

# EuroSlayage Conference Abstracts 2016

## Individual Papers

### Stacey Abbott “Another one for the Fire, Boys”: The Zombie in the Work of Whedon

During the 2012 Presidential campaign Joss Whedon filmed a satirical commentary on Republican candidate Mitt Romney, declaring that Romney was ‘a different candidate; one with the vision and determination to cut through business as usual politics and finally put this country back on the path to the zombie apocalypse’[1]. In this video, Whedon drew upon the popular iconography of the zombie apocalypse genre for political purposes, adopting the George Romero-approach in which it is used ‘as a character for satire or a political criticism’. Romero has commented that this more allegorical approach is lacking in the recent and popular zombie productions, most notably *The Walking Dead* [2]. When reflecting upon Whedon’s supernatural television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, it is interesting to note that the zombie does not appear to be a major player, appearing on occasion as a monster-of-the-week threat to our heroes while the vampire and other demons often take centre stage. As Gerry Canavan has shown with regard to *Firefly/Serenity* and *Dollhouse*, the Whedonverse does include elements of the zombie genre although perhaps not presented in the manner to which we have become accustomed [3]. The aim of this paper will be to offer a closer examination of the Whedonverse, revealing that the zombie is not only present on an episodic basis but plays a significant role, repeatedly emerging as a recognisable trope from *Buffy* and *Angel* to *The Avengers* and *Marvel’s Agents of Shield*. In these texts, the zombie not only evokes horror conventions and the seeming ephemerality of the monster-of-the-week but is often re-inscribed with the allegorical-potential of the genre that Romero argues is lacking in the mainstream, particularly televisual, appeal of the genre. Furthermore, rather than focusing upon a post-apocalyptic landscape in which all is lost and decline is inevitable, the zombie as metaphor in the Whedonverse is often used to reflect upon a world that is teetering upon the brink of apocalypse and where individual/political choice, as in a Presidential campaign, can make the difference between apocalypse and salvation.

[1] Whedon, Joss (2012), ‘Whedon on Romney,’ available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TiXUF9xbTo>. Accessed 18 December 2015.

[2] Han, Angie (2013), ‘George A. Romero explains why he won’t do *The Walking Dead*,’ *Slashfilm.com*, 14 November 2013, available at:

<http://www.slashfilm.com/george-a-romero-explains-why-he-wont-do-the-walking-dead/>. Accessed 12 October 2015.

[3] Canavan, Gerry (2011), ‘Fighting a War You’ve Already Lost: Zombies and *Zombis* in *Firefly/Serenity* and *Dollhouse*,’ *Science Fiction Film and Television* 4:2, 173-203.

### Andrew Aberdein: Whedonian Trolleyology

The Trolley Problem is a famous thought experiment [1]. In each of two scenarios a runaway trolley threatens five oblivious workers whose lives you may save--either by switching the trolley to another track on which there is only one worker or by pushing a fat man in front of the trolley. Much moral theory treats the cases as indistinguishable, but most people say they would intervene the first way but not the second. Respondents

are also susceptible to order effects: their responses to the scenarios are affected by the order in which they are presented [3]. Some analyses attribute the order effect to a lack of narrative detail in these scenarios [4]. Joss Whedon has used Trolley Problem-like dilemmas more than once [2]: e.g. Giles must decide whether to kill Ben in 'The Gift' (*BtVS* 5.22, 2001) and Dana must decide whether to kill Marty in 'The Cabin in the Woods' (dir. Drew Goddard, 2012). Both dilemmas are a variation on the 'fat man' scenario, whereby the whole world hangs on the choice. Nonetheless, although Giles and Dana chose differently, both choices are presented as justified within a richly detailed narrative. Thus, Whedon's viewers, whose sympathies have been fully engaged, may not exhibit the order effect. This paper reports on an empirical study testing this hypothesis.

[1] Philippa Foot. 1967. The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect. Reprinted in her *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

[2] J. Douglas Rabb & J. Michael Richardson. 2015. *Joss Whedon as Shakespearean Moralist* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland).

[3] Eric Schwitzgebel & Fiery Cushman. 2015. Philosophers' biased judgments persist despite training, expertise and reflection. *Cognition* 141:127–137.

[4] Jonathan Webber. 2016. Instilling virtue. In *From Personality to Virtue*, Alberto Masala & Jonathan Webber, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

### **Cristina Algaba and J. Lopez Rodriguez: The Critical Reception of Joss Whedon's Work in Spain**

Both cinema and television productions are the result of an industrial process where a wide variety of professionals collaborate and contribute to the final creation. However, current critics usually apply the principles of the auteur theory developed by the writers of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* during the 1950's in order to discuss and evaluate audiovisual works. This theory is based on the premise that films and TV shows tend to reflect the ideas, personality and creativity of their directors, who are considered as having the biggest responsibility.

This presentation will focus on the image of Joss Whedon as an auteur by analyzing the critical reception of his films and TV series in Spain. Through a content analysis of reviews, criticisms and comments about Whedon's works published in Spanish printed media such as newspapers and magazines, we aim to establish: 1) the evaluation of Whedon's works, in terms of quality, that Spanish critics have done, 2) the main features of Whedon as an auteur according to Spanish critics, and 3) how the image of Whedon as a creator has evolved over time in Spain.

### **Jay Bamber: History as Its Own Character in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and *Angel***

Buffy: I can't hold on to the past anymore

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* are noted for their dense mythologies/histories and are lauded for the ways in which those histories inform and enrich the text as it is presented to the audience. Both shows self-consciously reflect on their characters' pasts, some of which are revealed visually throughout the shows and some of which are only alluded to, in order to expand their world and present more complex narratives. I would argue that the protagonists, Buffy and Angel, are uniquely suited to be thrust into narratives about the past and history due to her status in the Slayer tradition and his

identity as a vampire who has experienced historical changes. As characters and as archetypes they both fit into clearly defined socio-historic roles.

I would like to use the examples of 'I Only Have Eyes For You' (*Buffy* Season 2, Ep. 19), 'Fool For Love' (*Buffy* Season 5, Ep.7), 'Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been' (*Angel* Season 2, Ep.2), 'Darla' (*Angel* Season 2, Ep. 7) and 'Waiting in the Wings' (*Angel*, Season 3, Ep.13) to illustrate and examine how the past becomes necessarily entangled with the present in these worlds. Both shows present a permeable boundary between the historic and the contemporary: affecting both the personal and the political. These episodes also illustrate how Whedon's early televisual texts engage with the classic tenet of the Gothic genre - that the repressed sins of the past will re-emerge and effect the present.

I will engage with pre-existing *Buffy* and *Angel* scholarship by using work by Tammy A. Kinsey, Stacey Abbott, William Wandless, Elana Levine, Rachel A. Melnyk, Philip Mikosz, Dana C. Och, Lorna Jowett, and Rhonda V. Wilcox to situate my argument.

### **Eve Bennett: Choosing the Wrong Family: Radicalisation and Gender in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.***

In her 2014 Slayage paper, Erin Giannini explored how the famous Whedon trope of the 'chosen family' is "subverted" in *Dollhouse*, as part of the programme's critique of corporate culture. In my paper, I would like to extend this exploration to *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, a series which, I believe, interrogates the 'chosen family' motif in a somewhat different fashion. Perhaps informed by governmental and media discourses surrounding radicalisation, *AoS* seems concerned with showing that people who had troubled upbringings may be prone to recruitment by 'bad' chosen families, such as extremist groups, as well as to adoption by 'good' ones. The two sides of this paradigm are illustrated by the parallel trajectories of Daisy Johnson and Grant Ward, both characters whose yearning for "powerful father-figure[s]" led them to be radicalised in different ways: Ward ending up in Hydra and Daisy joining The Rising Tide before being recruited by S.H.I.E.L.D.

Through these two characters, *AoS* poses questions about choice and agency: Daisy was initially kidnapped by S.H.I.E.L.D. but then decided to work for them, while Ward was brainwashed by John Garrett. However, I will argue, the way their respective narratives develop has a gendered underpinning. Ward's father-figure dies, allowing Ward to emulate and surpass him by becoming leader of the re-formed Hydra. Daisy's narrative, on the other hand, mirrors that of many other young women in recent American television who, having been involuntarily given superpowers by a 'bad' father-figure, end up using them in the service of a group headed by a 'good' one. Although the possibility of Daisy's joining a matriarchal community, *Afterlife*, is briefly raised, it is soon closed down by the revelation of her mother's villainy. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether Daisy will one day fulfil Raina's prediction by becoming a leader in her own right.

### **Charlotte Bosseaux: The Essence of Being Spike: From Britishness to 'Un Certain Je ne Sais Quoi'**

The cult TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has enjoyed international fame and is still broadcast in several countries such as France and the UK. When considering *Buffy's* worldwide success, it is worth investigating how translation mediates the use of British English as opposed to American English, since the characterisation of the two main

British characters, Rupert Giles and Spike, played respectively by Anthony Stewart Head and James Marsters, is primarily based on their British identity, cultural background, accents, and vocabulary use.

In order to reach various foreign audiences, *Buffy* has been translated worldwide and Spike has been travelling around the world; or rather his translated version has, reaching many destinations such as Japan and Russia. While the Anglophone world does not need different linguistic versions, other countries do, and in France there are two translated versions of *Buffy*, one dubbed and the other subtitled. This paper focuses on the 'marvellously irritating' Spike (Wilcox 2005: 33) although the other Brit, Giles, will also be mentioned since Spike's and Giles' Britishness have different connotations. We shall see what makes Spike Spike and how character specific features related to his identity have been negotiated in its French dubbed and subtitled versions. The paper ultimately reflects on what translation and non-translation do to characters whose identity is based, among other things, on cultural specificities.

### **Molly Brayman: The Morning After: Post-Coital Discourse in Joss Whedon's Film and Television Work**

In the wake of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, we have seen a renewed interest in the discussion of Joss Whedon's attitudes toward women, feminism, bodies, and sexual politics. While this is certainly well-trodden territory, this presentation hopes that by creating a narrow focus of analysis, it might reveal patterns in Whedon's work that may bear out some of the claims made by both proponents and detractors alike. Building from Sara Swain's work on Buffy and loss of virginity, this presentation will examine the conversations (or lack thereof) that happen post-sex between romantic partners throughout Whedon's work. By providing both an expansive qualitative coding of all post-coital discourses and a rhetorical examination of key couplings, I hope to show how Whedon's signature snappy dialogue both conforms to and challenges our understanding of gender expectations and sexual mores. While this project is ultimately large-scale, for this presentation I will focus on a few recurrent conversation and communication elements within Whedon's post-coital scenes in order to examine how these patterns work to establish dominant audience interpretations of positive and negative sexual behavior.

### **Alyson Buckman: "What is Your Childhood Trauma?!": Living with Trauma in the Whedonverse**

Joss Whedon's characters regularly experience trauma. Buffy, of course, is perpetually under attack. However, only some of her experiences result in emotional trauma, including the aftermath of sex with Angel, reliving her time in a mental institution, and the death of her mother. Angel experiences trauma as well, notably in his experiences with the First and in the loss of his son, Connor. Mal experienced trauma in that iconic moment in the original pilot for *Firefly* in which he stands at Serenity Valley and loses his faith in God. River is traumatized by her experience with the Alliance. Echo is traumatized repeatedly within the scope of *Dollhouse*. The flashbacks of the *Age of Ultron* hint at the trauma experienced by Black Widow. Phil Coulson's return to life from death and the processes used to effect that return result in lasting trauma for Coulson as well. There are numerous other examples.

Emotional, rather than physical, trauma will be the focus of this discussion. How do Whedon's characters learn to cope with the emotional traumas they have encountered? What is the ultimate effect such trauma has on these characters? These

questions will be considered in the context of perspectives on trauma, memory, and history. It is my perspective at this time that Whedon uses trauma not only for dramatic tension and for character growth, but also to repeatedly illustrate the need to know and work with the past in order to be empowered and effective in the world.

### **Cynthia Burkhead: ‘I’ve a feeling we’re not in Sunnydale anymore’: The Hollywood Lineage of ‘Once More with Feeling’**

*BtVS*'s "Once More with Feeling" has garnered much scholarly attention in large part because of its treatment of the musical genre (Albright), its treatment of race (Middents), and its linguistic depth (Masson), among others. What the episode also offers is a glimpse into the Hollywood musicals that influenced Whedon's first attempt at fulfilling his dream "of being the next Stephen Sondheim." This presentation will provide a side by side analysis of the musical numbers in "Once More with Feeling" and the big screen numbers Whedon seems to have recalled as he was creating this "all-singing, all-dancing" groundbreaking episode.

### **Tamy Burnett: Humanity, Monstrosity, and Reproductive Rights: Joss Whedon and Feminism's Most Contentious Topic**

Joss Whedon made headlines in December 2015 by pledging to donate up to \$100,000 to Planned Parenthood, an organization that provides free and low cost reproductive health care, primarily in the U.S. Although Whedon rarely ventures into public politics so directly, his stories are frequently political, regularly engaging themes including ethnic/racial identity (e.g.: Bacon-Smith, Curry, Fuchs, Hautsch, Lerner, Middents, Rabb and Richardson), LGBTQ identity (e.g.: Boulware, Frohard-Dourlent, McAvan, Tabron, Wilts), and feminism (e.g.: Beadling, Coker, Levine, Jowett, Spicer, St. Louis and Riggs, Vint). Whedon's pledged donation is especially notable coming at the end of a year when Planned Parenthood was subject to much controversy. Announcement of Whedon's pledged donation similarly garnered divisive responses, ranging from celebratory enthusiasm to denunciations of Whedon and threats to burn DVDs in protest.

Although existing scholarly work has investigated Whedon's relationship to women's rights, his engagement with reproductive rights—arguably the most controversial area of feminist ideology—remains under-examined. This paper will explore three storylines from Whedon's works dealing with women's reproductive rights: Ripley's forced maternity in *Alien Resurrection* (1997), Buffy's choice to have an abortion in the *Buffy Season Nine* comics (2012), and Black Widow's revelation in *Avengers 2: Age of Ultron* (2015) of being forcibly sterilized. Additionally, these characters have complicated relationships to human identity. Ripley is a human/alien hybrid clone, Buffy's consciousness is unknowingly residing in a robot body at the time of her decision, and Black Widow compares herself to a monster immediately following disclosure of her infertility. By exploring issues of what it means to be human, the common cultural conflation of women's reproductive systems and choices with monstrosity, and how such narratives intersect with feminist ideology, this analysis will offer increased understanding of Whedon's support of women's reproductive rights through fantastical storytelling and real world activism.

### **Daisy Butcher: ‘Like a Man Possessed’: Masculinity in Crisis in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Season 6**

Interrogating closely *Buffy* Season 6's Episodes 19, 20 and 21 I will be examining Spike and Warren in terms of masculinity crises. I will specifically pay close attention to Spike's sexual assault on Buffy in the bathroom scene and the gunning down of Buffy by Warren and his consequent flaying by Willow, highlighting how the most shocking events of the series are the results of male impotent rage (thanks to their symbolic neutering), i.e. the attempted rape and murder of Buffy and actual murder of Tara. I will examine the dysfunctional and doomed nature of Buffy and Spike's relationship despite its being a fan favourite, and how her very nature as the Slayer exposes the reality of his monstrous side. Exposing Whedon's interesting juxtaposition of sex and violence with Spike and Buffy, I link in Warren to the discussion of misogyny and how as a seemingly 'filler' or comic relief character flips the girl-power-orientated Buffyverse on its head by victimising Buffy, Tara and even, by proxy, Willow. I examine how Willow's slow burrowing of the bullet into his skin and flaying of his skin is indicative of sadistic penetration/rape and an involuntary striptease. I will look at these events as a result of Giles' absence, where his proverbial sons hurt his proverbial daughters (with the jilting of Anya as well), looking at protective masculinity versus threatening masculinity.

