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## **Much Ado About Whedon: Report on the 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial *Slayage* Conference**

[1] Located a few hours north of Sunnydale and its hellmouth and boasting far less demonic activity (not one presenter was exsanguinated in the making of this conference), Sacramento offered a geographically fitting home for the 6th biennial *Slayage* Conference on the Whedonverses. The first *Slayage* to be held in California (previous conferences having been held in Nashville [Middle Tennessee State University, 2004], Barnesville [Gordon College, 2006], Arkadelphia [Henderson State University, 2008], St. Augustine [Flagler College, 2010], and Vancouver [University of British Columbia, 2012]), this sixth gathering of fans, scholars, fan-scholars, and scholar-fans was not all that far from the setting of Whedon's earlier works, namely *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, as well as his home in Santa Monica, site of the filming of *Much Ado About Nothing*.



[2] California State University, Sacramento, where the *Slayage* conference was based, is located only a few minutes from Sacramento's downtown and is bordered by the American River. A walking or biking path runs along the river and provides beautiful views, and the campus itself is lovely and lush. The conference-goers were able to enjoy the California summer, taking advantage of the sunshine or the abundant shade. There were numerous courtyards and lawns where attendees could meet to discuss the panel they had just attended, muse about future research ideas, and generally geek out about Whedon.

[3] As in previous years, this conference saw an increase in the scope of Whedon scholarship. Whedon's creative output in recent years has been considerable, and for this conference, we saw the addition of *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012) and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (2013) to the Whedon oeuvre; scholars have also had time to pour over *Avengers* and *Cabin in the Woods*, both of which had seen wide theatrical release prior to the 2012 Vancouver *Slayage*, but neither of which had yet been available to rewind, pause, and re-rewind on home media.

[4] This year in the interest of (somewhat) limiting the agonizing decision of which of the all-equally-enticing panels to attend, the conference convened early, with panels beginning on Thursday afternoon instead of, as in years past, Friday morning.

### **Thursday, June 19, 2014 Tea Ceremony Presentation**

[5] An introduction to the Sokiku Nakatani Tea Room and Garden was a wonderful way to begin the first day of the conference. The tea room and garden were donated eight years ago by an anonymous donor in honor of his mother. In addition to this generous gift, the university was also presented with her kimono and tea utensils. Library administrator Sally Hitchcock explained to attendees that in addition to the tea ceremonies held two days a month, the tea room featured exhibitions of ceramic art and hosted community groups. Many professors have incorporated the tea room and garden into their curriculum as well. Ms. Hitchcock gave attendees a brief discussion of the history of tea ceremony and the importance of the space in this ritual. The tea room is meant to be a place of meditation and reflection, where one can enjoy the ordinary moments of life. While originally the tea ceremony was practiced by only men, women

have increasingly taken up the art in the past few centuries. The audience was also informed about how the ceremony itself is conducted. To prepare the drink, powdered green tea is scooped into a bowl, after which hot water is added. The mixture is whisked with a specially-carved bamboo implement into a froth. The ceremony ends with the statement "*ichi-go ichi-e*," which means "for this moment only"; this is meant to remind guests to enjoy every moment. After the discussion, attendees were given a tour of the space and the attached garden before the day's panels began.

### **T.1. Sexual Assault and Learning to Cope in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dollhouse***

Jessica Price, "['There's Nothing Wrong With You, but You Are Different': Sadomasochism and Trauma in Season Six's \*Buffy the Vampire Slayer\*](#)"

[6] Price's talk was situated within a nexus of complicated issues which dealt with the interlinked yet separate issues of the show's challenge of traditional gendered assumptions about physical strength (given Buffy's role as slayer) and the manner in which this affected her relationships. She examined the blurry distinctions the show creates and collapses between violence and sadomasochism, focusing on the way in which Buffy's use of sadomasochism is simultaneously a means to cope and a source of shame, while also indicating to a viewer the difference between the actions of an ensouled and non-ensouled Spike. Price chose to critique the show's portrayal of BDSM culture while also providing a close reading of the events in question to indicate these fluid power dynamics and Buffy's attempt to use her sadomasochistic activities as self-validation and therapy. Despite these positives, she did note that Spike's rehabilitation on the show after the events of "Seeing Red" and the choice of the narrative to have Buffy end up in the arms of her abuser are problematic, though the show makes an effort not to shy away from these issues, or from Buffy's choice to exert her own sexual and political agency.

Debra Jackson, "['Why Do I let Spike Do These Things to Me?': Seduction Fantasy, Attempted Rape and Moral Culpability](#)"

[7] Jackson's presentation shared themes with Price's, particularly the overlap of sex and violence, and the manner in which agency on the show is framed. However, Jackson approached the events of "Seeing Red" from a different perspective, specifically the manner in which sexual violence depicted within the narrative can reveal problematic real world attitudes. By examining fan reactions to the narrative, she argued that unlike numerous other episodes within the show, the events of this particular episode are distinguished by Buffy's complex position of victimization and culpability. Due to this narrative framing and the choice to frame the scene per Spike's attempt to reconcile with Buffy, Jackson noted that certain fans read the events of "Seeing Red" as Buffy's "fault" and the result of her miscommunication or abuse of Spike during the earlier half of the season. The troubling manner in which these attempts to shift blame for the events from Spike to Buffy by fans of a supposedly feminist show led Jackson to underscore three major points of note: (1) that not everyone is consistently strong and that strong women can also be victimized; women making unhealthy choices can only be held responsible for their own actions and not the actions of their abusers; (2) that the bad guys aren't always easily identifiable and may even be portrayed as sympathetic despite their actions; and that (3) the choice to eroticize a lack of consent can have serious implications for the manner in which rape culture narratives function.

Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan, "We've Always Been above the Law, Adele': *Dollhouse* and Contemporary Televised Rape Narratives"

[8] Sutherland and Swan's paper continued the panel's themes of sexual violence and the questions of agency. Their analysis examined the manner in which rape narratives pictured on screen are often positioned as single incident narratives that spark violent vigilantism when the law fails them, and the contrast between these depictions and real world events. Using examples drawn from *Veronica Mars*, *Sons of Anarchy*, and *Dexter*, and focusing specifically on a reading of Sierra's character in *Dollhouse*, they argued that the after-effects of rape position these women as outside of legal purview, therefore forcing the viewer to engage with a re-examination of the system. Upon recognition of the fact that the law either cannot or will not help them, each character undergoes a transformation wherein they seek verbal and physical confrontations with their abuser, which are themselves coded by a sense of moral loss associated with the urge to kill, even if this urge is focused on their abuser. Sutherland and Swan pointed out that while these outlaw narratives are often positioned as more effective and empowering, actual examination of real world events indicates that few women turn to violence despite the failure of their particular legal system.

## **T.2. Shades of Comedy in Whedon's Original and Adapted Texts**

Charlie Coile, "Didn't I Just Leave This Party?': *The Office* Meets the Whedonverse"

[9] Although none of the reporters were able to attend Charlie Coile's paper, Ms. Coile was kind enough to send us a rough draft of her piece. In her paper, Coile posited that although the vampire subplot of the Whedon-directed episode of *The Office*, "Business School," superficially identifies this episode as part of the Whedon oeuvre, it is actually his point-of-view cinematography, the conflation of humor and pathos, and narrative use of sets and props that mark this episode, and the episode "Branch Wars," as Whedonesque. Comparing the use of character point of view shots in *The Office*, *Serenity*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Coile argued that these shots are an essential element of Whedon's character development and narrative complexity. She also examined moments of silent emotion—both comedic and tragic—in Whedon's episodes of *The Office*, comparing their emotional poignancy and humor to wordless moments in *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Buffy*, and the Whedon-directed episode of *Glee*, "Dream On." Finally, Coile discussed Whedon's use of background elements and art to further character and thematic development, comparing the judgmental abstract-art eyes in "Branch Wars" to similar visual cues in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* and *Angel*.

David Fritts, "All The World's a Spaceship"

[10] David Fritts began his paper by noting that Whedon's *Firefly* is reminiscent of a Shakespearean comedy in both its characters and its structure. Fritts drew comparisons between the various characters: Mal as Prospero, Duke Senior, and the malcontent Jacques; Jayne's cynicism as connecting him to Touchstone (Fritts suggested that his hat might even be considered a nod to the "headgear of a jester"); that Simon's difficulty voicing his affection makes him a mirror of Orlando; and Inara, like Rosalind, must "tutor Mal to be a man." Fritts also argued that the plot of *Firefly* and *Serenity* follow the comedic structure seen in many of Shakespeare's works, which, reflecting Elizabethan anxiety about political and religious outsiders, culminates in the reconciliation of exiles with the community through the "conversion" of the tyrannical figure (whether that is a father, lover, or government). Like Prospero in *The Tempest*

and Duke Senior in *As You Like It*, the crew of the *Serenity* have been driven from the court (the central planets) to the woods, a place of greater freedom (the outer planets), by a tyrant (the Alliance). In order for them to return, the Alliance must, like Duke Frederick, repent. Fritts suggested that the ending of *Serenity* and the victory of the outsiders marks this resolution, as does an act of mercy; like Prospero, Mal forgives and does not kill The Operative in revenge. Fritts concluded by suggesting that, ultimately, like Shakespearean comedies, "*Firefly* is about love."

Elizabeth L. Rambo, "'Love's a Funny Thing': The 'Divine Comedy' of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*"

[11] Noting the similarities between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Elizabeth L. Rambo observed that both of them are concerned with the physical entrance into hell. Drawing on the critical work of Anthony Eoslin, Rambo argued that comedy as a genre contains the following: (1) Things have an end, (2) Things have meaning, (3) Things are connected. In *Buffy*, things have an end, both in the sense of an end/destiny/purpose, which Buffy grapples with and eventually overcomes when she is no longer the "one girl," with the closure of her smile in the season seven finale. *Buffy* also has meaning, and Rambo noted the "emotional truth" in its supernatural metaphors, and demonstrated its resonance by citing shared stories from fans about how the show has helped and affected them. Finally, Rambo argued, everything is connected through the show's focus on characters and their relationships. She looked at *Buffy's* retroactive continuity (as seen in doppelganger vamp Willow's being "kinda gay") and the interconnection of episodes and seasons within the show. She also examined the multi-genre effect of *Buffy*, and the way in which the show combines elements from drama, romance, soap opera, humor and horror, ultimately overcoming the horror of high school and hell with humor and wordplay.

### **T.3: Teaching First-Year Writing and Psychology with the Whedonverses**

Joseph Telegen, "The 'Goldilocks' Conundrum: Moderating *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Inclusion Toward a Generative Composition Praxis"

[12] When Telegen originally began his research, he wanted to connect how his students reacted to (and rejected) his incorporation of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* into the classroom curriculum. Eventually, this transformed into considering the concept from a more theoretical approach as opposed to a methodological one. Telegen began his presentation by outlining defining terms and critical scholarship that informed his research. He started with the term "knowledge transfer," which considers whether the lessons and skills taught in our classroom are useful to students in external contexts, both elsewhere in college and in the "real world." This was followed by introducing the work of King Beach, who is concerned with continuity and transformation and how students are constantly shifting from one position to another, resulting in their adoption of new identities. Beach criticizes the notion of students only having a linear relationship with their education. Other scholars Telegen mentioned discuss pedagogical memory as "an act of participation, a placing of oneself in a story in a particular way." Next Telegen introduced what is termed the "locales of pedagogical memory." The first is written-interactive, where students re-imagine themselves as writers through direct transmissions with the instructor, often into diverse textual expression. Next there is textual, where students gain confidence in their ability to synthesize multiple, often difficult-to-reconcile texts. Finally, there is collective pedagogical memory, where "boundary guarders" are students that have strong pre-existing writing skills and have

trouble branching out into new styles of writing, whereas “boundary crossers” are students that have less-polished writing skills but are less afraid of taking risks. Ultimately, Telegen connected the locales of pedagogical memory to the types of journeys that Buffy goes on throughout the series, which can help students to experience the types of continuity and transformation that allow their composition work to apply consistently throughout their lives.

Sherry Ginn, “That Makes Them Look All Manner of Stupid’: Psychology and ‘The Train Job’”

[13] Ginn’s work discussed how the concept of motives and motivation can be taught using the *Firefly* episode “The Train Job.” Ginn began by defining the terms “motive,” “motivation,” “drive,” and “incentive.” “Motive” is defined as the tendency to desire and seek out positive incentives/rewards and to avoid negative outcomes. Motives are inner states and processes that arouse, direct, and sustain activity. Motivations are the factors within and outside an organism that cause it to behave in the way that it does. Drives are biological needs that serve as motivation. Finally, incentives are extrinsic or intrinsic things that either push or pull behavior. Ginn also discussed various biological motivation concerns, and the connection between primary drives and secondary drives. She mentioned that drives cannot explain all of our motivations, and incentive helps to explain why drives do not motivate all of our behavior. Moving on to “The Train Job,” Ginn used each character in the episode to discuss drive, incentive, arousal, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Looking at each of these characters helps students to see how our incentives and drives and motivations are very similar despite our different backgrounds.

