point it seems her body is discovered. Taking away Martha's name comments on the expendability of women by creating an open-ended space for the names of other missing women to occupy. Dispensing with Martha's name is also an attack on her personhood; if she is just some "missing girl," the community does not have to acknowledge the loss. Though her actions are never explained, Martha tells Betsy on the night she disappears that she has "something to do" (Jackson 2018, 1). This is a vague statement that creates a gap for readers to wrestle with on their own terms, but the true nature of this decision is inevitably affected by Betsy then asking Martha, "Where? At this time of night?" (1). Martha may or may not have had something pressing to take care of, but Jackson influences our perception of her character's reputation by highlighting that she leaves under dubious circumstances.

During a time when the concept of a serial killer was unheard of, women like Paula Welden, represented by Martha Alexander, were configured as runaways, or, more specifically, their status as real victims was undermined by the impression that they should have "known better." In "The Missing Girl," Chief Hook eventually interviews someone who is believed to have witnessed Martha hitchhiking on the night she went missing. The woman interviewed is portrayed as a typical housewife who may have seen the victim while waiting for her husband to come home from a poker game. She subtly maligns Martha by

insinuating that she was wearing trousers, a seeming sign of promiscuity. Combined with the assumption that she was hitchhiking, this makes young Martha's choices susceptible to the community's judgment. That is, running away and hitchhiking equates to not taking proper precautions and questionable goals. The unacknowledged sentiment embedded within these choices is that she *deserves* whatever has happened to her. Eventually, the paltry witness statements taken by Chief Hook and his force are quickly dismissed for their unhelpfulness, and the investigation goes back to square one. Yet, the damage to Martha's personhood is complete. Including this component of the investigation is critical to Jackson's narrative because she is coaxing the reader into unintentionally siding (however uncomfortably) with Martha's uncle. She is creating a space where the reader starts to inhabit that same thought pattern, but they are eventually forced to confront the barbarity of abandoning the search for a missing young woman simply because there are other children to go around.

As in Jackson's story, the question of monstrosity is complicated in *Buffy*. "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" reverses the traditional saying "out of sight, out of mind" to reference the fact that Marcie Ross, a student at Sunnydale High, becomes invisible. Exacerbated by living on the Hellmouth, being willfully ignored by her peers and teachers (out of mind) results in Marcie literally disappearing (out of sight). Importantly, this monster-of-the-week is not seen or heard by those around her until she becomes invisible. As Marcie's retribution unfolds, seeking out her pound of flesh, Buffy and the gang eventually learn their mysterious adversary's name.<sup>1</sup> It is only when they learn her name that the Scooby Gang pieces together what the Hellmouth, and perhaps more so Sunnydale High, has created.

It is important to remember that what happens to Marcie is a literal translation of her reality. While Cordelia is Marcie's main target for vengeance, *everyone* contributes to her situation. Campaigning for the title of May Queen, Cordelia highlights Willow, Xander, and Buffy's outsider status at Sunnydale High, labeling them the "looney fringe vote" (Whedon 1997). Their position in this social pecking order means that they are more likely to know and remember Marcie. But, as the investigation unfolds, Xander and Willow realize that they signed Marcie's yearbook and took classes with her multiple years in a row but never really noticed her. Despite the solidarity that comes with the "fringes," they are guilty of the same form of bullying as Cordelia; she just wields it openly. The realization that Buffy, Willow, and Xander are just as much to blame

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning names, "Marcie" and "Martha," are strikingly similar.

inadvertently speaks to the culpability of “teenagedom” in general, the unspoken monster of this episode.

