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Toward a Rhetoric of Scholar-Fandom

Tanya R. Cochran
Georgia State University

TOWARD A RHETORIC OF SCHOLAR-FANDOM

by

TANYA R. COCHRAN

Under the Direction of Lynée Lewis Gaillet

ABSTRACT

Individuals who consider themselves both scholars and fans represent not only a

subculture of fandom but also a subculture of academia. These liminal figures seem suspicious

to many of their colleagues, yet they are particularly positioned not only to be conduits to

engaged learning for students but also to transform the academy by chipping away at the

stereotypes that support the symbolic walls of the Ivory Tower. Because they are growing in

number and gaining influence in academia, the scholar-fans of the television series *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer (*Buffy*) and other texts by creator Joss Whedon are one focus of this dissertation.

Though *Buffy* academics or Whedon scholars are not the only ones of their kind (e.g., academic-

fan communities have cropped up around *The Simpsons*, *The Matrix Trilogy*, and the *Harry Potter* franchise), they have produced more literature and are more organized than any other academic-fan community. I approach all of my subjects—fandom, academia, fan-scholars, and scholar-fans—from a multidisciplinary perspective, employing various methodologies, including autoethnography and narrative inquiry. Taking several viewpoints and using mixed methods best allows me to begin identifying and articulating a rhetoric of scholar-fandom. Ultimately, I claim that Whedon academic-fans employ a discourse marked by intimacy, community, reciprocity, and transformation. In other words, the rhetoric of Whedon scholar-fandom promotes an epistemology—a way of knowing—that in Parker J. Palmer's paradigm is personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational.

INDEX WORDS: Aca-fan, Academic-fan, *Angel* (television series), *Astonishing X-Men* (comic book series), Autoethnography, Browncoats, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (television series), Composition, Discourse, *Dollhouse* (television series), *Dr. Horrible's Sing-a-long Blog* (web series), English department, Fandom, Fans (persons), Fan-scholar, *Firefly* (television series), *Fray* (graphic novel), Gospel epistemology, Ivory Tower, Joss Whedon, Narrative inquiry, Parker J. Palmer, Popular culture, Rhetoric, Scholar-fan, Scholar-fandom, Scholardom, *Serenity* (motion picture), Writing centers

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TANYA R. COCHRAN

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by

TANYA R. COCHRAN

Committee Chair: Lynée Lewis Gaillet

Committee: Baotong Gu

                    Mary Hocks

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College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

In memory of my dad, the other Dr. Cochran

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me through much stress and anxiety, my life coaches Marsha Bartulec and Debbie Forshee-Sweeney as well as my massage therapist Donna Williams deserve praise and recognition. To my community of Whedon scholars—particularly Meghan Winchell for her comments and encouragement—I hope all of you find yourselves represented well in these pages. I value the opportunity to learn from you as well as to study alongside you. My appreciation also must go to Union College, who employed me before I was finished with this work, and especially to the librarians in the Rose Crandall Memorial Library; interlibrary loan made my research manageable even though I had many other professional duties. To all of my close friends and colleagues in the Division of Humanities at Union College—especially Jill Morstad for reading a final draft—and my chosen family at New Creation Community: you are shiny! Penultimate gratitude goes to Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and many other rich texts, who unawares has made me a better scholar and teacher, a better human being, and a better Christian. And finally, my deepest thanks and affection I give to my immediate family—my mother Rita V. Cochran, my sister Cynthia M. Cochran, and Jeff Roth—who have always already loved me, supported and encouraged me, and cheered me on. This is for all of us.

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PROLOGUE: THUS BEGINNETH THE LESSON

"The starting point of critical elaboration
is the consciousness of what one really is,
and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of
the historical process to date which has
deposited in you an infinity of traces,
without leaving an inventory. The first
thing to do is to make such an inventory."
                        ---Antonio Gramsci,
                            Selections from the Prison Notebooks

"The academy keeps refusing to tell me
about *my* self."
                        ---Scott Bukatman, "X-Bodies"

"It may be impossible to avoid writing
academically without providing a narrative
shape to one's 'theoretical' account (meaning,
nonjudgmentally, that all theories are also
stories)."
                        ---Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*

I am here at the beginning, yet I find myself at the end, writing and refining this

introduction, the final act before the curtain closes on my doctoral performance. I take my bow

with the above epigraphs in my ear and in my mind's eye—knowing myself a little better,

despite and because of the academy, and in the following pages sharing the story of how I came

to the spot on this, life's stage. It is a story that clings to and pulls away from my discipline and

its genres, that praises and chastises academia, that accepts and questions the private and the

public Self. It is the story of a *whole* person with reasons and emotions, an objective and

subjective pose, a story that will continue to say what it, what she has to say.

I am Woman, I am Christian, I am Fan, I am Scholar.

I am Story.

*   *   *

I'm sitting in Beth and Ed's den filling out a worksheet. Not a worksheet for school or work. A worksheet for me. A personal inventory of sorts. I read the first question: "What are your favorite stories in the world—movies and books?" I wonder how I can possibly think of just a few. Across the room, Beth sighs; how can she think of even one, she wants to know? I scribble quickly, filling more than the allotted eight spaces: "*The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Cinema Paradiso*, *Kolya*," and, not being able to choose just one of them, "any book by Jane Austen." Easy enough. With more time, I might be able to fill an entire page with favorites.

Next question: "What are your favorite stories in the Bible?" The question doesn't surprise me; I'm sitting among six friends who share my same desire: to know God more intimately and, thus, to know myself. But it *does* intrigue me. What can this question have to do with the last? I must think harder, longer before I scrawl "Esther" and "Naomi and Ruth"—the first, the story of a Jewish queen who saves her people from an impending holocaust; the second, the tale of two widows—a mother- and daughter-in-law—and a refusal to be separated by culture, creed, or physical distance.

Third question: "What characters in these stories do you identify with?" I immediately think of Buffy—how I've always identified with the character but not the actor, Sarah Michelle Gellar, and how not knowing why has nagged me for some time. I scratch down names to parallel my choices for the first question: "Eustace, Buffy *and* Spike, Scully *and* Mulder, Angel,

Mal *and* Inara, Frodo *and* Sam, Trinity *and* Neo, Fran *and* Scott, Salvatore, Louka *and* Kolya." I

can't pick just one Austen character, so I write "any Austen heroine." Answering these three

questions is labeled "Step 1" on my worksheet. I sense that "Step 2" is deeper in. I am right.

There is only one question: "What do all of these stories have in common? What common

themes do you find in these stories?" Now I have to work.

What can Buffy possibly have to do with an Italian boy left fatherless by World War II?

Or *The X-Files* (1993-2002) with Queen Esther? I feel frustrated, quite sure this exercise is going

to tell me nothing except that my inventory is lacking. I wait. I listen—to nothing, to the

unuttered exasperation of some others, to the curling lips of still some others, to . . . the Spirit of

God? I can't do this. My reasoning must grow inductively, so I focus on just one story at a time.

What theme from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) strikes a chord in me? "Resistance to a

prescribed calling," I note. And from *Angel* (1999-2004)? "Redemption." I move through the

others and find "deep, familial love," "being united," "acceptance," "being found desirable,"

"devotion," "seeking," "being loved for being fully me." Slowly, I pour over my answers; they

seem so disparate, the way I often feel: Tanya, Woman; Tanya, Christian; Tanya, Feminist;

Tanya, Fan; Tanya, Writer; Tanya, Academic and Scholar; Ms. Cochran, Associate Professor of

English; Tan-Tan, Daughter and Sister; Tiny, 15-year-old Del Taco Cashier . . . and how many

more?! But I gradually sip from the list of themes, imbibe them, distill them—drop by drop—

into one. I unintentionally but significantly *question*, "Coming into one's own?" I review my

extracted query and realize I've used the distant and impersonal "one." Why not coming into

my own? And why not a statement rather than a question?

Right now, there is no opportunity to answer. Time's up. We have homework, "Step 3,"

one question: "Why?" Why are these stories my favorite? Why are these characters the ones I

most identify with? Why do these stories and these characters share the theme of "coming into

one's own," into *my* own? Or do they really share a theme? Do I see something that isn't truly

there? "Step 3," the last question. Just one question. An important question. No, a profound

question. "Why? What does all of this tell you about God's purpose for you?" Good question.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

"The starting point of critical elaboration," explains Gramsci, "is the consciousness of

what [or who] one really is" (324). I have no misconceptions; I am the product of too many

people and events to count, to fully inventory. But I try anyway. I try not only because I am an

academic, a scholar, but also because I feel both drawn and compelled to "know thyself." Such a

pulling and compulsion comes and goes from many directions. Partly I must know myself

because, like Hills, "I am concerned by the possibility *that narcissism emerges at precisely the place*

where we stop self-interrogation, leaving a comfortable sense of our own cultural value(s) and

identity fixed in place as somehow authentic" (*Fan Cultures* 73, original emphasis). But knowing

myself just to avoid being an arrogant, narrow-minded, Ivory Tower dweller does not end with

a simple inventory or even with asking a few self-interrogating questions, questions that

themselves can become an act of narcissism. The hard work is in seeking the answers, in the

scratching and clawing and crying simply to understand the questions. Then again, maybe the

work is in creating the answers, actually stitching them together, or maybe it is sitting still long

enough for the answers to be shown and given to me, to be found by the answers. I don't know

for sure. Do I just pick up the crumbs of myself along the way and one day suddenly arrive at

self-realization? Or can I see right now a big enough part of the puzzle to know where and what and who I am? And if I can answer any of those questions, who or what laid out the crumbs? Who or what cut the puzzle into its pieces? These are just several of the questions autoethnography attempts to satisfy and why this dissertation is infused with that method's essence.

Embedded in the word *autoethnography* is the more familiar practice of ethnography. A branch of anthropology, ethnography is far more than the stereotypical researcher, the fair foreigner, who observes and documents a village tribe in the remotest parts of Africa or South America. No, ethnography represents "the lived experience of a convened culture" (Bishop 3). It is an intricately detailed, living photo of a particular way of life at a particular moment in time, a culture and time never again to be replicated. In a sense, every human takes a turn holding the camera. "'There is something of the perceptive ethnographer is each of us . . . each of us must succeed as an intuitive participant and observer for sheer survival in a social milieu. Each of us must figure out how to cope with the world we encounter, the unexpected as well as the expected,'" claims Harry Wolcott (qtd. in Bishop 15). This exposition, this story I tell is one of those moments when no one is around to take my picture, so I hold the camera myself, at arm's length, a very short distance for someone who stands only five-foot and three-fourths of an inch tall. I am guaranteed, then, a close-up.

Autoethnography lets me put my taste, my values, the fandoms I have deeply invested in, and ultimately *me* "under the microscope of cultural analysis" (Hills, *Fan Cultures* 72). There I am, laid out for observation and inspection. I question my questions, subject the "subjective" to testing. (I abhor this scientific metaphor and imagine myself naked and cold on this glass

plate, wishing for warmer, more relational figures of speech.) Autoethnography allows me to

not just be self-reflective—"Oh, look at what I did. Huh."—but to be self-reflexive—"Oh, look at

what I did. Huh. Why did I do that? Well, because . . . And what does that mean? Well, it could

mean . . ." I understand, by means of autoethnography, that merely making an inventory is not

enough. I cannot simply list my favorite movies, Bible stories, and characters. I cannot even stop

by distilling their various themes into one meta-theme. I must go beyond just self-reflection,

plunge headlong into self-reflexivity. I have to complete "Step 3": "Why?"

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

I was twelve years old when I decided and informed my mother that I would pursue a

Ph.D. At the time, I had two fairly simple reasons: first, I wanted to be Dr. Cochran, like my dad

who had died in an accident when I was four; second, I was watching a TV show I can't even

remember the title of now with a female lead who was a psychologist. Six years later, I entered

college and registered as a psychology major. But long before I could get my feet wet in

psychology, I had to get some general education classes taken care of. So with the college's offer

of a free summer class, I signed up for a four-week course in composition, ENGL 101. I wrote

like a ravenous child might eat. Finally, I had a captive audience. My teacher *had* to read and

respond to my papers about my first kiss, my grandmother's death, my childhood friend's

sexual abuse, and other true yet soap opera-esque narratives featuring characters with names

such as Blake and Eden.

Looking back, seeing the 18-year-old, first-year college student close up, I blush a little.

I'm simultaneously delighted and appalled. What she loves, what defines her is writing dark

poetry (mostly about love, death, or love *and* death), reading very poorly written Christian

romance novels, listening to Enya and Depeche Mode, hosting English-style tea parties, pining over not having Mr. Right, being on the constant lookout for Mr. Right, and wearing empire-waisted, floral-print Laura Ashley dresses with Air Force-issue, paratrooper jumping boots. And this 18-year-old is completely devoted to *Beverley Hills: 90210* (1990-2000), walking three-quarters a mile from her college dormitory every week to the volunteer fire station and trading her culinary skills for an hour of the teen melodrama.

From this scholarly distance, I see the rough stone and can soothe my embarrassment with the knowledge that that same year, she experiences two significant shifts, not necessarily in the core of who she is but definitely in the way she understands herself and the world around her. She schedules her first gynecological exam and receives as a gift a copy of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Her paradigm—flavored, at this point, almost solely by the two seemingly competing ingredients of a Christian upbringing, including all private and parochial schooling, and life-long addiction to popular culture and its artifacts—moves like crashing Teutonic plates, and she bemoans the ambiguity of her relocation.

*   *   *

I am a scholar-fan. Both. Of course, I put *scholar* first in the compound word to immediately establish my academic identity. Clearly, doing so is a rhetorical choice, an attempt to distance myself from the Other, the other side of the hyphen—the *fan*. *Scholar-fan* also lets me hold a position that is *not* that of the reverse compound, the fan-scholar. I am not a fan who masquerades and parades about as a scholar. No, I am first a scholar and *then* a fan. That's what many scholar-fans like to tell ourselves, anyway. There is some truth in that telling. But really,

honestly, the story always already begins with the fandom. Because long before we, long before

I was a scholar, I was one of Them.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

I was a fan before I was a first-grader. At five years old, I was angry about Elvis

Presley's death because my parents, regular concert goers, had promised to take me to the next

one they attended. My mother still has one of Elvis's scarves he so famously tossed from stage.

At eight, I became addicted to soap operas while spending a week of summer vacation with my

grandmother and grandfather on their South Georgia farm. Monday through Friday,

Grandmama cooked, served, and cleared lunch—even if Grandaddy was still trying to finish off

the "pot liquor" at the bottom of the butter bean dish—by 12:45 p.m. so that at 1:00 p.m. she was

sitting in front of the television set for *Days of Our Lives* (1965-present). Much to my mother's

chagrin, I was soon begging for a subscription to *Soap Opera Digest* and sending fan letters to the

stars of not only *Days of Our Lives* but also *Search for Tomorrow* (1951-1986), *Another World* (1964-

1999), and *Santa Barbara* (1984-1993).

I distinctly remember the first film I saw in a theater: Steven Spielberg's *ET* (1982). I was

ten. And once I had a taste for film, I was writing not only soap stars but the likes of John

Travolta, Olivia Newton John, and Sylvester Stallone—my three favorites. For years, I made

scrapbooks, meticulously searching newspapers, teen magazines, and *TV Guide*s for any photo

or blurb to clip and keep (see Appendix A). Up went posters on my bright pink walls. Before

long, I was steeped in fandoms of all types—for Barbie, Michael Jackson, films such as *The

Breakfast Club* (1985) and *St. Elmo's Fire* (1985), and even My Pretty Pony. But my biggest love,

my most intense craving was reserved for television. I loved television so much that one

summer my mother finally threatened to cut the TV cord if I didn't get up from our brown vinyl

sofa and "get my rear end outside" to climb trees, ride my bike, and play with my baby sister.

For goodness sake, we lived on a lake; there was plenty to do in the great outdoors! I went,

grudgingly. And I played outside, all the while pretending I was Hope Horton. Bo Brady would

surely soon convince my family that just because he wore a leather jacket excessively

punctuated with zippers, rode a motorcycle, and came from immigrant Irish stock did not mean

he couldn't love me passionately and provide a stable home for our future children. And if I

wasn't Hope Horton, I was Dee Dee McCall from *Hunter* (1984-1991) or Grace Van Owen from

L.A. Law (1986-1994); I was Jaime Sommers, the Bionic Woman, or Diana Prince, Wonder

Woman.

*   *   *

I grew up, and I was supposed to put away "childish" things said my Bible, my church

school teachers, my home town, my American culture—unless I planned to be a sports fan, that

is. And was it the church or the academy that gave me this monologue: "When I was a child, I

used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a [woman], I did

away with childish things" (*New American Standard Bible*, I Cor. 13.11)? But I'm pretty sure some

other authority figure—a kinder, gentler one—said, "Truly I say to you, unless you . . . become

like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18.3). I like that Teacher better.

*   *   *

"A mighty fortress is my guilt, a bulwark never fai-ai-aaai-ling," I sing to the tune in my

head.

I was raised a Seventh-day Adventist, in a conservative congregation in the South, and bore the burden of much guilt about my fandoms, so I kept that identity quiet as I entered my teens. Attending a parochial boarding school for grades 9-12 and then college only sustained my silence and fortified my shame. Many members of my local church renounced theater attendance, despised rock-and-roll, and frowned upon television. Even *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-1983) was declared too violent by some of my friends' parents. So it is no surprise that *studying* television or any other form of media never occurred to me until I was in a master's program on a public university campus.

I was taking Modern Rhetorical Theory, reading William Covino's *The Art of Wondering*, and somewhat secretly watching *The X-Files*. Because I was both an eager student and closeted fan (much more participatory than I ever had been before, having amassed a stash of trading cards, action figures, t-shirts, magnets, and custom-framed posters), I began to see connections among the class, the text, and the television series. I took a chance and wrote my first paper attempting to blend rhetorical theory, the call to "wonder" intellectually, and cultural studies. Quick to catch on to my fandom, my professor coaxed me into attending a regional meeting of a conference on popular culture. With two classmates who had already been accepted to deliver papers, I drove to Roanoke, VA, for the meeting of The Popular and American Culture Association in the South. After only one session in which presenters critically interrogated yet often openly lauded *The X-Files*, I knew I had found my niche. There were also papers on Marilyn Manson and body art and Laurel K. Hamilton. I responded viscerally, tingling all over. And at the same time presenters explored Mulder and Scully's relationship, Manson's androgyny, the social significance of tattoos, and vampire-detective novels, they called upon the

theories and philosophies of Freud and Jung, Baudrillard and Foucault, Kristeva and Dworkin. I

was amazed, in awe, and at home.

I belonged here. I sensed my *selves* converging, the cleaved pieces of me cleaving

together again, back to the natural state of me, the whole *I.* And my guilt started to slowly—

very slowly—slough away.

*   *   *

Can an academic feel "at home"? I mean, feel so at home that there is no distinction in

her mind between public and private, no difference between what she does and who she is,

even if what she does is write and teach in academia and who she is is a Christian, a woman, a

scholar, a feminist, and a fan? Can her theory use and theory construction be just another part

of the story she finds herself in, a cosmic story at that? Can it be true that it "may be impossible

to avoid writing academically without providing a narrative shape to one's 'theoretical' account

(meaning, nonjudgmentally, that all theories are also stories)" (Hills, *Fan Cultures* 70)?

*   *   *

I cannot know myself, I think, using only one methodology, so I bind it to another, look

at myself and others from a different angle. This other glass plate beneath the microscope is

narrative inquiry, a way to understand the depth and relevance of my experience as well as the

experience of others.

D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly explain that John Dewey, "the preeminent

thinker in education," believed that life is learning and research is the study of experience (xxii-

xxiii, 2). Life, education, and experience, then, cannot be separated, and when they are, it is an

artificial separation, an unnatural incising. We humans are storytellers, and we live our stories,

even if we use different "languages"—coos and gurgles, rap, signs, touch, or academese—and have different experiences.

By examining through story, according to Clandinin and Connelly, I, being both the participant and the observer through autoethnography, collaborate with my selves, looking at *me* "over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (20). I face, even if only metaphorically, the matrix of my experience as it is happening and turn away even as it continues to occur, "concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up [my life] . . . Simply stated, . . . narrative inquiry is [my story] lived and told" (20). I wonder, *What* is *this story I have found myself in?*

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

I am not just any scholar-fan. I am a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or, more commonly, a Whedon scholar-fan—the "worst" kind since I own not only every scholarly book available on the series but also trading cards, action figures, t-shirts, a replica slayer stake, lunch boxes, and several pendants that ask WWBD. But no matter how brazen I am with my declaration of identity independence, I am constantly reminded of the accusations and indictments against fandom generally and scholar-fandom particularly: being a fan, even a hybrid one, is for loners, losers, crazies, nerds and geeks, the "passing" academic, the socially inept, the uneducated, the lower class . . . any or all of *Those* People who are so easily moved by appeals to emotion that they straight away descend into (even greater) irrationality. Not Us but *They* actually, truly love _____. Fill in the blank: a film, an artist, a writer, an actor, a song, a composer, a

pastime, a game. And as those familiar with the *Buffy*[1] universe know, love makes one "do the wacky"—in more ways than one. Is Freud correct? Does love produce a loss of the will, of reason? Is it impossible to love *with* the will, with both reason and emotion?

If researchers are diligent, say Clandinin and Connelly, "they will be able to 'slip in and out' of the experience being studied, slip in and out of intimacy" (82). Sounds like real academic work, the kind that takes effort and skill. Sounds challenging, inviting.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The *X-Files* paper I wrote for Modern Rhetorical Theory was far from a stellar paper, but it *was* a beginning for me; writing it felt like intellectual and religious rebellion, a dirty little secret—something I was not used to possessing, especially not without academic and puritanical guilt. Yet in the back of my head was the still small voice telling me to turn off the television.

If indulging in the alien and government conspiracies of the *The X-Files* wasn't bad enough, one night while my graduate school roommate was watching her favorite show, I sat down to fold laundry. Demons and vampires flashed across the screen. Suddenly, slaying ensued. I slowly turned my head towards Carla. With a reproachful gasp, I cried, "Wwwhhhaaattt are you watching?" I felt the need to raise my hands and cross my index fingers in the sign of a cross.

Carla sighed dreamily, without peeling one eye from the TV, "Isn't Angel the most beautiful man you've even seen?!" Actually, he possibly was, but I turned away resolutely. *It's just not right*, I thought, *young girls falling in love with vampires!*

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[1] Throughout this dissertation, I alternate between the series full name and an abbreviation: *Buffy*. When I refer to the character of the same name, I do not use italics.

Carla summarized the plot, explaining that Angel used to be Angelus, an infamously vicious vampire, until he bit the wrong woman, a gypsy whose family then cursed Angelus with a soul. Now Angel had spent several hundred years trying to redeem himself, to rid his soul of the torturous knowledge of how cruel he had been as Angelus. But because he had fallen in love with Buffy—and she with him—and they had had sex, he had experienced a moment of pure pleasure, the one occurrence, according to the rule of the curse, that would release his soul again. He had reverted to Angelus. Now Buffy was heartbroken. For crying out loud, her first sexual experience had resulted in the loss of her lover's soul; she was devastated, of course! All I could muster was a gasp, "What kind of show is this?" But when Carla lost interest because the actor David Boreanaz took a hiatus as Angel, I kept peeking through cracked fingers and listening with wide-open ears.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　　*　　　*</p>

From the rising to the setting of the sun and everything that happens in between, God summons everything on this earth, I am informed in Psalm 50, verse 1 (*New American Standard Bible*). God speaks a story to me in and through every *thing* God can. And yet I am told by Scott Bukatman what I still suspect: "The academy keeps refusing to tell me about *my* self" (126). Who am I going to believe?

<p style="text-align:center">*　　　*　　　*</p>

On December 5, 2003, I wrote these questions in my journal: "Is Jesus' death and resurrection metaphorically played out in places we least expect? Do movies, television shows, pop chart ditties tell us something about Jesus?" I thought I was a little crazy for writing the

questions down on paper and even crazier for turning the questions into a conference proposal, but I soon discovered that I—even if but one of a few—was not the only person asking them.

Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor explain that for years Christians have been writing books and publishing articles about what in popular culture is acceptable, especially what films and TV programs are appropriate to watch. *Touched by an Angel* (1994-2003) and *7th Heaven* (1996-2007), for example, are praised by many people of faith and such conservative Christian media watch groups as Parents' Television Council and *Focus on the Family*. But little has been written and published about finding God where we might least expect—in songs by Eminem, in sitcoms such as *The Simpsons* (1989-present), in films such as *Crash* (2004), or in teen horror/action/science fiction/fantasy/comedy/dramas with campy titles like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Detweiler and Taylor argue that Jesus himself set the precedence for "shaking things up" when he told his listeners, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (*New American Standard Bible*, Luke 9.24). Jesus' declaration that life is secured only by losing it "flipped the script on people's understanding of power, life, and religion" (8). And flipping the script is exactly what Detweiler and Taylor intend to do by claiming that "God shines through even the most debased pop cultural products" (8). I was skeptical of their claims at first, but as I more fully realize what story it is that I find myself in, I take their words more and more to heart. My experience tells me I must.

For years as a Christian and a scholar, I have been moving between guilt and wondering, between justification of my tastes and intellectual inquiry, and I may remain in that ebb and flow for the rest of my life. Still, the rhythm of that movement continues to slow as I

allow my identity to fuse itself together, as I allow all of who I am to simultaneously be. I have

seen the parts coolly set out on the glass plates under a microscope. Now they must come back

together. No more guilt, only critical curiosity. This whole person sees striking and moving

metaphorical connections between the Bible's Gospel and *Buffy*'s "good news." This whole

person makes meaning for herself that deepens and enriches her religious, spiritual, and

academic experience. She hears a universal tune humming through both obvious and obscure

texts.

When I first wrote the questions in my journal—Is Jesus *there* in the least expected

places? In popular culture?—I first thought of similarities between C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the*

Witch and the Wardrobe (1950) and *Buffy*, between the deaths of Aslan toward the end of the book

and Buffy in the finale of the fifth season ("The Gift," 5.22). Particularly, I was reminded of

Gilbert Meilaender's comments in *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S.*

Lewis:

> Throughout his writings [including his fantasy novels] Lewis scatters
>
> references to the truth that "he who loses his life will save it." This is for him
>
> neither a prudential maxim nor a higher law. It is merely the truth of the
>
> universe on which all community must finally be based. Without such a
>
> willingness to give of self, the vicariousness needed for community could not
>
> arise. . . . Love, therefore, is "that mystical death which is the secret of life." Life
>
> requires that the self be not grasped but given up. Through self-giving we find
>
> our true selves; for it makes community possible, and we cannot be ourselves

until we have left isolation and entered into fellowship. . . . Love as self-sacrifice

is the incarnation of love as self-giving. (63)

Meilaender's words echo in the closing scenes of "The Gift" as I gaze at Buffy bounding up the

rickety stairs of a makeshift tower to rescue her sister Dawn, stolen from the family to be used

as a key to unlock the portal between human and demon dimensions. But Buffy will have none

of that. With the rift already opening, Buffy must make a choice: Dawn's life or her own.

Understanding that the crisis demands a blood sacrifice and that she and Dawn share the same

life-giving fluid, Buffy gasps her sister's arms, looks lovingly into Dawn's face, and speaks

words muted to the audience who are forced to simply watch, overcome by the emotion of the

soundtrack, as Buffy then turns in slow motion, runs to the edge of the tower, and gracefully

falls through the tear between dimensions. It is only later, when her friends and family gather at

her side, her body ravaged of life, that viewers hear her last words in voiceover:

Dawn, listen to me. Listen. I love you. I will *always* love you. But this is the work

that I have to do. Tell Giles . . . tell Giles I figured it out. And, and I'm okay. And

give my love to my friends. You have to take care of them now. You have to take

care of each other. You have to be strong. Dawn, the hardest thing in this

world . . . is to live in it. Be brave. Live. For me.

In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis himself writes, "martyrdom always remains the supreme enacting

and perfection of Christianity" (102) or, more generally, of authentic community.

I grew up believing that everything depends on the right act of the will, that we are free

agents, that our gift is choice. I *want*, I choose to believe. The way each person makes meaning,

the various ways we read and interpret and connect and internalize what happens in the world

around us is specific to each. Yet I may not be alone when I say that I am a richer person, a more

spiritual person, even a more genuine Christian for having been touched by Jesus' death as

echoed in the most unlikely of television shows. I recall the words on Buffy's tombstone:

"BELOVED SISTER, DEVOTED FRIEND . . . SHE SAVED THE WORLD A LOT." To some it

may sound silly to say so, but I have come to see, by way of my spiritual *and* academic

education, that God has used a petite, blonde, impractical-shoe-loving, dangerous-boy-dating,

savior-complex-sporting vampire slayer with a ridiculous name to save me, to save me a lot.

And so I write . . .

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

I am here at the end of the beginning, having told in this introduction a piece of the story

I find myself in, the story that I am. But there is much, much more to tell.

In Chapter Two, "Slaying Pupils, Siring Students: Composition Befriends *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer," I suggest that scholar-fans, or those who study the object of their fandom, are

especially positioned to help college and university students see the relevance of a higher

education, take ownership of their learning, and even enjoy their studies. Learners who

understand the relevance of their tasks find those tasks meaningful, and what is meaningful

sparks motivation, what is motivating commands students' attention. In this chapter, then, I

also share the narrative of how in a first-year writing class I discovered I could use my own

scholar-fandom not as the *content* of the course but as the *catalyst* for more engaged learners.

This personal experience, I explain, prompted me to study more closely the cultures of fans,

academics, and the liminal, hybrid figures of fan-scholars and scholar-fans, topics I address

beginning in Chapter Three.

In "Fandom: Etymology and Rhetorical Frameworks," I discuss the history of the word *fan* and summarize early popular and academic connotations attached to the term. Then I consider the more nuanced understandings of current popular constructions and scholarly treatments of fans before examining a particular fandom, one devoted to the television series *Firefly* (2002). I demonstrate how *Firefly* fans, who call themselves Browncoats, discursively and rhetorically compose their identity. One purpose of Chapter Three is to acquaint readers who are unfamiliar with fandom and to remind those who are familiar. More importantly, though, in my critique of the Browncoats I contribute to the wider discussion in audience and communication studies concerning fans' participatory nature and that tendency's relationship with and to technology, consumption, and copyright law.

A companion to the previous one, in Chapter Four, "Scholardom: History and Rhetorical Frameworks," I take a close look at academia by first offering a brief history of higher education in the United States and then focusing on my own fields of study—composition and rhetoric and writing centers—to consider how they, as representative examples of academic disciplines, also linguistically and rhetorically shape their identity. The purpose here is to draw attention to how similarly fans and scholars build their identities through language and create internal hierarchies that (un)wittingly construct external walls that keep "others" at a distance. Through these cases, I argue that fans and scholars mirror each other's discursive practices, an assertion that sets the stage for the conversation that follows.

In "Fan-Scholars and Scholar-Fans: Life in the Shadowlands," Chapter Five, I examine the blending of identities and, in particular, offer a detailed picture of the fan-scholar, a portrait currently absent from the academic literature on fandom. As one might suspect, both roles can

elicit ridicule or hostility from fellow fans and colleagues. As a result, this in-between space, this shadowland often leaves a person feeling simultaneously alienated and included. To conclude this chapter, I draw on the work Parker J. Palmer to craft a novel way of reading the academic-fan; I posit that scholar-fandom is—to use Palmer's terms—personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational. This framework I detail in Chapter Six.

I continue to use a multidisciplinary approach in "Scholar-Fandom at Work and (in) Play: The Case of Whedon Studies," a chapter in which I analyze scholar-fans whose research focuses on the works of Joss Whedon, creator of first *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, most recently *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), and many other texts in between, including comics and "webisodes." Specifically, I flesh out how Whedon scholar-fans have created both an epistemology and discourse—a rhetoric—distinguished by intimacy, community, reciprocity, and transformation. Before this, though, I provide a thorough background of how Whedon Studies came about, including my own relationship with and role in the community of scholars.

Finally in Chapter Seven, "Scholarly Hybridity, A Balm and Tincture," I synthesize the central arguments I have made throughout this dissertation and claim that the space where fandom/fans and scholardom/scholars meet is fertile land, a space where the most stimulating and relevant meaning making and knowledge creation can occur. I close the dissertation as it begins, locating myself yet again in this story that continues to say what it, what I have to say.

Thus beginneth the lesson . . .

