Report on SCW7: The Seventh Biennial *Slayage* Conference on the Whedonverses
The 'EURO'SLAYAGE Conference
Sponsored by the Whedon Studies Association and Kingston University
Kingston upon Thames
7-10 July 2016

Reporters: Jessica Hautsch, Jay Bamber, and Bethan Jones

Thursday 7 July 15.00-17.30

Welcome to EuroSlayage and Reception – sponsored by the Kingston Popular Culture Research Unit

[1] The seventh biennial Slayage was hosted in Kingston University, marking the first time that the conference has been held in Europe and leading to the catchy title *EuroSlayage* (which was emblazoned on all of the conference-goers' tote bags, t-shirts, and badges). Kingston is one of the few royal boroughs in England and Wales (one of only four) and has the distinct advantage of being on the

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Jay Bamber holds a B.A. in English Literature and Film Studies and an MA in Film and Screen Cultures, both from the University of Roehampton. His research interests include children's film, the horror genre, literary adaptations, and cult television, with a particular interest in how the iconography of the horror film intercepts audio-visual entertainment produced for children. His first two novels, *Until There Was You* and *The Restart Project*, are available from Less Than Three Press, and his pop-culture journalism can be found on *The Moon Project* as well as other online and print outlets.

Bethan Jones is a North of England Consortium for Arts and Humanities-funded Ph.D. candidate at the University of Huddersfield. Her thesis builds upon her interest in examining cult television, fandom, and nostalgia through a focus on *The X-Files* and *Twin Peaks* revivals. Her work has been published in the journals *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *Participations*, and *New Media and Society*, amongst others, and her coedited collection on crowdfunding was published with Peter Lang in 2015. She is a board member of the Fan Studies Network.

banks of the river Thames, offering areas of beautiful natural scenery, as well as easy access to a busy high street. Befitting its history as an ancient market town, Kingston mixes some beautiful old architecture with all of the modern conveniences to be expected from the capital. It is also the home of David Mach's famous, and somewhat controversial, art sculpture *Out of Order,* which shows a series of tumbling red phone boxes. Despite its wide green spaces and array of niche shops, Kingston is easily accessible from Central London with its own train station and plentiful bus routes that offer the ability to go anywhere in London.

[2] *EuroSlayage* began with a meet-up and wine reception in Kingston University's Knights Park campus, giving everybody the opportunity to pick up their *Slayage* swag, register, and begin talking about all things Whedon. After presenters and attendees had gotten the chance to meet friends old and new, Local Arrangements Co-chair Professor Simon Brown of Kingston University began the official welcome to the university and to the conference. Brown gave a brief history of Kingston, explaining its history with cinema technology and providing some information on the university's School of Performance and Screen Studies Popular Culture Research Unit. The aim of the research unit is to inspire discussions about the media we all consume and to offer insights into the process and reception of what we see on the screen, making it is the perfect place to hold *Slayage.*

[3] Brown then introduced Matthew Hilton, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations), who welcomed the WSA on behalf of Kingston University. He provided an overview of the history of the university and praised its commitment to diversity. He emphasized the importance of diverse experiences and perspectives and noted the way in which an ethos of inclusion contributes to progress, to creating "a future not defined by the past." He concluded by hoping that the WSA would find Kingston a very welcoming place.

[4] Professor Stacey Abbott of Roehampton University, program chair and current president of the Whedon Studies Association, welcomed everyone and provided some insight into the development of EuroSlayage, which was conceived as a way to incorporate more European academics and fans into the *Slayage* family. She expressed excitement and enthusiasm about the ways in which a European

conference could broaden the WSA's reach and scope. Abbott also spoke about how Whedon's work, with its emphasis on found families, collectivism, and "fighting the good fight," is especially important and poignant at a time where the political landscape is increasingly reliant on the discourse of isolationism and cultural distrust. In a room full of people from all across the globe and with all kinds of research areas, many commented that this point seemed especially moving and demonstrated how Whedon's work continues to have a philosophy which is relevant to academia and the world at large. Abbott finished her welcome with the immortal words from the *Angel* episode "Deep Down": "let's get to work" - which seems a fitting battlecry for the WSA as a whole.

[5] The evening continued as academics and fans discussed their histories with Whedon's work, their favorite episodes, and their upcoming conference papers.

Friday 8 July

Keynote: Rebecca Williams "Immortal Fandom?: The Post-Object Afterlives of Joss Whedon's Television Shows"

[6] Rebecca Williams opened the conference with a keynote discussing the "post-object" afterlives of Whedon's shows, using the term "post-object" to refer to TV shows which have ended and will no longer be produced, yet noting that these shows still have afterlives in which they are watched and discussed by fans. The first example she gave was *Dollhouse*, but she asserted that the fandom for *Dollhouse* is relatively invisible, which makes it difficult to study. Shows like *Buffy* still have fans creating content about them, as sites like fanfiction.net attest, but Dollhouse fandom—insofar as it still exists online—is hidden. *Dollhouse*'s afterlife is thus much shorter than that of *Buffy*, which still has Buzzfeed listicles written about it, but Williams noted that there is still value to be found in examining shows that have a short afterlife, particularly those which have been cancelled.

[7] Looking at any cancelled TV series raises a broader set of questions about TV and endings, particularly given debates on what

cancellation actually is. Williams pointed out that a lot of academic work has been done on the process of becoming a fan but very little has been done on exiting a fandom. In her work she spoke to fans of *Firefly* and found three ways that fans reacted: sadness and grief; acceptance; and, in some cases, a rejection of the show itself.

[8] Williams also highlighted the importance of looking at older shows. Citing Hastle (2007) and Hills (2010) she noted that TV studies tends to focus on the new, and there is not much currency to be found in writing about long-cancelled programmes. This is exacerbated by publishing pressures, which means scholars focus on current shows and create 'just–in-time scholarship' where work is inserted into the newly emerging zone of liveness. Returning to older programs, however, allows us to understand aesthetics, the demands of the television industry, and fan responses in the years since the show ended, particularly when fan sites, such as The Bronze, close down and fandom moves to new sites, like Tumblr. This transition between sites of fandom also evidences the role that texts play for fans and demonstrates how older texts can become recontextualized by being blogged about in relation to newer texts (for example, GIFs from *Buffy* circulate with memes from *Supernatural*). While a show may not be broadcast any longer, the fandom still continues, and Williams suggested that—in the Whedonverse at least—Whedon himself plays a large part in that. Fans follow Whedon, and the actors associated with his works, to other shows. This intertextuality—Williams noted Whedon's use of the same cast in different shows—allows an afterlife to exist and a fandom to develop based on fans' prior knowledge. Williams did point out that despite this casting, *Dollhouse* wasn't as successful as Whedon's other work and is considered a 'failure' by fans. Part of this, Williams, suggests, is because it is seen as less progressive than Whedon's other works, but it also does not have a transmedia presence, and Whedon's reluctance to create a transmedia universe for the show, as well as comments he made about FOX, may have influenced fans' opinions on the show.

[9] Talking about 'post-object' may, then, be a misnomer as the texts themselves still exist and fans still love, and engage with, them. In addition, new fans are being introduced to the texts all the time as they circulate on new social media platforms along with new shows. None of

the shows Williams discussed have ended, as they live on in fans talking and caring about them, and this should be reason for these shows, and their fandoms, to be revisited by scholars.

1 Marvel Universe: Agents of Shield

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

[10] Lorna Jowett and Mary Ellen Iatropoulous played good cop/bad cop when it came to interrogating some of the binaries surrounding *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, arguably one of the most contentious projects associated with Whedon. In order to demonstrate the controversial responses that Whedon fans have had to the show, they had the audience move to different sides of the room based on their like or dislike of it. (Some chose to place themselves between.) They then proceeded to interrogate some of the aspects of the show that render it so divisive, such as the meaning of auteurship and whether or not the show is truly a "Whedon show" (fan response suggests that it depends whether you like it or not; if you do, it is, and if you don't, it is not). They noted that the marketing of the show seemed eager to capitalize off of Whedon's brand and his loyal fan base, and that the show does contain many characteristics of the Whedonesque, like genre-blending, witty dialogue (replete with pop culture references), and chosen family, but that Whedon's actual involvement in the project is unclear. The issue of diversity on the show was also addressed. They noted the influence of Maurissa Tancharoen on casting but argued that although the show is the most diverse of Whedon's oeuvre, the representation of characters of color and the storylines they are given are often problematic. They weighed the complexity of casting diversity against the sometimes stereotyped and troubling representations of some of the non-white characters, who were frequently represented as evil, animalistic, enslaved, or in need of a white savior. Likewise, they noted that this show, like other Whedon properties, prominently features empowered, kick-ass

female heroes (super-powered and not), but that this representation is complicated by the show's tendency to "fridge" minor female characters. However, they also asserted that the show features a number of "evil old white guys," including Phil Coulson, which would suggest a critical stance toward patriarchy. The debate ended with a compromise—the show is not perfect, but even its imperfections address issues that are often ignored and encouraged a conversation about them—and, at the presenters' invitation, a binary-breaking group hug.

Malgorzata Drewniok: "'We need to get it done': Steve Rogers, Phil Coulson, and the Language of Leadership."

[11] Noting the relationship between discourse and power, Malgorzata Drewniok began her paper by arguing that "discourse is a form of social action" and one of the ways in which we enact and display authority and control. As a linguist, she was interested in analyzing what the language used by Steve Rogers (a.k.a. Captain America) and Phil Coulson suggested about their development as leaders within the Marvel Comics Universe (MCU). She combined this linguistic analysis with reference to John Keegan's imperatives of command, suggesting that the language of these characters could demonstrate insight into their leadership styles. According to Drewniok, close analysis of the discursive interactions between these characters and their respective teams reveals that they have contrasting leadership styles. While Rogers' leadership of the Avengers is built off of politeness, trust, respect, kinship, and teambuilding (which Drewniok described as "the softer-side of leadership"), as evidenced through his respectful language and use of the word "we," Coulson's leadership style is more authoritarian and depends on the use of prescription, sanction, and direct orders, demonstrated by his preference for the pronouns "you" and "I" and his proclivity for shutting down debate.

2 Food and Tea Rituals and Narratives in Whedon

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

[12] Heather M. Porter explained that she has identified over three hundred mentions or visual signifiers of tea-making and tea-drinking in Whedon's work, noting that the notion of tea spreads throughout the Whedonverses and is featured in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., Dollhouse, Firefly,* and *Cabin in the Woods*. Porter emphasized the different metaphorical values of Chinese and European tea-sets and how they are presented to the audience in order to reveal textual clues and provide deeper meaning to sequences. Using the example of Giles, and the ways in which his tea consumption codifies his "Englishness" and serves as a source of humor, Porter was then able to draw a distinction between tea in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* In the former, tea provides comfort and comedy (largely in the characterization of Giles), whilst in the latter, tea, and by extension, "Englishness," is typically used as an insult. Porter also brought forward the argument that tea-drinking in the Whedonverses enables group dynamics to emerge and reinforces the idea that Whedon's work is primarily focussed on found families. It offers a ritual that demands that the protagonist share screen time, making it a useful shorthand for the show's writers.

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

[13] AmiJo Comeford, taking the title of her presentation from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode "As You Were," charted how Whedon's work uses food and drink to establish, or re-establish, character identity and personal history. Although Comeford pointed out that Whedon's television shows pay little attention to food in terms of their narrative structures, she elaborated on the ways in which food and drink consumption acts as a "signatory agent," a messaging system that is constantly interpretable. What characters eat and drink, as well as how they eat and drink, provides the audience with a layer of metaphorical meaning and insight. Comeford provided close textual analysis to reveal how the act of drinking coffee and hot chocolate provides distinct metaphorical meaning in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. She argued

that drinking coffee often represents a situation that will end negatively in the Buffyverse and that hot chocolate acts as a reaffirmation of Buffy and Angel's relationship. In this way, recurring food and drink imagery may work in a similar way to a musical leitmotif. In television shows that feature so many inhuman characters, Comeford also pointed out that eating works to humanize the televisual vampire. Using Spike as a case study, the presentation examined how the audience response to and understanding of Spike is changed by the obvious joy he gains from eating and drinking.

3 Watching Whedon: A Glimpse into One Family's Prolific Consumption and Dynamic Discussion of the Whedonverse (A Multi-generational Roundtable)

[14] Due to some issues with the flight from Atlanta, this roundtable was moved to Sunday, and unfortunately Bill and Jack Pritt were unable to attend. Dreama, Grace, and Julia Pritt, however, presented an interesting discussion about watching Whedon as a family.

[15] The session started with a Powerpoint presentation from Julia on gender and sexuality in the Whedonverses. Julia looked at *Buffy, Angel, Dollhouse*, and *Firefly* and examples of masculinity and femininity (and how they are complicated) in each. For example, Julia highlighted the ways in which Lorne portrays femininity and contrasts that with the ways in which his mother presents as masculine: She greets her son with spit and has a beard. Julia also looked at the effects of the Whedonverses' portrayal of gender on the audience. She noted, for instance, that one viewer said Willow allowed her to explore her sexuality and helped her realize that she likes both women and men.

[16] Following this, Dreama, Grace, and Julia told audience members to push the chairs back to the edges of the room in order to play a game. Somewhat unusually for a conference, audience members moved from one end of the room to the other, depending on what the responses to various questions were. Dreama, Grace, and Julia took turns on the questions, with many of them relating to *Firefly,* given the family's fandom of the show. Questions ranged from characters' fashion choices to pieces of trivia about various Whedonverse texts, to who had

met Whedon himself. Of course, being played by a roomful of academics, there were several questions which ended up with respondents in the middle of the room, the middle ground of "yes, but" or "no, and" answers.

[17] Suitably energized, audience members then pulled our chairs into a circle to talk about the Pritt family's consumption of the Whedonverses. What became clear was the pleasure each member takes in analyzing the Whedonverses. Part of this comes from having a strong academic role model in Dreama, a college professor and the mother in the family, but college student Julia was clearly able to hold her own in performing a close reading of the text and talked about times she has pointed things out to her father. The Pritts also talked about watching shows on Netflix and the different dynamics in how they decided to watch which text, and who does the watching. Although the roundtable was run very differently to a traditional academic roundtable, it showed the importance of encouraging younger scholars to engage with popular cultural texts.

4 Marvel Universe: *Age of Ultron*

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"

[18] Swanson opened her paper by arguing that both *Age of Ultron* and *Fury Road* raise questions about world destruction, the former asking "how can we protect the world?" with the latter asking "who destroyed the world?" As a theology student, Swanson drew on Walter Wink's work, particularly the myth of redemptive violence: the story of the victory of order over chaos by means of violence. Wink's theological concern is focused on ending the domination system itself, not just obtaining justice. In *Fury Road*, the women resist violence as a first response, and the film portrays the wives' choice as a constructive act of hope. Swanson argued that the wives' actions allow the warboy Nox to "see through the curtain" and suggested that Furiosa's staying and Max's

leaving at the end of the film can be seen as a brutal indictment of Max's using violence at any cost. Swanson asserted that domination functions as contaminant in *Age of Ultron,* but it is psychological and technical. She offered the example of Tony Stark, who, after seeing a vision of the Avengers dead, seizes control and tries to build a wall around the world. Yet this is peace through a totalizing system of control. Ending the rule of redemptive violence involves seeing evil within, and Ultron, as a projection of Stark, demonstrates that. Both films show what domination built on redemptive violence can lead to—world destruction. And while violence might save the day, it does not eradicate the system.

