

Eve Bennett

**'I'm awake now': Female cyborgs, consciousness and (qualified?) rebellion in
Dollhouse and *Westworld***

While the sexually threatening female cyborg is a familiar figure in science fiction film, this trope “has increasingly been interrogated... as it has passed from cinema to television” (Palmer 2012, p.86). This is true of both Whedon’s *Dollhouse* (2009-2010) and the recent HBO series *Westworld* (2016-), with which it has numerous similarities, including the centrality of female cyborgs who, rather than being sexually aggressive, are the victims of sexual exploitation.

As Bronwen Calvert observes, the nature of serial television is conducive to the exploration of cyborg identity in a “subtle” and “complex” manner (2016, p.14), and indeed, like several other recent American TV programmes—*Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) and *Bionic Woman* (2007), for example—*Dollhouse* and *Westworld* “offer some interesting attempts to foreground the experience of technologically altered females” (Short 2011, p.105). Specifically, these two series focus on the gradual attainment of consciousness (and, concurrently, awareness of their own exploitation) by more than one female cyborg. However, what complicates this apparently emancipatory narrative is that, in both cases, the cyborgs’ acquisition of consciousness, and hence possibly their eventual rebellion (the outcome of *Westworld* is as yet unknown), is engineered or facilitated by men. These men include their ‘creators,’ morally ambivalent scientists who work both for and at odds with the sinister corporations that profit from the cyborgs’ exploitation. This paper will explore the ambiguities inherent in these dynamics in both series and to what extent each succeeds in subverting the common science-fiction image of the female cyborg as the “sexy tool” of a male-dominated institution (Sofia 1999, p.60). Does the rebellion justify the depiction of the women as playthings?

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Molly Brayman

“I’ll Be in My Bunk”: Sexual Euphemisms in the Whedonverse

In “Wild at Heart,” Xander claims, “If you’re doin’ it, I think you should be able to say it.” The “it” in question is sex, and tellingly, that word is not spoken aloud in the scene. Willow and Xander instead rely on the common “making love” euphemism that gets spun into further descriptors involving monkeys and Sarah Maclachlan. In fact, much like in reality, characters in the televised Whedonverse often resort to euphemisms when discussing sexual acts. While this linguistic move is certainly a result of network standards and practices, it is also useful to consider the ways sexual euphemism is deployed in these shows. This presentation will examine the various types of euphemisms used and the ways these euphemisms function within their given narratives to provide insight into character, establish tone, and underpin the sexual mores of each show. I will also examine how sexual euphemism can contribute to a culture of sexual shame and repression, and the relatively rare instances within the Whedonverse where sexual acts and language are made explicit and can serve to promote a greater sense of sexual literacy and agency (excepting, of course, for Captain Hammer).

Alyson Buckman, Renee St. Louis, and Catherine Pugh

Giving the Audience (and Characters) What They “Need”: A Roundtable on Joss Whedon and Trauma

Love and marriage, horse and carriage, chameleons and karma, Joss Whedon and trauma: all of these, putatively, go together. In the well known 2001 *A.V. Club* interview, Whedon famously stated, “Don’t give people what they want, give them what they need. . . . People want the tragedy. They need things to go wrong, they need the tension” (Whedon). Seventeen years later, at the *Guardians of the Galaxy, Vol. 2* premiere, Joss Whedon briefly discussed his work on DC’s *Batgirl*, stating that he wondered about why she would “get hardcore enough to need to put on the cowl. Like, what’s her damage? . . . She didn’t have her parents killed in an alley. Who is this person, who decides—rather than being forced to by their childhood trauma—decides to pick up this life?” (Gallupo and Couch). To say that Whedon loves to put his characters and audiences through the ringer is a truism, and yet that ringer will be at the center of this roundtable. How does Whedon portray trauma and healing from it—or not? What are the ramifications of traumatization? Alyson, Catherine, and Renee will consider sexual trauma, the relationship of trauma to symbolic rather than literal action, grief and loss as trauma, post-traumatic stress, and the ways in which Whedon traumatizes his audiences regularly as a self-imposed “mandate” (Whedon), and they look forward to audience involvement in the conversation.

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Cynthia Burkhead, Julie Hawk, Vickie Willis, Juliette Kitchens

“And What Are We if Not Women Up to a Challenge?”: Women’s Leadership in the Whedonverse and Beyond: A Roundtable

In protest, politics, and pop culture, 2017 gave us real and imagined movements helmed by women. While this activity may have laid the foundation for a future that is female, for at least the past 20 years, Joss Whedon and his team have created female characters often held up as examples of strength and empowerment. Importantly, Whedon’s take on female leadership has almost always centered around a young woman who must lead first within the paradigm of an already established oppressive patriarchy (the Watchers Council and their progenitors, the Shadow Men; the Rossum Corporation; Wolfram and Hart; etc) and then, once the full extent of the patriarchy becomes known, against the patriarchy itself. Repeatedly, Whedon’s female heroes awaken to the reality of the patriarchy and fight against it, with varying levels of success. The levels of patriarchy do not end there, however, as often the men with whom the female leaders work exhibit problematic patriarchal tendencies as well (Xander, Topher, etc), and feminist, not just female, leadership is needed to break down those acculturated behaviors. All of these narrative tropes are tinged with an inescapable irony, however, because to trace them all back to the origin, one will always find Whedon, a white man who in the last several months has taken on some problematic patriarchal characteristics in his own personal life. This irony extends far beyond Whedon, as film and television creators are still largely both white and male. This round table discussion will consider Whedon’s characters against the real-life female leaders in government, grassroots activism, writers’ rooms, and behind the camera, as well as contemporary fictional leaders like Vice Admiral Holdo to assess/reassess conventional claims about Whedon's female leaders.

Tamy Burnett

“Everything You Think You Know ... Is a Lie”: Exploring the Double-Double Cross Narrative Technique in *Buffy*, *Firefly*, and *Angel*

Joss Whedon’s television oeuvre overflows with examples of doubling, including characters who mirror one another (e.g.: Buffy/Faith, Angel/Spike, River/Reavers); inverted versions of individual characters (e.g.: Angel/Angelus, Anya/Anyanka, Fred/Illyria, all the Actives in the Dollhouse); and parallel A and B storylines in individual episodes. Doubling is a powerful storytelling technique because the variations between two seemingly like elements (characters, identities, storylines, et al.) offer viewers deeper insights into the larger narratives’ themes, characterizations, and lessons for everyday life.

One particularly interesting and under-examined form of doubling is the classic double-cross, where it appears as though a character (usually a black hat) will act one way and s/he instead breaks trust with others to betray them. The inversion of this action is the double-double cross, most commonly seen when a white hat anticipates the black hat’s betrayal and executes their own counter-move in order to ultimately win the day.

The double-double cross is a complex maneuver, and it is made all the more complicated

in Whedon's shows by the fact that a story built on communal heroic structures — as Whedon's generally are — must employ not one white hat acting alone but the collective action of many on the team to successfully outwit the villain(s). I will compare the representations of double-double crosses and the progression of their complexity in three of Whedon's series: *Buffy*'s "Enemies" (1999), *Firefly*'s "Trash" (2002), and *Angel*'s "Power Play" and "Not Fade Away" (2004).

This comparison will identify key elements for the successful double-double cross, both in terms of narrative continuity, but also in terms of revealing the double-double cross to audiences in a televisual medium. Double-double crosses are most exciting when they come as surprises to both the black hats and the viewer. In addition, my analysis will examine the implications of double-double crosses pulled off by teams — what characteristics a team needs to succeed and the dangerous prices a team may pay for their collective deception in the name of the greater good.

Niall Buryk

Community of Heroes: The Emergence of the Support Structure in 21st Century Horror

This paper engages in a discourse analysis of the female figure in the horror genre, making the claim that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* helped establish the conditions in which a new kind of female protagonist could emerge in popular media. In opposition to the heroines of mid to late 20th century horror films (*Alien*, *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, *Scream*, etc...), it is the collective efforts of a tight-knit community that leads to the triumph over adversity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. This innovation opens new possible worlds in which a dominant ideology of celebrated individualism is openly challenged by a repetitive theme of collective action and its success. This development in popular media was most recently reactivated in 2015's *It Follows*, where the triumph over a demonic force is achieved not by the actions of the lead character alone, but through the collective action of her supportive community. The emergence of this new community-supported heroine suggests, it will be argued, that the cultural, political, and social obstacles of the contemporary moment that the monsters of the horror genre represent (xenophobia, exploitation, sexual assault, etc...) are best confronted with a supportive structure, and not through an individual effort, no matter how extraordinary, an observation that holds true for fictional characters and real people alike.