This exploration of communal erasure of identity is the strongest connection between “The Missing Girl” and “Out of Mind, Out of Sight.” In “The Missing Girl,” the camp librarian “who was called Miss Mills when she was secretary to Old Jane, and the Snark when she was in the library,” says “one girl is much like another, at this age. Their unformed minds, their unformed bodies, their little mistakes; we too were young once, Captain Hook” (Jackson 2018, 9). This seems to be the explanation for the lack of information concerning Martha. She did not stand out in any way, so there is nothing unique enough about her *to* remember. Situated within this passage is an important suggestion that lies outside its overall message. Cryptically, Miss Mills refers to “little mistakes.” The implication, especially concerning “unformed bodies,” invites readers to supply sexual undertones to her testimony. Again, this is one of the insidious moments in Jackson’s story that steer the reader into participating in Martha’s erasure because it implies that she may have been behaving outside of society’s expectations regarding gender and morality, thus intimating her victimhood as a kind of punishment for transgression. However, the statement “we too were young once” is where Jackson’s subtle critique of community manifests. It insinuates that the mistakes of youth are universal. If we are all making mistakes, why is it okay to let *insinuated* promiscuity mar our understanding of Martha’s personhood? Perhaps it is because the conflation of femininity with sexuality calls upon a long tradition of damnation, and this heritage gives the community permission to justify the death of a young woman. Essentially, Miss Mills’ statement acknowledges the fact that we supply these justifications *instinctually* and without question.

Another important component of Miss Mills’ statement is the use of the phrase “at this age” because it ties the fear of invisibility to a very transitional, emotional, and terrifying time in the lives of young people. In “Out of Mind, Out of Sight,” Marcie’s plan to enact revenge on those who would willingly forget her culminates in her attempt to disfigure Cordelia, the May Queen, right before the spring dance. She says, “We all want what you have. To be noticed, remembered... To be seen” (Whedon 1997). While the idea of being “seen” would be especially important to Marcie, it is interesting that she prefaces her statement with the concepts of being noticed and remembered. Like “The Missing Girl,” one of the challenging aspects of this episode’s plot is figuring out who Marcie is as a person even though she clearly exists. She was reported missing by someone, she has records in the school database, and, as mentioned, Willow and Xander physically signed her yearbook. Yet, no one can remember

her. She has not simply disappeared; the Hellmouth seems to have erased her completely. It is not hard to imagine that Jackson's Martha would also feel completely erased from existence. She quickly goes from being a missing person to having her camp records rewritten to accommodate a false narrative about her "undesirable" character. She becomes a victim of revisionist history, effectively eradicating her actual identity. As the reader careens towards the end of the piece, the police, the local community, and even the reader are not sure Martha *ever* existed.

With Marcie literally becoming invisible, the question of her future existence remains uncertain as well. The fear of social erasure is an ever-present anxiety in *Buffy*. It reemerges in season three, episode five, "Homecoming," when Buffy misses school picture day. Not having that tangible representation of her image equates to a kind of social invisibility that being a teenager augments into total invisibility. Additionally with *Buffy*, this seemingly shallow fear is intimately tied to her secret identity as she is never recognized for the personal, emotional, and physical sacrifices she makes for her community daily. Regardless, one sees uncanny parallels to our current social climate where a popular following on social media, i.e., the right kind of visibility, directly correlates to self-worth. Though comedic in effect, the sea of generic "Have a great summer!" messages left in Marcie's yearbook underscores her lack of close relationships. As an emblematic totem of the high school experience, a yearbook full of impersonalized comments is the equivalent of total nonexistence. This effective nonexistence invalidates her identity and diminishes her personhood.

In "Who Died and Made Her the Boss?" Patterns of Mortality in *Buffy*," Rhonda Wilcox writes, "In *Buffy*'s world, the problems teenagers face become literal monsters. Internet predators are demons; drink-doctoring frat boys have sold their souls for success in the business world; a girl who has sex with even the nicest-seeming male discovers that he afterward may become a monster" (2002, 3). Ultimately, invisibility, and the concept of a girl so unnoticed by her peers that she *becomes* invisible, is an extension of this premise. However, one of the main principles of slaying is that the position necessitates invisibility. As one of the Watchers Council's mandates, keeping her identity a secret is a restriction deemed imperative to the safety of humanity and *Buffy* herself. In the opening credits of every episode, the narrator says, "She alone will wield the strength and skill to fight the vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness" (Whedon 1997). The word "alone" is especially important here. It is mirrored in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" when *Buffy* asks Cordelia why she works so hard to be popular: "Well, it beats being alone all by yourself" (Whedon 1997).