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

[19] Wilcox opened her paper by pointing out that although Whedon might be best known for his dialogue, his visual language is also a key way in which ideas are communicated. Wilcox noted that, while most viewers of *Age of Ultron* will be familiar with the statue behind the closing credits, statues are actually used to great effect in the film, and indeed are used in *Firefly,* to communicate the tension between public heroism and human failing. Wilcox observed that three kinds of statues appear in *Age of Ultron:* fictional Soviet style realism, fictional classic heroism, and real public art. The first few minutes of the film present us with two opposing images of public statuary (and heroes): a Leninesque Soviet style statue and a classical, Greek style. Yet while these statues may present binaries, and bring to mind Soviet-era propaganda, the one example of real public art (from Seoul, Korea) invites us to see a reflection of ourselves. Whedon's use of each asks the audience to question the extent of collateral damage in the film, and whether its heroes are actually monsters. Wilcox drew a parallel to Jayne's statue in *Firefly*, where Mal comments that "Every man ever got a statue made of him was one kind of sumbitch or another." Yet in *Age of Ultron,* images of statuary are not simple binaries of good or bad.

Kathryn 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"

[20] Wardell's paper focused most particularly on a specific moment with *Age of Ultron*: Captain America's moving towards the open door of a farmhouse, pausing in the doorway, then moving away from it. Wardell noted that this moment is a deliberate echoing of the conclusion of John Ford's *The Searchers* and evokes the ambivalence of both Ford's film and its protagonist. Wardell acknowledged that Whedon's citations of Ford have been teased out by other scholars, but her paper links this citation to gender and national identity. Giles and Buffy's exchange in "Lie to Me" echoes Ford's films in narrative form and style, and Mal's physical depiction and emotional nature cite elements of John Wayne, especially his portrayal of the anti-hero Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*. She argued that Whedon treats Captain America as part of and apart from the community of Avengers in *Age of Ultron*. He stresses the health of the community but raises troubling questions on the dangers besetting the community, be they from external forces or the Cap himself. Similarly the finale of *Fort Apache* is reflected in Black Widow's nightmare in *Age of Ultron*, but there are differences in meaning between the two images. Wardell thus drew out the citation of Ford from *Buffy* through *Firefly* and into *Age of Ultron*.

5 Whedon and Europe

Charlotte Bosseaux "The essence of being Spike: From Britishness to 'un certain je ne sais quoi'"

[21] Charlotte Bosseaux began her presentation by elaborating on the idea that words bring with them definitions but also many unfixed connotations. Through the act of dubbing, a translator is asked to transpose character traits and the specific tone of a show into another language. This presents the challenge of translating cultural signifiers into a new context, offering up the core issues of what makes a character unique and questioning the extent to which a character's cultural history

dictates the audience's understanding of him or her. Bosseaux examined the character of Spike as a case study, demonstrating the ways in which his character is changed and adapted during the process of dubbing and translation. By using audio-visual media, Bosseaux illustrated that Spike appears more educated within the French context and that the French voice artist who portrays Spike has a higher pitch and smoother tone. Due to this fundamental change, Spike's English heritage becomes subtler, especially when compared to the French version of Giles, whose Englishness is still integral to his French characterization. As Spike is imbedded within the Punk British tradition, which is made explicit by James Marsters's performance, this part of his characterization is necessarily muddied by the dub-artist's interpretation and the changed cultural touchstones that make up the dialogue.

Katharina Rein; Anna Grebe "'Oxford is 'where they make Gileses.': Translations of Europe in the Buffyverse"

[22] Katherine Rein and Anna Grebe began their discussion of how European characters are represented in the Buffyverse by situating them within a shifting and constantly moving framework. Drawing on the work of John Law's Acton Network Theory, which does not distinguish between technology/science or human/supernatural, Rein and Grebe examined *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* deep relationship with Europe and, specifically, the relatively ancient history of Europe. The presentation pointed out that nearly all of the weapons that are used on the show are codified as European and the presenters elaborated on the idea that the large majority of vampires who play a recurring role (Angel, Spike, Drusilla) have backstories which are explicitly linked to a European identity. Rein and Grebe used the character of Giles to examine how the television show works as a hinge between the old world and the new; he is caught between the language of the ancient texts, which make up his beloved library, and the slang-filled language of Buffy and her friends. He becomes an interpreter, yet when the character of Dracula, whose representation is clearly indebted to the iconography of the Universal movie, appears in Season Five of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Giles is somewhat lost. Rein and Grebe explained this by suggesting that

the character of Dracula is too much a part of the pop-culture canon, rather than the historical archives, for Giles to have actual knowledge. Giles's 'Englishness' is helpful in many situations, but it has its limitations, leading to questions as to what forms of knowledge are privileged by society.

6 The Rising Tide: Anti-Colonialism, Social Justice, and Diversity in the Whedonverses

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.*"

[23] Amy Li began by noting that although *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is commendable for its inclusion of two Asian American women as part of its main cast, likely due to Maurissa Tancharoen's influence on the show, the representations of Asian-ness that the show provides are not unproblematic. She suggested that the treatment of the two characters, Skye/Daisy and Melinda May, point to two of the problems of representation that non-white characters often face: colorblindness and stereotyping. Although the hybridization of Skye/Daisy's identity (she is half-white and half-Asian, just as she is half-alien and half-human) allows for an exploration of the liminality experienced by many people who identify as bi- or multi-racial, her character's status as an orphan erases her ethnic and cultural heritage; as Li explains, she is "orphaned from culture." Instead, her character is whitewashed, a practice that universalizes and normalizes the experience of whiteness and provides only a visual representation of diversity without consideration for diversity of experience. In contrast, May's character was rewritten after casting, and her Asian-ness was initially coded using the stereotypes of the Dragon Lady, the inscrutable Asian, and Martial Arts Mistress. However, Li noted that as the seasons progressed, the representation of May's character moved away from some of these stereotypes and became more complex. Li concluded by suggesting that the idea of the Asian superhero could be used to dismantle some of the destructive stereotypes associated with Asian-Americans' status as model minorities.

Rebecca Kumar "'Wanna see my impression of Gandhi?': Anti-Colonial Possibilities in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*"

[24] Rebecca Kumar started her paper by contextualizing Buffy's line in the season three premier "Anne," "Want to see my impression of Gandhi?" within the show's troubling representation of race. She noted that Buffy's "irreverent reference" to Gandhi is troubling, especially given representations of non-white characters and forces, like Kendra, the Inca mummy girl, the vengeful Chumash spirit in "Pangs," and the zombie-raising Nigerian Mask. She observed that while demons and vampires are frequently racialized by the show, standing in for the Other, black characters are killed off and Asian characters are silenced. This leads to what she calls her "ambivalent fandom" as a nonwhite woman. She argued that while *Buffy's* approach to race is problematic, there are stories, like Anya's status as an immigrant and Glory's diaspora, with which nonwhite viewers can identify. Asserting the challenge of intersectional identities, she argued that many women of color have historically been excluded from postcolonial and feminist struggles. Positing that Buffy's activation of all of the world's Slayers, and the show's privileging of cooperation, emotion, and destabilizing boundaries, presents "postcolonial possibilities," Kumar ended her paper on a positive, if slightly ambivalent note.

Kristan Woolford "Social Justice in Science Fiction Storyworlds"

[25] Kristan Woolford's paper, read by Li and Kumar in his absence, began with a shot-by-shot description of a scene he had produced in which, in a dystopian future, a car is stopped and the driver is assaulted by a robotic police officer. Connecting this scene to the current crisis of conflict between law enforcement and members of the community of color (a conflict that haunted the news during this conference), Woolford argued that science fiction stories can provide enough "distance" that they allow viewers to understand the plights and experiences of marginalized groups. He posited that science fiction texts can be used to promote social justice and what Elizabeth Anderson refers to as Democratic Equality. Woolford drew off of Whedon's work

with the *Astonishing X-Men*, and its construction of mutant as Other, to consider how the story line about the medical cure for mutant identity might be read as a metaphor for the assimilationist ideology that blames people of color for not conforming to mainstream white society. He also argued that the confrontation between Mal and the Operative in *Serenity* allows viewers to identify with either philosophy and opens up the possibility of debate about how to go about constructing the "best version of life."

7 Whedon and Globalization

Philip Smith 'Chinoiserie, Caning and Code-switching: Finding *Serenity* in Singapore'

[26] Philip Smith established the ways that *Firefly* is inherently interested in multiculturalism and used the example of the socio-cultural history of Singapore as a lens through which we can offer meaningful interpretations of the show. Smith pointed out that the large majority of academia that has focussed on *Firefly* has situated it within the American-Western context, but suggested that, although the show is clearly interacting with the Western, the academic emphasis on it has left *Firefly's* interaction with Asian cultures underexplored. Smith elaborated on this point by showing that the theme of resistance, which is absolutely integral to *Firefly's* narrative, is also a strong recurring motif of Singaporean theatre and literature. In this way, *Firefly* may work as a companion text to many established Asian texts. Although many of the characters in *Firefly* speak with a Southern American accent, Mandarin is often incorporated into the dialogue, especially in the form of curse words and terms of endearment. This may suggest that Mandarin represents a less formal, more naturalistic, form of communication within the *Firefly* universe. Smith, citing Susan Mandala's essay on code-switching in the series, also explained that code-switching, the act of changing one's language to suit different environments, is an important part of the show—as exemplified by the show's use of Singlish (the interspersing of English and Singaporean).

Christine Jarvis "Exploring Globalization: The Public Pedagogy of Joss Whedon"

[27] Christine Jarvis began her discussion by introducing the concept of "imagined universes" as a way of providing education and offering a way to recreate and rework established power systems. As there becomes an increasing number of ways to consume visual media, its influence as an educational tool seems to be growing. This leads us to question the style of "teaching" with which media-makers like Joss Whedon engage; are they radically didactic or figures of the establishment? Jarvis's presentation used *Firefly* as a lens through which we can interrogate Whedon's style of teaching. Due to being set in a dystopian future, where the rules that govern our current culture have been dismantled, the show has an opportunity to present radical new forms of social order and justice. Jarvis makes the point that the villains in *Firefly,* as with many villains in the Whedonverses, are attractive, which stops the series from being completely didactic, but the Alliance is still established as a place of evil. The show takes little time to explore the social ramifications of this new liminal space; the audience is not encouraged to see much in the way of positive aspects of it. In this sense the show may reinforce traditional notions of good vs evil, rather than interrogating them. Jarvis also questioned Captain Mal's form of leadership: Is he just another, slightly modified, form of the patriarchy? He uses violence to get what he wants, just as the Alliance does, and whilst it may be to a "better" aim, it is still an assumption that brute force is an effective tool. The alternative universe of *Firefly* may be nostalgic rather than challenging.

Elizabeth L. Rambo "'The mission is what matters--right?': Third-Culture Identity Paradigms in *Buffy* 7.17 'Lies My Parents Told Me'"

[28] Elizabeth L. Rambo began her discussion of "third culture kids" in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* by situating it in a close reading of the episode "Lies My Parents Told Me." Rambo explained that a third culture identity is one that is informed by having a relationship with

multiple social and political cultures, such as children who have travelled extensively due to their parents being diplomats, missionaries, or members of the military. By drawing on the work of David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken, Rambo argued that the characters of Buffy, Giles, and Robin Wood are somewhat typical of the "cross-cultural kid": a person who is forced to occupy several cultural identities. Particularly important to Rambo's analysis of these characters is the idea of 'the mission"—Buffy's drive to save the world and Robin's desire to avenge his mother's death—as "cross-cultural kids" are often taught to understand and respect their parent's mission. Often this mission is handed down to the child, a theme that Rambo identified in the Buffyverse by using the example of Giles being informed that he would be a Watcher at the age of ten. Clearly this example also ties into the lineage of the Slayer, from which Buffy inherits powers that are innate rather than chosen. The world of the Slayer, and all of the sacrifices it demands of those who interact with it, may work as its own unique "third culture."

8 Body Politics

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

[29] Tamy Burnett opened her paper by noting that Whedon's engagement with reproductive rights has been under-examined by scholars, although his relationship to women's rights more broadly has been well documented. Burnett argued that taking a look at Whedon's work demonstrates that his politics are progressive and left-leaning, and his publicized donation to Planned Parenthood should have come as no surprise to fans. However, Whedon was also involved in controversy earlier in 2015 with the Black Widow storyline in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Widow refers to herself as a monster when talking to Bruce Banner, and some viewers were troubled by the conflation of monstrosity and sterility, arguing that Whedon had betrayed his feminist roots. Burnett argued this is too simplistic a reading, and noted that Whedon doesn't textually engage with reproductive rights as frequently as other issues, but when he does, it is tied to humanity and monstrosity. Burnett

illustrated this by exploring three storylines from Whedon's works dealing with women's reproductive rights: Ripley's forced maternity in *Alien Resurrection*; Buffy's choice to have an abortion in the *Season Nine* comics; and Black Widow's forced sterilization. Burnett noted, in her analysis, the ways in which each of these characters have a complicated relationship to human identity, and how cultural conflations of women's reproductive systems and choice with monstrosity are used but also questioned by Whedon. Burnett closed by arguing that Whedon denies us an easy answer in each of these examples and in his work more broadly.

Bethan Jones "'Advocate of mass murder for fun and profit': Negotiating Celebrity Political Affiliation through a Conservative Moral Framework"

[30] Bethan Jones began her paper by noting the tendency of fan studies scholarship to engage with liberal critiques of conservative texts, for example issues surrounding gender in *Twilight*, but maintaining that we should consider opposing views. Jones argued that even if scholars are not comfortable with anti-fannish behaviour, it needs to be addressed for the insight it might provide. Jones focused on the backlash that Joss Whedon suffered from fans following a tweet by Planned Parenthood that stated that he would match donations from people who signed up to support the organization before the end of 2015. Fans tweeted their disappointment at Whedon along with comments renouncing their fandom and stating they would burn their DVDs. Jones asserted many of these threats could be seen as performance rather than plans for action, and they were positioned as individual responses rather than a collective call to boycott Whedon. She also noted that it was Whedon's paratextual activism that caused this backlash, rather than his texts which can be read as progressive, and she argued that Whedon's role as auteur in tweets means that fans have to accept his progressive politics as coming from him, rather than being mediated by other producers he worked with. Fans' ontological security, Jones suggested, was therefore disrupted by Whedon's liberal politics directly opposing their own politics, and this, as well as the application of a moral

evaluation framework to the texts following Whedon's paratextual activism, resulted in a move from fandom to anti-fandom by these fans.