Michael Buso

Buffy, Billy, and Queer Slayer Subjectivity in the *Buffy* Comics

Over the years, there have been several essays looking at LGBT+ characters in the expansive Whedonverse. However, not a lot has been written about Billy Lane, the vampire/xompire hunter first introduced in Season Nine of the *Buffy* comics. Billy, one of the few openly gay male characters in the Buffyverse, was eventually accepted as an ally of the Slayers after being granted visions by the First Slayer. In the comics, this shift of openly accepting a (gay) male in the Slayer-fold is explained as one of more agency on the part of the Slayer-force that powers the line of Slayers, though Billy is ultimately not

given the title Slayer. But what does it mean when the first male character to be chosen(-ish) identifies as a gay man? This essay seeks to explore what it means to be a queer male subject in the *Buffy*-verse, and more specifically to tease out if this queer subjectivity allows Billy to be able to occupy more than one subject position at the same time, and how that changes our understanding of who/what slayers are and what they can be. To help define the subject (or at least offer a place to begin such a definition), I will use Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject* and a section of Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." From there I want to look more closely at how the subject and subjectivity might offer possible means of exploring and analyzing the queer subject (as it exists and as it could potentially exist) including expanding the feminist notion of agency within subjectivity to include queer subjects.

Jefri Bussolini

Buffy and Maharakshak Devi

The recent Bollywood television production *Maharakshak Devi* makes an interesting comparison with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The series centers around a young woman named Devi who has supernatural powers to fight demons and who is guided by the efforts of an older male teacher. While *Maharakshak Devi* provides a vector for considering the profound and continuing influence of *Buffy*, it also indicates that the mythology of *Buffy* itself shares a great deal with the underpinnings of the Hindu epic of Devi -- who represents feminine power and is this realm's last line of defense against evil (when the male gods have failed, she combines their powers together to defeat evil). Unfortunately, much of the critical commentary about *Buffy* has served to reinforce a eurocentric and bible-focused interpretation that has often illustrated more about the disciplinary formation of the commentators than about the text itself (with some exceptions, Mukherjea 2014). In this respect *Maharakshak Devi* provides a useful corrective that also animates the popular culture realm.

Considering this recent Indian television production as both an offshoot of and mythological precursor to *Buffy* also allows a revisitation of the influence and feminism of *Buffy*. The twenty year anniversary of the series allows a vantage for considering the influence and longevity of *Buffy*, while the open letter from Kai Cole and the #MeToo and Time's Up campaigns have presented important questions about feminism, art, and practice. Devi's empowering presentation of the woman protagonist and attention to misogyny in society also raise the question of whether it relies on a defense of female dignity that can allow and legitimize patriarchal limitations of women's action. Would this be the case for *Buffy* as well?

Lewis Call

"To Bind Me, or Undo Me": Dominance and Submission in Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing*

Joss Whedon's 2012 film *Much Ado About Nothing* offers representations of dominance and submission that go well beyond those of the late sixteenth century play upon which the film is based. While Shakespeare's play understood sexual power primarily in the male-dominant terms of the patriarchal marriage institution, Whedon's feminist film

emphasizes the dangers of patriarchal power, and the benefits of female dominance. Whedon cut substantial amounts of patriarchal dialogue from the play, making the women characters more powerful, and the men more eager to accept women's power. Whedon also employed visual techniques such as set design, props, costume, lighting, scene composition, shot blocking, and framing to create images of powerful women, and images of men who find happiness by embracing women's power.

While Shakespeare's Beatrice has always lamented women's lack of power, Amy Acker's Beatrice recognizes more clearly than any other that her sexual dominance over Benedick offers a possible partial solution to that problem. Alexis Denisof performs one of the most eagerly submissive Benedicks in history. Jillian Morgese emphasizes the quiet strength of the submissive Hero. At the end of the film, Hero switches briefly to the dominant role; Fran Kranz's Claudio submits to her, suggesting that their future relationship will be more egalitarian. Whedon made Shakespeare's male villain Conrade female; Riki Lindhome's Conrade submits unthinkingly to Sean Maher's villainous Don John. This is a cautionary example of a male dominant/ female submissive sexual relationship that is dangerously unconstrained by ethics.

Ami Comeford

Helping the Helpless and Saving Souls: Team Angel—An Experiment in Liberal Arts Education

Liberal Arts degrees are “worthless,” “useless,” “degrees to nowhere,” and even “evil,” according to a November, 2015 article published on the Fox Business website. The constant refrain against liberal arts education seems a favorite public pastime for everyone from news pundits to politicians. Sadly, this drumbeat has resonated so loudly that liberal arts degree numbers have declined in most American colleges and universities. Yet, many inside and outside the academy are standing against the onslaught to liberal arts training. As we marshal diverse evidence to strengthen that tenuous line, we must be willing to take the argument to the one place that most people joyfully inhabit—popular culture.

Joss Whedon's *Angel* is an almost perfect microcosm of both the traditional academy and the progressive, problem-solving think-tank or business. Each of the major disciplinary areas is represented: visual and performing arts (Lorne), social and behavioral sciences (Angel), humanities (Cordelia, Angel), business (Gunn, Season Five), physical and human performance (Gunn), and, yes, STEM (Fred). While silos of knowledge are not un-typical in characters across the spectrum of television and film, what Team Angel offers is indeed a unique piece---the quintessential liberal arts representative, the traditional “Renaissance Man” who brings each of the disciplinary pieces together into a single unifying, problem-solving agent. Without Wesley Wyndam-Pryce's liberal arts training, the team's effectiveness decreases to a stunningly slow grind, even a complete halt, as we find at the beginning of Season Four. Yet, Wesley during this same period of the season is remarkably successful—unhappy without the team, certainly—but technically very successful. In other words, liberal arts training is crucial, as Angel's narrative structure so powerfully illustrates. Without it, specialized knowledge leads to

dangerous experiments in unilateral decision-making with perverse and even fatal consequences. *Angel* is a lesson to us all about the public consequences of eradicating liberal arts from our many academies.

Cyndi DeVito-Ziemer

A Liminal Fluid

Blood. The life force. Humans need it to remain inside of them in order to survive. Vampires need to consume it in order to continue in their undead state. So how do television series about the persistent struggle of keeping versus obtaining portray this essential liquid? Quite differently, it turns out.

In 2014 I was privileged to present a paper at *Slayage* about the appearance of blood in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. A question from a conference attendee if my findings held true for *Angel* also, prompted more research. While in *Buffy*, I argued that blood was presented in its decomposed form whenever a vampire was ‘dusted,’ that is not the case in *Angel*. The viewer is presented with blood in many permutations, most tellingly when consumed by Angel himself.

This new paper will address how and reasons for why blood is seen in *Angel*, and link its consumption to further feminizing the Monstrous Other. Because of its darker tone, blood was depicted quite frequently in the series *Angel*. Dead victims are depicted in pools of blood, there is blood spray, blood stains and even green blood shown. And we see Angel presented with tall, scarlet glasses of blood and his hesitation about accepting them and imbibing them. I will link his reticence to the gendered performance of eating and consuming, aligning him with the female position of hiding what and when he ‘eats’ so as not to appear outside the norm.

Zelda Engeler-Young

“You Love Humans”: The Unconventional Redemption of Anya Jenkins

Demonic characters in search of redemption populate *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the most evident being the ensouled vampires Angel and Spike. However, “newly human and strangely literal” ex-vengeance demon Anya Jenkins finds a unique path to redemption that revolves not around performing enough good works to nullify the evils of her past but around finding new ways to engage with the world by rejecting the binaries that governed her previous life.

James Francis, Jr. argues that Anya’s journey is analogous to that of a reformed prostitute seeking to re-integrate into society, but this perspective is ultimately reductive. Anya is not a prostitute but an Everywoman, the product of a world governed by stark paternalistic binaries: wronged women and wicked men, powerful demons and impotent humans. Anya’s redemption thus takes place not through her actions—a glaring exception to the Buffyverse’s stated philosophy that “all that matters is what we do”—but through her choice to embrace more nuanced ways of thinking.

