

## **Michel Foucault, The Patriarchy of The Shadow Men, and Buffy's Parrhesiastic Act of Psychoanalysis in "Conversations with Dead People"**

Jenny Platz

According to Michel Foucault and ancient Greek philosophers, in order to reach enlightenment one must possess parrhesia, or frank speech, and courageously confess aspects of the self to a listening interlocutor. Through the confession and risk of parrhesia one can locate inner truths of self and then escape the confining identities imposed by state structures such as gender, the church, school, and the family. In the season 7 episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "Conversations with Dead People", Buffy engages in parrhesia by confessing inner truths to the vampire Holden. Through her parrhesiastic act of courage Buffy reaches a psychoanalytical breakthrough and uncovers the origins of her intimacy problems, relationship problems, and her joint superiority and inferiority complex. Furthermore, by continuing the psychoanalytical work she started with Holden, Buffy is able to exit from the lingering patriarchy system of the Shadow Men who victimized and demonized the original slayer. By exiting the patriarchy system Buffy thusly creates a new society of powerful slayers who refuse to have their lives and identities defined and imposed by the patriarchy legacy of the Shadow Men. In my paper I will use Foucault's *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others*, "The Subject and Power", and "Hermeneutic of the Subject" to outline Foucault's discussion of parrhesia and the various hermeneutic identities imposed by the state. Moreover, by following Foucault's guidelines in "What is Enlightenment?" the work of Buffy and the new slayers can be applied to the show's real life female audience. The audience in turn can use parrhesia to locate the inner truths of self, separate from the oppressive gender restraints imposed on women in society, and thusly reach enlightenment and create an identity outside the patriarchy's limited concept of womanhood.