### **Bronwen Calvert: 'The Real Deal': Cyborg Identity and Simulacra in *Dollhouse***

Many scholars working on *Dollhouse* note that the process of imprinting individuals with constructed personalities, a process that requires 'Active architecture' to be installed permanently in the brains of each individual, creates cyborgs (for example, Calvert; Erickson; Randell-Moon). Through their artificial, hybrid embodiment, cyborgs break down and confuse binary oppositions (organic/technological, natural/constructed, and more) and the image of the cyborg is closely connected with ideas of performance, masquerade and simulation. Taking Jean Baudrillard's formulation of successive 'phases of the image', the simulacrum illustrates the third phase in which 'signs of the real' take the place of 'the real itself' (Baudrillard 166). As for 'the real', 'in a culture of simulation, images [...] perform to make the world as we know it, to generate our sense of what is real' (Toffoletti 121). These definitions fit very well with the concept of manufactured Active personalities in *Dollhouse*.

In this paper, I shall explore the representation of certain Doll characters, especially Priya/Sierra and Daniel Perrin, whose storylines accentuate tensions between simulated and 'real' or (in the show's terminology) 'actual' identities. Further, I shall examine how individuals without Active architecture, like Topher and Adelle, are affected by close proximity to Dolls. While a character like Priya/Sierra can be seen to 'perform' across 'multiple demographic categories [...] as a woman, as an Asian woman, as a migrant' (Mukherjea 65), and definitely emphasizes the point that 'the Dollhouse sells [...] the simulacrum of perpetual consent' (Nadkarni 84), others more subtly highlight ideas of performance, simulacra and 'the real'.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988. Print.

Erickson, Gregory. 'From Old heresies to Future Paradigms: Joss Whedon on Body and Soul.' *Reading Joss Whedon*. Ed. Rhonda V Wilcox, Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthia Masson, and David Lavery. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2014. 341-55. Print.

Calvert, Bronwen. "'Who Did They Make Me This Time?': Viewing Pleasure and Horror'. *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: Confounding Purpose, Confusing Identity*. Ed. Sherry Ginn, Alyson R. Buckman, and Heather M. Porter. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. 113-26. Print.

- Mukherjea, Ananya. 'Somebody's Asian on TV: Sierra/Priya and the Politics of Representation.' Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*. Ed. Ginn et al. 65–80. Print.
- Nadkarni, Samira. "In My House and Therefore in My Care": Transgressive Mothering, Abuse and Embodiment'. Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*. Ed. Ginn et al. 81–95. Print.
- Randell-Moon, Holly. "I'm Nobody": The Somatechnical Construction of Bodies and Identity in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*'. *Feminist Media Studies* 12.2 (2012): 265–280. Print.
- Toffoletti, Kim. *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2007. Print.

### **Inmaculada Casas-Delgado and Irene Raya Bravo: Spanish Academic Researches about Joss Whedon's Work**

Besides being iconic productions of popular culture and being widely accepted by fandom universe, Joss Whedon's work has an international academic impact, not only in English-speaking countries but also around the world, including the Spanish Academy. Since the early years of the new millennium several Spanish authors have published papers and articles about the author, focusing their works on different areas -especially concerning the field of communication. Among other analyzers, Professor Concepción Cascajosa has written about Buffy as an example of quality television drama (2005), about the school experience in Buffy, the vampire slayer (2006) and the interdependence between Buffy and Angel (2006). In the same way, Irene Raya has published an article about the genre mixing in Joss Whedon's work (2012). Other authors like Elisa G. McCausland (2014) have published articles about *Firefly*'s universe, even when the production has not been broadcasted in Spain.

In 2015, the first two books about Whedon have been published in Spain. On the one hand, there is *De la estaca al martillo. Un viaje por los universos de Joss Whedon* (Diábolo Ediciones), a collection dedicated to the author and the fourth book from the academic association Liga de Investigadores en Comunicación. On the other hand, the informative work *Los mundos fantásticos de Joss Whedon* (Delorean Ediciones), written by Joaquín Sanjuán, has also been released.

Our main objective is to make a bibliographic review on Spanish academics' researches about the author's career work, showing how his movies, series and comics have transcended their own production context.

### **Alaina Christensen: Opening the Hellmouth: Studying Pop Culture in the Academy**

Autoethnography gifts the scholar a moment to reflect on personal experience within the social, cultural, and political environment of their field. This essay utilizes that moment to explore the specific crises of confidence in studying pop culture within the academy. I wrote my Master's thesis on popular vampire texts, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Twilight*, and subsequently spent nine months defending my choice to do so to everyone from my department chair to my own mother. In discussing the constitution of the self, Jean Baudrillard writes, "at bottom individuals know themselves (if they do not feel themselves), to be judged by their objects, to be judged according to their objects, and each at bottom submits to this judgment." The object that constituted my academic self was and is vampire fiction. True to Baudrillard's description, I have felt and/or been judged by others and by myself on the basis of that source material. By participating in academia, I have also been complicit in the very power structure that denies value to my research. Autoethnography provides the means to reflect on fan-scholars' unique

relationship to the texts they study. And, by continuing to examine these so-called 'low-culture' texts, fan-scholars like myself have the opportunity to reappropriate academic and cultural value for these materials and to new ends. The enormous cross-audience appeal of Joss Whedon in particular makes the Whedonverse a useful case study for such endeavors, while other texts like *Twilight* provide a counterpoint – and a challenge with which to proceed.

Reference: Baudrillard, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. Trans. Charles Levin. St. Louis: Telos Press. 1981. Print. p. 40.

### **Tanya R. Cochran: *In Your Eyes* in the Audiences' Estimation: Situating Whedon's Paranormal Romance within the Larger Body of His Work**

*In Your Eyes* (2014) tells the story of Rebecca Porter (played by Zoe Kazan) and Dylan Kershaw (played by Michael Stahl-David), who share a connection that allows each to experience the other's senses—sight, sound, physical touch—across time and across many miles: she resides in New Hampshire, he in New Mexico. As the narrative unfolds, the two adults slowly realize that their connection is real, and they wonder at and revel in the novelty and surprise of their bond. Slowly, they fall in love. Tension rises as those around the two observe their odd behaviors. For example, both appear to be talking to themselves when they are communicating aloud with one another. On occasion, they experience disorientation while inhabiting each other's bodies, which causes strange physical behaviors as well—tripping, falling, running into objects. Dylan loses his job as a result, and Rebecca is forcibly institutionalized by her husband. The desire to be physically together overwhelms them, and they plot to unite. Directed by Brin Hill and produced by Kai Cole and Michael Roiff, *In Your Eyes* is the second feature film by Bellwether Pictures, Joss Whedon's adaptation of Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012) being the first. The script for *In Your Eyes* was written by Whedon, and he participated in its scoring as well. Yet surprisingly no scholars have investigated this text in any depth. My goal in this presentation is to begin that process, to address these preliminary questions: Where does *In Your Eyes* fit in the larger body of Whedon's work? What makes the film Whedonesque, and how do we judge its quality and significance? The answers to these questions offer a richer understanding of Whedon work as a whole.

### **AmiJo Comeford: "I Can't Eat This Stuff Another Night": Food and Narrative Identity-Making in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel***

Across cultures, cartographic lines, and generations, one constant is eternally present: food. Though sometimes food ingestion equates primarily to survival, it is always, nonetheless, an essential component to culture and serves as a fundamental component to individual identity. As freelance writer Amy S. Choi observes, "Our comfort foods map who we are, where we come from, and what happened to us along the way." This close connection between food and identity in its various incarnations has been explored in literature for centuries, sometimes even operating as the primary mode of narrative deliverance.

*BtVS* and *Angel* are rife with scenes containing food as a visual or audible focal point (not unusual in a vampire narrative, since blood-as-food is indispensable to the genre itself), sometimes occurring individually but more often occurring inside of chosen, and sometimes forced, communities. When we closely examine the way food is

used at critical points in *BtVS* and *Angel*, we discover that food—its sharing, ingestion, and refusal—acts as both conveyer and creator of group and individual narrative progression as well as a distinct cue to viewers about how they should read particular narrative moments and character relationships.

For several years now, Whedon scholars have been studying, critiquing, and identifying diverse genres in the Whedonverse that typically, and occasionally untypically, occur in traditional forms of literature. Inside of these individual discussions, references to food or analysis of scenes dominated by food are occasionally used to solidify or shore up a particular claim. Yet, within the body of Whedon scholarship, food as the focal point of analysis has not been undertaken with any definite purpose. The paper I propose fills this gap by connecting what has been a foundational analysis of the Whedonverse—identity—with a new point of reference for that identity creation—food.

### **Géraldine Crahay: The Insecure Masculinity of Zealous Civil Servants: The Operative and the Inspector**

In *Serenity* (2005), the Operative (Chiwetel Ejiofor) obsessively pursues River Tam (and incidentally the crew of the *Serenity* spaceship) in order to protect the darkest secret of the Alliance, the totalitarian government that he serves, whilst ignoring the nature of this secret. In Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* (1862), Inspector Javert chases a penitent convict on the loose, Jean Valjean, for more than fifteen years. Both civil servants blindly serve a power that overwhelms them, whether it be the Alliance or successive French governments (from Napoleon's Empire to the July Monarchy). Their identity is so completely intertwined with these entities that discovering their evil nature or the good nature of their so-called enemies brings their universe upside down. This paper completes David Magill's article "I Aim to Misbehave": Masculinities in the 'Verse' (*Investigating Firefly and Serenity* 76–86), which mostly explored the masculinity of Mal Reynolds, at the expense of that of the 'bad guys'. It argues that *Serenity*'s Operative and *Les Misérables*'s Inspector Javert embody to the extreme bureaucratic officials who sacrifice personal values and identities to fulfil their civic function. Renouncing their individuality allows these civil servants to conceal their insecure masculinity. They intend to posit themselves as models of virility, notably by adopting the postures of the hunter and the warrior, only to fail to develop themselves as complete men. Their masculinity therefore contrasts with that displayed by Mal, which is notably based on honour and an ethical code (Magill 79). Paradoxically, this paper shows that abandoning official 'truths' to embrace their own uncertainties is the only way for the Operative and Inspector Javert to assert truly their masculine identity.

### **Cyndi DeVito-Ziemer: 'Excuse Me, But Your Mascara is Running': How Buffy and Spike Perform Gender**

William Shakespeare informs us that all the world is a stage and that we each play different parts throughout our lives. Judith Butler points out that key elements of a life's varied performances are how and which gender is being performed. The garments, accessories and hairstyles worn are what signified class, status, rank and gender to the other 'players' who shared this world stage for much of civilized history. According to Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress "[t]hese broader signifying systems are essential for the smooth operation of systems governing particular semiotic acts. They link the social organization of semiotic participants with social organization on a larger scale." Further, they explain such acts are not merely markers of groups and therefore inclusion, but

convey important information and meanings in their own right about social relations. The visual is not mere costuming, but a necessary aspect of the politics of identity and which gender is being performed.

In my paper, I will discuss the performances of gender by Buffy Summers and Spike (William the Bloody, neé Pratt) through the visual. Indeed, Buffy's performance of gender is rooted in the visual. I will build upon my previous art historical analysis of the visuals of a pan-gendered Buffy, and compare/contrast this identity with Spike and his gender performances utilizing the methodologies of visual culture and semiotics. I will discuss hair, make-up and clothing. While scholars such as Lorna Jowett, Marc Camron and Leah Lenk and Denise Lynch among others have addressed gender in the Buffyverse, I will connect gender elements in a specifically visual analysis. Such an analysis allows the consideration of the politics of viewing within the narrative thread.

### **Kathrin Dodenhoeft: Inviting the Other in – Chosen Families in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

It has often been argued in *Buffy* scholarship that the main narrative of the series is the difficult journey of growing up and finding one's own place in the world. Another point of interest is whether Buffy presents the chosen family as being superior to the biological one – and therefore subverts patriarchal family structures – or whether nothing has really changed besides a gender swap with a girl taking on the role of family patriarch (c.f. Jes Batts as well as Agnes B. Curry and Josef Velazquez). This paper proposes to bring these two ideas together under special consideration of the incorporation of 'Others' into Buffy's chosen family. It will be argued that these Others – Angel, Faith, Spike, Anya, Dawn among others – serve to reflect Buffy's darker character traits and that with their incorporation or rejection Buffy's and the Scoobies' identity as a chosen family is constantly being renegotiated. With a special focus on the titular heroine, it will be explored how the introduction of Others into her chosen family affect her, her identity, and if the chosen family is a necessary tool to contain the characters' daily struggle between normalcy and monstrosity. As a consequence, it will be questioned whether the chosen family really is all so different from the blood-related one or if these relationships work the way most families do: the children move out when they are grown-up.

### **Selina Doran: A Shade Darker? Viewers' Interpretations of Buffy in Season 6 and Understandings of Gender Roles**

The paper published by Doran (2012), "The 'Faith Goes Dark' Storyline and Viewers," explored television audiences' reactions to storyline about Faith's transformation in season 3 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in relation to the gender roles within the characters of Faith and Buffy. Various *BTVS* scholars<sup>1</sup> have documented the transgression of traditional "femininity" by the main female protagonists in the show. Doran's (2012) audience study and Jowett's (2005) book both found that Buffy is positioned as a "good girl," as opposed to Faith's "bad girl" character. This presentation will follow on from this, examining how viewers interpret Buffy in season 6 of the show when she takes on "bad girl" attributes by having a sexual and violent relationship with

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Buttsworth, 2002 "Buffy and the penetration of the gendered warrior"; Early, 2003 "The female just warrior reimagined"; Jowett, 2005 "Sex and the Slayer"; Symonds, 2004 "Female empowerment, sex and violence."

the vampire, Spike.<sup>2</sup> The storyline of this relationship will be traced through the following episodes: “Smashed,” marking the beginning of her sexual relationship with Spike; “Dead Things,” where she reacts violently towards him when she mistakenly believes she has killed someone; “Seeing Red,” featuring a scene where Buffy is sexually assaulted by Spike. Video clips of this storyline will be shown to small audience groups stratified by gender and age group. Discussions will then centre on the role of masculinity and femininity, particularly in relation to sexual behaviour, deviance and criminality. Results will be situated within the existing *BTVS* literature, as well as gender and criminology studies.

### **Malgorzata Drewniok: We Need to Get It Done’: Steve Rogers, Phil Coulson, and the Language of Leadership**

Language is one of the most distinctive features of Joss Whedon’s work. It has been particularly noticed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) – the language used in this series has been extensively explored by scholars from many disciplines, including Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto (2002), Michael Adams (2003), Jesse Saba Kirchner (2006) and others in the whole special issue of *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* devoted to Buffy language (Slayage 20), as well as Susan Mandala (2007) and Malgorzata Drewniok (2012; 2013). Mandala (2010) also examined *Firefly* (2002).

This paper stems from my previous research into vampire transformations in Buffy and how they are signalled in language. However, here I would like to discuss Whedon’s recent contribution to the Marvel Telecinematic Universe. I will focus on two characters that undergo an important transformation: Steve Rogers/Captain America in *Marvel’s The Avengers* (2012) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and Phil Coulson in *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-present). Both Rogers and Coulson journey to a position of leadership. The former grows from a reluctant member of the Avengers to a confident leader; the latter goes from an agent following orders to the Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. I will explore how these transformations are expressed in the language both men use: their lexical choices, politeness strategies, and conversation behaviour. I will also show how they assert their leadership via language.