In his reading of *Buffy* through the writings of Donna Haraway, Joseph Doherty Bailey posits that Anya's power as a character stems from her composite nature, her ability to inhabit both human and demon roles while maintaining her signature candor and charm. By her very existence, Anya blurs the strict human/demon binary that governs the Buffyverse and thus possesses powerful insights on both human and demon behavior. Rejecting the binaries that dictate that she must be either woman or demon, caring or empowered, Anya claims redemption through her willingness to sacrifice the patriarchal standards by which she has long defined herself and walk alone into the dark, despite her fear that she is "really nobody."

Erin Giannini

"The Body Doesn't Matter, It's the Mind That We Want": The Framework as Contemporary Political Commentary in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

During the Vietnam era, Lyndon Johnson frequently asserted that victory would be achieved by winning the "hearts and minds" of the people of South Vietnam. On a strategic level, this meant using any number of means—economic, social, or military—to garner support for the conflict itself and its ultimate resolution. The idea of winning "hearts and minds" remains relevant in contemporary political discourse, particularly whether policies or candidates have managed to appeal (or not) to both the rational (mind) and the emotional (heart) within the electorate. In the case of the 2016 US Presidential Election, however, "mind" was largely abandoned in favor of primarily negative emotional responses, particularly xenophobia, racism, and sexism, using similar techniques to that seen in advertising and unscripted television: repetition, catchphrases, and anticipation. This prizing of emotional response over expertise and information not only characterized the different campaign styles of Trump and Clinton, but carried into the Trump administration's policy, legislative agenda, and public persona. This campaign and its outcome was directly addressed, through both narrative and metatextual references, in the "Framework" arc of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s fourth season.

A life model decoy named Aida (Mallory Jansen) uses a mystical text to create an alternate reality (the Framework), within which she plugs the minds of individuals whose bodies are either disposed of or placed in stasis. The contention of both Aida and that of her creator, Holden Radcliffe (John Hannah) is that the body is an unnecessary encumbrance; the mind (consciousness) is of paramount importance. The world Aida creates, however, is aligned on emotional lines; by removing each mind's "regret", the Framework is driven by the emotional desires of its inhabitants and characterized by the frequent absence of rational thought; a world out of balance. May's emotion-based decision to "save" an Inhuman child rather than kill her leads to a massacre that allows S.H.I.E.L.D.'s nemesis Hydra to play on the population's fears and institute a fascist government. Rectifying Fitz's abandonment by his father brings out his previously unforeseen dark side. Aida's blind love for Fitz leads to a plan to harvest the powers of Inhumans for her created physical body; concentrating power within a single new-born individual unable (and unwilling) to control her emotions creates a significant threat when she emerges from the Framework.

Contrasting this, the importance of the heart/mind balance is embodied in Framework version of Grant Ward (Brett Dalton), whose character arc was completely shifted through a change in mentor, from a man who played upon Ward's rage and other base instincts (John Garrett) to a woman who saw the good that he could do and appealed to his better lights (Victoria Hand), indicating the value of community over concentrated power based on fear.

Thus, in this paper I will examine the way in which the Framework arc engages directly and indirectly with the sociopolitical environment in which it debuted (early 2017) through both narrative references to the current political situation and the way it elucidates the current sociopolitical dangers of separating the rational and emotional, of prizing the "heart" over the "mind" through appeals to irrational and dangerous fears and attempting to concentrate power within the hands of the few.

Sofie Gieysztor

"Eww Ick" and Other Perspectives on Age in the Buffyverse

A wide range of intersectional issues have informed Whedon scholarship since its inception, with the recent queer issue of the *Slayage* journal being a fine example. For obvious reasons, gender perspectives take the lead, but wonderful research has been done from several other perspectives. There is one possibly glaring exception: age.

In this paper, for convenience of scope and coherence, I concentrate my investigation — of the themes of age, age difference, and ageism — on the Buffyverse in particular. But the Buffyverse is also a critically valuable choice because it provides the richest material on the subject: It includes teenagers and adults in its core groups, and adds ancient beings, young looking but very old vampires, and a wide range of related role pairings, including family, lovers, friends, co-workers, and learners. I explore the issues of age in the dyadic pairs of the Buffyverse, as expressed in dialogue, choice of pairings, and the fate of pairings. I supplement my analysis with the "Greek Chorus" commentary that the Scoobies customarily express about a great many things — in this case, age and age difference.

What does this research show? The Buffyverse expresses a condemnation of ageism as expressed by the old against the young, but largely embraces ageist tropes of the young against the old. But of course, this is a vampire show and we learn quickly that age is about appearance and role, not about chronological years. The presentation of the paper will select scenarios from particular episodes and place them in the context of a numerical analysis of pairings, plots, and dialogue.

Michael C. Gilbert (with Sofie Gieysztor)

The Family of Heroes and the Heroic Family: The Structural Co-Emergence at the Root of Whedonverse Stories

The themes of family, especially of the intentional variety, have received well-deserved attention of Whedon scholars. The topic was addressed in depth by Jes Battis in his book-

length take on the subject, *Blood Relations*. He provides solid groundwork for future scholars in an analysis of the particular family roles adopted by various characters. Other scholars have added to a topic that, for reasons both of analytic value and for reasons of the heart, remains deeply compelling. Family justifiably stands as one of the major thematic pillars of Whedon's work and our study of it.

In this paper, we push the topic forward by at looking closely at the literary, social, and structural interdependence and co-emergence of family and heroism in the Whedonverse. Most analyses of family dynamics, both in the Whedonverse and in society in general, focus on the internal dynamics of the family and the relationships between family members. Of course, this makes sense, because families, particular the kind we are born into and which therefore inform family-analysis, are largely inward-looking. This focus is a rich source of story for many reasons, not the least of which is the widespread dysfunction of such family dynamics. But in the Whedonverse, we are looking at families of heroes (and heroic families) and that changes everything.

We will explore how heroism completely shapes the structure of the chosen families of the Whedonverse. The traditional family is shaped like a circle with everyone's eyes on each other, with the outside world at their backs. But a family of heroes is shaped like a semi-circle, with everyone's eyes on the mission of saving the world and on each other. The themes that emerge from this insight include: They are successful because they are not alone (a well-explored theme on its own). More significantly, their family structure is what makes them successful. And even further, their heroism is what makes them deeply functional, as a family. This interdependent social construction of family and heroism deepens our understanding of almost every story in the Whedonverse.

Elizabeth Gilliland

Death of the Author?: Joss Whedon and the Question of Feminism

Joss Whedon's works have been noted for their feminist leanings, particularly the 1997-2003 television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Additionally, Whedon has been lauded by critics and recognized by organizations such as Equality Now for his contributions to feminist media. However, some scholars have long challenged Whedon's feminism (noting a lack of intersectionality and a tendency toward sexualizing his female characters). Further, recent critiques about the handling of the Black Widow character's storyline in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and accusations made about Whedon's private life, including treatment of his wife and relationships with subordinate female cast and crew members, have made it increasingly difficult to defend him as a feminist icon. This paper will not attempt to do so; rather, I will explore how and if we can separate texts such as *Buffy* from their creator, and how and if we can continue to make the argument for *Buffy* being a feminist text. In doing so, I will explore the ways in which self-professed atheist Whedon draws upon many religious symbols and iconography in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, to illustrate the ways in which the viewpoints of the text can dramatically differ from the viewpoints of its creator. I will not attempt to decipher the full extent of Whedon's feminist ethos (or lack thereof), but rather will focus on the ways we can continue to foster feminist discussion of his texts independent of their author.

Stephanie Graves

“I Don’t Need No Stinking Reboot”: The Enduring Cultural Significance and Influence of *Buffy*

During an exchange in August around the modern American watercooler that is Facebook, an acquaintance suggested in a thread about the work of Joss Whedon that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* would “end up a footnote.” She further declared that it had little academic value, that those of us who study his work should move on, and that nothing short of a “successful Buffy reboot (that kept at least some elements of the original show)” would prove to her “that something conceptual about Buffy has real significance.”

Yet one has only to look around at contemporary culture to see the influence of—and endless allusions to—*Buffy*. It is referenced across media, showing up in comic books, video games, novels, film, and, of course, television. *Buffy* is referred to in shows as wide ranging as *Farscape*, *Veronica Mars*, *CSI*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *The Simpsons*. Yet this intertextuality is of particular note in the CW’s long-running *Supernatural*, now in its 13th season. There is a generic debt and inherent narrative structure that *Supernatural* undoubtedly owes to both *Buffy* and *Angel*. Whedon alum Ben Edlund, who wrote and produced for both *Firefly* and *Angel*, was also a highly influential writer/ producer on *Supernatural*; additionally, there is a vast overlap in the cast, a phenomenon that Alyson Buckman terms “hyperdiegetic casting” that inherently evokes the Whedonverses. In this presentation, I will argue that through *Supernatural*’s overwhelming intertextual debt, *Buffy* proves itself to be a seminal work that retains a deep cultural significance that needs no reboot to still be relevant.