Molly Brayman "The Morning After: Post-coital Discourse in Joss Whedon's Film and Television Work"

[31] Molly Brayman opened her paper with a question. After pointing out that the first time Buffy has sex her boyfriend turns into an actual monster, she asked, "What does Whedon want to tell us about sex?" She argued that Whedon is interested in challenging traditional views of sex, especially how it pertains to gender and analyzed this challenge through focusing on post-coital scenes in the Whedonverses. Brayman posited that this is underrepresented in both scholarship and on screen. Sex, and the lead-up to it, is common, yet we rarely see scenes about how we communicate about sex or in relationships. Characters get to talk about sex in post-coital scenes, and these scenes allow us to interrogate Whedon's attitudes toward women, feminism, bodies, and sexual politics. Yet precisely because it is the Whedonverse, sex is power, and post-coital talks (or lack of) reveal the power hierarchies at play in the relationship, not intimacy between the characters. Brayman further argued that coding data could be used to look at pairings, power over time, and attitudes to sex in different media properties, not simply the Whedonverses.

9 War in the Whedonverses

Michael Goodrum "War, Profit, and Migration in *Firefly*"

[32] Mitch Goodrum's paper considered *Firefly* and *Serenity* from the perspective of movement and migration in American history. He noted the primary reasons for migration: 1) economic advantage, 2) resisting the sovereignty of an occupying force, and 3) forced migration. He argued John Bodnar's theory of transplantation, combined with aspects of Oscar Handlin's idea of uprootedness and Fredrick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, in which immigrants influence the existing culture of a space and the culture clash, best explains the migrant

experience of *Firefly*. Comparing the terraformed planets of *Firefly* to the American myth of the virgin land (a national narrative that erased the existence and subsequent genocide of indigenous people), Goodrum took the position that the Reavers, who are silenced in the series and film, are analogous to American Indians, whose violence can be attributed to the encroachment of and a response to the mistreatment by white settlers. Goodrum also examined how the Mudders suggest the forced migration of indentured servants in an objectifying capitalist system (which also commodifies River). He posited that as a veteran, Mal's nomadic migration, made possible by his ship, is a rejection of the sovereignty of the Alliance. Although the Alliance and Blue Sun Corporation profit from movement and migration (going so far as to tolerate slavery), migration can offer a site of freedom and resistance; he argues that movement is "integral to the Alliance and a way to resist it" as "the movement of people and information challenge the government."

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

[33] Craig Franson positioned *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as a refutation of the first *Avengers* movie. He argued that first film used images evocative of September 11th to offer an optimistic regeneration through violence of America's moral certainty and exceptionalism, maintaining that the "spectacle [functioned] as a source of pleasure." The Avengers' ability to save New York from destructive alien forces creates a narrative in which "the country returned to greatness." However, this optimism, he asserted, requires viewers to identify with either individualist, technocratic neoliberalism (symbolized by Tony Stark) or self-sacrificing, conservative, nationalistic, traditional democracy (represented by Steve Rogers). While the former discursively aligns itself with a concern over rights and the latter's focus is on securing popular sovereignty, both discourses are used to promote and benefit American interests. Using Spivak's critique of *Frankenstein*, Franson argued that in *Age of Ultron* Stark's worldview is ultimately flawed, because it relies on only scientific logic, and in the second film,

we see the development a sense of aesthetics and morality through Vision and the Maximoff twins. He suggested that while the first film is neocolonialist, *Age of Ultron* attempts to undo the imperialist implications, but unfortunately, repeats some of the same ideological missteps. He concluded by suggesting that the film is best seen as an "illuminating mistake."

10 Posthuman/More than Human: Cyborgs, AI, and Brainwashing
Bronwen Calvert "'The real deal': Cyborg Identity and Simulacra in *Dollhouse*"

[34] Bronwen Calvert drew on Jean Baudrillard's formulation of successive 'phases of the image' to examine the concept of manufactured Active personalities in *Dollhouse*. "Reality" in relation to both the Actives and Baudrillard is a term to be used with some caution, particularly as we move to the third phase, the simulacrum, in which the "signs of the real" take the place of "the real itself." Calvert argued that the process of imprinting individuals with constructed personalities creates cyborgs and the Priya/Sierra and Daniel Perrin storylines accentuate tensions between simulated and "actual" identities. Calvert showed how the imprinted personalities in *Dollhouse* are treated as real by the Actives, but also demonstrated how non-Active characters, like Topher and Adelle, are affected by close proximity of the Dolls as well.

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

[35] The focus of Sherry Ginn's paper was the brainwashing of Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow) through her education and training. Ginn noted that the terms "condition" and "brainwashing" frighten us because they imply the existence of someone, somewhere who is in control. The word "brainwash" itself comes from a translation of the Chinese term and among the steps used by the Chinese to brainwash their captives were isolation, physical harm, sleep deprivation, and starvation. Ginn observed that the Marvel-sanctioned *Forever Red*

provides us with more detail about Natasha's brainwashing. Obeisance to orders is paramount, so memory wipes are implemented for Black Widow, but the conditioning is not entirely successful with all of the characters undergoing it and memories do resurface.

Madeline Munterbjorn "Alterity, Ambivalence, and Artificial Intelligence"

[36] Madeline Munterbjorn opened her talk by citing Marti Noxon's Season Six DVD commentary, where she suggests the Buffybot would provide "fodder for academic symposia." Munterbjorn acknowledged the work done on the Buffybot but suggested that scholarly discourse should look at the show through the bot's point of view, not simply on Buffy's perspective. The Buffybot endures a variety of ordeals that the "real" Buffy would be unable to endure, but Munterbjorn argued that this is a problematic narrative device with deep roots in sexism and racism. Indeed, Muntersbjorn maintained that arguments that the Buffybot is reappropriated by the female community are not accurate as she goes from being Spike's slave to becoming Willow's. While the Buffybot can be considered a bridge between structuralist and post-structuralist discourse, the Buffybot as a transgressive simulacrum might be better way to view her, and Munterbjorn drew parallels with *RWBY's* Penny Polendina, who is embraced as a friend rather than dismissed as a machine.

11 Masculinity

Georgina Willms "The Inter-male Relationships of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*"

[37] Georgina Willms began her discussion by acknowledging that there is a large body of academic work interrogating the feminist credentials of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* but significantly less on the interactions between males in the Buffyverse. Willms used the example of Giles to elaborate on how the show destabilizes traditional interpretations of male power, arguing that, at first glance, Giles may be

seen as a representation of the ruling class. However, that representation is interrupted by the introduction of Ethan Rayne, whose appearance in Sunnydale provides the audience with an unexpected backstory for Giles. Willms also discussed the relationship between Giles and Xander, especially in the episodes "The Pack" and "Restless," the former of which may be seen to establish a problematic dynamic in which Giles agrees to keep Xander's memory of his attempted assault of Buffy secret while the latter elaborates on Xander's desire to have Giles as a replacement paternal figure. Giles as a figure of paternity is once again visited, as Willms pointed out, in the episode "Tabula Rasa" when Spike suggests he may be Giles's son. This may lead audiences to question who the "real Giles" is and reveals a more nuanced and complex representation of homosocial interactions than is traditionally seen in genre television shows.

Daisy Butcher "'Like a Man Possessed': Masculinity in Crisis in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Season Six"

[38] Daisy Butcher began her discussion of destabilized masculinity in the sixth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* by using the incident of Spike's attempted rape of Buffy in the episode "Seeing Red" as a starting point for analysis. Butcher made the point that, in a fictional world overrunning with supernatural occurrences, the attempted rape is a very human event, making it, perhaps, even more shocking due to incongruity with the Buffyverse. Also in this episode, it is a modern weapon, an automatic pistol, which causes catastrophe, and tragedy is the result of a man-made tool not an act of supernatural malice. Butcher identified the way in which guns are widely interpreted as a representation of the phallus, linking Warren's feeling of inadequacy and disempowerment with his choice of weapon. The bullets from his gun, and all of the Freudian associations that present, are forced into two female bodies; the masculine disrupts the female form. The presentation linked this with the imagery of the Buffybot being dismembered. Butcher introduced the concept of the Penis Aculeatus (the male version of the Vagina Dentata) as a way of reinforcing her argument and expanded upon the metaphorical value of a vampire's body needing to

be penetrated in order to be killed. The presentation also discussed how the episode's events, which are some of the most brutal of the whole series, happen when Giles is away, perhaps showing a retrogressive view that patriarchy is still essential to maintain order.

Geraldine Crahay "The Insecure Masculinity of Zealous Civil Servants: The Operative and the Inspector"

[39] Geraldine Crahay presented a paper that compared and contrasted the character of 'The Operative' in *Firefly* and 'The Inspector' in Victor Hugo's classic novel *Les Miserables*. The discussion began with Crahay establishing the similar themes that run through the television show and the novel, including a preoccupation with resistance, the rule of law, and the moral implications of enforcing the law. The presentation posed the question as to what defines the zealous civil servant and linked the two characters together by virtue of their existence in times of political instability (the Operative in the post-war world and the Inspector in the French civil war) and their absence of core identities, as exemplified by their not being referred to by their first names. Crahay also linked the characters through their choice of weaponry; the sword and the stick are both phallic symbols and perhaps a visually symbolic way of suggesting that the characters are experiencing a crisis of masculinity. Crahay pointed out that both Whedon and Hugo's works are preoccupied with issues surrounding free will, atonement, and the pursuit of justice. By drawing parallels between the texts, Crahay was able to show how these themes extend over radically different time frames and perhaps how influenced Whedon is by literature.

12 Empowerment or Empire?: Troubling the Whedon Trope of Fighting the Good Fight (Roundtable)

Samira Nadkarni, Mary Ellen Iatropoulos, Jessica Hautsch

[40] Samira Nadkarni began the roundtable discussion by defining empire and considering the various forms that it takes. She argued that when talking about empire, we are discussing a wide range of practices,

including colonization, cultural imperialism, economic exploitation, cultural hierarchies, financial systems, education and media, knowledge structures, and structures of privilege.

[41] Jessica Hautsch focused her discussion on the way in which Buffy's good fight is positioned as a just war and rearticulates some of the same discourses, like moral absolutism, the evil enemy, and exceptionalism, that the United States uses to justify its preemptive and interventionist military policies. She argues that *Buffy* needs its Slayer to be engaged in an endless war, because it is the battle against evil that justifies the Slayer's existence, gives her purpose, and bestows moral authority on her.

[42] Mary Ellen Iatropoulous considered the representation of corporations as a form of institutionalized evil. She argued that although *Angel, Dollhouse,* and *Firefly/Serenity* all focus on individuals resisting corporations, they do not actually provide a productive model for combating corporate culture. We actually need corporations, she noted, and most people are not willing to actually risk their lives, exist completely outside of the system, or engage in physical violence to fight against corporations. Whedon, she concluded, does not provide a model of realistic resistance.

[43] Samira Nadkarni considered the issue of U.S. exceptionalism, moral authority, and humanitarian intervention as demonstrated by Whedon's work in the MCU. She began with the question "Who gets to justify going where?" and considered the way in which the Avengers and Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. frequently disregard national boundaries during their humanitarian missions. She also interrogated the racial politics of who gets redeemed in Whedon's properties and contrasted Wanda's redemption in *Age of Ultron* with Jiaying's condemnation in *S.H.I.E.L.D.*

[44] During the discussion, Rebecca Kumar considered the difficulty of resistance when the only language that you have to resist empire is the same language that empire has coopted. Nadkarni also noted the difficulty of removing oneself from the dominant discourse.

[45] Kristopher Woofter asserted that in *Buffy* corporations are not invisible, and that by the end of Season Seven, saving the world means destroying suburban America (and the mall). Tamy Burnett also

posited that when it comes to capitalist complicity, there are different levels, which can allow for more resistance.

[46] Renee St. Louis noted that Joss Whedon works for corporations and his work is produced and mediated by them. But, she argued, he demonstrates how to make use of privilege, even if you can't help but reinscribe it. The conversation also shifted to the issue of ethics. AmiJo Comeford observed that she always tries to see the people who work for corporation as people, and Iatropoulous argued that sometimes ethics are the result of privilege. People coming from a space of less privilege cannot afford to take the same ethical stands.

7.30 Conference Dinner

[47] During the traditional *Slayage* Conference dinner, the Mr. Pointy Award winners (for 2016 for work published in 2015) were announced. This award, honoring outstanding scholarship in the field of Whedon Studies, is presented to one long (book length) and one short (article length or book chapter) piece of scholarship each year. The winners for scholarship published in 2015 were David Kociemba and Mary Ellen Iatropoulos, who won the Short Mr. Pointy for "Separate Worlds or One?: Canonicity, Medium and Authorship," published in *The Comics of Joss Whedon: Critical Essays,* edited by Valerie Frankel, and Michael Goodrum and Philip Smith, who won the Long Mr. Pointy for editing the collection *Firefly Revisited: Essays on Joss Whedon's Classic Series*. Since the conference is biennial, the WSA also honored the winners for work published in 2014: Short Mr. Pointy winner Kristopher Woofter for "Watchers in the Woods: Meta-Horror, Genre Hybridity, and Reality TV Critique in *The Cabin in the Woods*," published in *Reading Joss Whedon*; and Long Mr. Pointy winners Rhonda V. Wilcox, Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthea Masson, and David Lavery for editing *Reading Joss Whedon*. Thanks were offered to the awards Jury: Chair Bronwen Calvert, Secretary Mary Ellen Iatropoulos, and other members: Stan Beeler, Tamy Burnett, Ami Comeford, Lorna Jowett, David Kociemba, and Mike Starr (some of whom had to recuse themselves from certain votes). The Mr. Pointy Awards continue to highlight the strength of Whedon Studies scholarship being published each year.

Saturday 9 July

Keynote: Marcus Recht "Undead Masculinities: Visual Gender Constructions of Angel and Spike"

[48] Marcus Recht opened his discussion with an analysis of how the clothing of key male protagonists in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reveals elements of their personal histories, key aspects of their characterization, and their narrative arcs. By collecting a comprehensive set of screenshots from the show, Recht was able to demonstrate how the visuals of the characters change throughout the seasons. Recht situated Angel's clothing, velvet blazers and open collars, as a reflection of a queer and extroverted aesthetic, linking him with the dandy and the Byronic hero. However, when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* look at Angel's past, his choice of clothing allows us an understanding of his emotional journey throughout time. In the episode "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been," Angel has clear visual links with James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, raising questions about how much Angel is influenced by the visuals of the pop-culture landscape. He is a reflection of his times and social standing and has links with the themes of *Rebel Without a Cause*, including the concepts of the outsider and eternal youth. Whilst Angel seems to be interacting with movie history, Spike is presented as being imbedded in the British punk movement. His physical representation, with his bleached blonde hair and clothing, corresponds with the musicians Sid Vicious and Billy Idol.