### **Cheyenne Foster and Melanie-Angela Neully: ‘You Wear That Come-Bite-Me Outfit’: Vampires as a Rape Metaphor in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

Life on the Hellmouth means the constant threat of death from evil of all sorts. In addition to death, vampires present the threat of sexual violence. Indeed, they are portrayed as sexual deviants and predators. Through a critical examination of all seven televised seasons, we argue that vampires as a threat are framed as a women’s (Slayer’s) issue. Season Three’s ‘The Wish’ can be conceived as an analytical prism for the series making evident how such rhetoric mirrors the victim-blaming attached to rape. Although vampires and their victims span the genders, the responsibility to eradicate the problem initially falls upon one girl, the Slayer. Throughout the series, Buffy struggles against the patriarchal pressure from the Watcher’s Council for her to conform to traditionally masculine hero archetypes favoring reaction instead of prevention, individualism, violence, and isolation. It is ultimately through the acceptance and adoption of feminist

---

<sup>2</sup> The ‘dark’ nature of seasons six and seven is documented in the edited volume by Edwards, Rambo and South, 2009 ‘Buffy Goes Dark.’

collaborative values that she reshapes and redefines a women's issue (Slaying vampires/avoiding rape) as a societal one.

### **Craig Franson: 'There Are No Strings on Me': Joss Whedon's Vision and the Global War on Terror**

Hollywood's "post-9/11" period has been characterized by a dramatic escalation in cinematic violence, spectacle, and fantasy, and the superhero film has become one of the period's defining genres (Pollard). Joss Whedon's two Avengers films top the genre's earnings lists, and they also stitch together the dozen narrative threads running through the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Providing both the financial engine and the imaginative infrastructure for the world's biggest film franchise, Whedon's superhero blockbusters have had an outsized impact on global cinema. Despite their institutional and cultural prominence, however, and despite, too, their largely positive critical reception, only a handful of critics and scholars have explored the films' larger cultural and political significance.

Yet, both *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) merit sustained critical attention. Ensley F. Guffey and John C. McDowell have demonstrated the first film's relevance to U. S. war cinema and to the American Civil Religion, and I have previously discussed its incorporation of iconography from the 9/11 attacks on the United States. *Age of Ultron*, in turn, centers itself around an internal struggle that echoes U. S. political debates from the Bush-era over unilateralist responses to global terrorism. In focusing its critical gaze inward, *Ultron* is no different than other prominent MCU offerings, many of which concern themselves with atavistic authoritarian movements suddenly emerging within decaying liberal societies. Yet, both of Whedon's Avengers installments are different in their deployment of Romantic irony—a sustained meta-critical reflection that disrupts aesthetic satisfaction, refracts interpretation, and opens these texts up to supplementation and radical redirection. Not only does Romantic irony turn Whedon's superhero film against both its franchise and its genre, it also turns Whedon's film against its author, revealing some of the ideological strings that animate his organic vision. Drawing upon recent work in literary Romanticism (Simpson, Redfield, Pyle) and in political science and philosophy (Laclau, Mouffe, Butler), this project will analyze the film's complex political agency, asking what capacity a blockbuster superhero film has to oppose a mode of warfare that may be its real word double.

### **Bernhard Frena: The Death and Afterlife of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Examining the Cracks between TV, Comic, and Fan Fiction**

The fictional universe of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* encompasses at the very least one movie, two TV shows, and a plethora of comic books. If one also counts the video games and the myriad of different works of fan fiction – ranging themselves from text to comic to video – there is an overwhelming number of different representations of *Buffy* and its various characters. Still, most of these representations purport to be about those very same characters. It doesn't seem to matter that in one, Willow ends up as a lesbian vampire and in another as a heterosexual werewolf. Both representations seem to be at their core about the same Willow Rosenberg. This directly leads to my main question: How can we try to conceptualize these different representational aspects, while at the same time affirming that we are still essentially talking about the same characters?

In my talk I will propose a possible solution to this problem. By building upon Judith Jack Halberstam's notion of the Brandon archive (Halberstam 2005) and Walter Benjamin's figurative storyteller (Benjamin 1936) I will conceptualize these characters not as fixed personas, but rather as malleable archives. These archives are in constant flux: they get added to by each specific narrative establishment of a character and embody the totality of all singular representational modes a character has ever occupied. Each concrete narrative takes some aspects from this archive, builds upon them, changes them, and by doing so, adds onto, rearranges and reaffirms the original state of the archive.

Recent considerations have already shown the importance of a character's memory (Jowett 2014) and the process of reinterpreting memory as part of a subjective narrative (Rabb/Richardson 2014). My approach fits neatly into these discussions, by showing how the characters themselves get created through narratives that build upon common cultural memories. By using this model I will try to move away from the primacy of any canonical texts (Durand 2009; Kociemba/Iatropolous 2015) and will instead focus on the complex interplay between specific narratives, their medium and the archive that they together constitute.

### **Alexandra Garner: 'Darn Your Sinister Attraction': Buffybot and the Construction of Humanity**

This presentation analyzes the role of canonical television depictions as well as additional fanfiction characterizations of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* minor character (the) Buffybot as a human double, a robot, and a cyborg. In doing so, I argue that the use of Buffybot as a foil for the show's titular character is a critique of sexual objectification, heteronormativity and hegemony, as well as the construction and regulation of "humanity." I interrogate other non-human characters whose humanity is in question, and through careful consideration of the few episodes in which Buffybot appears on Buffy, as well as her representations in fanfiction, I argue that the latter examples generally challenge the show's dehumanizing depiction of her as a mere robot, preferring instead to find/create spaces for Buffybot to feel, dream, and think.

This project relies on feminist theory and critical media studies for its theoretical frameworks, as well as considering the role of fan counter-narratives in constructing characterization in fandoms such as *Buffy's*. I discuss the relationship between the creators and producers with fans that actively problematize and challenge the canonical representations of the Buffybot. This project also presents a new approach to scholarship, examining specific fanfiction examples in conjunction with analysis of the show's canon. I hope to add this element to the wealth of extant scholarship on Buffy the Vampire Slayer and its feminism.

### **Michael C. Gilbert and Sofia Gieysztor: Point of View as Identity: Themes of Mindfulness and the Power of the Container in Whedon's *Dollhouse***

Cynthea Masson once made it clear just how profoundly Joss Whedon's work invites the reader to gloss the text. In this paper, we accept that invitation and gloss the text of *Dollhouse* through the heuristic concept of 'mindfulness'. In so doing, we offer what may be a slightly new interpretation of the notion of identity in a show that is rich with such notions. We propose that what Susan Quilty described simply as "negative space" is more than just the mysterious background left after the mind is removed. In applying the concept of mindfulness, we assert a specific, powerful, and identity-building role for the body, the supposedly empty container of the mind: the role of observer.

The concept of mindfulness tells us that it is the container itself that is either mindless or mindful — the latter only to the extent that the constructs of the mind are observed, rather than merely obeyed. Observing the mind (or minds, in the case of Echo) IS mindfulness. More importantly, mindfulness, not the mind, is the true inviolable core of identity. Some of the groundwork for this view was laid by Susan Quilty in "Negative Space in the House" and, importantly, by Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan in "There Is No Me; I'm Just a Container - Law and the Loss of Personhood in Dollhouse." Hugh Davis pushed us further in this direction with his notion that masks (or personas) are a state of mind. And Bronwen Calvert opened the door to the vast array of cyberpunk glosses, many of which also point in this direction. Outside of the literature, many cross-cultural philosophical, scientific, religious, and psychological disciplines — including European Existentialism, American Humanism, and Asian Buddhism — offer similar themes about mindfulness and not mind itself, as the supreme identity.

We will explore as many themes of container-as-identity as possible in a twenty-minute paper presentation. At the least, we intend to explore at least these three themes: (1) Echo's story provides the core justification for our gloss. Her arc is precisely the story, not of some core identity coming out of some corner and taking over, but of the growing power of mindfulness. Echo's specialness emerges specifically from her ability to control her minds, rather than be controlled by them. It is through her ability to observe them that she avoids merely becoming them. (2) The physical dollhouse itself (the building) is also a container, built to assert its control over the minds within, primarily through its powers of observation. As one might expect from the always meaningful spaces in Whedon's work, the surveillance architecture of the Dollhouse provides dozens of direct comparisons with the architecture of mindfulness. (3) Last but not least, the show's audience is itself a kind of engine of awareness, yearning for the dolls in the story to not be consumed by the minds installed in them. We the viewers provide, in the context of the narrative experience, an embodiment of the vast potential of awareness of mind.

### **Elizabeth Gilliland: Not Much with the Damseling: Gothic Heroes, Heroines, Subversions, and Shadows in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

Much has been written, by both academics and fans, in discussion of Buffy Summers' love life, particularly in regards to her three main love interests on the series: Angel, Riley, and Spike. Some intriguing work has already been done by Whedon scholars looking at some of these romantic heroes as shadows or doubles of Buffy herself, including Stacey Abbott; J. Michael Richardson and J. Douglas Rabb; Rhonda Wilcox; and Delores Nurss. Building off that research, this paper expounds on those ideas by addressing Angel, Riley, and Spike not only as shadow figures of Buffy, but also as subversions of traditional literary Gothic figures (Angel/Angelus as Jekyll/Hyde; Riley as Frankenstein's monster; and Spike as a Byronic hero). Focusing on the combination of these two elements in Buffy's romantic counterparts indicates not only how her character is both shaped and revealed in relation to them, but also points to what each lover and his ties to a classic Gothic narrative can tell us about Buffy's fears and anxieties in facing her role as the Slayer, and in becoming a woman. This paper argues that Buffy's romantic partner at any given stage of the series acts as a physical manifestation of these Gothic fears, and thus become tied to the personal obstacles that must be overcome in order for her to ultimately transition into adulthood.

### **Sherry Ginn: Red Rooms, Conditioning Chairs, and Needles in the Brain: Brainwashing and Memory Manipulation in the Whedonverses**

The notion that someone can play around with your brain or mind, without your knowledge, is a scary thought. Human beings pride themselves on their strength of character and ability to resist undue influence. The average person does not understand or acknowledge the various ways in which their behavior is manipulated every day. Such manipulations do not just occur in television advertisements via what social psychologists call the “peripheral route” of persuasion. They may also occur during news broadcasts, watching television series or films, listening to the radio, or texting friends. Our brain increasingly automates many of the activities in which we engage daily and such automation can be considered brainwashing. However, when the average person hears the word brainwashing, they think of The Manchurian Candidate and reports from Korean War veterans of techniques used by the Chinese on American prisoners-of-war, techniques that have been adopted by countries, including the US, to program counter-intelligence operatives.

In this paper I will briefly discuss the ways in which “brainwashing” can occur, specifically in relation to the education and training of Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow. However, I will also discuss other characters in the Whedonverse who have been subjected to “brainwashing,” including Dottie Underwood on *Agent Carter*, River Tam in *Firefly/Serenity* and the Dolls/Actives of *Dollhouse*. Other examples in the Whedonverse include Maggie Walsh’s experiments in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

### **Evan Hayles Gledhill: An Unsuitable Job for a Woman: Emotional Labour and Heroism in the Work of Joss Whedon**

Heroism is depicted as an emotionally, as well as physically, demanding calling in American media, particularly in fictions about superheroes. The heroes, and their support team or ‘sidekicks’ if they are blessed with such, must manage the grief of loss, the pain of trauma, even the fear of death - their own, and others’. This process is ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983), expected and yet unremunerated and poorly supported in real workplaces as well as fictional teams. Since Hochschild’s naming of the process, there has been much interest in and exploration of gendered expectations around emotional labour, and its feminine associations (Lutz 1996, Brooks and Devasahayam 2010). What is unusual about Joss Whedon’s fictional worlds containing superpowered beings, and concomitant depictions of heroism, is the regularity with which it is men who undertake the ‘caring’ roles, and focus upon communication, team-building, and trauma recovery.

This paper explores the idea that a form of gender inversion is at play in these texts, where male characters are more likely to administrate and nurse than in comparable heroic fictions. This paper explores the ‘emotional labour’ performed by Xander Harris, Rupert Giles and Spike in Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2004), and Nick Fury, Phil Coulson and Clint Barton in the Avengers films (2012, 2015). Critical voices from within fan communities have accused Whedon of centring a mediocre white man as a ‘Mary Sue’ amongst more skilled or ‘super’ characters. In de-centering men’s action and re-centering their emotion as a new model of heroic masculinity, is it the case that men have, in fact, retained the central position in the text that Whedon, as a self-proclaimed feminist, had hoped to subvert with his action heroines?

Lorna Jowett has suggested that in *Buffy* representation of masculinity ‘struggles with a binary construction [...] old masculinity is macho, violent, strong, and monstrous, while new masculinity is “feminised”’(2005). As response to feminist critique that suggests binarism itself ‘is an unhealthy patriarchal worldview’, Marc Camron’s exploration of gendered identity in *Buffy* suggests that ‘removing the binary would place

the show so far into the realm of unreality it could no longer be effective' as a critique (2007). This essay works from the queer perspective that binaristic gender construction is an illusion *created by* the 'patriarchal worldview', and that in working within such a constraint Whedon does not make his own fictions more real, but shows us how unhelpful and divisive the fiction of normative gender really is—even if he doesn't always know this himself.

### **Michael Goodrum: War, Profit, and Migration in *Firefly***

*Firefly* (2002) is a show preoccupied with movement and migration. In the 'verse, Mal and his crew, like the Confederate veterans of many Westerns, are displaced by the aftermath of war and the construction of a new regime to which they are ideologically opposed; the Reavers, the product of Alliance biological experimentation, are similarly placeless, and constantly rove the outer rim as a symptom of Alliance ideology. There are also settlers, generally depicted as economic migrants who leave the civilized (and expensive) core worlds for the uncivilized (and therefore cheap) outer rim in whatever vessels they can find to carry them. Whether they are setting out for a new and better life or fleeing persecution, or some combination of both, is hard to discern; it is far easier to ascertain those who benefit from such migration. 'Jaynestown' shows the conditions under which migrants work, with costs being kept low so that the benefits can be passed on to the consumer – and indeed the producer. Settling new planets is also costly, so although some individuals may attain a degree of independence and affluence in the process, it is to be expected that the main beneficiary of the conquest of these newly terraformed planets are the Alliance and the corporations who supply them, most notably Blue Sun, who operate a monopoly over seemingly all available commodities in the 'verse. This paper will investigate the shaping of individuals and their relationship to their surroundings through war and capitalism, placing emphasis on the role of migration, both forced and unforced.

### **Ensley Guffey: 'They're Trying to Create an Army of Things like You': Super Soldiers in the Whedonverses**

Since the 15th century CE, increasingly rapid advances in military technology, medicine, and science have produced progressively more effective soldiers. In terms of health, endurance, battlespace intelligence, and sheer firepower a 21st century soldier from the developed world is the most impressive – and deadly – combatant in human history. In fiction, this ongoing multiplication of force at the individual level led to the development of the trope of the super soldier, defined by TVTropes.org as "a soldier specifically intended to be above and beyond a normal man; harder, better, faster, stronger, tougher, more skilled, more determined, built and trained to fight and win." Beginning in the early 1990s, fiction started to become fact as the US Department of Defense's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) began serious research into ways to enhance individual soldiers in the real world, investigating powered exo-skeletons, chemical enhancement, cybernetic augmentation, bioengineering, and even genetic engineering.

Heavily influenced by comic books and speculative fiction, and entering his prime as a storyteller and executive producer at a time when DARPA's new research avenues were revealed, it is no surprise that super soldiers repeatedly appear in the works of Joss Whedon. From the Initiative in both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, to the Alliance's brutal reprogramming of River Tam in *Firefly/Serenity*, to Rossum's special-forces-to-order capability in *Dollhouse*, to Captain America himself, Whedon is

fascinated with super soldiers – and the ramifications of their creation. This presentation will examine Whedon’s use of super soldiers throughout his body of work, and the ways in which those characters critique both institutional efforts to “make folks better,” and cultural understandings of what exactly makes someone “super.”