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Dale Guffey, Ensley Guffey, Masani McGee, Paul Smith

Feminist or Nemesis?: A Roundtable Discussing the “Art v. Artist” Conundrum

Joss Whedon built the foundation of his career on re-imagining the trope of the helpless blonde cheerleader. In interview after interview, he insisted that his creation of “strong female characters” was nothing special to remark upon; indeed, seeing the genders as equal was simply part of his psyche. Moreover, Whedon often emphasized the importance of having male characters who were not threatened by taking orders from a competent female leader.

Following the release of Kai Cole’s devastating remarks in August 2017 regarding Whedon’s long-standing infidelity within their marriage and his frequent gaslighting of Cole, many Whedon fans felt personally hurt and deeply betrayed. Even within the ranks of scholars (who know a thing or two about the art not always being an autobiographical reflection of the artist), there was disbelief, shock, and even a few full-throated calls to abandon the study of Whedon’s work.

Within a short time, the revelations regarding Whedon were overshadowed by the tsunami of disclosures and credible accusations about Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., Brett Ratner, and many, many others. It seemed that every time you turned around, there was yet another report of Powerful Men Behaving Badly.

This roundtable, consisting of scholars representing a spectrum of ages, races, genders, and persuasions, will wrestle with what this all means, both for future scholarship and for human decency. Can one separate the art from the artist, or is it tacit support of reprehensible actions to support the work of deeply flawed human beings? Does creating Quality Work somehow give the creator a pass on these issues? Is the author dead, as posited by Roland Barthes or, as Jonathan Gray suggested at a previous *Slayage*, is a living author more in the “undead” range? Does an author’s corporeal status even matter in the ultimate analysis of the work?

The roundtable will attempt to answer all of these questions, hopefully without resorting to flinging loose objects at one another.

Steve Halfyard

Buffy/Faith, Music/Death: Tracing the ‘Death Motif’ Through the Score of *Buffy*, Season 3

“Helpless” is not an episode the crops up on many people’s list of favourite *Buffy* moments, but it is positioned at the start of the second half of Season 3, and the season midpoint is often an important point in the narrative arc. Like many episodes “Helpless” has a stand-alone, episode-specific theme, composed by Christophe Beck, relating to the idea of fathers (especially bad fathers) that appears several times in this episode before disappearing from the score; but ‘Helpless’ also contains a more subtle and easily missed musical idea from Beck that runs for the rest of the season and becomes increasingly important. This musical idea is a short, three-note motif that I argue comes to represent the plot between the Mayor and Faith to kill Buffy – it is the theme of Buffy’s mortality and impending death, introduced in the episode where she is stripped of her powers and very nearly killed by the ‘coming of age’ test imposed on her by the Watcher’s Council.

In this paper, I trace the path of the death motif through the second half of Season 3, demonstrating how it carries us from “Helpless” to the season finale, transforming along the way, accruing meaning to itself, those meanings shifting and changing as the plot develops towards the climactic battle between Buffy and Faith.

Jessica Hautsch

Hamilton Goes to Sunnydale: Intertextuality and Rhetoricity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Hamilton* Mash-Ups

On Tumblr, a number of blogs are dedicated to mashups combining the text of one media property with the visuals with another. While these mashups are often humorous in nature, they also comment on the connections between seemingly disparate texts. For example, *Arrested Westeros* takes quotes from *Arrested Development* and places them over visuals from HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, uncovering thematic links between the two texts, often in the form of family drama, lost appendages, and mistaken identities. Likewise, *The Hamilton West Wing* plays with the political themes and characterization of *The West Wing* and *Hamilton* by integrating the two shows.

In this paper, I want to consider the rhetorical implications of a more unlikely Hamilton pairing-- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The Tumblr blog, *Hamilton in Sunnydale*, takes screenshots from *Buffy* and pairs them with lyrics from Miranda’s musical, for, I will argue, a range of rhetorical purposes, including ekphrasis, argumentation, and ironic inside jokes. Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality, I will examine the rhetorical ambivalence present in this mash-up of *Hamilton* and *Buffy*. In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva explains that “the writer can use another’s word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had” (73) which results in the “joining of two sign systems” and the “relativizing” ambivalence that this joining creates (73). In this paper, I want to explore the different rhetorical ways that the sign systems of the lyrics and images interact, recontextualizing each other, and how, in some cases, the ambivalence created through the mashup communicates fans’ interpretations of and functions as an argument about the characters, and their interiority, in *Buffy*.

My conclusion will consider some of the problematic racial elements of this appropriation (and other appropriations like it), specially the way in which decontextualizing the lyrics from *Hamilton* whitewashes them, rhetorically erasing the racial representation by replacing the bodies of Hamilton’s actors of color with *Buffy*’s white bodies. *Buffy* itself has been accused on whitewashing by critics, and this erasure of people of color’s presence, and it seems that this practice extends to fannish productions (if unwittingly or unintentionally).

Darrell J. Jordan

Gender-Coded Diegetic/Non-Diegetic Music: A Stake Through the Heart of Gendered Musical Traits

In opera, television, or cinema, the accompanying soundtrack and musical gestures within aide in informing the audience how one should perceive a situation, environment,

emotion, or character, in addition to conveying cultural and social messages. Whether the music or sounds are made within the story space—and thus, are perceived by the on-screen characters—or created for the purpose of eliciting moods or reactions from the audience, the sounds and silences that one experiences from a motion picture are an integral part of forming the identities of the characters and subsequently how the audience responds to that character. This paper will attempt to investigate the relationship between masculine and feminine musical features in both diegetic and non-diegetic music in film and television, and the fictional characters with which they correspond.

The paper will briefly explore traditional gender-coded musical traits in male and female characters in earlier classical compositions, such as opera. The research will then look at how women were depicted in early Hollywood films primarily using Heather Laing's book *The Gendered Score*, specifically how diegetic music can be used for masculine characters, while non-diegetic music is often associated with an emotional, feminine character. Philip Tagg's 1989 empirical research on television themes and gender association will then be discussed to give a basis of expectations for gender-coded music. Finally, the paper will then consider the main theme of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, using Janet K. Halfyard's article in *Slayage* and contributions in the book *Music, Sounds, and Silence*, discussing the diegetic and non-diegetic music within several episodes, exploring how the television series and its female protagonist exploit gendered musical traits and, on occasion, purposefully reversed some gendered musical expectations, without reducing the protagonist to a parody or caricature of anti-femininity.

Jodie Kreider

“We gotta face it, we've changed”: Millennial Students Engage with *Buffy*

Twenty years after *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* began, the millennial generation continues to watch, study and analyze the series. This panel includes four students who took a course on *Buffy* (three of them last fall) at the University of Denver, and presents three papers that reflect how this much younger generation in a radically different context responds to Whedon and Co's handling of various social justice issues including colonialism, race, and addiction. While those issues have been addressed by Whedon scholars over the past two decades, these papers will demonstrate that the reception of the series by millennial students reveals large changes in attitudes and expectations from twenty and even ten years ago. Joss Whedon was a feminist icon for creating this show. Now, as women from diverse backgrounds, these students assert that having a white fallible man as a leader in the feminist television movement is not enough. It is important to recognize how much popular media reflects social issues and that those opinions change over time and shape changes in media as well. This panel will discuss the new perspectives of millennial students watching this series: the importance of shifting societies' opinions on addiction and addicts and how to teach about them; recognizing the continued harmful impacts of portrayals of indigenous peoples and their cultures in Western media that are still confined to the deep roots of colonialism and appropriation of indigenous cultures; and racial inequities and how they remain in today's media.