### **SAC State Welcome and Announcements**

[14] The *Slayage* Conference was welcomed to Sacramento State College by Edward Inch, the University’s Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. Inch expressed his commitment to critical thinking and the importance of experiment, creativity, and playfulness in academia. He thanked the departments involved in bringing *Slayage* to Sacramento State, including the English and Communication departments, and specifically, Alyson Buckman. He also noted that the *Slayage* conference embodies the three themes to which the college is committed: enriched academic experiences, innovation that matters, and impactful engagement.

### **T.4. Love, Romance, and Vampires in Classic and Contemporary Texts**

William Tringali, “Buffy vs. Bella: Gender and the Undead”

[15] William Tringali examined *Buffy* and *Twilight* in his presentation, specifically in terms of Freud’s concept of the uncanny, or *unheimlich*. He argued that Buffy and *Twilight*’s Bella Swann embodied the *unheimlich* by being women that are ahead and behind the times respectively. Bella’s behavior—which in the novel includes refusing to continue her education and being utterly obsessed with her boyfriend—are more reflective of the Victorian Era, where women were expected to both marry early and set aside educational goals in service to said marriage. *Twilight* largely presents higher education as boring or tedious, and instead presents Bella’s relationship with her vampire boyfriend Edward as a better ideal to ascribe to. Conversely, Buffy is shown as being progressive in terms of her behavior and relationships, particularly in terms of how learning is presented in the series. Buffy is ultimately shown to be self-actualized without also needing to be in a relationship with a man. Additionally, in *Buffy* learning is

a constant process, and the lack of an education has consequences—such as being forced to work a minimum-wage job in order to provide for one's family. Bella Swann's character is unheimlich in that she is anachronistic, a passive, beautiful, female figure defined by her male partner. Buffy maintains her uncanniness by constantly defying and often refuting the stereotypical feminine characteristics of her environment and time period.

Eva Hayles Gledhill, "Wuthering Revello Drive: Eroticism, Romance, and Time in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight*, and *Wuthering Heights*"

[16] Drawing on George Bataille's analysis of *Wuthering Heights*, Eva Hayles Gledhill noted the Kantian moral structure of Bronte's work. She focused on the importance of Cathy's agency to choose between the good Edgar, who embraces social norm, rules, and decorum, and the bad Heathcliff, who rebels against the social order through immorality, vice, and the abuse of those around him. She suggested that like Heathcliff, Spike is a man accursed, exiled from his former life and the social norms associated with it, and forced to live in the vampire world, which Gledhill suggested is a "kingdom of childhood," an eternal present. She asserted that the suspension of sexuality and the language used in constructing the relationship between Buffy and Spike during season seven mirrors that of Cathy and Heathcliff. However, Buffy, Gledhill posited, cannot shift to the "unending present" of the vampire world. *Twilight's* Bella, on the other hand, has no such reserves about entering the kingdom of childhood, largely because she has misread and misunderstood *Wuthering Heights* and Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship. Bella consistently romanticizes this relationship, which is actually based in eroticism, and by extension, she romanticizes what should be read as horror in both her own relationship and the relationship depicted in Bronte's novel.

### **T.5. Inner Truth, Trauma, and Memory in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel***

Victoria Miceli, "Hard to Forget: Trauma, Memory, and Illyria as Reluctant Archive"

[17] Drawing on Bronwen Calvert's "'The Shell I'm In': Illyria and Monstrous Embodiment" as a means by which to consider Illyria as an archival site which both is and is not Fred, Miceli correlated trauma and archive theory to suggest that Illyria's monstrous embodiment of Winifred Burkle disrupts the possibility of closure amongst members of the group by constantly reinscribing the wound by her very presence. Miceli asserted that an archive is the creation of memory or a record of experience while emphatically being distinct from the original events; Illyria, while capable of seeming Fred-like and with access to Fred's memories, is utterly distinct from Fred. Additionally, an archive produces historical creation as well as a connection to the past, and thus Illyria's negotiation and interaction amidst the group positions her as Fred/ not-Fred, human-like/inhuman, self/other, self/archive, shell/essence; in every case she is neither entirely one nor the other and this makes her monstrous. That this monstrosity echoes the monstrosity associated with trauma, its unknowable and ungraspable nature, means that at every moment the trauma of her presence is re-inscribed because it only exists through interpretation.

Jenny Platz, "Michel Foucault, the Patriarchy of the Shadow Men, and Buffy's Parrhesiastic Act of Psychoanalysis in 'Conversations with Dead People'"

[18] Platz drew links between the modern day Watcher's Council and the Shadow Men depicted in "Conversations with Dead People" to indicate a history of men policing and controlling women's power within the patriarchy. Using Foucault's production of the truth of the individual and the self as hermeneutic (while being careful to distinguish these from Freud's Talking Cure), she argued that the episode rejects any prescribed notions of selfhood in favor of articulating a new self. In this manner, and in accordance with Foucault's theory of parrhesia, the self is revealed as conditional, thereby allowing for a reconstruction which allows for an exit from institutional systems. By voicing her sense of self following the actions of the Watcher's Council, Buffy frees herself from their control and renegotiates her selfhood and her agency. Platz suggested that this confirmation of a fluid self that can be negotiated by parrhesiastic acts allows the viewer to also consider negotiating their own relations within patriarchy, such that our prescribed roles should never be viewed as absolute.

### **Opening Reception**

[19] The Opening Reception was a chance for all the attendees to gather and socialize. First time attendees were welcomed, and, for the first time at Slayage, were gifted with copies of *My First Big Book of Whedon*, a book project designed and printed by Aphelandra Oneida Messer, with extra copies being available for purchase. In accordance with well-established and much beloved tradition, David Lavery created and hosted a quiz, with tables of individuals taking on questions on a single show within the Whedonverse. As a conclusion to the evening, a raffle was held with copies of Whedon scholarship as prizes.

### **Friday, June 20, 2014**

#### **F.1. Keynote Speaker, Sherryl Vint, "Difficult Men, Powerful Women: *Buffy* and Quality Television"**

[20] Sherryl Vint, a professor of Science Fiction and Media Studies at the University of California Riverside and the editor of *Science Fiction Studies*, *Science Fiction Film and Television*, and *Humanimalia*, began her talk by noting the way in which *Buffy*, her first TV love, although adored by fans, continues to be marginalized or completely excluded from discussions of quality television. She argued that the show brought a number of innovations, like serialized formatting, killing off major characters, character development and redemptive arcs, genre mixing, strong female leads, and the phenomenon of showrunner as celebrity, to the small screen, and that many of these innovations would later become staples of quality television.

[21] She also noted some of the formal innovations found in episodes like "Hush," "Once More with Feeling," and "The Body." Vint offered a close reading of "The Body," in which she discussed the episode's directorial innovations in the form of long takes, overlit sets, and static characters, which all contribute to the emotional poignancy of the episode. She applauded Whedon's inclusion of the vampire in the final scene, the way in which he mixes metaphor and realism. However, she argued, it is the fantasy aspect of the show, its use of metaphor, that causes it to be excluded from discussions of quality television, most of which is viewed as a space of physiological realism that does not admit to being fantasy.

[22] Challenging realism of shows like *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Deadwood* through a close reading of *Buffy's* "Normal Again," Vint asserted that this episode demands that we consider why a superhuman girl seems "ridiculous" while a sick girl

seems normal. She noted the way in which the reality of the hospital frames commercial breaks and blends into the reality of Sunnydale, the visual elements and staging of the show deliberately seeking to confuse these realities. Vint proposed that this episode is about Buffy's choice to live in either a fantasy where she is a "little girl" and taken care of, or her Sunnydale reality where she is a young woman with adult responsibilities. Vint theorized that the final shot of the episode articulates to viewers the toll of being the Slayer, what Buffy has given up so that she might save the world (a lot).

[23] As Vint noted, many of the shows deemed quality television focus on a male antihero, a conflicted male lead who is eventually "redeemed by guilt and love of his family." *Buffy*, in contrast, focuses on an actual hero and none of the characters are given an easy out. (For example, Michael Gershman's brutal camera work during the episode "Seeing Red" disrupts Spike's "bad boy appeal.")

[24] Vint also argued that the treatment of wives in quality television shows and the way in which these characters and the actors who play them are often the recipients of vitriolic misogyny is revealing. This, she observed, exposes that these shows are as much a fantasy as *Buffy*. While *Buffy* is about high school and female empowerment, these shows are concerned with resolving a crisis of masculinity and offer a fantasy to male viewership, one that does not invite them to consider the ethics of this cultural brand of masculinity. *Buffy* is overlooked precisely because it forces its male anti-hero, Spike, to change in order to fit into a post-feminist world.

## **F.2. Intelligence and Surveillance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Cabin in the Woods*, and *Dollhouse***

Heather M. Porter, "[We're Also Misunderstood, Which Great Humanitarians Often Are': From Walsh to Brink, Examining the Intelligence and Wisdom of Whedon's Mad Scientists and Their Monsters](#)"

[25] Focusing her attention on the mad scientists of Whedon's work—which she noted, are, in fact, quite numerous—Heather M. Porter's quantitative analysis suggested some interesting connections between wisdom and redemption in these figures. Tracing the mad scientist archetype back to fears of the potential and power of science, which are embodied by scientists being undone by monsters that they are unable to control, Porter identified the three categories of mad scientists: (1) Creators of robotic monsters, like Ted and Warren, (2) Creators of monsters outside of the self, like Maggie Walsh, and Topher Brink, and (3) Creators of the self as monster, like Pete Clamer. Using Robert J. Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence, Porter quantified the examples of intelligence (analytical, practical, creative, successful) and wisdom seen in Maggie Walsh, Adam, Topher, Echo, and Alpha. Seeing higher instances of wisdom in the *Dollhouse* scientist and his monsters than those of Walsh or Adam, Porter posited that wisdom is connected to redemption. She concluded her presentation by acknowledging the need for further research into characters like Tony Stark, Bruce Banner, Fitz and Simmons, and Fred.

Jessica Hautsch, "[We're Not the Only Ones Watching': Spectacle, Surveillance, and Foucauldian Power Structures in \*The Cabin in the Woods\*](#)"

[26] Hautsch's paper suggested that within the film *The Cabin in the Woods*, viewers can observe multiple levels of power, like those delineated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, at work. She argued that the power exerted by the technicians over the teens makes manifest the other invisible levels of power in the film, allowing viewers to see the way in which bodies are manipulated and observation is used as a

form of control. She also equated the ritual sacrifice of the teens to the public torture and execution discussed by Foucault, suggesting that it is not really about transgression but about display of power. Hautsch concluded her talk by looking at how box office dollars, low Cinema Scores, and negative reviews are used by the audience to punish films like *Cabin*. She suggested that there is something oddly empowering about the apocalyptic conclusion of the film, which seems to imply that Whedon and Goddard believe that the audience does have the power to demand better, innovative, intelligent horror.

### **F.3. Hyperdiegesis, Fandom, and *Much Ado About Nothing***

Alyson Buckman, "['We Are Not What We Are': Hyperdiegesis in the Whedonverse](#)"

[27] Buckman began her presentation by building on Jeffrey Bussolini's work on intertextual casting, defining hyperdiegetic casting as the way in which meaning is created through the use and reuse of actors solely and specifically within a particular, cohesive narrative space. She posited that Whedon has built a specific form of knowledge accessed by those that engage with his work and that the way fans engage with these texts then affects the text in specific and unique ways. With Whedon acting as a nexus and within his now publicly recognized role as an auteur, Whedon himself consolidates meaning and becomes a specific object of fandom. As such, the distinctiveness of Whedon's worlds and their themes, along with the re-use of his stable of actors, leads to a richer allusiveness as the reception of an actor's role is affected by the viewer's knowledge of the body of work within the Whedonverse. As such, fans may read a text differently than non-fans because of the knowledge they have accumulated, since watching an actor in two separate roles in close proximity to one another creates a slippage in how these roles and the actor themselves are viewed. Additionally, viewing order can also produce this sense of slippage. The line between character and actor can become semiotically blurred, and actors can seem "out of character" when they play a character outside of fan expectations. Buckman concluded by noting that Whedon's style as auteur is becoming so recognizably distinct that even in "non-Whedonverse" texts, Whedon still acts as a nexus.