Throughout the entirety of the series, especially while they are still in high school, Buffy tussles with this *Slayer Handbook* commandment by prioritizing her friends, family, and whatever scrap of a social life she can maintain. It is long understood that insisting on community over solitude is how Buffy manages to triumph. However, it is not always straightforward. There are plenty of times when Buffy is doing damage control instead of focusing on her mission. Often, this comes as a result of her friends taking on her burdens or when Buffy directly contradicts her authority figures. It would be easier to be the Slayer in solitude because it means fewer people get hurt in the process, but, as the series loves to point out, this approach is not necessarily better. This is underscored in the next episode, “Prophecy Girl,” when Buffy is saved by her friend Xander performing CPR after the Master does indeed fulfill the prophecy of killing the Slayer. It is arguable that the positioning of “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” as the penultimate episode of the season is not accidental. Though it seems like an in-between episode, it is no coincidence that Buffy faces someone who has, as Giles phrases it, “gone mad” (Whedon 1997) at the hands of loneliness and constant exile before she faces her biggest threat yet. We find further resemblance when, in the film *Shirley* (2020), Jackson’s character (played by Elizabeth Moss) states, “What happens to all lost girls? They go mad” (Decker 2020). Accordingly, Marcie operates as a kind of warning for Buffy, one that is reiterated in the alternate reality of season 3, episode 9, “The Wish,” when viewers are exposed to a hardened, cruel version of Buffy that embodies the solitary ideology of the Watchers Council. Importantly, this version of Buffy is killed in “The Wish,” reiterating the expendability of the Slayer and many of Jackson’s women.

That said, the “madness” in Jackson and “Out of Sight, Out of Mind” is more nuanced than outright mania. “Madness” subsumes the same dismissive attitude as the word “hysteria” when speaking about Jackson’s work because, as Linda Trichter Metcalf argues, Jackson’s women “[live] in anger, denial, and emotional estrangement... [Their] themes are punishment, invisibility, anger, and denial of emotion” (1987, 258). Given that Martha is, ultimately, a non-entity in “The Missing Girl,” Marcie emerges as strikingly Jacksonian in her characterization. Forced to the fringes of Sunnydale High via the intentional and apathetic dismissal of her peers, Marcie becomes an angry soul on a mission to literally murder and disfigure both actual (Cordelia) and imagined (Mrs. Miller) bullies. In this way, the episode draws a parallel between Marcie and Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice*, the Shakespeare play being read in Mrs. Miller’s classroom. This connection calls upon a specific reading of Shylock, one where his morality has been compromised by the cruelty and persecution

he experiences as a Jew. As Metcalf states, Marcie becomes so angry that it subsumes all other emotions. She is emotionally, mentally, and physically estranged from her peers (and family), and, of course, she becomes supernaturally invisible, both punisher and punished.

One of the darker aspects of these two stories is the role of adults. In “The Missing Girl,” adults and their ineptitudes are on full display. Chief Hook’s position in the community is described by his constituency as the product of nepotism. The narrator says, “No one doubted Chief Hook’s complete inability to cope with the disappearance of a girl from camp” (Jackson 2018, 5). Will Scarlett, the camp nurse, literally locks herself in her office with barbiturates rather than deal with the situation. Old Jane, the Camp Mother, emerges as a character completely incapable of fulfilling her role of authority at Phillips Education Camp, which culminates in her eventually “[falling] down dead drunk” (12) as the investigation wears on. Regarding her title, the role of “camp mother” implies that she would have some understanding of who is at her facility, what their names are, and their daily routines. Yet, she mistakenly refers to Martha’s surname as “Albert,” she does not know where Martha is from, and she is not in the habit of enforcing the rules that would ensure all campers are accounted for, including attendance. Importantly, Jackson’s characters cover up the attendance oversight rather than acknowledge it as a mistake. Again, this is a microcosmic example of a larger problem that persists in our reality. Systemic issues surrounding the investigation and prosecution of cases of murdered and missing women are often overlooked, unacknowledged, or deemed not pertinent, especially when they are minoritized women, which further echoes the idea of women as expendable.<sup>2</sup>

Another factor that contributes to the incompetence of these adults is this story’s setting, a sleep-away camp. Consequently, all figures of authority have names that evoke a sense of fantasy—for instance, Will Scarlett, Old Jane, Little John, Tarzan, and Bluebird. Even Chief Hook is referred to as Captain Hook by the librarian. This is important because it creates a fairytale-like atmosphere around Martha’s disappearance, and it seems to underscore the ineptitudes of these characters. As a result, these names also serve as a disturbing juxtaposition. Rather than a happily-ever-after ending, Martha’s tale becomes a

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<sup>2</sup> Criminologist Steven A. Egger defines these victims as the “less dead.” Accordingly, the less dead “are considered less-dead because before their deaths, they virtually ‘never were,’ according to prevailing social attitudes. In other words, they are essentially ignored and devalued by their own communities or members of their neighborhoods and generally not missed when they are gone” (2002, 278). He posits that these victims are often marginalized members of society, like sex workers, people of colour, the homeless, the undocumented, people in queer communities, the impoverished, and even the elderly.