--Rosa Elena Gutierrez and Ana Carolina Gutierrez

“Two seconds of conflict with an indigenous person, and I turned into general Custer:” Colonial Issues in *Buffy*

The *Buffyverse* history of the world stated that first there came the demons; then came man. And the job of the Slayer, the Council, and man is to subordinate or eliminate the demons. This order mirrors how early colonizers described the fate of indigenous peoples across the world - barbaric, uncivilized, and needing to be conquered. Perhaps this parallel was unintentional by Joss Whedon. Throughout the show, however, white characters infringe into an indigenous culture or appropriate indigenous objects, and yet the indigenous person then becomes the villain of the episode. The “villains” in these episodes are quickly dispensed with, and although there may be ethical questioning on the true motives and intentions of the indigenous person/practice, the existence of this culture threatens the wellbeing of Sunnydale’s ‘civilized’ society. This paper will analyze the issue through the episodes “Pangs” (addressing U.S. colonization of Native Americans), “Dead Man’s Party” and “The Pack” (portraying indigenous African sacred objects being appropriated by Westerners), and “Inca Mummy Girl” (portraying a pre-colonization indigenous person encountering the Western world). It is unclear if Joss Whedon is trying to critique the colonization of indigenous peoples or if he is reifying them without questioning the basic reasons of why these ideas exist. These episodes seem aimed at white audiences, showing them how there are reasons to feel bad for what happened in the past but still villainizing the indigenous character. In this presentation, we will analyze current literature by Ono, Szeghi and Dempster while critically reflecting on the colonial undertones of Joss Whedon’s work. As young women of indigenous heritage watching these episodes, over the last years we shifted from being excited to see an Inca woman portrayed on the show to realizing how many stereotypes she fulfills that are still problematic within our society today.

--Shaolin Parks

“I mean, admittedly, it's not a haven for the brothers.”: Millennial Student Critiques of Race in *Buffy*

While the previous paper addresses the increasingly glaring lack of critique regarding the representation of colonialism in *Buffy*, this paper will tackle the topic of race in the series. As second-wave feminism has been supplanted by third-wave feminism’s focus on the need for intersectional analysis and representations in media, the lack of characters of color, as well as their stereotyping and fetishization in the series are increasingly seen as problematic by first-year and millennial students. The distance of the students from the original media context of the series and its impact at the time makes them much less tolerant to such disparities and underrepresentation. While there is quite a bit of recent work on the topic, those scholars are usually old enough to have viewed *Buffy* in real time during its first broadcasts within its original context and an analytical distancing of time in university and graduate school. This paper will discuss the problematic representations of race in *Buffy* and the questions and issues raised by millennial students watching or binge-watching the series via streaming, classroom presentation, and disc. This paper will analyze the text and millennial response using the following questions: Where are the latinx characters? Native characters? Why are the white characters the only

ones who move the plot forward and get actual character arcs? Why does this trend pervade today?

--Amanda Martinez

Teaching the Millennial Student: Addiction in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

This paper will present a lesson plan regarding addiction in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The unit's primary aim will be to challenge the students to connect their preexisting beliefs surrounding addiction and drug abuse, and whether it is reasonable to connect Buffy to this complex topic twenty years after it began broadcasting. Furthermore, the students will be pushed to consider several approaches to how addiction is shown in the series, which characters are being used as the subject of this theme, and why Whedon chose to include it in the series' story arc.

Cori Mathis

One for the Ages? *Buffy* as a Teen Drama

When *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* premiered on The WB in 1997, few could have predicted its impact on not only the network but the burgeoning genre of which it is now a major touchstone: the American teen drama. But how has *BtVS* aged after twenty years and so many additions to the genre—which now contains multiple subgenres? As genre scholars, can we responsibly point to the series as a teen drama that does great work, or do we need to add some qualifiers?

In this paper, I will argue that *Buffy* remains a classic and important part of televisual history, particularly because of its heroine, its introduction of LGBTQ characters, and its position as an early example of the young adult fantasy drama. However, after recognizing the series' significant contribution to the teen drama, we must note that *BtVS* is deeply problematic in many ways; in fact, one might say that it has not aged well when compared to some of the series airing today. For example, contemporary teen dramas feature young people of color who not only have their own arcs independent of the protagonists—they are the protagonists. *Buffy* has a well-documented problem with presenting whiteness as the norm and routinely excluding and even demonizing the Other. This issue comes up in how the series handles class issues as well. While Whedon and his writers seem to feel they represent the lower class position with Xander, the introduction of Faith truly shows how uncomfortable they are with the idea of Buffy interacting with someone from outside her bubble for any length of time—yet another issue that the contemporary teen drama handles with more sensitivity. As we continue to study and teach *BtVS*, we need to remember how its origins can deepen our understanding of the series.

Katia McClain

Joss Whedon's *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*: "Sokovia...it's nowhere special"

In the introduction to *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion*, Robert Moore asks why Joss Whedon's "creations resonate so strongly with fans." The second reason he gives is:

“Joss Whedon thinks we are smart.” There are aspects of *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, which suggests that Whedon is directing a film for the viewer who wants to think. For example, Rhonda Wilcox shows how the film uses the story of the Maximoff twins to push viewers to question “Captain America and America’s practices.” However, the representation of the Eastern Europe in the fictional country of Sokovia is problematic. As Lewis Call points out, “the film... has trouble imagining convincing non-American characters.” The problem is more fundamental. Where in Eastern Europe is Sokovia? One of the Maximoff twins is named Wanda, which sounds vaguely Polish, the other Pietro, a name not native to any part of Eastern Europe. Many visuals suggest Sokovia is located in the Balkans, but the Hydra Research Station seems to be in a Central European forest. The Sokovian characters all speak English, with accents that range from vaguely Russian to vaguely American. Most of the signs that appear on Sokovian streets are in Serbian; some are in Russian. Whedon creates a Sokovia that assumes that his viewers are not at all smart, at least when it comes to Eastern Europe.

Call, Lewis. “Joss Whedon’s Radical Icon of Third Wave Feminism.” *Marvel’s Black Widow from Spy to Superhero: Essays on an Avenger with a Very Specific Skill Set*. Ed. Sherry Ginn. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017, 106-127.

Moore, Robert. “Why Cast a Spotlight on Joss Whedon.” *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion*. Pop Matters Media, Inc, 2012.

Whedon, Joss. *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Marvel. 2015

Wilcox, Rhonda V. “‘Every Man Ever Got a Statue’: Whedon’s *Age of Ultron* and Public Statuary in the Light of *Firefly*.” *Slayage: The Journal of Whedon Studies* 15.1 (44), Winter 2017.

Casey McCormick, Devin Gibbs, Hannah Beach Creative Approaches to Studying Joss Whedon: A Roundtable

The participants in this roundtable will be myself and two of my students from an upper-level undergraduate course on Whedon that I taught at McGill University last semester. The goal is to share some of the strategies that we used in the class and consider how these methods might be expanded upon and improved for future Whedon Studies classrooms. In terms of format, I propose that we each speak for 5-10 minutes. I will discuss the overall framework of the course and introduce some of the creative activities and assignments that I used. I will also talk about how our use of Twitter allowed us to integrate current issues into the class (for example, Kai Cole’s letter to Whedon, as well as broader discussions about gender, race, and power in Hollywood). Devin Gibbs will share his final project from the course, a “zine” called *Buffy Made Me Gay* that incorporates original fanfiction, collages, photo spreads, collaborative scene analyses, and poetry. This zine is an effective project that grapples with the relationship between fan practices and subject formation in a fun, original, way. Hannah Beach will discuss our class’ use of blogging as a method for creative engagement, focusing on a short fanfiction assignment and an accompanying in-class collaborative activity. Beach is

interested in how taking on fannish practices in academic spaces can allow for a less voyeuristic, more immersive, study of fan cultures. After these short presentations, we would open the floor to the audience for questions about the course, aiming to generate a discussion about the future of Whedon Studies in the undergraduate classroom.

Stephen Melvin

“Trouble Always Comes Around”: Sisyphian Philosophy in the Whedonverse

On the commentary track to “Objects in Space,” Joss Whedon acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Sartre’s *Nausea* and Camus’s *Myth of Sisyphus*. Since then, scholarship considering existential themes in *Buffy* and *Angel* has been plentiful. There is a website of Whedon criticism titled *The Existential Scoobies*. In his collection of episode reviews, Mark Field identifies Camusian philosophy as the overarching theme of *Buffy* Season 3. However, little attention has been given to these themes in Whedon’s work with the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

While the dilemma central to Sisyphus—“judging whether or not life is worth living”—is explicitly explored in “Amends” (S3.E10), Whedon has also addressed another concern of Camus’s: “philosophical suicide,” seeking a reconciliation of the absurd through transcendence. Per Camus, humankind must accept absurdity and compel meaning from the incessant tasks it faces. For *Buffy* and *Angel*, this equates to slaying demons and warding off the Apocalypse.

A similar case can be made for the obstacles faced by *The Avengers*. However, in *Age of Ultron*, overwhelmed by the vision of another alien onslaught (a.k.a. being tasked with pushing the boulder up the hill again), Tony Stark takes an irrational “leap of faith” and creates Ultron, a metaphorical higher power, thus denying the stubborn resolve and acceptance of the absurd that both *Buffy* and *Angel* come to accept.