Chapter Two

SLAYING PUPILS, SIRING STUDENTS:

COMPOSITION BEFRIENDS *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

In a scene from the film *Good Will Hunting* (1997), Matt Damon's Will comes to the

defense of his friend Chuckie (Ben Affleck) who is being verbally belittled by Clark (Scott

William Winters), an Ivy League graduate student. When Chuckie asks Clark if there is going to

be a problem between them, Clark responds in the negative, only he wants to know if

Chuckie—a blue-collar worker with no formal higher education—has any "insight into the

evolution of the market economy in the early colonies." Clark begins to offer his perspective

when Will steps in:

> WILL. Of course that's your contention. You're a first year grad student. You just
>
> finished some Marxian historian, Pete Garrison prob'ly, and so naturally
>
> that's what you believe until next month when you get to James Lemon and
>
> get convinced that Virginia and Pennsylvania were strongly entrepreneurial
>
> and capitalist back in 1740. That'll last until sometime in your second year,
>
> then you'll be in here regurgitating Gordon Wood about the pre-
>
> revolutionary utopia and the capital-forming effects of military mobilization.
>
> CLARK. [Taken aback.] Well, as a matter of fact, I won't, because Wood
>
> drastically underestimates the impact of—
>
> WILL. "Wood drastically underestimates the impact of social distinctions
>
> predicated upon wealth, especially inherited wealth . . ." You got that from
>
> "Work in Essex County," page 421, right? Do you have any thoughts of your

own on the subject or were you just gonna plagiarize the whole book for me?

[Clark is stunned.] Look, don't try to pass yourself off as some kind of an

intellect at the expense of my friend just to impress these girls. [Clark is lost

now, searching for a graceful exit, any exit.] The sad thing is, in about fifty

years you might start doin' some thinkin' on your own and by then you'll

realize there are only two certainties in life.

CLARK. Yeah? What're those?

WILL. One, don't do that. Two—you dropped a hundred and fifty grand on an

education you coulda' picked up for a dollar fifty in late charges at the public

library.

CLARK. But I will have a degree, and you'll be serving my kids fries at a drive-

thru on our way to a skiing trip.

WILL. Maybe. But at least I won't be a prick. . . .

The scene raises at least two points relevant to my goals for this dissertation. First, it reinforces

ingrained stereotypes about the snobbery of those who frequent and are employed by the Ivory

Tower. Second, and more importantly, the scene draws attention to one of academia's ever-

present challenges: remaining relevant, especially in a society filled with not only public

libraries but also home and personal computers with high-speed access to the World Wide Web.

In "Who Says We Know: On the New Politics of Knowledge," Lawrence Sanger, a

cofounder of *Wikipedia* and current editor-in-chief of *Citizendium*, argues, "Professionals are no

longer *needed* for the bare purpose of the mass distribution of information and the shaping of

opinion. The hegemony of the professional in determining our background knowledge is

disappearing—a deeply profound truth that not everyone has fully absorbed" (original emphasis). Sanger welcomes and lauds this shift, this democratization of knowledge. However, the shift is a double-edged sword. While one edge is desirable—a collaborative, grassroots model of creating "what we know," the other edge must be dulled: "As wonderful as it might be that the hegemony of professionals over knowledge is lessening, there is a downside: our grasp of and respect for *reliable information* suffers" (original emphasis). In the new knowledge economy, the expert, ideally, still plays a central role. Sanger insists that everyone—both the specialist and the amateur or novice—has a place "at the table," that new epistemologies can be simultaneously egalitarian and expert. In other words, truth need not be sacrificed for every person to play a role in knowledge creation; in fact, Sanger would argue that the most innovative ideas are born out of the mingling of minds, *all* minds. This is the juncture at which academia must abandon any snobbery or elitism and post a road sign that reads "We are necessary *and* relevant!"

From my own teaching experience, I surmise that most students get the message that education is a necessity—at least, that a diploma is a necessity. Of course, many of them seek schooling because they believe that an education entails a better paying job and that a better paying job results in an easier and more privileged lifestyle (i.e., ultimately a degree buys "stuff," and certainly, there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to better one's material reality). Regardless of one's equation, though, the point is well-taken by the majority of students; they believe they need a piece of paper that confirms they finished some form of college. Believing that that piece of paper also represents an education that is relevant . . . well, that's a completely different story, a story that could use a few scholar-fans as main characters.

Scholar-fans—those who study the object of their fandom[2]—are particularly poised to bridge the gap between relevant education and students who too often just want to get by and get out.[3] Because what is relevant is meaningful and what is meaningful is interesting and what is interesting captures and holds a student's attention, fandom can play a central role in learning. In the first-year composition classroom, where I find myself most of the time, the scholar-fan can be the embodiment of one of the fundamental mantras of writing: write about what you know. The personal experiences of emerging writers are brought into the classroom as the most obvious starting point for the writing process. The media autobiography is an example, an assignment that asks students to think critically about their relationship with a formative book, film, or other medium. Once students identify a particularly affective artifact—a favorite television series or episode, a video or multi-player online game, a musical artist or band—community becomes important; classmates share their experiences with the whole class, inviting discussion and feedback about what their experiences may mean to not only themselves but to a broader audience. In other words, they collaboratively begin to decipher meaning, to generate understanding. After the whole-class exchange, students begin to draft their individual essays and soon after choose review partners. Students in the writing classroom become mentors to each other as they participate in the peer review process, reading one

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[2] A detailed discussion of scholar-fans appears in Chapter Five.

[3] In the introduction to his *Neil Young and the Poetics of Energy*, William Echard shares his belief that scholars who are also fans are "in a unique position to bridge discourses" between the two audiences—academics and enthusiasts (3). Both a scholar and fan himself, Echard goes on to describe his goal for his work: "Although technical in parts, I hope that the spirit of this book is not too far removed from the enthusiasm and desire for dialogue that underlie the discussions taking place daily between fans about music they love. . . . I see this work both as a contribution to scholarship and also as an attempt to explicate and expand my intuitions as a native listener. As a result, it is inevitable that parts of the work will be too academic for some fans and other parts too casual for some academics. Rather than attempt a forced reduction to one side or the other, I have decided to leave myself in this intermediate space" (3). The academic-fan, then, becomes not only a liminal figure but also a mediator, discursive guide, and interpreter. This role, of course, is essentially one that every educator always already plays in the classroom.

another's drafts, talking through content, even jotting comments in the margins of each other's essays. Writing and thinking deeply about what one already knows, sharing one's passion with others, offering and receiving writerly advice, personally and collaboratively creating meaning for a broader audience than self—these basic acts of composing are transformational for both students and teachers. A reformation occurs in the classroom when writing becomes more than a general education requirement, a hoop through which students must jump before they can get on to the "real business" of the university.

Of course, bringing media into the writing classroom and using the artifacts of popular culture to teach analytical thinking are anymore neither innovative nor original strategies.[4] What would be novel is exploring the role the academic-fan plays in students' learning. What would be refreshing is openly and nonjudgmentally acknowledging the passion the fan can inspire in the scholar, the scholar in the fan. As Lisa A. Lewis declares, "we are all fans of something. We respect, admire, desire. We distinguish and form commitments" (1). Why not

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[4] When so many others have already done so, there is no need to justify the use of media texts in a writing classroom. However, it is worth noting some of the most compelling central arguments. For example, Bronwyn T. Williams notes that while writing teachers are deeply devoted to the printed word (as Williams believes they should be), popular culture texts—especially television—must be invited into the composition class. These texts do no become the content of a writing course; rather, they are used to both capitalize on and correct students' ways of reading. Most importantly, observes Williams, "print literacy is no longer the sole, authoritative form of discourse in our culture" (175). For writing teachers and higher education to remain relevant, they must recognize this cultural shift, study it, and use it. As Williams explains, television is not an isolated medium any longer; students daily engage in what Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture," a culture in which television, the internet, newspapers, magazines, and the radio all communicate among each other. In this world, students read a comic book that later becomes a film that has a website that hosts a fan discussion board that links to fan blogs that contain fan-written fiction about the original comic book. In other words, students daily participate in and employ multiple discourses—graphics, images, videos . . . and much writing. As a result, writing instructors must choose to provide students with the reading, thinking, and composing skills they need to most effectively and intelligently participate in and shape this media-driven existence. In *Tuned In: Television and the Teaching of Writing*, Williams explores how compositionists should go about such an endeavor. For further arguments, see also Diane Penrod's edited collection *Miss Grundy Doesn't Teach Here Anymore: Popular Culture and the Composition Classroom*.

admit that we are all *scholars* of something also? After all, isn't the timeless, desired outcome of education to create critically engaged citizens?

In the next two chapters, readers find that the characteristics of fans and scholars are strikingly similar and that, stripped of value judgments, fandom makes a comfortable, common sense entry for students into a lifetime of learning, a span of time in which daily life—the mundane—can and should become meaning filled. But first, in the following section I share the story of how my fandom, blended with my training as an academic, first helped me see how a hybrid identity could transform pupils into students. In subsequent chapters, I take several steps back to analyze the experience recorded here, to see the separate parts before putting them back together again in the epilogue.

BRINGING *BUFFY* FANDOM INTO THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM

A not-so-long time ago, in a classroom not-so-far away, I wondered: *What would I have to do to have just one first-year writing class—just one—that didn't begin, proceed, and end with grumbling, unengaged students; to have just one group of students who didn't openly express "I hate writing"?* I knew I wouldn't come by the answer easily. But I needed to know, to try.

I knew from the outset that to slay pupils and sire students, to bury the notion of empty vessels waiting to be filled with the professors' wisdom and to give rise to the concept of students—active-minded, meaning-making individuals was my goal, the goal of hopefully every educator. For me, slaying pupils and siring students meant revealing my scholar-fandom to my writing classes, presenting myself to them as the embodiment of seriously passionate scholarship, and continuing to investigate how that identity could enhance my teaching and incite an authentic desire to learn among those in the classrooms where I was teaching. I started

there, with scholar-fandom, because that identify was what allowed me to see that using the object of my own pleasure (at that time, *Buffy the Vampires Slayer*)—*not* as a text but as a catalyst—in the writing classroom could help me engender *real* students, the kind I wanted to teach and hoped to learn from. Over many semesters, I came to see that fandom, however, is only one piece in a richly detailed puzzle of disparate pieces that also include but are not limited to cognitive linguistic views of metaphor, composition and rhetorical theory, and the study of human motivation.

Educating **Buffy**

One semester during my doctoral education, I had a classroom full of disengaged pupils. Maybe because it was an eight o'clock class, maybe because I was new to teaching at the university, maybe because I was using the default composition text, maybe because my students entered the class with squashed spirits about writing, or maybe because all of these factors were combined . . . I do not know, but except for the two exceptional young men in the class who were self-motivated when they walked through the door, everything that semester was a nightmare. Even in the early weeks of that September, I knew something drastic would have to change to make the following semester better—for the pupils and for me. That point in time is when I began to wonder how I could infuse my class with my own enthusiasm for research and writing, how I could convince twenty-five young people that the scholarly production of written texts is not only empowering, but downright fun. How could I slay the empty-vessel pupils and sire the knowledge-making students? I tried to pinpoint when it was that *I* first knew I wanted to research and write for the rest of my life. It did not take me long to recall. My "aha moment" came in my master's program, when my professor allowed and then

encouraged me to bring my *X-Files* fandom into the classroom. *Of course*, I thought. *I need to offer similar opportunities in my classroom, let pupils bring their own loves to the table!* And my first instinct was to turn to my interest in *Buffy the Vampires Slayer* as an exemplar.

Bringing *Buffy* and more generally popular culture into my own work in the classroom seemed the logical first step, so in the midst of my hellish semester, I began reviewing as many composition texts as I could find that used culture as a vehicle for writing instruction. I finally chose *Common Culture: Reading and Writing About American Popular Culture* (Allyn & Bacon, 2003) by Michael Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure, both at the University of California Santa Barbara. In its fourth edition at the time, the text promised to be a fashionable and useful one for my pupils and my purposes. Next I began to develop a syllabus based on the text. With too many chapters to cover in one semester, I narrowed my choice to four—Advertising, Cyberculture, Television, and Film. From research, I was already convinced that young people might be more motivated than usual if they could talk and write about popular culture, but I also knew I would be happier and more motivated myself if I could talk and write about it with them. What did not strike me, however, until I walked into the classroom the following January, is that I would and could speak about the object of my own fandom, *Buffy*, from the outset, that the text I personally studied would become a metaphor of the class itself.

I passed out the syllabus, went over all of the technical bits—grading policies, attendance, and academic honesty—then put down my copy and smiled out at their blank faces; some seemed a little frightened, some either groggy (even at 9:20 a.m.), already bored, or both. "I'm going to tell you something about myself now," I said. "The reason I want to use pop culture to teach writing is because I like popular culture myself. And I like to research and write

about it. In fact, I'm a huge *Buffy* fan!" I knew I had broken the first-day-of-school ice when a

young woman on the front row felt comfortable enough to burst out, "Oh, I *hate* that show!"

Others started to laugh. Once they got over the initial shock that there are actually real people

who call themselves *Buffy* scholars and even have their own academic journal,[5] the pupils

initiated a heated conversation about why Shaylen hates *Buffy*, why I enjoy it, and if and why it

is worth studying. I sensed I had a few pieces of an intricate puzzle:

> My Enthusiasm for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
> + My Skills as a Composition Instructor
> + The Average Pupil
> _____
>
> *Real* Students

With so few pieces, it was an incomplete picture, but one that was beginning to take the shape

of invigorated classes and student writing. So as the semester unfolded, I searched for the

missing parts and discovered a few more: scholar-fandom, cognitive linguistic views of

metaphor, composition and rhetorical theory, and the study of human motivation. Now I had to

put the pieces together and see if a clearer portrait emerged.

Scholar-Fandom

That semester when I went looking for research on scholar-fandom, my literature review

revealed much scholarly attention paid to sports fans (e.g., Aden; Brown; Redhead; Wann et al.),

soap opera fans (e.g., Bacon-Smith; Baym; Harrington and Bielby), and science fiction fans (e.g.,

Aden; Jenkins; Sanders), in particular. Other than an introductory chapter in Matt Hills' *Fan*

Cultures, little or only passing attention was paid to scholar-fans, especially in relation to

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[5] I look at the Whedon scholar-fan community in detail in Chapter Six.

popular culture. The research that had been done mostly concerned the tendency of academics to develop cults around literary or philosophical figures such as Joyce or Marx, for example (Cavell; Collins). But because at the time I was familiar with the work of Whedon scholars and already participating in it myself, I remembered both private conversations among academics who study *Buffy* and public conversations in articles about the series that called for such research on Whedon scholar-fandom in particular.[6]

In "Feeling for Buffy: The Girl Next Door," for instance, Michael P. Levine and Steven J. Schneider are concerned that Whedon scholarship is not rigorous enough.[7] They argue,

> There has been much less of the kind of self-reflective work about the
> nature of [*Buffy*] scholarship . . . than there should be, or than there in fact is . . .
> Those in English, Film and Television, and Cultural Studies departments would
> be better off investigating the nature of the unreflective and narrow critical
> responses to [*Buffy*] instead of responding to the show unreflectively, narrowly,
> and mistakenly themselves. As a paradigmatic instance of a superficial but
> immensely popular TV series, [*Buffy*] merits a degree of scholarly attention. This
> does not require that the show be regarded as anything but a well-made and
> fairly unremarkable instance of popular culture. (301)

When the authors wrote the essay, prior to its 2003 publication, they believed that scholars who work with Whedon texts, specifically *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, more often exhibit the

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[6] See a more complete discussion of Levine and Schneider in Chapter Six. Also see Bradney; Burr, "Scholar/'shippers and Spikeaholics"; Lavery, "'I wrote my thesis on you!'"; Pender; Rogers; Turnball; and Wilcox, "In 'The Demon Section'" who all address some aspect of Whedon scholar-fandom.

[7] In 2003, Whedon Studies was about four years old. As publishing a book can take at very least a year, Levine and Schneider were likely making their judgment of *Buffy* scholarship in the first year or two of its existence. As with any field of study, early academic work grows stronger as scholars search for the discipline's center and build a foundation for future scholarship.

characteristics of fans rather than scholars, an imbalance that emasculates academicians' work. Series creator Joss Whedon is only a "genius," according to Levine and Schneider, in that he produced a visual text that allows *Buffy* scholars to erect "their own fictions and fantasies about what is going on in the various episodes . . . and [to be] unduly impressed with some clever and entertaining dialogue. [*Buffy*] scholars are, in psychoanalytic parlance, repressing, projecting, and 'acting out' their own fantasies in relation to the program. They love [*Buffy*]" (299). The writers mistakenly assumed, based on Freudian psychology, that love only produces scholarly impotence when, in fact, it could produce scholarly fecundity. Many Whedon scholars would admit to loving *Buffy* and other Whedon texts. And certainly loving the character Buffy or the series *Buffy* would have an effect on what I was researching for my classroom. Intellectual flaccidty, however, was not an effect I chose to anticipate. Instead, I was beginning to believe that the scholar-fan could play an intimate role in encouraging pupils to become students.

Some empirical researchers worry, though, that becoming too intimate with an experience—the participants, environment, data—may result in a loss of objectivity or, in Levine and Schneider's terms, impotence. But others believe, as D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly discuss in *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, that *not* becoming intimate with an experience often results in only a superficial understanding of that experience (81). I agreed then and today believe that many times teachers do and even should "fall in love" with participants—or in this case, students—and our studies. As David Lavery declared in his presentation at the first *Slayage* Conference on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in response to Levine and Schneider's criticism, "We will understand *Buffy* best when we love her, without shame" ("'I wrote my thesis on you!'"). It is also very possible that we might

understand and teach our students best when we shamelessly love *them*. But loving them, I

knew then and know now, is not enough. At this point in my research, I turned to theories of

metaphor and human motivation.

The Cognitive Linguistic View of Metaphor

"I don't know about you, but in high school I turned everything inside and it was all so

horrible and dramatic," states *Buffy*'s creator Joss Whedon. In essence, he deplored his high

school years:

> Everyone always says [high school's] part of being a teen, but it isn't easy for
>
> anyone. It may be all those hormones; I'm not really sure but there's just so much
>
> emotion happening and nowhere to let them go. You blow everything out of
>
> proportion, and the tiniest thing can set you off. You have no control over the
>
> situations you are in . . . I don't care how together you are during that time of
>
> your life, everyone experiences those seesawing emotions. Puberty basically
>
> sucks. (qtd. in Havens 33)

According to Whedon's description of adolescence, some first-year college writers are still

experiencing it and its social woes. At least, that's how I felt. Granted, my experience may be

somewhat different than the average first-year's experience since I moved from a parochial

boarding academy to a parochial residential college, long-time friends/classmates (and our

group's dramas) in tow. Still, I wouldn't be surprised if others agreed that the first semester of

college, though academically more challenging, can be much the same socially as high school.

Integral to Whedon's success with *Buffy*, then, was that he kept the scripts authentic, real to the

teen viewers' experiences. One may snicker at calling the series "real" since it is classified in the

fantasy genre, but the word fits—if not literally, at least metaphorically. When Joyce, Buffy's

mother, says "You can't go out tonight," it is the end of the world—one apocalypse in a series to

come. When Buffy runs away from home, she finds herself working in hell. In the second

season episode "Innocence" (2.14), when Buffy loses her virginity to Angel, her vampire lover

who has been cursed with a soul and a conscience, she is met the next day with a flippant and

condescending monster. He merely chuckles when Buffy says that she loves him and answers

her query "Was it me?" with a smirk and an "I'll call you." Angel becomes Angelus, the soulless

version of his vampire self. Whedon remarks that he knew he was doing something right when

a female fan posted to a message board after the airing of "Innocence," "That's exactly what

happened to me [after I slept with my boyfriend]" (qtd. in Havens 47). The idea is clear: in

Buffy's universe, monsters are often metaphors for real-world troubles.

Many theorists argue that metaphor is the basis of all human communication. This

position is the very reason the monsters in *Buffy* are so powerful, so significant to audiences

sitting in living rooms or in classrooms. Linguist Zoltán Kövecses claims that understanding

metaphor can actually save a person's life—according to classical literature, anyway (9).

Kövecses summarizes the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx in which the Sphinx riddles, "Which

is the animal that has four feet in the morning, two at midday, and three in the evening?"

Apparently Oedipus does not hesitate to reply that the solution is a human being. Kövecses

argues that only because Oedipus deciphers the metaphors at play—mainly, **LIFE IS A DAY**,

and less importantly, **LIFE IS A JOURNEY**—does he answer correctly and not only save his life

but later become the king of Thebes (9). Again, Oedipus's solving of the riddle depends on his

knowledge of the conceptual metaphors.

When I say "conceptual metaphor," I am referring to the cognitive linguistic view, one that opposes the traditional view (Kövecses vii-xi). From a conventional perspective, metaphor is a property of words or a linguistic phenomenon based on the similarities of two entities, a figure of speech used only for artistic or rhetorical purposes. Because metaphor is a flourish, it is used deliberately; therefore, talent or even genius is required for it to be employed well. Also, then, metaphor is not essential for daily living; we can live without it. Not so, according to the cognitive linguistic view. Instead, metaphor is a property of concepts used to understand ideas, especially abstract ones, so it is not at all for flourish. As Kövecses notes, metaphor is often *not* based on similarities, is used effortlessly by everyone, and is an inevitable part of human thought and reasoning. According to cognitive linguists, then, because metaphors are conceptual in nature, because they are how we comprehend abstract ideas, we cannot communicate, function, or live without them (ix; see also Lakoff and Johnson). That we need metaphors to communicate and function and live is exactly why *Buffy* is such powerful television and exactly why it can be used to inspire writers in a composition classroom (more on this assertion below). For me, *Buffy* seemed inspirational because it also reflected my developing philosophy of teaching.

Composition and Rhetorical Theory and Pedagogy

Over the years, I have grown as a teacher by learning to define myself, to name where it is I stand in the flow of composition pedagogies. Initially I defined myself by negation, deciding what I was *not.* For example, I was not Peter Elbow or Donald Murray. I was not Rebecca Moore Howard. I was not Henry Giroux, Paul Freire, or Ira Shor. I was not Ellen Cushman. I was not Susan McLeod. I was not Charles Moran. I was not Susan Jarratt, Andrea Lunsford, or Karlyn

Campbell. I *was* and remain an amalgam. Like Elbow and Murray, I believe that students need voices—the opportunity to find them, define them, and exercise them. Like Howard, I advocate for students learning to share their work and practice giving and taking in a workshop setting or on a group project. Like Giroux, Freire, and Shor, I think students deserve a writing classroom that is "not simply pledged to but successfully enact[s] the principles of equality, of liberty and justice for all" (George 92). Like Cushman, I want students to be able to make the leap from "mere intellectual" to "community intellectual." Like McLeod, I desire that students have opportunities throughout the university to practice their writing skills, getting the best advice from professors who write in the fields students' have chosen as careers. Like Moran, I agree that students need to be able to play in and manipulate the ever-increasingly virtual world computer technology is creating for us. And ideally, like Jarratt, Lunsford, and Campbell, I hope all of these chances and skills and writing positions occur in a space that is not defined or marked by any "ism."

My philosophy of teaching, then, was and continues to be rhetorical at heart. It is one that neither promotes nor denies any other philosophy or pedagogy. It is one "not restricted to self-expression or the acontextual generation of syntactic structures or the formulaic obedience to rules, but instead keeps in view the skills and contingencies that attend a variety of situations and circumstances" (Covino, "Rhetorical Pedagogy" 37). In essence, I saw how I myself could act as a metaphor for my students, to be for them the student I wished each one of them would aspire to be. But even this wish, I realized, was not enough to complete the pupil-to-student transformation, to add another piece to the puzzle. I felt the final and key ingredient I needed was students' intrinsic motivation. I wanted them to love research and writing for themselves.

If as a teacher I was and am similar to any one person, that person is William Covino. In "Rhetoric Is Back: Derrida, Feyerabend, Geertz, and the Lessons of History," Covino reminds readers that even in the most progressive writing classrooms—ones imbued with student-centered, process-oriented, and feminist activities such as workshopping and conferencing—we still privilege the final product: "work-in-progress does not count as writing, at least not as writing that counts" (316). What does count "is rushing through the beginning, middle, and end of an uncontemplated and patently artificial topic in 30 or 40 minutes . . . What counts is ending rather than continuing the discourse" (316). Writing teachers—across curriculums—must begin to count something else, declares Covino. They must count wandering and wondering. They must count writing that avoids closure, that trades certainty for ambiguity, preservation for investigation, conclusion for "counterinduction" (317; see Feyerabend). What is needed is "a philosophy of composition informed by the lessons of a revisionist history, a philosophy of composition that exploits writing as philosophy . . . The climate is right for writing teachers to point out that the world is a drama of people and ideas and that writing is how we consistently locate and relocate ourselves in the play," in story (317). In Campbellian terms, students need permission to follow their bliss. They need encouragement to play.

Theories of Human Motivation

Some readers may counter that play is inappropriate for a college or university classroom, that play promotes chaos and anarchy. Chaos and anarchy, maybe. Inappropriate, no. At this point in my inquiry, I realized that theories of intrinsic motivation fit perfectly with scholar-fandom, the cognitive linguist view of metaphor, and a rhetorical philosophy of teaching writing. My educated hunch was that most teachers wish for and try to encourage

more intrinsically motivated students and believe that the goal of education is to create

thoughtful human beings who are assets to themselves, their families and friends, and their

cities, counties, country, and world. Educators want students who think and do for themselves.

Interestingly, children are especially self-inspired. According to psychologists Edward L. Deci

and Richard M. Ryan, "Children learn through behaving—through thinking and acting—and

much of this behavior, as well as the integrative process itself, is intrinsically motivated" (121).

What researchers interested in theories of human motivation seem to agree upon repeatedly is

that intrinsic motivation is encouraged, nurtured, and manifested in environments that allow

students to be curious and to play, ones that are marked by all (and more) of the following:

1. Teachers who are trusting/trustworthy and empathic

2. Freedom from the yoke of rewards and punishments

3. Trial-and-error learning—i.e., allowance of and for failure

4. Discovery, choice, autonomy for students

5. "Stimulating learning materials and constructive feedback" (246-248)

And these markers do not necessarily lead to "anything goes," as some people may suspect.

"Anything goes" could lead to anarchy, but it doesn't have to. Covino cites scientist and

philosopher Paul Feyerabend and his *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of

Knowledge* in which Feyerabend draws the attention of readers over and over to the fact that as

children play, their "aimless wandering" allows them to stumble upon solutions to problems

that they did not even recognize as such beforehand ("Rhetoric Is Back" 313). Instead of

anarchy, the freedom to play can create some semblance of order. As Feyerabend assuages

hesitant readers, "we need not fear that the diminished concern for law and order in science and

society that is entailed by the anarchistic philosophies will lead to chaos. The human nervous system is too well-organized for that" (21-22). So even the most "unreasonable, nonsensical, unmethodical" play tends toward resolution and "turns out to be an unavoidable precondition of clarity" (Covino, "Rhetoric Is Back" 313). Clarity, of course, is one of the paramount goals of composition professors. Feyerabend's anarchistic theory of knowledge, one that calls for counterinduction, is just what Covino believes is needed in writing courses. He argues that Feyerabend's advice is meant to rehabilitate educational practices in science classrooms, ones that slay free-thinking students and prevent students from making their own discoveries (313). Any other discipline could be put before the word *classrooms*. Even writing classrooms—for example, those that only offer students the five-paragraph essay or modal models—can kill students' abilities and, more importantly, desires to think and do for themselves. With free intellectual play that inspires intrinsic motivation added to the puzzle, I wondered if I finally had enough pieces to distinguish a picture of students rather than pupils.

Snapping the Puzzle Pieces into Place

That spring semester when the composition students and I began reading, talking, and writing about the television chapter in our textbook, I opened the topic by delivering a speech reminiscent of seventh-season Buffy who tries to keep her weapon-wielding troops, a group of potential Slayers, together while fighting the ultimate evil they call The First—the incorporeal evil that even the demons and vampires are scared of. Moved by my own research, I stood from my chair and commenced. "Writing is about life," I said. "It's not about getting the grade and, thus, the diploma and, thus, the better paying job and, thus, the better looking mate and, thus, the nicer house with the best kids and most well-groomed dog on the most posh suburban

street." I knew I was being idealistic; of course, many students come for these very things. But a

teacher can dream, so I did. I continued, "Writing is about life. It's about making you a better

thinker, a better communicator, a better person. And life is about wonder. I want you to write to

explore. I want you to resist closure and feel comfortable with resting places instead of

conclusions. You can't solve the world's problems in one essay. Write to learn!" I became so

excited that I was actually perspiring. I deeply believed what I had just said, and I could see in

the students' eyes that they were following me. So I ventured, "Can *Buffy* help us do this?" They

snickered. "And why not?" In my mind's eye, I saw the clearest picture yet:

> Scholar-fandom
> + Cognitive Linguist Views of Metaphor
> + Theories of Rhetoric and Composition
> + Theories of Intrinsic Motivation
> _____
>
> *Real* Students

"Write because you want to, because you love it, because you want to find out about something.

Write to know. That's what I do when I write about *Buffy*."

Here I felt I needed to disclose to students the reality of the tangled and sometimes ugly

political side of what I wished for our composition classroom. As Johnmarshall Reeve explains,

education programs—for all teachers—do very well at instructing educators about how to

structure and control classes. Among other strategies and practices, teachers learn how to set

limits, how to modify behavior, and how to give "appropriate" praise. But what teachers are

not taught often or well is how to encourage and support autonomous students; Reeve claims

that the idea "is basically a foreign concept to many teachers" (207-208). He goes on to say that

creating a classroom rich in autonomy support is not easy. In fact, it is much easier to just tell

students what to do or let them do anything they want. But neither is good in the long run—for

the student *or* the teacher (208). Teachers know this, so why do they do nothing about it? "The

problem is not in the attempt to understand, accept or master principles such as involvement,

structure, and autonomy support," claims Reeve. "Rather, teachers report they experience a

literal bombardment of demands and imperatives from a culture obsessed with achievement

and performance . . . and from a school system obsessed with ability assessments" (209).

Teachers actually have a more difficult time trying to satisfy parents, principals, school boards,

and local and national governing bodies than they do trying to create an autonomy-inspiring

classroom. Therefore, I explained to students, we were engaged in trying to change an entire

system, a whole culture related to the understanding of learning (see Bain). The system itself

does not give teachers what they need to give their students: autonomy support (Reeve 209).

"See what teachers face," I declared to my students. "I guess I'm kind of asking you to rebel," I

concluded. Then I went to the DVD player and showed two clips from *Buffy*—one from

"Becoming, Part I" (2.22) and one from "Checkpoint" (5.12).

In "Becoming, Part I," viewers see a flashback to sixteen-year-old Buffy and her stylish

L.A. friends streaming out of their high school after the last bell. Buffy sucks on a lollipop as she

chirps to her friends, "So I'm like, 'Dad, do you want me to go to the dance in an outfit I've

already worn? Why do you hate me?'" Once the girls establish that Buffy is probably going to

the dance with Tyler, they part ways. Buffy shouts out after each of them, "Call me! Call me!

Call me," as she sits on the steps and waits for Tyler to meet her after his ball practice.

Suddenly, a robust man with thinning hair and a thick mustache approaches her. He looks

disheveled, hurried, even frightened, and completely out of place on a sizzling hot day in

Sunnydale, California, in his heavy, dark suit.

"Buffy Summers?"

"Yeah. Hi. What?" She does not recognize him, looks confused and a little disturbed; the

guy is kind of creepy.

"There isn't much time. You must come with me. Your destiny awaits." Beads of sweat

sit across his forehead.

"I don't have a destiny," she replies, still confused. Then she nods and smiles, "I'm

destiny-free, really."

"Yes, you have. You are the Chosen One. You alone can stop them." He is dead serious.

"Who?"

"The vampires."

Lollipop poised before her gaping mouth, Buffy cocks her head and queries, "Huh?"

The camera cuts to the local cemetery. Buffy is thrown to the ground and scrambles to

get out from under her growling vampire foe. They tussle some more. Buffy is not sure how to

act, what to do. She fumbles for the wooden stake she has dropped earlier in the fight. Minutes

pass as the two punch, kick, and side-step each other. Finally an opening comes, and barely

realizing that her instinct guides her, Buffy throws the vampire down and swings the stake at

his heart. "Uh, not the heart," she says and tries again. This time she hits the mark and the

vampire vaporizes in a cloud of dust beneath her. Wide-eyed and open-mouthed, she hears her

Watcher, the dark-suited man, state more than question, "You see? You see your power?"

Later at home, Buffy's mother Joyce scolds her for not calling and being late for dinner. Buffy apologizes and claims she was with Tyler. They just lost track of time. Perturbed, Joyce tells her dinner is in a few minutes. Buffy slowly makes her way into the bathroom to wash up from her perilous romp in the cemetery. As she stares into the mirror, she hears her parents arguing about her. Her eyes well up.

I ended the clip, turned to the students, and asked them if they could identify with Buffy. "Tell the truth," I said. "Isn't that how you felt and looked when you found out that there was no way out of comp?" They laughed. "Really. Sometimes you don't want to be the Chosen One, do you?" Several nodded. Being chosen means responsibility, effort, self-discipline. It means the equal possibility of success and failure. Being chosen is scary because it's intrinsically, thoroughly full of risk. As Buffy discovers, though, taking risks can be worthwhile.