Grimm-style *warnmärchen*, or an unending warning, for other young women. But the logic is missing. All possible leads or explanations for Martha's disappearance are supplied via misguided assumptions about her personhood. The reader is never given any concrete details about who Martha is or what she was doing at the time of her disappearance. As with many of Jackson's texts, the "fairytale" embedded in this story is really more about the ways in which community fails those on the edges. As mentioned, they become dispensable, and, arguably, Paula Welden's disappearance had the same effect on the women of Bennington College, especially because she was never found.

Citing the use of fantastical elements as metaphor, emphasis on destiny, and the cycle of death and replacement, Kerry Boyles argues in "Witches, Mothers and Gentlemen: Re-Inventing Fairy Tales in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" that "Not only does *Buffy* use fairy tale elements as a basis for several monster-of-the-week episodes, the series as a whole can be examined as a modern-day fairy tale" (2019, 35). To that point, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" evokes Jackson's fairytale mode when it is revealed that Xander and Willow should know who Marcie is. Xander and Willow, as integral members of Buffy's community, are not supposed to be villainous, like the Master, or cruel, like Cordelia. But this episode uses the same moral lesson from Jackson's text to indict their passivity.

In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," the role of the neglectful adult is assumed by Mrs. Miller,<sup>3</sup> an English teacher. In a flashback scene, the audience sees Marcie, Cordelia, Xander, and Willow in her class. Mrs. Miller is leading a discussion, and every character but Marcie gets to weigh in on the conversation.<sup>4</sup> It is at this moment that she notices her hand is disappearing. No one else is paying attention as the reality of her situation dawns on her. The reason this is disconcerting is that Marcie is clearly raising her hand to speak in class. To that point, in the episode's flashbacks, she is actively trying to be seen whether it be by participating in class or gossiping in the bathroom. Though her efforts

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<sup>3</sup> Another naming connection—"Mrs. Miller" echoes "Miss Mills," the librarian at Phillips Education Camp for Girls Twelve to Sixteen.

<sup>4</sup> The flashback scenes in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" are reminiscent of Chapter Eight in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) when Eleanor begins eavesdropping on the other residents at the manor. She listens to Theo and Luke discuss "The Grattan Murders," an old murder ballad; she spies on Doctor Montague attempting to navigate Arthur's boredom; and she finds Mrs. Montague helping Mrs. Dudley in the kitchen. Amidst Hill House's increasingly personal attacks, Eleanor finds herself wondering, "When are they going to talk about me?" (Jackson 2018, 162). Her eavesdropping reveals that none of the guests are interested in what is happening to Eleanor at Hill House, and her complete absence from their conversations seems to emphasize her increasingly spectral presence.

become increasingly pitiable, she is not content to let invisibility consume her. Like the adults in “The Missing Girl,” there is the expectation that figures of authority will use the power they have to prevent Martha and Marcie’s fate. Mrs. Miller, as an adult in Marcie’s life, has a responsibility to ensure the visibility of every student in her classroom. As Buffy says in the library, “This isn’t this great power that she can control. It’s something that was done to her. That we did to her” (Whedon 1997).