### **Janet K. Halfyard: The Sound of Whedon: The Influence of Joss Whedon’s Early Television Series on TV Scoring**

The innovations Joss Whedon promoted in the musical strategies of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly* have had a lasting influence on subsequent scoring strategies, especially in cult TV. Key ideas here are the use of thematic scoring, introduced as a key element of *Buffy*’s music from season 2 onward; and the use of contrasting idiomatic scoring, heard in *Firefly*’s use of American folk, Eastern modes and ‘supercultural’ orchestral scoring (Slobin, 2008) for Mal/ Serenity, Inara and the Alliance respectively as a means of defining and delineating areas of narrative space. This, in itself, is an extension of *Buffy*’s own strategy where the narrative slippage between genres (horror, romantic drama, teen drama) is signalled musically, classic horror tropes contrasting with thematic scoring focusing on the emotional lives of characters, and popular music in the Bronze creating a third musical space. My main example is *Supernatural*, which closely parallels *Buffy*’s overall strategy in the use of subtly thematic writing focused on love and loss, particularly associated with Dean’s emotional vulnerability, contrasting with gestural horror scoring and the third space of the Impala and its associated rock music. Furthermore, like *Buffy*, *Supernatural* regularly plays genre games involving music, in episodes that never merely imitate Whedon’s playful approach to genre (e.g. ‘Hush,’ ‘Once More, with Feeling’), but extend, develop and reinvent ideas of musical playfulness in scores that build on the legacy of Whedon and contribute significantly to furthering the work that Whedon’s composers began in establishing a genuinely televisual rather than filmic approach to music.

### **Jessica Hautsch: Blackwater in the Battle Against Evil: The Moral Implications of Slayers as Hired Guns in *Buffy Season Nine* and *Angel and Faith Season Ten***

Season 9 of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comics introduces Deepscan, a private security company set up by Kennedy. At first glance, Deepscan seems like worthy employment for Slayers: It was begun by one of their own, and in a capitalist world where many of them lack marketable skills (a problem that *Buffy* herself faces), the corporation provides Slayers considerable monetary compensation for the use of their strengths. However, more importantly, as Kennedy notes, Deepscan gives these Slayers a purpose, something that many Slayers lack after magic and interdimensional travel is destroyed at the end of season 8.

At different points in *Buffy* and *Angel and Faith*, the titular Slayers engage in a brief sojourn with the company, and they both leave because of ethical qualms with Deepscan’s operation and an inability to assimilate to its culture. This dissatisfaction is linked to Deepscan’s profit-driven *raison d’être*, similar to the ethos espoused by Milton Friedman; although not as outright immoral as Wolfram and Hart or the Dollhouse, Deepscan’s profit-driven motives are shown to be at odds with *Buffy*’s and *Faith*’s moral code and MO.

This paper will examine how the comics’ presentation of Deepscan offers a continuation of Whedon’s anti-corporate ethos. Additionally, given that *Faith* refers to Deepscan as “Blackwater on estrogen” in the final issue of *Angel and Faith Season 9*, it

would seem that the series invites discussion of how Deepscan's practices align with those of the more notorious Private Security and Military Firms (PSMF), most notably a lack of concern about social benefits and a focused interest that favours the wealthy. It is this contradiction of privatized capitalist militarization versus the seeming socialist morality associated with the Slayer ethos that this paper explores.

**Mary Ellen Iatropoulos and Lorna Jowett: Good Cop, Bad Cop: Interrogating *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (Iatropoulos Part One, Jowett Part Two)**

A certain trepidation pervades critical discussion of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* amongst Whedon scholars. For all the trumpeting of Joss Whedon's name to promote the show, Whedon's nominal involvement in production prompts the question of whether *AoS* is "really" a Whedon show. At times, *AoS* seems too mainstream for a cult audience; at others, it courts this audience with narrative "special effects," references to comic book sources, and Marvel Cinematic Universe tie-ins. The show resists linear interpretation by constantly upheaving itself, from dramatic reversals in basic narrative expectations (e.g. the Hydra revelation following *The Winter Soldier*) to sudden twists requiring us to completely reassess characters (e.g. Ward having been Hydra all along). How can we make sense of such a swiftly-shifting and seemingly contradictory show? Are they S.H.I.E.L.D, or are they Hydra? Are they good guys, or are they bad guys? Is this really a Whedon show, or isn't it? Is it any good, or not? This paper deliberately adopts binary positions to engage this dialectic and flesh out debate regarding *AoS* as part of the Whedonverse.

This paper extends Abbott, Calvert and Jowett's discussion of *AoS* as part of the Whedon brand (2015) and Kociemba and Iatropoulos's examination of Whedon's auteurism (2015). Some "Whedonesque" elements (as defined by Lavery, Wilcox, and others) do surface in *AoS*. As Jowett will contest, when understood as Whedonesque, *AoS* is televisual art deserving of acceptance into Whedon canon. Yet, as Iatropoulos will argue, *AoS*'s strategy of undermining expectations can result in the show's "Whedonesque" elements also being undermined. Jowett and Iatropoulos will present an embodied performance of critical contention involving the show's treatment of race, gender, and age, inhabiting--and thus making visible--*AoS*'s oscillation between subverting ideological and genre paradigms and reinforcing them.

#### Works Cited

- Kociemba, David and Mary Ellen Iatropoulos. "Separate Worlds Or One? Canonicity, Medium and Authorship." *The Comics of Joss Whedon*. Ed. Valerie Estelle Frankel. North Carolina, USA: McFarland, 2015. 31-47.
- Jowett, L., Abbott, S. and Calvert, B. (2015) "A Part of Something Bigger': A Roundtable Discussion of *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, Transmedia television, and the Joss Whedon Brand." *Joss Whedon: the Complete Companion*. Ed. PopMatters Media. Revised and updated ed. London: Titan Books, 2015. 421-430.
- Kociemba, David. "Understanding the Espensode." *Buffy Goes Dark: Essays on the Final Two Seasons of Buffy the Vampire Slayer on Television*. Eds. Lynne Y. Edwards, Elizabeth L Rambo and James B. South. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. 23-39. Print.
- . "Slayage 5: "Whedon As Undead Author." *Watcher Junior: The Undergraduate Journal of Whedon Studies*. 27 July 2012. Web. 10 Sept 2014.

<<http://blog.watcherjunior.tv/2012/07/slayage-5-whedon-as-undead-author.html?>>

Lavery, David. *Joss Whedon: A Creative Portrait From Buffy the Vampire Slayer to Marvel's The Avengers*. I.B. Tauris: London, 2014. Print.

Wilcox, Rhonda V. "Introduction: Much Ado About Whedon." *Reading Joss Whedon*. Eds Rhonda V. Wilcox, Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthea Masson, and David Lavery. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2014. Print.

### **Christine Jarvis: Exploring Globalisation: The Public Pedagogy of Joss Whedon**

This paper will examine how Whedon teaches audiences about globalisation and resistance in *Firefly/Serenity*. It argues that Whedon operates as a teacher, by presenting what the influential adult educator, Stephen Brookfield, called 'imagining alternatives'. Whedon creates worlds in which he shows that those aspects of human existence so profoundly entrenched as to appear inevitable and unchallengeable can be resisted and alternative ways of being developed.

The paper draws on educational scholarship, such as that promoted by Luke, Sandlin, Wright and Giroux, which argues that important educational processes, 'public pedagogies', increasingly take place outside institutions. Such scholars have critiqued assumptions that popular/mass culture is a monolithic process, engaged in reinforcing hegemony, offering instead more nuanced accounts of the way popular fictions teach us about the world.

It will also build on the work done by Whedon scholars who have explored the complexity of the *Firefly* Universe, and its capacity to subvert and represent contemporary hierarchies, injustices and power relations. Scholars such as Huff and Davidson consider how Whedon's imaginary universe creates spaces in which alternative gender hierarchies can be presented. Brown considers the complex ways in which *Firefly* addresses the 'othering' of oriental cultures; conversely, Curry suggest that these texts may have reinforced racial stereotypes with respect to American Indians. Jencson notes the prominence of human rights issues in the texts and makes connections with political activism. This activism is also addressed by Wilcox and Cochran.

The paper's contribution to these discussions will be its demonstration that 'the imaginary' is an educational space, in which Whedon uses all the resources at his command, to promote critical reflection on globalisation and resistance in ways that enable audiences to recognise possibilities for change, and their own complicity in the maintenance of the status quo.

### **Bethan Jones: "Advocate of Mass Murder for Fun and Profit": Negotiating Celebrity Political Affiliation Through a Conservative Moral Framework**

Joss Whedon has often been lauded for his tendency to speak vocally about the things in which he believes: his desire to see strong female characters; his commitment to equality; his support of charitable organisations. His recent donations to Planned Parenthood, however, have generated a backlash from conservative fans, with many rejecting their fandom of Whedon and his texts. Work on moral antifandom (Gray, 2005), has often tended to focus on liberal criticism as it supports a move towards equality, rather than prioritising conservative critique which can be sexist, racist or homophobic. Thus feminist critique of Whedon for *Avengers: Age of Ultron* highlights the positioning of Black Widow as monstrous due to her forced sterilisation as symptomatic of the way women are treated in film, with the intention of improving the

depiction of women in future films. Far less work has been done on conservative antifandom by scholars.

In this paper I analyse the response to Whedon's support for Planned Parenthood and the move from fandom to antifandom by those opposing his actions. I question the extent to which Whedon is policed by fans who argue that the celebrity's job is to entertain rather than share their political leanings, and suggest why this conservative antifandom should also be studied by scholars. I also examine how people who still identify as Whedon fans but disagree with his stance negotiate their fandom.

### **Gemma Killen: Blood Kin and Scooby Gangs: Queering Kinship on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

Mr Maclay: We are her blood kin, who the hell are you?

Buffy: We're family.

In her article '*Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Vampires, Postmodernity and Postfeminism*', Owen argued that *BtVS* addressed a number of themes of gender and sexuality including the 'crisis' of changing gender scripts within the 'fragmented heterosexual middle class family unit' (1999). This paper will build on this and other work exploring the figure of the family in *BtVS* (Battis 2005; Stevens 2010; Jarvis & Burr 2005, 2007) through a feminist lens. In particular, the paper will use queer readings of the show in order to examine the ways in which hetero-normative concepts of the family are critiqued and queered throughout *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Historically, the figure of the vampire has been constructed as harbinger of social and sexual anxiety and has predominantly represented a violent undoing of gender norms and familial and racial autonomy (Gordon & Hollinger 1997). Interestingly, Buffy's vampire acts instead as a symbol of traditional kinship and reveals the monstrosity inherent in the patriarchal family unit. Beginning with the character of the Master as the figurehead of the traditional family and moving through to the Potentials as the non-biological offspring of a contemporary and arguably queer family, this paper will explore how normative families are constructed as threatening and violent and the ways in which *BtVS* offers new subversive and feminist imaginings of kinship.

### **Ian Klein: Resurrecting Sunnydale: Chronicles of the Hellmouth**

Buffy wasn't the only new kid in Sunnydale when she arrived in 1997; millions of viewers got their first glimpse that spring, but the town they saw—often shrouded in impenetrable darkness—was not fully formed. Like any town, Sunnydale did not merely spring into being. Over the course of seven seasons, Sunnydale grew not only in scale, but also in its identity. Albeit a fictional town, Sunnydale, CA, became more real the more of its facets were revealed through new sets, locations, character remarks, and yes, even better lighting.

Beyond the Scooby Gang, Sunnydale is possibly the next most important character. After all, Sunnydale is what makes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* possible. Without a town atop it, the Hellmouth would be little more than a hole in the California desert. Details about Sunnydale rival—and in many cases surpass—even some minor characters about which many a page has been written: Amy, Dracula, Sweet, Whistler, to name a few. After nearly twenty years spent with the cast of Sunnydale, we know most of them quite well, and while academics always find more to write about them, thanks in part to the ongoing comic book line from Dark Horse, Sunnydale itself remains uniquely apt for further study.

Featuring interviews with the show's writers, producers, production team and other contributors to the Buffyverse, this in-depth study of Sunnydale will bring new perspectives and understanding to its identity in the world of *Buffy* and as Hollywood creation.

**Rebecca Kumar: “Wanna See My Impression of Gandhi?”: Anti-Colonial Possibilities in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

In the episode “Anne,” our eponymous hero has abandoned Sunnydale and her duty, posing as a waitress as she seeks a life without life-or-death responsibility. However, when Buffy learns that a community social worker, Ken, is actually a demon running a slave ring in an alternate dimension, she is compelled to resume her calling. She finds that homeless teenagers have been kidnapped, stripped of their names, and forced into manual labor. At the end of the episode, when she successfully frees these dispossessed slaves, she comes face-to-face with their master and asks, cheekily, “Hey Ken, wanna see my impression of Gandhi?” before killing him. Lily, one of the captured youth, queries, “Gandhi?” Buffy shrugs and says, “Well, you know, if he was really pissed off.”

Buffy's flippant self-comparison to the famously non-violent anti-colonial leader who freed India of British rule may seem particularly irreverent given the larger racialized trend in the series, one that disregards people of color. Lynne Edwards has critiqued the representation of the Caribbean slayer Kendra as the “tragic mulatta” and Jeffrey Middents has highlighted how Mr. Trick, the compelling black vampire of season 3, is marginalized as a sidekick. The show itself seems self-aware of these oversights when Mr. Trick provides metacommentary, quipping: “it's strictly the Caucasian persuasion in the Dale.” Moreover, portrayals of the “Other” are often dripping with colonial stereotype, as Dominic Alessio outlines in his reading of the controversial episode “Pangs.”

And yet, as other scholars have suggested, in *Buffy*, color-codes of goodness and evil, pacifism and violence, civility and savageness – as light and dark – are not in stark opposition. In this regard, I argue that Buffy's comparison to Gandhi is telling; it engages the longstanding debate over the kinds of signified darkness deemed necessary in anti-colonial freedom struggles. Following both Kim Hall's work on the interplay of lightness and darkness and engaging a gendered reading of Frantz Fanon's work on blackness and violence, this paper recovers anti-colonial possibilities in Whedon's seemingly colonial text.

**Amy Li: “Nobody's Asian in the Movies” but Now They're in Marvel: Asian and Asian-American Representation in *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.***

What does it mean to be an Asian/Asian-American in pop culture media, especially as a superhero? Though Maurissa Tancharoen wrote and sang in the commentary to *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, “[n]obody's Asian in the movies / Nobody's Asian on TV,” times are changing. In the same month that Marvel Comics debuted Kamala Khan, the first female Pakistani-American superhero, *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (for which Tancharoen is co-writer and producer) introduced television audiences to high-ranking S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Melinda May, and Skye, later revealed as a racebent (half-Chinese) adaptation of the superhero Daisy Johnson.

My paper will explore the tension between the stereotypical aspects of May and Skye as Asian/Asian-American women versus their ‘agency’ as a badass agent and superhero, a particularly important negotiation given the recent NY Times op/ed by Umapagan Ampikaipakan on the “oxymoron” of the Asian superhero. At times

*S.H.I.E.L.D.* toes the line between depicting Asian-American characters as racial stereotypes such as the “Dragon Lady” (May, emotionless and expertly trained in martial arts), or avoiding stereotypes to the point of whitewashing (Skye, who in the beginning is only Asian in looks), which Jessica Hautsch in “‘What the Geisha has gotten into you?’: Colorblindness, Orientalist Stereotypes, and the Problem of Global Feminism in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight*” labels as “the result of the ideology of colorblindness;” she adds that whitewashing “eliminates the representation of racial difference and is not uncommon within the Buffyverse, nor in American television in general” (2). As the show progresses, however, both characters gain nuance. May and Skye’s character developments allow them the “multiple identities” which Elana Levine argued were denied Kendra, a Jamaican Slayer, and Satsu, a Japanese Slayer, as Hautsch argues. May’s emotionless façade receives an explanation, while Skye gets superpowers, discovering her heritage along the way.

### **Christopher Lockett: “Into Each Generation ...”: Fantasy, Prophecy, and Power in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* begins in the absolutism of a Manichaean universe: demonic forces are invariably malevolent and evil, and the Slayer’s role is cosmically ordained as a bulwark against the darkness. However, as the series progresses over its seven seasons, and spins off into *Angel*, it slowly but surely erodes this absolutism. It complicates the narrative and mythic conventions in which it initially grounds itself, ultimately depicting the previously transcendental understanding of good and evil as contingent and arbitrary.