The next scene I showed students takes place years later. Buffy has come a long way by the time "Checkpoint" occurs; she has even left the auspices of the Watcher's Council over irreconcilable differences. But now the Council is back, and because Buffy believes she may need their help with her latest foe, she submits to their poking and prodding. They want to know if she can obey orders, perform certain fight techniques, and answer questions about ancient texts. Buffy is patient with their requests until the final moments of the episode when she realizes that she has something they do not. Instead of being the recipient of another hidebound lecture, Buffy turns the tables. After instructing everyone that there will be no interruptions and as her friends look on, she begins *her* lecture. "See . . . I've had a lot of people talking at me the last few days. Everyone just lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I've figured out why. Power. I have it. They don't. This bothers them." She paces the room as

she speaks, taking her coat off as she continues. She explains that Glory, the season's villain, visited her earlier that day. "She told me I'm a bug. I'm a flea; she could squash me in a second. Only, she didn't. She came into my home, and we talked. We had what in her warped brain probably passes for a civilized conversation. Why? Because she needs something from me. Because I have power over her."

Buffy tosses her long, blonde hair and puts her hands on her hips. As she walks around the room eyeing every Council member, she says, "You guys didn't come all the way from England to determine whether or not I'm good enough to be let back in. You came to beg me to let you back in, to give your job, your lives some semblance of meaning." A timid Council member interrupts her, and Buffy interrupts his interruption with a sword that she strategically flings into the wall beside him. "I'm fairly certain I said 'no interruptions,'" she declares. "You're Watchers. Without a Slayer, you're pretty much watching *Masterpiece Theatre*. You can't stop Glory. You can't do anything with the information you have except maybe publish it in the *Everyone Thinks We're Insane-O's Home Journal*. So here's how it's gonna work." No one moves; they finally truly listen. "You're gonna tell me everything you know. Then you're gonna go away. You'll contact me when and if you have any further information about Glory." When she explains that she will continue to work with her friends, an extremely cautious Council member raises her hand.

"I, uh, I . . . don't want a sword thrown at me, but, but, civilians, I . . . we're talking about children."

Buffy looks at her friends, the Scoobies as they call themselves, and declares, "We're talking about two very powerful witches [Willow and Tara] and a thousand-year-old ex-demon

[Anya]." Another member protests that "the boy," Xander, has no power; he is merely a human. "The boy," snaps Buffy, "has clocked more field time than all of you combined. He's part of the unit." Her friends beam with pride as she concludes, "You all may be very good at your jobs. The only way we're gonna find out is if you work with me." Quentin Travers, the leader of the Council, without hesitation accepts Buffy's terms, and the Scoobies cheer triumphantly. It is a shining moment for Buffy, one in which she feels comfortable and confident in her skin as the Chosen One, as the one girl in all the world—with a lot of friends—who can fight the demons and the vampires . . . and the insecurities of early adulthood.

When I stopped the tape, I did not need to say a word. I could see in my students' faces that they were getting my point. They were beginning to see how Buffy and *Buffy* could work as a metaphor for our own classroom, *not* a course text but a catalyst. For Buffy, leaving the Council and learning how to make slaying her own was never about anarchy. Being the Slayer, the Chosen One, was about making meaning for herself, about being free to play and practice, to fail and win, to discover solutions to problems that had yet to present themselves. And because she recognized her own power and was continually learning how to wield it, Buffy slowly but consistently was becoming the Slayer she was destined to be, the Slayer she was capable of being. "This," I explained to my students, "is what I wish for you. I want you to realize the power you have when you can wield language. Language *is* power, you know." I paused, letting students think about my proposal.

"So. Am I crazy?" They began to laugh quite heartily. The answer, of course, was "yes." Yes, they thought I was crazy. But it did not matter to me. At that moment, I knew that they believed me anyway.

CONCLUSION

Those many semesters ago, I realized that what I was calling for was complicated—on a personal, professional, and political level. Yet it seemed reasonable to me to expect educators from across disciplines to make choices that "slay" the concept of pupils and "sire" authentic students, professors who understand the following:

1. Teachers can use their own interests to spark students' interests.

2. Metaphors help students understand abstract concepts.

3. Intrinsic motivation is only fostered in an environment rich with choices to make and chances to play.

4. Intellectual play can and does engender students who are able and willing to think and act for themselves.

But beyond this list, I hoped for a revolution in the United States educational system. I imagined a time when, for example, writing assessment was not a gate-keeping device made up of questions such as "If you could be any piece of furniture, which piece would you be and why?" For then, though, I was willing to settle for professors who were convinced that they should play and let their students play in the classroom. I was willing to settle for an academe that wasn't surprised or taken aback by the scholar-fan in the classroom. In a space such as that, higher education could begin, I believed, to undo the stereotype that leads Will Hunting to justifiably quip, "But at least I'm won't be a prick . . ."

That was then. That semester was just the beginning. My research had been cursory, but it had been enough for me to know that this was what I wanted to pursue further, in more depth: the meeting and mingling of fandom and academia. To do that, I knew I was only one

step into a long journey. As my doctoral education progressed, I began asking myself questions, questioning my questions, listing the topics I needed to know more about, reading scholarship and fan blogs, sketching outlines of a dissertation, and self-reflecting. The chapters that follow are the result of years of this questioning, thinking, reading, writing, and being.

Chapter Three

FANDOM: ETYMOLOGY AND RHETORICAL FRAMEWORKS

In October 2007, I attended Feminisms & Rhetorics, a biennial conference sponsored by the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. One presenter shared her surprise and confusion about why the college students she works with continue to reject being labeled a feminist, treating the term as "the other *f* word." The distaste, even fear, students have about the naming is similar to what some of them feel about yet another *f* word.

To introduce one of the essays in my first-year, first-semester composition course, I ask students to share with a classmate and then the class their answer to the question "What do you know more about than anyone else in the room? Fill in the blank: Among those in the room, I'm an expert on/at . . ." Students savor confessing their love for and knowledge of everything from body boarding to car engines, television shows to baking. In a recent class, one student declared her Josh Groban expertise. When I asked her if she was a fan of Groban, she screwed up her face as if she had just nursed a lemon and let out an indignant grunt: "Uh, no way. I'm not a Grobanette." I pressed her; why not? "Well, I don't like go to every concert and have every CD or anything." Even as the student disavowed the fan distinction I attempted to make, she revealed a level of knowledge attributed to the stereotypical fan. In other words, she was fan enough to know the term *Grobanette* (from the *–ette* ending, gender is one of the most obvious features) and what constituted one (concert attendance, CD ownership, etc.).

I am surprised when students resist an identity Cornel Sandvoss observes is "a common and ordinary aspect of everyday life in the industrialized world" (3). What is so disagreeable about being a fan and being proud of it? To some, nothing at all; to others, quite a bit. The

spectrum of responses to the question lies in the history and evolving meanings of the word as well as popular, academic, and self-representations of fans.

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FAN—ETYMOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

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In the United States, the term *fan* came into use because of the country's developing love affair with baseball. As David Shulman explains, late 19th century sports writers needed a new word to describe the enthusiasts of the pastime. Though they had long relied on *rooter* or the more disparaging, British import *crank*, reporters sought a fresh and affirmative name as baseball became more and more popular as an American pastime (328-29). Shulman notes that the word was sometimes a shortening of *fancy* and sometimes *fanatic*, terms that have distinct etymologies yet seem to share similarly negative connotations.

According to William Nugent, *fancy* was used in early 19th century England to describe enthusiasts of boxing, among other hobbies and sports (Dickson 186). Later, *fancy* was clipped to *fance* then to the homonym *fans*. Not used as an adjective until the middle of the 18th century, *fancy*, referring to a state of being, dates from around 1465, a contraction of *fantasy*. As a verb, beginning in 1545, it means to take a liking to, from *fantasien* or to fantasize about. This meaning may be why both *fancy* and *crank* were used for English boxing supporters, since *crank* refers to those in the stands who arrogantly purport to know more about the sport than the players themselves.

Fanatic, on the other hand, came into use in 1525 to refer to an insane person and is derived from the Latin *fanaticus*. Long associated with religion (*fanaticus* comes from *fanum* or temple), the Latin use indicated a person who was mad. This sense is more akin to Plato's understanding of madness as desirable and divinely-inspired rather than the modern

understanding—madness as mental illness. Of course, as we currently use *fanatic* in English the word indicates people as diverse as lovers of *Star Trek* and purveyors of religious, fundamentalist violence.

Understanding the etymology and denotation of *fan* helps explain why someone might claim to be an expert on but not a fan of Josh Groban or even a more supposedly scholarship-worthy figure such as Shakespeare. Who wants to be characterized as an overzealous know-it-all? To understand the word's meaning across various contexts, however, is a much more complex endeavor, one that requires considering the rhetorical framing of fans by scholars—historically and currently—and by fans themselves.

<div align="center">RHETORICAL FRAMEWORKS</div>

Early Academic and Popular Representations of Fans and Fandom

In *Textual Poachers* (1992), his foundational work on television fandom, Henry Jenkins asserts that however playfully the term was and still is used, *fan* has yet to escape its relation with "religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness, connotations that seem to be at the heart of many of the representations of fans in contemporary discourse" (12). Because *Star Trek* enthusiasts are some of the most well-known media fans, Jenkins uses Trekkies[8] as an example. He cites a *Saturday Night Live* sketch that depicts several fans' overeager encounter with the actor William Shatner (Captain Kirk), an encounter that "distills many popular stereotypes" (10). The fans in the sketch

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[8] There is an ongoing historical debate about the "official" name for *Star Trek* fans. Even among the original television series' actors and creator Gene Roddenberry, disagreement existed. I have chosen to use the term *Trekkies* as opposed to *Trekkers* because I assume it will be the most recognizable name to my readers. Though I understand I may be making a choice that has political implications, I have no ill intent by doing so.

a.   are brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the

program or its cast . . .

b.   devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge . . .

c.   place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material . . .

d.   are social misfits who have become so obsessed with the [object of their

fandom] that it forecloses other types of social experience . . .

e.   are feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement

with mass culture . . .

f.   are infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature . . .

g.   [and] are unable to separate fantasy from reality . . . (10)

Jenkins' list might be summarized in one sentence: Fans are social and cultural aberrations; they

deviate from the norm.

The same year Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* was published, Lisa A. Lewis's edited collection

The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media (1992) was also released. In the chapter

"Fandom as Pathology" in Lewis's collection, Joli Jenson notes that the popular view of fans

that Jenkins paints is found in other early popular and scholarly accounts of fandom, ones

"haunted by images of deviance" (9). These pictures of fans' identity crises and abnormal

behavior run the gamut of science fiction nerds who collect *Star Wars* action figures, soccer fans

who trample fellow spectators, and stalker-murderers such as Mark David Chapman, who

killed John Lennon in 1980, and John Warnock Hinckley, Jr., whose attempted assassination of

Ronald Reagan in 1981 has been attributed to his desire to impress the object of his fandom,

actor Jodi Foster. Depicted in these ways not only in film, on television, in newspapers, and in

everyday conversations but also in academic publications, fans are constructed (often with very little evidence that should count toward a generalization) as unstable—socially pathetic and psychologically pathological.

In Jenson's understanding, two models of fandom emerge from conventional, increasingly outmoded mainstream and academic perspectives: "the obsessed loner, who (under the influence of the media) has entered into an intense fantasy relationship with a celebrity figure" and the "frenzied or hysterical member of a crowd" (11-12). Examples of the first kind of fan are few but memorable. Besides Chapman and Hinckley, Jr., infamous stories of stalkers who have killed, attempted to kill, or committed suicide include Robert Bardo. Bardo saw a commercial for the TV show *My Sister Sam* (1986-1988) and felt instantly connected to actor Rebecca Schaeffer. In 1989, the paranoid schizophrenic tracked down her address and appeared on her doorstep dressed as a flower delivery person. After she gave him an autograph and then politely excused herself from his further advances, he returned later and shot Schaeffer at point blank range when she again answered her apartment door. A more recent instance involves the Icelandic singer/songwriter Björk who was shadowed by Ricardo Lopez. In 1996, Lopez constructed an acid bomb and mailed it to the performer before he committed suicide. Fortunately, the London post office intercepted the package.[9] Specific examples of the second type of enthusiast are also few and though sometimes dated continue to shape public and academic perceptions of fans (even when some scholars attempt to complicate those

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[9] It is noteworthy that the majority of celebrity stalking cases involve male stalkers regardless of the celebrities' sex. More recently, though, cases of female stalkers have become more common: Margaret Ray, for example, who stalked *Late Show* host David Letterman. Ray spent ten months in prison and fourteen months in a mental institution before committing suicide in 1998. Other instances include Dawnette Knight and actor Catherine Zeta-Jones, Ursula Reichert-Habbishaw and actor Richard Gere, Diana Napolis and director-producer Steven Spielberg, Emily Leatherman and actor John Cusack, and Dessarae Bradford and actor Colin Farrell. In most cases, the individuals—both male and female—have been convicted of stalking and have spent time in prison.

perceptions): stampeding international soccer and football fans;[10] screaming, fainting crowds of

pubescent women at early Beatles' concerts;[11] and the rushing mass that crushed eleven fellow

fans at a performance of the rock band The Who at Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum in 1979.

The Cincinnati tragedy had enough impact on American culture that it became the subject of a

rather pensive television episode, "In Concert," of the sitcom *WKRP in Cincinnati* (1978-1982)

and the impetus for changes to first-come, first-served festival or open area seating in venues

throughout the United States. These cases of loners and frantic crowds, however different, have

helped establish the assumed social eccentricity and mental instability of both, which, in turn,

has allowed for Othering (Jenson 9)—a binaristic division, an "us against them" scenario.

On the "us" side are aficionados, the people who have plenty of friends and aesthetic

taste (Jenson). Aficionados know the difference between reality and fantasy, do not gallivant

around with a light saber or devote 72-hour weekends to multi-player online games, and keep

their emotions in check. They frequent the opera rather than the mosh pit. They read John

Donne rather than John Grisham. They eat caviar rather than catfish. And they collect rare

cigars rather than rare trading cards. A quick visit to a national bookstore chain will diminish

doubt about this distinction. Between finishing my master's degree and starting my doctoral

studies, I spent one year employed in such a chain. My primary task was to keep thousands of

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[10] In 1985, thirty-nine fans were killed at Heysel Stadium in Brussels, Belgium, during a World Cup soccer match when a retaining wall collapsed; ninety-six killed in Sheffield, England's Hillsborough Stadium (1989); seventy-three crushed, six of them critically injured, at a football game at University of Wisconsin-Madison's Camp Randall Stadium (1993); eighty-two killed and one hundred forty-seven injured at a World Cup qualifying match in Guatemala City (1996); seventy killed in a stampede in a Nepal stadium (1998); forty-three crushed to death in Ellis Park Stadium, Johannesburg, South Africa (2001); one hundred twenty-six killed at a soccer match in Ghana (2001); twelve killed in a stampede at a soccer game in Zambia (2007).

[11] See Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, who argue that rather than the behavior of frenzied fans, the young women who eagerly accepted the Beatles' "license to riot" were demonstrating "the first and most dramatic uprising of *women*'s sexual revolution" (181).

magazines and journals stocked and organized. In my experience, corporate instructions about where to place certain titles are at least a reflection of societal expectations if not the very means of shaping them and, therefore, the privileging of cultural artifacts and "modes of enactment" (Jenson 19). For example, magazines such as *ToyFare*, which is largely devoted to action figure collecting, are shelved near entertainment tabloids, whereas *Cigar Aficionado* and *The Robb Report*, the former devoted to cigar collecting and the latter dedicated to luxury living, are shelved adjacent to high fashion men's magazines and not far from guides to exotic vacation spots.

On the "them" side, contrasted with the aficionado, is the fan.[12] While it is easier to place all aficionados into one category, it is far less simple to classify fans, because even among self-identified fans stratifications are plentiful. A perusal of scholarship on audiences underscores how difficult it is to identify, understand, and articulate what it means to be a fan. Scholars can generalize about female soap opera and romance novel "junkies," but do not account for the male viewer- and readership. Those who study football and wrestling fandom have had to revisit their research as women continue to become active sport fans, both with their time and energy as well as their wallets. Gender is only one element of the complex world of fans, though. An obvious gap in theories of fandom is a consideration of race.[13] In other words, while upper class aficionados may, like fans, privilege or snub each other based on objects of fondness and draw lines of acceptance according to race and gender, such hierarchies are most abundant

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[12] *Aficionado* (from the Latin root *affectionem* or affection; to be fond of) and *fan* are often used interchangeably, though *aficionado* tends to be associated with high culture and class. After discussing the distinction made by Jenson, I will, for variety's sake, use the terms interchangeably throughout my remaining chapters.

[13] Unfortunately, I am unable to address the role race plays in scholar-fandom as it falls outside of the scope of my research and scarcely can be found in the published literature. In fact, race and class both deserve more emphasis in audience and fan studies.

and most visible among the middle-class masses—whether they profess to be fans or not.

Looking at sports and science fiction and fantasy (SF/F) fandoms provides an example.

Unlike SF/F enthusiasts, sports fans generally receive few looks askance and are rarely

considered odd by mainstream culture. For instance, a Nebraska Huskers football fan proceeds

unquestioned with funeral arrangements that ensure the interior lid of his or her future casket

will be embroidered with the Huskers logo. Couples renovate rooms in their homes to dedicate

space to the love of sports—spaces reserved for framed baseball jerseys, memorable sports

moments, and front-page newspaper announcements of victorious teams; for ensconced

trophies, balls, bats, and clubs; and for home theatre equipment used to view televised sporting

events, a pastime often accompanied by food and friends. So common as to draw little to no

attention from the media or fellow spectators, male *and* female Washington Redskins, Green

Bay Packers, or Minnesota Vikings fans expose bare chests (yes, women as well) and beer bellies

(mostly men) slathered in team colors in sub-zero weather and are hailed for their diehard-ness.

Other than the fear of stampeding crowds (usually only associated with international soccer

matches[14]), the sport fan in America is considered quite normal. In fact, it is one of the few

pastimes around which it is culturally acceptable and even expected that men, especially fathers

and sons, bond. The parallel behaviors of SF/F fans—being buried in a Stormtrooper costume,

having a *Star Trek*-themed bathroom, and wearing a *Battlestar Galactica* uniform in a SF/F

convention parade—do not receive the same label of commonness and acceptability. So while

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[14] It seems worth mentioning that each year more people are trampled to death during religious journeys and celebrations, particularly in the Middle East, than are killed in sporting events. In fact, many sports related deaths are partially the result of poorly constructed or poorly planned venues rather than simply the fans' heightened emotions.

Jenkins' abovementioned list suggests that all fans are thus characterized, the description more accurately represents a particular kind of fan.

Jenkins' observations, of course, are based on the *Saturday Night Live* sketch that features *Star Trek* fans, not sports fans. The choice, I argue, is intentional, a reflection of American cultural assumptions. By transference, the *Star Trek* fans act as symbolic representation of many if not all other SF/F enthusiasts—past and present: *Star Wars* fans, Gaters (*Stargate*), 'Scapers (*Farscape*), Whovians (*Dr. Who*), Ringers (*The Lord of the Rings*), Leapers (*Quantum Leap*), and X-Philes (*The X-Files*), to name a few. In fact, if mainstream depictions of SF/F fans are to be believed, Trekkies are more closely related to the hysterical, teenage fans of The Beatles and Elvis than to a Nebraska Husker fan buried in a logo emblazoned casket. Reactions from students in my colleague's first-year communication course reinforce that belief.

Each fall semester, I guest lecture for one week about fandom in COMM 125, Media and Meaning, an introductory class for majors in the field. The first time I taught the sequence of lectures, I used clips from the film *Trekkies* (1997) to garner students' interest. What I found, however, was that their interest took the form of disparagement and condescension rather than scholarly curiosity. It was very difficult to move students back into an academically critical stance once they had begun to make fun of Dr. Denis Bourguignon, a dentist in Orlando, Florida, who has trademarked the name "Starbase Dental" and decorated his office like the starship *Enterprise* or David and Laurel Greenstein, of Woodland Hills, California, whose home is filled with *Star Trek* memorabilia and whose poodle Tammi has a *Star Trek* uniform to match those of her owners. Even as I attempted to normalize Trekkies by comparing their devotion with images of football fans gone wild and talk of the sales for team apparel and paraphernalia,

the students remained disdainful of the SF/F enthusiasts. As a result of that first series of

lectures and the reactions I received from students, in later semesters I took another approach,

beginning with a brief history of audience studies and then a leap into sports fandom and

finally a look at SF/F fans. Student response was more balanced as a result of delaying their

knee-jerk reactions.

Though not scientific in nature, the work with students in the Media and Meaning

course suggests what media scholars have long argued: hierarchies as well as degrees of

culturally-sanctioned behaviors permeate the world of fans. It's okay to be a fan of *some* kinds of

objects and activities, to consume *some* kinds of products, to know trivia about *some* kinds of

pastimes; it's not (as) okay to be, consume, or know a lot about other kinds. This process of

Othering—from without *and* within fandom—has its roots, then, in exclusivity and notions of

superiority: "the characterization of fandom as pathology is based in, supports, and justifies

elitist and disrespectful beliefs about our common life" (Jenson 10). Or, as the television series

Buffy the Vampire Slayer suggests, it's all about power (see Jencson).

Power, of course, has much to do with fear, for those who have power are afraid of

losing it, and those who do not have power fear everything—often including where their next

meal will come from. Jenson sees fear of the off-kilter fan as a mere reflection of a much deeper

trepidation: our belief that the present is fundamentally worse than the past. "The present,"

explains Jenson, "is seen as being materially advanced but spiritually threatened. Modernity

has brought technological progress but social, cultural, and moral decay . . . This conceptual

heritage . . . defines modernity as a fragmented, disjointed mass society" (14-15). Thus, the two

models of fandom Jenson addresses—the obsessed loner and the frenzied crowd member—are

projections of mainstream apprehensions about daily life today: someone who is cut off from all support systems (family, friends, community) and someone who, while not isolated from other human beings, is easily manipulated (peer pressure, political propaganda, etc.) (15). In both cases, some form of compensation results. The loner seeks the companionship and validation of the object of his or her fandom (this is the typical view of a SF/F fan—particularly a young, white, "nerdy" male). The crowd follower soaks up the irrationality of his or her group mentality and havoc or violence ensues. These two dominant stereotypes, though, have been recently complicated in many productive ways, both by popular media and by scholars.

Recent Popular and Academic Representations of Fans and Fandom

The continued scholarly exploration of audiences in general has led to a more nuanced look into fandom and a richer understanding of fans. This academic trend coincides with a turn in the media. As Robert Bianco reports in a September 2007 issue of *USA Today*, "the meek may inherit the Earth, but on TV, the geeks are set to save it" (10D). We may well be experiencing a 21st century reincarnation of the "revenge of the nerds," only this time the reaction of mainstream culture is more akin to warm, fuzzy feelings than to surprise and curiosity with a touch of repugnance, as was the response to films such as *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984) twenty years ago. Though the symbolic representation of the deviant fan, especially in film, is still worth analyzing, American popular culture has progressively adjusted its relational role to fans and fandom, sometimes sheepishly sidling up to them and other times boldly embracing them, as seems to be happening recently.

An example is what television critics are calling "the rise of the geek" on primetime's fall 2007 lineup: CBS's *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-present), NBC's *Chuck* (2007-present), and the

CW's reality series *Beauty and the Geek* (2005-2008) for example, feature Mensa-worthy brainiacs who effortlessly fold talk about mathematical algorithms and black holes into talk about *Star Wars* and the Flash, a DC Comic superhero. When *Beauty and the Geek* moved an episode challenge to San Diego's annual Comic-Con, the world's largest comic book and popular media convention, the camera captured geeky William's overjoyed weeping en route to the venue. By the end of the series' three-month run, David, who from the very first episode had proudly proclaimed his love for Live Action Role-Playing (LARPing),[15] had so captured viewers' attention and hearts that he and his partner Jasmine won the ultimate $250,000 prize, a prize that depended on the audiences' popular vote. In an episode of *Chuck*, Chuck's college nemesis Bryce Larkin, who has since downloaded the government's best-kept intelligence secrets to Chuck's brain and supposedly been assassinated for said secrets, returns from the dead. When he finally meets Chuck face-to-face, Bryce wishes to confirm Chuck's identity, and he does so by speaking to Chuck in a "foreign" language: Klingon.[16]

While geek-centered TV series risk reinforcing stereotypes, they also can push at the edges of traditional constructions. If nothing else, they help normalize the science fiction and fantasy fan (in *Beauty and the Geek*, normalization occurs via contact lenses or contemporary glasses frames, high-end salon haircuts, and fashionable clothing), disrupting older understandings and beliefs about the instability of George Lucas or Anne Rice enthusiasts.

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[15] LARPing resembles the classic card-based role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*, only the game is enacted live. Those unfamiliar with LARPing might imagine the marriage of *D and D* with creative anachronism.

[16] Klingon is the language spoken by Klingons, a warrior race depicted in the *Star Trek* franchise. According to The Klingon Language Institute's website, "Klingon was invented by Marc Okrand, for use in some of the *Star Trek* movies. He invented not just a few words to make the Klingons sound alien, but a complete language, with its own vocabulary, grammar, and usage." As a result, Klingon is taught and learned by fans around the globe. The film *Trekkies* reports that even such important works as the Bible have been translated into Klingon. A current version of the Klingon Language Version (KLV) of the Bible can be viewed at <http://klv.mrklingon.org/>.

Several notable disruptions defy the obsessed loner and crazed crowd stereotypes that Jenson

discusses. Even if unintentionally, series such as *Beauty and the Geek* and *The Big Bang Theory*,

which showcases an endearing pod of exceptionally intelligent friends, reveal the complex and

socially rich lifestyle of geekdom generally and fandom particularly, aspects not at all lost on

scholars. According to researchers Scott Thorne and Gordon C. Bruner, whether a lover of

sports, music, film, or TV, fans have several common characteristics: they invest deeply and on

a very personal level in the object of their passion, possess a strong desire to get outside of only

internal thoughts and feelings, crave accumulating related artifacts and experiences, and covet

the company of fellow fans (53-55).

Casting fans in a more positive light than in early audience and fan scholarship, Thorne

and Bruner sketch them as deeply, internally attached to their preferred objects. For example,

fans spend much time and many resources on their fandoms, significantly more than a non-fan

would (53). As an act of not only devotion but also respect and appreciation, fans may schedule

regular blocks of time that are solely reserved for interacting with their favorite show or video

game, or they may set aside a percentage of their earnings towards the purchase of branded

apparel, tickets to a concert, or flight and hotel accommodations for a fan convention. Their

involvement, their personal investment is so powerful that they are usually completely at ease

with non-fans—whether strangers, friends, or family members—not sharing their interests or

receiving as much pleasure as they do from the object of their focused attention. In other words,

issues of aesthetic taste do not seem to faze them, a significant kind of freedom for fans.

Additionally, their interest is usually so strong that they will make minor to major changes in

their lifestyles to accommodate acts of devotion (53). Changes may range from rearranging a

routine schedule to watch a special episode of a television series to purchasing technology (i.e.,

TiVo® or a DVR) to make watching on demand and without commercial interruption easier,

from taking vacation time to coincide with a fan convention to choosing a career to mimic a

beloved character's professional life. These acts of internal involvement, though, are only a

small piece of the larger picture.

Fans also have a desire for external involvement, a desire often coupled with a passion

for collecting (Thorne and Bruner 54-55). Compelled by the urge to demonstrate their fandom,

fans frequent conventions; dress up like their favorite characters; write poetry, compose songs,

and pen fiction to honor favorite stories, fill gaps in plotlines, or extend the universes (especially

of canceled television series); draw and paint pictures; and create websites, message boards, and

blogs. This participatory nature, of course, often requires consumption. Fans tend to want to

possess material objects related to their particular interest—t-shirts, shot glasses, coffee mugs,

water bottles, sheets and throw pillows, trading cards, action figures, and underwear. Even in

the case of gathering experiences with a beloved actor, singer, or sports figure, the time and

cash investment can be steep. At a SF/F convention such as Atlanta's annual Dragon*Con, the

cost for a personalized autographed picture, a brief chat, and a snapshot with an actor such as

Buffy the Vampire Slayer's James Marsters (Spike) or *Harry Potter*'s James and Oliver Phelps (the

Weasley twins) runs between $40 and $75. The money one hands over is, of course, often in

addition to several hours of standing in line. If the goal is to collect experiences with and photos

of an entire cast, a series such as the SyFy Channel's reincarnated *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009)

can total hundreds of dollars. Meeting actors, though, is only a part of the whole experience.

Vendors from all over the United States make the same yearly trek to Dragon*Con, Comic-Con,

WonderCon, and over a hundred other fan conventions to sell *Astonishing X-Men* comic books

($5), *Smallville* trading card decks ($10-$20), *Firefly* t-shirts ($20), *Southpark* sweatshirts ($40),

reproductions of *Star Wars* light sabers ($150), and exact replicas of *Matrix* and *Stargate*

costumes ($250-$1500). Calculating airfare, living quarters, meals, autographs, and other

paraphernalia, it is easy to understand how a long weekend can average several thousand

dollars. However, some expenses are rarely the burden of a solitary fan. Despite hyperbolic

stereotypes of loner fans, the SF/F conventioneers have friends—lots of friends.

Of the fan markers Thorne and Bruner discuss, the last is "desire for social interaction"

with other fans (55). When Dragon*Con goers start making plans for the year's convention, they

do not make them alone. With over thirty thousand people in attendance, the event is more

than anything else a social one; it is extremely difficult to find a loner, much less an obsessed

one, and the crowds are remarkably well-behaved contrasted with, for example, sporting event

crowds.[17] Many convention attendees get together each year because they know each other,

having met in other social venues such as local fan clubs (*Star Trek* enthusiasts have the most

extensive and organized clubs). And fandoms are growing at an unprecedented rate as, more

and more, fans are meeting online through e-mail, chat rooms, blogs, fan websites, and social

networks such as MySpace and Facebook. Many people, scholars included, are fascinated

(and/or concerned) by both fans' relational and consumptive behavior. Also, production

companies have become increasingly attentive to fans, not only because they will spend money

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[17] As seen in the list in the tenth footnote, deaths and injuries—some related to the venues, others to overzealous crowds—are a serious problem at international sports tournaments (especially soccer events), so much so that preventing it is a regular topic of casual, governmental, and scholarly conversations. See the Council of Europe's website, including its coverage and documentation of "The European Convention of Spectator Violence," at <http://www.coe.int/>. It is also worth noting I have found no record of deaths or life-threatening injuries directly related to attending a fan convention.

and encourage their friends to spend money, but also because their participatory urges, in this more technologically savvy age, are sometimes a challenge to copyright and, therefore, profit margins. Looking more closely in the next section at a specific fan group and its interconnected relationship with itself, the object of its fandom, and the media conglomerates responsible for the object's existence will demonstrate how some fans—particularly SF/F fans—rhetorically frame themselves.

Fans' Self-Representations: The Case of the Browncoats[18]

My personal and academic interest in fan cultures—their productivity, purchasing power, activism, and intricate communal systems—has led me to a case study of "Browncoats," devotees of creator/writer/director Joss Whedon's television series *Firefly* and companion feature film *Serenity* (2005). Who are the Browncoats?[19] How do they define themselves and, more broadly, what it means to be a fan? And ultimately, what significance do the answers to those questions have? While there are no tidy answers to these questions, even the messy ones prove to be intriguing. Before exploring those questions and answers, though, a brief detour into the story that Browncoats so identify with is necessary.

Firefly was Joss Whedon's third venture into the world of primetime television. His success with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel* had already created a devoted fanbase when Whedon began playing with the idea of a space Western, the descendant and

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[18] A version of this section has been published as the book chapter "The Browncoats are Coming!: *Firefly*, *Serenity*, and Fan Activism" (see Wilcox and Cochran, *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity).

[19] Rather than a version of the series' or film's name—such as Whovians for *Dr. Who* fans—the title Browncoats comes from attachment to a character and an event within the fictive universe. In *Firefly*, Captain Malcolm "Mal" Reynolds fought for the Independents against the Alliance, a somewhat totalitarian, interstellar central government. The Independents lose the Battle of Serenity Valley, and thus the war, in the opening minutes of the pilot episode ("Serenity," 1.1), but that loss doesn't suit Mal. He continues to identify with the losing side by sporting his mid-length, brown leather coat.

folding together of the original *Star Trek*, *Stagecoach* (1939), and *Wagon Train* (1957-1965).

Though set in space in a distant yet familiar future,[20] the *Firefly* universe (or "'verse") is much

more driven by its story and characters than by impressive computer graphics—though the

graphics are quite good. In the voiceover introduction to the film *Serenity*, the audience receives

a succinct and "official" history of the 'verse from the lips of a teacher who works for the

Alliance, the central and ruling government:

> Earth-That-Was could no longer sustain our numbers, we were so many. We
>
> found a new solar system: dozens of planets and hundreds of moons. Each one
>
> terraformed—a process taking decades—to support human life. To be the new
>
> earths. The Central Planets formed the Alliance. Ruled by an interplanetary
>
> parliament, the Alliance was a beacon of civilization. The savage outer planets
>
> were not so enlightened, and refused Alliance control. The war was devastating.
>
> But the Alliance victory over the Independents ensured a safer universe. And
>
> now everyone can enjoy the comfort and enlightenment of true civilization.