[49] Angel's body proves a counter-thesis to the traditional representation of the vampire body as willowy and ethereal; David Boreanaz has the muscularity of a 1950's superhero actor. Despite the power that this muscularity connotes, his naked body is often presented as passive and tortured. This is in contrast to Spike's body, which is slimmer and more defined, which may provide him with more agency. Recht demonstrated that when human characters are tortured in the shows, they are usually fully clothed, whilst scenes of vampire torture usually display them as half naked, making their bodies part of the visual spectacle of torture. The vampire body is also often tortured while it is hung in the shape of the crucifixion. By displaying the vampire body so

frequently, these shows call into question the idea of the female gaze. Recht used the example of Angel exercising topless, whilst being watched by Buffy, as a way of demonstrating how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* often uses the female point of view.

13 Trauma and Mental Health

Alyson Buckman "'What is your childhood trauma?!': Living with Trauma in the Whedonverse"

[50] Alyson Buckman began her paper by observing just how traumatized the characters of the Whedonverse must be. All of our protagonists experience trauma, and it can be read as contributing to Whedon's larger themes of helplessness and empowerment. Buckman discussed representations of trauma as the "discourse of the unrepresentable," and suggested that they could help us to confront the anxieties and fears of a world that seems to be increasingly violent and dangerous. She reviewed a number of the symptoms associated with trauma, such as numbness, anxiety and fear, flashbacks, visceral sensations, and loss of control. She also noted the biological response to trauma and the way in which it affects the brain (a fact that is likely significant for the Actives in the Dollhouse) and that the participation in violence increases the likelihood of PTSD. Buckman then shifted her focus to the Slayers of *Buffy*. The trauma of Faith's abusive past, witnessing the death of her Watcher, her betrayal by Gwendolyn Post, and being hunted by the Watcher's council can help us to understand Faith's insecurities and guilt as a response to trauma. Likewise, she suggested that Buffy's "death wish" (or death drive as the Freudians would say) is a result of the trauma she has endured fighting the forces of darkness. Buckman posited that Buffy sees the world as "hell" and is exhausted by it, which results in her dreams, her suicide in Season Five, withdrawal in Season Six, and second suicide attempt in "Once More With Feeling." Buffy did not "come back wrong"; in the later seasons she is not herself because of the trauma she has endured. Buckman argued that community and communication are of vital importance when it comes to attempting to heal from traumatic experiences (note

the differences between Buffy and Faith or Wishverse!Buffy and Sunnydale!Buffy) and suggests that shows like *Buffy*, which explore trauma, can help people suffering from it to cope, as well as help others to better understand it.

Catherine Pugh "Such Pretty Things: Madness in the Whedonverse"

[51] Catherine Pugh's interest is in literary representations of madness, which she explains is transgressive and transformative. She categorized madness within the horror genre as the fracture state (high charisma/ low empathy, which tends to be associated with vampires), the feral state (the violent animalism of werewolves), and the tabula rasa state (blankness and emptiness associated with zombies). She argued that the tabula rasa state tends to be associated with women and is connected to 19th century hysteria, melancholia, and literary figures such as Ophelia and Lady MacBeth. Within the Whedonverses, Drusilla and River demonstrate the dissociative and sometimes incoherent tabula rasa state. Their physicality (long hair, light or natural colored clothes, graceful movements, and fragile appearance), linguistic representation (poetic, imagery-rich language that is often nonsensical), and prophetic ability mark them as in this state of madness. Pugh noted that madness in the Whedonverses often allows access to different realities and can be used as a weapon (as it is in the case of River and Drusilla). She argued that the hyperfemininity and infantalization of these characters is an illusion; they are powerful and dangerous. She also noted that this madness is the result of trauma (although not all trauma leads to madness in the Whedonverse). Concluding her talk with "Normal Again," Pugh posited that the episode positions the audience as insane, unable to tell which reality is true.

14 Whedon and Science Fiction

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

[52] Michael Starr noted that the end of the world is one of science fiction's most enduring tropes, and this is certainly evident in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s many apocalypses, to say nothing of the threats of various armageddons in *Angel*, *Firefly*, *Dollhouse*, *The Cabin in the Woods*, and *The Avengers*. Starr used the notion of accelerationism, which suggests that in fully expressing the potentialities of capitalism we can exhaust it and open up something beyond it. In aesthetic terms, accelerationism revels in depicting situations where the worst of capitalism comes to pass, and science fiction becomes about contemporary fears placed in defamiliarized narratives. Through focusing on *Dollhouse, Avengers,* and *Age of Ultron*, Starr suggested that the Whedonverses function as an accelerationist metaphor and argued that accelerationist theory can work as a cypher to look at these capitalist utopias and deconstruct them. Thus, *Cabin in The Woods* is about the biopower of capitalism, overturning consumerist identity rather than overturning capitalism, yet it suggests an intervention that imagines radically different freedoms beyond capitalism. The Avengers, for Starr, are workers fighting the unilateral capitalist ideology espoused by both Stark and Ultron. They save the world from the singularity that Ultron posits, but they create Vision and thus accelerate the situation. *Dollhouse* is where capitalism has blocked a historical imagination—the Dolls are wiped and have no immediate agency, and their daily imprints provide alienation from their historical time, a fundamental aspect of modern capitalism. Starr specifically linked this depiction of *Dollhouse* as the worst deprivations of capitalism and the creation of a neo/slavish workforce. Starr argued that Echo is a key figure here as she forms a personhood from fragmentary identities and thus avoids being reduced by capitalism. Starr ended by acknowledging that the alignment of accelerationism with the figure of the posthuman is dubious as political strategy, but science fiction is positioned as a powerful artistic means of exploring radically different worlds.

Alexandra Garner "'Darn your sinister attraction': Buffybot and the Construction of Humanity"

[53] Alexandra Garner analyzed fanfiction characterizations of, and fan reactions to, the Buffybot and the way she is presented on the show. Garner argued that the show presents a dehumanizing narrative, where the Buffybot is created as both cyborg and sexual object, creating complexities between her own body and Buffy's. In contrast, fanfiction characterizations of Buffybot allow for a fuller characterisation, though she's still presented as "lesser" than Buffy. Garner offered a close reading of several fanfiction stories, as well as episodes in which the Buffybot appears, and other non-human characters such as Spike. Garner argued that the Buffybot is not a mere robot, but rather that she is more cyborg, and that opens up queer possibilities within fanfiction. Indeed, fans find and create spaces for Buffybot to feel, dream, and think through their fanworks.

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

[54] Josefine Wälivaara began her paper by noting that science fiction has often been characterised as juvenile by various discourses, but while this can be considered part of a dominant discourse of science fiction in relation to film and television, it does not include all science fiction. Rather, Wälivaara suggested that it derives from a highly influential type of science fiction represented by *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, which became synonymous with the idea of science fiction as a popular genre. Part of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*'s legacy was the disassociation from adult themes, particularly sexuality and queer sexualities. Science fiction as scientific, as masculine, and as juvenile meant that the genre was positioned as asexual, or with sexuality existing only at the periphery. Wälivaara argued that *Firefly* was an early sign of television science fiction moving away from being juvenile, technology focused, and generic about identity. In particular, *Firefly* bucked science fiction's tendency toward oblique and juvenile portrayals of sexuality, where domestic love is assumed to be boring. *Firefly* mixed genres, but Whedon didn't account for the manner in which its adult content and moral ambiguity came up against expectations. Its genre hybridity, format,

franchising and the expectations of generic science fiction were thus all reasons for *Firefly*'s cancellation.

15 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 (Roundtable)

Mar Rubio-Hernández, Irene Raya Bravo, Inmaculada Casas-Delgado, and Cristina Algaba

[55] Although the English-speaking academic world has embraced Joss Whedon as an auteur and his work as a rich source of intellectual enquiry, this roundtable illuminated the fact that academia by and for Spanish language fans of the Whedonverse is limited. Mar Rubio-Hernández, Irene Raya Bravo, Inmaculada Casas-Delgado, and Cristina Algaba introduced the first Spanish language book dedicated to Whedon's work: a book which covers his films, television programmes, and comic books. This approach stemmed from the idea that a book which encompassed all of Whedon's work, rather than splintering the focus onto specific films or programmes, would open up the discussion of Whedon Studies more successfully in Spanish-language countries. This seems especially important as there is not a strong televisual lineage of science fiction in Spain (something which may be changing with the recent popularity of the television show *El Ministerio del Tiempo*). Each contributor discussed aspects of the chapters that she contributed to the book; these included an innovative look at Whedon's beginnings in the entertainment industry through the lens of the characters in *The Avengers* universe, an examination of *Angel* as a single entity, rather than a brand extension, by focusing on the existential elements of the programme, and Whedon's ability to create blockbusters as well as independent films through an in-depth analysis of *Much Ado About Nothing* (which received a limited release in Spain on 20th December 2013). The presenters expressed their desire to make academic textbooks that primarily focus on television studies accessible to the general audience by putting them in large scale bookstores, creating promotional material, and engaging with current trends in the televisual landscape. Audience members asked

several follow-up questions about distribution and dissemination of Whedon scholarship in Spanish-language countries. Questioners exhibited particular interest in *El Ministerio del Tiempo* and possible parallels to Whedon's work. The presenters were asked whether their attempts at studying popular culture in academia were acknowledged or rewarded in the university in which they teach. Although the answer seemed to be in the negative, Mar Rubio-Hernández, Irene Raya Bravo, Inmaculada Casas-Delgado, and Cristina Algaba expressed excitement at seeing their work gaining traction with both academic and non-academic audiences, as demonstrated by their placement in Spanish non-fiction book charts. This dissemination is helped by their active website, which they use to publicize events as well as to post shorter academic pieces. Audience member Anna Grebe expressed interest in the fact that Buffy Summers has become important in the iconography of some feminist groups in Chile. Her remarks led to a discussion about how transposing the show from its original cultural milieu either changes or reinforces certain aspects of it, including its feminist qualities. During this discussion it was revealed that the dub-artist for Sarah Michelle Gellar is also the voice for popular characters such as Emma Swan on *Once Upon a Time*, making her an interesting figure as she is both very famous (aurally) and not very famous (visually).

Whedon Studies Association Meeting All were invited to attend the meeting, chaired by President Stacey Abbott. Past President Tanya Cochran presented the biennial report on the state of the organization, which is expanding. The organization discussed matters such as conference planning and methodology for the future and the continuing work of the journal. Secretary Kris Woofter took detailed minutes available to all.

16 Up Close and Personal: Episodes under the Microscope

Cynthia Burkhead "'I've a feeling we're not in Sunnydale anymore': The Hollywood Lineage of 'Once More with Feeling'"

[56] Cynthia Burkhead began her discussion of "Once More with Feeling" by establishing it within the long tradition of the Hollywood musical, explaining how Whedon's use of diegetic music aligns it much more closely with an Old Hollywood aesthetic than the teen musicals of the 1980's. The presentation reinforced this interpretation by drawing parallels between the musical numbers of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode and the traditional musical standards. These include the "I want song" where a character expresses their desires through music ("Going Through the Motions") and the "I am song" where protagonists reassert their personal identities through song ("I've Got a Theory"). Burkhead also argued that the visuals of the episode have a strong correlation with the classical Hollywood musical, pointing to the "Mustard Song" as a prime example of musical choreography and cinematography, explaining how the formation of the dancers reflects dance sequences in *West Side Story* and *A Chorus Line*. The song "I'll Never Tell" has clear correlations with "Good Morning" from *Singing in the Rain*; it carries the same sense of diegetic music encroaching on the domestic sphere and carries with it the same pop sensibility. However, this song seems to be self-reflexive, including lyrics which would have been deemed inappropriate in the traditional genre piece. In this sense, Burkhead argues that the episode is an act of bricolage, mixing influences and generic conventions to create something that both reflects its origins in the movie musical and offers interesting deviations from it. By infusing traditional tropes with contemporary issues, Whedon is perhaps able to create an episode of television that offers something fresh but also engages in a conversation with the pop-culture past.

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

[57] Mary Alice Money presented a close reading analysis of the *Firefly* episode "Heart of Gold," with a specific emphasis on the role of women's representation in the Western genre. By comparing the female characters in *Firefly* to their antecedents in the Old Hollywood Western tradition, Money was able to demonstrate a focus on female agency in *Firefly* that reworks the more passive, or almost non-existent, role that women often played in movies like *The Magnificent Seven*. The

presentation established that the episode calls upon the tropes of the Western but is not satirical in nature; it is not a parody as much as it is an homage. Money pointed out that one of the great pleasures of the series, and this episode in particular, is picking apart the allusions and intertextual references to the genre. The presentation explained that the West was often represented as a place people could live more democratically, especially in terms of equality between men and women. The visibility of female labor in this environment, arguably, allowed women increased agency—the first state to allow female suffrage was Wyoming. However, the females in "Heart of Gold," are demonstrably quicker to violence than in their generic forbears. *Firefly* allows the female characters a physical power and strength that was rare in the Hollywood Western, although Money did present Grace Kelly's character in *High Noon* as an interesting and dynamic example of female empowerment. This level of violence results in a level of explicitness that contemporary television allows but would have only been alluded to in the films of the early 50's.

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

[58] Svetlana Seibel began her discussion by proposing that there is a dynamic between the characters of Angel and Faith that neatly reflects the narrative structure and themes of the Orpheus myth—as reflected in the title of the episode "Orpheus." Orpheus is a central character in ancient Greek mythology. In a short clip, the link between Orpheus and Angel was made explicit through song; Orpheus is referred to as a "divine singer" and Angel is shown singing (less divinely) along to Barry Manilow's hit "Mandy" and is introduced by the song *MacArthur Park*. The presentation also pointed out that Angelus is shown being "saved" by two supernatural entities, Buffy and Faith, an intriguing intertextuality with the ancient story—he becomes a "damsel in distress" who is 'saved' from his own personal version of hell, thus taking on the role of Eurydice in the myth. However, Seibel was clear that the Orpheus archetype is not simply applicable to the character of Angel/Angelus; citing Halfyard's work on Orpheus in *Buffy*, she noted

that the show creates multiple meanings and multiple understandings by placing different characters in the Orpheus role. Faith herself is often represented as needing to be redeemed from a hell of shame and impulsiveness—as demonstrated in her season one arc, which runs from the episode "Five By Five" to "Sanctuary." By offering multiple models of the Orpheus archetype, *Angel* can be seen to be in constant negotiation with it, offering reimaginings and renegotiations and providing new lenses through which the myth can be reinterpreted.

17 Uploading to the Cortex: *Watcher Junior* and the Process of Undergraduate Publication (Roundtable)

Meghan Winchell, Jodie Kreider, Cynthea Masson, and Kristopher Woofter

[59] Jodie Kreider and Meghan Winchell, the current editors of *Watcher Junior: The Undergraduate Journal of Whedon Studies*, opened the roundtable with a discussion on the history of the journal and detailing how they divide up editorial tasks based on their individual strengths. Winchell takes responsibility for communicating with students and reviewers and acquiring the permission needed to publish. Kreider does all of the technology: updating the websites and Facebook, formatting the articles, and advertising to professors and students. Both then compare what the student's final version looks like with the reviewer's comments. Winchell noted how the editor position was very much a two-person job and that they are always on the lookout for more reviewers to help with the process. They also noted the need to keep the reviewers' broad timelines in mind: if they are in academia, shorter periods of two months are fine for summer but during term they will need longer.