In this respect, *Buffy* effects a Foucauldian critique of power within the context of a set of intersecting genres—mythology and legend, fantasy, the gothic—traditionally predicated on the extrinsic logic of prophecy and destiny. In initially replicating this logic in its now-famous opening lines (“Into each generation, there is a chosen one”), *Buffy* employed what Farah Mendelsohn identified in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* as a generic “download of legend”—a brief historical or prophetic exposition tacitly granted the status of unquestioned truth. However, “The assumption that ‘the past’ is unarguable,” has narrative consequences (16), most specifically that in spite of the truism that all fiction is based in conflict, “the possibilities for such conflict are limited by the ideological narrative that posits the world, as painted, as true” (17). In spite of the specific agency granted Buffy as the Slayer, the extrinsic principle of prophecy—and its practices of power upon her—constrain her agency in the broader narrative (and ontological) sense.

What the series effects, however, is the shattering of this unitary, extrinsic conception of power into a network of intrapersonal agency that rejects the model of transcendental patriarchal power on which traditional fantasy predicated itself—in effect, using the tropes of fantasy to open an imaginative space within fantasy.

#### WORKS CITED

Mendelsohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2008.

### **Gert Magnusson: The Superhero Dilemma**

According to utilitarian philosophy it is in some cases right for you to sacrifice one person if you by that act can save more people. This is a problem that does not only interest philosophers but has become predominant in fiction, specifically in every action novel, movie or TV-series there is. The utilitarian problem is however negated and

reformulated in fiction to what I call the superhero dilemma: How is the superhero (or hero) to act in order to save everyone without sacrificing anyone?

I will exemplify how the utilitarian moral problem is presented in fiction and how the protagonists face such horrors. My examples are mainly taken from season five of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and I show various ways in which the utilitarian problem is presented and what strategies are available to the superhero (Buffy) when she faces the dilemma that she might have to sacrifice someone in order to let others live.

The presentation is exploring one of the themes from my essay "The Superhero Dilemma," where I deal with a much wider field of problems.

### **Barbara Maio: Agents of Shield and the question of authorship in Whedon factory**

*Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is a television series made by Marvel Studios in a more wide project about superheroes between comics, cinema, and TV. Joss Whedon directed the first episode of the series in 2013, then leaving the project to his brother and his sister-in-law, Jed Whedon and Maurissa Tancharoen.

But if his involvement is liminal, it's also clear that all the usual Whedon tropes are present, starting with the main character Phil Coulson and his resurrection that kicks off the story. Narrative construction, characters' descriptions, recurring issues are all labels for a Whedon product in a wide sense. My paper will explore these moments in the history of the series, showing how *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* could be called a Whedon Series, both from the Joss and the Jed/Maurissa point of view and also for the wide perspective of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where Joss Whedon was for years one of the main authors.

### **Masani McGee: "We Create Our Own Demons": Trauma in the Marvel Cinematic Universe**

Trauma and its sometimes debilitating aftereffects have typically been reserved for male characters within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Yet with the release of Netflix series *Jessica Jones*, the dynamic surrounding this issue has changed. Unlike the majority of male-focused films within the franchise—where post-traumatic stress is either downplayed (the *Captain America* series) or even portrayed humorously (*Iron Man 3*)—the online series has displayed an ability to explicitly and honestly acknowledge how trauma impacts a person's everyday life.

These new developments make it necessary to examine whether or not multiple perspectives on this concept can coexist within Marvel's shared universe. To that end, I will discuss the implications of presenting trauma through a gendered lens, the impact of different mediums, and how the MCU can be used as a framework to discuss real-world instances of post-traumatic stress. Cathy Caruth's definitive work on trauma theory will provide a starting framework to examine how this concept functions within the MCU, while the work of Anne Cubilié and Victor Seidler will allow me to consider trauma through gender, in addition to its function in the aftermath of 9/11 respectively. As arguably the dominant film genre of the new millennium, superhero films and the Marvel Cinematic Universe in particular have a unique opportunity to depict trauma in a varied and respectful manner. However it is also clear that this opportunity will be heavily shaped by the economic goals of Marvel as a corporation, and especially the cultural narratives in America regarding mental illness.

### **Mary Alice Money: Exploring *Firefly's* "Heart of Gold"**

“Heart of Gold,” w. Brett Matthews, dir. Thomas S. Wright, episode 1.13 of Joss Whedon’s *Firefly*, is probably the most simple-minded episode of that marvelous series. Whedon himself states that it was an opportunity for the crew to really “do a Western”: “Let’s help a bunch of nice whores and get ourselves into kind of a classic Western scenario” (qtd. in *The Official Firefly Companion*, II: 174). And they certainly fit in, all without irony or parody, a remarkable number of iconic Western elements: a wind-swept prairie settlement, a rag-tag band of altruistic mercenaries, a group of marginalized working-class “homesteaders” (prostitutes), the local power-mad land baron, much violence and gunplay (and laser beams), some deaths, a birth, a funeral, an execution, some sex, and the hero on a horse tackling the villain on a hovercraft. The villain is unredeemable and the hero will win.

So why would Joss Whedon televise such a simple story?

First, of course, much of the fun of the episode is in seeing horse opera turned into space opera, noting the echoes of classic Western movies. Second, the viewer sees that the changes in the Western elements reveal new versions of gender roles and sexual attitudes. While David Magill argues that the male characters “demonstrate the range of gender’s flexibilities” (“I Aim to Misbehave,” *Investigating Firefly and Serenity*, 174), I argue that the women characters in “Heart” do so. Third, supporting all the action is a conflict between two versions of the Western myth: Turner’s Frontier thesis and Slotkin’s Progressive vision of the frontier, both discussed by Froese and Buzzard (*Slayage* 13.2, par 14+) and Lorna Jowett (*Investigating* 108+). Finally, the key to “Heart of Gold” is enjoying the unexpected juxtapositions of genres, character roles, and themes in this “simple” episode.

### **Madeline Muntersbjorn: Alterity, Ambivalence, and Artificial Intelligence**

In DVD commentary to S6.2, Marti Noxon predicts that the scene where a recently resurrected Buffy watches as her mechanical alter is drawn and quartered will provide ‘fodder for academic symposia’. Indeed, several scholars have examined the symbolism of the Buffybot’s graphic demise as a pivotal point in the heroine’s journey. But neither Scoobies nor scholars regard the Buffybot as an end in herself. As the tropers note, “It’s not entirely clear how sentient she is, but the Scoobies seem a little unnervingly cavalier about how they treat her.” The Buffybot endures grisly ordeals that could not befall the really real Buffy, partly because the decapitation or dismemberment of a human body would be too bloody for prime time. Viewing the Buffybot as a non-person is not only a means to put censor-friendly ultra-violence on the small screen, but also a problematic narrative device with deep roots in sexism (“men like sandwiches”) and racism (“she’s the descendent of a toaster oven”). This talk considers the Buffybot alongside arguments against the possibility of artificial intelligence, from Nagel’s (1974), “What is it like to be a bat?” to Sullivan’s (2006), “What is it like to be a bot?” Both argue we could not create machines that possess what we don’t understand, namely self-consciousness. The ambivalence many feel towards sentient machines is a revealing rule with notable exceptions, in Season 7 and beyond. For example, Penny Polendina of RWBY is a robot girl who denies she’s “real” until Ruby Rose scoffs: “You think just because you’ve got nuts and bolts instead of squishy guts makes you any less real than me?” Ruby can sense Penny’s heart and soul, not because her creator has cracked the “hard problem” of consciousness, but because Ruby embraces Penny as a friend rather than dismisses her as a machine.

## **Samira Nadkarni: 'In a World This Vulnerable': Tony Stark's In/Visible Corporate Militarism and Drone Warfare**

The Whedonverses have traditionally been posited as sites of resistance to corporate or military culture, with examples ranging from the ill-fated military-led Initiative in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Dollhouse's* Rossum Corporation, which sees in its finale the combat zone produced by capitalism taken to its zenith.

However, Whedon's more recent work within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with the franchise films *The Avengers* (2012) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), suggests a more complicated stance that appears to posit a surface resistance to corporate or military ideology that fails to be borne out upon a closer examination of the media itself. Given the manner in which these films appropriate and re-imagine real world events, such as the war in Afghanistan and 9/11, and the manner in which pop culture is often used to re-enforce militarism (Martin & Steuter, 2010; Martin & Petro, 2006), the films' presentations of corporate entities, semi-nationalised militarism, and use of drone warfare is particularly worthy of discussion. This paper will examine these themes with a particular focus on the character of Tony Stark, whose disavowal of militarism and war-mongering on the one hand is complicated and overshadowed by the reality of his participation within the Avengers Initiative.

## **Matthew Pateman: I Thought J-Mo Would Back My Play: *Dr. Horrible* and the Transitions of Whedons**

This paper will address the role of *Dr Horrible* as a transitional moment in Joss Whedon's career, and it will do this by discussing three individuals whose contributions to *Dr Horrible* offer a tangential history. These three people will be discussed in two separate sections. The first part will look at the decision to have Lisa Lassek edit the series and to locate this choice within a brief discussion of the role of editors more broadly, and Lassek in particular, in Whedon's career. The importance of Lassek in Whedon's filmic career will be briefly discussed as a way into the "Hollywood Whedon." This is intended to prompt rather than exhaust discussion of the role of the editor in TV studies more generally.

The second part will offer a discussion on the emergence of Jed Whedon and Maurissa Tanchoren (J-Mo) as writers on *Dr Horrible*, and their centrality to any assessment of post-*Dr Horrible* Whedon-produced television, with the implicit argument that we have to accommodate J-Mo within the phrase "Whedon-produced television." As with the first part, this is intended to encourage further discussion of the fetishisation of the name "Whedon" rather than to provide a conclusive argument about it.

The dual-focus of the paper is intended to provide broad areas for discussion rather than a detailed and self-contained argument.

## **Nicholas Peat: "Is This Bizarro World?" The Adaptation of Characterisation in the German Translations of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

While a considerable amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to looking at the translation of television series, what happens to popular cultural references and how characters are portrayed in translation is thus far only beginning to be examined. This paper presents some of the results of my doctoral research project on the adaptation of intertextuality and characterisation in the German dubbing and subtitles for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Following established scholarship, including on the translation of Britishness in *Buffy* (e.g. Bosseaux 2013) and the adaptation of character identity via dialogue in *Buffy* (e.g. Drewniok 2015), I explore through linguistic analysis how audiovisual translation can adapt characterisation in *Buffy*. To this end, I provide a brief overview of *Buffy*'s reception in the German Sprachraum, in order to establish the programme's status for its German-speaking audience. The framework employed in my linguistic analysis of *Buffy* will be established by giving an overview of some of the research which has inspired my framework (e.g. Culpeper 2001, Walker 2012, Bednarek 2010). I will then apply the framework to various data taken from the 22 episodes comprising *Buffy*'s sixth season – I demonstrate some of the phenomena with regards to how characterisation of recurring characters is adapted, including lexis, implicature and self- & other-presentation. Finally, I discuss the findings of this research: I explore how patterns in the adaptation of both translations affect characterisation, such as differing intertextual references or concessions made owing to the restrictions of the media of translation (e.g. fitting the lip patterns of dubbing, space issues for subtitles).

- No prior knowledge of the German language is required to attend this paper.

### **Heather M. Porter: Cuppa Tea, Cuppa Tea or Something Stronger: Images of Tea in the Whedonverse**

The drinking, making and serving of tea are images that are often seen in the works of Joss Whedon. From Giles with his porcelain teacup and saucer in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the tea ceremonies of the Companion in *Firefly* to Adelle serving tea to both clients and newly recruited Dolls and the ever-present tea set in her office in *Dollhouse*, tea often appears in both the foreground and the background. This paper seeks to examine these images of tea and how they are used throughout these series, including the history of tea and how tea is utilized to show both British and Chinese culture and how those associations are used to code certain characters and relationships. This project will also examine the ideas of tea as a ceremony or ritual and how tea is used to include and exclude people using In Group/Out Group theories and social identity theories. This presentation will examine these aspects of tea across Whedon's works including his television series, comic books and feature films.

### **Dreama Pritt: Teaching Composition Through the Works of Whedon: Is Joss Really Boss, or Is It Much Ado About Nothing?**

In their 2010 book *Buffy in the Classroom: Essays on Teaching with the Vampire Slayer*, Jodie A. Krieder and Meghan K. Winchell said, "As instructors, we are always looking for new ways to enliven the classroom, engage students in difficult conversations about complicated topics, and spur them to think critically about the text in front of them and the world outside." They further revealed that "[b]y exposing our students to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, we accomplish all of these goals." By extending student exposure to the entirety of the Whedonverse—which crosses and connects multiple genres—these accomplishments take on even more depth and dimension. This presentation will be a detailed look at the experience of teaching collegiate Advanced Composition to both high school seniors and college freshmen using the works of Joss Whedon as impetus for critical thought, engaging discussion, and challenging written assignments. Works studied include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (TV series), *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (web series), *Firefly* (TV series), *Serenity* (film), *Astonishing X-Men* (graphic novel), *The Avengers* (film), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (film), *Much Ado About Nothing* (film), and *Much Ado About Nothing: A Film By Joss Whedon* (book and

screenplay), as well as a variety of academic articles, interviews, and other related materials. Student-produced artifacts include personal responses and reviews, research papers on Whedonesque topics, and creative projects—like short fiction, mini-graphic novels, film homages, and mixed media portraits. The presentation will address activities, challenges, successes, and reflections for improvement.

### **Catherine Pugh: Such Pretty Things: Madness in the Whedonverse**

Joss Whedon's work is full of physical portals between realities. Therefore, can it be argued that madness in the Whedonverse also opens a gateway between realities – one that is not physical? Additionally, does insanity in these worlds have the ability to create supernatural beings? In *Buffy/Angel* Whedon has consistently demonstrated that physical and emotional trauma can catalyse supernatural abilities, but does madness take this further, offering another layer of reality in worlds that are already fantastical?

I aim to explore this concept, as led by Cathy Caruth's work on trauma, Joshua David Bellin's work on fantasy, and Alyson R. Buckman's essay "Much Madness in the Divinest Sense: *Firefly's* 'Big Damn Heroes' and *Little Witches*'. Although many characters in the Whedonverse experience some form of madness, I focus primarily on Drusilla (*Buffy, Angel*) and River (*Firefly, Serenity*), supported by other characters from the two franchises. Drusilla and River are vastly different characters, yet their insanity manifests in an almost identical fashion. It is in *Buffy* and *Angel* that the template for psychosis developing into the psychic was established, but it is River that proves that the phenomenon is not magical in origin and that it has a wider life within the Whedonverse. As Buckman notes, the insane in Whedon's work do not see time or reality in the same way as their counterparts. This is amply demonstrated in the *Firefly* episode "Objects in Space," where the audience sees the world directly from River's point of view. This paper asks what it is to be mad in the Whedonverse, and why this insanity manifests in such a powerful way.

### **Elizabeth L. Rambo: "The Mission Is What Matters--Right?": Third-Culture Identity Paradigms in *Buffy* 7.17 "Lies My Parents Told Me"**

People "who...have been raised internationally because of a parent's career choice and have experienced numerous cross-cultural transitions" are called "Third-Culture Kids" (TCKs) or "global nomads" (McCaig). They include so-called "military brats," "missionary kids," and children of career diplomats and of international business executives. Sociologist David Pollock notes that "although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background" (Pollock and Van Reken 13), creating a "third culture" much like Homi Bhabha's "third space," but first described by Ruth Hill Useem in 1973. TCKs rarely feel that they have control over their lives; they may cope by idealistic commitment to the same missions that took their parents to far-flung and occasionally dangerous situations. Ambivalence may be crushed, only to emerge later in self-destructive patterns. In the controversial *Buffy* episode 7.17 "Lies My Parents Told Me," Principal Robin Wood (the son of a Slayer), re-ensouled vampire Spike, and Buffy herself, may be read as metaphorical Adult TCKs, illustrating some typical TCK coping strategies—some more successful than others, and some incomplete. Consideration of the series' characters as marginalized, outsiders, or otherwise transgressive will also be relevant, since one's "third culture" is not defined by place, but by common experiences, interests, and objectives.