In the series' pilot episode "Serenity" (1.1),[21] we meet one of the nine main characters in the

throes of the battle, an Independent in the War for Unification. Malcolm Reynolds (Nathan

Fillion)—in his khaki uniform, knee-high boots, and brown leather coat—dodges gun fire and

explosions as he directs and encourages his fellow soldiers in the Battle of Serenity Valley; they

await air support. When the reinforcements do not come and the soldiers learn that their

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[20] See Jowett for an exploration of the series' steampunk elements.
[21] The Fox Network aired *Firefly* out of Whedon's intended order, a decision that many fans and scholars believe contributed its quick cancellation (of the fourteen filmed episodes, only eleven aired; all are available on DVD). My numbering of episodes follows Whedon's intended order and the order used for the DVD set.

superiors want them to surrender, Mal's world, his faith, crumbles around him. What will be his cause, his *raison d-être* now?

The series leaves Mal's immediate answers hanging, allowing subsequent episodes to fill in the gaps. But when the audience sees Mal again, after having seen him devastated on the battlefield, they learn that he is the captain of a 03-K64 Firefly-class vessel named Serenity.[22] Along with his original team and a few paying passengers who eventually become family-like members of the ship's crew, Mal is a kind of futuristic Robinhood, only he steals from the Alliance to give to himself and his crew. Serenity is a "salvage" ship, but it is also a home, home to a motley group of compelling characters: Zoe Washburne (Gina Torres), Mal's first mate and fellow veteran—a woman of few words, strong and fiercely loyal; Hoban "Wash" Washburne (Alan Tudyk), Zoe's husband and the ship's exceptionally skilled pilot; Jayne Cobb (Adam Baldwin), the ship's muscle—a bit dumb but good with his favorite toys: guns; Kaylee Frye (Jewel Staite), Serenity's very capable mechanic—always the peacemaker; Shepherd Derrial Book (Ron Glass), a Bible-believing man on a personal journey; Inara Serra (Morena Baccarin), a self-employed, highly trained and geisha-like Companion—the ship's only member making a living that the Alliance considers legal; and Simon and River Tam (Sean Maher and Summer Glau), he a brilliant, young doctor and she a disturbed, genius teen—both fugitives from the Alliance, who has experimented on River's brain. The adventures of this eclectic crew (and *Firefly*'s sound writing, some by Whedon himself) are, according to fans and many critics, simply magnetic. The series' magnetism is why it is so deeply identified with and loved by fans, a group that continues to grow, even seven years after *Firefly*'s untimely cancellation.

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[22] To avoid confusion, I use quotation marks to refer to the episode "Serenity," italics for the film *Serenity*, and no emphasis for the spaceship Serenity.

As I mention at the beginning of the chapter, Cornel Sandvoss claims that being a fan is "a common and ordinary aspect of everyday life in the industrialized world" (3). In fact, those TV series creators who have a pulse on how fans usually operate, create their series to inspire such a following, including the kinds of activities inherent to the culture: filk,[23] fanzines, conventions (or "cons"), and more. For example, Renaissance Pictures crafted *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) to draw a cult following and welcomed fans' creative poaching, a decision that led to a "symbiotic relationship" with its avid viewers (Jones 175). Only on the rare occasion that fans tried to profit from their creations did Renaissance threaten or take legal action; it particularly understood the benefits of *Xena*'s online enthusiasts: "part virtual temple, part cosmology in and of itself, part community, part arena for creative enterprise, and part unofficial advertising campaign" (175). In the family of fandom, Xenites and Browncoats—along with the many other fandoms I note earlier in the chapter—are closely related through their online presence and their participatory nature.[24]

As Thorne and Bruner observe, most fans want to do more than just talk about their favorite show, film, or band. So participating quickly comes to mean both consuming and producing cultural artifacts (54-55). The easiest way to testify of one's fandom is to buy an "official" product. For *Firefly* and *Serenity* fans, these products include DVDs of the series and film, soundtracks, visual companion books, novelizations, trading cards, action figures, and t-shirts authorized by and mass-produced for Twentieth Century Fox and Universal Pictures. The

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[23] According to Gary McGath, "*Filk music* is a musical movement among fans of science fiction and fantasy fandom . . . , emphasizing content which is related to the genre or its fans, and promoting broad participation." While McGath's definition is useful, filk has as complex and rich a history and livelihood as fandom itself. See *Wikipedia*'s entry for *filk* and the additional source links provided.

[24] Browncoats further benefit from an unusually reciprocal relationship with Whedon, who lurks on but also posts to and interacts with fans on message boards such as *Whedonesque*.

products are easy to get (especially at fan conventions or through online stores), though they can be pricey, as I point out above. In addition to being expensive, objects such as action figures and sculpted busts are designed with collector-investors in mind; it's difficult to resist buying just one of a series, variants, or limited editions. In contrast to official merchandise—and perhaps more pleasurable to produce and consume—are wares created by fans for fans.

For instance, *The Signal* continues to podcast every other week.[25] Shows include chat about specific television episodes or the film; tips on gaming; news about fan events such as the Browncoat Cruise (December 2007); reviews of fan fiction and filk albums such as the Bedlam Bards' *On the Drift: Music Inspired by Firefly and Serenity*; and updates on fan-made films such as the parody *Mosquito* (2005) and the documentary *Done the Impossible: The Fans' Tale of Firefly and Serenity* (2006). At the website *deviantART*, the search term "Firefly" calls up a surplus of creative work, including that of artists by profession and fans like Kristèle Pelland, whose cartoon drawing of the *Serenity* cast has to date elicited over 42,730 views and over six hundred comments. *Fireflyfans.net* catalogs fan fiction sites as well as hosts the writing and art of its message board members. In the Blue Sun Room, for example, Ichiban[26] began posting a series of comic book pages in June 2007, a project called "Patience" that he is writing with a friend. In a hunt for fan poetry, one unearths gems like Solai's "black humor" haiku, which memorializes the death-by-wooden-plank of Wash in *Serenity*: "Wash stated firmly/'I am a leaf on the wind'/Leaf then, kabob now." Over 1.5 million hits materialize when browsing the web for

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[25] See also *Firefly Talk*.
[26] Online users often go by screen names. Where possible and with permission of the individual, I use real names; however, in accordance with those who prefer a pseudonym, I use their screen names.

"*Firefly* vids."[27] Or one might eventually come across the work of writer/playwright/actor/

musician/artist Stan Peal whose original music and lyrics include "Jayne's Hat," the tale of

Jayne's cherished, mama-knitted noggin protector. Peal's other *Firefly* work consists of the

Christmas/advertising ditty "Have You Seen *Serenity*?" and the tribute "Praise to Joss

Whedon"—the former set to the score of "The Little Drummer Boy"[28] and the latter to the hymn

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty."[29] When dressing like a favorite character strikes the fancy,

maybe in preparation for a shindig (Browncoat gathering) or con, fans like Maggie are happy to

share how they put their costumes together. Maggie details her step-by-step process—some

pieces from scratch, others from retailers—of assembling Kaylee's jumpsuit from the pilot

episode, right down to a teddy bear patch and accessories such as the Asian parasol Kaylee

carries to shield herself from the sun. If Frederick Kreuziger's argument that "science fiction

today functions as a religion" (1) seems doubtful, listening to the "*Firefly* Prayer" on Succatash's

website might remove some skepticism. Set amidst eerie background music, the prayer is

prefaced by an uncanny voice that asks listeners to bow their heads then leads a call and

response appeal:

> We believe in one *Firefly*. . . .
>
> We know that Fox is the devil.
>
> We believe in Joss Whedon. . . .

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[27] "Vids" are fan-made music videos, visual clips edited and set to a popular song. The manipulation of video clips can be defended because, in legal terms, it is "transformative," but the use of music puts fan vids outside of "fair use" (Tushnet 71). As a result, I do not share examples here, though many are worth viewing.

[28] Words and music by Katherine K. Davis, Henry Onorati, and Harry Simeone.

[29] Words by Joachim Neander, music by Erneuerten Gesanbuch, translation from German to English by Catherine Winkworth, and harmony by William S. Bennett.

> Give us this day our weekly *Firefly*,
>
> And deliver us from Reavers.
>
> Guide us through the Black.
>
> Show me how to walk the way of *Firefly*.
>
> Amen.

Some *Firefly* and *Serenity* fans, who might first identity as academics, engage in scholarly

activities such as writing conference papers, journal articles, book chapters, and books.[30]

In addition to these artistic, imaginative, and academic displays of fandom,

Browncoats—not unlike *Angel* devotees, Trekkies, or Elvis fans—often actively support non-

profit organizations. The last few years have seen Browncoats raise money for victims of Asia's

tsunami, those displaced by Hurricane Katrina, and Freedom from Hunger. They also earnestly

support Whedon's charity of choice, Equality Now, which works to "end violence and

discrimination against women and girls around the world" (*Equalitynow.org*). At San Diego's

Comic-Con 2005, Browncoats collected over $12,000 for the organization. Jessica Neuwirth, an

Equality Now representative, believes that Whedon's work, especially his strong female

characters, has made a significant impact on viewers and, in turn, has helped advance the

efforts of the organization. Whedon is able to rally fans, she believes, because "he has a way of

communicating with people that is like magic, and it just manages . . . to turn people on to this

idea that they have a responsibility, that they *can* make a difference" (qtd. in *Done the*

Impossible). Because actor Ron Glass (Shepherd Book) serves on its board, the Browncoats chose

to fundraise at a subsequent Comic-Con for the Al Wooten Jr. Heritage Center, a South Central

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[30] See Rhonda V. Wilcox's "In 'The Demon Section of the Card Catalogue': *Buffy* Studies and Television Studies" for a history and bibliographic overview of scholarship on Whedon's work.

Los Angeles non-profit that hosts after-school social and academic programs for local youth.

The philanthropy of *Firefly* and *Serenity* fans suggests that being a Browncoat has much to do

with fostering a "spirit of community and activism" (Neuwirth qtd. in *Done the Impossible*). That

spirit has paid off: *The Signal* reported in its June 7, 2007, podcast that Browncoats raised over

$60,000 just for Equality Now in 2006 ("The Signal #11"). They far surpassed that number in

2007 with the second annual international fundraiser *Can't Stop the Serenity*, screenings of the

film in cities from Adelaide to Dublin, from Boston to Portland in honor of Whedon's birthday

and to benefit Equality Now.[31] The event website reported that in 2007, the screenings had

raised over $115,000.

Being participatory and productive may be typical fan markers, but fannish behavior

does not necessarily make one a Browncoat. Among *Firefly* and *Serenity* fans themselves,

intensity of devotion and level of activity distinguishes admirers from true Browncoats:

> A fan is someone who watches the show and likes it—simple enough. But a
>
> Browncoat . . . is much more of a fan activist, . . . has taken the next step: Instead
>
> of just saying, "What a great show—oh well, too bad it was cancelled," the
>
> Browncoat says, "F#ck that! What can I do to keep *Firefly* going!?!"
>
> ---po1s (qtd. in *Browncoats.com*)

Other online Browncoats describe their fandom repeatedly with words such as *passionate*,

rebellious, and *independent*. Particularly, an "us against them" motif colors their self-depictions.

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[31] Ticket sales may have been helped by Whedon's impassioned post to *Whedonesque* on May 20, 2007, where he responds to the "honor" killing of seventeen-year-old Dua Khalil as well as the movie trailer for Roland Joffé's *Captivity* (2007). Whedon encourages readers, "Do something. Try something. Speaking out, showing up, writing a letter, a check, a strongly worded e-mail. Pick a cause—there are few unworthy ones. And nudge yourself past the brink of tacit support to action. Once a month, once a year, or just once."

Borrowing from the series and film, many make direct comparisons (as if *Firefly* and *Serenity* are allegories of their experience) between Serenity's crew and themselves, between the Alliance and Twentieth Century Fox:

> Browncoats. It's not just a cute name because that's what they called people on the show. That's who we are. We're the people who lost, and we're the people who were brothers in arms when the cancellation came down. (Luke Piotrowski, qtd. in *Done the Impossible*)

> *   *   *

> Outside the story are us, the fans.

> We Browncoats resemble more than a little the disenfranchised crew of the show. And not unlike Mal and Zoe, we have refused to lay down in defeat and accept the choices that the "Alliance" has left us. (Editors, *Browncoats.com*)

From these representative examples, particular words and phrases reiterate the active defiance of being disenfranchised and the conviction—even dogma—that a Browncoat is engaged in a "fight" against the "Alliance." The metaphors of war, resistance, and insurgency clearly govern the symbolic paradigm of Browncoat-ness,[32] not surprising considering that Whedon himself introduced the early film screenings of *Serenity* with a rallying cry: "They tried to kill us. They *did* kill us. And here we are. We've done the impossible, and that makes us mighty" ("Joss Whedon Introduction").

While "fightin' words" shape much of *Firefly* and *Serenity* fandom, another aspect of Browncoat identity is dominated by heart. The community's camaraderie and ethic of care is

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[32] See a list of "guerrilla marketing" tactics at *Fireflyfans.net*, including viral ads for the series, the film, and the "*Serenity* 'Versary."

well illustrated by the story of Kerry Pearson. According to actor Adam Baldwin (Jayne),

Pearson was a "perfect example of the *Firefly* family and the *Firefly* universe" (qtd. in *Done the*

Impossible). Pearson, who went by the screen name Lux Lucre, died of complications related to

diabetes about two years after the cancellation of the series. In the special feature "Tribute to

Lux" on *Done the Impossible*, Jeremy Neish explains, "I think Lux was one of the first über-fans.

He created the *South Park* characters based on the *Firefly* characters. He did comics. He was just

really active in the fan community. Everybody just kind of knew who he was."[33, 34] In March

2003, Pearson joined some friends from the original *Firefly* message board in Las Vegas to

celebrate his 40th birthday, and the twenty fans who gathered claim that party as the first

Browncoat shindig. In January 2004, Pearson died. Fans who knew him relate the reasons why

he was both a Browncoat and friend: "I remember Lux sending me a private email when I

joined the official board. It struck me as a very friendly gesture and made me feel welcome and

started that feeling of extended family I get from the boards" (Browncoat1). Because Pearson

died before *Serenity* went to theatres, some message boarders vowed to honor him by buying

extra movie tickets and giving them to strangers (*Done the Impossible*). Pearson's popularity and

the reason for memorials to him seem largely attributed to his activism, his giving to and

participating in the community through his art, filk, and stories.

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[33] Lux Lucre's *South Park* renditions of the *Firefly* crew are archived in memoriam at
<http://www.profj.org/firefly/luxlucre/>.

[34] Not "everybody" knew or knows about Kerry Pearson/Lux Lucre. For example, Wendy Campbell, a colleague and fellow fan who offered comments on my research, notes that she has never heard of him and, as a result, questions her own devotion: "Is it me? Maybe I'm not enough of a fan." She raises an excellent point, one that suggests at least two questions: (1) Who, what, and how much does one have to know to be considered "fan enough"? and (2) Does the answer to the previous question reveal an embedded hierarchy in the *Firefly/Serenity* fan community? Though not a part of my current project, they are questions worth pursuing. For more on "fan-tagonisms," see Derek Johnson.

One story in particular epitomizes Pearson's fan experience and contributes to the rhetorical construction of Browncoat identity for the entire community. While in Vancouver filming an episode of *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007) after *Firefly* was cancelled, Adam Baldwin signed on to the message board where he had previously met Pearson and invited him to a local hotel for a beer. Later, they were joined by Alan Tudyk (Wash) who was in the area filming *I, Robot* (2004). To fellow fans' appreciative awe, Pearson posted to the board soon after, sharing the event through personal testimony and photos. He had, of course, experienced a rare and coveted fan moment: one-on-one time with celebrities associated with the object of his fandom—at *their* invitation, no less. Pearson created a vicarious experience for others, one that continues to be told and retold as it strengthens the Browncoat mythos, even for those who never knew or will know him: "I never got to know Lux, but I know he was one of our finest. Few fandoms get to have such prolific and creative contributors. He was truly one of a kind" (Channain).

Scholars interested in fan communities, particularly "aca-fans," can spend a lot of time and energy watching Browncoat vids and short films, perusing self-defining manifestos, and reading about fans' encounters with Whedon, his cast and crew. Yet exploring, enjoying, and validating fan activities and identities provide only pieces of a whole picture, pieces too long focused on, according to Derek Johnson. Johnson argues that researchers should be looking at the schisms among fans, the riffs between fans and "external institutions" (287). While the early work of scholars who study fandom stressed and praised the creativity, unity, and normality of fans, that work continues to be challenged and complicated. In the meantime, the orthodox understanding of the culture industry and fandom being isolated entities has led both fans and

scholars to see the industry as "unequivocally exploitative" and the fans as deliciously resistant (Jones 163). But devout television aficionados live in neither a separate nor distant universe from the production companies they sometimes vilify. These "fan 'politics' . . . are enormously problematic and complex" (163), and the invention and ubiquity of the internet have only magnified the matter (Tushnet 62-63).

As Sara Gwenllian Jones and Rebecca Tushnet relate, it was not too long ago that fan-produced artifacts were localized and of varying qualities (Jones 165-166; Tushnet 63). The most well-known examples, of course, come from *Star Trek*, a series that engendered an audience response like no other television show before it. Probably the first fan activists, Trekkies took to the streets and also flooded the network with letters when the show was slated for cancellation. The fans were so involved in the series that they had begun, after only a few episodes, to respond in creative ways, generating some of the earliest fanzines and filk, for instance. But most if not all of their inventive projects were shared among local friends and fellow fans and were not for profit. These creations had limited distribution and were, according to Jones, of low production quality;[35] Trekkie-made art, fiction, and music were not perceived by *Star Trek*'s owners as a threat (166). The internet as well as image, sound, and film editing software now allow for wide distribution of high quality products, some of which fans sell, which makes them a greater threat than in years past. The account of artist and Browncoat 11th Hour serves as a good example.

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[35] In its May 24, 2007, podcast, *The Signal* notes that "*Done the Impossible* is so well-made that sometimes it's easy to forget that it's a *fan* creation. But that's what being a Browncoat is all about: achieving the impossible is what we do best" ("The Signal #10," original emphasis). The statement seems an unwitting nod to Jones' mention of the "low quality" past and "high quality" present of many fan productions.

11th is famous among Browncoats for her artwork, especially her guerrilla marketing posters for *Serenity* and her recent cover art for the official *Serenity* role-playing game. She is also famous because of what happened to her in the fall of 2006: lawyers representing Universal Pictures sent her an email threatening legal action if she did not clear her Café Press store of merchandise sporting *any* reference to the film in conjunction with the film's title. She immediately began to comply, but within a week received another email in which the law firm warned that damages could include retroactive fines of $8,750, attorney's fees, and up to "$150,000 per infringed work" (11th Hour, "Universal's Legal Action"). Just as quickly as a lawyer can send an email, a fan can post to a message board. 11th went to her friends and fellow fans with a warning that elicited nearly 800 responses. She explained and cautioned, "The thing is that the law firm takes issue with even including a written reference to the *Serenity* movie. So even if fans offer images which are not copyright infringements, if they just mention the *Serenity* movie that's enough to warrant legal action. . . . It's very serious. . . . this will affect us all" ("Universal's Legal Action"). The word spread. Dizzy's response on *Whedonesque* sums up most others:

> Poor 11th. . . . I can actually understand why a company would want to protect their properties, but this goes so far beyond. We fans were used as tools by 'versal to promote *Serenity*, and 11th was in the front lines. And now—since Universal seems to have decided fan promotion is a no-no—even while she is making every move to follow their [Cease and Desist], they send this to her?

I can understand stopping people from selling licensed property. But

this? Ticking off the very fanbase that's been working so hard for years to

promote the property? I don't get it.

Dark days are ahead for fans if [Universal] can't tell the difference

between what 11th is doing and the fan just out to make a buck. ("Universal's

Legal Action")

What Dizzy refers to is the company's effort to channel fan energy.

In the months leading up to *Serenity*'s release, Universal Pictures capitalized on fan

enthusiasm by constructing a members-only online community that awarded points and

eventually products (t-shirts, hats, movie tickets, etc.) to those able to recruit more members.

This kind of community-building is called "word of mouth marketing," a strategy employed by

Affinitive, the firm which spearheaded the promotion. On its website, the group claims the

ability to "democratize" clients' brands and uses *Serenity* as one case study of its success. First,

Affinitive had to organize fans: "With a relatively large cult following existing relatively

untapped across several fan sites, Universal's agency, Special Ops, sought to utilize Affinitive's

technology platform to consolidate and mobilize the group and help build excitement leading

up to the theatrical release of the film and subsequent DVD." The results exceeded expectations;

Affinitive reports that over 75,000 fans became members of the campaign, 85% of which joined

because they were invited or heard about the movement from other people. In the end, boasts

the firm, the campaign "harnessed the power of a large member base."

Fans certainly felt "harnessed" when news of 11th's predicament hit the internet. So in

addition to much online discussion about 11th's plight as well as a few others like hers, The One

True b!X decided to tally fans' volunteer hours to promote *Serenity*. The result was *The*

Browncoat Invoice, which declared that Universal owed fans an estimated $2.1 million for about

28,000 "billable fan-hours." The site acknowledges that the invoice is not real, though it raises a

real issue: "the relationship between producers of entertainment and their increasing (and

knowing) reliance in the 21st century on fanbases to help promote that entertainment." Johnson

calls this issue a war over hegemony:

> Fans attack and criticize media producers whom they feel threaten their meta-
>
> textual interests, but producers also respond to these challenges, protecting their
>
> privilege by defusing and marginalizing fan activism. As fans negotiate positions
>
> of production and consumption, antagonistic corporate discourse toils to manage
>
> that discursive power, disciplining productive fandom so it can continue to be
>
> cultivated as a consumer base. (298)

The complexity of fan-studio "politics" reveals itself: both walk a fine line; both have and do not

have power. Henry Jenkins says as much as he continues to flesh out his earlier notions of fans

and fandom. Su Holmes explains that Jenkins now draws attention to the relationship of media

and cultural convergence. Media convergence denotes "technological fusion or producers

marketing a text across a range of media platforms" (e.g., a film, video game, and graphic

novel—each telling a part of the story), while cultural convergence refers to "the ways in which

audiences may relate to this media culture and the meaning-making strategies arising from

this" (e.g., fan-made websites, costumes, filk, and fiction) (220). Because of these entwined

convergences, a Browncoat is often simultaneously an "Alliance" pawn. In fact, scholars such as

Jenkins and Will Brooker[36] argue that the two identities are actually indivisible (Holmes 220).

As seen from the examples I have shared, fans have taken ownership of their

entertainment, not only by their activism to resurrect *Firefly* through *Serenity* (an undertaking

that involved buying *a lot* of series' DVDs) but also through creating their own content:

podcasts, fanzines, games, parodies, tributes, and cookbooks.[37] They are stakeholders in and,

therefore, owners of the Whedonverse (just as Whedon wants; he himself has said that *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer and I expect everything Whedon creates is meant to be iconic, able to inspire fan

play and production). Media producers need those stakeholders; only fans' perception of

ownership and property does not always align with legal definitions of those concepts,

especially in the United States (Jones; Tushnet).[38] So fans work within both a community and a

capitalistic system with a bottom line, one Whedon himself has a vested interest in—

misbehaved fanboy though he is—if he wants to expand his imaginative 'verse(s). Yet even this

community/capitalistic system distinction is a kind of reduction to "sides," considering that

media producers intentionally construct spaces—particularly online ones—within which they

invite and expect fans to interact.[39] Tom McCourt and Patrick Burkart posit that these spaces are

meant to "automate fandom," which results in fans' alienation from the texts they love, from

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[36] See Brooker's "Overflow and Audience."

[37] *Big Damn Chefs*, a collection of "the best recipes in the 'Verse . . . put together for Browncoats, by Browncoats" can be ordered by visiting <http://www.bigdamnchefs.com/>.

[38] It is very significant that the main documentary feature of *Done the Impossible* was released under Creative Commons (CC), a reinforcement of the "rhetoric of community." For more information on this kind of copyright, see the *Creative Commons* website.

[39] Several other examples include perusable résumés, class notes, and love letters of *Dawson's Creek* characters (<http://www.dawsonscreek.com/>) and, more recently, *Lost*'s Wiki (<http://lostwiki.abc.com/>). For an extreme case of institutional control of fan creativity, see Jones' discussion of LucasFilm and *Star Wars* fans (173).

fellow fans, and eventually from themselves: "On both the individual and collective levels, [Customer Relations Management] furthers the reification of culture" (270). Whedon seems well aware of this complicated relationship yet also a participant in it, for he has on occasion tried to calm fans' ire for big entertainment by reminding them that *Serenity* would not exist without Universal's support even as he sounds his "they-tried-to-kill-us" battle cry. He has also repeatedly attempted to coax fans into identifying more with the Alliance, insisting that "the reason I made the Alliance a generally benign, enlightened society was so that I could engage these people in a debate about it," one with "as many points of view as possible" (qtd. in Russell).

Many viewers, fans and scholars alike, have high and intimate regard for *Firefly* and *Serenity*. Many would even fall into the category of Browncoat. However, the belief that Browncoats are part of a war effort against a clearly-identified enemy is unjustifiable; no "us against them" exists when the rhetoric is carefully examined. A Browncoat is neither disenfranchised nor a hero; the "Alliance" is neither totalitarian nor a villain. Ultimately, a Browncoat's power lies in the honest admission that they continue to participate in the (un)real 'verse they have come to love, aware that practicing their fandom will always already entail a consumptive relationship with "them," an act that does *not* negate free will, the ability to make informed decisions about when, where, how, how much, and how often they get involved. *They* choose their level of engagement.

If nothing else, I have aspired in this section to suggest that fans' self-reflexivity in the labyrinthine network of the culture industry and everyday life, consumerism and fandom— none of which are mutually exclusive—makes any fan at least a little bit mighty. As long as

fandom is a conscious, educated choice, fans are not slaves to the studios, even when they buy

or promote some of the material "stuff" the studios peddle. And as long as they hold their

fandom in tension with what else about life matters, as most Browncoats seem to do, they have

not given in to the "fatal strategy" Jean Baudrillard describes: the deliberate and gluttonous

consumption of goods in the face of capitalism (Jones 163).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have considered the etymology of the word *fan*, looked at early popular

and academic connotations grafted onto that term, discussed the more nuanced understandings

of current popular constructions and scholarly treatments of fans, and shown by examining the

Browncoats how fans themselves rhetorically establish their identity. The work I have done

here serves to (re)familiarize readers with the discourse of fandom and fan studies. In the next

chapter, I turn my attention to academia where I present a brief history of higher education in

the United States before focusing on my own fields of study—composition and rhetoric and

writing centers—to consider how they, as examples from academe, rhetorically and discursively

define *their* identity.

Chapter Four

SCHOLARDOM: HISTORY AND RHETORICAL FRAMEWORKS

In the foreword to James Berlin's *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*, Donald Stewart argues, "It is the mark of educated persons to ask themselves, constantly, 'Why do we think the way we do?'" (ix). The answers shape one's identity. As readers saw in the previous chapter, fans construct their identities discursively, defining themselves and their activities sometimes with and sometimes without (or in direct opposition to) the input of non-fans, the media, and scholars. In this way, the realm of fandom is not so unlike the world of scholardom. Both construct internal hierarchies that (un)wittingly build external walls that keep "others" at bay, and both communities accomplish this through language. I now turn, then, to academia in the United States to examine its history and the ways in which the institution has rhetorically framed itself. Specifically, I briefly draw on scholarship that treats the development of higher education. Then, because I am affiliated and most familiar with them, I first look at composition and rhetoric as a field within English departments before considering the writing center community. These case studies demonstrate that fans and scholars mirror each other's discursive practices, an assertion that prepares readers for the discussion of fan-scholars and scholar-fans in the next chapter.

THE HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

When I was twelve years old, I told my mother, "I'm going to be a Ph.D. someday." I had this ambition partly because my father, who died when I was four, had been Frank E. Cochran, D.D.S. and partly because I was watching a television show, one I don't even remember the title of now, that featured a female psychologist. Smart enough to know that

being a dentist or a psychologist required getting a doctoral degree, I set this high bar for myself

at a very early age. It was only later in life, in college, when I realized that many people disdain

those with letters after their names, seeing them as stuffy, elitist know-it-alls. About the same

time, I first noticed the phrase *Ivory Tower* being batted around in conversations I overheard in

coffee shops, in the media, and even at the food courts of shopping malls. It was a phrase often

accompanied by the rolling of eyes or a hearty "pppfff" from pursed lips. Up until that point in

my life, I had assumed that being a lifelong learner, teacher, and researcher was one of the

noblest careers a person could seek, and thus, would come with a certain amount of respect; I

thought academics were wholly revered by their families, their colleagues, and even the general

public. It did not take long for my naivety to dissipate.

I quickly began to understand what Scott Schaeffer, managing editor of the *Journal of*

Mundane Behavior, addresses in his editorial "On Intellectual Inferiority." Schaeffer describes the

two most common uncomplimentary responses he receives from general audiences about the

contents of the scholarly periodical he edits. The first typical reaction is boredom; some readers

find scholarly work downright dull. The second response, one Schaeffer admits "stings," is

being accused of "mental masturbation." He elaborates:

> When I was in graduate school . . . , we reserved "mental masturbation" for those
>
> academics who went on and on about work we felt was irrelevant, trite, or
>
> pursued only for the sake of hearing themselves speak. The group of friends I
>
> had in graduate school were those who pursued research that they wanted to
>
> have an impact on the world; we wanted, if not to change the world from the
>
> bottom-up, then certainly to have people's awareness of how they lived their

lives changed. We wanted to be relevant. We wanted to be productive, not just in

the sense of having CVs (resumés) that ran the length of a novella, but in having

our work mean something to and do something positive for the world outside

the "ivory tower." *We* were not "mental masturbators"; we were concerned

citizens who did our bit of good for the world by trying to figure out how it

really works. (original emphasis)

The criticism may indeed sting, but it a criticism with some merit. As a college student, I began

to notice that some of my own teachers and many of the scholars I read in my coursework

spoke and wrote with an air of superiority about topics that seemed completely irrelevant to my

life. Their better-than-thou tone and impractical, irrelevant banter was not lost on me or my

fellow students. Some of our professors and many of the authors of our assigned texts *did* seem

to be engaged in "mental masturbation" that simultaneously othered most audiences. As a

result of these experiences, I vowed that, though I would still pursue my childhood dream, I

would attempt to never use my education against anyone; rather, as Schaeffer describes, I

would work for the good of the people—myself *among* them rather than *above* them. It was a

vow I was doomed to break, if only a little, for the history of academe was against me.

Whether accurate or hyperbolized, the characterization of academics being stuffy, elitist

know-it-alls can easily be found in the sweeping trajectory of the history of higher education in

the United States. It was not until after the Civil War that the college and university system as

we understand it today began to take shape. As Hugh Hawkins notes, "For academia, the years

1895 to 1920 can aptly be designated 'The Age of Standards'" (318). It was during this period

that accrediting bodies and accreditation standards developed. In fact, up until this point, there

were few common terms or practices among educational institutions, no sense of "system." The early twentieth century, then, saw the organization of colleges and universities (Oleson and Voss vii-xxi); from this period emerged the idea of schools of thought and practice, of standards for what constituted a credit hour and how many credit hours were sufficient to constitute a degree. In addition to these moves toward system, John Brubacher and Willis Rudy note that what defined "professional education" began to change. They establish that "professional education in colonial times . . . was largely by apprenticeship" (379). As higher learning institutions became more organized, more systematized, so the meaning of "professional" became associated with theory rather than practice: "Lectures replaced empirical training; telling replaced doing" (381). For many people, regardless of historical context, theory—the world of ideas—has long been associated with the upper class, with those who possess the financial resources to seek a "higher" education and the luxury of time to philosophize about life. The stereotype of the wealthy pontificator is based partly on myth and largely on fact.[40]

The first schools of higher learning in the United States were formed for an obvious purpose: to train clergy. Though not a purpose laced with ill intent, it was very easy for ministers of the faith to see themselves in a special or privileged position in relation to the masses they shepherded. And while to some extent the earliest schools utilized an apprenticeship model of teaching and learning, most of them rapidly became theory-based,

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[40] It is not surprising that class—and, therefore, wealth—continues to be associated with higher learning. From the earliest days, one of the key factors that spurred the organization of colleges and universities in America was the belief that knowledge could "solve practical problems and promote *material* well-being" (Oleson and Voss vii, emphasis added).

likenesses of their European predecessors and competitors.[41] As a result, they tended to produce

graduates who were more and more removed from practical life. In her tracing of the rise of the

social sciences, for example, Dorothy Ross states that these new kinds of academics, those

beginning to specialize and form discipline-specific theories,

> thought of themselves as members of a social and cultural elite who represented
>
> the dominant line of American development; as the heirs of the republican
>
> tradition, they sought to assume the moral authority befitting their station.
>
> Generally the sons of native Protestant families, they had been taught in college
>
> that they constituted an elite of learning and virtue whose leadership American
>
> society should follow. Thus they regarded themselves, often quite explicitly, as a
>
> natural aristocracy generated by and in some ways identified with the "people,"
>
> but yet a class apart. . . . the authority of their class was seen as synonymous with
>
> intellectual order in the society at large—the assertion of the one being a
>
> guarantee of the other. (293-94)

In *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, Alexandra Oleson and John Voss

support Ross's description of early academics, even as the authors note that educational

reformers were attempting to meet the varied needs of diverse publics, a reason for creating the

elective system, for example. In other words, however superior they may have considered

themselves, they wholeheartedly believed in the essentialness of education to a democracy (xi).