Richard S. Albright, "['Wesley and Fred Went to Heaven and They Got This!': Fred, Wesley, Mal, Simon, Topher, Dominic, Andrew, and Agent Phil Do the Bard at Joss' House: The Whedon Coterie, the Fans, and \*Much Ado\*](#)"

[28] Albright began his paper by reminding the audience that *Much Ado About Nothing* is about duplicity, which is visually referenced in Whedon's adaptation. Duplicity also works as doubling: he contended that the low-budget *Much Ado* is a kind of double of the blockbuster, *Avengers*. Whedon's version of *Much Ado* is also haunted by the audience's awareness of not only previous adaptations of the play, but also awareness of the actors' previous roles within the Whedonverse, and this increases their enjoyment of the film. As such, the film draws on audience associations with the actors' prior work and adaptations, in addition to the real lives and interactions between these actors. For example, fans can ascribe their own narratives to Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado* as a way to link them to Acker and Denisof's prior roles, and as such, in some respects, the film operates as a kind of sanctioned piece of fan fiction.

Tanya R. Cochran, "[From Angel to \*Much Ado\*: Cross-Textual Catharsis and Whedonverse Fandom](#)"

[29] Cochran's paper continued in a theme similar to Albright's, as she began by stating that Whedon's mantra of giving fans what they need as opposed to what they want has, in some respects, come to justify the deaths of major characters. The bodies of the actors become sites for transubstantiation, a place where fans can ascribe meaning to the narrative and transfer this meaning to different narratives as well. The actors thus act as conduits for the resurrection of the now-dead characters, leading to the creation of continued narratives. Cochran linked this urge in the audience to the Aristotelian notion of *katharsis*, where the realistic death of prominent characters creates a greater affective response. She suggested that the multiple death scenes within Whedon's work encourages a sense of kinesthetic empathy, but only through the connections fans draw between texts and between characters can that empathy be more powerful. Thus, the meaning ascribed to the actors' bodies and their movement through the viewer's relationship with their previous work provides an opportunity for catharsis. Cochran therefore concluded that through the opportunity for cross-textual catharsis, Whedon may in fact have given fans what they want, instead of (only) what they need.

#### **F.4. The Many Incarnations of Marvel's Black Widow**

Jillian Coleman, "The Transformation of Black Widow and What It Means for American Cinema"

[30] Coleman's paper began by discussing the manner in which Black Widow is relocated both within her history and agency, escaping objectification in the *Avengers* movie. Examining comic issues from the 1950s through to 2009, many of which have overt sexism or domestic violence as unchallenged tenets of the female superhero experience, Coleman establishes that women's stories, even when given their own title and comic, were often focused on traditional patriarchal assumptions of passivity in male-female relationships or romantic rivalries with other women. Thus, Black Widow is often characterized by passivity within these comic incarnations, and while Lois Lane might have been given her own comic, her story is focused on her relationship to Superman and the many romantic rivals she has to suffer. Coleman traced out multiple examples to show that the issues within the early Black Widow comics were not anomalies but media standard, and then linked these to contemporary fan art in order to indicate that these representations not only continue but have bled through to fan-controlled representation. In contrast to these, Coleman argues that Whedon repositions Natasha's role such that while her background as an unwanted orphan and spy remains significant to her role and true to the established comic canon of Black Widow, the perception of her ability to use gendered expectations and roles works in her favor, and is depicted largely positively.

Lewis Call, "'A Very Specific Skill Set': Joss Whedon's Black Widow as Radical Icon of Third Wave Feminism"

[31] Call began his paper by situating Black Widow as a representation of intersectionality within the *MCU* (Marvel Comics Universe) as she is female, Russian, queer (through her non-conformity and manipulation of gendered roles rather than her sexuality), and multi-lingual. Widow, per Call's assessment, is born in second-wave feminism. Her representation in *Iron Man 2* shows her as little more than gender-essentialized kick-ass eye candy, but she eventually achieves more feminist agency in *Avengers* that is itself representative of a more socially conscious third-wave feminism. He justified this reading by drawing on gender performance theory and assumptions of power relations and argued that while *Avengers* is often charged with female tokenism,

this doesn't hold up to a sustained critique. Examining the manner in which the Black Widow uses submission as a tactic by which to gain dominance, her identity being firmly located in her Russian ethnicity, her ability to both save people and be saved by them, and her lack of superpowers, Call argued that her ability to function within the team saw her emerge as a powerful force to be reckoned with. Call's paper was co-awarded a Mr. Pointy for best presentation.

David Kociemba, "Hulk? Smash!': The Impact Aesthetics of *The Avengers*"

[32] Kociemba began by noting that the action film is under-theorized despite its popularity as a genre and linked this to the fact that action cannot be easily translated simply by narrative or dialogue because it is also dependent upon bodily aesthetics and an almost tactile experience for the viewer. He argued that this was perhaps one of the reasons that comics and the action movie genre often push back against each other despite being linked. The exerting body is located at the heart of the action film genre, which produces the male body to the gaze, and positions bodies as states of becoming. Dialogue is often incidental and this produces the monologue as a site of power within the genre while also emphasizing the need to visually emote. Consequently, fighting styles are often gendered as masculine and feminine, and this provides traditional visual cues to the viewer about the possible outcomes. Kociemba pointed out that emoting so prominently is contradictory to traditional teachings within martial arts that specify the need to conceal or discard emotions. Genre plays a role in the production of mythology which is itself cultural production, celebrating it and potentially concealing cultural conflict behind the impact aesthetics. Quoting Whedon's professor Richard Slotkin, Kociemba reiterated that regeneration through violence is at the heart of American mythology, and Americanism is a strong factor in terms of the genre's evocation of survival, the status quo, and its sacrificial figures.

### **F.5. Teaching the Whedonverses**

[33] This section focused on the discussing some of the difficulties and rewards of teaching the ever-expanding Whedonverse. As Joss Whedon continues his creative output, it has become increasingly difficult to cover the span of work. David Kociemba and Michael A. Buso shared their experiences teaching semester-long courses on the works of Joss Whedon.

[34] Kociemba explained that he begins his course by asking students "What is Whedonesque?" His course then proceeds to investigate Whedon as script doctor, director, and auteur. He also uses the works of the Whedonverse to discuss genre (e.g. *Angel* as noir, *Avengers* as action movie, "Smile Time" as comedy) as well as critical theories and themes (applying the monomyth, *The Cabin in the Woods* and the final girl, Whiteness in the Whedonverse, Feminism in *Buffy*, the Evil Dead Lesbian Cliche, etc.). Kociemba shared his impressive syllabus (18 pages long), which he said helps to alert students to the intellectual rigor of the class, and the critical summaries which he requires from students in order to hold them responsible for screenings and readings. In addition to the syllabus and sample assignments, he also provided attendees with an invaluable packet of secondary readings and handouts.

[35] Buso explained that he organizes his course thematically, using the Whedonverse to investigate issues of gender, postcolonialism and multiculturalism, the internet and pop culture, the construction of heroes and villains, and reality. He begins his course by analyzing the archetypes in *The Cabin in the Woods*, which students can then use to begin their analysis of Whedon's other work. Buso explained that in class he

provides students with theoretical background information and then supports his students as they apply those lenses to Whedon's films and television shows. He said that his midterm asked students to answer (and defend the answer to) one question: "Is *Buffy* exceptional?" His final follows a similar format.

[36] Megan Winchell began the question and answer period by asking Buso and Kociemba how they decided what to include and what to leave out of their course. Buso explained that he wanted to present *Buffy* so that students could still follow the show's narrative arc, which meant assigning thirty-seven episodes over the course of thirteen classes. Because of this heavy emphasis on *Buffy*, Buso did not cover *Angel*. He noted that "something has to give" and explained that he would give students extra credit for viewing supplemental episodes. Kociemba stated that he avoids narrative; the narrative of *Buffy*, he noted, is difficult to cover in a semester fully devoted to it, let alone in a course in which he was also covering all of Whedon's other works.

[37] Jodie A. Kreider asked what they would do differently if they were to teach the course again. Buso said that he would keep the structure intact, but that he would likely include less *Buffy* and more *Angel*. Kociemba stated that he likes to include some controversial material that not every student likes, stating that such episodes and theoretical approaches have "high-upsides but low ceiling," meaning that while most students might not respond positively, a few are really influenced by it.

[38] Other issues discussed in this session included best practices for screenings, the problem of spoilers in the classroom, and the role of fan-students.

#### **F.6. "My Uncle's Got a Barn": Do's and Don'ts of Convening a Conference**

[39] K. Dale Koontz and Ensley Guffey, having recently organized the first Joss in June conference in Shelby, NC, on June 29, 2013, shared their experiences of having done so and provided an outline of what one might expect in convening a conference. The session was arranged such that there was a presentation with handouts as well as an open discussion amidst the workshop's participants. The following are a list of bullet points that might be helpful for anyone thinking of organizing a conference in the future:

1. Koontz and Guffey made sure to emphasize the amount of work involved, even as a shared load, and were very clear that even a one-day conference would likely require more than one person in charge of convening it. They emphasized the need to remember to check a personal work calendar, as holding a conference requires a significant amount of energy, time, and patience.
2. They suggested that the planning of the conference take place at least a year in advance. Gauge the interest in the conference before so there is some idea of the size of the crowd of attendees and their willingness to pay a particular fee. Assess things such as conference facilities and transport to and from these facilities to likely residences; try to get quotes to approximate the amount of money as far in advance as possible (though these figures will likely eventually be subject to change). The registration fee was decided by breaking down the cost of facilities and print costs by the number of people estimated as interested in attending the conference.
3. Aside from money, a summary and general information about the space, a keynote speaker is necessary and might request payment. Remember that this speaker might have a partner who might travel with the speaker, and so that needs to be a factor that is considered when looking at proximity, willingness to speak and travel, and financial arrangements. Ensure that you have a safety cushion of a little extra money. Above all else, break even.

4. Find out if your institution will help support a conference monetarily. If not, it is always worth asking if they would be willing to provide other services like printing, rooms, transport, or more. Do all the rough math about costs and place this versus what you can provide to make it financially viable and attractive to people.

5. Try to get an estimate for an approximate number of people and hotel rooms, since you might have to block them off in advance.

ABBA - Ask, Borrow, Beg, Acknowledge - are the keywords of any conference. Asking for help is imperative, and ensure that all the people involved feel special because their help will be invaluable.

Borrow ideas from other conference and other people. Guffey and Koontz acknowledged that they borrowed the idea of tech minions being dedicated one to a room from the *Slayage* conference in Vancouver. These minions would need to be provided with different plugs and wires for tech needs.

6. Make a call for papers that pops and send it to multiple websites. They suggested UPenn, H-Net, Slayage, and to potentially look at other media options like Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter.

7. Set up dedicated Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. These are great to locate the call for papers and also continue their life post-conference as a site of discussion.

8. It is increasingly important to have a social media policy for a conference and it is worth looking at what similar conferences do. The *Slayage 6* social media policy was drawn in part from the policy at Joss In June, which was itself reproduced (with permission) from Vanessa Varin's April 2013 article in the American Historical Association's magazine, *Perspectives on History*. Ensure that you have the permission to reproduce a policy, if you have chosen to reproduce it from somewhere, and check that this policy is applicable and up to date by circulating it amongst members who would require knowledge of this policy and whose opinions are considered trustworthy.

9. With inexperienced academics, instead of rejecting call for paper responses that fail to meet the mark outright, it might be worth reaching out and offering suggestions for resubmission.

10. Tamy Burnett has offered to teach people about autopopulate and mail merge and the way this can help with panel info and print design.

11. Holding a raffle at the conference can help with money. Ensure that the state laws permit raffles because certain states with gambling laws may not allow them. If this is not the case, then make sure that you get good prizes that people will enjoy bidding on. Ask around for people who will donate these prizes and check with larger organizations for your raffles. For example, Dark Horse has been known to donate to *Can't Stop The Serenity*. Jennifer Stuller has contacts with Dark Horse and has offered her help with contacting their management.

12. Look into local sponsorship that might want to advertise at the conference, but pre-plan what is appropriate to the conference and establish pricing.

13. Remember to create t-shirts, tote bags, and other merchandise for the conference. This promotes the conference, is a handy souvenir, and helps raise funds. If possible, try to keep the creation of these local so that the community benefits from this conference as well.

14. Be really careful about bookkeeping, and if there is any sort of question, get someone who can help keep the bookkeeping clear.

15. Think about where this conference is being held and whether local food is able to provide for different dietary needs. If not, look into alternate facilities. Food trucks can be an option.

16. Make sure to feed volunteers and include yourself in the count. It might be that this cost is not covered in the official conference budget but it is well worth swallowing the cost.

17. Make sure your conference has enough time built in between sessions for people to get together, discuss and enjoy the conference community. 18. Try to arrange a get-together the night before as that gives people a chance to meet each other and to start on a good note.

19. Most of all, Koontz and Guffey emphasized the need to be patient. The process is slow and taxing, but can be infinitely rewarding.