## **Katharina Rein and Anna Grebe: Oxford is "Where They Make Gileses." Translations of Europe in the Buffyverse**

In almost every episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, we find elements that point to Europe: mythological characters, ancient texts, artefacts, rituals etc. However, these are not treated directly but via their constructions within the Buffyverse. They are either actually translated from one language into another (usually by Giles), as in the case of foreign or ancient texts; translated in a narratological manner as they further the plot, such as the apocalypse, which is, removed from its religious context, repeatedly centered in the series. A third kind of translation is an audio-visual one, concerning, for instance, the translation of mythological creatures into their audio-visual embodiment. We argue that these processes of translation create an own image of "Europe" within the series, are medial processes, which can be described by Actor-network theory, make migration, transformation and the formation of networks between technical and non-technical objects visible, and define them by doing so.

Our concept of translation is borrowed from Actor-network theory, where it refers to a process comprised of four idealized parts, describing relations of actors and their networks. Further, translation can also be understood as the act of displacement of an element within its network (Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay," in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. John Law (London: Routledge, 1986), 196-223).

Not only does the series adapt and modernize historical, originally European concepts, it also constructs an image of "Europe," mostly through characters, weapons and artefacts. For instance, Spike's and Giles's shared Britishness, associated with history, ancient books and artefacts as well as a certain kind of old-fashionedness, is a translation of "Europe." Hence, the University of Oxford simply turns into the place "where they make Gileses" in "Choices" (season 3, episode 19).

Our paper aims to make these processes of translation visible and describable, thus revealing the ways in which objects, characters, texts and figurations in *BtVS* become actors in the sense of Actor-network theory.

## **James Reynolds: The Daimonic Tale and the Re-watch Ritual: Monstrous Duality and Joss Whedon's New Horror Tradition**

Whedon was not alone in contributing to the millennial return of the soul in *Buffy* and *Angel* – think Philip Pullman's daemons, JK Rowling's horcruxes. While the soul is well-trodden in Whedon Studies, the folding back into religious tropes and traditions it foreshadows (Galactica/Caprica's poly-versus-monotheism, Meyer's migrating souls, Kate/Clare's Nephilim, Dominion's angels) suggests further study.

Stimulated by *Buffy* and *Angel*'s sheer re-watchability, I argue that these central character narratives take us through a ritual experience mirroring the structure of the "daimonic" tale. We desire to repeat this experience, which thus becomes a personal tradition, due to the daimonic tale's intrinsic structural relationship with the idea of separation from an "essential" self.

The daimonic tale centres on "The Solitary" – initially naïve, affluent, and hubristic – whose subsequent isolation and fall drives him or her into death, and rebirth – becoming "the daimon's master instead of the daimon's thrall" (Stefan Zweig). Tellingly, the term's etymology is "the verb daiomai, 'to divide, lacerate'" (Agamben). Whedon's restorable souls and other separations from self (the body-snatching vampire, The Visions, the downloaded identities of the 'Dollhouse' – even Slayer-ness itself)

behave like daimons; not as an essentialising presence, but as external forces which operate to possess the subject in a march towards self-knowledge, regardless of suffering or consequence.

Indeed, it is the the duality of consciousness saturating these narratives which makes them monstrous; their horrors of the split psyche go beyond a moral failure to integrate the Jungian Shadow (Riess), and possess greater truth than the monsters 'outside'. Whedon's daimonic tales thus retain considerable pleasure when re-watched – because they reboot horror as us – as our self- and other- alienations, split psyches, as our amoral and inexplicable drives. By compelling a new horror tradition that is fundamentally a ritual of re-watching, these series may even be driving, daimonic experience themselves.

### **Mar Rubio-Hernandez, Victor Hernandez-Santaollala, and Javier Lozano Delmar: The Spanish Whedonverse: A Study of Whedon's Fans' Creations**

The reception of Joss Whedon's work has a universal character, since its impact reaches different countries in both the professional and fan contexts. Actually, the author counts a devoted army around the world which is responsible for the configuration of the well-known Whedonverse.

In this way, Whedon's work has not just created an active fandom that follows his work in general, but there are groups which focus on a specific movie or TV show and develop different activities such as fanfics, fanarts, etc. Moreover, it is also possible to identify certain groups depending on the country. Spanish fans are part of these collectives; thus, they will be the main focus of the present study. We are interested in analyzing the creations and activities developed by Spanish fans, especially on digital platforms, in order to study their features and peculiarities. Furthermore, we will pay attention to which products are the most common ones within this fandom environment. We consider this approach to be significant, since Spain does not have an extended tradition in the creation and production of science fiction and fantastic audiovisual products. Taking into account the academic and experts' opinions as a reference, it would be revealing to study how fans react to Whedon's releases and how they expand this universe through their creations.

### **Svetlana Seibel: "There'll Be Another Song For Me": The Significance of the Orpheus Myth in *Angel's* "Orpheus"**

In their introduction to the volume *The Literary Angel: Essays on Influences and Traditions Reflected in the Joss Whedon Series*, AmiJo Comeford and Tamy Burnett assert that "part of *Angel's* appeal is that it draws on literary allusions and engages significant cultural narratives just as regularly as it depicts visually-stimulating fight scenes" (1). Indeed, both *Buffy* and *Angel* display notable intertextuality, which frequently serves to deepen the meaning of a scene or a storyline. Whether evoking Shakespeare, Robert Frost, or classical Greek motifs in what Janet K. Halfyard calls "mythic gestures" (51), these textual layers complicate the narrative and widen the scope of its possible interpretation. *Angel* especially is ripe with allusions to classical tragic narratives, from Othello to Oedipus to Orpheus, reflecting *Angel's* own status as a tragic hero: it is hardly a coincidence that many of these references are activated by or with relation to *Angel's* worst nemesis—Angelus. In this paper, I will take a closer look at the way this "cultural layering" (James 238) manifests itself in *Angel's* episode "Orpheus" (4:15) and how it contributes to the storyline's narrative and semantic complexity. This effect, I believe, is achieved through an open, two-way flow of meanings between the

ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and his descent into the Underworld and the narrative universe of *Angel*. By virtue of interaction and dialogic interpretative stance vis-à-vis each other, both these storyworlds combine in a unique way, which contributes to the episode's "richness of the text" (Halfyard 51) and makes "Orpheus" the outstanding piece of storytelling that it is.

### **David Simmons: "The Future's so Bright and I Owe it All To You": Considering Negative Capability in Relation to Joss Whedon's Unfinished Oeuvre**

This paper explores the ways in which selected, unfinished projects have functioned as a tool to preserve the perceived subcultural status of Joss Whedon amongst a particular sector of his fan-base. Significantly, this process intensified at a time when Whedon's commercial profile increased exponentially; as the co-organisers of the fifth Slayage conference claimed: "Whedon's audience has expanded beyond what most writers, producers, and directors dare to dream of" (Comeford et al 2012: online). I read this process of fan interaction with Whedon's unmade projects in terms of 'negative capability'. Henry Jenkins, amongst others, has popularised this concept as a "gap or hole viewers want to fill in" (2011, Online); as one of the prime motivating factors behind generative fan activity. In contrast with this reading of 'negative space' as primarily textually orientated, this paper will apply such ideas extra-textually. By looking at fan posts concerning the still unmade *Wonder-Woman* and *Dr Horrible's Sing Along Blog sequel* I will argue that the continuing immateriality of these ventures has consciously allowed for the creation of a kind of epistemological gap in which potential viewers are 'freed' from the constraints of existent TV shows and films to invent their own 'best case scenarios' that tell us more about their cultural and subcultural orientations towards Whedon, and his persona, than they do about their desires for a new *Wonder Woman* film or *Dr Horrible* series.

### **Philip Smith: Chinoiserie, Caning, and Code-Switching: Finding Serenity in Singapore**

In Whedon's *Firefly* universe the great powers of the United States and China collectively propelled humanity to the furthest reaches of the stars. The *mise en scène* reflect this union; *Firefly* and *Serenity's* visual and auditory palate is a meld of the American Western and Chinoiserie (plus a great deal more). There have been various attempts to locate *Firefly's* aesthetic in the modern world, perhaps most persuasively in the work of Tara Prescott, who finds *Firefly's* intercultural patchwork in San Francisco, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. In my talk I seek to offer an alternative local for *Firefly*; Singapore. I seek to ask what Singapore can teach us about *Firefly*, and what *Firefly* can teach us about Singapore?

Modern Singapore was the product not of American and Chinese territorial expansion, but a base of the British empire on Malaysian soil, populated by a large immigrant community from China and India. Singapore's economic and social divisions rhyme with *Firefly's* core-periphery relationship; it is a city of modern brilliance driven by a largely invisible underclass of foreign laborers. Singapore was described by William Gibson as 'Disneyland with a Death Penalty', where the polished surface of modern capitalism and 'guided democracy' are kept in check by a draconian system of punishments and a selective state narrative. Singapore's local creole, Singlish, is, like the speech of the characters in *Firefly*, a meld of English and various Asian languages. As in *Firefly* (as has been documented by Susan Mandala and Kevin Sullivan), Singlish

speakers can code-switch, shifting to different linguistic systems depending on their situation. The ways in which they do so has several key implications for the social movements (of lack thereof) which occur in *Firefly*.

Perhaps most profoundly for the ways in which we view *Firefly*, Singapore famously presents, both in its internal search for a cohesive 'Singaporean identity' and its outward-face as tourist magnet, a manufactured and consumable version of Asian identities (or 'Asia lite' as it has been variously described). We must ask, then, as we view *Firefly* and Singapore side by side, what relationship does the city-state, the series, and we, the viewers, have to concepts of Asian culture?

#### Works Cited

- Comeford, AmiJo, and Tamy Burnett. "Introduction: Los Angeles, City of Story." *The Literary Angel: Essays on Influences and Traditions Reflected in the Joss Whedon Series*. Ed. AmiJo Comeford and Tamy Burnett. Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. 1-13. Print.
- Halfyard, Janet K. "Hero's Journey, Heroine's Return?: Buffy, Eurydice, and the Orpheus Myth." *Reading Joss Whedon*. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox, Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthia Masson, and David Lavery. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2014. 40-52. Print.
- James, Paula. "Crossing Classical Thresholds: Gods, Monsters and Hell Dimensions in the Whedon Universe." *Classics For All: Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture*. Ed. Dunstan Lowe and Kim Shahabudin. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009. 237-261. Print.

#### **Renee St. Louis: Veteran Victor: *Dollhouse* and the Depiction of Real-World War Survivors**

As conflicts continue and escalate around the world, and societies struggle to accommodate and understand refugees from conflict zones, veterans returning to civilian life, and our own relationships to these conflicts, fictional texts potentially provide a space in which to engage in meaningful discussion about what it means to survive a war zone and the difficulties of finding peace in its aftermath. The work of Joss Whedon is filled with depictions of war, but these wars are typically both fictional for the audience and never-ending for the character/participants. An interesting exception to this tendency appears in *Dollhouse*. Read as an extended discussion of trauma, memory and identity, the show offers a rare opportunity to examine the depiction of ongoing geopolitical conflict in a genre-fiction format.

One central character, Victor, represents an amalgam of struggles, conflicts and post-war consequences borne by soldiers returning from the ongoing (U.S.-led) coalition wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. Examining this character's depiction--as well as some of the narratives constructed around his service, survivor guilt, ironic and confusing nostalgia for the ideological clarity of war, failed effort at civilian reintegration, and manipulation at the hands of powerful defense contractors--affords an opportunity to consider how veterans and other survivors of real-world conflicts are (and, often, are not) depicted on screen, and the consequences of these choices.

#### **Michael Starr: "It's the End of the World. It's Rather Important Really": Accelerationist Aesthetics of the Whedonverses**

Amongst science fiction's most enduring tropes is the apocalyptic portrayal of the end of civilization; in keeping with this teleology, since the inaugural episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the Whedonverses have consistently positioned depictions of the end of the world as a backdrop for their speculative drama. For example, *Buffy*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, *Dollhouse*, *The Cabin in the Woods* and *The Avengers* have all utilised the threat of (technological, ecological, Malthusian or demonic) armageddons as metaphors with which to reflect upon and critique Western culture (Vinci 225.) Indeed, various Whedon scholars (such as King and Wilcox) have explicitly identified Whedonverse representations of the end of the world as explosive negations of capitalism, in which the apocalypse carries with it all manner of fundamentally utopian fantasies of bringing about a radically different world (King 5.) The proposed paper draws upon, expands and problematizes such prior readings via the contemporary notion of philosophical Accelerationism. As defined by philosopher Benjamin Noys (who first coined the term), Accelerationism is the bastard offspring of a furtive liaison between Marxism and science fiction, occurring at the intersection of Marxist, postmodernism and techno-capitalist ideologies (Shaviro 2). Its basic premise is that the only way out is the way through: to get beyond capitalism, we need to push its technologies to the point where they explode. In other words, rather than abandoning technological modernity for illusory homeostatic Eden (a position identified by the aforementioned readings of Whedonverse apocalypses), we should instead exploit and ramp up its incendiary potential. Noys points out that this may be dubious as a political strategy, but claims that it works as a powerful artistic program. Drawing from the aforementioned Whedonverse texts, with primary emphasis upon *Dollhouse* and *The Avengers* and *Avengers; Age of Ultron*, this paper will therefore argue that, in their position on the cutting edge of speculative popular culture, Whedonverse texts can be viewed as cyphers as to the transhumanist or posthumanist transformations espoused by the Accelerationist telos, wherein "the future must be cracked open once again, unfastening our horizons towards the universal possibilities of the Outside" (Williams & Srnicek 23-34).

#### Indicative Bibliography

- Comeford, Amijo and Burnett, Tamy. Eds. *The Literary Angel: Essays on Influences and Traditions Reflected in the Joss Whedon Series*. North Carolina: MacFarland, 2010.
- Giannini, Erin. "Charybdis Tested Well with Teens": The Cabin in the Woods as Metafictional Critique of Corporate Media Producers and Audiences." *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* 10.2/11.1 [36-37], Winter, 2013.
- Ginn, Sherry, Buckman, Alison R and Porter, Heather M. Eds. *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: Confounding Purpose, Confusing Identity*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014.
- King, Derrick. "The (Bio)political Economy of Bodies, Culture as Commodification, and the Badiouian Event: Reading Political Allegories in The Cabin in the Woods." *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* 11.2/12.1 [38-39], Summer 2014.
- Land, Nick. *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Falmouth: Urbanomic Media, 2011.
- Ligotti, Thomas. *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror*. New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010.
- Mackay, Robin and Avanesian, Armen. Eds. *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Falmouth: Urbanomic Media, 2014.

- Noys, Benjamin. *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Hants: Zero Books, 2014.
- Shaviro, Steven. *No Speed Limit: Essays on Accelerationism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Thacker, Eugene. *In the Dust of this Planet: The Horror of Philosophy*. Hants: Zero Books, 2011.
- Vinci, Tony M. "Not an Apocalypse, the Apocalypse': Existential Proletarianisation and the Possibility of Soul in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*." *Science Fiction Film and Television* Vol. Four, Issue Two. 2011: 225-248.
- Wilcox, Rhonda V. and Lavery, David. Eds. *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

### **Anthony Stepniak: 'Woman's Body as Warzone': The Gender Identity of Drusilla**

Building on *Buffy* scholarship undertaken by Claire Knowles, Lorna Jowett, Catherine Siemann and Allison McCracken, to name a few, and the cultural theory of Julia Kristeva, I intend to perform a close reading of the character of Drusilla, as she appears in the second season of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.