This presentation will argue that the series finales of both *Buffy* and *Angel* reiterate the merits of living a Sisyphian existence. By contrast, *Age of Ultron* thematically presents the consequences of “philosophical suicide.” Only after confronting and defeating Stark’s leap of faith does the film’s close reiterate the aforementioned finales, echoed in Nick Fury’s dialogue: “No matter who wins or loses, trouble always comes around.”

Mary Alice Money

The *Firefly* Capers: “Ariel” vs. “Trash”

“Ariel” (w. José Molina, d. Allan Kroeker) and “Trash” (w. Ben Edlund and José Molina, d. Vern Gillum) are the two episodes of *Firefly* that most clearly use the classic tropes of caper / heist movies. Although the episodes share a writer, Molina, they showcase two different approaches to the caper subgenre on and beneath the surface. Both stories involve dangerous deeds, hair’s breadth escapes, and successful thefts, yet the two episodes are quite different on and beneath the surface. One is in aid of Simon’s well-planned, altruistic theft of medical services needed to determine the nature of and possible cure for River’s brain damage. Of course, the crew can also steal a fortune in

prescription drugs to sell to those uninsured citizens on the frontier. And the drugs will be automatically replaced by the automated hospital supplier. The other caper is a straight-out, completely illegal theft of a valuable artifact not from the Topkapi Museum, but from a filthy rich fat cat living on a “gated” planet. Both capers are complicated by a network of betrayals and double-crosses: Jayne plans to turn in the Tams for a reward; the artifact theft is the plan of Saffron, most duplicitous female in the galaxy. (What could go wrong?)

The settings reinforce the mood and tone of each episode. One takes place in a sterile, cold, sharp-edged hospital, while the other shifts among a variety of earthy and glamorous settings: the crew’s usual grungy hangouts, a lush mansion, various trash heaps, and a barren desert. The final scenes of the episodes drive home the differences. One ends with Mal almost murdering Jayne, and the other ends with ridiculous scenes of near disasters and a naked although victorious Mal in the wilderness.

Thus we have two heists, two revelations of character, and two showcases of the different ways to get away with grand larceny out in the Black.

Ananya Mukherjea

Reckoning Feminism: Joss Whedon, the Women of the *Age of Ultron*, and the Judgment of Fans

The controversy surrounding how feminists received the *Age of Ultron* in 2015 seemed to anticipate later controversy about Whedon’s place as a feminist culture maker in light of the critical open letter his ex-wife published about him in 2017, a letter fans read in the context of the then nascent #me-too movement. The disappointment many feminist fans and viewers expressed about the portrayal of female characters in *Ultron* fueled a slew of articles ranging from “serious” journalism to academic papers to angry blog posts. The tone of conversation regarding Kai Cole’s letter was sometimes angry too, but just as often, shocked and sad. The highly emotional nature of all these responses indicates the deep personal and intellectual investments many Whedon and Marvel fans have made in these texts and in the political commitments they believed they shared with Whedon, to whom they had entrusted these women and their stories. This paper seeks to use the context of these charged discussions to consider the characters of Black Widow, Scarlet Witch, Laura Barton, and Maria Hill. In considering these characters, their portrayal, and fan perceptions, expectations, and investments, I refer to scholarship by Tamy Burnett, Heather Porter, Jillian Coleman Benjamin, Lewis Call, and Tanya Cochran.

Madeline Muntersbjorn

Dismembered Monsters and Dissembled Selves: Recollecting Fred/Illyria

In *Joss Whedon as Philosopher* (2017), Dean A. Kowalski looks to the series *Angel*, in general, and the relationship between Angel and Angelus, in particular, to illustrate classical conundrums surrounding the nature of human beings as individual selves: Who are we if not some concatenation of bodies, souls, and memories? Could we get by with one or two or do we need all three in order to be persons worthy of the name? In this talk,

I do not dispute Kowalski's claim that the Angel-Angelus thought experiment undermines the continuity of consciousness thesis. I continue his analysis of personal identity in Angel by considering the relationship between Fred and Illyria in more detail. On my view, Fred/Illyria shows that the holy trinity of body, soul, and memory should not be contrasted as competitors in a philosophical fight to champion what makes anyone uniquely human. In fact, even an ecumenical "all of the above" approach to personal identity cannot help us understand how, for example, Illyria could be both the contagion that destroys Fred even as what's left of Fred infects Illyria with her humanity. The interconnected stories of Fred and Illyria call into question perennial philosophical questions. That is, philosophers searching for what makes us who we are need to consider more carefully how much our selves depend upon others. Our bodies depend upon other bodies, our memories rely upon other's recollections, and our personal natures are evanescent manifestations of enduring material constraints. On my reading of Fred/Illyria, the authentic human, true to herself, becomes a fanciful fiction while an imperfectly resurrected Old One, who manipulates time and communes with plants, becomes something more than a mythical monster.

Matthew Pateman

Edited Out: The Excluded Part of the Troika

"Edited Out" is a companion piece for my 2012 presentation, "The Directors Cut," and will examine the role of editors in the Whedonverse. A brief and broad examination of the general role and duties of an editor in US TV drama will lead into an examination of a range of editors with whom Whedon has worked, with particular focus on the function and importance of Lisa Lassek.

The paper will seek to begin a process of rectifying scholarly omission of this pivotal role in TV studies in general, but also will insist on the creative necessity for Whedon of this third arm of the team of Writer, Director, Editor.

Whedon rewards success and enjoys consistency, as is evidenced by his writers' room and his suite of directors. The same is no less true of his work with editors. The Mutant Enemy writing school is full of writers working across two, three or four of Whedon's shows; actors likewise, and directors and editors: Lisa Lassek has edited not only Whedon's TV shows and been associate producer on *Firefly*, but also edited *Dr Horrible*, *Cabin in the Woods* and *Avengers*. An assessment of her significant contribution and the contribution of other editors in the Whedonverse is long overdue.

Heather M. Porter

Corporate Tools: Examining the use of Psychology in the Corporations and Organizations in the Whedonverses

Since the beginning Joss Whedon's works have depicted many different aspects of corporate and organizational culture, from the Rossum corporation in *Dollhouse* to evil law firm Wolfram Hart in *Angel*, to various governmental and military institutions, including the Alliance in *Firefly*, the Initiative in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and

S.H.I.E.L.D in the Avengers and *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* John Mohan notes that the mad scientist of today is often a faceless corporation: "You don't have this mad-scientist face on it. But the anonymous, corporate world that's behind that is just as threatening." In previous works I have discussed how these faceless corporations, such as *Fringe's* Massive Dynamic, reflect society's current very real fears of big business taking over. Their slogan, "What do we do? What don't we do?" epitomizes the power held by such entities. However, corporations and institutions in the Whedonverses are not faceless. We know characters in these organizations and often our main characters are part of them, which gives us an interesting perspective from which to examine these organizations. This paper will examine the corporations and organizations in the Whedonverses through a psychological lens looking at how the theories of industrial organizational psychology are portrayed in these organizations. This includes organizational culture, socialization, employee recruitment and training, organizational commitment, group dynamics, motivation and leadership. This paper is a part of a larger project examining psychology in the Whedonverses.

Catherine Pugh

"Why Can't I Stay?": Sickness, Disability, and Redemptive Power in *Angel*

Angel features both heroes and villains who are physically sick and/or disabled. Some, such as Lindsey McDonald ("To Shanshu in LA" – "Dead End"), Vanessa Brewer ("Blind Date") and Darla ("Darla") suffer from real-life afflictions. Other conditions, such as Doyle and Cordelia's visions and Fred's transformation into Illyria, are supernatural in origin but are arguably coded as a physical ailment, such as epilepsy or cancer. While these supernatural disabilities are invasive, debilitating and potentially fatal, they nevertheless grant the sufferer a degree of power. I have previously argued that trauma and madness in the Whedonverse – while horrific – opens up the sufferer to different realities, thereby granting them access into new, liminal worlds as a form of power (such as precognitive abilities). I believe there is a parallel here in that physical disabilities can produce physical abilities, such as granting Vanessa Brewer a certain degree of sight, or uncontrollable, convulsive visions allowing the sufferer to see through someone else's eyes.