[60] Kreider spoke about keeping *Watcher Junior* relevant to the association, to the undergraduates who are consuming Whedon differently to older academics, and to how Whedon's work evolves over time. She noted that it is not just about research skills: undergraduate journals have to walk a line between final quality and growing a student's skills. In part, however, this is also about making sure they provide a

good supportive atmosphere that can see the organization and pop culture studies grow. Both Kreider and Winchell agreed that questions they ask about the submissions include: is the writing of good quality, is it supported by evidence, is the argument insightful, and how/does it tie into larger scholarship? They also noted that there are challenges to the process. Sometimes students do not revise the paper they submitted to their class before they submit it to the journal. Often, students don't understand the revision and editorial process. If a recommendation is for a student to revise and resubmit, it often means they do not revise the piece and disappear from the process. Part of this issue, they agreed, was in dealing with reviewer comments. Students aren't familiar with the process and often panic on receiving the comments or do the nuts and bolts of what is asked for rather than engaging with the critiques. It is important for the journal to avoid crushing students' spirits, but also to maintain a high bar. It is thus important to get students ready for the process of publication and help them to actually understand how that works. In addition to this, the other issues faced by *Watcher Junior* are the need for more articles, and linked to that an increase in the number of lecturers teaching classes on Whedon. Kreider and Winchell also noted they are hoping for those teaching to help students through the process of understanding reviews and to identify students who should submit to the journal.

[61] Cynthea Masson then talked about how she engages her students with the journal, noting that she starts promoting *Watcher Junior* from the very beginning of class by asking students to find out about the journal's history as part of their coursework. She also wrote to Kreider and Winchell to find out if there was anything they wanted to convey to the students. In their response, they asked Masson to remind students that the people peer reviewing their submissions would be some of the same people they would be reading in class. Masson also showed a video of *Slayage* conference attendees singing at the banquet to enable the students to see Slayage as community and to humanize the scholars they were reading. Academics were also invited to give Skype lectures to the class, which was received very well by students. Masson pointed out the importance of showing students they have something to say and that they can push back against ideas expressed in academic articles. She also

read us responses from some students to show what being published in *Watcher Junior* meant to them, from encouraging them in academic pursuits to helping them get a job.

[62] Kristopher Woofter spoke about his role as a reviewer for *Watcher Junior* and the manner in which he works with undergraduates. Woofter's area of expertize is horror, and he noted that, as a reviewer, he often sees students doing work and drawing on Whedon scholarship but not horror. One of his difficulties is how to challenge them to engage with that scholarship without their becoming daunted. There is thus an importance to finding a balance between Whedon scholarship and theoretical concepts that have their own history and need work. In order to do that, Woofter makes lots of track changes and engages in a conversation with the piece but also puts in general comments to contextualise his changes. All in all, it takes Woofter about three days to review a paper, of three-hour sessions each, and one of the biggest question he has to ask is how the paper contributes to bigger academic debates around Whedon and his collaborators. Suggesting key works of scholarship to help buffer or build a point and being careful about the misuse of terms are things Woofter has to detail to students but suggesting corrections to ideas that are misconceived can be very difficult. Winchell added that *Watcher Junior,* as a teaching journal, offers an educational experience for students, and this is a key difference from other academic journals. Woofter noted that he never rejects a piece submitted by a student to the journal. His recommendations are either to revise or to revise and resubmit.

[63] All roundtable participants had taken questions from the floor during the course of the session, offering a fluid space for discussion rather than the more typical paper followed by a question and answer session. The roundtable then opened to the floor, with Kreider and Winchell asking how they can encourage students to do the hard work of revising and resubmitting. One of the delegates, a current M.A. student in the U.K., noted that having a support system is an important issue: professors need to encourage students to come to them to re-review the paper and engage in dialogue with them. Conferee Samira Nadkarni also suggested an easy-to-access-and-comprehend document on the website which students could use to understand what the next

steps in the publication process are. This suggestion picked up on the earlier discussion in which Kreider and Winchell noted the importance of using *Watcher Junior* to educate students about writing for an academic journal. Kreider and Winchell committed to look at making a document for students on what the next steps are once they have received their reviewer comments.

18 Communication, Education, and University Fiction

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

[64] Amy Williams discussed how she uses the episodes "Hush" and "Once More with Feeling" to teach self-disclosure and social penetration theory to her students. These theories focus on the effects that sharing information about the self can have on forming (and dissolving) relationships and how it can contribute to or reduce relational satisfaction, arguing that "relationships are a series of self-disclosures." According to Williams, we build or disrupt intimacy by sharing information about ourselves and keeping one another's secrets, and she analyzes the effects that sharing information nonverbally or in song has for the various romantic relationships in *Buffy*. She argued that learning each other's secrets actually decreases Buffy and Riley's relational satisfaction, while Spike's disclosure of his feelings for Buffy and his determination to keep her secret helps to build intimacy between them. Xander's disclosure of his feelings for Anya by, ostensibly, defending her from Spike in "Hush" leads to greater intimacy, but their unwillingness to discuss the things that they sing about in "I'll Never Tell" eventually leads to the dissolution of their relationship. Likewise, while disclosures in "Hush" bring Willow and Tara together, magically and romantically, in "Once More with Feeling," they separate them.

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

[65] Dreama Pritt's presentation outlined the composition course that she teaches around the works of Joss Whedon. The goal of the course is for students to develop skills in critical thinking, writing, and researching, and Whedon provides an avenue to meet these goals. She discussed the texts she uses, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ("Hush," "Once More With Feeling," "Fool for Love," "Crush," "The Body," and "Forever"), *Doctor Horrible, Much Ado, Firefly, Serenity, Astonishing X-Men, Avengers,* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron,* and some of the connections that she makes to other areas of study (*Buffy* gets linked to the literary tradition of the vampire; *Much Ado* is taught within the context of Shakespeare's other work and performance criticism). She outlined the assignments students complete for the course: an annotated bibliography, personal reflection, research paper, and creative project. Her talk focused on the latter two, and she shared some of the students' research paper titles and their creative projects, which ranged from skits to webpages to sock puppets to iphone apps to genderbent versions of *Doctor Horrible.*

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

[66] Elizabeth Kate Switaj expressed her dissatisfaction with Season Four of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, attributing it to the reduced attention paid to university life and not enough Maggie Walsh. She tried to fill the latter void by "tenurefic," in which she explored the academic life of Walsh, but this kind of fanfiction draws attention to the distinction between student-centered and faculty-centered university fiction. After the Second World War, the focus of university fiction moved from students to faculty, but *Buffy* starts the season as very student-centered. Switaj argued that in student-centered university fiction, faculty members function as either mentors or antagonists, and Maggie Walsh, initially, sets herself up to be either: "Maggie" or "Evil-Bitch-Monster-from-Hell." She proposed that Adam can be read as a continuation of the student/professor relationship between Buffy and Walsh, as Buffy uses the knowledge she has gained from Walsh to defeat her monstrous cyborg, and in this way, he can be seen as a kind of

project-based learning. Walsh, who is shown to prioritize her research over her teaching, assumes an antagonistic role, because she has presented her students with a problem but does not provide enough guidance or support for successful completion of it. In addition, Switaj argued that the threat of Adam could imply the life-or-death severity with which some students approach their end of semester grades.

19 The Development of Whedon's Work in Spain: Reviews and Reception of His Artistic Career

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

[67] Inmaculada Casas-Delgado presented a paper that she had co-authored with Irene Raya Bravo detailing the development of Whedon Studies in Spain. She noted that the works of Joss Whedon have not been traditionally accepted as worthy of study because of their position as popular culture and the stigma of being fantasy/sci fi. However, she argued that these prejudices are changing, and her paper discussed some of the major contributors to the field of Whedon studies, including Concepción Casajosa, who pioneered the field, analyzing the function of fantasy as metaphor in the show and interrogating the relationship between the *Buffy* and *Angel*'verses; Pedro Garcia, a researcher and blogger who analyzed Willow and Xander as misfit and geek; and Irene Raya, who looked at Buffy as a new form of femininity. Casas-Delgado also discussed the first Spanish academic book about *Buffy*, *De la estaca al martillo*, which consisted of fourteen chapters and showcased the work of sixteen academic authors.

Cristina Algaba and J. Lopez Rodriguez "The Critical Reception of Whedon's Works in Spain"

[68] Cristina Algaba presented a paper that she had co-authored with J.Lopez Rodriguez analyzing the critics' responses to Whedon's work as a way to interrogate the idea of the auteur. Although authorship affects three levels of the work, the material, the rhetorical, and the

pragmatic, this paper focused on the rhetorical, which refers to the characteristics of an auteur's work, like dialogue, character development, use of metaphors, thematic recurrences, and casting. After selecting a number of sources for reviews (largely newspapers and magazines), Algaba and Rodriquez found that the critical consensus about Whedon (which focused largely on his films) seems to be that although his work does demonstrate stylistic consistency, because of the types of projects he is undertaking, he ultimately lacks the creative freedom to achieve the innovation, originality, and surprise valued in an auteur.

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

[69] Maria del Mar Rubio-Hernandez presented a paper that she had written with Victor Hernandez-Santaolalla and Javier Lozano Delmar about the Spanish fans of Joss Whedon. She cited Henry Jenkins' work about fan communities and productions and the way in which fans form Stanley Fish's interpretive communities. She considered a survey of general media fans in Spain, noting that fans are both male and female, are of all ages, tend to be well-educated, professionally successful, and active viewers who prefer to download and stream content than to wait for by-appointment viewing (even though some of the practices are illegal in Spain). The survey also found that Spanish self-identified fans are more likely to consume non-Spanish media, like the works of Joss Whedon. An investigation into Whedon fandom in Spain found that while there were few platforms for people to express their fandom, Whedon does have a recent and small but active and devoted fanbase. Spanish fans seem to prefer social media interactions to the production of cultural texts like fanfiction and fan art, but they describe emotional attachment to the characters and story and a sense of community among the fans.

20 Whedon and Family On and Off the Screen

Matthew Pateman "I thought J-Mo would back my play: Dr Horrible and the Transitions of Whedons"

[70] Matthew Pateman used Joss Whedon's musical performance in the *This American Life* episode "Returning To The Scene Of The Crime" and the *Dr. Horrible* musical commentary to chart how Joss Whedon's relationship with the entertainment industry has changed since the writers' strike of 2007-2008 and how his brother, Jed Whedon, and his sister-in-law, Maurissa Tancharoen, have taken an increased role in the writing and directing of the expanded Whedonverses. The song "Heartbroken," which is the eleventh track on *Dr. Horrible*'s *Commentary: The Musical,* establishes a family dynamic; members of the Whedon family provide backing vocals and interjecting into the narrative flow. Often, these interjections seem to be antagonistic to Joss's main polemic, emphasizing the need to make the production financially viable and imploring him to maintain his contacts within the Hollywood system. The presentation situated the writers' strike as marking the origins of a more contentious relationship between him and the television industry and a pivotal moment in Joss Whedon's transition from television to film. Pateman noted that Jed Whedon and Maurissa Tancharoen have become the spearheads of the television show *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.,* taking on producer duties and being credited as co-creators of the show. This leads to questions about who has authorial ownership of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*: can we really refer to it as a Joss Whedon show if his input is, at the very least, unknown? The question of authorship became central to Pateman's analysis, creating a source of discussion as to how Whedon Studies will change and adapt to include the influence of his brothers Jed and Zack Whedon and his sister-in-law Maurissa Tancharoen.

Barbara Maio "*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and the question of authorship in Whedon factory"

[71] Barbara Maio began her presentation by offering a brief timeline of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, situating *Iron Man* as an important point for the franchise due its enormous financial and critical

success, which proved that there was a genuine public appetite for Marvel narratives. *Iron Man* also gave audiences who may not have engaged with comic books previously an entry point into the wider Marvel universe. With the advent of the original *Avengers* movie Joss Whedon was tasked with maintaining a coherent narrative whilst incorporating different story threads from other entries in the MCU. Maio theorized that Whedon was particularly well suited to this balancing act due to his experience in running television shows, which often need to balance season-long arcs with standalone episodes. The character of Coulson, played by Clark Gregg, links the cinematic universe with the televisual one as he is the only cast regular to cross both mediums and offers an intriguing bridge for fans of the movies and the show. The presentation reinforced the idea that *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is in fact, demonstrably, a Joss Whedon show by drawing parallels between the themes of the show and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Both shows are interested in the moral complexities of "doing the right thing" and have a keen interest in the after-life, thanks to Coulson's death in the MCU and subsequent resurrection, mirroring Buffy's journey in Season Six of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*

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

[72] Eve Bennett began her presentation by situating *Dollhouse* as a potential subversion of Joss Whedon's established trope of the "chosen family," questioning the Dolls' ability to choose their role in the dynamic of the television show. As they are constantly changing their identity, bending to the whims of other people, we can question what constitutes their "true" personhood. This then extended to Bennett's examination of why the characters in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* become a part of the agency in the first place: is it an act of true free will, and if it is, who is most susceptible to making these kind of choices? The protagonists are often subjected to brainwashing and grueling training, so they may not be able to act out of their own volition. The characters of Ward and Daisy are both presented as coming from "broken" homes, something which aligns them with the simplistic, traditional media narratives of

radicalized female "terrorists." Ward and Daisy have similar backstories but follow divergent storylines, suggesting that there may be a gendered difference in the way radicalized characters are presented in pop culture. By providing the audience with complex characteristics and comprehensive character histories, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is in a prime position to interrogate the relationship between brainwashing, radicalization, and the overarching group dynamic of the agents.

21 Fandom and Audiences

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."

[73] David Simmons drew on Henry Jenkins' adaptation of Keats' notion of negative capability in his paper, but instead of relating it to textual productivity as Jenkins does, he argued that the term implies a kind of constructive uncharted space where the possibility of new creative activity is encouraged, applying it extratextually to fans themselves. In particular, Simmons talked about "unfilms" and the growing popularity of discourse about shows that don't exist, noting how the unfinished *Wonder Woman* script is used by fans to re-read and re-assert ideological assumptions of Whedon as subcultural auteur. A *Den of Geek* article about Whedon emphasized his genuine engagement with the original comic book material, and Whedon was depicted as the fan who came closest to bringing the film to life. Yet it was a lack of enthusiasm for the project at studio level which halted them, and this was used by fans as a counter-narrative to Whedon "selling out" with the *Avengers* movies. There was a mixed reaction to the *Wonder Woman* script (a read-through of which exists on YouTube) with many fans attacking it for not being Whedonesque enough, but fans also removed responsibility from Whedon for that, talking about the script as unfinished or in draft. Simmons noted that it may seem paradoxical for fans to use a big budget film like *Wonder Woman* to suggest Whedon's subcultural status, but the system's slight against Whedon allows that

subcultural status to continue and that selected, unfinished projects function as tools to continue preserving that status.