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[41] Europe was forefront in the minds of American educators as they moved toward system. In fact, some of the distinct qualities of United States' institutions were their sheer number and diversity. They also could boast about the high numbers of students they served and professors they employed as well as the generous public and private funding they received (Oleson and Voss vii). According to Oleson and Voss, by 1920 these distinguishing traits, poised American higher education to assume "a position of eminence in the intellectual world" (vii). Simply put, America wanted to replace Europe as the longtime leader in noteworthy contributions to knowledge.

They also were able to create a system of education that, while it borrowed important elements from Europe (especially Germany), was innovative and less influenced by Europe's "social hierarchies" (xix). Most impressive, American institutions were surprisingly uniform in their organization, without the aid of any centralized, directive overseers. In a relatively short period of time, then, higher education went from serving sons of the elite who wanted or were expected to become clergy to serving various populations with very different career goals: "they mirrored the democratic insistence on equal access, at some level, to all areas of knowledge— from the most esoteric to the most technical" (xix). Paradoxically, even with these democratic leanings, higher education was and continues to be compared to "industrial corporations," entities that foster nationalism, promote dispassion, and establish and maintain social hierarchies (xix; see also Fussell 128-150). Consequently, the elitism that Ross describes and Oleson and Voss validate continues to shape popular views of academics.[42] The *Wikipedia* entry for *Ivory Tower* provides an instructive example.

The now (in)famous free, online reference source *Wikipedia* began in 2001 and now boasts 3.1 million articles in English alone. The model it uses is collaborative: "*Wikipedia* is written . . . by volunteers from all around the world. . . . Visitors do not need specialised qualifications to contribute, since their primary role is to write articles that cover existing knowledge; this means that people of all ages and cultural and social backgrounds can write *Wikipedia* articles" ("Wikipedia: About"). Of course, writers can also edit each other's entries;

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[42] Of note is that even with its democratic ideals—"equal access, at some level" (Oleson and Voss xix), and, later, much more egalitarian open admissions policies—as the system of higher education continued to develop, kinds of learning became stratified, some kinds more valued than others. For example, those today who attend "trade school" do not share the same status with those who attend university. Two-year degrees do not have as much cultural currency as four-year degrees, nor do four-year degrees hold as much social weight (in certain circles) as do master's or doctoral degrees. Therefore, the United States may not be as influenced by social hierarchies as Europe once was (or still is), but it is nevertheless affected by issues of class, by the (de)valuing of labor and cultural artifacts.

citing sources and cross-referencing entries are also strongly suggested, "as unreferenced facts

are subject to removal." My coworker Sabrina Riley, a research librarian and the library director

at Union College, shared with me the unpublished results of a study by one of her colleagues

that compared the accuracy of information found in *Wikipedia* with that in *Encyclopedia*

Britannica, the highest standard for reference books in English. Riley's colleague concluded that

Wikipedia entries are generally just as accurate as those in *Britannica*. Such a high level of

accuracy is attributed to the online encyclopedia in part because of constant revision: as new

ideas are shared with the public or corrections to previously held notions are revealed, *Wikipedia*

almost immediately reflects these updates. So in many senses, *Wikipedia* truly is, as it claims,

"the people's encyclopedia." And "the people" include scholars themselves ("Wikipedia:

About"). Because contributors are treated with equitability, the entry for "Ivory Tower" is

fascinating and enlightening; apparently, scholars as well as "common folk" agree with the

following definition (or at least make no effort to revise it):

> The term **Ivory Tower** designates a world or atmosphere where intellectuals
>
> engage in pursuits that are disconnected from the practical concerns of everyday
>
> life. As such, it has a pejorative connotation, denoting a willful disconnect from
>
> the everyday world; esoteric, over-specialized, or even useless research; and
>
> academic elitism, if not outright condescension by those inhabiting the
>
> proverbial ivory tower. In American English usage it ordinarily denotes the
>
> academic world of colleges and universities, particularly scholars of the
>
> humanities. (original emphasis)

Of course, it could be argued that academics have more important agendas than correcting *Wikipedia* entries. Still, they *are* conversing about and considering who they are and how they enact their identities, just not necessarily on *Wikipedia*.

In the *European Journal of Social Theory* in his essay "The Social Structure of Critical Minds," Salvador Giner summarizes two theories held in the social sciences regarding the construction of human thought. The older and less popular theory is what Giner calls a "mild" one, one that holds that environment affects but does not solely determine how humans think and behave (321). The competing theory, that most if not all aspects of our lives are "mundanely, that is, socially, produced and shaped" (321), is currently one of the central tenets of the social sciences. The idea is so commonly accepted in the academic community that one might wonder why Giner bothers to note it. Because, Giner argues, beneath the assumption that our thoughts are socially constructed is "a wicked paradox": the disciplines that claim for themselves a positionality marked by reason, detached analysis, impartiality, and the ability to pursue, without bias, objective truth simultaneously act as if the social environments they observe, the influence those environments have on human thought and expression, have no influence whatsoever on they themselves or their research (321). In other words, even as academics hold to the belief that thought is socially constructed, they "perform" as if their own thoughts are exempt from the very social conditions they claim shape human epistemologies. On the other hand, argues Giner, some scholar's unabashed embrace of the notion that objectivity is always already impossible explains "the Dadaistic (and for a while highly fashionable) plunge into the banal obscurities characteristic of the *academic fans* of

postmodernity" (322, emphasis added). However, that response is not how all academics react

to the paradox.

For many who frequent the halls of academe, considering implications of "the wicked

paradox" occupies at least some of their research time. In fact, one such scholar addresses the

issue head on. According to Giner, in *Méditations* Pierre Bourdieu deals directly with scholars'

"claim to independence from social conditions, or more precisely, on their systematic ignorance

of the conditions of social existence of their trade and discipline" (322). Giner's reading of

Bourdieu culminates in the assertion that "scholarly" thought (particularly philosophical

thought), far from being objective, is the result, as is any kind of thought, of its "class, tribe,

guild, corporation, and subculture" (323). The idea that an academic's thoughts and behaviors

are somehow free from social conditioning is, in Bourdieu's words, "scholastic illusion" (qtd. in

Giner 323), an illusion that leads straight away to fanaticism. In their research on fandom,

Thorne and Bruner define *fanaticism* as the level or depth of involvement one has with the object

of one's interest and devotion (53). They are quick to note that their use of the term is neutral.

However, they do distinguish between a fan and a fanatic—the former characterized as

unusually interested in a person, place, or thing but without grossly violating social norms; the

latter as abnormally interested in a person, place, or thing and breaking if not defying social

conventions. Is it possible, then, that Bourdieu sees the so-called objective, academic pursuit of

truth as the labor of fanatics? According to Giner, yes:

> Like all fanaticisms, [this "scholastic illusion"] is blind and blinding. Thus
>
> philosophy—otherwise so acutely aware of the human condition in the abstract
>
> as well as of some of the main formal epistemological issues—ignores the social

conditions of its own production. The conditions that make it possible fall
outside its field of interest. This is illegitimate, and constitutes an epistemological
sin. (323)

Giner isolates, I believe, the deeply seated feeling that the average person has about academia (the feeling articulated in the *Wikipedia* entry for *Ivory Tower*), only he states it in the very language that can produce disdain for the "higher learned." From his explication of *Méditations*, Giner demonstrates that "Bourdieu attempts to show how the particular social position achieved by scholars (scientists, humanists, historians, social scientists, philosophers) facilitates their efforts to defend and strengthen their own privileges . . ." (323). What is the remedy for, in Giner's words, this "epistemological sin"? *Analysis situs*, situational logic (324)—or self-reflexivity.

RHETORICAL FRAMEWORKS

In an effort to better understand the scholar and academic, I now turn my analysis outside in, in an act of discipline-specific reflexivity. Composition and rhetoric, as a track within English departments, has for nearly a century attempted to garner the same status as the field of literature, to, in fact, regain the status it had as recently as the 19th century and as far back as Ancient Greece. Particularly through its scholarship, its discursive practices, I consider how it has pressed toward that goal. Then I move even deeper into composition studies to consider the writing center community, noting how it continues to frame itself, particularly through acts of naming. The purpose of the following subsections, then, is to note how—like fans such as the Browncoats—scholars construct an identity through language, an identity that is unique (or elite) and guarded against intruders or impersonators.

The Case of Composition and Rhetoric

Often, of course, a family's identity is born out of its culture, one that is related to, among other aspects, the family's nation of origin or residence (my family is American), region (we are Southerners), religion (most of us are Christians), genealogy (we are Funderbergs, Ventras, Palmers, and Cochrans), class (most of us are middle and upper-middle class), and race (we are by U.S. Census definition Caucasian or white, though I am the granddaughter of Italian, German, and British immigrants). Traditions and rituals are also woven into a family's identity—how they celebrate holidays and what they do with vacation time, for example. From a distance, however, families, even with their unique internal cultures, look and act alike; after all, everyone has a family, even if it is different from the denotation of the word-concept. Similarly, the identity of academe is derived from its culture; it has, as seen above, origins and traditions, a history. A scholar of that history, Tony Becher argues that across institutions and educational systems worldwide, the culture of a particular discipline, like that of "the family," remains essentially the same. This cultural resemblance manifests itself in several ways.

First, all disciplines have professional associations. For instance, in graduate school I became aware early on that I would be expected to join, in addition to other groups, The National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE). Being a member of NCTE was one way to acquaint myself with the discipline, to become acculturated, since, as Becher notes, "subject associations . . . embody collective norms." I still distinctly remember attending the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Atlanta in 1999. It was at that meeting, my first, where I began to learn how I would be expected to deliver a professional paper, what was "normal" for CCCC presentations—what to say, how to say it, what to do while reading or

speaking, what to wear. Just as if not more important, I learned what would *not* be expected of me, what would be considered "abnormal" or unprofessional. None of what I learned was necessarily related to me with words, rather the atmosphere itself and my observation of participants—i.e., my reading of the silences—schooled me in the ways of my profession.

In addition to collective norms, notes Becher, disciplinary associations provide "a shared context for research," a context out of which publications emerge. Some of these publications—for example, in the form of position statements—allow an organization to wield considerable influence on the shaping of curricula for both undergraduates and graduates. In the case of NCTE, guidelines such as the "Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing" prepared by CCCC are intended to directly impact "the preparation of teachers of writing at all levels, by college and university English departments, faculty of teacher preparation programs, faculty and administrators in elementary and secondary schools, and staffs of state departments of public instruction." The statement outlines specific ways in which current and future teachers should be trained, including how to teach writing as a process and how to offer productive feedback on students' drafts. Such guidelines, committed to paper (and website), are textual evidence of the field's identity and, thus, a way in which to assess ourselves or those who claim to be able to teach what we teach. In the case of teaching first-year composition, a graduate assistant or adjunct professor who refused to emphasize, even require, writing as a process would at least receive askance looks if not open criticism or reassignment. To discard process in a writing classroom demonstrates rebellion or ignorance about the field's very character.

Becher claims that the similarity of disciplinary cultures can also be observed in how easily professors and scholars are able to move among institutions, if they so desire. Those in the same discipline read the same scholarly publications; regularly communicate with peers, whether their peers are in the same department or in an institution across the globe; attend regional, national, and international conferences; and often engage with one another in collaborative, cross-institutional research and publication. All of these similarities mark a discipline as a discipline, give it the structure it requires to function effectively and over time (Becher). More importantly, the commonalities provide a discipline with ethos or authority. What happens, though, when a discipline has multiple branches on its "family tree"; when those branches have their own ways of thinking, speaking, and writing; when the branches appear to be or *are* unequally valued? Many may argue that such is the case in the field of English.

According to Edward A. Kearns, "the twentieth century began with English departments suffering from a simple schizophrenia, what Robert Scholes calls the 'invidious binary opposition between writing teachers and literary scholars'" (54). Today, those same departments have developed what Kearns considers "full-blown Multiple Personality Disorder." For example, in 1987 Peter Elbow described that year's English Coalition Conference in a piece titled *What Is English*? Unfortunately, no one could answer Elbow's question—neither an elementary nor a graduate school teacher. No one could answer, insists Kearns, because English teachers and English departments everywhere lacked "a coherent identity . . . had tried to become all things to everybody" (54). In other words, English professors in one way or another are responsible, according to NCTE and the International Reading Association, for

teaching "diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles . . . media techniques . . . graphics . . . personal fulfillment . . . cultures of the United States and the world . . . [and] the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience" (qtd. in Kearns 54-55). The all-things-to-all-people model, one Kearns calls "obviously deluded," has resulted in English being "the only department devoted to an art in which making the art plays second fiddle to talking about it," a phenomenon that starkly contrasts with what one might observe in, for example, a division or college of fine arts where the artifacts of professors who sculpt or compose are as esteemed as the high theory regarding or criticism of those very artifacts (55).

In a typical art department, one rarely finds a distinction between drawing *teachers* and art *scholars* as Scholes identifies in the typical English department between "writing teachers and literary scholars" (qtd. in Kearns 54). When I first entered the master's program in composition and rhetoric, I had little knowledge of such distinctions. As I recalled above, in college I became aware of the Ivory Tower stigma, but my blissful ignorance concerning the English department binary (or Multiple Personality Disorder[43]) largely stemmed from my undergraduate experience: I attended a private, faith-based institution where hierarchies among literature and writing faculty (a small, intimate, and mutually supportive group of colleagues) were absent and where I was never completely immersed in "the ways of the academy." However, when I started graduate school I caught on quickly. I remember a particular literature student I encountered in a literary criticism course who dominated classroom discussion and regularly challenged or even denigrated other students he deemed literarily dim—usually, us

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[43] Of course, the English department is more akin to (at least) a triad rather than a binary, often having three personalities: literature, composition and rhetoric, and creative writing.

comp/rhet people. The same student went barefoot, rarely changed clothes, nursed coffee from

an over-sized travel mug, and hoarded the company of an equally aloof literature professor

who had a reputation among students for making his classes especially difficult for those not

willing to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the literary canon. I began to understand that often

there are English departments within English departments, like family members who, for the

sake of their blood relation, tolerate and, in some cases, even genuinely love but do not

necessarily like or respect each other.

My story could easily be read as an isolated case, one misunderstood or even

exaggerated because of my close proximity to the situation. Perhaps. In their *Comp Tales: An*

Introduction to College Composition through Its Stories, Richard Haswell and Min-Zhan Lu share

the voices of both graduate students and professors who are engaged in teaching writing and

administrating writing programs—whether they began their careers as compositionists,

rhetoricians, or literature specialists. Of course, the book is not devoted to tales of woe. But

several are strikingly similar to mine and are told by individuals concerned enough about the

repercussions of making their stories public that they chose to remain anonymous for

publication. Here is but one example:

> Walking down the hall to my office, I was stopped by one of the literature
>
> faculty. The previous year he had not been a member of the department to
>
> congratulate me when I made tenure. But this time he had something to say.
>
> "Heard you published a book." I had—a research monograph. "What is it," he
>
> asked, "a textbook?" As usual, I didn't have a clever riposte, but then he didn't
>
> wait around for an answer of any kind. (qtd. in Haswell and Lu 97)

The unclaimed scenario corroborates Scholes' teacher/scholar binary and highlights what is particularly disconcerting: the assumption that the work of writing a textbook and the final product, the textbook itself, is somehow *not*, truly, a scholarly pursuit, rather it is technical writing, "blue collar" academic labor and, therefore, deserving of scorn. Still other narratives in this genre demonstrate how those in graduate writing positions—whether they began in the field or not—attempt to simultaneously prepare and encourage their students who will someday enter the profession:

> This is [the] simplest of tales, and I bet it is not unique. I earned my Ph.D. in literature (18th-century). Two years on the job and my chair asked me to direct the writing program. The Americanist who was hired with me took me aside and asked, with a look of the utmost concern, if the move wouldn't hold back my advancement in the department, jeopardize my career. That was his word, "jeopardize." Three years later during a financial crunch, he did not make tenure. That was all some time ago. Last year I was promoted to full [professor].
> *I tell this to comp/rhet students when they have been snubbed by lit students, but on the promise that they won't pass it on. I've never told it to any of my literature colleagues.*
> (qtd. in Haswell and Lu 32, original emphasis)

Again, the contributor remains nameless. Not only his or her anonymity but also the manner in which the story is delivered to students—in the classroom but "in secret"—and the professor's deliberate withholding of the tale from peers who teach literature show how deeply felt are the English department's "politics of identity."

The multiple identities of English described by Kearns—between composition and literature; between composition, literature, and creative writing; and, unfortunately, increasingly between composition and rhetoric itself—have demonstrated themselves as recently as April 4, 2008, in a session report from the CCCC in New Orleans. In his aptly titled report for *Inside Higher Ed*—"What Is a Composition and Rhetoric Doctorate?"—Scott Jaschik describes how a civil conversation among professors about trying to find graduate students "versed in the theory of rhetoric and the practicalities of managing writing programs" turned edgy when a graduate student expressed frustration over feeling pressure to choose between the two. Jaschik paraphrases Stuart C. Brown, an English professor at New Mexico State University, who observes that the "disordered" identity of the composition and rhetoric track within English manifests in the very naming of such programs. In Jaschik's words,

> Some composition and rhetoric programs are parts of English departments and others are free standing. But names now include "rhetoric in professional communications," "Ph.D. in English with professional writing in new media," "English composition and rhetoric," and many programs that have added "new media" or "digital" to their names. The proliferation of names, [Brown] said, is a challenge in terms of the field establishing more visibility in the graduate education world.

Brown's concern about *visibility* could be read as an even deeper concern about *viability*—viability of programs and, more importantly, of graduates' terminal degrees and job opportunities. Possibly Brown is even more concerned that linguistic ambiguity/diversity (as a

symptom of professional schizophrenia) may be weakening the field's identity, undermining it all together. Who are we if we don't even know what to call ourselves?

These identity issues and the conversations swirling about them, whether they arise among composition and rhetoric colleagues or between literature and composition and rhetoric as fields, are laden with some irony. After all, the study of both rhetoric and poetic (or literature)—more broadly, literacy—has been considered an essential part of a student-citizen's education for as long as civilizations have existed (Kearns 61). For most of human history, then, rhetoric and poetic have been equally valued. As James Berlin observes,

> No matter what else it expects of its schools, a culture insists that students learn
> to read, write, and speak in the officially sanctioned manner. It is for this reason
> that rhetoric, the production of spoken and written texts, and poetic, the
> interpretation of texts, have been the indispensable foundation of schooling,
> regardless of the age or intellectual level of the student. (1)

We need only look to the works of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Augustine, says Berlin, to understand the centrality of rhetoric to teaching and learning in the ancient world (2). And little changed over the centuries that culminated in formalized education in Europe and later the United States. In fact, Berlin notes that up to 1850, the works of British authors George Campbell, Hugh Blair, and Richard Whatley were "the dominant texts used" in American colleges and universities. Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), "a theoretical treatise, was designed to establish the philosophical ground for the discipline that served as the core of the [British] curriculum" (2); Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) was influential enough that is "went through 130 editions" from its date of publication to 1911; and Whatley's

Elements of Rhetoric (1828) served as the text for his Oxford divinity students. In summary, declares Berlin,

> This brief sketch underscores the fact that writing instruction was an integral part of the British and American college systems at a time when only the *well-endowed* and the *well-prepared* were in attendance. Instruction in rhetoric was in no way considered remedial, designed only for those who should have mastered it in the lower schools. It was instead regarded as a necessary concern of the college curriculum. (2, emphasis added)

There was, in essence, equilibrium between rhetoric and poetic, a balance that only recently has been disturbed.

Kearns indicts the department's abandonment of Art for Science as the real cause for its personality disorder and loss of equilibrium: "Led by college faculties, the profession turned away from making and judging literature and from forthrightly dealing with matters of taste" (55). As Kearns describes it, the split in the department occurred near the beginning of the 20th century when at the first Modern Language Association (MLA) meeting in 1883, "German professor H. C. G. Brandt . . . affirmed that 'our department *is* a science, and . . . its teaching must be carried on accordingly'; 'a scientific basis dignifies our profession'" (qtd. in Kearns 56, original emphasis). The result, according to Kearns's reading of Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*, was a widening gap that privileged objectivity over subjectivity, which is too often and mistakenly equated with arbitrariness and caprice (57, 61). In other words, the English department ceased to teach students how to evaluate, to make value judgments, to develop their Taste; instead, it focused on teaching them how to describe and infer. This move from Art

to Science, in Kearns' opinion, was a serious mistake that continues to impact the whole field. It has sharpened students' ability to interpret at the expense of their ability to judge, an aptitude required for the most weighty issues human beings face: "namely, problems involving competing goods and lesser evils, problems *inherently* based in values, and problems that require decision making" (60, original emphasis). To correct itself and set the English department back on track, "we should teach students that creativity and a critical stance go hand in hand, that science without judgment is dangerous, and that there are such things as cant and drivel, much of it appearing in academic journals" (58). More directly, English professors must teach their students how to distinguish, no matter the text, "between quality and crap" (64). Ultimately, Kearns calls for a university-level English curriculum that restores the balance between Art and Science and promotes the development of Taste.

While Kearns' argument is both agreeable and persuasive, the issue of teaching Taste causes me some discomfort. When I return to Berlin's assertion "that writing instruction was an integral part of the British and American college systems at a time when only the *well-endowed* and the *well-prepared* were in attendance" (2, emphasis added), I question if the literature and composition and rhetoric tension is, yes, rooted in matters of Taste, but matters of Taste that are heavily informed by gender, class, race, and, therefore, power. Perhaps it is not composition and rhetoric, the field, that is such a thorn in the side of literature; rather, the issue may be an academic/class system that only in the last century developed a coping or defense mechanism when faced with the *un*-endowed and *ill*-prepared middle-classes associated with open admissions, set in motion in the 1960s by The City University of New York, and the genesis of first-year writing programs. Like the "blue collar" academic labor of writing textbooks,

composition teachers may be seen in the department as the ones who "get their hands dirty." I must admit to sometimes feeling as if my position on the faculty is considered grunt work, especially when I am approached by extra-departmental colleagues on stairwells and in elevators who query me about why their students have limited vocabularies or do not know how to document a research paper in a particular field of study. Whether unconsciously or consciously, my associates insinuate that I have not done my job, a job that shouldn't be so difficult if it has been boiled down to a science and is, therefore, constituted by a set of prescribed steps that lead to "good" writing—which generally translates, error-free writing.[44] Have my colleagues and literature faculty nationwide forgotten, as Kearns suggests, "that the language arts are the only arts required of all citizens" (61)? In other words, do they ignore that fostering students' skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking is *every* professor's responsibility (which isn't to suggest that compositionists aren't experts)? Or, again, does an academic/class system relegate the compositionist-rhetorician to the Ivory Tower's servant quarters? Perchance, what happened early in the history of American higher education—the move from apprenticeships to lectures, the valuing of theory over practice—is what continues to advantage *scholars* of the "great books" rather than *teachers* of writing and persuasion and even *writers* themselves. More pointedly, among college and university faculty the study of

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[44] These insinuations, of course, are directly connected to the Art/Science swing that Kearns explores. For example, he suggests that our rubrics for scoring writing are just one of the many manifestations of Art cloaking itself in Science: "It is much easier . . . to demand five-paragraph essays and eight-sentence paragraphs and to prohibit one-sentence paragraphs and legitimate, stylistically effective sentence fragments; doing so reduces the decision making for writers and judges, as does applying rigid grading standards for errors (e.g., a one-point grade reduction for three major errors). Some teachers may justify these and a host of similar practices in the names of objectivity, standardization, and fairness, but standardization, even under its most legitimate applications, masks simple convenience" (60).

literature rather than the production of it is associated with the academy's version of the upper class.[45]

Issues of class aside, Stuart C. Brown's concern over the "disordered" identity of composition and rhetoric programs as manifested in their diverse names mirrors a similar, long-time unease in the writing center community. The casual and published conversations about what writing centers are called and how they are viewed from the outside because of the metaphors used to describe them: these conversations demonstrate how dominant is the role of language in the construction of an academic field's identity and how that identity, discursively distinguished, acts simultaneously as a dividing line between "us" and "them."

The Case of Writing Centers

Several years ago on a faculty listserv, I became intrigued by a discussion about Phillip Shelley's essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled "Colleges Need to Give Students Intensive Care." Shelley criticizes higher education's borrowing of corporate models in which students become customers and claims that

> adopting that [corporate] ideology may unintentionally compromise the
>
> traditional academic expectations of student and faculty responsibility.
>
> Academic institutions are becoming what intellectuals used to abhor—
>
> enterprises whose focus is on the bottom line, and whose assessments rely solely
>
> on quantity, not quality or critical analysis. (B16)

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[45] Of note, English departments do not teem with adjuncts who teach literature. Nor do literature professors regularly take stacks of "themes" home each night or commute among multiple campuses in order to maintain the near-equivalent pay of a full-time job without benefits—medical, spatial (no permanent office space), or social (rarely considered a colleague due to transience). A university literature professor is never told that a master's degree is all one needs for his or her position. Also, it is noteworthy to draw attention to the (de)valuing of those who teach only first-year writing (especially in a community or teaching college context) and those who do not teach but coordinate writing programs, conduct composition research, and/or construct theory (usually in a research university setting).

Instead of business metaphors, Shelley suggests a medical one: teachers should think of themselves as doctors and their students as patients. In such a paradigm, teachers advise, prescribe, listen, and make necessary referrals; in turn, students adhere to expert advice, take their medicine, come for regular check-ups, and seek the expertise of those to whom they have been referred. The outcome, according to Shelley, is promising: "Having taken more control over their own enlightenment in college, students would be more likely to succeed in later life—and to engage in lifelong learning. Faculty members would also continue to learn, seeing that education, like medicine, is a practice that involves continuous experimentation and questioning" (B16). While Shelley's metaphor seems productive, it begs to be challenged just as much as the corporate model. As one professor remarked on the listserv: "To refer to our students in the language of doctors ('patients'), lawyers ('clients'), or marketing specialists ('customers') is to use misleading terms which lead inevitably to a skewed picture of the people whom we serve. . . . Educators the world over can recognize . . . superb *teaching* without the need to clothe it in a borrowed tuxedo of false language." The professor's conclusion was this: students aren't patients, clients, or customers; they are students.

"Borrowed tuxedos" may be an apropos way of discussing the name shifts that have occurred over the history of writing centers and continue to occur today. In fact, Peter Carino observed over a decade ago that "the various attempts at definition in our literature can leave one dizzy" (31). For example, whether in publication, in casual conversation, or in the minds of students, writing centers have at various times been explored or rejected as, called, or thought to be the following: laboratories (Moore; Carino; Leahy), clinics (Moore; Carino), hospitals (Pemberton), fix-it shops (Ede), prisons (Pemberton), service stations (Krapohl), centers (Carino;

Pemberton), workshops (Pemberton), Burkean parlors (Lunsford), oases (Krapohl), contact

zones (Wolff; Severino), churches (Healy), birthing rooms (Rabuck), jazz ensembles (Lerner)—

and the list goes on (see Fischer and Harris). The sometimes heated talk about a writing center's

name and the seriousness with which proponents of one name or another treat the extended

metaphors attached to each name seemed almost silly to me when I first entered the field—

until, of course, I myself had to (re)name one.

Several years ago, I was hired to direct a first-year writing program as well as a so-called

writing center at Union College, a four-year, liberal arts, faith-based Midwest college with a

student population of approximately 800. I say "so-called writing center" because when I

arrived, the director admitted that the area was not his expertise and he was more than ready to

hand over the responsibility to me. After seeing the facilities and observing and talking with the

peer tutors, I understood that what for years had been called the writing center was really a

first-aid station or fix-it shop. Students—almost entirely from the English as a Second Language

program and first-year writing courses—clearly took advantage of the service to have tutors

edit or "fix" papers. The scenario was all too familiar to me, who as an undergraduate was also

a peer tutor assigned to an adjunct-sized office on weekday and Sunday evenings. Then, my

qualifications included working for the composition coordinator, writing well myself, being an

English major, and having a soft heart. Among other nevers, I was never trained, never exposed

to writing center literature, never informed that the National Conference on Peer Tutoring

might have been an invaluable resource for me. My lack of training and my absence from and

ignorance about the larger professional community left me feeling isolated and frustrated, too

often falling back on what I was good at—editing and proofreading—to help my peers. I didn't

have field-specific language, a writing center identity to guide me. As the result of my own

tutoring experience, I knew right away that the situation at Union would have to change.

Therefore, when I joined the faculty I began, with the help of colleagues and peer tutors,

to grow the three-tutor, 8' x 6' "writing center" into a fully operational entity with a new name,

a new mission, new goals, and even a new space; essentially, I planned an identity overhaul. I

was excited about the work until I realized that the college-at-large was no different than a lot of

other campuses I had read about in writing center literature. Faculty and staff still used

"writing lab" and "writing center" interchangeably, persisted in thinking that peer tutors edit

and proofread papers, and considered the center a place to send students perceived to be

remedial or lazy. It did not help that before I arrived the common practice of staffing the center

was requiring English and Education majors to "serve" so many hours a week as a tutor.

Several stories about indifferent and sometimes mean peer tutors made me immediately

petition to change that practice.

Carino, who suggests that the writing center is both a social and linguistic construct (32),

might argue that my dilemma was itself social and linguistic. The writing center on my campus

had neither a culture nor a language of its own. The culture was handicapped by obligatory

labor, lack of on-going training, and no solidarity among tutors, and the language—how the

writing center was talked about and, therefore, understood—belonged to the students and

faculty who were at least misinformed about if not completely ignorant of writing center work.

Addressing Thomas Hemmeter's insistence that the writing center is "our words, a linguistic

phenomenon," "an idea—in language"[46] (qtd. in Carino 31), Carino proposes that the writing

center is more. Yes, it is "our words," because writing centers can only be thought and

theorized about via language. Yet the writing center is not simply "our words," because the

culture is comprised of ways of being and acting as well as "a body of intellectual and

imaginative work" (Raymond Williams qtd. in Carino 32). In fact, from a Bakhtinian

perspective, one that "deconstructs the boundary" between how one acts and what one "thinks

up," we—me, the director, and the new tutors—needed to own the words, the language, the

name of the writing center on our campus; taking ownership was the only means of giving it

being—flesh (Carino 32; see also *New American Standard Bible*, John 1 as well as Fleckenstein). So

within Union's context and under the conditions I and the tutors found ourselves, how could

we convey what the writing center should actually be? And what name would best provide a

versatile but effective metaphor for what is supposed to happen in such a space?

During my brainstorming for answers to these two questions, I explored many

metaphors and similes that the faculty and students would recognize from our shared religious

faith. To emphasize the role of the writing center on campus, what seemed an advantageous

metaphor came, not surprisingly, from the Bible:

> The writing center is an integral part of intellectual and spiritual life on a
>
> campus; it, like all other entities on campus, is a part of the body of the
>
> institution. As the apostle Paul describes the body of Christ, no part is more or
>
> less valuable than another. To each is given a role, a purpose that enables the

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[46] As Carino notes, when Hemmeter uses the expression "an idea—in language," he is echoing Stephen North's foundational essay "The Idea of a Writing Center," first published in *College English* in 1984. See also Hemmeter.

body to function at its optimal capability and fullest potential. (See *New American Standard Bible*, I Corinthians 12, especially verses 14-30.)

The writing center, I proposed, is a vital organ that performs a specialized and necessary role in the body of the institution. This metaphor, though, was only one of several needed to begin shaping the center as a reinvented space and linguistic phenomenon on campus. The center also needed a new name, one that suggested, especially to students, a more inviting space than the center had previously been and one that promoted (remember Kearns' argument that English is an Art rather than a Science) the entire process of writing rather than merely the proofreading of writing.