Reading dominant patriarchal culture as operating through a framework of binary oppositions, I aim to approach the character of Drusilla as a response to this. I identify Drusilla as a character where a number of binary oppositions are combined and as a result blurred, due to her backstory, appearance and behaviour. These oppositions relate to, and result in, a complex gender identity for Drusilla. Through a critical analysis of Drusilla's behaviour and mental state, I intend to suggest these as a result of the tension created by her combining and blurring a number of binary oppositions. This tension results in Drusilla's body being a warzone where she struggles, literally and metaphorically, to contain the contradictions inherent in the oppositions she blurs.

I plan on approaching Drusilla's vampire identity, due to its inherent abjection (most obvious through its undead status) as an enabling force for binary oppositions to be blurred and, through its fantastical quality, a symbolisation of the impossibility for such a contradictory (from a patriarchal perspective) gender identity to be constructed.

### **Sharon Sutherland, Rowan Meredith, and Darsey Meredith: Raising Slayers: Buffy the Vampire Slayer through a Generational Lens**

Academics, popular culture commentators, and individual fans have written countless articles and blog posts on the enormous impacts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on popular culture, television's willingness to grapple with social issues in meaningful ways, and individual world views. We plan to examine many of those assertions of influence through our own family lens – an autobiographical framework across two generations.

Sharon watched *BtVS* from the first episode's first broadcast. So too did her twin daughters, Rowan and Darsey. Rowan and Darsey, however, had a very different experience of the series given that they started watching at the age of two. Nonetheless, *BtVS* rapidly became weekly family night viewing – the one show that could not be missed. It was not long, of course, before engagement with the show required considerable family discussion of many topics that might not have arisen had Rowan and Darsey been satisfied with *Barney and Friends*.

Over the years, the girls kept up with the weekly episodes, but engaged in numerous rewatches of the entire series – developing entirely new perspectives on the show, its characters, and even new understandings of storylines. This deepening and

changing understanding of the show over time has led both to develop a continuing interest in critical studies of media more generally and has fueled ambitions in each to engage in different forms social justice work as a career.

We will explore several specific areas in which *BtVS* is lauded as a critical cultural influence and explore how childhoods immersed in the Buffyverse lend support to many commentators' assertions. Topics we will consider include representation of gender roles, the normalization of queer identities, and conscious ethical decision-making.

Williams, Alex and Srnicek, Nick. 'Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics.' *Critical Legal Thinking*. May 2013.

### **KJ Swanson: 'Avenging Is Your world. Your World Is Crazy.' Joss Whedon's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* as Action Films that Problematize Redemptive Violence**

Within weeks of one another, two films opened to both critical and box office success: *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Joss Whedon's second film for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the long-anticipated fourth installment of George Miller's dystopian film saga. And whilst, for differing reasons, both films found themselves at the center of feminist debate, less critical attention has been paid to the surprising ways these two action films problematize the violence used to communicate their stories. In *Age of Ultron*, Whedon complicates accepted tropes of super-heroism and implicates his protagonists with the question of at what point, if ever, safety and survival may be worth the price of autonomy. *Fury Road*, Miller's portrayal of a world wherein safety and survival no longer co-exist, features protagonists who would answer the above question with a visceral "Never." But whereas Whedon's vision (pun allowed) veers ambivalently between the hope of human cooperation and the inevitability of isolated, exceptional leaders, Miller's story exchanges a valorized "last man standing" archetype for an empathetic and interdependent, rather than independent, response to injustice. By comparing how *Fury Road* and *Age of Ultron* explore and illustrate issues of destructive hyper-masculinity, gendered response to conflict, and what activist and theologian Walter Wink notably termed "the myth of redemptive violence," this paper will demonstrate how both films manage to self-reflexively challenge not just their own filmic genres of action violence, but the very idea that peace is best achieved through violent force. According to these two films, does a world bent on self-destruction need avengers, or is it the violent, rather than the violence, that need redemption?

### **Elizabeth Kate Switaj: How's College?: Considering *Buffy* Season Four in the Context of University Fiction**

While many critics have discussed the uses of genre in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, one genre that has not been often considered is that of campus or university fiction. Even the season that focuses most on life at UC Sunnydale—season four—is primarily considered through the lens of science fiction, in large part due to Adam's resemblance to Frankenstein. Another contributing factor to university fiction having been overlooked is that said genre primarily expresses itself through novels rather than television shows or even film—and this tendency was perhaps more pronounced at the time of the airing of the *Buffy* season that focuses most on life at UC Sunnydale: season four. While the expression of genres changes depending on the medium, however, some elements remain.

Considering *Buffy* season four in the context of campus fiction illustrates how the episodes that make the demons of the first-year college experience literal adapt a genre in parallel to the ways that the early seasons do with the genre of the high school film or series. More importantly, a critical consideration of this context also illuminates the relationship between Buffy and Professor Maggie Walsh. Walsh's roles as potential mentor and eventual adversary in fact both resemble pedagogical relationships that more standard works of campus fiction depict. More importantly, because adversarial pedagogical relationships in this genre do not necessarily preclude learning, Walsh's role can be seen as more ambiguous and complex than that of a mad or corrupted scientist.

### **Josefine Wälivaara: Deviants in Space: The Cancellation of *Firefly* as Testament to Shifting Tonalities in Science Fiction**

Science fiction film and television from the 2000s-2010s differ in many ways from their predecessors in terms of character depictions, themes and possible motifs, not least in depictions of, and narrative dealings with, adult themes and content such as sexuality. Throughout its history, science fiction has often been characterized as juvenile by different discourses, including academic definitions, fan positions, and classifications/rating systems. However, though this tendency can be considered as part of a dominant discourse of science fiction as a film and television genre, it by no means includes all science fiction. I instead argue that it is derived from a particular type of science fiction that became highly influential in the 1980s-1990s, and is represented by *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. They often become synonymous with the idea of science fiction as a Hollywood, or popular television, genre. Furthermore, I argue that this salient tendency of juvenility has been part in disassociating science fiction film and television from adult themes and concerns.

By the turn of the millennia, however, I suggest that a turn towards more adult science fiction took place. In this paper I argue that *Firefly* was a forerunner to the more adult science fiction that we see today, and its cancellation and later success, a testament to the discursive shift occurring in the genre at that time. Though the reasons behind the cancellation of the series are attributed to different things by different scholars (see, e.g. Jes Battis; Ginjer Buchanan; Keith R.A. DeCandido; Matthew Pateman) both Battis and Buchanan discuss it primarily in relation to science fiction as a genre. I join these in the idea that the generic lineage of science fiction into which *Firefly* was produced also contributed to the early demise of the series. I see this as an unpreparedness for an adult science fiction narrative and world. While I do not contend against the idea that there are multiple reasons for the cancellation of the series, I focus my consideration on the generic lineage into which it is positioned as science fiction, in relation to that earlier history and its continued development. While I consider the cancellation of *Firefly* as an example of the changes that occurred in the genre at the time, I do not suggest that it was responsible for the turn itself, but rather that *Firefly* was cancelled partly because of this ongoing change. It can thus serve as an example of this shift in tonalities in the genre.

### **K. Brenna Wardell: 'Fully Loaded, Safety Off. This Here Is a Recipe for Unpleasantness': Joss Whedon, John Ford, and the Dark Side of the American Mythos**

There's a moment in Joss Whedon's *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) that may pass almost unnoticed: Captain America moves towards the open door of a farmhouse, pauses in the doorway, then moves away from it. However, this is no throwaway occurrence.

Echoing the conclusion of John Ford's iconic western *The Searchers* (1956), this moment not only connects *Ultron* with a seminal moment in American film but evokes the ambivalence of Ford's film and its protagonist Ethan Edwards: a wanderer without a home, a man both heroic and demonic.

As Cap walks away from the farmhouse and its evocation, literal and figurative, of family, community, and peace, Whedon foregrounds the restlessness, alienation, and sense of loss of Cap and of the Avengers as a whole. In this moment Cap becomes, like Malcolm Reynolds in Whedon's *Firefly* (2002) and *Serenity* (2005), a character aligned with Ford's complex, conflicted protagonists. Through this citation of Ford, as through others from the beginning of his career onwards, Whedon interrogates ideas of heroism and villainy, civilization and disorder, and the vexed mythos of America itself.

Scholars and reviewers have noted the connection between Whedon and Ford, particularly in discussing Whedon's western/science-fiction *Firefly* and its sequel *Serenity*, as exemplified by Mary Alice Money's discussion of *Firefly*'s "Out of Gas" in *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier*. This essay explores this connection in-depth, tracing the manner in which Whedon has evoked Ford's films, especially his westerns, and the formal and sociocultural stakes of this citation, focusing on *Firefly* and *Serenity* in particular, while gesturing to the trajectory of this citation from *Buffey* (1997-2003) to *Ultron*.

### **Rhonda V. Wilcox: "Every Man Ever Got a Statue": Public Statuary in Whedon's *Age of Ultron***

Whedon is a master of words; however, he also communicates consciously through visual language. Scholars such as Stacey Abbott and Matthew Pateman have elucidated his direction, while others such as Marni Stanley and Jessica Hautsch have analyzed the drawings of the comics. Visual symbolism has long been part of Whedon's method (see, e.g., *Why Buffy Matters* on thresholds, 40-45). Authors including Sanford Levinson and Barbara Groseclose have explored the semiotics of public statuary. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Whedon makes repeated use of public statues—imagery that deepens and complicates themes of this complex production.

Many viewers will remember the image behind the closing credits: a statue of the movie's larger-than-life characters. But there are half a dozen earlier images of statues, often in fraught contexts. Whedon himself points out one of the preceding instances (of "the heroes of New York") during his commentary, comparing it to the closing statue of the Avengers which "elevates them but . . . also grounds them." The division he touches on is even clearer in an earlier work, the "Jaynestown" episode of *Firefly*, in which Mal declares that he believes "Every man ever got a statue made of him was one kind of sumbitch or another." The tension between public heroism and human failing is represented by the idea Mal expresses, and directly related to the very significant issue of the U.S. role in global politics, as raised in *Age of Ultron* by the question of "collateral damage," unilateral action, and the possible monstrosity of the heroes. The heroes immortalized in statue also have a queer reflection in the robots of *Ultron*; indeed, one of those heroes is, in part, such a robot. Whether the Lenin-like statues of Sokovia or the real artworks of Seoul, the statues of *Ultron* have much to say.

### **Amy Williams: Interpersonal Communication in *Buffey the Vampire Slayer*: Theories of Self-Disclosure in "Hush" and "Once More With Feeling"**

Within the field of Whedon Studies, there is a wealth of excellent scholarship on the use of Joss Whedon's work in college teaching. As someone who teaches interpersonal

communication, I have found essays exploring the role of nonverbal communication in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode “Hush” (Shade, 2006; Cogan, 2010) to be most helpful to my own work. I’ve used “Hush” to teach nonverbal communication for several years, but as my teaching has shifted from the fundamentals of interpersonal communication to more advanced theory courses, I have begun to use the episode in new ways.

Specifically, “Hush” lends itself beautifully to the study of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships. A self-disclosure is anything we choose to tell another person about ourselves, from the most trivial detail to the most deeply personal. Disclosures—or the avoidance of disclosures—are strategic communicative acts used to accomplish relationship goals, and are at the heart of relationship development and dissolution. Additionally, the musical episode “Once More With Feeling” provides a complement to “Hush” that allows the discussion of self-disclosure to continue. Said Whedon in a 2011 interview, “I think of ‘Once More With Feeling’ actually as a sequel to ‘Hush’ because they’re both about communication. They’re both about when your natural mode of communication stops...or it’s elevated to this mode where you can’t stop telling the truth...it completely either binds or dissolves what people think of as their natural relationships.”

This paper will discuss the ways in which theories of self-disclosure are illustrated by both episodes, making them useful tools in sparking discussions in the interpersonal communication classroom. Emphasis is placed on social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), the staircase model of relational development (Knapp, 1973; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009), and communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002).

### **Georgina Willms: The Inter-Male relationships of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

*BtVS* is well (and rightfully) known as a show that examines and celebrates the intricacies of female relationships. Throughout the run of *Buffy*, women are shown working together to fight the evil and triumph over the powers of darkness (and, I daresay, the patriarchy?). Less attention has been paid, however, to the relationships between the male characters. Stereotypically of course we have the father figure (Giles), the de-sexualized brother-type (Xander), the romantic lead (Angel), and the bad boy (Spike) (amongst others). While a cursory glance might show the relationships between these male characters to be somewhat superficial and inconsequential, a closer look shows a fascinating framework of male bonding that proves just as fundamental to the structure of the show as the female relationships. These relationships range from the fatherly to the romantic (the sexual flirtation and hints of past dalliances between Angel and Spike are particularly compelling). Also, as often with themes in the Whedonverse, what is hinted at onscreen is adopted and expanded on by the fans. To this end I will first detail the particular elements of the male/male relationships in *BtVS* in light of, as Lorna Jowett puts it, the “renegotiation of masculinity in pop-cultural forms”<sup>3</sup> while at the same time remaining in a recognizable patriarchal landscape (as Marc Camron notes).<sup>4</sup> I will follow this pattern by showing how these themes have been interpreted and expanded on by the fans, particularly in fanfiction.

This paper will concentrate solely on the canonical *BtVS* television series (seasons 1-7), although mention of happenings on *AtS* may occur (but will not be the focus).

---

<sup>3</sup> From *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan* (2004)

<sup>4</sup> From „The Importance of Being the Zeppo: Xander, Gender Identity and Hybridity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.“ (2006).

**Kristopher Woofter: Archival Anxiety and the Hysterical Male: Andrew Wells as Gothic (Mock-)Documentary “Storyteller” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer***

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s seventh and final season, Andrew Wells, self-proclaimed super-villain in season six, stakes his claim as one of the most alienated major characters in the *Buffy* metanarrative. Effete, simpering, whining, meek, and, accordingly, more-than-probably gay, Andrew is one of the series' most comedic evocations of “alternative” masculinity. As such, his disenfranchisement in socio-cultural terms goes mostly overlooked in the series. That is, until Andrew attempts to stake a claim for agency in the *Buffy* narrative in the 16th episode of the series' seventh and final season, “Storyteller” (before it's too late!).

In one of the most inventive episodes of an otherwise lackluster season, Andrew taps into the recent popularity of cinematic (mock-) documentary horror popularized by films like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) to redress his grievances in the form of a wresting of agency that harkens back to 19th century Gothic narratives centered on women such as Jane Austen's parody, *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Charlotte Brontë's hugely influential *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Wilkie Collins's under-appreciated *No Name* (1862). In these narratives, women, alienated by a colonial and patriarchal worldview that writes women entirely out of history (and even legal claim to an identity), attempt to reclaim status as active subjects with power and voice.

Andrew's anxiety to document the struggles of *Buffy* through his unique perspective can be read as an attempt to reframe the history of the *Buffy* narrative to feature himself as a key player, similar to the season four episode “Superstar” (episode 17) in which one of Andrew's supervillain “bros,” Jonathan, imagines himself as the show's true hero and narrative center.

Taken together, these two episodes (both written by key series writer Jane Espenson) show clear inspiration by a Gothic tradition of narratives that feature alienated outsider-abjected others struggling to write themselves into history, akin to American Gothic feminist narratives such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) in which a woman undergoing a “rest cure” for what seems to be post-partum depression must struggle for a voice among so many that would remove her only outlet for expression—writing—as a violation of her isolation treatment. In *Buffy*, Andrew's homosexuality is here refigured as an abject figuration that is the equivalent of the feminine other in the traditional female Gothic. The documentary he records in “Storyteller” is, thus, his attempt to write himself into *the Buffy* narrative by inscribing his own point of view, his narrative, his reconfiguration of *the Buffy* legacy, on the terms of the “other.”