Alaina Christensen "Opening the Hellmouth: Studying Pop Culture in the Academy"

[74] Alaina Christensen took a slightly different approach to her paper, offering an autoethnographic account of studying pop culture within academia. In particular, Christensen talked about writing her Master's thesis on popular vampire texts, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Twilight*, and subsequently defending her choice to departmental colleagues, friends, and family. She noted how a male friend of a friend criticized her decision to write a paper on *Twilight* and the assumption that she was reading *Twilight* in a bubble bath while daydreaming about Edward. The familiarity that Christensen's acquaintances had with the texts translated into a criticism of academic analysis of them, even though many of those critics hadn't read the texts themselves. Christensen noted that "There is nothing to be done with these texts" is still the most popular accepted opinion, and she became so frustrated with people's reactions to her academic engagement with them that she began using "five dollar words" to bore people enough so that they would not ask about her research. She noted that there is an assumption that fandom leaves one bereft of critical, rational analysis of the text, but as a fan-scholar Christensen has the opportunity to reappropriate academic and cultural value for these materials. She argued that popular texts offer source material more important for cultural analysis than the academy realizes, and as scholar-fan and fan-scholar become liminal identities, epistemological implications can be introduced in studying popular culture.

Selina Doran "A Shade Darker? Viewers' Interpretations of Buffy in Season Six and Understandings of Gender Roles"

[75] Selina Doran's paper drew on audience research work carried out with three focus groups: One of pensioners, one of men aged 21-71, and one of women aged 21-63. Doran had done previous research on

Buffy and Faith, and this work follows from that, examining how viewers interpret Buffy in Season Six of the show when she takes on "bad girl" attributes, previously belonging to Faith, by having a sexual and violent relationship with Spike. Doran showed the focus groups clips from "Smashed," marking the beginning of Buffy's sexual relationship with Spike; "Dead Things," where she reacts violently towards him when she mistakenly believes she has killed someone; and "Seeing Red," featuring a scene where Buffy is sexually assaulted by Spike. The discussions which followed centred on the role of masculinity and femininity, particularly in relation to sexual behaviour, deviance, and criminality. Feedback from some viewers suggested a possible link between the violence both characters show and their attraction to each other, though the male focus group was most critical of Spike. Viewers argued that Buffy comes off as in control when she first rejects Spike in Season Five, but their opinion of her shifts in Season Six to seeing her as vulnerable and lacking power, which surprised Doran. One of the women commented that "She can't help herself. . . . . It doesn't make her a very good role model . . . ." The rape scene resulted in some contradictory responses. The men felt the assault was the most realistic scene in the storyline, with Spike adhering to a hypermasculinity model to reestablish power. Yet there was also empathy with Spike because he is not hiding his emotions and thus transgressing hyper-masculinity. Buffy, however, received no love from the group even though viewers knew that Spike should not have assaulted her. She is hated and seen as an abuser herself, and she is not assertive, she's aggressive. Doran also found an element of victim-blaming in the focus groups' responses, evidenced by comments that Buffy had "let it get that far."

22 Bringing Buffy Back: The Slayer as a Learning Teaching Solution (Roundtable)

Paula James, Amanda Potter, Anastasia Bakogianni, and Wendy Maples

[76] Paula James, Amanda Potter, Anastasia Bakogianni, and Wendy Maples discussed the possibility of a pedagogical use of *Buffy* to

introduce students to and help them to better understand Greek myths. Paula James' area of study focuses on mythic resonances, specializing in Ovid; Amanda Potter's interest is in viewer reception of Greek myth in television and what television teaches about myth; and Anastasia Bakogianni focuses on the reception of the classics, the afterlife of Greek and Rome, and Greek tragedy.

[77] James, Potter, and Bakogianni discussed the benefits of examining texts that, while not a direct adaptation of myth, share thematic resonances. These connections afford an "entry point" into a discussion of the classics and can help to make some of their thematic concerns more relevant to students. It also allows the students to see the cultural and conceptual changes that have taken place, for example, our shifting understanding of what it means to be a hero.

[78] They pointed to Buffy's thematic richness as rendering it an appropriate pairing for classical texts. James provided an example of a module she teaches in which she pairs *Buffy's* "Made to Love You," with Ovid's "Pygmalion." She noted that in either case, students are getting excerpted versions of each story, but that they pair very well together to demonstrate issues of gender and relationships.

[79] Potter also discussed a lesson that she teaches: comparing Buffy's experience returning from the underworld with Alcestis. Alcestis, like Buffy, sacrifices her life to save her family, but unlike Buffy, she is silenced upon her return. Potter suggested that Buffy's expression of life as hell can be used as an entry point into discussion about what is concealed in Alcestis's silence. Bakogianna asserted that the lesson also speaks to a larger issue of the role of women in Greek tragedy, and audience member Jodie Kreider observed a gendered approach to these texts and a consideration of how the idea of heroic sacrifices are often coded as male.

[80] Bakogianna noted that Greek and Roman myths were constantly being refashioned and retold; shows like Buffy continue this trend. Svetlana Seibel, who had presented earlier that day on *Angel's* "Orpheus," argued that we can look at these television retellings as a continuation of ideas, not a straight adaptation.

23 Generations/History/Place

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

[81] Sharon Sutherland and her daughters, Rowan Meredith and Darsey Meredith, with the help of the wonders of video technology, began their presentation by describing their family's history with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. By watching the show as a unit and engaging with debates each week about the episodes, they formed a close attachment to it and used it as a springboard to discuss social and ethical issues. Sutherland explained that she received some mild criticism for letting her daughters watch the show at a young age, an idea that she demonstrated was widespread by showing similar comments on parenting message boards. Issues such as the occult and queer sexuality appear to be the central source of parental anxiety, but the presenters demonstrated how, by talking openly about these issues, they were able to come to terms with aspects of their own personality and their family dynamic. Rowan and Darsey spoke about how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* informed their worldview, enhancing their sense of social justice and acceptance. Since the first television run of the show all three have re-watched episodes, and they elaborated on the different experience of watching them alone as opposed to being part of a familial group. Their experience of the show has changed as they have grown older and discovered more of the world, showing that our favourite visual media adapts and changes with us throughout our lives.

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

[82] Jay Bamber offered a close reading of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode "I Only Have Eyes for You" and *Angel* episodes "Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been?" and "Waiting In The Wings" to explore how the past interrupts the present in the Whedonverses. These episodes demonstrate how there are often parallel narratives running through the shows: the one that is presented to the audience in current

time and the fictional past that informs character motivations and storylines. The presentation made a distinction between episodes that treat the past as a "performance" and those that act as "data gathering" or exposition. Bamber used the term "embodied liminality" to describe the process of characters performing events of the past, such as Angel and Cordelia re-enacting the illicit love affair between a prima ballerina and her paramour who lived a century before in "Waiting in the Wings." In this sense the characters become liminal—they are the protagonists that we know from our prior knowledge of the television shows, yet their bodies are occupied by another force. They both are and are not themselves. This process fragments the sense of continuity that rules conventional television; the membrane between the past and present is permeable, something which is especially relevant to these shows due to eternal nature of the vampire's existence. Vampires are attractive to us, in part, because they are able to transgress the barriers of time and space that constrain us as the audience. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* the past is not just a rupturing force but one that acts as a legitimate agent of narrative thrust.

Ian Klein "Resurrecting Sunnydale: Chronicles of the Hellmouth"

[83] Ian Klein began his presentation by examining the landmarks of Sunnydale, explaining that despite the fact that it seems to take up a relatively small amount of surface area, it contains a surprising number of locations. Sunnydale is a malleable space, as exemplified by the beach which is shown in "Buffy vs. Dracula"; the geography of the town is expanded and contracted to suit the needs of the individual episode. Klein's research was born from an extended project he created that reimagined the various sets of the Whedonverse as a theme park. By engaging with writers and production designers who worked on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* including Carey Meyer, Klein was able to provide insights into how the backdrop of Sunnydale factored into the creation of individual episodes and season-long narrative arcs, suggesting that continuity is not as important as innovation. The presentation linked the fictional history of Sunnydale to the real history of America's gold rush states: just as specific areas became boom towns for those seeking to

profit from the gold rush, Sunnydale's position above the Hellmouth meant that it drew the attention of demonic activity. Thus there is an embedded social history to the fictional town that enriches the world of show. The contrast between the bright architecture associated with the suburban feel of Sunnydale and the plentiful dark spaces that it provides can be seen as allegorical of humanity's ignorance of the dangers around them, just as Sunnydale's residents seem to ignore the constant threat of supernatural horror.

24 Identity Construction

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

[84] Michael C. Gilbert and Sofia Gieysztor utilized the concept of mindfulness in their paper, and assert that in *Dollhouse*, the "I" of "Who am I?" is the body rather than the mind. They suggested that identity is relational, and we know who we are in relation to where we are, but the idea of being decontextualized from your history leaves you adrift within capitalism and places you as a mindless body. Gilbert and Gieysztor drew on a wide variety of disciplines dealing with the notion of mindfulness as the supreme identity, including European Existentialism, American Humanism, and Asian Buddhism, and focus on Echo's story in examining these. They suggested that Echo's specialness comes from her ability to control her minds, rather than be controlled by them, drawing comparisons with Avalokiteśvara. Fundamentally, they argued that action means choice, choice means responsibility, and responsibility, in the Whedonverse, means love.

Kathrin Dodenhoeft "Inviting the Other In – Chosen Families in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*"

[85] Kathrin Dodenhoeft opened her paper on chosen families in *Buffy* by noting that families are always responsibility, echoing Gilbert and Gieysztor's comment on what responsibility means in the

Whedonverse. Dodenhoeft paid particular attention to the inclusion of the 'Other' in Buffy's chosen family, focusing on the ways in which Angel, Faith, Spike, Anya, Dawn and others function to reflect Buffy's darker traits. Dodenhoeft noted that arguments have been made for family in *Buffy* being held together by eschatological glue; soldierly bonds; proto-fascist glue, banding together against an Other; and lastly, "chosen people" glue. She contests the former and suggests that Buffy makes the choice as to who is included in and who is rejected from the family. Spike is Othered by virtue of being a vampire, and when he becomes a defanged vampire, he is further othered. His, and other's, incorporation into Buffy's chosen family results in both Buffy and the Scoobies' identities being renegotiated.

Gemma Killen "Queering Kinship on BtVS"

[86] Gemma Killen continued the theme of family by examining the concept through a feminist lens and critiqued hetero-normative concepts of family by undertaking a queer reading of the show. She argued for reading Buffy as a queer text in which heteronormative kinship is disrupted to allow for non-normative sexuality and noted that Buffy's mostly male antagonists, and the rarity of her fighting and killing women, is part of the show's feminist ethos. She further argued in favour of destabilizing heteronormativity in *Buffy* and asked what cracks in the text afford us new queer possibilities that change heteronormative readings. Killen noted that historically, the vampire has been constructed as harbinger of social and sexual anxiety and represents a challenge to familial autonomy. Yet the vampires in *Buffy* live in groups, or families, and represent a "stubbornly archaic" familial structure. A literal monstrosity is thus inherent in the patriarchal family unit, and the character of the Master, as well as the Potentials, demonstrates the ways in which normative families are constructed as threatening and violent. To the contrary, the depictions of kinship seen in Buffy's family (for example the sharing of power in the Season Seven finale) offer new subversive and feminist imaginings of kinship.

Sunday 10 July

Featured Speaker Lewis Call "'I Adore You . . . But I Need the Other Guy': Black Widow/Hulk as a Whedonesque Relationship of Dominance and Submission"

[87] Lewis Call's talk focused on the motif of dominant women, characters he calls Whedommes, in Joss Whedon's work. He noted that these Whedommes are often eroticized, and we see multiple instances of men finding pleasure and happiness in submission to them. He posited that these relationships follow patterns that we see in Dominant/Submissive (D/S) erotic communities and that their presence in the Whedonverse normalizes the dynamics of female domination and male submission, highlights the therapeutic potential of these relationships, offers an inclusive representation of a group that has been traditionally marginalized because they embrace kink, and is fun.

[88] Call anchored his reading of the Whedommes in Lacan, and his theories about the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic. He argued that the dynamics of the D/S relationship can bring partners from the symbolic order back to the imaginary and the real, and thus present therapeutic potential as a response to trauma. D/S relationships can offer a healthy form of disabled sexuality and can lead to increased self-knowledge.

[89] The first D/S couple that Call analyzed is Buffy and Spike. Spike sings about his desire to submit to Buffy, and Call argued that Buffy's ability to dominate Spike functions as a kind of therapy for dealing with the trauma she endured after being pulled out of "heaven." Through kink, Buffy learns to live again. However, he noted that the show also demonstrates the difference between kink and rape by visually marking Spike's attempted assault on Buffy as different from BDSM. He suggested that Spike's submission to Buffy allows him to make amends for the rape and earn Buffy's forgiveness. In "End of Days" we see the flexibility of D/S roles, as Buffy takes on one of vulnerability, while Spike is the strong protector.

[90] Call then turned his attention to Scott Summers and Emma Frost. He argued that Emma Frost plays a central role in the X-Men community, because it is only through submission to her domination

that Scott Summers is able to come to terms with his guilt about his inability to control his power. Call described Scott's power and his surrounding guilt as a form of disabled sexuality and argued that by giving control of his power to Emma, which frees him from the symbolic order, he is able to come to terms with it.

[91] Call also discussed Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff as a dominant woman. He noted that her empowerment means that she frequently subverts expectations: she uses a performance of submission to assert her dominance. Call also argued that in the first *Avengers* film, when the Hulk chases her, the scene could be read as an attempted rape, but Widow survives and eventually comes to dominate the Hulk.

[92] According to Call, like Scott Summers, Bruce Banner feels guilt about not being able to control his power, so he too submits it to a dominant woman. Call argued that Bruce Banner is the Super Ego and the Hulk is the Id. Banner's ego is "threatened by the guilt" he feels about his actions as the Hulk. Drawing on Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, Call posited that Natasha functions as both the mother and the father as she controls his movements from the real to the imaginary to the symbolic. He examines how both the lullaby and the anti-lullaby (i.e. pushing Banner into that chasm) demonstrate her control of his powers and her ability to help Banner to negotiate his Super Ego, Ego, and Id.

[93] Call claimed that despite her sterilization, Widow is able to play the role of mother for the Hulk. Acknowledging that the treatment of Natasha's sterilization in the film was controversial, Call argued that it was the act of sterilization, which took away Natasha's agency, which is presented as monstrous, not Black Widow herself. He also argues that the sterilization opens up the possibility for a "satisfying non-reproductive sexual relationship."

Featured Speaker Stephanie Graves "'What Other Choice Do We Have?': Agency and Autonomy in the Whedonverses"

[94] Stephanie Graves opened her talk by expressing the importance of agency, autonomy, and choice in the works of Joss Whedon. A thread that runs through his oeuvre, Whedon emphasizes

the importance of the choices that we make; to quote Angel, "If nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do."