After consulting colleagues in the writing center community as well as in my own English department, I settled on the name Studio for Writing and Speaking—the Studio, for short. A strong influence on this choice came from Beth Burmester, who had used *studio* in her reinvention of the writing center at Georgia State University. As both her student and a tutor in Georgia State's Writing Studio, I came to see the moniker as a progressive and rich one. While many writing center practitioner-theorists have lobbied for the continued use of *lab* (insisting that the metaphor of a science lab where experimentation takes place is a positive image), *studio* seemed even better—edgy, artsy, student-inhabited. For my campus's environment, the concept of an art studio nicely echoed a familiar biblical metaphor used to describe one aspect of a human's relationship with God: the potter and his clay (see *New American Standard Bible*, Jeremiah 18). In *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis calls an artist's love for her or his work "the lowest type" (34) because it forms the basis for an intimacy that cannot be reciprocated: the lump of clay on the potter's wheel is inanimate, without sentience. Because humans are

sentient, the analogy obviously unravels, is flawed. Still, insists Lewis, it provides the follower

of Jesus with a hint of his love:

> We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something
>
> that God is making, and therefore something with which [God] will not be
>
> satisfied until it has a certain character. . . . Over a sketch made idly to amuse a
>
> child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even
>
> though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—
>
> the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man
>
> loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would,
>
> doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can
>
> imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and recommenced for
>
> the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumbnail sketch whose making was
>
> over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had
>
> designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing
>
> not for more love but for less. (34-35)

Lewis's words so closely echo the refrains of composition instructors everywhere that I, as a

first-year writing teacher, have difficulty hearing a difference in the spiritual and vocational

tones. When I read student evaluations each semester and at least one or two students note

"writing more than one draft is stupid and a waste of my time," I hear "I wish for less love

rather than more." These young artists mistake "thumbnail sketches" for masterpieces. In

regards to the writing center I was reinventing, I thought, *If we who attempt to foster the art of*

writing could convince students that great works require time and effort, maybe we could convince them

of how natural it is to set up their "easels" in the Studio.

Instead of arguing about which writing center name or extended metaphor is most

accurate or appropriate, Katherine A. Fischer and Muriel Harris suggest that their colleagues

consider why and at what point the analogies break down (34). For example, as a field born out

of composition and rhetoric, the writing center community is, at its heart, a field familiar with

the rhetorical situation, familiar with how to navigate the relationship among author/speaker,

audience, and subject. As a happy result, there are names and metaphors for seasons, so to

speak; "the metaphors shift as do the purposes and the situations that envelop them" (31). On

the other hand, Fischer and Harris observe that shifting metaphors may also indicate that

writing centers lack "recognizable identities" (33). "Outsiders" may simply not know the what,

where, when, and how of writing centers. It is telling that "generally no one likens math or

English departments, for example, to factories or gas stations or hospitals" (33). In the end,

however, a hint of self-congratulation can be detected in Fischer and Harris's own rhetoric, as

they affirm that "writing centers are more complex than images and metaphors can convey"

(34). Complexity is, of course, more desirable than ambiguity if one must define one's self. Even

so, having an intricate or complex identity can just as easily act as a barrier that distinguishes

"us" from "them" as can a name, a metaphor, and/or a departmental track.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have recounted a brief history of higher education in the United States;

considered the "rift" in English departments between the fields of literature and composition

and rhetoric; and discussed the writing center community's on-going discussion of naming and

extended metaphors. This work demonstrates the analogous activities of identity-construction performed by both fans and scholars, with special attention to how similarly each group establishes internal hierarchies and builds protective, external walls to keep "others" at bay. This and the previous chapter, then, set the stage for a deeper look into fandom's complex relations with itself and the "outside world," especially the world of academe. In previous chapters, I mention scholars who also identify as fans. Nestled between fan and scholar, there are actually two figures: the fan-scholar and the scholar-fan. In the next chapter, I consider definitions of each and explore what kinds of politics crop up around and among these two personalities.

Chapter Five

FAN-SCHOLARS AND SCHOLAR-FANS: LIFE IN THE SHADOWLANDS

Fans and academics have rich histories. They have discourses of their own, ones marked by self-constructed myths and rife with jargon, and they have sets of internal rules and hierarchies. Each also has a particular self-image (as complicated as they may be from the insider perspective) that is often developed in opposition to or despite what "outsiders" understand them to be. Using the previous two chapters as an introduction, readers can now begin to understand why fans moving toward the "scholar camp" or scholars moving toward the "fan camp" may find themselves in an awkward or even hostile position vis-à-vis their fellow enthusiasts and colleagues, respectively. This liminal space, this shadowland is sometimes marked by a sense of alienation and loss, sometimes by inclusion and fulfillment, sometimes by all of the above. Because this shadowland deserves to be examined, I take up that task here. To conclude, I propose a novel way to frame the academic-fan, a portrait I sharpen in the succeeding chapter.

COMING TO TERMS

Only in the last decade and a half have the terms *fan-scholar* and *scholar-fan*—synonyms include *fan-academic* and *academic-fan*[47] (or "aca-fan"[48])—been used by researchers who, rather than attempting to define the identities, have spent time analyzing and critiquing what fan-scholars and, more often, scholar-fans *do*, their scholarish/ly behaviors. This disinterest in, distaste for, and, in some cases, refusal to define has fostered the production of book reviews,

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[47] According to Matt Hills, *academic fan* is a phrase that was first used by Richard Burt in *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares* (1998) (*Fan Cultures* 2).

[48] This truncated form was coined by media scholar Henry Jenkins who uses the term to refer to himself in the title of his blog. *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* can be viewed at <http://www.henryjenkins.org/>.

articles, and book chapters at the expense of clarity and sometimes substance. As an academic, I can appreciate the political and/or theoretically fashionable reasons for avoiding definitions, but communicating with precision requires them. The need for such demarcations is evident in the work of academics who repeatedly cite only Matt Hills, who describes the fan-scholar as someone "who uses academic theorizing within their fan writing and within the construction of a scholarly fan identity" and the scholar-fan as someone "who draws on their fandom as a badge of distinction within the academy" (*Fan Cultures* 2). These references are made by media scholars despite Hills' insistence that his goal is to resist defining either, preferring instead to offer "a general theory of media fandom" (1). Still, even these depictions are not universally accepted or employed in scholarly discourse as they are not monolithic terms but rather fluid linguistic constructions symbolic of diverse identities performed in and among diverse contexts. Furthermore, the fan-scholar and scholar-fan identities are, as most other things that matter in life, enmeshed with politics—politics of the fan club, the weblog, the academic department, the classroom.[49]

The terms *fan-scholar* and *scholar-fan* continue to be (con)tested in part because there are many questions yet to be asked and answered about the personas. For instance, one of the questions Hills does not address in *Fan Cultures* is this: What specifically do the fan-scholar and scholar-fan hold in common? Also, what do both lose or gain by claiming such a position? In the next two sections, I answer some of these questions by first fleshing out the definition of the

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[49] While the American academic and fan play the central roles in my inquiry, it is important to mention that international scholars note a marked "difference between academics in Britain and America and how cult texts in the latter form a significantly bigger part of university curricula." As such, argues Lincoln Geraghty, British scholars "place greater emphasis on the effect of cult-media on popular culture," making "the very nature of intense affective fandom . . . a particularly American identity."

fan-scholar through interrogating specific examples from personal experience and the World Wide Web and then constructing an operational definition of the scholar-fan that will serve as grounds for my work in subsequent chapters. Looking closer at each identity provides readers with a more thorough understanding of what each means and what consequences issue from being identified as one or the other.

<div align="center">

THE FAN-SCHOLAR

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Very little research has considered the fan-academic or fans' "scholarship." (There is, however, a plethora of studies on fan fiction.) In fact, "while the academic-fan or 'scholar-fan' has become a highly contested and often highly visible topic for theorists, the fan-academic or 'fan-scholar' has been passed over in silence" (Hills, *Fan Cultures* 2). One reason for this silence may be that the fan-scholar rarely if ever self-identifies; rather, the label is generally imposed by others—i.e., scholars. One might expect that the average fan is much more interested in the object of his or her devotion rather than the "work" of self-study or self-reflection which affords little to no cultural capital among fellow fans; that kind of work is the custom of and expectation for academics. Take popular press writer Nikki Stafford (her pen name) for example. The author of television companion guides for series such as *Lost* (2004-present), *Alias* (2001-2006), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*,[50] Stafford was the guest speaker for the Friday evening banquet at the third biennial conference of scholars who study the works of Joss Whedon. In his introduction to her address, David Lavery, at that time Brunel University's Chair in Film and Television, described Stafford as "the ultimate fan-scholar." The

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[50] All of the guides listed are published by ECW Press.

story Lavery shared to support his claim (paraphrased below) speaks to the complicated nature of the fan/scholar distinction.

On Monday, May 21, 2007 the first-season finale of the science fiction series *Heroes* (2006-present) was broadcast on NBC. Within ninety minutes of its last scene, Nikki Stafford posted to her regularly maintained web space *Nik at Nite*, a blog devoted to the analysis of quality television.[51] She wasn't thrilled. Creator Tim Kring and crew had promised a finale to rival the highly-praised twenty-two chapters leading up to "How to Stop an Exploding Man," installment twenty-three. In Stafford's experienced opinion as a television critic and avid viewer, the episode fell far short of expectations. In fact, it was "a disappointment," completely "anticlimactic." And she spent over 2500 words defending her position. Across the globe from Stafford's locale in Canada, David Lavery watched the episode a day later in England. Having a professional relationship with him, Stafford (who not only writes but also acquires manuscripts for ECW Press) emailed Lavery to solicit *his* thoughts on the epiosde. In *Saving the World: A Guide to Heroes*, Stafford declares her shock when she received his email reply: "OMG. Loved it" (Porter, Lavery, Robson 177). How could their responses be so different, she wondered?

A month later, Lavery wrote his own assessment of the episode, "Damn Season Finales," and posted it to his blog *The Laverytory*. In his review, he refers to Stafford's blog comments as "derisive scorn"; at the same time, he admits that season finales of critically-acclaimed shows *do* have to "clear a very high bar." However, this high bar is mitigated by the suspension of disbelief, suggests Lavery, a concept Tim Kring accused fans of abandoning when he spoke

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[51] Scholars, critics, and viewers use the phrase *quality television* to distinguish among televisual texts. A "quality" series may be defined as such because its narrative is complex, its characters are richly developed, its content provokes thought, or it b(l)ends genres. The *Wikipedia* entry for the term offers a good starting point for further research, including a list of scholarly sources to pursue.

about the finale with *TV Guide*. Concerning the inconsistencies and sloppiness the audience

perceived in the episode, Kring admonished, "Theoretically [they] are not supposed to be

thinking about that. . . . But what can I say? [It] requires the proverbial suspension of disbelief"

(qtd. in Lavery, "Damn Season Finales"). Lavery elaborates:

> The concept [of suspension of disbelief] . . . comes from the great
>
> Romantic poet, philosopher, and literary theorist Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-
>
> 1834) and first appears in *Biographia Literaria*, where it is described as an essential
>
> "poetic faith" elicited from a reader by "a human interest and a semblance of
>
> truth sufficient to procure" it.

In the interview with *TV Guide*, Kring leaves out the most significant word from this formula,

argues Lavery: "the *willing* suspension of disbelief" (original emphasis). Lavery's initial "OMG.

Loved it" response to Stafford was the result of his willingness to believe. Admittedly, there

were "inconsistencies and disappointments" that set off his "crap detector," but "when Nathan

flew in . . . Kring had me at Flying Man's arrival. At 'You saved the cheerleader, so we could

save the world,' I cried," confesses Lavery.

Soon after his blog entry, Lavery asked Stafford for permission to include her blog post

in *Saving the World* under the chapter title "Finale Face-Off: Nikki Stafford Versus David Lavery

on 'How to Stop an Exploding Man.'" Lavery also gave her the opportunity to write a postscript

to his critique. In that rejoinder, Stafford defends her original judgment, unmoved by Lavery's

arguments. After noting that she is a "*huge* fan of *Heroes*," admiring and savoring the writing,

storytelling, and acting, she insists that her investment in the series is the very reason "the finale

was so painful" (177). She explains,

I think David and I have different interpretations of what the phrase "suspension of disbelief" means. I've always taken it to mean one must suspend notions of what would exist in the real world to believe what is happening on screen. . . .

What David and Tim Kring . . . are suggesting instead is that I should suspend my *belief* in the quality of writing. . . .

Yes, every show is allowed it slip-ups, and yes, there are limitations to the medium (which is the other half of what Coleridge's term meant), but as someone who has spent years writing about television, I cannot remember the last time I was disappointed in a finale the way I was in this one. It has nothing to do with me being an unwilling viewer . . .

My vehement dislike of this episode . . . shows how much I care about the series. If I'd been watching a series that I didn't love, and it had given me a finale as unsatisfactory as this one, I'd have shrugged and changed the channel. It's my passionate belief that the writers of the show could have done *so* much better, that they had *so* much potential they'd shown us throughout the otherwise fantastic first season that renders it so disappointing . . . (177-179, original emphasis)

Stafford's remarks are passionate without being untenable. In fact, after admitting to being brought to tears by the finale, Lavery grants that he, in his own words "the scholar-fan," was much more willing than Stafford "to respond as [the episode] was written," to willingly suspend disbelief, to have a little "poetic faith" in Kring. He also admits that this was not the first season finale about which he had been "less objective" than other viewers.

Lavery's tale of two blogs not only is recorded in the pages of *Saving the World* but also was the bulk of his introduction of Nikki Stafford at the Whedon conference banquet, where he reiterated that she, "the ultimate fan-scholar," had had a much more level head than he about *Heroes*' season finale. A conference presenter and attendee, I spoke with Stafford the day after her presentation, asking if she considered herself, as Lavery had introduced her, a fan-scholar. She responded with a query rather than a reply: "What is a fan-scholar?" Though her response is an isolated example and certainly not generalizable, I still must wonder if her answer suggests that academics are more familiar with the classification than anyone else, that they are actually the ones who created both the designation and definition(s).

I answered Stafford's question with my own explanation, one that fit the keynote address she had given the evening before:[52] "Well, *my* definition is someone who can think intelligently about popular culture and articulate those ideas in graceful and moving prose, which you did last night."

She smiled—flattered, I think—and blushed a bit. "Well, thanks. Uh, yeh. Then I guess maybe I *would* call myself one of those."[53]

Others beside Lavery may consider her a fan-scholar as well, but without using the actual term. For University of Western Ontario's *Young Alumni Magazine*, Bob Klanac profiles Jennifer Hale (a.k.a. Nikki Stafford), who graduated from the university in 1996 and finished her master's at University of Toronto several years later. Hale explains that the pseudonym had already been assigned to a companion guide for the television series *Xena*, only ECW Press had

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[52] Nikki Stafford's keynote address, "Don't You Forget About *Buffy*: Why Joss Whedon's Masterpiece Captivates Us Still," can be read on her blog dated 12 June 2008 at < http://nikkistafford.blogspot.com/>.

[53] Readers should note, as I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section, that in this scenario the label "fan-scholar" is assigned to Stafford and the definition of the term is initially unfamiliar to her.

yet to find an author for the book, something she discovered while they were interviewing Hale

for a job. When the call came back from the publisher that they wanted to hire her, her first

assignment was to complete the *Xena* book. "She knew that ECW just wanted a title they could

flog for the then-hot [*Xena*] market," writes Klanac. "What they didn't count on was someone

coming from a university background," Hale says. "I had gone to the University of Toronto to

do my Master's and I was in the midst of my thesis. I knew how to do research. . . . I was able to

write colloquially and it turned out to be a more analytical book" (qtd. in Klanac 10). Just happy

to have found an author for a book already slated for publication, the press seemed to care less

whether or not it was researched and analytical. Only it did matter to readers, most of them

fans. Within weeks of the book's publication, Hale/Stafford got her first invitation to appear at a

fan convention for a book signing. And sales in North America were good—very, very good.

Thus, Nikki Stafford was born. Klanac concludes,

> Although Hale could have just ghost-written these books with one eye on
>
> the keyboard and the other on a clock, the obsession to detail in the books is a
>
> testament to her awareness of the audience reading them.
>
> "Genre fans are really critical and nit-picky. The Nikki Stafford books
>
> have some meat to them."
>
> "The best compliment I ever had was a comment in some site like
>
> Amazon," Hale says. "The person was writing about another *Lost* book. They
>
> said 'this book sucked, I'm waiting for the Nikki Stafford one.'" (10)

In Klanac's estimation, Hale/Stafford has become such a popular and respected writer about

genre television because she is a devoted fan, an exceptional writer, *and* an astute scholar—yet

another definition of the fan-academic: "her books are well-researched and quite frankly good reads" (10). Lavery echoes this observation in his blog entry: "Nikki [is] the ultimate fan-scholar, *as her first-rate books on* Buffy, Angel, *and* Lost *have demonstrated*" ("Damn Season Finales," emphasis added).

It would be tidy to end the discussion of fan-academics here and adopt the definition I offered above, but Hale's/Stafford's case raises some interesting rhetorical questions. For example, has she been identified as a fan-scholar because she is not employed by an institution of higher education? After all, she has completed undergraduate and master's degrees. Or is she a fan-scholar because she works and writes for a popular press under a pseudonym—in other words, because her work does not receive blind peer review and appear in academic journals such as *Camera Obscura* (Duke UP) or *Screen* (Oxford UP)? The answers to some of these questions could not come without considering more examples, for Stafford represents only one incarnation of the fan-scholar and not necessarily the most common.

Unlike people such as Nikki Stafford whose job is television criticism and whose education affords her a certain affinity for academia, the general public in the United States seems to have a torrid love-hate relationship with the Ivory Tower. Whether they harbor disdain for, declare indifference about, or gladly keep up with the goings on of academia, they want to be associated with it, according to Paul Fussell. Fussell finds evidence for this desire in the ways higher education is imitated in society. For-profit establishments, for instance, have adopted the practice of "seminars" and powerful lobbying groups call themselves "institutes." It is not surprising, then, that not only business and politics but also fandom has its forms of imitation. When I was studying *The X-Files* in graduate school in the late nineties, I discovered

X-Files University, an extensive fan website that offered "students" a range of "degrees" in aspects of the series (see Appendix B for the university's official seal).[54] Today, little of the original site is still accessible, but even the small portion that remains is a testament to Fussell's observation.

The remaining webpage of *X-Files* University is organized to introduce visitors, and potential students, to the faculty and teaching assistants for the College of Interdisciplinary Studies and two of its branches, the School of Slashology/Gay Studies and the School of X-Philes Studies (or the study of fans, literally "lovers of *The X-Files*"). Each department offers a brief description of itself as well as examples of what students may study in the area. Also, the webpage includes a section on "Degree Requirements and Guidelines." A student can earn a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree by writing a thesis of six, twelve, or eighteen thousand words, respectively. Theses do not have to be completed within a particular time period, but the guidelines suggest that students keep their department chairs informed of their progress. Once a thesis is finished, it must be submitted to the appropriate faculty who will then read and evaluate it. An alumni section of the site includes both the names of graduates and links (now defunct) to their theses. Besides the mock degree programs and procedures, the site has a "Recommended Reading" list that is composed almost entirely of academic publications, including the following:

- *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files* (1996); edited by David Lavery, Angela Hauge, and Marla Cartwright; published by Syracuse University Press

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[54] As far as I can tell, the site was not created or maintained by fans trained as academics.

- *PopLit, PopCult and The X-Files: A Critical Exploration* (2000); written by Jan

  Delasara; published by McFarland

- *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992); written by Henry

  Jenkins; published by Routledge

- *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (1992);

  written by Camille Bacon-Smith; published by University of Pennsylvania Press

Only one book on the list—*X-Treme Possibilities: A Paranoid Rummage through* The X-Files (2000)

by Paul Cornell, Martin Day, and KeithTopping—comes out of a popular press, Virgin

Publishing. This reading list composed of well-known scholars in Media Studies is coupled

with links to fan websites under the heading "Recommended Sites." As a result, alongside

books that are somewhat accessible to general readers but primarily written for an academic

audience, students are asked to consult webpages such as "Top 40 Reasons That Christ Carter of

The X-Files is a Closet Duran Duran Fan" and "You Know You're an X-Phile When." The

pairing of such resources and performing of academia may seem ridiculous, even absurd and,

therefore, rare. But *X-Files* University is only one example of this kind of fan-academia.

    Whoosh!, "the birthplace of the International Association of Xena Studies" (IAXS) is a

much more impressive example of fan scholarship, one that was active for eleven years after its

online inception. Devoted to the television series *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Whoosh!* was created by

Kym Masera Taborn, the publication's editor-in-chief and IAXS's board chair. (Taborn is a

California tax attorney.) In Taborn's editorial note to the first issue (of just over one hundred

issues), she explains the purpose and scope of *Whoosh!*, calling the journal "a fan publication"

intended to host the creative work—fiction, reviews, analyses—of IAXS members. The fans,

though, represent "*an amateur organization of arm-chair scholars* who wish to devote time to the

contemplation and study of all things to do with the world-wide syndicated television show"

(emphasis added). While above all *Whoosh!* aims to be entertaining, notes Taborn, it is also

meant to incite readers "to reminisce, laugh, ponder." She closes with this salutation: "On

behalf of the [*Whoosh!*] staff, I thank you and invite you to read, enjoy, and perhaps *think* about

some of the ideas contained in these pages" (emphasis added).[55]

After considering just these few examples of fan-academics and fan scholarship, it is

tempting to suggest that Nikki Stafford is an anomaly among fans and fan-scholars alike; only,

she isn't. In 1999, a woman who uses the online screen name Masquerade the Philosopher (or

Masq to her friends) started a website called *All Things Philosophical on* Buffy the Vampire Slayer

and Angel: The Series. Web users are greeted: "Have a technical question about how the

Buffyverse works? Want to debate ethical dilemmas of the [*Buffy*] and *Angel . . .* characters? This

is your complete compendium to all things mystical, good, and evil in the Buffyverse." Users

might also notice on the homepage a clip of dialogue from *Buffy*'s spin-off series *Angel*: "Man!

This place is way better than college" ("Origin," 5.18), an understandable choice if one considers

Masquerade's autobiographical sketch. She writes, "Masquerade got her Ph.D. in philosophy

from the University of California, Davis in 1996. In 1999, she gave up a career as an ~~Evil bitch monster of death~~ Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nebraska Omaha, and

now lives in San Francisco" (original strikethrough). The strikethrough, of course, denotes a

correction to the text, one that assumedly is left for comparison; the editorial mark suggests to

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[55] It is not within the scope of this chapter to closely analyze the contents of *Whoosh!* However, several questions would be worth pursuing at another time in another place: Are the contents of *Whoosh!* "scholarly"? If so, are the contents, according to an academic definition, "rigorous"? Do fans poach from academia in the same ways Henry Jenkins argues they poach from favorite popular texts? What significance does this kind of poaching have?

readers that Masquerade equates being a professor of philosophy with being an "Evil bitch monster of death." The denigration of her former academic position aside, the point is that Masquerade is another example of an academically trained scholar writing and inviting others to write brief comments, paragraphs, and even full-length essays on *Buffy* and *Angel* using the tools of a philosopher, however (un)skilled she and they may be with those tools.[56] Is, then, Masquerade a scholar-fan or a fan-scholar now that she is no longer employed as a professor? The literature on fandom currently offers no answer to this question, yet it is plain to see that *fan-scholar* is not a discrete, orderly category.

In Paul Fussell's chapter, "The Life of the Mind," wherein he discusses the imitation of academia, Fussell makes clear that he is opposed to such impersonations. He argues that the impersonators weaken the ethos of higher education, whereas the ethos of the impersonators is strengthened. When businesses hold "seminars" and lobbying groups establish "institutes," they gain something (at least, among those who are not already skeptics). Using that example, one might ask what the fan-scholar has to gain by imitating the academy. Only one answer is sufficient: It depends. If Nikki Stafford is the epitome of a fan-academic, her story demonstrates how such a person can attract the attention and praise of both Ivory Tower and Main Street residents. However, she and others like her simultaneously risk (1) alienating fellow fans whose stereotypical view of an academic as an interminably dull, mentally-masturbating elitist is mapped onto the fan-scholar and (2) threatening academics who interpret the fan-scholar's theorizing as a challenge to their expert authority. Being caught in the middle of these two audiences or discourse communities can be a very lonely, even hostile, shadowland. Of course,

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[56] The essays appear on the sister site *The Existential Scoobies* at <http://www.atpobtvs.com/existentialscoobies/>.

the fan-scholar is not the only one to inhabit this liminal space; the scholar-fan takes his or her own risks, one of several topics to which I now turn.

<div align="center">THE SCHOLAR-FAN</div>

After a decade of talk among scholars about the academic-fan, there is still no clear or generally accepted definition of the identity. Just like the fan-scholar, the scholar-fan is usually either assigned the label by another academic rather than self-identified or simply never uses the actual word, choosing instead to describe in alternative terms the personal investment in his or her research and writing. Additionally and, again, much like fan interests, academic interests change; one may not remain a scholar-fan, especially of a specific artifact, from start to finish of a career.[57] As a result of being difficult to identify and sometimes cyclical in their fandoms, the academic-fan is difficult to pin down long enough to have a good look, so the task feels in many ways futile, at the very least frustrating. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, a functional definition is essential as a foundation for further discussion. In this section, then, I first consider how the scholar-fan is viewed by his or her peers through the lens of book reviews, extrapolating from the reviews a sort of identity map. Noting why this rendering has been lacking, I next construct my own working definition. Ultimately, I propose that the academic-fan and his or her scholarship promote a personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational way of knowing, what writer, teacher, and activist Parker J. Palmer calls a "gospel epistemology."

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[57] See Matt Hills, "Patterns of Surprise" for a more thorough discussion of cyclical fandom.

Scholarly Treatments of the Academic-Fan

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the terms *scholar-* and *academic-fan* have

not been used until very recently—and then not widely—even if the identity has long been

common. Because of the lingering negative stereotype of the fan, one can imagine that claiming

in print, within one's published research, to be a scholar-fan could at worst deter publishers

and/or distract academic readers from the content of one's work and at least (dis)color those

readers' perceptions. As a result, it makes sense that self-admissions are few. Despite this

scarcity of self-naming, the academic-fan has become enough of a concern, interest, or delight

that scholarly critique, acknowledgement, or praise has begun to appear particularly within the

context of book reviews, one of academia's venues for public peer-assessment. The rhetoric of

the commentary within these reviews deserves some examination as it reveals a range of

responses to the academic who is also a fan.

In her appraisal of *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture* (2006), Joanna Paul

commends, among other aspects, Gideon Nisbet's treatment of comic book and graphic novel

representations of the classic and modern stories of Hercules and the Trojan War. She argues

that this feature of his book, without the author's promoting his own popular culture passions,

distinguishes the research. Even so, Nisbet ultimately addresses the position he assumes

throughout the book, a position Paul refers to as "controversial." His epilogic appeal, claims

Paul, seems directed more at his academic peers than to the student audience he targets

throughout, and this is where Paul's critique takes a more pointed tone:

> Characterising himself here [in the epilogue] as 'the scholar-fan,' and arguing
>
> against the possibility of assuming an objective stance, one might . . . be left

feeling anxious about what Nisbet implies—popular culture 'fandom,' lumbered

with images of sci-fi conventions and obsessive fan websites, can suggest

exclusivity and inaccessibility as much as the opposite, leaving us wondering

whether Nisbet can really be talking to as wide an audience here as he should

hope to.

On the heels of that query, Paul allays her statement of reservation remarking, "But this is not, I

hope, the 'sniffy review' (p.138) that Nisbet feared getting." Instead, the peer response should

parallel "the spirit" with which Nisbet makes his appeal, says Paul, one that recognizes "how,

whether we share his love of comics or not, the lessons Nisbet has learnt from his own

participation in pop subcultures can be applied to a wide range of reception material and, most

importantly, can be used to keep reinvigorating and challenging the field before it too goes

stale." Personal experience, then, is the reason that *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture* is

worthwhile not only for the intended audience (students and professors) but also for reception

theorists as well as, more generally, those engaged in the study of ancient history. In the end,

Paul remains positive regarding Nisbet's work and his scholar-fan role, but her accolades are

nonetheless modest; after all, she likely would not want to be accused of being Nisbet's fan.

In contrast to assessments like Paul's, occasionally one comes across a review that

unapologetically praises the academic-fan position. One example is David Chute's "Deeper into

Bollywood: Further Research for the Curious," an evaluation of several academic works that

treat Indian cinema.[58] Chute first notes the growing scholarly interest in Bollywood films,

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[58] David Chute is s freelance critic who writes for publications such as *Film Comment*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Vanity Fair*. Of course, his positionality complicates his praise of scholar-fans; though he has written and

especially in Britain and India itself, before distinguishing between the few publications that do

and the many publications that do not rely on "'primary source criticism,' writing that directly

implicates the critic in the movie experience." In his own words, Chute extols,

> One could never accuse . . . Nasreen Munni Kabir of pretending that she
> has not herself been seduced by the immediate experience of watching Hindi
> movies. The great strength of her lucid and thorough book *Bollywood: The Indian*
> *Cinema Story* [(2002)]. . . is that it's the work of a lifelong scholar-fan who is not
> too proud to admit (to paraphrase Robert Warshow) "that in some way she takes
> all that nonsense seriously."[59]

Assuming that Chute's choice of words and phrases is deliberate, he implies several important

points. First, by drawing attention to Kabir's transparency (she is markedly *not* pretending to be

exempt from the seduction of Hindi films, he notes), Chute hints at the ambiguity with which

most scholars usually treat their own involvement with and investment in their work. Next,

Chute attributes the book's "great strength," its perspicuity and meticulousness, to Kabir being

a scholar-fan. He could have halted his praise there, at "it's the work of a lifelong scholar-fan,"

but he doesn't. Instead, Chute continues the sentence with a relative clause, a group of words

that describe what kind of scholar-fan Kabir seems to be: one "who is not too proud to admit (to

paraphrase Robert Warshow) 'that in some way she takes all that nonsense seriously.'" The

clause suggests multiple readings: a simple fact about Kabir, an apology for her, a defense of

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has even guest edited for *Film Comment*, a scholarly publication, he is not a career academic. My goal here is not to interrogate the complications Chute's positionality raises but to simply acknowledge those complications.

[59] Robert Warshow (1917-1955) was an American author and critic known for his interest in popular culture, especially the Western and gangster film genres. The collection *The Immediate Experience* (1962) includes most of his published work.

scholar-fans everywhere, an indictment of less enthusiastic scholars, a declaration of academic independence, an uncomplicated praise for the author. In fact, Chute insinuates all of those meanings. Evidence for my assertion comes later in his review where he makes note of another scholar—in this case, Rachel Dwyer, one "among the new wave of serious Bollywood scholars"—who is "a rare bird: an earnest academic openly delighted by her subject." He calls her book *All You Want Is Money, All You Need Is Love: Sex and Romance in Modern India* (2000) "a trailblazing study of India's emerging middle class and its shape-shifting impact on popular culture." Again, Chute intimates that most scholars are *not* "openly delighted" by their subjects of study and vigilantly identifies Dwyer as a "*serious* scholar . . . an *earnest* academic" (emphasis added).

In his review of Sanford Sternlicht's *All Things Herriot: James Herriot and His Peaceable Kingdom* (1995), Alan S. Tinkler is less congratulatory than Chute and more critical than Paul when interrogating the scholar-fan's authorial stance. Tinkler implicates "obvious affection" for Herriot's works as the book's double-edged sword, both its strength and weakness: "At times the scholar/fan uses too light a brush when discussing valid and interesting points. The only time Sternlicht criticizes [the author] outright is when discussing James Herriot's *Dog Stories* (1986)." From Tinkler's comment, one deduces that he associates weak or absent analysis with the fan who occupies a post-slash position—"scholar/fan." Also, the reviewer links affect to "light" critique. Though not directly stated, the inference is clear: a fan's feelings, even if that fan is also a scholar, cloud his or her ability to think. Subtly yet surely without intent, Tinkler hurls readers into a not-so-distant past when fans are generally understood to be out of their minds, capable only of irrational expression. What is more, Tinkler is the only scholar I have

come across who uses a slash rather than a hyphen to discuss matters of identity. His choice,

whether deliberate or unconscious, implies that one cannot occupy both positions

simultaneously; one identity will always dominate the other. As if two personalities inhabit one

body, the scholar/fan becomes the schizophrenic or the sufferer of multiple personalities.

A variation on the theme of the scholar/fan duality can be found in Cotton Seiler's

review of William Echard's *Neil Young and the Poetics of Energy* (Indiana UP, 2005). I selected

Seiler's review partly because it represents a conversation about the academic-fan that is

occurring outside of media or cultural studies proper, where most of the conversation is

located. While Seiler himself is a professor of American Studies, he takes readers into the field

of musicology, particularly ethnomusicology, and the discussion that is making the rounds

there about the role of the fannish researcher. In fact, Seiler calls the scholar-fan "a breed of

fairly recent origin in North American musicology, [one] that is determined to put on speaking

terms the discourses of formal musical analysis and cultural studies." Echard is but one of these

(notably, a self-identified one), and he argues from that identity "that rarefied investigations of

harmony, melody, dynamics, tonality and meter" cannot, in and of themselves, ever fully

explain what it is rock fans experience in body and soul when exposed to the "lascivious magic"

of their beloved music. When he finally turns away from Echard's book to observations on the

new "breed" of musicologist, Seiler uses language that concurrently praises and impugns:

> *While these scholars do not abandon the tools of classification and hermeneutics in which*
>
> *they were trained*, they assert that musical texts are received and produce meaning
>
> only within specific spatial, temporal and cultural communities, that their
>
> pleasures anchor certain identities and problematize others, and that listening to

the Troggs[60] (as well as Bach) requires a sophisticated set of cultural competencies. *The quest of musicologists like Echard for the sources and patterns of musical meaning-making is to be applauded, even if the results can show some methodological incoherence or interdisciplinary overexuberance*. (emphasis added)

Though he applauds them, Seiler is sure to note that scholar-fans engage in incoherent methods and display "interdisciplinary overexuberance." Rather than having a multiple personality, as Tinkler's comments suggest, the academic who claims a fan identity is to Seiler a sort of mixed breed.