Furthermore, this work explores how Whedon's representations of sickness or disability interact with gothic and other horror representations of disability. In particular, the work asks whether there is a tendency for the more morally dubious character to suffer physically (perhaps as a punishment), whereas heroes may be traumatised and self-tortured, particularly compared to Whedon's other work (Vriess, in *Alien: Resurrection*, Xander in *Buffy*, Fitz and Coulson in *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*). More specifically, this work examines where disability, sickness – and the suffering they involve – fit into one of the key themes of the show: redemption.

Elizabeth L. Rambo

Making Hell Look Pretty in Pink: *Buffy: The High School Years Comics*

When *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was originally broadcast on television, critics who were not looking closely often compared it with another series about a high school girl with supernatural powers, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003, ABC and WB). *Sabrina*, however, was a sitcom while *Buffy*, more difficult to categorize, is based in horror, with action, drama, and comedy, and many judged it unsuitable for younger viewers. When Dark Horse comics first began issuing comics in parallel with BtVS, the storylines fell generally outside the series' narrative, with art by various creators (including Cliff Richards and Ryan Sook), but the graphic style generally followed that of the show: dark, dramatic, and intense. Though not written by Whedon or BtVS staff writers (except for "The Origin," adapted from Whedon's script for the 1992 *Buffy* movie, and a few scripts by Doug Petrie), these comics are densely scripted with some of the verbal spark that Whedon's work is known for (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer Omnibus*, vol. 1). Most of these comics fill in the narrative edges before and between the show's first three seasons. In contrast, Dark Horse's 2016-2017 "Buffy: The High School Years" have uniform manga-style art by Yishan Li and overall a lighter, spare look with far fewer words per page and per frame, evidently to appeal to a younger audience. Originally, Sunnydale High really was hell; in the "High School Years" comics, it's hell-lite.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer Omnibus, vol. 1-4, edited by Scott Allie, Dark Horse, 2007-2008.

Hicks, Faith Erin. "Freaks & Geeks." Art by Yishan Li. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The High School Years*, Dark Horse, 2016.

McDonald, Kel. "Glutton for Punishment." Art by Yishan Li. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The High School Years*, Dark Horse, 2016.

McDonald, Kel. "Parental Parasite." Art by Yishan Li. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The High School Years*, Dark Horse, 2017.

Sabrina the Teenage Witch, created by Jonathan Schmock and Neil Scovell. Pramont/ABC/WB, 1996-2003.

Marcus Recht

Gender Images *In Your Eyes*

The presentation will explore the visual staging of gender in Joss Whedon's *In Your Eyes* (2014). As writer and executive producer, Whedon should be in charge of the representations of the varying gender depictions of his characters. Additionally the movie has a fantastic element, therefore theoretically opening up new possibilities for deviating representations of gender, which Whedon has tried to emphasize in some of his work. It is Joss Whedon's obligation – by calling himself a feminist or genderist – to deconstruct the basis for inequalities.

The visual material will be analyzed through looking on the gender-specific vestment of the characters, furthermore by analyzing their bodily construction and their habitus and

gesture, analyzing rooms and objects which were chosen to emphasize or deconstruct the characters' gender-roles. The image composition, selecting the leading colors in postproduction, the character-specific framing and field size is a further important part. Additionally an intersectional approach – especially with the focus on class and race – is necessary for the movie *In Your Eyes*.

Robin Robinson

Inferior Black Slayers: Race in *Buffy*

Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) was considered a groundbreaking television series when it first aired in 1997. Young women especially were enraptured by the character of Buffy, a blonde, vampire-killing teenager, living in Sunnydale. While this show was hailed for its feminist themes and strong female protagonists, it offers very little for the black female spectator. In bell hooks' essay "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," she discusses the exclusion of the black female from television and indicts white feminist theorists who do not include the perspective of black female spectators in their analysis. Often, when black women are included in mainstream media, they are there to uphold the ideals of white womanhood. This is also true for Joss Whedon's *Buffy*. The show features little representation of non-white characters and no positive representations of black women.

The few black women in the series serve to uphold Buffy's white womanhood as an ideal beauty and serve as cautionary figures – warnings for Buffy to stay inside the social norm. The black female characters are comparisons that serve to highlight Buffy's white superiority. For example, Sineya's African heritage may be a reference to the Garden of Eden, where the concept of sin was first introduced to the world. Critic Lynne Edwards points out that "the fact that Tara, a white female character, had to speak for Sineya is troubling, given the psychic link Buffy has shared with other female characters" (95). How does limiting Sineya's speech serve the purpose of this narrative? My paper further examines this tendency by looking at the three most significant black female characters featured in the show – Sineya, Kendra, and Nikki Wood – and will highlight ways these marginalized characters serve as entities that maintain white womanhood's superiority. The criticism of bell hooks, Lynne Edwards, and Candra K. Gill, along with interviews of Joss Whedon, will be employed to further illustrate this thesis.

Nancy Roche

Gender Politics, Booze, and Subterfuge in Iambic Pentameter: Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing*

William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, finished in 1599, has been one of the writer's most popular plays for theater. Multiple modern adaptations have been made of the work for television as well, including a 1973 New York Shakespeare Festival production and a 1967 and 1984 BBC version. These notable performances have starred such luminaries as Sam Waterston and Maggie Smith. The first major production of the text into film, however, is Kenneth Branagh's 1993 adaptation, which contains all of the elements of classical Hollywood film. Produced by Warner Bros., the movie features

some of the biggest stars of the day, including Branagh, Emma Thompson, Denzel Washington, and Michael Keaton. Shot on location in an Italian villa and replete with a grand orchestral score, Branagh's production cost was eleven million dollars. His film is large, dramatic, and slightly overwrought. The actor shot his movie as a larger-than-life play, and by today's standards, some of his devices, such as the level of violence against Hero, appear outdated.

Eighteen years later, in 2011, Joss Whedon filmed his version of Shakespeare's play in twelve days, in his own residence, using a stable of actors from his television productions, and released the film in black and white through a production company he created especially for the project. A.O. Scott of the New York Times found the film charming and professed it far superior to Branagh's. This paper will deconstruct the two as Hollywood versus Indie films and argue the merit of Whedon's production. Postmodern, slapstick, sincere, and carnivalesque, Whedon's work captures a more naturalistic version of an Early Modern play into Postmodern clothes. Whedon's devices of sex, alcohol, and modern-day accoutrements bring the narrative alive in innovative ways while reflecting midcentury romantic comedies and highlighting gender politics. Whedon's film will be discussed in the context of Branagh's, and in light of his earlier work.

Kathrina Schneekloth

Threshold Guardians in the Works of Joss Whedon

The presentation will examine how Joseph Campbell's text *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* influenced the works of Joss Whedon. More specifically, how the threshold guardian archetype is dramatized within the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Dollhouse* series. The presentation will offer contemporary comparisons in other popular culture media and question whether Whedon's uses are more dynamic. To briefly describe, the threshold guardian archetype marks the transition between the old and new worlds of the journey and is often a herald of danger or of consequences to previous decisions. Whedon's heroes are often plagued by complex choices and sometimes haunted by their decisions. This preoccupation with choice and possibility is one of Whedon's favorite tropes. The presentation will offer some biographical detail found in Amy Pascale's biography as well as touch upon points previously made by Whedon scholars. These scholars include, but are not limited to, K. Dale Koontz (*Faith and Choice in the Works of Joss Whedon*), essays edited by Lynne Y. Edwards, Elizabeth Rambo, and James B. South; as well as texts by Stacey Abbott and Rhonda Wilcox. Whedon's preoccupation with figures of influence and their persuasion to sway events of the journey becomes more complicated when these figures exist within several roles. For example, rather than compartmentalizing characters into singular archetypal positions, Whedon often engages his characters in multiple positions. This may make their persuasion of the hero more ambiguous or perhaps more tenacious. These questions and theories will be pulled apart through episode comparison, scene breakdown, and Whedon's subtexts. The ultimate goal of the researcher and her presentation is to contribute to the dialogue regarding Whedon's uses of archetypal literary criticism and contemporizing the monomyth.

Renee St. Louis

Demon Magnet in the Friend Zone: Reconsidering Xander Harris in the Age of #MeToo

An entire generation has passed since the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* originated; the recent 20th anniversary of its premier invites a re-examination of the text in light of all that has (and hasn't) changed in popular culture. Treated within the show as flawed but fundamentally good, as the Scoobies' valiant and selfless heart, Xander simultaneously exhibits a range of sexist and even misogynistic viewpoints and behaviors; these range from objectification of women to sexually possessive and controlling behavior directed at his closest female friends to actions frequently treated as benign, such as slapstick reactions to information about menstruation. While these traits and behaviors have been noted widely in both critical and fan responses, both inside the show and in writing about it this behavior is frequently excused, explicitly exonerated, and/or blamed on the failings of female characters.