In “Raising Her Voice: Stephen King’s Literary Dialogue with Shirley Jackson,” Carl H. Sederholm states that “Allusions help foster a greater awareness of the community of texts that make up a larger tradition [...] Put another way, texts are potentially rich sources of understanding, connection, and dialogue” (2021, 62). Accordingly, this analysis has examined how “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” reflects similar representations of female subjectivity to Jackson’s “The Missing Girl,” despite the difference in the time of their creation. But, as Sederholm states, texts are also in dialogue. We have established that “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” echoes the themes and challenges in “The Missing Girl,” but the dialogue between these texts begins at their respective endings. “The Missing Girl,” in its efforts to critique a community that *allowed* a young woman to be erased, draws its dramatic and critical tension from the shame and pity of a thrown-away body. It must be acknowledged that *Buffy* is a relatively recent, long-form television series that has inevitably been influenced by the pressures and expectations that come from having an audience and a network. Keeping this dialogue in mind while answering those demands, “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” asks, what if Jackson’s Martha was reborn, and the invisibility inflicted on her by others was crafted into a component of her identity?

In “The Missing Girl,” Martha’s uncle concedes that the investigation is not working. He justifies calling it off by explaining that Martha’s mother, a widow no less, has plenty of other children to keep her occupied. However, to be clear, her uncle never says this directly. He stammers, “Of course she loves Martha and all that, and of course *no* one would want to say anything about a girl like this that’s missing, and probably had something horrible done to her...” (Jackson 2018, 15). A potential violent death for Martha is all insinuated, which makes it worse because it means they *know* abandoning the case is wrong. Calling off the investigation is the ultimate declaration of dismissal. Of course, this is exacerbated by the conclusion of this piece. Jackson writes, “A body that might have been Martha Alexander’s was found, of course, something over a year later, in the late fall when the first light snow was drifting down. The body had been stuffed away among some thorn bushes, which none of the searchers had cared to tackle” (2018, 16). This passage is important for two reasons. First, the body

they found “might” be Martha Alexander’s. Whether it was Martha and the cause of death are never clarified, though this mysterious corpse is buried as Martha. Second, she was not the victim of an unsolvable, seemingly supernatural, mystery. Though her body was discovered in a thorny location, she could have been found if anyone had “cared” enough to look. Again, this is Jackson’s indictment of communal apathy, the idea that Martha (and Paula) are dispensable, likely deserving whatever fate fell upon them.

In response to Martha’s uncle’s declaration, Old Jane proceeds to wipe Martha from the camp’s records. In a long speech, she says that Martha *applied* to attend the Phillips Education Camp for Girls Twelve to Sixteen, but that she was labeled as “possibly undesirable” (Jackson 2018, 16). Retroactively labeling Martha as “possibly undesirable” underscores the main objective of the communal narrative. “Possibly” pushes at the mystery behind her disappearance as Jackson has insinuated that *why* the girl went missing could be dubious in nature. Furthermore, the term “undesirable” highlights both how much energy was put into finding her, and how her uncle justifies calling off the investigation. Together, they represent both the tone of “The Missing Girl” and Jackson’s objective. Old Jane then goes on to list all the classes, activities, and services offered by the camp that Martha “has not used” (16), including the infirmary and local church. She concludes by saying “our records are fairly complete,” though the reader knows that “most of the counselors kept slipshod attendance records, and none of them could remember whether any such girl could have come on any given day” (8). This is a direct contradiction embedded within a cover-up.

What is more, Old Jane’s revisionist characterization of Martha as an objectionable person comes easily. Despite his incompetence, Chief Hook is a representative of the law. He could certainly indict the education camp for its negligent practices. When that does not happen, it leads the reader to believe that this might have happened before, or, more likely, that it will happen again. Ultimately, neither the law nor camp authorities see this incident as a real issue because it speaks to a larger understanding of the expendability of young women. There are always more of them to go around. Similarly, *Buffy* calls on this attitude with the Slayer cycle. It is understood that these women will die young for a destiny they have no control over. But this is no real tragedy as another will always be called. This pattern is later challenged by the series’ final season turning a cycle of manipulation and death into a communal source of female-centered power.

As mentioned, Marcie experiences an altogether different fate when she is finally caught. Rather than being vanquished or fixed by Buffy, Marcie is one

of the few “monsters” that is repurposed. This is a marked deviation from the Scooby Gang’s general approach, and it also contributes to a more complicated argument on the Slayer’s morality later taken up in “Bad Girls” when Faith, an alternative Slayer initiated by Buffy’s temporary death in season one, mistakenly kills an innocent human being. In the end, the viewer watches as Marcie is taken by two male agents to FBI headquarters where she is put in a classroom with what seems to be other invisible teens and given a textbook about assassination and infiltration. The atmosphere of this scene does not indicate a peaceful resolution. The music is ominous, hinting at the conspiratorial agenda of the FBI, and her sardonic chuckle at the class’s lesson plan indicates a dramatic shift in her personality. She is no longer an innocent band nerd from the suburbs, but an invisible assassin enticed by the possibility of violence.