Even from these representative reviews, only a Daliesque portrait of the academic-fan emerges, a portrait to be expected. As I state earlier in this chapter, both the term and the individual are fluid, always already being reinvented through the language and actions of not only the scholar-fan but also his or her colleagues and academia at large, fans and the general public. So while fan-academics risk alienating fellow fans who see fan scholarship as irrelevant and pretentious and academics who find the scholarship "undisciplined," academic-fans risk alienating colleagues who discount their research as overly affective or excessively multidisciplinary (i.e., scattered) and fans who view their theorizing as esoteric and even denigrating of fans' thoughts and feelings. In this liminal space, this shadowland, is there no "good news"?

"Glad Tidings" and Scholar-Fandom

For my purposes, I can allow neither the scholar-fan's ambiguity nor his or her complexity to prevent me from holding still the concept and the person and taking a critical

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[60] In the mid-1960s the British band The Troggs made famous the song "Wild Thing."

look. To accomplish that task, then, I employ a particular instrument or lens, one that I borrow from Parker J. Palmer. Trained as a sociologist at Berkeley and most recently the founder and Senior Partner of The Center for Courage and Renewal, Palmer has devoted over three decades to writing, teaching, and advocating for change. Specifically, he advocates that those in serving professions align rather than compartmentalize their identities and their vocations:

> Good work is done with heart as well as knowledge and skill, done with a depth of commitment that brings integrity and courage to the workplace. But workplace culture can make it risky to reveal our hearts. So we hide them—and sometimes lose them. By supporting teachers, medical professionals, clergy and others who want to reclaim their hearts, we bring new life to them, their work, and the people they serve. (The Center)

In addition to founding The Center, Palmer has worked out this career-long thesis via hundreds of lectures and essays as well as seven books, including *The Courage to Teach* (1997), *The Active Life* (1990), and *To Know as We Are Known* (1980). These contributions to the academic community and American higher education have been recognized with multiple honorary doctorates, many awards, and several substantial grants. A living example of what he teaches and advocates, Palmer's identity and life's work are infused with his Quaker faith. Rarely named yet always present in Palmer's writing, teaching, and activism, belief has served to support his argument that "reconnecting who we are with what we do" is essential for leading fulfilling personal and professional lives, lives that benefit local, national, and global communities. It is this very argument that attracted me, an argument that seems to capture the scholar-fan whom I encounter most, not in book reviews but in person—at academic

conferences, in the halls of the university, over steaming mugs at downtown Atlanta tea rooms.

So while Palmer's work is infused with faith, it is not a faith that is evangelistic, dogmatic, or

even obvious; his work allows me to read academic-fandom in an original way, one that both

challenges and fleshes out previously held notions. Particularly, I draw on one of Palmer's

essays originally written for a faith-based audience and published in Douglas V. Henry and Bob

R. Agee's edited collection *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation*. In subsequent

paragraphs, I summarize the central ideas of the essay so that I can apply them to the case I

present in the next chapter, a case that I believe gives Palmer's hypothesis even greater

legitimacy.

In "Toward a Spirituality of Higher Education," Palmer describes the "spiritual hunger"

he sees in American colleges and universities, a hunger arising from "the shallowness of

academic culture, its inability to embrace the whole of the human condition, its failure to create

community, and its inadequacies in dealing with the deep problems of our time" (75). None of

these causes are the result of a lack or loss of religion or theology so much as the blind eye the

academy has turned to the "formation or deformation" of the human "soul," Palmer's term for

heart. Palmer argues that what matters most in any teaching-learning moment is the relationship

higher education creates "between the knower and the known" because it is that connection

that shapes how a student, "an educated self," will inevitably relate to the world (76). "This

deep and abiding process [of the wedding of subject and object, knower and known, student

and studies] goes on at the heart of what has been called the 'hidden curriculum,'" insists

Palmer, and the process happens on every campus—whether public or private, secular or

parochial, often in contrast to publicly proclaimed mission and vision statements and rule-laden

student handbooks. Unfortunately, this unseen curriculum is, in Palmer's opinion, far more

*de*formative than formative, and at the core of these damaging propensities is objectivism.

"Epistemology," explains Palmer, "is the philosophical study of how people know and

the conditions under which their knowledge is said to be true" (76). In United States' higher

education, the preferred way of knowing is objectivism. This epistemological posture grew out

of the Enlightenment, a movement that developed in part as an antidote to superstition. Among

Enlightenment values was a devotion to the scientific method, to objectivism itself—a method

of understanding that requires knowers to hold the subject of inquiry at a distance before they

may claim to truly know that subject; in other words, to find the truth, knowers must learn to

objectify. What proves to be "valid and pure" is knowers' detached consideration of facts which

they use to "gain mastery and control over [the world]." Students are never expected or asked

to pinpoint where their own "little story" meets "the big story" (77).[61]

In essence, objectivism occurs in three phrases, requiring the knower to first objectify the

object of study, to then analyze it, and finally to experiment with or on it (Palmer 77). The foe of

objectivity, of course, is "utterly untrustworthy" subjectivity: "Subjectivity is equated with

darkness, error, prejudice, bias, misunderstanding, and falsehood"; in theological terms, it is the

sin of academics (77). So, again, objectivity requires knowers to distance themselves from the

subject to find truth. Once made an object, the thing to be known is then subjected to analysis.

Learners "cut that object apart, figuratively or literally, to see what makes it tick before [they

have] even had time to appreciate it in the round, so to speak." The pursuit of objectivity

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[61] Readers may recall my discussion of Bourdieu in the previous chapter under the subheading "The History of Higher Education." To refresh our memory, Bourdieu argues that the academic's belief in pure objectivity is a "scholastic illusion" that leads to fanaticism and then, in Giner's words, "epistemological sin" (323).

teaches the knower to ignore internal, personal responses and cues, argues Palmer, and analysis—a form of dissection—teaches the knower little to nothing about how to put things back together again. So with a pile of pieces before them, knowers are encouraged to experiment, to move the pieces about "to see whether [they] can create something that pleases [them] more than the reality that was given to [them]" (78). Palmer cautions readers not to think of these traits—objectivity, analysis, and experimentation—as connected only to a laboratory in a college or university science department. Rather, he suggests ways in which humans and human institutions over and over again objectify, analyze, and experiment on each other:

> Think about experimentation . . . as the mode in which we have related to the economically underdeveloped world. We have often said to Third World countries, "What if we took a little piece of your political system out and put some of ours in it? We think we would like you better that way." We have said, "Let us take some of your economy out and put some of ours in. We think we could deal with you more conveniently that way." We have said, "What if we took some of your religious beliefs away and replaced them with our own? We think you would be more pleasing to us that way." (78)

Essentially, Palmer maintains that educators perpetrate violence against the human heart when they teach "the big story" without letting it intersect with "the little story." The solution, of course, is *not* to throw out objectivity, analysis, and experimentation but to refuse their supremacy and hold them in "paradoxical tension" with intimacy and appreciation (80). Objectivism as the only valued way of knowing must be balanced with an approach that is

personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational—what Palmer calls a "gospel epistemology."

Admittedly, confesses Palmer, the pairing of *gospel*—from the Greek *euangélion*, meaning good news, glad tidings—with *epistemology* seems odd because the gospel is usually associated with "an ethic, or a way of *living*" (81, emphasis added). Yet, it is more than that. It, too, is a way of *knowing*. In a gospel epistemology, "truth is personal" (82). For example, the professor who teaches the Holocaust does more than convey the "facts" about Nazi Germany and concentration camps. She weaves into her lessons family photos saved by survivors, music composed in camp barracks, and poetry penned by interned children. She invites her students to share Great Grandpa and Grandma's firsthand tales. As Palmer notes for his audience, in the Bible's New Testament when Roman governor Pontius Pilate asks Jesus what truth is, Jesus is silent, his silence signifying that he himself is the answer (82). A gospel way of knowing means truth is embodied, present.

For the scholar-fan, the truth is similarly personal. In November 2008, for instance, a colleague phoned me to discuss the recently released movie based on Stephenie Meyer's young adult novel *Twilight* (2005) the story of Bella, a young woman who falls in love with Edward, a forever 17-year-old vampire. My and my colleague's interest in the film stemmed from our scholarly work on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, with which *Twilight*, leading up to the film release, had been compared. Our lingering concern about *Twilight* is how utterly different the female protagonists are and, more importantly, how Bella and Buffy themselves embody and symbolize for young female readers and viewers such opposing "truths" about was it means to be a woman: unlike Buffy, Bella nibbles on muffins if she eats at all, denigrates her looks and

intelligence regularly, and at times puts herself in deliberate danger in order to attract the

attention of Edward. The character construction of Bella as a symbol of and role model for

young American women was so disturbing to my colleague that she experienced a visceral

reaction to the movie—laughing out loud in the theatre (to the dismay of many fellow movie

goers), releasing exasperated screams in the car on the way home, counteracting the movie

experience by watching an episode of *Buffy* later that evening, and calling me to work through

her thoughts and feelings. "Someone has to write about this," she declared during our

conversation, her voice rising sharply at the end of the sentence. Someone—whether fan or fan-

scholar, scholar or scholar-fan—must write because the "truth" *Twilight* promotes undermines

the efforts of activists who have worked and continue to work for women's equality. For many

people, including scholar-fans such as me and my colleague, gender equity is quite literally an

embodied truth: "The personal is political," as the feminist mantra goes. The women's

movement has always already been concerned with women's physical bodies, and today that

concern includes the textually, televisually, and filmically mediated female body. As Palmer

insists, truth is personal in a "good news" way of knowing.

In a gospel epistemology, truth is also communal as it is "tested in a continuing . . .

process of dissent and consent" (Palmer 82). Palmer's proposition is steeped in the educational

philosophy and activism of Paulo Freire who would argue that communal truth arises from

discourse. The professor who values this kind of truth may offer students the traditional, aptly-

researched lecture, but he will also train and expect students to raise questions, to engage in

discussion, to take ownership of their learning—in essence, to resist the one-way, teacher-to-

student direct deposit of knowledge, the "banking concept of education." As Palmer explains,

in the biblical narrative Jesus calls disciples (from the Greek, meaning learners) to join an itinerant, motley community that discerns truth through "dialogue and encounter, and in wrestling with relationship" (82). At one point in the narrative, for example, the brothers James and John ask Jesus if they can sit beside him, one on each side, when he assumes his throne (*New American Standard Bible*, Mark 10.37). (The brothers falsely expect Jesus to become an earthly rather than heavenly king who will overthrow their Roman oppressors.) Though Jesus has just told them of his impending trial and death sentence, they do not listen. Instead, they seek preferential treatment and political power. Before a fight can break out among the brothers and their traveling companions, Jesus speaks: Too many powerful people—say, in government—create and maintain hierarchies, "lord it over" others. Not you! To be great, you must be a servant to all (Mark 10.42-45a, paraphrase). These words or, more accurately, the idea that these words convey are foreign, cryptic to the disciples who must not only negotiate and forge relationships with each other but also decode Jesus' teachings, a contentious yet collaborative task that does not happen in the moment but over time and in community.[62] The same can be said of academia and academic-fandom.

A question that scholars (and scholar-fans) in every discipline have always and will always ask concerns what or who deserves to be valued, that value, in turn, determining what artifact or human being deserves careful study. In the field of English literature, for instance, value judgments are related to issues of canonization. It is easy for literature professors as well as students to assume that Shakespeare has always been considered classic literature, worthy of

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[62] In fact, it might be said that Jesus' contemporary disciples, the believers of today, are still working out the meaning and application of Jesus' teaching on servant leadership. In other words, they are still engaged in the process of negotiating and living by communal truth.

readers' attention and critics' analysis. Of course, that assumption is incorrect. As John Storey

points out in *Inventing Popular Culture*, at the beginning of the 19th century in the United States,

Shakespearean plays were considered popular culture. It was only toward the latter part of the

century that the works of Shakespeare began to be considered high culture, a change in position

largely due to the agenda of the upper class. According to sociologist Paul DiMaggio, what

emerged between 1850 and 1900, particularly in Boston, was an elite class of citizens that began

to define and control the difference between art and entertainment—the former being

associated with not-for-profit organizations and educational institutions, the latter being

aligned with for-profit, commercial entities and "the mainstream" (Storey 33).[63] One must

appreciate the irony of the "polite" elite appropriating a text that is itself far from polite and

ubiquitous enough to inspire much "impolite" parody and punning: "When was Desdemona

like a ship? . . . When she was Moored" (qtd. in Levine 16).

The example of Shakespeare provides just one instance of how answers to the question

of art versus entertainment have been negotiated in American culture. Of course, there are no

final answers because the value of Shakespearean tales vacillates as those tales are reinvented in

new mediums, particularly film. Being based on *The Taming of a Shrew*, for instance, will not

necessarily secure a place in the film canon for the high school comedy *10 Things I Hate About*

You (1999). Instead, academics and academic-fans who enjoy and study the works of

Shakespeare will continue, along with fans and fan-academics, to contest the value and position

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[63] Storey notes that the same shift from entertainment to art happened to opera (36-38).

such mediated texts hold in mainstream, high, and academic culture. As Palmer conceives, in a gospel epistemology truth is communal.

More than being personal and communal, a gospel way of knowing means that truth is reciprocal and mutual, not "out there," an elusive grail to be tracked down. On the contrary, as Palmer explains, most spiritual traditions understand that truth pursues believers, only they must be confident and still long enough to be found. Though being found by truth may seem at first an alien concept in a college or university classroom, nothing could be further from reality—not always but especially when the classroom is mobile. I think of the day, while on a European tour for an undergraduate sociology class, I first truly met the Holocaust or, actually, it met me. Quietly, reverently walking the grounds of Dachau concentration camp in Germany, I was gripped by the reality of Othering and Hatred. Following in the shuffling footsteps of the ghosts, touching the splintered wood of the bunk beds, imagining the flames and ashy smoke of the ovens, tracing with my own fingers the rusty barbs of the fence wire . . . there at Dachau I found and was found by an ugly truth that changed my learning and my life—for the better. "Never again" became a part of me, fostered my desire and choice to be active on behalf of social justice at home and abroad. In the New Testament book of Luke, Jesus says, "For [I have] come to seek and to save that which was lost" (*New American Standard Bible*, 19.10). For the Christian, that message is an essential aspect of the glad tidings: Jesus seeks and finds. Those who believe only need to be confident in the promise and wait to be found. Strangely enough, scholar-fandom is not so different.

In the preface to her edited collection *Miss Grundy Doesn't Teach Here Anymore: Popular Culture and the Composition Classroom*, Diane Penrod opens with a declaration, what might even

be called a confession: "Popular culture has been linked to my education ever since my childhood days" (vii). Granted, she stops short of using the term *fan*, and she does not refer to her adult self as a scholar-fan. Yet her words are a striking example of being found by truth, the truth that popular culture can teach us more about what it means to be human than, in Penrod's words, "reading all the 'great works.'" She describes a rural upbringing in New York—growing up "plugged in" to a transistor radio, listening to the likes of The Buckinghams, The Cyrkle, Buffalo Springfield, The Youngbloods, and others; her bedroom floor covered with copies of *Mad* magazine; her after-high-school hours spent "in the art studio and in the photography lab learning how to replicate the visuals on my record albums and posters." Not necessarily the attentive fan solely devoted to a certain band or performer yet still the fan of mass culture, Penrod acknowledges that she learned much about herself and humanity:

> Looking back, I experienced the pain of love, the angst of a society in flux, and the hope of a better work from those songs. *Mad* taught me about satire and cynicism in print, and the difference between the two. As a result of my childhood investment in popular culture, I became fascinated with advertising's mix of images and words; and later, as a college undergraduate immediately post-Watergate, I witnessed the incredible power of the press to influence public thought toward government. *I found a vitality in learning through popular culture that was often lacking in my formal education*. (vii, emphasis added)

That was not all Penrod learned, though. After college and before returning to academia for graduate school, she entered the professional world of "advertising, packaging design, and sales for just under a decade." Another truth emerged for her; she found that "the innocent,

romantic quality of popular culture clearly becomes reduced to economics—the language of gross rating points, costs per thousand, and household reach." Eventually, she found herself back in the classroom, first as a graduate student and then as a professor, teaching students about writing and rhetoric. As one might gather, for Penrod using popular culture in the composition classroom is far from a strategy; it is an expression of self, of a life lived on "both sides of the fence," of both a scholar and a fan. In Palmer's terms, Penrod is the embodiment of truth as reciprocal and mutual.

Finally, in a gospel epistemology, truth is transformational. Palmer claims that "objectivism has persisted because it is really about power rather than knowledge—about who controls meaning, who controls institutions, and who controls the truth" (83). Consequently, objectivism produces knowers who are "always the transformers and never the transformed": "We have wanted to teach about Third World cultures in a way that allows us to look at them, but never allows them to look back at us for fear that we would have to change our lives. We have wanted to teach about the natural world in a way that allows us to look at it, but never allows it to look back at us for fear that we would have to change our lives" (83). At its core, unchecked objectivism woos us into thinking that we are in complete control, that we have power and dominion. The New Testament's Jesus might have explained it this way: You Jews and Gentiles have objectified each other long enough; don't you get it? It's not about controlling each other. There's a better way, and that way is servant leadership (*New American Standard Bible*, Mark 10.43-44, paraphrase). Palmer would caution that when divorced from the human heart, objectivism entices humans to wield unbridled power, to control and even harm others, a

frightening prospect that sparks every level and sort of war, both literal and symbolic. And, Palmer entreats, that is no way to teach, to learn, or to live.

In his concluding remarks, Palmer summarizes a better or revolutionary way to teach, to learn, and to live. That way is good news and should bring glad tidings, for it works to change the world and to create a space where all humans embody the truth we know; where we come together, asking "others to check, correct, confirm, and deepen" what we think we understand; where we simultaneously seek and expect to be found by truth; and where individual and communal transformations are plentiful (83). For his purposes, Palmer calls this space authentic higher education. For my purposes, I call this space scholar-fandom, a definition that paints a much more detailed picture than past researchers have painted as they have largely focused on the scholar-fans' writerly choices rather than on characteristics of their epistemology.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have taken a close look at the complex relationship between fandom and academia and between those liminal figures who are (self-)identified as fan-scholars and scholar-fans. Particularly, I have considered other and constructed my own definitions of each personality while exploring the politics that arise about and between them. Finally, I have suggested a new way of reading scholar-fans, one built on the work of Parker J. Palmer. To flesh out my working definition of academic-fans, in the next chapter I take readers deeper into scholar-fandom by exploring a particular community, one that studies the works of Joss Whedon—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, *Serenity*, and other texts. I maintain that Whedon academic-fandom uses a discourse and has formed a community of scholars and body of scholarship distinguished by intimacy, community, reciprocity, and transformation.

Chapter Six

SCHOLAR-FANDOM AT WORK AND (IN) PLAY: THE CASE OF WHEDON STUDIES

In the previous chapter, I articulated why fans moving toward the "scholar camp" or scholars moving toward the "fan camp" may find themselves in unfriendly if not hostile territory with their fellow enthusiasts and colleagues, respectively. This liminal space or shadowland, I explained, can be marked by a sense of alienation and loss, sometimes by inclusion and fulfillment, sometimes by both. After explicating Parker Palmer's "gospel epistemology," I proposed that Palmer's work be used to perform an original reading of scholars who study the object of their fandom. In this chapter, I consider scholar-fans whose research is focused on the works of Joss Whedon: the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 8 of which is currently unfolding in comic book form), *Angel*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse*; the major motion picture *Serenity*; the graphic novel *Fray*; a line of the comic book series *Astonishing X-Men*; and the Internet "webisodes" *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008). Through both traditional and personal academic writing, I demonstrate that Whedon scholar-fandom employs a discourse marked by intimacy, community, reciprocity, and transformation. To use Palmer's framework, the rhetoric of Whedon scholar-fandom promotes an epistemology—a way of knowing—that is personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational. To fully understand this way of knowing, to contextualize it, I first turn to the history of "Whedon Studies," including my own relationship with and role in the community of scholars.

THE FORMING AND MATURING OF WHEDON STUDIES

In the early 1990s, budding script doctor and writer Joss Whedon penned the screenplay for the motion picture *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992). After being submitted to the production

company, the script was out of Whedon's hands and the author had little to do with the final

product, a film about which he later openly shared his disappointment. Whedon has since that

time oft cited the casting of the film and the misinterpretation of the script as reasons for his

dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, he realized that the chance to tell his story of the teen heroine in

the way he had envisioned had likely passed; second chances are rare in Hollywood. It was

with surprised joy, then, that Whedon was approached by Twentieth Century Fox several years

later with an opportunity to bring Buffy and her cohorts to the small screen. On March 10, 1997,

the Fox television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* premiered on the Warner Brothers Network,

affectionately referred to as "The WB" by the predominantly teen audience. Immediately

drawing the rapt and delighted attention of both a diverse audience and many entertainment

critics, the series also captured the interest of scholars from a variety of disciplines.

In the summer of 1999 just two years after the series' premiere, the first academic

publications analyzing the *Buffy* text appeared in the *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, essays

by scholars Rhonda V. Wilcox and Susan A. Owen. In "There Will Never Be a 'Very Special'

Buffy: *Buffy* and the Monsters of Teen Life," Wilcox notes the marked differences between the

series and its contemporaries, programs such as *7th Heaven*, *Party of Five* (1994-2000), and *The

Wonder Years* (1988-1993). Specifically, Wilcox argues that the "very special episode"—on teen

suicide or alcoholism or the perils of encroaching adulthood—is a literal way of addressing the

issues of teenage life, one that can seem melodramatic, didactic, and belittling to young adult

viewers. In contrast and on at least two levels, *Buffy* deals with the same issues in a symbolic

manner. On one level, fantastic monsters represent real-world problems. For example, when on

her seventeenth birthday Buffy loses her virginity to her boyfriend Angel, a vampire with a

soul, she awakes to find a stranger—a heartless, cruel, and soulless Angelus. Angel's

transformation into Angelus, the result of a broken Gypsy curse, produced a profound effect on

many female fans who attested to the storyline's resonance with their own realities. Yet on an

even more sophisticated level, *Buffy* addresses the challenges of real life through language:

"Buffy confronts the vampires of adulthood not only with weapons, but with words of her

own" (23), language that "starkly contrasts with that of the adults" (16). As Wilcox observes,

Buffy and her friends are not distinguished from adults simply by the words they choose. While

the adult characters may select more sophisticated vocabulary or generally know more about

the world than their young charges, the teenagers "know different things," especially popular

culture things:

> When Buffy says in the "I, Robot" episode [1.8], "My spider sense is tingling,"
>
> she has to apologize to Giles: "Pop culture reference—sorry." When she
>
> complains in "The Pack" [1.6] that Giles is refusing for once to consider a
>
> supernatural explanation, she says, "I can't believe that you of all people would
>
> Scully me," assuming knowledge of *The X-Files* television character famous for
>
> stretching rational explanations to cover unusual events. (22)

Beyond references to popular culture, Wilcox notes that the teens rearrange word order for

emphasis; turn verbs into nouns, adverbs into adjectives, and adjective into nouns; or make

"metaphorical or metonymic substitutions" (22). These linguistic choices are deliberate on the

part of Whedon and his team of writers who have Buffy's friend Willow note, "The Slayer

always says a pun or witty play on words, and I think it throws off the vampires" ("Anne," 3.1),

vampires who are often linguistically associated with the adults in the series.

I detail Wilcox's argument for several reasons. Foremost, her essay was one of the first of its kind—i.e., academic—and the first one I read as an emerging scholar. In fact, I remember feeling surprised and then giddy the day I used the phrase "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" for what I thought would be a futile keyword search of the Modern Language Association Bibliography. I immediately recognized Wilcox's name before the *Buffy*-related article title because I had read her chapter in an anthology of essays on *The X-Files*. So I filled out the paper-based interlibrary loan form and impatiently waited for a library assistant at a distant university to locate the journal, make a photocopy of the essay, and send that copy to the University of Tennessee Chattanooga where I could claim it. Once in hand, I read voraciously and found my own experience echoed in the pages of the argument: I, too, was drawn to *Buffy* by its deeply affective metaphors and its clever and innovative dialogue. As Wilcox describes, the language struck me (at that time in my mid-twenties) on a more personal level than any after-school television special ever had or could have. Like Wilcox, I recognized the teens' language as part of their heroism and, by extension, part of my own everyday heroism (23). At this moment, I was simultaneously developing a relationship with the television program, with the increasing scholarship related to it, and with Wilcox. Though then I had met the scholar only by way of her writing, I would later become her mentee, then her colleague, collaborator, and friend.

In the same *Popular Film & Television* journal issue, Susan Owen, in "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Vampires, Postmodernity, and Postfeminism," reads the show through the intersections of the elements listed in her subtitle, particularly noting both how the "television narrative appropriates body rhetorics and narrative agency from traditionally masculinist metanarratives in the horror and mystery genres" and how the characters navigate feminist politics and a

postmodern world all while living in an idyllic—at least, on the surface—contemporary American suburb (24). In addition to essays by Wilcox and Owen, the same year linguist Michael Adams published a two-part article in *Verbatim: The Language Quarterly* titled "Slayer Slang" in which he explores *Buffy*'s impact on American English. Also, Ashley Lorrain Smith devoted a portion of her master's thesis *Girl Power: Feminism, Girlculture and the Popular Media* to the series, its genre and young female audience. Before these publications were available, professors and graduate students like me who were interested in *Buffy* had to rely solely on popular sources such as newspapers, magazines, and websites for direct references to and discussion of the program. Therefore, particularly the articles written by Adams, Owen, and Wilcox became the academic bedrock for those beginning to study *Buffy*, foundational pieces that continue to be cited today.

By 2000, *Buffy* was the subject of approximately five more academic essays and began to be a popular topic for conference presentations. Also that year, the first dissertation on the series—Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: The Insurgence of Television as a Performance Text*—was completed at the University of Toronto by Michele Byers. Just prior to and around this time, David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox, who were longtime members of and acquaintances through the Popular and American Culture Association in the South, began soliciting and receiving proposals for an anthology that would eventually be called *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer (see Appendix C). Published in 2002 by Rowman & Littlefield, *Fighting the Forces* became the first scholarly collection devoted to the study of the televisual text. The editing process, however, began in the late fall of 1999, when Lavery and Wilcox released their Call for Papers. The two quickly found themselves overwhelmed with proposals.

In fact, the coeditors ultimately pored over approximately 120 abstracts. As they explain, they soon learned "that two other collections of essays on *Buffy* were also in the works. It seemed obvious that there was a not-soon-to-be-exhausted international critical and scholarly interest" ("Site History"). So in January 2001, even before *Fighting the Forces* had been published, *Slayage: The International Journal of* Buffy *Studies* made its debut on the World Wide Web (see Appendix D). From its inception, Lavery and Wilcox have acted as coeditors of the blind peer-reviewed electronic journal and maintain that *Slayage* "will continue to be published at least four times a year as long as interest warrants" ("Site History"). To date, academic interest in the works of Joss Whedon has not waned: *Slayage* has published twenty-seven issues and over 125 essays in the last eight years.

The same interest that has kept *Slayage* viable was and continues to be alive and well among academic conference attendees. The number of conference presentations on *Buffy* and *Angel*, *Buffy*'s 1999 spin-off, sharply increased at the beginning of the new century, jumping from two in 2000 to over 65 in 2002.[64] In graduate school for a master's degree during those years, I myself contributed to that number by presenting several of my very first papers at the Popular and American Culture Association's regional and national conferences (see Appendix E). The dramatic increase in such presentations, though, was largely due to one conference. In October 2002, the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom became the first academic institution to host a scholarly conference devoted to Whedon's *Buffy*. The conference, titled Blood, Text and Fears: Reading around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, was organized by Catherine Fuller, Scott MacKenzie, Carol O'Sullivan, and Claire Thomson and was a collaborative effort

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[64] It is extremely difficult to accurately record conference presentations. The numbers reported here are estimates based on evidence found in conference programs accessed via print or the internet.

among several university departments: the School of Language, Linguistics, and Translation Studies; the School of English and American Studies; and the British Centre for Literary Translation. In a university press release, Claire Thomson comments on the high level of interest the conference call for proposals attracted: "We were astonished to be inundated with submissions from scholars of all ages and degrees of distinction, from all over the world" ("Blood, Text and Fears"). But this bringing together of scholars from a multitude of disciplines and institutions was one of the organizers' goals, a goal they easily met. About 160 people were in attendance, 60 of them presenters from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Italy, Canada, and the United States.[65] According to Scott MacKenzie, other goals for the conference included exploring the cultural significance of *Buffy* and *Angel*, particularly through disciplinary lenses—philosophy, literary theory, gender studies, musicology—and dismantling the distinction between "'high-brow' and 'popular' culture." MacKenzie rhetorically queries, "Why shouldn't well-made television tell us just as much about ourselves and our world as canonical literature?" To most media scholars, the answer to MacKenzie's question is obvious.

As was the case with conference presentations, a dramatic increase in published journal articles occurred at the beginning of the new century. Between 2000 and 2001, essays in scholarly journals rose from four to 29. This surplus was mostly the result, of course, of *Slayage* since it published over 20 essays in 2001. Nevertheless, there was significant cross-pollination in academia in regard to *Buffy* and, more and more often, *Angel*; in addition to *Slayage*, essays appeared in such publications as *The European Legacy*, *Television Quarterly*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Popular Culture Review*, *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, *Educational Studies*, and the

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[65] *Salon.com*'s Stephanie Zacharek reports that the two-day program could only accommodate half of the approximately 120 proposals submitted to the conference organizers.

Journal of American and Comparative Cultures. Even though *Slayage* published and continues to publish more or less two dozen essays a year, journal articles continued to proliferate, peaking at 37 in 2005, two years after *Buffy* ended its seventh season on television (see Fig. 6.1). Again, essays addressed disparate topics from a wide range of disciplinary points of view and thus appeared in a variety of academic journals—both print and online, all of them refer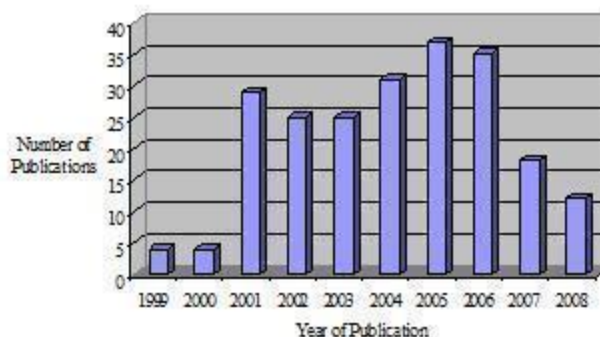eed, peer-reviewed publications. Of course, some of these fertile years occurred because journals such as *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* devoted whole special issues to Whedon's works.[66]

Fig. 6.1. Academic Journal Articles Published on Whedon Texts, 1999-2008

During the same decade, 17 single-authored books that analyze, in particular, *Buffy* and *Angel* have been published. Nine dissertations have been penned, 15 master's theses have been approved, and some 16 edited collections have been released. Also, nearly 40 chapters on Whedon texts have been included in anthologies not specifically devoted to *Buffy* and its televisual siblings. Though difficult to track, around the globe and in venues from classrooms to conferences, anywhere from 50 to 100 papers on the Whedonverse are delivered each year, some of those coming out of conferences like Blood, Text and Fears that convene chiefly to interrogate Whedon's texts. Such is the case for we *Buffy* scholars, now more commonly called Whedon scholars, who six years ago began attending biennial conferences sponsored by *Slayage*.

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[66] *Refractory*'s Special Issue on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be found at
<http://blogs.arts.unimelb.edu.au/refractory/category/browse-past-volumes/volume-2/>.

Once the online journal was on its feet and it was clear to Lavery and Wilcox that

interest was not only healthy but also growing, the obvious next step was to host a States-side

conference. Both a successful conference and a symposium had already occurred: Blood, Text

and Fears in the United Kingdom and Staking a Claim: Exploring the Global Reach of *Buffy* in

Australia. Yet both had been in locations outside of the United States, the birthplace of

Whedon's series. As a result, Lavery and Wilcox planned the first Slayage Conference on *Buffy*

the Vampire Slayer to be hosted in Nashville, Tennessee, by Middle Tennessee State University in

Murfreesboro. With many other scholars, fans, fan-scholars, and scholar-fans, I much

anticipated the conference that ran from Thursday, May 27, 2004, to Monday the 31st.