### **F.7. Bewitching the Powers-That-Be: A Proposal-Writing Workshop for Whedon Studies Scholars**

[40] Kristopher Karl Woofter led a workshop regarding the best way to write paper proposals. The following points are a summary of the group discussion that took place:

1. Follow directions provided on the CFP and address questions being asked.
2. Presentation in proposal writing is always important. In academia, taking an informal tone may affect how people receive your work.
3. Some grammar choices are negotiable, but in those cases it is important to be consistent.
4. Proposals always should be written in present tense (“I analyze,” “I contend,” “I propose”).
5. Make sure your argument is prominent; noting why your argument is significant is essential.
6. The individual aspects of your argument need to be connected so that the reader can see how these elements can make a cohesive argument.
7. The reader has to have a sense of what makes your argument new or interesting.
8. Have a sense of whether or not the ideas you have are all feasible to cover in one article / presentation.
9. Be conscious of how your idea fits in with the original vision of the CFP, both at the proposal stage and the revision stage.
10. Choosing to use or not use passive voice can have a profound impact. Note that not using passive voice lends a sense of agency to your work (though this can be an aspect of grammar that depends of discipline and/or culture).
11. Connect your work back to previous scholarship within the particular field you are writing; it shows that you are in conversation with current scholarship.
12. If you do choose to cite a direct quotation, make sure that it is absolutely essential to your proposal’s argument.
13. Assume that competition is fierce. Ask how you can grab someone not just by being original and organized, but by looking organized. Grab your reader with clear formatting.
14. Treat the project with a degree of seriousness and formality befitting the subject.
15. In order to get a complicated thesis into a 200 word blurb, you must have a title and make a point in that title. Follow one key argument through to at least one tentative conclusion. If you are at an early stage of thinking on the project, build your proposal around clear, specific, leading, argumentative questions. Avoid the “top-heavy syndrome.” This is when the proposal consists of a lengthy lead-in at the

expense of a clear thesis or overall argument. Go directly to the point via specific observation.

16. You will distinguish yourself as a writer by answering the “so what” question; you need to show your readers why your work matters.

17. Avoid generalizing.

18. Touch on at least one key point regarding the texts to be discussed, and briefly model how the argument might look.

### **F.8. Musicology, Participatory Culture, and *Firefly/Serenity***

Ian Dawe, “You Can’t Take the Sky from Me’: Deleuze and ‘The Ballad of *Serenity*’”

[41] By comparing *Firefly*’s theme with Johnny Cash’s “I Walk the Line,” Dawe illustrated the way in which the open melodies, empty spaces, and unresolved melodies and chords of “The Ballad of *Serenity*” contrast with the steady rhythm and repetition, continuous motion, and homogenous, striated chords of Cash’s song. In order to elucidate the thematic importance of this musical difference, Dawe applied Deleuzian theory to the songs, looking at what the musical structure of these songs reveals about the composer’s views concerning the individual’s relationship with the state. Deleuze contrasts State agents, who are marked by striation and homogeneity, with Nomadic agents, who are creative, mobile, and heterogenous. This led him to conclude that Cash’s song gestures towards a state orientation, while “The Ballad of *Serenity*” is decidedly nomadic. Dawe suggested that the lyrics of “I Walk the Line” and “The Ballad of *Serenity*” also support this State/Nomad divide, the former expressing anxiety and commitment through oppositional language, while the latter offers a deterritorialized view of the world that values freedom. He concluded that “The Ballad of *Serenity*” is an “expression of Deleuzian nomadology.”

Aya Esther Hayashi, “Serenading the ‘Verse: *Firefly* and the Importance of Fan Song”

[42] Aya Esther Hayashi examined the way in which fan music functions within fan communities. She began by looking at the song, “Vera Flew the Coop,” by Marian Call, on her 2009 album *Got to Fly*, a murder ballad that tells the story of Vera, a fabled outlaw and the namesake of Jayne’s gun. Hayashi observed that this song is an example of hyperdiegesis; it expands the verse of *Firefly* by providing a background for Jayne’s gun and enhances fan experience. Available for purchase, it participates in fan culture and fan economy and was written for, and thus demarks, the Browncoat community. Hayashi noted that “Mal’s Song,” written by Michelle Dockery has crossed over from the filk to the Browncoat community. Adding verses to “The Ballad of *Serenity*,” Dockery explores Mal’s experiences and presents his reactions and values, offering a kind of “musical character exploration.” This kind of textual borrowing, Hayashi observed, is common among filkers, as is an invitation to sing the final verse together, which celebrates a sense of community. She concluded by noting the importance of music within the fan community, which works to enhance narrative experience, create fan economies, and build distinct communities in fan culture.

Janet K. Halfyard, “East/West/Other: The Musical Construction of Mal, Inara, and Simon in *Firefly*”

[43] Janet K. Halfyard framed her analysis as a response to other scholars who have critiqued the way in which Greg Edmonson’s score has been used in *Firefly* to code certain characters as Other, specifically through the normalization of Western musical stylings and the Othering of Eastern, which are associated with outsiders, sex workers,

and villains. Halfyard suggested that the show works to undermine this construction. Brass, which in Western cinema is often associated with the hero, is given to the Alliance, while Mal is often accompanied by a fiddle or guitar, two instruments of folk music and the Old West. Inara is associated with the violin and the guitar, and although her musical styles do appear more Eastern, the scales are actually a hybridized hexatonic, not the anhemitonic pentatonic found in Eastern music. Halfyard explained that Inara's musical stylings are most Eastern when she is alone and the subject of the gaze, which, she posited, Whedon uses to make us uncomfortable with our intrusive voyeurism. Then turning her attention to Simon, Halfyard observed that he is most associated with the piano, and his musical stylings fall somewhere between Inara's hybridization and Mal's folk music. Halfyard argued that Simon's music is used to construct his conflicted and fluid identity and to code him as Mal's shadow double and that his music shifts during the course of the show to mark his acceptance by the crew.

### **F.9. "A Closer Look" at *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Much Ado About Nothing***

Katherine E. Whaley, "Aging the Vampire: Old Monsters Passing for Young People in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*"

[44] Whaley's presentation examined the implications and complications concerning aging in the Whedonverse. Beginning with *Angel*, she noted that while his vampiric nature inherently defies physical aging, as a person *Angel* is often portrayed as sensitive or even duplicitous about his age. He becomes defensive when younger characters assume he is older, and often goes out of his way to pass as younger. However, his temporality is inevitable; he cannot avoid demonstrating how old he is, such as making outdated popular culture references, or being magically forced to age, as in the episode "Carpe Noctem." *Angel*'s experience with aging is reflective of a greater trend within Whedon's work wherein age has an Othering effect on characters and being older is often equated with being the brunt of the joke. Ultimately this reflects a culture that is deeply fearful of aging.

Cindi Devito-Ziemer, "The Look of Blood"

[45] Devito-Ziemer's presentation was concerned with the presentation of blood in the *Buffyverse* and was based upon the assumption that blood is often treated in a metaphorical sense throughout the series. For the protagonists, blood is something that represents connection or transformation—for example, *Buffy*'s relationship with Dawn or the use of Dawn's blood to open the portal in "The Gift." Yet despite moments like these, Devito-Ziemer argued that blood is sanitized in the series, and for a show concerning vampires, often plays only a minor role. While this is due in part to the show's status as a network television series, she argued that the show wastes many opportunities to explore the semiotic values of blood, including connections to menstruation and associations with cultural meanings that were ignored.

Marcus Ray Recht, "Much Ado about Gender: A Visual Analysis of Joss Whedon's *Shakespeare-Adaptation*"

[46] Recht's presentation examined how Whedon's *Shakespeare-adaptation* presented gender from a visual standpoint. His analysis focused on both cinematography and costuming—particularly, what features of both Whedon chose to emphasize. He noted that the costuming relies largely on stereotypical concepts of gender, with men depicted in suits versus women in dresses. The suits represent authority and action,

while dresses display women as objects to be gazed upon. While initially it would seem that the film engages in a more traditional framing of gender, there are examples of subversion. The photographer is the only woman presented in a suit, as well as the only woman who looks directly at the camera. Additionally, the idea of the suit as a symbol of authority is compromised when men are presented childishly wrestling in their attire.

#### **F.10. From Comics to Containers in the *Firefly*verse**

Samira S. Nadkarni, "This Is Where I Am... Ain't a Place of Wishes': Kyriarchy and the Preservation of Power in the *Firefly* Comic, *Better Days*"

[47] Nadkarni's paper focused on tracing kyriarchy through the *Firefly* and *Serenity* 'verse to argue that the often presumed egalitarian multi-ethnic space of the crew is one in which white hegemonic male privilege dominates. Defining kyriarchy per Elizabeth Schüssler Fionrenza as the contradictory nature of compliance and rebellion that exists within the intersection of multiple social and religious structures of ruling and oppression, such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, empire, and other structures of discrimination, Nadkarni stated that Mal, far from his perceived role as rebellious outlier, is actively complicit in the persistence of a number of these systems, relying on them to retain both his identity and authority. Based upon the events of *Better Days* that see Mal ensure that the crew is left penniless at the close of the story, despite a successful heist in order to maintain his found family, she argued that Mal and the Alliance function in similar ways that sees them subordinate the needs of those under their control to their own preservation of power. Tracing this and other narratives within this 'verse, Nadkarni argued that despite the crew of the *Serenity* seemingly functioning as a challenge to traditional structures of dominance and suppression, it works as a subversive confirmation of these structures instead.

Mary Alice Money, "Why 'The Train Job' Is Not a Train Wreck"

[48] Money's paper focused on reclaiming the *Firefly* episode "The Train Job" as a successful introduction to the world of the show. Money drew on her previous scholarship on "War Stories" as she traced the manner in which the episode establishes the parameters of genre for the show, working within yet away from traditional romantic Old Western tropes and renegotiating its own stance on a depiction of space and a futuristic society apart from well-established science fiction 'verses, such as *Star Trek*. The episode also does much to establish both the 'verse's overall Big Bad (the Alliance) and a Big Bad for the current episode (Niska), thus tying the episode immediately into the show's bigger anti-establishment themes, while also contrasting the influence of an evil person versus the more subtle problems of an establishment that the protagonists disagree with politically. Money argued that having established all this and more, the episode does in fact work as a good introduction to the show's plot and themes, despite being a hastily thrown-together pilot.

Cynthea Masson, "Let's See What's in There': Unlocking the Containers of *Firefly*"

[49] Masson's paper focused on the issues of the containers within the 'verse as sites of both knowledge and the unknown. She began by quoting Robert Hirsch, who states that containers function as control but they are routed and not rooted, thereby indicating that they are not fixed and are, instead, liminal. The ship functions as a container containing containers which can be boxes, vaults, hidey holes, and more. Moreover, the ship itself is also the site of liminality because its contents remain the same during its motion through space, yet it is in motion - its contrast of inside and

outside, stasis and movement, codes it within the `verse as both containment and freedom. According to Masson, containers are the site of the uncanny or unheimlich. The most prominent example of this is River, the content of container when she is in the cryogenic container, a container herself (in "Ariel"), and a container or repository of knowledge in *Serenity*. Masson concluded by questioning the ethical responsibilities to and of the contents of the container, suggesting that as containers that are contained, we must take responsibility for what lies in our own "boxes."

### **6th Biennial Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses Banquet**

[50] During the banquet, the recipients of the 2013 and 2014 Mr. Pointy Awards were honored. Being recognized for excellence in Whedon Scholarship in 2012 were H  l  ne Frohard-Dourlent (Short-Form Award) for her article, "When the Heterosexual Script Goes Flexible: Public Reactions to Female Heteroflexibility in the Buffy the Vampire Slayer Comic Books," and Marcus Recht (Long-Form Award) for *Der sympathische Vampir: Visualisierungen von M  nnlichkeiten in der TV-Serie Buffy*. The winners of the 2014 Mr. Pointy Awards were also announced. Cynthea Masson (Short-Form Award) won for her article, "Break Out the Champagne Pinocchio': Angel and the Puppet Paradox," and David Lavery (Long-Form Award) was recognized for his book, *Joss Whedon, A Creative Portrait: From Buffy the Vampire Slayer to Marvel's The Avengers*.

[51] After the awards were given out, conference goers engaged in the biennial raucous and only slightly off-key Buffy "Once More with Feeling" sing-along and an impromptu rendition of the Angel favorite "Mandy."