Like the symbol of the Slayer, it is tempting to configure Marcie’s story as representative of radical third-wave-feminist subversion, one where invisibility as a disability becomes Marcie’s greatest strength. However, it is important to recognize that Marcie is a victim. The Hellmouth perceived her to be invisible because her community refused to acknowledge her. The real critique in “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” resides in the weaponization of this tragedy. Power, especially for women in the Buffyverse, comes with a price. We see this in the final two seasons of *Buffy* when our titular character struggles with the pressure of her community to continue saving the world even after her traumatic resurrection. In “Out of Mind, Out of Sight,” the US government exploits a victim, and turns Marcie’s trauma, both physical and mental, into a tool they can use to advance a secretive objective. Just as it becomes apparent that the Slayer is a tool of the patriarchal Watchers Council, the sentiments, expectations, and “madness” of women in Jackson’s era may simply be wearing a new coat. While the ending of “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” moves beyond the total erasure of Martha’s personhood, Marcie’s ending does not truly reveal an advancement in the ways women are empowered by the structures purported to serve everyone equally. Instead, the dialogue between these pieces uncovers a critique of the true nature of empowerment. Speaking to Angel about this invisible girl terrorizing the school, Giles states, “By all accounts, it’s a wonderful power to possess” (Whedon 1997). But, as the episode emphasizes, invisibility is not a superpower Marcie chooses and it does not free her from the emotional estrangement she experiences as a young woman trying to establish a connection with her peers. Instead, she is ultimately expected to wield her invisibility according to the demands of the government, further diminishing any agency she might have gained from the magic of the Hellmouth. Despite their different eras, characters like Martha Alexander act as a useful gauge with

which to examine figures like Marcie Ross (and Buffy Summers). The seemingly subversive roles Buffy and Marcie inhabit as Slayer and invisible assassin continue to reiterate the loss of identity that many of Jackson's female characters wrestle with while imprisoned in domesticity.

"The Missing Girl" and "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" are both tangible representations of the disempowerment and erasure of women. Martha and Marcie lose their personhood when they disappear from their communities. "The Missing Girl" seemingly falls through the cracks of Jackson's oeuvre, likely overshadowed by its companion novella, *Hangsaman*, which explores the impact of this phenomenon in a much more extensive way. Similarly, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" comes right before the finale of the very first season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. This episode lays the groundwork for certain plot points to come, but it also explores one of the seemingly less "threatening" aspects of growing up. That is, the idea that young people "at that age" do not warrant visibility.

In "The Missing Girl," the reader experiences Martha's erasure second hand. Jackson coaxes the reader along to the point where they also find themselves buying into the apathy and resentment. She left her cabin without telling anyone where she was going, and the open-ended nature of this explanation allows the reader to supply the salacious details that create a whirlwind of unconscious spite. The inception of this thought underscores how easily people can be manipulated into feeling a false sense of superiority, even when they might have made the same mistakes, and how monstrous it is to stop looking for a missing person because society thinks women operating outside of prescribed expectations deserve violence.

In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," the Scooby gang must confront the fact that Marcie became invisible at the hands of others. As Buffy concludes, invisibility is not a "power" that Marcie has been given. Rather, she became invisible because people intentionally and maliciously ignored her until it became routine. Throughout this episode, we see Marcie's characterization continue to emphasize the relevance of the experiences and emotional turmoil of Jackson's women, but it imagines an altogether different kind of fate for "The Missing Girl." While Martha experiences total erasure, Marcie is repurposed into an assassin for the government, further diminishing her personhood. Tapping into the uniquely feminine rebellion of community versus solitude that sets Buffy apart from the legacy of the Slayer role, what happens to Marcie sets up a greater critique of a largely patriarchal power structure that weaponizes tragedy and turns young women into tools. Despite the misconception that Marcie's story is unremarkable in the greater landscape of the series, this episode

encapsulates Buffy's eventual questions regarding fate, authority, and the true nature of empowerment.

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