Interestingly, in recent years the character has received more frequent public scrutiny and critique, coinciding with an increase in both public misogyny and resistance to it, from #GamerGate to the Santa Barbara shooter to the #MeToo campaign. Recent months have brought a public reckoning with sexual harassment and assault, as well as a scandalous public feud between Whedon and ex-wife Kai Cole which prompted some to reconsider public understanding of Joss the feminist. Rather than offering a closed argument about the meaning of the show or the authenticity of Whedon's feminism, this paper aims to use Xander Harris as a prism through which we can examine the shifting norms of gender and sex; recent public engagement with sexual politics in the public sphere; and the difficult questions we all must answer for ourselves when we look back on our favorite art in light of new information and perspectives.

Mike Starr

“The Only Thing I Like About Myself Is You” : The “Terminal Identity” of *In Your Eyes*

This paper interprets a selection of Whedonverse texts via the concept of “terminal identify.” Coined by Scott Bukatman (in the 1993 text of the same name), “terminal identity” concerns the conceptualization of constructions of selfhood and identity in science fiction, operating as "an unmistakably doubled articulation" where the self-contained subject ends and a virtual subject is constructed by a "new subjectivity" at the computer screen or television (Bukatman 9.) In accordance, Whedonverse texts frequently negotiate such conceptualizations, providing considerations as to how identity can be conceived in the contemporary age of perpetual connectivity and the resultant overlap of physical and electronic cultures. Whilst it shall be noted that Whedonverse texts such as *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), *Buffy tVS* (1997-2003) and *The Avengers* (2012) perform these negotiations in an explicit manner, the paper's principal critical focus draws upon *In Your Eyes* (2014.) This film has thus far been typically critically positioned as a “paranormal romance”, and viewed as a slight and lightweight counterpoint to other, more intellectually engaged Whedon projects. However, it shall be

argued that, via its depiction of two people interconnected on a profound level via an extra-sensory bond (and despite an apparent absence of explicit science-fictional or technological themes), *In Your Eyes* can be interpreted as a text that provides a variety of intriguing conceptualizations as to the end of a traditional notion of the human subject; how identity functions not as a single, static form, but instead as a state “on the periphery, with no fixed identity, defined by the states through which it passes” (Deleuze & Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*, 20).

Brenna Wardell

Fooling with Fashion: Costume as Comic Catalyst in Joss Whedon’s *The Avengers*

Aggressive invaders threaten the world, the team that offers Earth’s best defense is in disarray, and a man finds himself, as a helpful security guard notes, “buck ass naked” amidst a pile of rubble. While all hope seems lost, the solution to the man’s predicament is simple: a pair of pants from the guard and his pronouncement, “Son, you’ve got a condition.” This comic, very human, moment from *The Avengers* (2012) not only demonstrates five essential Whedon signatures highlighted by David Lavery in *Joss Whedon: A Creative Portrait*—language (“idiolect,” in Jane Espensen’s words), genre-hybridity, the naughty, emotional realism, and bringing the funny (183-199)—but it also provides a memorable example of how Whedon and company’s strategic use—or not—of costume highlights these signatures.

Many scholars have examined costume choices in the Whedonverses to illustrate the complex nature of Whedon’s characters or discuss the visual richness of his texts’ environments; my contribution is to consider the comic function of these choices, arguing that costumes serve not only as markers of characters’ identity self-fashioning, for example, but as witty leavening agents to dramatic situations. In utilizing costume’s carnivalesque potential to rewrite characters’ identities and turn entire situations topsy-turvy, Whedon and company reflect both critically and playfully on these characters, situations, and the genres and traditions to which they belong, engaging viewers critically.

While I examine diverse examples from the Whedonverses, my focus is *Avengers* due to the unique, high stakes nature of this text in Whedon’s oeuvre as his first blockbuster, the first MCU team-up, and as a superhero/war film, genres often treated very seriously. That Whedon is able to insert wit and levity and, with these, humanity is, I argue, due in part to the considered comic use—or lack thereof—of costume.

Rhonda V. Wilcox

Smoking the Hat: Fred/Illyria in *Angel* and Juliette/Eve in *Grimm*

David Greenwalt, who served as co-executive producer of *Angel*, also served as co-executive producer of *Grimm*. Though the *Angel* character of shy Fred transitioned to the powerful character of Illyria after Greenwalt left *Angel*, the compound character has significant similarities to the transitional character of Eve in *Grimm*, who started out as Juliette. Both Fred and Juliette begin as intelligent women—Fred a scientist, Juliette a

veterinary doctor—who are depicted with heterosexual relationships (Fred with Gunn then Wes, Juliette with the series' lead protagonist, detective Nick Burkhardt, the Grimm, who perceives the true nature of human-like supernatural creatures). Both, however, go through an abnormal death and emerge as much more powerful characters who no longer have the same gender presentation or sexual interests. The former god Illyria is last seen on television facing possible apocalyptic death with her chosen family, in *Angel's* finale; Eve, on the other hand, is shown surviving such an apocalypse, part of another chosen family that is facing an open future. The very names of Juliette and Eve suggest a shift from representing the romantic to representing womanhood more generally. Late in the series, Eve tells her former significant other Nick that she does not live for happiness; she has chosen to live for a larger purpose. This speech expresses a positive theme in the character that is implicit in earlier actions. While Fred is transformed into Illyria against her will, Juliette makes a choice that ultimately results in her becoming Eve. Hexenbiests, or witches, on the show—women of power—are shown transforming themselves by means of an ancient witch's hat which emblemizes both female and male qualities as its bent crown rises, filled with smoke which the user breathes in. Juliette is warned that there may be unpredictable consequences to accessing this power, but she makes the choice in order to help in the fight against darkness. She herself becomes a dark witch for a while and as a result is both shot and forcibly re-trained mentally. She eventually emerges as able to make her own decisions, and she decides that her fight—in effect, her career—is more important than romance or children. Yet, at the end of the series, she is nonetheless part of the chosen family. While Illyria is an almost complete rewriting of Fred, Eve is a transformed character who bears within her some threads of the earlier Juliette, who, year after year, refused Nick's offers of marriage. She thus displays a forceful evolution of identity rather than an evacuation of it. Juliette/Eve demonstrates the unpredictable results of our choices and their impact on our identities while evincing an internal continuity of character. Fred is felled by the disease of Illyria, but Juliette smokes the hat, the dangerous drug of power.

Kristopher Woofter, Lorna Jowett, Stacey Abbott, Bronwen Calvert, Erin Giannini, Stephanie Graves

Joss Whedon vs. Horror: A Roundtable

Led by co-editors Kristopher Woofter and Lorna Jowett, this roundtable session focuses on topics taken up in the forthcoming collection of essays from I.B. Tauris, *Joss Whedon vs. Horror: Fangs, Fans, and Genre in BUFFY and Beyond*. The collection is the first comprehensive study situating the work of Joss Whedon and his collaborators within the horror traditions that have been a major source of inspiration and influence. Each presenter will focus on a key aspect of their chapter with an eye towards surveying the critical and theoretical horror landscape for Whedon studies. Representing the collection's focus on the pervasive horror conventions operating in the Whedon oeuvre, Bronwen Calvert traces horror tropes such as abjection and uncanniness in the haunted house that is *Dollhouse*, and Stephanie Graves situates *The Cabin in the Woods* within a long tradition of postmodern horror films. Representing the collection's focus on televisual horror production, Stacey Abbott discusses negotiations of violence and horror within the restrictive production context of the earlier Whedon television series; and Erin

Giannini situates *Angel* within a genealogy of vampire/horror-crime hybrid series such as *Forever Knight* and *Supernatural*. Co-Editors Lorna Jowett and Kristopher Woofter represent the collection's third section, focused on revisiting Whedon's revisionist stance regarding horror. Jowett interrogates the feminism of the Whedon corpus, a rather timely topic, and Woofter looks at that corpus in terms of its hybridizing of the Gothic's hauntological worldview, and the Weird tradition's focus on radical alterity.

As this is a roundtable, the presenters would speak for five to seven minutes only, allowing for participation in a discussion with the session attendants. The goal of the session is, like the goal of the collection, to encourage a broader and more complex approach to the Whedonverse in terms of the horror tradition and its scholarship.