### **Saturday June 21, 2014**

#### **SA.1. The Gothic, Lovecraft, and Selfhood**

Christopher Lockett, "Magical Humanism: Joss Whedon's Rewriting of Lovecraft"

[52] Christopher Lockett's presentation was part of the larger project he is currently working on regarding the humanist fantasy of George R.R. Martin, Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, and Joss Whedon. Lockett argued that *The Cabin in the Woods*, like Whedon's earlier work, places human and humanism in opposition to powerful, omniscient collectives, the mystical and supernatural, as well as the industrial and technocratic. *Cabin* combines the Lovecraftian horror of the mystic bad numinous with the 20th century anxieties of "technocratic conspiracy," which Lockett noted both Karl Popper and Don DeLillo have suggests function a secular belief in an omniscient and omnipresent power. Lockett observed that "science and magic are on a continuum," and that Lovecraftian horror is all about the limitations of science in the face of the mystical. However, in *Cabin*, the mystical and the technical are contiguous; he argued that *Cabin* demonstrates that "reason to the extreme becomes unreason." It is this systemic madness then, Lockett concluded, that dooms the world, not the actions of Marty and Dana.

Chiho Nakagawa, "The Future Echo—Fantasy Self in *Dollhouse*"

[53] Chiho Nakagawa identified a connection between Whedon's *Dollhouse* and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'  ve future*. Both narratives, she noted, were about an attempt to use science to create the perfect woman, and both are concerned with the nature of the soul. In *The Future Eve*, the cyborg does not possess her own soul; she is

imbued with the soul of another woman or she merely reflects back the soul of her proprietor. The actives in *Dollhouse* are also soulless, without a sense of self when they are not programmed. However, Echo is able to overcome this when she organizes her multiple selves under her super-self. Nakagawa argued that Echo's sense of self is made stronger by this multiplicity. She finished by suggesting that *Dollhouse* posits that the singular self is an illusion that Echo reflects and fulfills.

Eve Bennett, "The Mad Doll in the Attic: Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* as Female Gothic for the Neoliberal Age"

[54] Eve Bennett began by asserting that *Dollhouse* follows in the neo-gothic tradition of interrogating the relationship between power structures and the individual. She noted that the show can function as an allegory for Neoliberal sex trafficking or the entertainment industry, both of which commodify the individual. However, Bennett posited, the show is also an example of the Female Gothic, which illustrates and examines women's physical and ideological confinement in the "labyrinthine" domestic sphere. The physical space of *Dollhouse*, concealed and underground, suggests its hidden past and nefarious plans. Bennett also linked Dr. Saunders/Whiskey to the Gothic trope of the woman in the attic. Appearing as both an Angelic and Exotic/Evil Other, Whiskey functions as a double for Echo and elucidates the true, exploitative nature of the Dollhouse, although it costs her sanity, and she remains trapped, unable to escape the Dollhouse. She concluded her paper by suggesting that while Whiskey may not be much of a feminist icon, Echo's narrative arc, especially her union with Ballard, which subverts his identity to hers, allows her opportunities from which nineteenth century Gothic women were excluded.

## **SA.2 Costumes, Comedy, and Kick-Ass Heroines: Re-Investigating *Angel* and its Legacy**

Lorna Jowett, "Costume, Character, and Connotation: The Legacy of Leather Pants"

[55] Jowett's presentation concerned the connotations of fashion versus costume in *Buffy* and *Angel*, with a particular attention on how these concepts related to character. She begins with *Buffy* and *Angel*, stating that clothing is used to demarcate good characters from bad ones. For women in particular, clothing is often associated with moral corruption; female costuming that is meant to reflect an evil character often has animalistic characteristics. Yet equating outfits with morality becomes a more ambiguous concept in latter seasons of both series. For example, the unchanging costumes of vampiric characters denotes their inability to age. Because vampires are created rather than born, their clothing becomes apart of their performative identity. Additionally, the costuming of female characters can reflect the level of autonomy the character possesses; this can be seen distinctly in Willow Rosenberg, whose choice in attire over the course of the series reflects her growing self-assurance. Jowett also focused on the use of leather in various Whedon shows, a fabric which has a specific connotation in both film and television. The leather jacket can be correlated to armor, something a warrior would wear. Brown or untanned leather in particular is associated with a particular type of warrior, someone that is rugged or outside of normal society. For female heroines, leather signifies a certain kind of toughness, but also style. There are also distinctions between specific articles of clothing when it comes to the material. Leather jackets are very much associated with heroes, while leather pants tend to be related to villainy. Jowett maintained that costuming encourages an affective response

in the viewer, and also insists that, in Deborah Nadoolman Landis's words, "fashion and costume are not synonymous, they are antithetical"; costumes are never just clothes.

Stacey Abbott, "All Mirth and No Matter': The Comic Legacy of Angel from *Supernatural* to *Much Ado about Nothing*"

[56] Abbott's presentation discussed the *Angel*'s legacy as a comedic text for both film and television. She began by defining comedic hierarchies: physical comedy is typically considered more low-brow, while cerebral comedy is deemed more refined. Focusing on physical comedy, she noted that the bodies involved are often out of control—both those of the performers and the audience reacting to the performers. Physical comedy is a common tactic used in *Angel*, though there is a greater purpose than laughs alone. The series as a whole is invested in image construction and deconstruction, and as a result, the audience can see how physical comedy disrupts our image of the characters. For every brooding image we see of Angel, we see him deliberately challenging that image as well. Abbott also points to the strong tradition within cult television where non-comedic series include a comedic episode. These episodes challenge the conventions of the series while still having the option of returning to normality. The creators of *Buffy* and *Angel* chose not to use these episodes in isolation, ensuring that they had lasting effects on the overall narrative. Other series, such as *Supernatural*, have incorporated this sensibility.

[57] As for Whedon's other series, Abbott argued that *Dollhouse* is a natural follow-up to *Angel* in regards to theme, structure, and use of comedy. *Dollhouse*, like *Angel*, is about performance of identity; those performances also occasionally lead to comedy. The physical performance of the actors demonstrates not only the incongruity of behavior, but also the skill of the actor in question. On the whole, male actors are allowed opportunities for physical comedy in ways that actresses are not in *Dollhouse* and *Angel*. Abbott maintains that slapstick is considered to undermine the ideal of feminine beauty, yet women being funny also becomes a form of resistance, of being "unruly" (in Kathleen Rowe's famous term). In contrast to *Dollhouse* and *Angel*, *Much Ado About Nothing* not only allows for female slapstick, but also undermines the tendency within some Whedon properties to keep women from performing more physical comedy.

Bronwen Calvert, "I Am My Power': Illyria and the Development of the Cult Action Heroine"

[58] Calvert asked whether or not Illyria's character has impacted the development of cult action heroines after the end of *Angel*. She began by focusing on the physical depiction of the character, particularly as that applies gender. Illyria's body, while physically and referred to as female, is largely irrelevant to what she/it can accomplish. Yet the god (not goddess) Illyria's ambiguous presentation of self points to how Whedon's heroines tend to be complicated in some way. Illyria's status as an alien being inside the body of Winifred Burkle challenges the level of agency the character has to fight as her/his own person. Calvert examined other television series as well, gauging their depiction of female heroines in light of Illyria's legacy. She stated that despite the many examples of action heroines within cult television, access to them and the consistency in terms of how they are presented still needs development.

### **SA.3. Whedon, War, and Politics, or How Fantasy Informs Reality Informs Fantasy**

Derrick King, "Hacktivism,' the State, and Neoliberalism: Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and the Limits of the Political Imagination"

[59] King's paper began by questioning the seeming opposition between the ideology of complete transparency in terms of information as represented by the hacker group Rising Tide and the secretive information policies of S.H.I.E.L.D., arguing that free information becomes synonymous with free markets, aligning anarchic impulses with neoliberalism. Yet, at the same time, the conservative agenda this implies is simultaneously put in question by the revelation of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s own infiltration by Hydra, its code of secrecy enabling the events of the season one finale. As such, King argued that the show sets up two negative positions, each of which is trying to negate the other, and emphasized the limited political action of each of these positions. Much like the events of season 5 of *Angel*, *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* appears to suggest that working from within an institution has its own advantages and pitfalls, but can only succeed (even if this success is limited) upon the negation of both these points to create an open space within which neither functions.

Craig Franson, "The Unruly *Avengers*: Marvels of Terror and the End of History"

[60] Franson began by discussing the fact that *Cloverfield* and *Avengers* broke the previous pattern in Hollywood films that chose to represent rather than invoke the events of 9/11. He noted that while *Cloverfield* was criticized for this evocation, *Avengers* was not, despite its clear intent to elicit parallels by bringing the fight to the streets and cars of New York. The dramatic moment made apparent by the experience of 9/11 produces political relevance which is undercut within the narrative by humorous dialogue, and the film lies between the relevance and irrelevance. Franson paired Keats with Whedon to suggest that Romanticism can be used to examine the *Avengers* film, reading wit against sentiment. Given that Romanticism saw the sensible and the imaginative paired against each other, while terror was also invoked because of the events of the French Revolution, he argued that parallels could easily be found in the film's choice to pay homage to a particular historical moment. By doing so, Franson posited that Whedon reinscribes both a narrative of terror and vengeance, which is given an immediate sense of resolution, collapsing the space of the attack and its military reprisals onto the singular frame of New York City.

Renee St. Louis and Miriam Riggs, "Clocking Field Time': War-Making as Elevated Labor in the Whedonverse"

[61] St. Louis and Riggs, drawing strongly on Ensley Guffey's work on war in the Whedonverses, focused on the manner in which soldiering and war-making forms a major theme within the Whedonverses. Positioning soldiering as both elevated and elevating labor, St. Louis and Riggs considered the metanarrative that runs through the Whedonverses, arguing that there is slippage between soldier tropes being brought to the forefront of these narratives that then themselves become a narrative critique of these very tropes. The viewer is implicitly enmeshed as complicit in the historical events evoked onscreen; the intensity of war, the damages suffered, and our own inability as a society to deal with the after-effects of these wars play out within this assessment. Parallels in the Whedonverses to real-world ideologies and the consequences of war—such as the notion of building a "better" world or the increasing events of soldier suicide—lead St. Louis and Riggs to question the representation of soldiering within both

these `verses and the contemporary media and the manner in which knowledge and power is controlled and mediated by institutional authorities.

#### **SA.4. The Female Body, Action, and Desire in Whedon Works**

Wendy Sterba, "Guise and Dolls: Prostitution as Representation of Capitalistic Masking and Mark(et)ing of Women in the Televisual Whedonverse"

[62] Wendy Sterba examined the prostitutes of the Whedonverse, focusing specifically on the characters of Darla from *Buffy* and Inara from *Firefly*. Sterba asserted that Darla attempts conceal her vampiric nature and her status as a prostitute, although she is marked as both. Darla uses the innocence and femininity implicit in her schoolgirl costume to mask her sexual transgressiveness and the phallic (and thus hermaphroditic) nature of the female vampire, but her "rotten," syphilitic heart continues to code her. Sterba also linked Darla to consumerism and capitalism, noting her fabulous clothes (in every era) and shopping excursions, which suggests that corporations, like Rossum in *Dollhouse*, also use masks to conceal their corruption. Turning her attention to Inara, who, at first glance, appears to conceal the least, Sterba noted that although Inara, who renders manifest the positive aspects of the Alliance, does not mask her status as a prostitute, though she does conceal that something is slowly killing her. Just as the Alliance conceals its true nature, Inara hides the ways in which objectification and monetization of the body marks it.

Ananya Mukherjea, "Speed at 20: Revisiting the Whedonisms of a Great Action Movie at the Edge of the Whedon Canon"

[63] Unfortunately, Ananya Mukherjea could not attend the conference, but Rhonda Wilcox read her paper on *Speed* in her stead. Mukherjea noted in her paper that Joss Whedon worked as a script doctor for *Speed* and can be credited with over ninety percent of the dialogue. She argued that this dialogue is full of wit and Whedonisms. However, Mukherjea noted that the similarities between *Speed* and Whedon's other work also extends to how he constructs characters. Officer Jack Traven is not a solitary hero; instead he understands the importance of community, teamwork, and partnership, and these are themes that are evident in many of Whedon's other works. He is uncomfortable with the hypermasculinity of the action genre and has no problem putting Annie Porter behind the wheel. This, Mukherjea argued, helps us to identify and understand *Speed's* place in the Whedon oeuvre.

Hélène Frohard-Dourlent, "I Prefer 'Man-Reaction': Exploring Representations of Doll (Hetero)Sexuality and Desire in *Dollhouse*"

[64] Hélène Frohard-Dourlent interrogated the relationship between Sierra and Victor in *Dollhouse*. Establishing the way in which the inactive dolls are coded as children, Frohard-Dourlent noted the infantilizing asexuality of the dolls, as evidenced by their unisex showers and the Dollhouse's disposal of a handler who sexually abuses Sierra when she is inactive, which is treated as child abuse. When Victor has a "man-reaction" in the showers, Frohard-Dourlent argued, this troubles the Dollhouse's supposition of the dolls as asexual and innocent, and the company treats it as a dangerous cancer and contagion, because it undermines the social construction of childhood asexuality and the social control of the Dollhouse. However, while the relationship between Victor and Sierra can be read as subversive, it is also problematically heteronormative. Frohard-Dourlent observes that the narrative

naturalizes (hetero)sexuality and (hetero)romance as inseparable and forecloses the possibility of fluid sexualities or non-heterosexualities.