[95] Graves went on to define agency as the "ability to make choices," and she suggested that agency is predicated on "how much autonomy one can exert in a structure." However, in order to understand how agency is represented in the Whedonverses, we need to consider its moral and philosophical implications.

[96] Drawing on the work of Emmanuel Kant, Graves asserted a distinction between agency and moral agency or what Kant calls rational agency. She explained that in order to have autonomy, one must have the ability to act, but in order for that action to be moral, it should not impinge on others' ability to act. She pointed to the idea of the universal law which states that "any act is right as long as it can coexist with everyone's freedom."

[97] Graves also drew a distinction between moral duty and inclinations. When one follows one's inclinations, one is following reflexes and instincts. The actions might be right and good, but they are not moral because moral worth comes from moral duty and rational consideration.

[98] She argued that the idea of moral duty is very important in Whedon's work. Graves observed that this idea of duty is also tied up with that of free will, of choice. She noted that we see Buffy struggle with her duty as the Slayer throughout the series and argued that Buffy empathizes with other characters trapped by duty and destiny, like the Inca Mummy Girl. In "Prophecy Girl," her inclination is to reject her duty because she does not want to die, but eventually she acts morally and accepts it. However, Graves noted that Buffy's agency in the decision is important; it is what marks her behavior as moral. She has the autonomy to make a moral choice. Graves argued the Buffy's free will is contrasted with the Master's deterministic world view, and Buffy is ultimately triumphant. She also argued that part of what makes Angel and Mal heroes is that they, like Buffy, often go against their inclinations in order to make moral choices.

[99] Graves noted that the removal of agency in the Whedonverses is often presented as literal horror, as we see in "Bad Eggs," "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered," Katrina in "Dead

Things," Jasmine in Season Four of *Angel*, and those on the planet Miranda in *Serenity*. She also discusses the "psychological horror" of the Dollhouse, which attempts to remove all agency from the Actives.

[100] She ended her talk with an inspirational conclusion about our agency in the real world, our ability to make the moral choices that a world full of hate and violence desperately needs.

25 Teaching the Whedonverses (Roundtable)

James Zborowski and Matthew Pateman

[101] This roundtable led by James Zborowski and Matthew Pateman featured Tamy Burnett, Elizabeth L. Rambo, and Janet K. Halfyard as respondents.

[102] The discussion began with an analysis of the results to the survey that Zborowski had disseminated through the conference email earlier this year. He had eight responses (but hopes to get more) and was already seeing some trends develop. He noted that while Whedon was taught in a wide range of classes, including Film & Television/ Screen, Media and Communication, Mass Production, Composition, Gender Studies, English, and Psychology, the same episodes seem to be used. "The Train Job" topped the list, followed by "Hush," "Once More with Feeling," "The Body," and *Doctor Horrible*. He noted that these courses were not typically Whedon-centered, and the way in which the material was taught and assessed, class discussion, lecture, screening, summaries, essays, tests, and portfolios, varied. He stated that he would like eventually to consider issues of discipline when it comes to Whedon Studies, including whether or not it might even be considered a discipline of its own.

[103] The conversation then shifted to what we want to achieve by teaching Whedon. Zborowski's survey revealed that by teaching Whedon's texts, instructors want students to develop skills for encoding and decoding, rhetorical analysis, critical thinking, reading visual texts, and reflecting on real world issues. Burnett emphasized the importance of developing "ways of seeing." She observed the difference between using Whedon in a skills-based class, like composition, and content-

based, like a television production class. Rambo said that one of the issues that comes up when teaching Whedon's texts is acting, and Zborowski asserted that when he teaches Whedon, he almost always has to include a discussion of cheese and camp. Pateman observed that he used Buffy's "The Freshman" to talk about student introduction to university life. And Halfyard explained that she uses the music in Joss Whedon's shows to talk about the mechanics and meaning of music and the effects of intertextuality.

[104] The conversation then turned to the idea of student fans and teaching students that you can (and should) be critical of the things you love. Fandom does not mean that you have to love every aspect of a text; indeed, fans are sometimes the most critical.

[105] The problem of context was then brought up. Students normally lack the historic context for many of Whedon's shows, as well as not knowing the full narrative of the texts. Eve Bennett noted that this sometimes leads to student anxiety, and they were often reluctant to write about television shows for major assignments. Jessica Hautsch said she makes use of this lack of context by using the first two acts of *Dr. Horrible* to demonstrate the difficult task of the television reviewer: to evaluate something that you have only had a sliver of.

[106] Zborowski then turned the discussion to the question of "Why Whedon?": How do we defend our choice to include Whedon's texts in our courses? Answers included personal interest and expertise, the vibrant community of Whedon scholarship, the examples Whedon provides, and the richness of the text. Halfyard stated that she uses Whedon because it is one way to help students to become "better, more interesting" people and Burnett seconded that idea.

26 Power and the Paranormal

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

[107] James Reynolds began his presentation by arguing that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel's* preoccupation with the soul, an "essential, removable self," makes them particularly suited to re-watching. As they

both grapple with difficult, perhaps unanswerable, questions, they can be a constant source of interest and interrogation, which means that they reward multiple viewings and interpretations. In these shows, personal identity is presented as a constant process of addition and subtraction, a theme that is expanded upon with the addition of the show *Angel* rather than disrupted by it. There is often a division of self in the Whedonverses; personal identity is a negotiation rather than simply a fixed idea. As characters are often shown toeing the line between their innate goodness and evilness, especially Angel and Willow, there is a transportability of identity that makes following character arcs gratifying, encouraging the binge watch. By experiencing crises in their identity, these protagonists often become isolated from the community and from the people they always assumed themselves to be, aligning them closely with the archetype of the daimonic journey, wherein good and evil meet in an act of traumatic self-discovery. For the audience, rewatching can become ritualistic and, perhaps, a source of comfort when they are experiencing their own personal crises. The act of re-watching the shows can also be an integral part of recommending them to friends, allowing the prospect of seeing episodes with a fresh perspective.

Tanya R. Cochran "*In Your Eyes* in the Audience's Estimation: Situating Whedon's Paranormal Romance Within the Larger Body of His Work"

[108] Although Tanya R. Cochran began her presentation by acknowledging that there has not been a large body of critical work surrounding the movie *In Your Eyes*, she suggested that it was still interesting to interrogate how it fits into the larger Whedon canon. Cochran identified some elements that link the film to Whedon's other work, including the emphasis on dialogue, the general theme of the supernatural, and an interest in socially unacceptable or unworkable romance. However, we can also see enough of a difference to question whether a viewer who did not know Whedon's involvement in the project would be able to identify it as part of the Whedonverse. In exploring the critical reception of the film, Cochran recognised the recurring use of the word 'sweet' in reviews, a description that does not

fit easily with shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly* and may be seen as a departure from Whedon's mode. The distribution model of *In Your Eyes* can be seen to be influenced by the similar rollout of *Dr Horrible*, bypassing a traditional cinematic release and showing Whedon's willingness to interact with innovative new ways to get content to fans. The presentation suggested that there is some dissonance between the two trailers that were produced for the film, one focusing on the romantic elements and one presenting the harsher, more dramatic themes. Whilst this is reflective of Whedon's interest in genre hybridity, it may also point to a certain lack of coherence in the tone, which may be due to the fact that the screenplay was written when Whedon was much younger and then later revised.

27 Discursive Surround: Influences and Paratexts
Janet K. Halfyard "The Sound of Whedon: the Influence of Joss Whedon's Early TV Shows on Television Scoring"

[109] Janet K. Halfyard opened up her presentation by positioning *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as an innovation in the way music was used to portray meaning and emotion in the televisual landscape. In the 1980's, television music was often seen as counterproductive to notions of quality, offering decoration to an episode rather than adding anything to the characterization or narrative. However, with the introduction of Christophe Beck in Season Two, the show began to incorporate more musical elements. Halfyard explained that Beck contributed leitmotifs to the score, most famously "Close Your Eyes," the Buffy and Angel love theme. To expand upon the influence that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has had on television, Halfyard offered up the example of the CW's *Supernatural,* specifically its use of a restrictive score. *Supernatural* uses leitmotifs in a way similar to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, restricting music to specific spaces and characters so that they act as a recurring theme. Just as Buffy and Angel had a leitmotif, so does Dean—an instrumental theme that is used for times when he is under stress or experiencing sadness. Dean's Impala was used as an example of a space that is very much codified with music; it is situated as a place where rock music remains supreme, gendering the car and deepening the audience's

understanding of Dean as a character. The idea of music being a gendering force is subverted by *Supernatural* in its 200th episode, which shows a group of young girls performing a musical based on the adventures of Dean and Sam. As the final number in their musical, the girls sing "Carry On My Wayward Son*,*" a song which has a resonance for fans of the show and reinforces the relationship between music and the world of *Supernatural.*

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

[110] Steven Wosniack opened his presentation by placing *Buffy the Vampire* firmly within the generic boundaries of the telefantasy, and its success with both critics and audiences as the beginning of a resurgence of interest in the subgenre. In order to replicate the success of the show, television executives tried to establish some kind of "Buffy formula," leading to an influx of supernatural shows that focussed on a strong female protagonist. During the time that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* aired, shows such as *Charmed* and *Roswell* gained traction with audiences*,* sharing the genre hybridity, supernatural elements, and family themes that became the hallmark of *Buffy's* seven seasons. Wosniack made a distinction between shows that innovate and those which imitate, placing Whedon's show as a prime example of an innovative piece of television. In this sense, the influence of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can still be felt on television today with shows such as *The Vampire Diaries, The Nine Lives of Chloe King,* and *Supernatural* absorbing narrative and visual elements and reappropriating them for their own purposes. Due to its far-reaching impact on the genre and on television as a whole, Wosniack argued that the show has now become a canonical television text, leading him to make the claim that in some ways it is still on the air in a fragmented form.

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

[111] Bernhard Frena began his discussion on how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has gained an afterlife since completing its television run in 2003 by raising the question of who can claim authority over the show. If it is a canonical text, then we have to question who is able to contribute to the canon and whether there are any cracks through which fans can add their own narratives to the larger whole. Frena argued that television characters are not fixed personas as much as narrative archives; they change and adapt depending on the writers of specific episodes, the artists of the comic books, and, in an increasingly digital world, the interpretation of fans. Whilst there is certainly resistance to fan reinterpretations of beloved characters, there may be a space for fan fiction and ancillary media to reinforce the original rather than be adversarial to it. If Joss Whedon has ultimate control of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, then the episodes that he did not write can be seen as invalid, destabilizing the idea that the show is the ultimate canon. Frena also suggested that the show itself is built on several different archives, including those of the horror movie and the teen drama; these acts of genre reappropriating render it an inherently intertextual show. It is also important to note that the television show is a remake, of sorts, of the 1992 movie. By embracing the ever-changing archive of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and allowing outside sources to contribute to it, it may be possible to enrich and broaden its scope and reach.

28 "We Can Kill It for You Wholesale": Militarization and Capitalism in the Whedonverses

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

[112] Renee St. Louis began by observing that fictional texts provide "space to make sense of what we have witnessed," and Whedon's fictional wars provide this space for veterans. But, she noted, representations of real wars can be an even more powerful tool, especially because most of our information about and understanding of war comes from fictionalized texts. Civilians often do not understand the experiences of veterans returning from war, and as a result, veterans

experience misunderstanding, alienation, and isolation. Tony, who was suffering from PTSD, entered the Dollhouse as a veteran of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, suggesting government complicity in the exploitation of soldiers. St. Louis raised the issue of consent for those suffering from the psychological distress of trauma. She argued that his NATO alphabet name, Victor, connects him to war and is also one of the few names that could exist as an Active or civilian name: he is "returning and returning as Victor," St. Louis posited that Victor's slippage between Active, soldier, and civilian suggests that there is "no such thing as a former soldier." She noted that Victor's relationship with Sierra is built off of shared trauma, and she suggested the healing possibility of using representations like Victor to help veterans discuss their own struggles with guilt, trauma, and reintegration.

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*"

[113] Jessica Hautsch's paper explored how Deepscan, a Slayer-employing private security company introduced in *Season 9* of the comics, continues Joss Whedon's anti-corporate ethos. She argued that the profit-driven motivation of the corporation forces its managers and employees to make moral "compromises" and is presented as antithetical to fighting the good fight. She noted that the only time the corporation contributes to the battle against evil, it is because they receive monetary compensation. The company's focus on profits also creates an alienating corporate environment, in which employees are reduced to ID numbers and Slayers are encouraged to abandon their instincts and their mission. Deepscan's reliance on guns also sets it in opposition to Buffy's moral code and demonstrates the Slayers' alienation from their duty to fight the forces of darkness. She concluded by contrasting Deepscan to Angel Investigations, suggesting that it is the familial atmosphere and willingness to work without financial profits that separates the two endeavors.

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

[114] Samira Nadkarni connected Tony Stark's development of Ultron in *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* to the United States reactionary doctrine of preemptive warfare in the wake of 9/11. She argued that Ultron functions as a rebuttal of Stark's, and by extension the United States', militarism in the wake of tragedy, demonstrating the problems of industrial militarism and use of humanitarianism and exceptionalism to justify global military interventions. Stark's position within the military industrial complex allows him to be a hero. Stark industries does not just provide the Iron Man suits, but it also bankrolls the Avengers. Nadkarni asserted that the relief funds Stark establishes emphasizes his, and the Avengers', ethical exceptionalism and reaffirms their duty to protect and police the world while propagating the discourse of their morality. However, this morality, she posited, is challenged by having Stark set up as a parallel to the villains of both films, which draw attention to their personal and philosophical similarities. Nadkarni then broke down Ultron's mission, teasing out that his genocidal initiative for peace is actually the result of moral interventionist ethos that means that war will never end. The Avengers will need to intervene in conflict after conflict, to police the world while ignoring national borders and sovereignty. However, Nadkarni concluded her paper by noting that Whedon's questioning does not go far enough and that Vision undercuts a lot of the work that Whedon accomplished with Ultron's critique of Tony Stark and the Avengers' humanitarian interventionist authoritarian policing of the world.

29 Heroism and Choices

Gert Magnusson "The Superhero Dilemma"

[115] Gert Magnusson opened his paper with an explanation of utilitarian philosophy, and particularly the idea that in some cases it is right for a person to sacrifice someone else if more people will subsequently be saved. Utilitarians would argue that while it is right to

sacrifice one person to save many, it is not right to save a person you know and sacrifice two strangers. When it comes to the question of saving the person you know rather than the one you do not, utilitarians look to what the resulting happiness would be. Magnusson asked how that relates to the superhero: how are they to act in order to save everyone without sacrificing anyone? And how does the superhero avoid sacrificing a person they know in order to save many others? Magnusson suggested that the superhero finds a new loophole or perspective, and drew on examples from *Buffy* to illustrate. For example, Faith argues that one dead person does not undo all the good things she and Buffy have done, while Buffy finds a loophole in sacrificing herself and thus avoiding the superhero dilemma entirely.

