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### Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003) and Let the Right One In (2008)

There are many classic stories in literature, movies and pop culture which explore teenage angst, and the complex struggles of relationships and not fitting in. Joss Whedon's hit television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* (2008) both explore extremely similar themes that teenagers emotionally go through, it's just the two go about it in completely different ways. In the series of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creator Joss Whedon has audiences follows the main hero Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar) as she takes down a continuous growing breed of 'Vampire Slayers,' along with several of her high school friends who are largely known by fans as the 'Scooby Gang.' Similar to the conventions of other popular fantasy series like *Star Wars*, *Matrix* and *Lord of the Rings*, the character of Buffy is considered by many to be the 'chosen one,' a slayer chosen by fate to battle against the evil forces of darkness. We all know many teenagers can be narcissistic, selfish and believe the world all revolves around them, and so it's no surprise such an idea like the 'chosen one' is something teenagers can strongly relate to.

Friendship, romance and a strong female hero who learns to come to terms with her own identity all the while trying to maintain a normal life, are many of the struggles young teenagers can greatly identify with in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. When watching the episode "*Becoming Part 2*" in class, I was immediately moved by the sub-plot which involved Buffy finally revealing to her mother Joyce (Kristine Sutherland) that she was in fact a 'Vampire Slayer.' This

powerful moment in the show (which gave me the interest in one day watching it) gave strong parallels to a teenager finally coming out and telling their parents that they were in fact homosexual. Of course the reaction that immediately comes after is denial and disbelief with Buffy's mother suggesting to her that she could just "try and not be a Slayer."

In the article "Who Died and Made Her the Boss?" by Rhonda V. Wilcox, she explores the importance of strong binding friendships within the teenage world and that when it comes to the Slayer and her supposed isolated battle in fighting the forces of darkness, Buffy will always have her friends in her corner. Many of the characters within the 'Scooby Gang' seem to come from broken families and so these lost-like orphans ultimately find one another and create a strong family unit of their own. "Without her friends, Buffy would have simply stayed dead; but with them, she returns from the dead stronger than she has ever been before" (Wilcox, 5). The bonding within the circle of the 'Scooby Gang' gives what seems to be at times a bleak show a slightly positive element, presenting a sense of support and community by Buffy's family and friend's. When the character of Faith (Eliza Dushku) enters the group within the third season of the show even she is touched by the 'Scooby Gang' and their relentless sense of strong patriarchal commitment to one another, and she states: "If I'd had friends like you in high-school...I probably still would have dropped out, but I might have been sad about it" (Wilcox, 8).

Tomas Alfredson's horror masterpiece *Let the Right One In* is a completely different beast than *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and yet the two share slightly similar themes. Unlike most of the black and white, good vs. evil oversimplifications that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* tends to approach, *Let the Right One In* instead presents a much more adult approach to the world of vampires, offering us a harsh cruel world filled with isolation, loneliness, despair and several

characters with different shades of morality. The story takes place in a bleak and cold suburb of Stockholm during the 1980's as it explores a troubled and violently angry 12 year old boy named Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) who is bullied relentlessly at school by his classmates. His relationship between his mother and father seems to be almost non-existent and he ultimately comes to befriend another isolated child named Eli (Lina Leandersson) who had just recently moved in next door. The two misunderstood outsiders (which is very parallel to Buffy and the 'Scooby Gang') slowly begin to bond and when Oskar ultimately discovers that Eli is a vampire, he comes to understand and even accept it. *Let the Right One In* presents Eli as an incredibly sympathetic and misunderstood character and her being a vampire is not necessarily the embodiment of the forces of evil but more an unfortunate and tragic curse.

In Milly Williamson's article of "Let Them All In: The Evolution of the 'Sympathetic' Vampire," Williamson explores the fact that the monster is no longer a monster but rather a victim who the spectator shares a large amount of empathy with. "It is now a truism to suggest that the vampire is no longer a monster dramatizing the fear of the 'Other', but has been rendered sympathetic, knowable, a figure of empathy" (Williamson, 71). Unlike the baddie vampires in *Buffy* who seem to enjoy killing and working for the forces of darkness, Eli in *Let the Right One In* kills simply because it is a necessity to survive. In fact there is no enjoyment in her killing at all, and for her to have to commit such heinous acts continuously torments and shames her. She hates doing it so much that she hires a man named Håkan (Per Ragnar) to go out and commit her murderous work. Many question the true purpose of Håkan's character, but I believe Eli is simply manipulating him by dangling sexual pedophilic favors so he will go out and do her bidding.

“This vampire continues to depict the essence of the outsider, the tortured soul, a figure at odds with its ontological being” (Williamson, 71). The characters of Oskar and Eli are both misunderstood outsiders rejected from their family, peers and society which causes these two to reach out and develop a strong friendship with another. Unlike the character of Buffy they don’t have the necessities to join a ‘Scooby Gang’ and instead have to learn to fight the world all on their own. Both stories project themes of teenage angst like identity, loneliness, friendship, isolation, self-confidence, love and the doubts of not fitting in with society. Whedon seems to be suggesting that the real education on the realities of the world for a teenager is not necessarily in school but found between the bells of the classes, while Alfredson tends to give a bleaker and more pessimistic message on lost youth. And yet all these themes that represent many of the struggles that teenagers seem to go through always end up cloaked in a world of fantasy, horror and the supernatural. Maybe presenting such complex themes in a more fantastical context is probably the only real way to get the message across to a younger teen-like crowd.