### **SA.5. "It's a Magical Place": Transmedial Counternarratives in the Whedonverse**

[65] Julie L. Hawk acted as presenter and facilitator of a panel-led discussion on counternarratives within the Whedonverses, with Ensley F. Guffey and Samira Nadkarni acting as invited respondents. Hawk suggested the need to read Whedon's independently produced film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* against the big-budget blockbuster, *Avengers*, indicating that the former was perhaps a reaction to the more strict constraints of the latter. Arguably, despite both films being situated in a distinct canon, the independent production of *Much Ado* provided Whedon with far more freedom of vision than a Hollywood superhero franchise film intended for a wide audience and was a more intimate look at the landscape of Whedon's world. Hawk acknowledged that this intimacy was itself very mediated and that the intended audiences for each film were fairly distinct, but reiterated that the contrast of the superhero antics of *Avengers* did seem to find a response in the more subtle *Much Ado*. Hawk then opened up the discussion to members of the panel regarding Whedon's transmedial counternarrative, the manner in which feminism was constructed in both movies, and the inherent problems of Whedon being a straight white male attempting to represent different types of feminism.

[66] Ensley Guffey began by being careful to refute the assumption that *Much Ado*, being a potential response to *Avengers*, was in any way an apology by Whedon for a vision compromised by canon. He cited the inclusion of Black Widow in *Avengers* as a strong sign of Whedon's continued commitment to portraying strong female role models, and the film's focus on the power of found families as a continued theme within the Whedonverse. Samira Nadkarni agreed with these points, but stated that if Hawk's assertion of *Much Ado* being a response to *Avengers* was true, then Whedon's depiction of race and feminism were hugely problematic. Nadkarni argued that the depiction of Conrade as female added little to the text and, in fact, deliberately made the text distinctly heterosexual, despite the opportunity for queering, and produced a woman as a site of evil and passive sexuality. In addition to this, Nadkarni pointed out that the depiction of "The Ethiopie" within the film was in very poor taste as other racial slurs were cut from the text, indicating that while Jewish identity was deemed inappropriate to offend, visible racial difference was not. She linked this to a continued theme within Whedon's work of appropriation rather than engagement with ethnic or racial difference and a privileging of whiteness.

### **SA. 6. *Cabin in the Woods* Screening and Roundtable Discussion**

[67] Kristopher Karl Woofter acted as a facilitator for a roundtable discussion on the Whedon and Goddard film, *Cabin in the Woods*, with Erin M. Giannini, Jerry D. Metz, and Michael Starr as invited respondents. According to Woofter, *Cabin in the Woods* explores a variety of issues that have affected viewership post-9/11, such as surveillance, spectatorial passivity, corporatization, ethical and moral disengagement, and more. He argued that the positioning of the viewer is fraught and that it is unclear who these disengaged "gods" are meant to represent. Starr's argument was focused on the manner in which Whedon approaches intertextuality through use of space. To that end, he posited that the "factory" where the third act of the film takes place is a space for ritual and transformation; it is a liminal space, and the ascribed "identity" of the

characters falls away within the space of the factory. Meaning is thus initially gained through an understanding of intertextuality, though the intertexts eventually collapse within the liminal space because of their multitude. Starr used this argument to suggest that liminal space is about potentiality—everything breaks down so that things can be constructed in new ways.

[68] Metz chose to focus on the fact that despite Goddard and Whedon's desire to expose the corrupt nature of the horror genre, it is too immersed within the clichés of the genre to critique it. Lacking this distance, Whedon and Goddard use violence in a manner similar to the torture porn they supposedly denounce, and yet they assume that the viewer is supposed to understand that their approach is the superior one. Taking a different tack, Giannini argued that *Cabin in the Woods* is a critique of corporate media. According to the corporate mindset, Giannini stated that the concept of externality maintains that the job of a corporation is to maintain profits. As a result, the societal costs of running the corporation get passed on to the consumer and society at large. Therefore, the characters (and their archetypes) represent the people that bear the costs of this corporate action.

### **SA.7. Feminism, Choice, and Gender Representation in Whedon Works**

Amy A. Williams, "Choice and the Chosen One: Abortion in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*"

[69] Williams examined the storyline of an unexpected pregnancy in the *Season Nine* comics of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in which Buffy makes a choice to terminate her pregnancy, in order to draw parallels between real world experiences of women considering abortion and Buffy's choice in the comics. She noted that Buffy's reasoning for choosing abortion includes six of the most common reasons why most women make the same decision. However, instead of dealing with the issue, the story undercuts the representation by replacing Buffy with the Buffybot, replacing the reality of the situation with farce. Having used these comics in her health communication classes, Williams discussed the manner in which the women reacted to the comics and this particular narrative twist, noting that the Buffybot took away after-effects of abortion decision and limited the possibility of women identifying with the narrative. She noted the fact that in a number of pop cultural representations, women who seek abortions are inevitably likely to either face punishment or be killed in the narrative, and this contributes to a negative mythos that surrounds abortion.

Stephanie A. Graves, "'You Really Think I'm Pretty?': The Problem of Gender Representation in *The Avengers*"

[70] Graves outlined pre-existing problems of sexism and bad writing in contemporary female superhero films, like *Catwoman* and *Elektra*. She argued that while gender is better represented in *Avengers*, the standard by which one would measure these things is very low. While scenes in *Avengers* depicting members of S.H.I.E.L.D. has an approximate ratio of 30% women to men, still a number of these women are dressed in skirts and heels in accordance with gendered expectations. Graves went on to note that *Avengers* fails the Bechdel Test, noting that while there were challenges to the Bechdel Test that point out its flaws, the reasoning behind it remains valuable. The franchise's choice not to include any of the female Avengers of the comics (Graves pointed out that while Whedon was considering Wasp, he termed having both her and Black Widow as "too much"), as well as the manner in which Black Widow follows the Smurfette Principle of a single female surrounded by men, are both incredibly problematic when viewed in terms of basic feminism. Whedon might be a feminist,

Graves asserts, but the fact that no women speak to each other in the course of the film and only a single female character was seen as sufficient, arguably leaves this statement in doubt with regard to representation of gender in *Avengers*. Graves' paper was co-awarded a Mr. Pointy for best presentation.

Rhonda W. Wilcox, "Give Us the Swords': Whedon's Feminism in Shakespeare's *Much Ado*"

[71] Wilcox opened her presentation by stating that while Beatrice and Benedick are usually the focus of any feminist discussion of the play, they were not the focus of her paper. Beginning by drawing attention to the manner in which historical double consciousness recognizes both past and present social mores and provides relief in changed circumstances, Wilcox examined the way in which the representation of women in the film outlines Whedon's feminism. Therefore, the analysis focused on secondary characters within the movie. She noted that Margaret's role is formed along the nexus of class and gender, such that Margaret's wit and the fact that the shorter length of the film gives her proportionally more time on-screen makes her more equal in representation to Beatrice and Hero. In a less overt manner, Maurissa Tancharoen's rendition of "Sigh No More" changes the manner of the address from the original play, and the female gymnasts in the background appear physically strong. When discussing the female photographer, Wilcox emphasized the way in which the male gaze is challenged by the choice to cast a woman, as well as the choice to use a woman to represent the breakdown of private and public spaces. Wilcox concluded with an emphasis on the way in which visual or emotive cues were reworked in the film to provide greater feminine agency while still keeping to the content of the original play.

### **SA.8. Power, Apocalypse, and Redemption in the *Angelverse*.**

Jacqueline M. Potvin, "Pernicious Pregnancy and Redemptive Motherhood: Narratives of Reproductive Choice in Joss Whedon's *Angel*"

[72] In her presentation about abortion and motherhood in the *Angelverse*, Jacqueline M. Potvin noted the negative representation of pregnancy in the show. Most of the instances of pregnancy are non-consensual and unwanted—the result of rape, demons forcing their spawn on human women—and also endanger those women's lives. In these instances, the ethics of the *Angelverse* are solidly pro-choice. However, Potvin argued that this pro-choice ethos is complicated by Darla's pregnancy and the way in which her self-sacrifice constructs motherhood as a redemptive force for a sexually transgressive woman. Potvin claimed that this idealization of motherhood can also be seen in the maternal role assumed by Cordelia within *Angel Investigations*. Especially problematic within this narrative of redemptive motherhood, Potvin concluded, is that both Darla's and Cordelia's stories end in death because of their altruistic, self-sacrificing support of the men around them. Although this idealization does not negate the pro-choice message of the monstrous pregnancies of *Angel*, it does limit and complicate it.

Chelsea Caward Moore and Anthony Chase, "Law as Power, Law as Meaning: Jurisgenesis and Jurispathy in the *Angelverse*"

[73] Chelsea Caward Moore (Anthony Chase was unable to attend) began the paper by suggesting that in *Angel* and *Buffy* prophecy functions as a form of law; its status is static and stable, despite relying on changing and unstable interpretations. Drawing on the work of Robert Cover, Moore argued that, in *Angel* and *Buffy*, the possibilities for alternative interpretations of prophecy have been foreclosed by the

powerful institution of Wolfram and Hart and the Watcher's Council. They control the jurisgenesis of the prophecy, using it to construct a nomos, or a normative world view, that mythologizes their existence and world view. Moore posited that in *Buffy* and *Angel* the titular characters seek to destabilize this nomos by establishing alternative jurisgenesis. Buffy undermines the jurispathy of the Shadow Men and Watchers Council by rejecting the demon essence offered to her by the Shadow Men and by choosing to empower the potentials, an act that deconstructs the interpretation that there can only be one slayer. Likewise, Angel, despite Wolfram and Hart's best attempts to control him, abdicates himself from the Shanshu prophecy, thereby rendering it unstable. Moore concluded by noting the flexibility and instability implicit in prophecy in the Whedonverse and used it to demonstrate the problematic mythologizing of some of America's founding documents.

**SA. 9. Jessica Neuwirth, Keynote Speaker, "Joss Whedon: Born into Feminism"**

[74] One of the founding members Equality Now, a global Women's Rights organization, Jessica Neuwirth spoke about the influence of Joss Whedon's mother, Lee Stearns, on the development of her feminist and humanitarian consciousness and her commitment to activism and action. She recounted that Stearns taught her to "care about the world and work to change it," and stressed the Whedon received the same education in justice and compassion from his mother.

[75] Neuwirth worked with Amnesty International for a number of years before leaving them in 1992 to form Equality Now, with its specific emphasis on gender and sexual equality. She cited the story of a young Indian girl being sold to a sixty-year-old man who planned to take her to Saudi Arabia as an impetus for the development of the organization. Neuwirth determined that she would combat the human rights violations endured by women, including female genital mutilation, sexual violence, trafficking, and discriminatory laws, using the same strategies and techniques employed by Amnesty International. Equality Now focuses on donor direct actions, and Neuwirth asserted that their philosophy is "minimum bureaucracy, maximum impact."

[76] She also emphasized the link between art and activism. She noted Whedon's 2007 response to the stoning of Du'a Khalil Aswad, and the outpouring of support from Whedon fans that it prompted. She also cited some of the dramatic work that Whedon did for the 2012 20-year anniversary celebration of Equality Now, including his humorous "Evil Robot from the Future" and the poignant "As I Speak." She concluded by noting that "art has a way of lifting you up" and credited art with the power to inspire and mobilize the masses to fight against injustice for human rights and humanitarian ideals.

[77] The reporters would like to note that while Neuwirth's presentation on Equality Now was important in terms of its focus on gender, equality, and what we might contribute to this effort, it did raise certain problematic issues in terms of charities as brands and their role within what functions as a neocolonial framework. That is, while Equality Now does important work, it is worth thinking about whether its brand can overshadow local NGOs that pre-existed their presence and have been doing work in the region much before a large organization came in to focus on the issue in question. While publicity on certain issues is a good thing, it does emphasize the manner in which local organizations are often heavily overshadowed, despite contributing just as much with less funds, less people, and with knowledge of locals. Empowering local organizations that are already located within the struggle is very important, and can be a way in which

to move away from continued colonial systems of power that see the Western world as “saving” developing countries, with all the cultural and systemic prejudice and hierarchy that can indicate. Zambia, Pakistan, and other countries being represented in Neuwirth’s speech have their own local activists too, who are often unsung. Local activists can work really hard but are often unrecognized by larger world media because they aren’t Western, aren’t white, aren’t being publicized the same way. And this is an issue that is worth thinking about along with the good work that is done. Evidence does indicate a type of erasure through which the Western charity brands overshadow local efforts and that there are ways around this, if we are willing to seek them out. (Editor’s note: During her presentation, Jessica Neuwirth urged conferees to access <http://donordirectaction.org/activists/> , noting that Donor Direct Action is a means through which to directly support local organizations such as Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles, of the Democratic Republic of Congo, or the Syrian Women’s Forum for Peace, among many others listed on the site. See the “Letter from Jessica Neuwirth” on the conference website, <http://scw6.whedonstudies.tv>)

### **Can’t Stop the *Serenity*: Charity Screening for Equality Now**

[78] In spirit of humanitarian activism, the *Slayage* conference hosted a charity screening of *Serenity*, the proceeds of which were donated to Equality Now. This event allowed Whedon’s fans to honor one of their favorite auteurs by contributing to an organization that has had his enthusiastic support.