Andrew Aberdein "Whedonian Trolleyology"

[116] Andrew Aberdein also referenced utilitarianism in discussing the "trolley problem," a thought experiment in which a runaway trolley threatens five 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. Aberdein laid out the issue and various moral theory responses to them. Aberdein noted that much moral theory treats the cases as indistinguishable, but when asking people how they would react most would chose the former, not the latter option. Aberdein notes that Whedon has used "Trolley Problem" dilemmas more than once and focused on two examples: Giles deciding whether to kill Ben in "The Gift," and Dana deciding whether to kill Marty in *The Cabin in the Woods*. The whole world hangs on the choice in each situation, though Giles' decision can be seen as morally ambiguous while Dana's is morally praiseworthy, even though each has the potential to result in human death on a huge scale. Within the narrative, however, each choice is presented as justifiable even though, according to Aberdein, we cannot find an ethical theory that says both Giles *and* Dana were right. Aberdein suggested, in agreement with Rabb and Richardson's theory of narrative ethics, that the existence of a richly detailed narrative surrounding both choices affects the ways in which the

audience responds to them, which diverges from reactions to the original trolley problem.

Evan Hayles Gledhill "An Unsuitable Job for a Woman: 'Emotional Labor' and Heroism in the Work of Joss Whedon"

[117] Evan Hayles Gledhill noted that heroism is depicted as emotionally and physically exhausting in American media and particularly in superhero fiction. The superheroes manage a range of pains and losses on their own, and as such perform "emotional labor," which is often associated with femininity. Whedon's work is unusual, however, with male superheroes often taking on the role of caregiving and emotional labor, including focusing on communication, team-building, and trauma recovery. Gledhill focused on the emotional labour performed by Xander, Giles, and Spike, and Nick Fury, Phil Coulson, and Clint Barton. Gledhill argued that Whedon makes explicit what has been previously implicit. Xander's emotional intelligence helps him find a place in the group as the heart or animus, and his professional role as carpenter reflects his role in the group as the "guy who puts things back together." The role of male as caregiver is further solidified by the fact that female staff members in *Buffy* are often the ones who are threats to students. The male teachers are the ones who are usually nurturing and liked, and Giles performs emotional labor in trying to ensure Buffy's physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing. Similarly, Spike's emotional intelligence enables him to provide Buffy with understanding and motivation to continue as the Slayer. Gledhill noted that many fans have criticized Whedon for centering a white, male "Mary Sue" among more skilled characters, and by doing so Whedon maintains a central position for men within the text that he had initially wanted to subvert in creating action heroines.

30 Gothic and Horror

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

[118] Elizabeth Gilliland began her discussion of gothic tropes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* by comparing Buffy's three main romantic partners to three of the genre's most enduring and fascinating characters. Angel/Angelus's dual identity has direct metaphorical connection to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Riley's history of being experimented on has clear connections to Frankenstein's Monster, and Spike can be seen to fit into the archetype of the Byronic hero. This shows an intertextuality with the classic gothic novels. Once these connections were established, Gilliland explored how Buffy's interpersonal relationships with these gothic characters reflect her anxieties about being a member of the Slayer lineage, as well as her struggles with being a powerful woman in society. Angel, Riley, and Spike are the external embodiment of her very personal struggles, physical entities that allow her to come face to face with issues that she may have trouble articulating. In order to conquer her fears, which can be interpreted as contemporary reflections of those experienced by gothic literature heroines, Buffy must have a close relationship with them. When these relationships end, however painfully, it signals to the audience that Buffy has made a personal breakthrough and is better able to embrace her identity as a Slayer. Her journey is informed by her relationships with these gothic stereotypes, but the trajectory is not dictated by them; it is her ability to overcome her own fears that constitutes her character arc.

Stacey Abbott "'Another one for the Fire, Boys': The Zombie in the Work of Whedon"

[119] Stacey Abbott began her discussion by providing a history of the use of zombies as allegorical figures in movies and television, linking it to Joss Whedon's mock campaign advert for Mitt Romney's presidential run in which the candidate was presented as a decaying zombie. This allegorical power can be seen to have been watered down in television shows like *The Walking Dead*, at least according to George Romero, whom Abbott quoted in her presentation. Whilst zombies are part of the narrative of many Whedon shows as monsters-of-the-week, they also play a role in the larger thematic arcs of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* By using the examples of Buffy and Ward,

two characters who have been resurrected from the dead, Abbott demonstrated how the zombie trope aligns with Whedon's classic themes of the afterlife and dysfunctional families and holds metaphorical value as a signifier of cultures or interpersonal dynamics that are unstable. By placing the zombie in the contemporary world, not one dealing with the ramifications of an apocalypse, shows in the Whedonverses can be seen to be politicizing them. Rather than being presented as mindless villains, as they are in episodes like "The Thin Dead Line" and "Dead Man's Party," when central protagonists become zombies, they are presented in a more complex way.

31 Gender Politics/Roles

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

[120] Anthony Stepniak performed a close reading of Drusilla in this paper, focusing on how she is presented in the second season of *Buffy*. He drew on Judith Butler's ideas on gender to view Drusilla as a response to dominant patriarchal culture that operates through a framework of binary oppositions. Drusilla blurs and breaks these reductive binaries, depicted as a vampire, a witch, a siren, a fetishized child woman, a bestial monster, a virginal innocent, and a sexual aggressor. A tension exists in these oppositions and results in a complex gender identity for Drusilla. Stepniak argued that the way Drusilla acts maternally towards dolls and dead animals, but not living children, queers the maternal instinct. He further suggested that the change in Drusilla in Season Two is often explained as her regaining her strength, but it is actually more complex than that. Her use of BDSM in torturing Angel is also important in deconstructing notions of sexuality. Stepniak also used the notion of abjection as an enabling force for binary oppositions to be blurred and argued that Drusilla actualizes abjection: she is both dead and alive, autonomous and engulfing. She respects no positions, rules, or boundaries and thus operates both inside and outside of Buffy's symbolic binary structures. Stepniak also asserted that, much as Buffy's body is a site of considerable struggle in the narrative, so is

Drusilla's, and it becomes a warzone as she fights to create herself within binaries as she is erased by her slippage between them. Drusilla's madness can thus be seen as her being unable to settle on either side of the binary. "Abject," "dead" and "fantastical" are three descriptors of vampires that are key to understanding the blurred binaries Drusilla embodies, and when she kills Kendra, Stepniak argued, she crosses all boundaries and binaries at once.

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

[121] Cyndi DeVito-Ziemer also made reference to Judith Butler's work on gender in her visual analysis of gender in *Buffy*. She argued that Buffy's performance of gender is rooted in the visual, and a visual analysis allows for an examination of the politics of viewing. DeVito-Ziemer used the term pangender to move beyond simple binaries of masculine and feminine and compared Buffy's gendered identity with Spike's gender performance. She noted that Whedon did not draw on current fashion alone to showcase who Buffy is; she, and her wardrobe, are well crafted to serve a particular identity. Buffy being blonde is one example of this: blonde hair has many connotations including sensuality, sexuality, ditziness, 'dumb'ness, and weakness. All of these feed into the stereotype that Buffy ultimately defies. Yet Buffy is not the only one in the show with blonde hair. Spike bleaches his hair blond, drawing on a British punk aesthetic and the gender performance it implies, though this punk aesthetic is subverted in the show when we are told that Billy Idol stole the look from Spike, who created it. Hair dye doesn't necessarily Other men, however. DeVito-Ziemer instead argued that it becomes part of pangender presentation, just as makeup does. Indeed, both Spike and Buffy use makeup to perform their gender throughout the course of the show. In addition to hair and makeup, DeVito-Ziemer analyzed costume. She argued that costume design is narratively and visually important as it gives the audience clues into the character's persona. Buffy performs conventional feminine identity when she is not Slaying, and her clothing in later seasons is different from what she wears in Season One. DeVito-Ziemer moved away from the idea of whether

clothing is feminist or not to the idea of pangendering of clothing performance. Buffy's wearing leather trousers when Slaying goes back to the wearing of animal skin by (male) fighters and hunters. Similarly, Spike's taking Nikki Woods' leather coat after he kills her can be read as a performance of hyper-masculinity: Spike is "skinning" his victim. For both Buffy and Spike, then, the visual is not mere costuming, but a necessary aspect of the politics of identity and which gender is being performed.

[122] While the focuses of both Stepniak and DeVito-Ziemer's papers were on gender, issues around race were also highlighted both in the discussion in the room and on the Twitter conference back channel. Stepniak's analysis of Drusilla killing Kendra aimed to demonstrate the ways in which this shows Drusilla consolidating her position of power, but there are clearly other issues at stake when arguing that a white vampire's killing of a black Slayer demonstrates female empowerment. Participants noted that Kendra's death in the series empowers Buffy as well as empowering Drusilla, and the ways in which women of color are killed to further the empowerment of white women is a problematic discourse, which was not questioned in the presentation. Similarly, the terminology DeVito-Ziemer used to discuss Spike taking Nikki Wood's coat after he kills her had the unfortunate aspect of conflating women of color with animals to be hunted and skinned by white men. Empowerment for Spike was obtained through the killing of a woman of color, and this was also presented unproblematically. While both papers brought up extremely interesting and thought-provoking points about gender, each also demonstrated the need for race to be included in discussions – around the Whedonverses specifically, and in media more generally. This point was raised in the Q&A session at the end of the panel, and both Stepniak and DeVito-Ziemer acknowledged that they had not considered the way women of color are presented in the episodes they discussed. This matter is an ongoing issue within academic discourse and highlights the need for us as scholars to consider race alongside issues like gender, to ensure we a) are aware of and b) engage with discourses that disempower people of color even if they are not our central argument, and also to think about how the arguments we make will affect the people reading or hearing them. Importantly, we need to

ensure there is space for scholars of color to feel empowered and welcome in conferences like *Slayage*, and in organizations like the Whedon Studies Association.

Cheyenne Foster and Melanie-Angela Neuilly "'You Wear That Come-Bite-Me Outfit': Vampires as a Rape Metaphor in Buffy the Vampire Slayer"

[123] Cheyenne Foster's presentation looked at feminist theories of crime and the U.S. criminal justice system through a focus on "The Wish." Foster suggested that the threat of vampires is framed as a women's issue, the same as sexual violence. Stopping them falls onto the Slayer's shoulders and, by extension, women as a whole. In "The Wish" women are expected to learn how not to get bitten, and this rhetoric, argued Foster, mirrors the victim-blaming attached to rape. Foster provided historical evidence for the treatment of sexual assaults against women, noting that marital rape was not illegal in all U.S. states until 1993. She also noted how much of the U.S. criminal justice system is very specifically white masculine as a space, including rape investigations. As far as the system (versus individuals within it) is concerned, sexual violence is not a serious matter, and victims are interrogated and re-traumatized during the process of the investigation. This pattern of action parallels vampire attacks in the show, particularly in relation to structural institutions being implicated in knowing about, but failing to address, the attacks. Foster also drew parallels between Cordelia being a vampire-magnet and victim-blaming and suggested that Cordelia evidences a learned helplessness, blaming Buffy because she knows she cannot change the system. Similarly, Buffy recognizes that she will be replaced by another Slayer, but that will not change anything; the system will still be as it was before. Foster thus urged us to consider collaborative empowerment as a narrative to fight rape culture, just as Buffy reshapes Slaying vampires (avoiding rape) as a societal one through the acceptance and adoption of feminist collaborative values.

17.30-18.15 Whedon Bookers: The Past, Present and Future of Whedon Studies + Closing Remarks

[124] The Whedon Bookers panel was the last panel of the conference and as the remaining attendees filed into the room, many expressed the sense that it was hard to believe that the first Euroslayage was over. Given they had published major works in the last year, Stacey Abbott asked Steve Halfyard, Mary Ellen Iatropoulos, and Alyssa Hornick to talk about their experiences, as well as provide some tips for early career researchers. Halfyard insisted that scholars should try to avoid compromising on titles because that is what readers get first: *Sounds of Fear and Wonder* was supposed to be *Music and Cult TV: An Introduction*. Hornick noted that having a publisher with the right price point for an audience is important. She chose McFarland for those reasons, but noted that they are very hands-off. Not all publishers are, but it is important to be aware of your publisher's style. Publishing can be a *very* long process, which involves waiting and feeling as if you are a failure, so if you find a suitable publisher knock on their door and do not give up. Iatropoulos also spoke about how long copyright permissions can take. It took her and Lowery Woodall nearly two years to obtain permissions for their book, and Halfyard added that it is important to find out where publishers stand on the copyright practice called Fair Use and to get it in writing. There is no consistency. Hornick (noting the generosity of her co-editor) also pointed out the importance of agreeing on the royalties in advance. Most publishers will split royalties for the editors equally between them, but if that is not what you want, you need to agree it in advance.

[124]There were various contributions from the floor about things that scholars should be aware of in publishing, and marketing, their work. Tamy Burnett made an important point about self-promotion, as well as the importance conferences like SW/TX PCA/ACA: winning awards also helps promote your book. Jay Bamber also mentioned paperless versions of books as these can increases the readership and earn the author more money as they are cheaper to buy.

[125] Samira Nadkarni pointed out the importance of working with someone who has experience in publishing as you can learn from such a person. She also stressed the importance of not sharing copies of work on open access sites, like academia.edu, while you are in the

process of publishing it, as not all publishers will be happy with that and copyright may also be an issue.

[126] Turning to the future of the field, Lorna Jowett suggested that someone do a special issue of *Slayage* for queer studies. Scholarship that the Whedon Studies Association would like to see more of includes *Dollhouse*, comics, thematic articles drawing different areas of Whedon together, work acknowledging or engaging with Whedon's work beyond a U.S./U.K., English-speaking context, and studies of fan fiction for the Whedonverses, not just studies of fans. Sherry Ginn also noted that McFarland has started a series on Whedon that she is editing and called for scholars to submit to that.

[127] As well as discussing the state of the field, the closing panel awarded the Mr Pointy Award for best presentation. This year's award went to Ian Klein for his paper "Resurrecting Sunnydale: Chronicles of the Hellmouth."

[128] The conference ended with thanks given to Kingston University; the Whedon Studies Association, including President Stacey Abbott, Vice-President, and rising President Cynthia Burkhead, the absent and missed Treasurer Dale Koontz Guffey, Secretary Kris Woofter, and Past President Tanya Cochran; Program co-chairs Stacey, Tanya, and Rhonda Wilcox; the Euroslayage team of Stacey, Local Arrangements Chair Simon Brown, Bronwen Calvert, Lorna Jowett, and Mike Starr (noted for his design work), as well as local support Lucy Williams and grad student aides Silvia Storti and Katherine Wise; plenary speakers Rebecca Williams, Marcus Recht, Lewis Call, and Stephanie Graves; and all the presenters and attendees.