In constructing this alternative narrative, Andrew reveals himself as part of another horror tradition, from 18th century Gothic to film noir, to the 1970s Poe adaptations by Roger Corman (especially *The Fall of the House of Usher*): the hysterical male. In one way, Andrew's minor intervention in the *Buffy* metanarrative or myth, embellished or not, highlights the entire *Buffy* series as a “historical” narrative emphasizing the play of power in getting a story told—and this may also relate directly to Whedon's pre-*Avengers* (2012) struggles with TV networks who provided his only outlet and support at that time. The corporate powers-that-be in *Angel*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse* can then be reframed as particularly media-oriented juggernauts who “own” the stories and exercise the power of distribution and omission as they see fit.) In this context, Andrew's revisionary act of documentation is a critical intervention in a series that already wants to be a critical intervention in situating a female as its “hero.” Here,

Andrew stakes a claim as the series' most "queer" subject, crying out for a voice equal to others whose privilege they owe to a heterosexual, bourgeois, monogamous culture that leaves perspectives like Andrew's uncomfortably buried.

### **Kristan Woolford: Social Justice in Science Fiction Storyworlds**

Joss Whedon crafts storyworlds in which his characters are free to grow, develop, and ultimately embody philosophical ideas. This skill has proven itself useful for two of his works that I hope to analyze as vehicles for expressing philosophies of social justice as they pertain to issues of normativity and its relation to power. As a science fiction filmmaker, I am currently in the process of creating a storyworld for my thesis film, in which achieving social justice is the primary motivation of my story's heroes. Whedon's works provide an excellent reference as I consider story structure and characterization.

In *Astonishing X-Men*, Beast contemplates taking a newly created 'cure' that would turn mutants into 'normal' humans. Being a mutant is positioned as being a flaw in human development, and the audience is allowed to witness Beast negotiating the treatment's implications on him as a mutant. Whedon is able to seamlessly use the already existing story structure and portrayal of X-Men's heroes to arguably critique society's approach to medication via chemical treatment. Mental health treatment methods frequently use chemicals to restore patients to what the practitioners of the field consider 'normal'. With patients being made to feel pressured to subject themselves to medication to function in society, a point of intervention for social justice to be attained is presented. Whedon's storytelling strategies give us a platform to spark debates about norms and status quo.

Elements of social justice also ring true in Whedon's *Serenity*. The question of which *Serenity*'s characters hold power, how the genre of space westerns influences character development, and society's response to being governed for what is considered the 'greater good' have become important aspects in developing my own creative work. Combining Elizabeth Anderson's social justice theory of Democratic Equality and abstractions from Whedon's *Serenity*, I will outline a number of aesthetic and political possibilities.

### **Steven Wosniack: Pre, While, and Post Buffy: The Televisual Lineage of the Slayer**

At the 2010 Slayage Conference, Jennifer K. Stuller presented a brief history of "The Best, Worst, Known, and Not-So-Known, Pop Culture Influences on the Buffyverse" (which was later published as a chapter in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* volume of Intellect Books' Fan Phenomena series). While Stuller depicted a variety of works that had their share of impact on the creation of *BtVS*, I suggest tracing the televisual legacy of *BtVS* – from its part in establishing a network identity for The WB with obvious imitations like the first year(s) of *Smallville* to recent programmes comprising quite an amount of skilfully choreographed martial arts like *Daredevil* or *Jessica Jones* on Netflix.

In a manner reverse to how Steven Gil identified several television series as predecessors to *The X-Files* in his essay "A Remake by Any Other Name: Use of a Premise Under a New Title", I would like to show how *BtVS* left its mark on the televisual landscape. By means of a timeline, I will give a rather chronological overview of developments reflecting a certain awareness of and thus reaction to Whedon's most successful series. In addition to Stuller's broad take including B-movies as well as comics, I will narrow my main focus to the medium of television, allowing for an

occasional look back at TV traditions (e.g. fantastic TV, strong female characters on TV) that *BtVS* helped maintain and that still echo in subsequent programmes.

So in a way, I would propose to give a talk complementary to that of Stuller, resuming where she left off and not only showing - from a TV studies perspective - how *BtVS* was influenced by other works but also how the show paved the way for what was yet to come.

## Roundtables

### **Bringing *Buffy* Back: The Slayer as a Learning and Teaching Solution: Paula James, Amanda Potter, Anastasia Bakogianni, Wendy Maples**

We propose a round table discussion on resurrecting *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in pedagogy and tearing her out of her cultural history heaven. Buffy is clearly still an icon for older teenagers but she is problematic and might look like ‘ancient history’ in degree level modules. As classicists we are particularly interested in the dissemination of aspects of the Ancient World in mass culture and audience recognition and perception of such resonances. Classical Reception Studies on screen is now an established field in our subject area so the focus of our Round Table will be on why and how televisual texts like *BtVS* continue to refresh our perspectives on the world of Greco-Roman myth and mythical figures.

In our teaching of Classical cultural history we have experimented with specific episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* in order to illustrate the cultural trajectory of specific myths from the tragedy of Alcestis to the poetic narrative of Pygmalion. The teaching has taken the form of one-off lectures and seminars with school and college students to producing teaching material for adult part-time and distance learners on the UK Open University degree programme. The effectiveness of introducing *Buffy* into the OU Myth in the Greek and Roman Worlds module will be briefly assessed during the discussion.

Bowman, Pomeroy, Alderman, Haynes, Marshall and James have all conjured with heroic archetypes, uncanny creatures and classical texts that feature in the Buffyverse. However a rich source for questions and answers about the continuing cachet of the series is Kreider and Winchell, *Buffy in the Classroom* (2010.) We shall reflectively revisit the theory and practice of teaching the vampire slayer outlined in its chapters and re-assess the pedagogical principles of writing and lecturing about ancient culture through a popular text that is a quality product with a quotidian appeal (as much Greek and Roman entertainment was.)

We could also touch on how Buffy learns and develops in traditional and unorthodox ways to achieve her dialectical understanding about human and non-human conditions and behaviours (also a preoccupation in ancient philosophy.)

### **De la estaca al martillo. Un viaje por los universos de Joss Whedon: The First Spanish Academic Book about the Author and His Artistic Career: Mar Rubio-Hernandez, Irene Raya Bravo, Inmaculada Casas-Delgado, and Cristina Algabe**

Our proposal for roundtable consists in the presentation of *De la estaca al martillo. Un viaje por los universos de Joss Whedon* (Diabólo Ediciones, 2015), the first academic book dedicated to the author published in Spain. This book, which was coordinated by the researchers Pedro J. García and Irene Raya Bravo, is a project of the academic association Liga de Investigadores en Comunicación (<http://www.ligaincom.com>), a research group created in Seville in 2012. The scholars who belong to this group focus their research on cultural studies and, specifically, relevant aspects of popular culture.

The book is composed of fourteen chapters where sixteen authors from the Academia and communication industries develop a thorough study of Whedon’s work in different fields, from his TV productions to his incursion as a comic book writer and including his mainstream cinematic works as well as his independent films not so

popular among general audiences. Based on the interests and specializations of the authors, each chapter focuses on a key element of Whedon's work associated with a particular title of his cultural production: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is analysed as the epitome of the new millennium Quality Television; the author's ability to create expansive and transmedia universes is dissected through paradigmatic examples like *Angel* or *Marvel Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*; the female characters in *Firefly* and *Serenity* are studied to explore complex constructions of gender roles; or how his particular author's brand is noticeable in all his works, from blockbusters like *The Avengers* to more personal productions such as *In Your Eyes* as well as in quite experimental television works like *Dollhouse* or in his reinterpretation of Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Several authors of this book (María del Mar Rubio-Hernández, Cristina Pérez Algaba Chicano and Inmaculada Casas-Delgado) and one of the coordinators (Irene Raya Bravo) will take part in this roundtable, whose main objective will be explaining the great importance of Whedon's works outside their own production context and showing how universal topics and themes present in their narratives have become an interesting object of study for the Spanish Academia.

### **Empowerment or Empire?: Troubling the Whedon Trope of Fighting the Good Fight: Samira Nadkarni, Mary Ellen Iatropoulos, Jessica Hautsch**

The Whedonverses see a multiplicity of representations that engage with theories of post/colonialism and Empire. These range from easily dismissable examples, such as Glory (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) and Jasmine (*Angel*) invading from other realms in order to convert or conquer humanity to their cause, to Loki's attempt at world domination (*The Avengers*) consciously paralleling Hitler in WWII. Whedon also provides more complicated iterations through the dystopian empire of *Firefly* and *Serenity*'s Alliance, the capitalist empire of *Dollhouse*'s Rossum Corporation, and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s fraught expression of neocolonialist empire in *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

In effect, Whedon's theorising has traced the historical theoretical conceptions of Empire, from its original notion as imperialist expansion (with its attendant assumptions of enslaved or colonized citizens, expansion of territories, and tribute), as seen in *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Firefly*, to Hardt and Negri's (*Empire*, 2000) contemporary assertion of the declining sovereignty of the nation-state in favour of a decentralized and deterritorialized sovereignty through capitalism, explored in *Dollhouse* and *Marvel's* properties. More recently, as Schueller and Dawson (*Exceptional State*, 2007) note, the U.S., although still functioning through capitalist systems, has begun to reassert a version of imperial global control that is centered and territorialized, suggesting a definition of postmodern Empire that seemingly inhabits both forms: its original imperialist definition as well as Hardt and Negri's.

Jessica Hautsch will discuss the manner in which the Slayer ethos rearticulates the discourse of the "just war," the celebration of war as an ethical instrument: framing Slaying as a "war" against the forces of darkness forecloses any ideological questioning of the "mission." The righteousness of this discourse underlines the Slayer ethos as one that originates within the show as fundamentally American and rooted in American culture to its later global stage within the comics.

Mary Ellen Iatropoulos will examine images of the corporation as evil empire across the Whedonverses. Scenarios of protagonists struggling against systematized corporate oppression run rampant throughout Whedon's work, demonstrating an ongoing concern with how characters construct notions of good and evil through

interaction with and repudiation of exploitative, colonizing corporate antagonists. A Postcolonial reading of several Whedonverse “evil” corporations--*Angel's* Wolfram & Hart, *Dollhouse's* Rossum Corporation, and *Firefly's* Blue Sun Corporation--reveals that the attempts of Whedonverse characters to subvert corporate power structures often reinforce the very structures they attempt to disrupt.

Samira Nadkarni will explore *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *The Avengers*, and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* to suggest that their portrayal of empire and neocolonialism conflates militarism with the myth of US exceptionalism, linking back to Schueller and Dawson's assertion of a postmodern Empire in which the permeability of the borders of the nation-state is depicted as only applicable outside of the U.S..

Following this discussion, the panelists will invite the audience to join in exploring the value of these changing definitions and the complexities they pose in outlining Whedon's stances.

### **Teaching the Whedonverses: James Zborowski and Matthew Pateman**

What is the place and purpose, within a film/television/media studies curriculum, of the study of Whedon's work, and how should we teach it? This roundtable is designed for teachers in higher education who teach the works of Joss Whedon as part of their curriculum.

Thanks to the nature of humanities research in general, and the work of the Whedon Studies Association in particular, it is possible for research into Whedon's work to be pluralist, and to spread out to fill a range of small niches. However, when one takes responsibility for designing a unit of work that uses Whedon's work to form part of the education of young undergraduates, one is forced to exclude most of Whedon's canon and most of the work written about him. In short, one is forced to make choices. On what grounds are these choices made?

This roundtable is intended as a forum in which those who teach Whedon can share ideas and perspectives, with the hope that we will all be encouraged to continue to reflect upon the methods and choices that inform our Whedon pedagogy.

Two sets of questions are proposed:

FIRST SET OF QUESTIONS- Curriculum design and delivery: Pragmatic questions (nuts and bolts)

1. What texts from Whedon's output have roundtable members chosen to focus on in past teaching? How effective has this been?
2. What are the ingredients of a typical week's teaching? (A screening? A lecture? A seminar? Required reading?)
3. What topics are explored?
4. How is students' learning assessed?

SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS- Curriculum rationale: Metadisciplinary justification (philosophy)

1. What is the relationship between text and context in your teaching? (e.g. Are Whedon's texts used as a way of exploring theoretical issues of representation and identity politics? Are theoretical approaches used as hermeneutic keys to deepen appreciation of the core texts?)
2. What 'ways of seeing' are you trying to cultivate in your teaching?

3. If someone were to ask you whether the things you are trying to get at could not be gotten at equally well, or better, using texts other than Whedon's, what would your response be?

**Uploading to the Cortex: Watcher Junior and the Process of Undergraduate Publication: Meghan Winchell, Jodie Kreider, Cynthea Masson, and Kristopher Woofter**

Jodie Kreider and Meghan Winchell, current editors of *Watcher Junior: The Undergraduate Journal of Whedon Studies* will lead a roundtable discussion on the process of publishing undergraduate work in *Watcher Junior*. The intended audience includes undergraduate students who want to publish in the journal and professors whose courses yield potential submissions to *WJ*. Kreider and Winchell will outline their editorial perspective on the place of the journal in Whedon scholarship, as well as the requirements used to evaluate and edit articles published in *WJ*, with an emphasis on effective writing, use of evidence and argument, and connections to existing Whedonverse scholarship. Cynthea Masson teaches a course on *Firefly* and a number of her students have published high-quality essays in *WJ*. She will explain how and why she helps students revise the papers they have written in her class before sending them to *WJ* for potential publication. Kristopher Woofter, a long-time reviewer for *WJ*, will discuss the approach and tone he takes when reading and commenting on student submissions and give examples of the type of advice he offers students for the revision process. It is our hope that this roundtable will increase the number of student submissions to the journal as well as enhance the quality of those submissions. The roundtable will also build excitement for the journal and encourage instructors to add research-based assignments to their courses. The journal, and the organization as a whole, would also benefit from the additional international reviewers this roundtable could generate.

**Watching Whedon: A Glimpse into One Family's Prolific Consumption and Dynamic Discussion of the Whedonverse (A Multi-generational Roundtable): Dreama Pritt, Bill Pritt, Jack Pritt, Grace Pritt, Julia Pritt**

This multi-generational roundtable session promises to be an engaging and enlightening look into the responses—both scholarly and fannish—from a geek-filled household. From 15 to just a smidge over 50, the five members of the Pritt family are aficionados of every corner of the Whedonverse. Unlike Joyce and Giles in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—who, as parental figures, display what Cynthia Bowers in *Slayage* called “adult lapses and irresponsibility”—the Pritt parents continue to guide their offspring into critical thought, along with the connoisseurship of science fiction and fantasy in general and of Joss Whedon's work specifically.

Dreama Pritt, AKA “Mom,” who is a full-time Marshall University English Department faculty member (where she teaches several sections of ENG 201 Advanced Composition based on the works of Whedon), will be facilitating the roundtable. She is currently researching how the strong, sassy, smart-mouthed female characters in Whedon's work mirror the strong, sassy, smart-mouthed female characters in Shakespearean comedies, with a particular interest in how those characters reflect the writers' mothers. Bill Pritt, AKA “Dad,” is a US Army veteran who is still sad that his mother threw out his comic book collection when he went to college; he will be investigating both links to and subversions of classical mythology found in Whedon's projects. (Be assured that references to heroes and quests will make an appearance.)

Jack is a twentysomething lightsaber combat instructor with a gift for impressions who will present his examination on parallels in paranormal private investigations, which focuses on the intersections of Joss Whedon's *Angel* and Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files*. (Angel and Harry have more in common than just vampires and demons.) Grace is a college freshman and world traveler who spent a gap year between high school and college doing missions work on three continents; she will consider connections between Whedon's activism and his writing, particularly in terms of gender roles and diversity. Are "strong female characters" enough to garner Whedon a Social Justice Warrior badge? High school freshman Julia has watched Whedon on repeat even more than the rest of the family, and she plans to analyze the vastly different approaches to sexualities throughout the Whedonverse, including treatment of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, as well as expectations of consent in *Buffy*, *Dollhouse*, and *Firefly*.

While the witty and clever contributors in the roundtable will prepare remarks, a good portion of the discussion will be audience-driven, with questions and lively participation encouraged.