[79] Conference organizers also publicized the event throughout Sacramento and the surrounding area, inviting the local fan community to enjoy a screening of the film with fans from around the world and in support of a worthy cause.

**Sunday, June 22, 2014**

### **SU.1. Featured Speakers**

Mary Ellen Iatropoulos, “It’s All About Power’: Critical Race Theory across the Whedonverses”

[80] Mary Ellen Iatropoulos’ presentation focused on the problematic representation of racial diversity (or lack thereof) within the Whedonverse. As has been noted by a numerous critics, the Whedonverse largely forecloses discussions of race and racism by rendering it invisible through the absence of characters of color.

[81] Iatropoulos framed her discussion by noting that acknowledging the Whedonverse’s lack of diversity and universalization of whiteness is not a personal condemnation of Whedon or any of his writers, but rather it reveals systemic issues of white privilege, institutionalized racism, and the normalization and naturalization of racist practices and the ideological discourses that underpin them; as she argued in a crucial premise of her paper, “in the unintentional, we see the situational.” Media, like film and television, is but another of these institutions. However, as Iatropoulos noted, media does have the power to influence the individual. It can either reify existing stereotypes, prejudices, and norms, or it can challenge and demystify them.

[82] Iatropoulos was especially critical of the colorblindness evident in the treatment of characters of color within the Whedonverse. She observed that this denial of difference is particularly insidious because it “denies the cultural influence of racism.” Color blindness presents whiteness and the white experience as the norm, while ignoring the ways in which racial difference is used to “code and organize individuals.” Although

these racial categories are culturally constructed, the effects that they have on individuals living within their system are very real, and ignoring does not facilitate social progression but hampers it by rendering the problems of racism and racial discrimination invisible.

[83] The Whedonverse does not entirely ignore race, and Iatropoulos pointed to multiple episodes, including *Angel's* "Thin Dead Line" and *Buffy's* "Go Fish," in which issues of institutionalized white privilege and power are brought to the fore. She also examined the way in which patriarchal institutions like Wolfram & Hart and the Watcher's Council codify white, male privilege and are represented as, at best, exploitative and, at worst, evil.

[84] However, despite these attempts to confront white power and white privilege, characters in the Whedonverse are often represented in such a way that reinforces racism and reifies white privilege. Iatropoulos pointed to Buffy and Xander's bafflement at Bollywood in "Reptile Boy" and the depictions of non-Western Euro-American cultures in "Inca Mummy Girl" as naturalizing white, middleclass American-ness as the norm, while Other(ed) cultures and people who do not fit that sensibility are excluded.

[85] Iatropoulos concluded her remarks by urging white people to be aware of their race and the privilege it allows them. As she noted, "The more you pay attention [to race and privilege], the more you can do about it."

Jennifer K. Stuller, "All That Matters Is What We Do: Fans, Community-Building, Love, Social Justice, and Other Activist Lessons From The Whedonverse."

[86] Stuller began her presentation by looking at the manner in which communities function, presenting a rhizomatic map of her interactions with various people and social groups who influence her work, suggesting that no position is absolute and that everything is eventually relational. She stated that she often applied this mode of thinking to her work on Geek Girl Con, trying to steer away from moral absolutism as it inevitably functions as a faulty position from which to begin.

[87] Stuller traced the inception and evolution of Geek Girl Con, citing the need for safe and fun communities within which women could feel welcomed and empowered within spaces that, until that time, had been coded as male. She explained that the evolution of Geek Girl Con was very much an example of Do-It-Yourself and Do-It-Together aesthetics which brought together people who were keen on empowering women who wished to participate in geek culture without sexism and harassment being a factor in their experience. Stuller emphasized the fact that community was at the heart of her endeavor, insisting that "without communities, we risk bitterness." Collaborative community-building produces its own rules and can push back against systems where women are often marginalized.

[88] Stuller was careful to emphasize that complete and anarchic systemic overhaul is likely destined for failure—people being resistant to abrupt wide-scale changes—but that small radical everyday acts are a necessity and can eventually result in big changes. Using the rhizomatic map of collaborative community, Stuller spoke about the ways in which interlocking collaborative communities change each other (for the better). Quoting feminist icon Gloria Steinem, Stuller stated that, "the whole path to success is to behave like everything we do matters." Then, quoting Whedon, she concluded with a call to arms to help change our communities and ourselves for the better – "All of you that are ready to be strong."

## **SU.2. Seeking to Solve the Questions of Human Morality, or Whedon and Ethics**

Erin M. Giannini, "Call Us What You Want, Just Not Family': Corporate Culture and the Subversion of the Created Family Whedonverse Trope in *Dollhouse*"

[89] Erin M. Giannini began her examination of corporate culture in *Dollhouse* with a close reading of the Rossum advertisement that first introduces Caroline to the corporation. The ad presents an image of a family, but, as Giannini argued, it is not a true family. She suggested that the corporate culture of Rossum subverts the chosen family motif found in much of Whedon's work. Unlike the Scoobies, Angel Investigations, or the crew of *Serenity*, a found family cannot exist within the "toxicity of corporate culture," even though the maternity of Adele and paternity of Boyd provide the illusion of family. Giannini noted that the conflict between corporate profits and family can also be seen in *Angel* and *Firefly*. Drawing a parallel between the found family of Terry Kerran in "Belle Chose" and his perverse family of dolls, and the family that Boyd attempts to create with his own dolls, she suggested that the poisonous, dehumanizing environment of the corporation is not conducive to the creation of familial bonds.

Tara Prescott, "The Future Isn't So Shiny: *Blade Runner*, *Firefly*, and the Effects of American Consumerism in Modern China"

[90] Anchoring her paper in Mike Daisey's observations about industrial, urban China ("like *Blade Runner* threw up on itself"), Tara Prescott compared the visions of the future in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and Whedon's *Firefly*, noting the prominence of Asian culture in both. While in *Blade Runner*, Asian imagery and influence is presented as ominous and oppressive, *Firefly* offers a more positive multiculturalism wherein American and Asian cultures have merged and blended. Prescott acknowledged that Whedon's multiculturalism is not unproblematic (the lack of Asian actors is especially troubling), but that the linguistic melding and the normalization of multiculturalism challenges the xenophobic anxieties of white America represented in *Blade Runner*. Prescott then interrogated the ethics of globalized economies in *Firefly* and *Blade Runner*, drawing parallels between the Mudders of Jaynestown, Scott's replicants, and the inhumane, sweatshop conditions endured by workers in countries like China so that Americans can have cheap consumer products. Prescott concluded by stating that as the Mudders demonstrate, foreign corporations might bring economic growth to these countries, but it does not excuse the abuse of workers. Although globalization can introduce positive changes, these changes are tempered by exploitative and dehumanizing working conditions.

J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson, "jAYNe Cobb, The AYN Rand of the Whedonverse: Selecting Texts in Narrative Ethics"

[91] Donning Jayne hats, J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson presented on "jAYNe Cobb, The AYN Rand of the Whedonverse." They identified Faith Lehane, Jayne Cobb, and Tony Stark as the most Objectivist characters of the Whedonverse, a philosophy which is at odds with Whedon's "communitarian post-Christian love ethics." They noted Faith's "Want, Take, Have" motto and Jayne's selfish, self-interest (which extends to betraying Mal in *Leaves in the Wind*, if the price is right), but also looked at the way in which these characters develop a more altruistic ethos as their narratives progress. Indeed, they posited that initially, Jayne can be read as a parody of Rand's philosophy and that his narrative arc refutes Objectivism. Likewise, Tony Stark, who begins *The Avengers* as the poster boy for egotism and selfishness, realizes that he is not so different from the also self-absorbed Loki and ends the film willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. Rabb and Richardson suggested that Whedon's ethics of

self-sacrifice, the antithesis of rational self-interest, offers an extension on Marvel's ethos that "with great power comes great responsibility."

### **SU.3. Linguistic Considerations across the Whedonverse**

Malgorzata Drewniak, "That Doesn't Sound Like the Phil Coulson I Used to Know': Language and Change in Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*"

[92] Drewniak's paper used linguistic analysis to posit that the revival of Agent Coulson on the show *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* starts out with linguistic links to the previous incarnation of Coulson who theoretically died at the end of *Avengers*, but this link grows gradually less evident post-revival. Drewniak examined Coulson's lexical choices, his politeness strategies, and his conversation behavior to trace this change through much of the show's extended arc that deals with the effects of this revival, moving from Coulson's own awareness of the issue, to his fear upon its revelation and consequent suspicion of Melinda May, to an eventual certain amount of acceptance. The change in Coulson's use of language sees distinct iterations from Agent Coulson in *Avengers* (who is both within and outside of the Avengers as a group), to the revived Agent Coulson in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, to Director Coulson at the conclusion of the first season. Drewniak linked this pattern of transformation through Whedon's work, arguing that Coulson follows a pattern similar to Buffy in terms of lexical changes post-revival and her eventual role as the leader of her cohort.

Michael Starr, "I Always Watch What I Say. I Am What I Say': Joss Whedon as Deleuzian 'Minor Writer'"

[93] Starr positioned Whedon texts as cultural cyphers per Deleuze; that is, matrixes of cult fandom, power, feminism, and more. Drawing from Deleuze's writing on Kafka, Starr differentiates between major and minor use of language. Major use of language regularizes and compartmentalizes form and meaning in order to stabilize categories and promote the illusion of a single voice, whereas minor use of language destabilizes this by intervening in an established vector of literature and reversing its basic structural flow. Minor literature is thus the deterritorialization of the language, the connection of the individual and the political, and the collective arrangement of utterance. Revolutionary conditions of destabilizing literature occur amidst a community and its roots, functioning as rhizomatic structures, and Starr argued that Whedon's production of texts is dependent upon his role within a community of creation and socialization within this rhizomatic system. As such, the collectivity functions within the assumptions of an ethical hermeneutics that sees the use of major languages or the use of the established verbiage intermixed with minor languages or the use of colloquialisms and slang shared within a community as a minor language, the latter eventually possibly being re-appropriated by the major language. The constant movements within major and minor languages produce live languages which are evolving. The creation of a community through shared major and minor languages is one of the ways in which the collapse of distinctions occurs, and in which totalizing principles (whether of language or of community) can be questioned.

Ami Comeford, "B-I-T-C-H, Bitcha, Biotch: An Analysis of 'Bitch' as Destabilized Social Linguistic Referent in *BtVS* and *Angel*"

[94] Comeford's paper focused on an analysis of the term 'bitch' as a gendered insult, and its use in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. She traced the manner in

which feminists are attempting to reclaim the term that, while not distanced always from its original misogynistic roots, has managed to be troubled and destabilized. Arguing that this is reflected in the Whedonverse, Comeford discussed critical use of the term by Whedon scholars and the problematics of using it in accordance with trope. Much like Starr's discussion of major and minor languages, Comeford indicated that the turning away from a collective identity to a more fractured system of individual groupings can come to mean individual reclamation of the term, though she noted that the problem that remains is that the term is only reclaimed within individual usage and not entirely reclaimed on a larger scale. For example, Willow's use of the term in the second season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is intended to be a destabilization of the term, yet in season six she appropriates the term "superbitch" from Warren and uses the term to denigrate Buffy. Given Warren and Willow's relationship in season six, taking on his use of sexist language and placed alongside her powers, which are coded as masculine (drawn from Giles, Rack, Warren) and feminine powers, shows that this use, despite being within the shared language community, functions in accordance with the trope and fails at reclamation of the term. Comeford noted that in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its associated series *Angel*, Lilah and Cordelia both wear the mantle of vicious bitch. She read this as empowerment and an attempt at reclamation, but also noted that it functioned as isolated usage when deployed. While in the aftermath of the attack by Billy, both Cordelia and Lilah use 'bitch' as an empowering mantle, this starting point falters within the show and isn't fully reclaimed from its own gendered roots and the issues that lie alongside this.

#### **SU.4 Whedon and Making the Invisible Art of Comics Visible**

Valerie Estelle Frankel, "Kitty Pryde and the Heroine's Journey"

[95] Frankel discussed the *X-Men* character Kitty Pryde, specifically how her story arc in Whedon's run on *Astonishing X-Men* mirrors that of the heroine's journey. Characteristics of the heroine's journey include an emphasis on protecting others, utilizing talismans instead of weapons, and facing an antagonist in the form of a shadow figure. The shadow figure is particularly significant to this journey, and takes the form of someone diametrically opposed to the heroine's values. In the case of Kitty Pryde, this constitutes characters like Danger and especially Emma Frost, towards whom Kitty feels a long-standing animosity. In order for the heroine to complete her journey, she must reconcile herself with the shadow; the reconciliation occurs when she finally makes peace with Emma and comes to a mutual understanding with her former enemy. Kitty is able to complete her journey by sacrificing herself to save the earth—once again demonstrating the need to protect others.

Traci J. Cohen, "'So I Wear Pearls': Depictions of Gender in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Tales*"

[96] Cohen began her presentation by mentioning Simone de Beauvoir, who argued that men are defined by action, whereas women are seen as passive, which causes women to lose definition. Whedon, then, turns this concept on its head in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Tales*, a collection of stories focusing on various vampire slayers throughout history. The female protagonists of the graphic novel are defined by their actions. In the story "Nikki Goes Down!" the main character's agency is in part demonstrated by her choice in clothing. Rather than wear something feminine as a matter of course, she is shown choosing to do so. In the course of the story, Nikki's feminine and masculine characteristics help her to accomplish her mission. Similarly, the

story “Presumption” portrays a gender-fluid character named Elizabeth. Her gender identity is depicted as a useful tool in her battle to defeat vampires. Cohen ultimately concluded that Slayers deconstruct gender binaries; they show the necessity of seeing gender as a spectrum and being free to move throughout that spectrum.

#### **SU.5. “That Girl Hated Me ... I Matter!”: A Roundtable Discussion in Defense of ‘Hated’ Characters in the Whedonverses**

[97] A round table convened by Tamy Burnett and comprised of her, Dan Madsen, H  l  ne Forhard-Dourlent, Amanda Drake and Samira Nadkarni, came together to defend characters who are known to be disliked within the Whedonverse’s fandom. Focusing on the manner in which these characters contribute to the narrative, each panelist spoke on a “hated” character in order to defend that role and reiterate the characters’ importance within the Whedonverse’s narrative.

[98] Dan Madsen focused on the character of Riley Finn, who has often been viewed as either boring or a sexist representation of the patriarchy. Madsen drew attention to the fact that Riley’s significant romantic role in Buffy’s life was bracketed by Angel and Spike (as well as Parker, though he fails to register as significant romantically in terms of longevity) who were both polarizing fan favorites. He argued for the realism of the representation, laying out Riley’s journey from small town, hyper-masculine soldier, a man likely raised without access to feminism and trained within his role as a soldier not to ask questions, leading Riley to only become feminist upon being challenged by strong, empowered women, eventually leading to his position as a feminist ally of the Scoobies. Madsen cited examples drawn from the course of the show as well as the standalone comic *Riley*—which focuses on Finn’s egalitarian relationship with his wife, no doubt influenced by his awareness of and comfort with strong and empowered women—to provide evidence for his reading.

[99] H  l  ne Frohard-Dourlent defended Kennedy, arguing that homophobia and sexism may have played a large role in fandom’s negative reaction to the character. She cited the fact that the Willow and Tara relationship conformed to heteronormative ideas of traditional gendered pairings with a visibly dominant and visibly submissive partner, whereas Kennedy, being bold, queer, and unabashed about her sexuality, did not conform to this balance. Additionally, Frohard-Dourlent suggested that the extremity of fan response against Kennedy could be due to the fact that there was no “emotional rebound” person to be discarded by the audience in the aftermath of Tara’s traumatic death (much like Parker in the aftermath of Buffy sending Angel temporarily to a hell dimension), leading the audience to reject Kennedy outright in favor of loyalty to Tara.

[100] Amanda Drake defended Echo from *Dollhouse* against suggestions that Echo acted as the fulfillment of sexist fantasies about sex, scantily clad women, and guns. Instead, Drake posited that Echo grows from a naive sexual object, that appears to be created for the male gaze in the first few episodes, into a fully realized and empowered being. Echo’s evolution thus begins with her constant reiteration of wanting to do her best—perhaps suggesting the need for women to constantly seek a form of servile perfection—to a force to be reckoned with, moving gradually from sexism to feminism in the course of the show.

[101] Samira Nadkarni defended *Angel*’s Connor, arguing against the popular conception of his character as overwrought and unnecessary. She argued that his character is repeatedly manipulated in the course of the series—by Holt, by Jasmine/Cordelia, and eventually by Angel as well, who, as the series’ primary

protagonist, holds much of the viewer's sympathy. Nadkarni pointed out that the show has troubling implications for people with mental health issues, as the solution in this case seemed to be abandonment and a rewriting of their selfhood rather than any attempt at therapy or responsibility. Connor's eventual growth and independence shows him participating in a repeated pattern in the Whedonverses of collating his past and present selves to create a more fully realized present and sees him achieve a sense of empowered resolution.

[102] Tamy Burnett defended Dawn, who was the focus of a great deal of hate from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom. Burnett posited that fan reactions to the character soured once Dawn's initial character arc was resolved at the end of season five and no new arc was truly introduced, leading the character to stagnate and fans to reassess her previous narrative as "boring" or "whiny." She suggested that, while in initial seasons Dawn acted as a plot device for Buffy, later seasons saw her significantly contribute to the show's narrative. She posited that Dawn is more representative of an authentic teenager than Buffy because she wasn't called. Dawn bridges the gap between viewer and Buffy, as we all want to be heroes but sometimes have to find other ways to help.

[103] Having provided defenses, the floor was then opened to discussion. Other characters such as Penny from *Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog*, Harmony from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, and Lindsey from *Angel* were then discussed as well.

## **SU.6. Whedon Studies and the Stories We Tell Ourselves about Who We Are** Madeline Muntersbjorn, "Telling Stories about Stories: Buffy, Slayer of the Vampyres (and Dana, Destroyer of the World?)"

[104] Noting that she had amended her title to "Telling Stories about Stories: Buffy, Slayer of the Vampyres (and Dana, Destroyer of the World?)" to account for her topic's insistence that she discuss *The Cabin in the Woods*, Madeline Muntersbjorn framed her discussion with three questions: (1) Why do we need stories? (2) Why do we like scary stories? (3) Why do we tell stories? She proposed that we need to consider the middle question in order to answer the other two. Providing an overview of literary Darwinists like Jonathan Gottschall, Muntersbjorn described the leading theories of the evolutionary explanations for literature and fiction, including stories' roles as education and entertainment, their function in crafting social cohesion, and the meaning they give our lives and world. While Muntersbjorn acknowledged that stories help to construct communities, she warned against homogenizing the audiences of these stories. Then turning her attention to monster stories, she posited that monsters inhabit the liminal space between human and the animal Other, and thus, allow us to explore the implications of Humanism and reality. She argued that while Buffy embraces humanism, Dana rejects the abstraction of her concrete relationship with Marty. She suggested that monsters in general change and evolve to reflect the cultural anxieties of their time, including anxieties about a punitive God and scientific advancement. Muntersbjorn concluded by asserting that the Ancient Ones in *Cabin* are not representative of the audience, but of human's need for horror.

## J. Gordon Melton and Alysa Hornick, "Buffy's Continuing Relevance: Some Bibliographical Reflections"

[105] J. Gordon Melton spoke about the extensive work he has done on creating a bibliography of vampires, a project focusing on the appearance of vampires in fiction and nonfiction. Melton explained that the scope of his project is limited to print English

Language publications (with a few notable online exceptions, like *Slayage*), published between 1800- 2009 for fictional work and 1800- 2013 for academic work. He noted that his definition of vampires extends to include cultural variants, like the pontiank, succubi, and psychic vampires. In a historic overview of the vampire, he identified the 1960s as a watershed moment for vampires when their characterization changed, a shift he credits to Barnabas Collins of *Dark Shadows*, the first romantic, conflicted vampire, and Vampirella, the first hero vampire. According to Melton, modern vampire studies originated in the 1970s with *In Search of Dracula* and *A Dream of Dracula*, and the first *Buffy* articles appeared in 1998. Melton observed that the amount of *Buffy* Studies scholarship (1269 publications out of a total of 5010 on vampire texts) argues for the cultural and academic relevance of *Buffy*.

[106] Alysa Hornick, the compiler of the Whedonology bibliography (for which all of us Whedon scholars are eternally grateful), spoke about some of the major themes of this conference, which she identifies as eternal childhood, academic fandom, and quality vs. cult TV. She also noted that despite the recent surge in the popularity of vampire texts, *Twilight*, *Vampire Diaries*, *Mortal Instruments*, etc, *Buffy* continues to be the most widely written about, which suggests something about the quality and depth of Whedon's work. Hornick also spoke to some of the challenges in categorizing Whedon scholarship.

David Lavery, "I Wrote My Thesis on You' 2, the Reckoning: Reflections on the Birth, Growth, and Nature of Whedon Studies"

[107] David Lavery revisited his earlier reflections on *Buffy* Studies as he noted the way in which it has grown from the first (supposed-to-be-one-time) *Slayage* conference and the first (supposed-to-be-one-time) publication of *Slayage*. He also analyzed the way in which the show itself recognized its scholar-fans and fan-scholars in the form of Lydia, an academic, who like all of us, has written on the characters of the *Buffyverse*. Lavery observed the diverse subfields of *Buffy* Studies and provided a "previously-on" slide show detailing the numerous and international books, articles, and conferences that have been published and convened on *Buffy*. He also recounted his personal journey, praising the highly collaborative nature of *Buffy* Studies and asserting that his work with *Buffy* and *Buffy* Studies has allowed him to achieve his dream of "being on the ground floor of an academic movement, to contribute to enlightening consciousness." He gratefully recounted the opportunities that *Buffy* Studies has given him, and he concluded by proclaiming himself the "Grandfather of Whedon Studies."

## **SU. 7. Whedon Bookers: The Past, Present, and Future of Whedon Studies**

[108] The Whedon Bookers began by honoring those editors or writers who have published or are about to publish a work dealing with Whedon. Those who had published books during the preceding year were each encouraged to provide a piece of information or guidance to those who might choose to take on such a project in the future. They emphasized the need to:

1. Know the partners you are working with, if it is a collaborative project, and to ensure that you have compatible skills and personalities as well as schedules.
2. Find a suitable publisher to pitch to and to ensure to follow it up. The choice of publisher would also indicate the audience the book might be aimed at, so to try and ascertain that as soon as possible.

3. Don't be afraid of how long the process takes. Permissions for quotes or screen shots can often make the process much lengthier than originally planned.
4. Double and triple check the citation system you are expected to use and ensure that your contributors are aware of it as well. If possible, provide contributors with a style sheet to minimize errors.
5. Don't be afraid to use the contacts you know in order to get in touch with publishers.

[109] Having established the new body of work produced since the last *Slayage* conference, questions were raised about aspects of Whedon Studies that have been left relatively underexplored. Topics such as Whendonverse comics, filmic elements, performance studies, queer studies, intersectionality, production and/or networks, marketing, paratextual studies, comedy, peripheral or less known works or collaborators, fan studies, auteur studies, directing, retextualizations, mirror texts (like *Veronica Mars* or *Teen Wolf*), embodiment, international reception and changed cultural narratives, and translation studies were raised as potential options for the future.

[110] Lewis Call and Stephanie Graves were joint winners of the Mr. Pointy Award for Best Presentation, voted for in secret ballot by conferees. Tanya R. Cochran stepped down as President of the WSA, and was thanked for her warmth, her commitment, and her drive. Stacey Abbott was installed as President in her stead (having been elected earlier in the year by the WSA membership), with Cynthia A. Burkhead elected as Vice President, and K. Dale Koontz as Treasurer. Kristopher Karl Woofter was re-elected as Secretary.

## **Thanks**

[111] We would like to begin by thanking Sacramento State and its affiliates for allowing us to use and enjoy their beautiful campus. And on behalf of the Whedon Studies Association and the conference attendees, we would like to thank Conference Conveners and Program Chairs Tanya R. Cochran and Rhonda V. Wilcox; Local Arrangements Chair and Accessibility Point-Person Alyson R. Buckman; and Roving Superchairs Hélène Frohard-Dourlent, K. Dale Koontz, and Katia McClain. This conference would not be possible without their hard work and dedication.

[112] We would also like to thank our WSA officers, Stacey Abbott, President; Cynthia A. Burkhead, Vice President; Kristopher Karl Woofter, Secretary; K. Dale Koontz, Treasurer, and outgoing President / Past President Tanya R. Cochran for all of the time and effort they put into the running of our organization.