Approximately 300 people were present, making it a well-attended and topically and

disciplinarily diverse event. Four keynote addresses and about 180 papers, including my own,

were delivered over that Memorial Day weekend, and the gathering was significant enough to

catch the attention of local and international news agencies.

At the closing ceremony, Lavery and Wilcox, whom I was familiar with by this time,

posed the question of the audience members: Was there enough interest to continue holding

conferences? The overwhelming response from our international assembly was affirmative. As

a result, two years later, The Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses convened at Gordon

College in Barnesville, Georgia. And in 2008, the third conference was held at Henderson State

University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Though the number of participants dropped slightly after

the first meeting, that number has continued to warrant subsequent gatherings. However,

having no central organization for support—especially financial and administrative support,

the third conference included an open discussion between those of us present and coconveners

Lavery and Wilcox concerning the feasibility of future meetings. The possibility of not gathering in 2010 disappointed many us; some proposed action. By the conclusion of the conference, several future locations had been discussed—including California, Canada, Florida, and Nebraska—and fellow scholars had stepped up to offer administrative and financial support to ensure that the conference continued. In a surprising turn, Lavery and Wilcox received notice that a benefactor was willing to give the group of academics a substantial monetary gift. With the promise of such a considerable donation, *Slayage* and Whedon scholars were about to take a new turn in our unfolding history.

Hearing of a potential patron for future conferences, I began to think and discuss with a colleague the need for a formal organization. In August of 2008, I sketched a list of possible titles for the conceptual organization that I planned to approach David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox with. By this time, both were close friends of mine, and Rhonda and I had together recently completed the edited collection *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity*: Science Fiction on the Frontier*. Before I could contact either, though, Rhonda emailed me with the news that she and David had been mulling over a similar idea: seeking non-profit status for *Slayage* so that they would be able to responsibly accept financial gifts. In September 2008, Rhonda also requested that I join her and David as an officer. In the following two months, Rhonda pursued non-profit status and on October 16 of that same year, the Whedon Studies Association became a legal entity. In January 2009, our first board meeting occurred via conference call from Rhonda's home in Atlanta, Georgia. As secretary-treasurer of the association, I began collecting the names of charter associates in February when the announcement about the organization was made public by way of the *Slayage* website (see Appendix F). As of December, 6, 2009, 146 charter

associates have added their names to the growing list of supporters. Also in the fall of 2009, the board members voted to replace the journal's subtitle with *The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association*. Currently, the vitality and longevity of Whedon Studies appears more secure than ever before, and Whedon scholars, fans, fan-scholars, and scholar-fans are planning to assemble in St. Augustine, Florida, in the summer of 2010 for the fourth biennial conference.

With an understanding of how the community came about and continues to grow, I next consider the individual aspects I introduced towards the end of the previous chapter and at the beginning of this one: scholar-fandom as personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational. In other words, I flesh out each aspect of the Palmerian epistemology, a way of knowing that distinguishes Whedon Studies and its scholar-fans.

WHEDON STUDIES: TRUTH IS PERSONAL

per·son·al (pûr'sə-nəl)—the most intimate aspects of a person . . .
---*The American Heritage Dictionary*

"I love *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," I wrote in a graduate seminar paper for my Modern and Contemporary Rhetorical Theory course:

> I love the show, I love the characters, I love the soundtrack. I own the DVDs, the guides, the scripts. I have a *Buffy* watch, Buffy and Spike full-sized stand-ups, and plan to purchase the "Buffy Lives" t-shirt before I attend the first States-side academic conference on the series. So as any good researcher should do, I am admitting that I speak from a blatantly subjective position: I am a fan.

Now years later, I use this writing sample to talk with first-year composition students about academic discourse, ethos, and scholarly narrative writing. "Did I confess too much," I query.

"Should I have left it all out and pretended I am not a fan at all?" In Palermian terms, should I have disavowed my personal investment in the text, pretended that the truth I experienced by watching *Buffy* was disembodied? When I share these several lines of text, they usually spark a lively discussion about the place of emotion and subjectivity in academic writing. What I tell students finally is that it is impossible for affect—for our Selves—to be completely removed from our writing, and as a component of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle—ethos, pathos, logos— "a personal touch" is actually an *essential* ingredient. Even if scholars disguise (their) feelings in their writing—by denying them, ignoring them, or retreating into stylistic choices that supposedly convey pure objectivity (e.g., passive voice)—emotion is still present, for even silence is a form of communication. What is most important, I explain, is that we are conscious of our subjectivity and "appropriately" acknowledge, interrogate, complicate, and incorporate those subjective bits into our scholarship. At the same time, our enjoyment or love for the object of our studies cannot be allowed to completely overtake our objectivity. Both subjectivity and objectivity are necessary; the hard work rests in ever negotiating those two stances.

To the chagrin of some Whedon scholars, David Lavery once said "we will understand *Buffy* best when we love her, without shame" ("'I wrote my thesis on you!'"). And though scholarly love can cause one to vehemently defend a preferred text or artifact, a healthy, "disciplined" love—in intimate as well as academic relationships—is honest, has its eyes wide open (despite the ubiquitous, erroneous cliché that tells us otherwise). Love is *not* blind; the *Buffy* text has flaws. Rather than idealizing the text and deifying Whedon, true lovers—whether fans or academics—look and listen *through* the flaws, wrestle emotionally and intellectually with those imperfections, and continue to make meaning that is useful for both everyday life

and intellectual inquiry. In other words, the text is personal, and admirers of the text embody

the text's (flawed) truth. Anyone can see as much by visiting the "Discovering *Buffy*" page of

the *Slayage* website, a collection of narratives and anecdotes about how viewers have come to

watch the series. One quickly understands that *Buffy* does not simply create silent awe in the

majority of viewers, a state of speechless aesthetic resignation. Though Schopenhauer would

insist otherwise, the will has *not* vanished (see *The World as Will and Representation* 411). Instead,

the audience makes very personal meaning out of the text, markedly intentional meaning. One

example comes from Vivien Burr, Reader in Psychology at the University of Huddersfield,

United Kingdom:

> My daughter . . . watched [*Buffy*] from the start, . . . but, like many, [I] just
>
> assumed it was a shallow teen soap . . . By Season 4 (2000-2001 on terrestrial TV
>
> in the UK) I was watching it a bit more attentively, mostly because my daughter
>
> seemed to be around at that time in the evening and we were having dinner.
>
> Then she finished at school and took a year out before going to [university].
>
> *While she was away I missed her . . . and found myself watching* Buffy *as a symbolic*
>
> *way of being with her . . .* (emphasis added)

Burr's interest in the series eventually turned academic, and she became one of the many

scholars who write about and publish on *Buffy*. Her initial investment, though, will always be

rooted in an intimate connection to her daughter.

Lisa Hendricks provides another "Discovering *Buffy*" example. A registered nurse who

at the time of her post worked in a hospital psychiatric unit, Hendricks first watched *Buffy*

because her acupuncturist recommended it. Having a relationship with her care provider and

trusting his taste, Hendricks gave the series a try and was pleasantly surprised by what she

discovered:

> In an age of exploitation . . . , *Buffy* has been a breath of fresh air. It is
> empowering to watch this young woman take on the world.
>
> As a nurse, I've used *Buffy* to break the ice with some patients. I work
> with ages 12 and up. . . . I've had teens, who have not wanted to talk at all, hold
> lengthy conversations with me when I ask if they watch *Buffy*. We talk about the
> show, the characters, and the meaning behind the stories. *It provides an opening for*
> *communication and a less-threatening approach to discussing the patient's own issues.*
> . . . *Buffy* has impacted my life in only positive ways. (emphasis added)

Obviously, as a psychiatric nurse Hendricks once passed through the halls of academia. While

her training focuses on applied knowledge and she does not deliver conference papers or

publish academic essays on the series, I identify her as a Whedon scholar because Hendricks

has allowed *Buffy* to find its way not only into her own experience but into the experience of the

young people with whom she works.

Emerging scholars also find deep, personal meaning in *Buffy*. The first project I assign at

the beginning of my 300-level rhetoric course is a media autobiography. The purpose of the

short paper is for students to think self-reflexively about the media that has influenced their

behavior and more importantly their thinking. In the fall of 2009, one of the students, Hannah

Adams, shared how a particular episode of *Buffy*—the musical episode "Once More, with

Feeling" (6.7)—continues to resonate with her experience. While she identifies with each

character in some way, here Adams explains her particular connection with Amber Benson's

Tara Maclay and Alyson Hannigan's Willow Rosenberg:[67]

> New-comer Tara represented my life with and before [my ex-boyfriend]—always
>
> afraid people would find out my big secret. Tara's secret had to do with
>
> genealogy, whereas mine had to do with attraction to women. When the "big
>
> secret" was discovered, both on-screen and in real life, friends were very
>
> supportive. . . .
>
> The unassuming key-figure Willow echoes my personal journey even
>
> more closely than her girlfriend's does. It wasn't until later in the show that
>
> Willow discovers two unrelated facts: she's a lesbian and prone to substance
>
> abuse. In "Once More, with Feeling" these two topics are finally able to come to
>
> the forefront of audience attention. . . . Unfortunately, Willow's substance abuse
>
> problem comes to a head and threatens the couple's tranquility. I followed a
>
> similar journey by discovering that I too am a lesbian and am prone to substance
>
> abuse. If I let the second fact become a problem, don't keep myself in check, I
>
> could ruin a (future) relationship as Willow did with Tara.

More than a just television series to her, Adams finds herself in the characters and storyline and

uses both to make her own real-world decisions. She concludes by noting that there will be new

television shows for her to identify with—she hopes. If not, she will "pop *Buffy* into [the] DVD

player for the millionth time" and continue to use the text for her literal and symbolic journey

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[67] Used by Adams's permission.

through life. Of course, many other texts—from Shakespeare to *The Simpsons* (1989-present)—

may inspire personal engagement as well.

The experiences of Burr, Hendricks, and Adams attest to Parker Palmer's

epistemological model in ways Palmer may never have suspected. Nevertheless, in that model

truth permeates not selected aspects but *every* aspect of a believer or a researcher, practitioner,

student.[68] The heart and the mind are completely engaged. Truth is personal and embodied—

the text becomes flesh. For some scholars in particular, however, this truth—when brought into

university classrooms, conference sessions, and academic publications—is at once fleshy, queer,

and epistemologically "sinful" expressly because it is personal, laced with feelings, emotion,

and subjectivity.

Affect, especially the influence of emotions, is fused with the concept and practice of

fandom. As I describe in the third chapter, most authors posit that the word *fan* as it is used

today is derived from *fanatic*, employed as early as 1525 to refer to a person with mental illness.

Fanatic, in turn, is derived from the Latin *fanaticus* which comes from *fanum* or temple. Ancient

Greek and Roman temples can incite images of frenzied, bacchanalian cult practices, so it is

understandable that the religious connotation, even these many years later, is difficult to rend

from mainstream stereotypes of fans. While fans' enthusiasm, their "religious" devotion to the

object of their admiration, is sometimes perceived as a positive characteristic, they are

simultaneously thought to be "just a little bit crazy"—strange, weird, odd, Other.

Unfortunately, what has been lost from the original sense of *fanaticus* is the Platonic

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[68] I find striking similarities between Palmer's description of truth as personal and embodied and the literature in the field of composition that promotes narrative scholarly writing, creative non-fiction, and other names for a blending of personal and academic writing (see Nash; Pearl and Schwartz; and Spiegelman).

understanding of madness as desirable and divinely-inspired, a state of being to be envied and revered instead of mocked and denigrated. To be sure, both religion and fandom bear the marks of contemporary rather than ancient definitions. And one of their primary markers is emotion, feelings—in western culture, the negation of reason. To many of us, religion and fandom appear to be robed only in subjectivity. To reiterate Palmer's observation, in academia the enemy of objectivity or reason is "utterly untrustworthy" subjectivity which "is equated with darkness, error, prejudice, bias, misunderstanding, and falsehood" (77). In theological terms, says Palmer, subjectivity is considered the "sin" of a true scholar and the academy's most hated adversary because subjective posturing *inappropriately* assumes proximity, intimacy, relationship—the personal; whereas, an objective stance *appropriately* assumes distance, detachment, aloofness— the impersonal. Supposedly, only then can one discover truth. As Giner argues, however, the real "epistemological sin" is privileging objectivity/reason over subjectivity/emotion, a transgression that can be allayed by *analysis situs* or situational logic (324). In other words, repentance—a deliberate turning away from transgression—can be accomplished through self-reflexivity. Certainly, the academic ideal of objectivity and vigilance against subjectivity are just as much a concern among those who study popular culture as those who study parasites and pathogens. For example, in a 2006 conference presentation, Dee Amy-Chinn argues that Whedon scholars participate in what literary theorist Linda Hutcheon and cultural theorist Angela McRobbie call "complicitous critique," a form of analysis distastefully flavored with fandom. Understanding Amy-Chinn's position requires a slight detour into post-feminist theory.

In "Post-feminism and Popular Culture," McRobbie defines a post-feminist text as one that simulates feminism—and gender equality—at the same time it establishes "a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that [feminism] is no longer needed, it is a spent force" (255). As an example, in a later essay, McRobbie discusses the television series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), a show she believes supports complicitous critique or "a style of scholarship which examines cultural phenomena from a feminist perspective, but which appears to suspend critical engagement with the wider political and economic conditions" ("Young Women ," 539). For instance, nearly all of the authors collected in *Reading* Sex and the City (2004) neglect to examine lead character Carrie Bradshaw's "cloying girlie infantilism" (541). Nor do other critics take to task Carrie's "desperate child-like search for male approval . . . wooden self-conscious and painful banality of language . . . [or] tedious narcissism'" (542). Instead, these scholars revel in the series, applaud its use of "staged femininity," and ultimately participate in the very act accomplished by the four female characters of *Sex and the City*: neither the scholars nor the television characters actually subvert the patriarchal order; rather, they both reinforce it even if they appear to be doing otherwise. The question that begs to be answered is why. Particularly, why are these specific academic readings of *Sex and the City* so laudatory in nature that McRobbie sees them as complicitous in undermining feminist ideals? The short answer is that *Reading* Sex and the City is the work of academic-fans.

For both McRobbie and Amy-Chinn, scholar-fandom is to be blamed for feeble critique. When the editors of and authors anthologized in *Reading* Sex and the City identify as fans, they do so "unashamedly" (McRobbie, "Young Women," 540). Their admission gives McRobbie grounds to state her claim: "Fandom . . . seems to be the key to understanding complicity."

Evidence of their fandom resides in the editors' and authors' writerly choices—narrating their

"field research" excursion to New York City, reprinting a recipe for one of the characters'

favorite drinks, and devoting more space to summarizing episodes than to interrogating them.

Lacking the vocabulary of traditional feminist critics who critique the power of the media and

its representations of women, today's media scholar simply does not fill the same role he or she

once did. Using McRobbie's notion of complicitous critique, Amy-Chinn argues that Whedon

scholars can also be classified with those found in *Reading* Sex and the City. One of her reasons

for making such an assertion is to draw attention to Michael P. Levine and Steven Jay

Schneider's essay, a chapter in James B. South's anthology Buffy the Vampire Slayer *and*

Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale (2003).

      As I briefly mention in an earlier chapter, in "Feeling for Buffy: The Girl Next Door"

Levine and Schneider charge Whedon scholars with being in love with the series and

particularly the main character, with Buffy herself. The series' appeal, argue the coauthors, lies

not in its witty dialogue, its confrontation of real-world issues, or its home-grown morals—as

they say scholars of *Buffy* would have everyone believe. Rather, the appeal is simply Buffy: "the

'girl next door'—sweet, charming, and virginal on the one hand; attractive, alluring, and always

potentially (if not actually) accessible on the other" (303). In other words, Levine and Schneider

hold that Buffy is an object of love and sexual desire for scholars, fans, and their hybrids. And

because scholars and fans love and desire "the girl," in Freudian terms, these scholars and fans

will never be satiated; like any love object, Buffy represents the Mother, a symbol that leaves

devotees unable to "perform." Academically speaking, then, when *Buffy* scholars write about

the series, "[they] are, in psychoanalytic parlance, repressing, projecting, and 'acting out' their

own fantasies in relation to the program. They love [*Buffy*]" (299). Or as Amy-Chinn puts it, *Buffy* scholarship is "unreflective and narrow and fail[s] to acknowledge the way the show embodies questionable values and stereotypes on a number of levels," especially those values and stereotypes that concern gender, class, and race.

Instead of addressing Levine and Schneider's contention, Amy-Chinn admits that she mentions their argument only as a vehicle to arrive at her true critical destination: David Lavery's public response to the philosophy professors. In Lavery's keynote address at the first *Slayage* Conference, he speaks to the accusation of Levine and Schnieder and defends his own love for *Buffy* by saying, 'We will understand *Buffy* best when we love her, without shame'" ("I Wrote My Thesis on You"). The trouble with his response, asserts Amy-Chinn, is that rather than demonstrating Levine and Schneider's judgment is unfounded, he strengthens it: "He could have drawn attention to the—admittedly limited—*Buffy* scholarship that questions its racism and endorsement of white, middle-class values. Instead he simply attacks his critics for not loving *Buffy* enough to understand her." This expression of (scholarly) love as it is equated with puny or impotent scholarship is disturbing to Amy-Chinn who goes on to plead "for a degree of critical distance *even* in our engagement with media texts from which we derive a great deal of pleasure" (emphasis added).[69] At the same time, she suggests that scholars who study popular media texts continue to clutch "the third wave/post-feminist pleasure of the text—the *jouissance* if you will." The question, of course, is how one should go about doing so. Where does one draw a line between pleasurable objectivity and pleasurable subjectivity,

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[69] I am not completely sure what to make of Amy-Chinn's use of the word *even* in this sentence. Is it a choice that reflects her own negotiation of the scholar-fan identity? Does the choice represent an unsettled feeling about studying the medium of television? Is there another possibility for the word's use?

between reason and emotion? And if such a line exists, *who* has drawn it and *why* and *how* is it crossed? Amy-Chinn suggests at least one answer to the *why* and *how* questions:

> Perhaps some of the issue lies in how, as academics, we present some of our fan-scholarship [or scholarship by academic-fans]. Critiques of both *Sex and the City* and *Buffy* scholarship tend to be aimed not at theorized engagements with these texts published in journals such as *Feminist Media Studies* or *The European Journal of Cultural Studies* but the anthologies that attempt to straddle the fan-scholar market. After all, the fans most likely to buy these books are doing so in order to have their taste in media endorsed, not challenged. Clearly the fan market is not going to respond well to the book that relentlessly critiques *Buffy* for its racism, vigilante values, and endorsement of consumer culture. Moreover, there is the challenge to get these books out while the show is still "hot."

As an example, Amy-Chinn notes that while no one can predict how long the series *Desperate Housewives* (2004-present) will air, a call for papers for the first edited collection had been circulated before the first season had come to a close on British television.

Having myself been a coeditor and a purchaser of such collections, I concede that Amy-Chinn has some evidence upon which to base her claim. However, capitulating to the "fan-scholar market" is only one silky strand of a large and complex web.[70] And frankly, some collections are superior to others. Additionally, Amy-Chinn makes a sweeping generalization

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[70] For example, Amy-Chinn does not consider *any* of the following: (1) Because of academic work loads, authoring an essay rather than a book is much more possible for many scholars; (2) editing, more and more often coediting, and contributing to an anthology is one of the most common avenues of publication for emerging scholars; (3) scholarly texts with broad audience appeal are attractive to quasi-academic publishers, publishers who are often more financially viable than their purely academic relatives; and (4) the publication timeline for texts like *Reading* Sex and the City is significantly shorter than that of a traditional text, a timeline that may complement an emerging scholar's plan for tenure and promotion.

and participates in the disparagement of fans by arguing, without sufficient discussion or

support (possibly due to time limitations placed on her public address), that "fans most likely to

buy these books are doing so in order to have their taste in media endorsed, not challenged."

Much of the scholarship by fans that I discuss in the previous chapter suggests that Amy-Chinn

is in error. While fans tend to be forgiving of flaws, they generally do not ignore them. In fact,

deeply devoted, astute fans *do* think about, analyze, and evaluate the object of their fandom.

Some of those fans are also scholars. In fact, Amy- Chinn's own passionate response to Lavery's

"call to love" suggests that the scholar and fan wrestle within her. *Even* with all of its flaws,

Amy-Chinn also loves *Buffy*.

I read Lavery's response to Levine and Schneider very differently than Amy-Chinn.

Rather than an attack on the philosophers—a lashing out—I understand the declarative

statement "We will understand *Buffy* best when we love her, without shame" as an appeal to

scholarly self-reflexivity—a turning within. To paraphrase, we who enjoy the television series

Buffy the Vampire Slayer from both fan and academic perspectives will appreciate and

comprehend the text most thoroughly when we simultaneously revel in and critique it without

believing ourselves to be justifiably confined to the mainstream or Ivory Tower "culture closet."

I believe Lavery's statement has much more to do with fortifying television studies and

encouraging fannish and academic pride than to do with debunking a plausible yet minority

opinion presented by only two philosophy professors. Still, Levine and Schneider *have* become

mythic anti-heroes in the self-constructed narrative of Whedon Studies; they are indispensable

symbols who serve as reminders to always already check emotions against reason, to maintain a

balance between the subjective and objective, the personal and the impersonal, the obsessed fan

and the esoteric scholar. In essence, Levine and Schneider single-handedly drive Whedon

scholar-fans and fan-scholars to the center, a space where both identities are slightly more

accepted, where the individuals who claim such identities are slightly more comfortable and, as

a result, create more relevant if not also more thoughtful observations than their polarized

peers. A space occupied by a spectrum of people living and making meaning in the round or

holistically, unashamedly and self-reflexively sharing the most intimate aspects of their Selves:

this is the Palmerian heart of Whedon Studies, a space where truth—however sound, however

flawed—is personal, embodied.

WHEDON STUDIES: TRUTH IS COMMUNAL

com·mu·nal (kə-myōō'nəl)—marked by collective ownership . . .
--- *The American Heritage Dictionary*

While academe is often indicted for its high drama and intense competition over such

low stakes or cultural capital, it can also be one of the most nurturing and collaborative sites in

contemporary culture. This dual nature of academe mirrors my own experience in the fields of

composition and rhetoric, writing centers, and Whedon Studies. For better or worse, "marked

collective ownership" perfectly describes scholarly circles (as well fan communities). In

Palmer's model, we see that the disciples' understanding of Jesus' seemingly cryptic sayings

arose neither immediately nor agreeably. Instead, the disciples mulled over and openly

debated, sometimes contentiously, what their teacher and friend meant. The working out of that

meaning anticipated or assumed community. Truth emerged from many minds and hearts

engaged in rhetorical listening and speaking. In many ways, academic epistemologies are also

inherently communal—from classroom discussions to conference presentations to on-going

conversations in journals and books. At the same time, what one knows and how one knows it remains very different across discourse communities. Fan communities do not necessarily value academic knowledge, and academic communities do not necessarily value fan knowledge. In fact, some fans and scholars are openly hostile to each other. Is it any wonder, then, that fans stereotypically harbor disdain for scholars, scholars for fans? While Whedon scholar-fans are not perfect examples, they do offer a hopeful glimpse of a scholarly community that values fan *and* academic discourses, attempts to blend those ways of using language, and aims to share their ideas with a broad audience. The multidisciplinary and differing perspectives advanced by the growing number of books, anthologies, and journal articles as well as *Slayage* conference presentations are fine examples of the communal nature of Whedon Studies.

Because Whedon scholars represent a wide-range of disciplines, many of the anthologies on Whedon's texts are rich with critical yet accessible perspectives. In the collection I edited with Rhonda Wilcox on Whedon's *Firefly* and *Serenity*, scholars from fields of study obviously related to visual popular culture texts—television, film, and media studies—share close readings of the texts. But the collection also includes work by English literature and composition professors, a philosophy professor, musicologists, a law professor and a practicing attorney, and professors of logic and humanities. Bringing these authors and their disciplines together in one place allows any reader—fan or scholar—to analyze, for example, how technical choices are bond to aesthetic effects. In "Deathly Serious: Mortality, Morality, and the *Mise-en-Scène* in *Firefly* and *Serenity*," Matthew Pateman demonstrates "the ways in which the *mise-en-scène* of death . . . contributes to [the audience's] affective and moral engagement with the show and its characters" (212). Detailing several scenes from both the series and the film, Pateman

argues that Whedon intentionally, skillfully forces viewers to notice "the structures of representation" and by doing so ensures that the visual texts represent death in complex ways. In other words, *Firefly* and *Serenity*, circumvent "simple, plot-driven, affectively empty representations of death as well as sentimentally overwrought, morally empty ones" (212). These technical choices do not simply satisfy the eye, and they do not merely move the plot along. Death becomes a recurring theme through which Whedon and his creative team instruct viewers in the "deep moral seriousness" of life itself. With no knowledge about the production of a television episode or major motion picture, I and many other readers require Pateman's expert assistance in understanding how important these technical choices are. As a result of that expertise, the text and the theme sink deeper into readers' consciousnesses and shape how we respond to death in the real world of our experiences.

Pateman's work, of course, stands alongside many other pieces in the collection that make *Firefly* and *Serenity* more intricate and valuable to both scholars and fans. For instance, I have used Cynthea Masson's "'But She was Naked! And All Articulate!': The Rhetoric of Seduction in *Firefly*" in a rhetoric course to talk with students about cross-gender communication and the ethics of present-day courtship. Students learn rhetorical vocabulary and techniques—e.g., *oraculum* involves quoting scripture as a persuasive strategy—while thinking and talking self-reflexively about their own intimate relationships. In "'I Aim to Misbehave': Masculinities in the 'Verse," David Magill explores what the series and film tell viewers about what is means to be a man. Essays by Rhonda Wilcox and Gregory Erickson both ask readers to consider the place of religion in Whedon's texts and, ultimately, in our own lives, cultures, societies. Neil Lerner and Christopher Neal reveal how profoundly affective music

shapes viewers' emotional and intellectual responses, particularly as those responses reflect our

understanding of race and Otherness in our own culture. Stacey Abbott and I respectively

discuss how the series is translated to film and how both visual texts are used by fans to make

sense of daily living. Partly because we contributors employ multidisciplinary points of view,

partly because we touch on issues and themes that many audience members care about, and

partly because we editors asked contributors to use scholarly yet accessible language, Rhonda

and I were able to deliberately fashion a text that we intended to meet the needs of a broad

audience—fans, fan-scholars, scholar-fans, and scholars. In fact, if Robert G. Evans is correct

when he claims that interdisciplinarity is the academy's equivalent of a CT scanner, the various

perspectives we brought to our anthology should give any person who picks up the book a

better picture of *Firefly* and *Serenity* and its personal and cultural significance. One way to know

if we have accomplished our goal of broad audience appeal is to listen to our readers.

One group of people reading and critiquing *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity can be

found in virtual spaces. Currently on *Amazon.com*, for instance, there are four reviews for the

collection. Of course, those willing to take the time to post an online review may represent

readers who have the most extreme perspectives. Still, considering the responses proves

enlightening. The first reviewer, L. McConnell, finds the collection a waste of time and

deliberately written above the heads of the average reader. After trying to establish ethos with

costumers by claiming love for the television series, McConnell explains his or her opinion

before resorting to name calling (*ad hominem*) to conclude:

I love all things *Firefly* and have everything published on *Firefly* and

Serenity. That is—until I got this from the library. It is AWFUL. It's written for

people with PhDs who never leave academia. If you pick this up you better have

a dictionary in the other hand. Seriously—one of the chapter titles is: "Feminism,

Postfeminism, and Third-Wave Feminism in *Firefly*." What exactly is that

supposed to mean—and WHO CARES!! Another chapter is: "The Companions

and Socrates: Is Inara a Hetaera?" What is a Hetaera? Who knows—the author

never bothers to explain. And it just gets worse. Unless you're a [doctoral

candidate] (like the authors) you need to AVOID THIS BOOK. Written by

eggheads for eggheads. Needlessly complicated and simply awful.

McConnell awards the collection only one star out of five. Interestingly, zero of sixteen people

rate the review as helpful.

Lauren Mitchell follows McConnell's appraisal with a very different perspective, one

that twelve of twelve people find helpful. Mitchell writes,

The last (and only other) reviewer . . . called this book "trash" simply

because it was "meant for PhDs." I have to disagree—I think that just because

this book was intended for a different audience than he or she expected doesn't

automatically make it trash. This is a book with a particular audience, though—it

is geared toward those who enjoy academic film and/or literary analysis.

Read with this perspective in mind, it is an excellent addition to the

academic work that is being done on Joss Whedon's television and film

productions—and there is a significant audience for such texts and the academic

analysis that they offer. *Apparently the reviewer is unaware of this particular (but very*

active) part of Whedon's fan base. . . .

I, in fact, enjoyed very much the chapter "The Good Wife: Feminism, Post-Feminism, and Third Wave Feminism in *Firefly*," as well as the wide range of topics that the other chapters cover. There are some excellent essays that discuss the racial implications of Whedon's work, the role that the musical score plays in setting up certain aspects of *Firefly* and *Serenity*, the differences between the series and the film based on the differences of the mediums of television and cinema, and connections between the show/movie and the current post-9/11 socio-political context.

I would say this book is not for every fan, but I think that any fan who is interested in examining Joss Whedon's work more in-depth will be rewarded when they pick up this book. (emphasis added)

I find two points most intriguing about Mitchell's assessment: (1) she appears well aware that scholars are also fans of the series and film, and (2) she makes a distinction among fans—some are more interested than others in "examining Joss Whedon's work more in-depth."[71] This second observation suggests that there are more than four personalities on the spectrum from fan to scholar.

The next reviewer echoes Mitchell when he or she notes that "one must have a willingness to understand what the authors are attempting to accomplish with their respective essays and what the editors are attempting to do with this collection" (Myc). Overall, Myc rates the collection highly—five out of five stars—because it contains "serious academic works, and not just fan fodder like some other collections." The importance of the anthology, according to

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[71] Could those who *are* interested in examining more in-depth be called fan-scholars?

Myc, resides in the fact that one day *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity—and other works like it—

"will become the foundation of future academic understanding of culture." Apparently, Myc

values what such work contributes to our understanding of the world and our place in it.[72]

Finally, Loren Morris provides the most recent review (September 2, 2009), one that

seems to strike a balance among all of the others:

> This is a good series of essays on the *Firefly* universe. I also like all things
>
> *Firefly*, but I found many of the other essay books to only touch on a point
>
> without fully exploring all areas and aspects of the points with which they are
>
> trying to get across. *As for being deep, I understand as some of the essays required me*
>
> *to look up some of the referenced work, but I think that is what makes this such a great*
>
> *book.* These essays were written with a college-level understanding in mind. If
>
> you are looking for *something to make you think and at times think hard, and you*
>
> *actually want to broaden your horizons or learn new thoughts and ideas*, then this is a
>
> great *Firefly* book. (emphasis added)

Like McConnell, Morris begins by establishing ethos, noting a personal investment in the visual

texts: "I also like all things *Firefly*." As an editor of the anthology, a Whedon scholar, and a

college professor, I am most satisfied by Morris's remark that the essays provoke thought, that

they compel some readers to do their own research, "to broaden [their] horizons" and "learn

new thoughts and ideas." If the collection does that for even a fraction of book buyers, it will be

a success in my estimation.

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[72] I cannot help but wonder if Myc works at a college or university in a media or cultural studies program.

In addition to frequenting online spaces, those reading *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity share their criticism in the pages of academic journals. For example, in an issue of *SFRA Review*, Jason W. Ellis begins his assessment by declaring that Rhonda and I have "assembled an *amazing* collection of *superlative* essays" (9, emphasis added). While I am flattered by Ellis's choice of adjectives, his enthusiasm probably undermines his review, even if just a little; he doesn't strike an "appropriate" balance for an academic or academic-fan. Still, our work should stand on its own without the help of adjectival padding, so Ellis does go on to show evidence for his generous opinion. In particular, he notes that the collection boasts interdisciplinary perspectives, that the essays do not stand alone but seem to dialogue with each other, that the book is organized well—in topical clusters—and that the zeal of the writers "leaps off the page with each essay" (9-10). After detailing several specific essays, Ellis concludes by calling scholars and professors to action:

> The collection's breadth of material demands that it receive a special place in the library stacks for [science fiction] scholars and popular culture researchers to easily find and make use of the work that it contains. *Another special audience for this collection is undergraduate students*. I can imagine this anthology's inclusion in a [science fiction] studies, film studies, or fan studies course that in some way engages the Whedonverse (in whole or in part), because it contains so many good ideas at a really terrific price. (10, emphasis added)

While *demands* is a strong word, the fact that Ellis sees potential for *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity to be helpful to both other media researchers as well as undergraduate students suggests that he finds the anthology accessible to multiple audiences, even if those audiences

are all academic in nature. Ellis's critique is only one of several, however, and other reviewers

disagree with his position.

In *Studies in Popular Culture*, Fred Erisman shares a different perspective on the

collection's relative success versus failure. Erisman grants that "the work is a generally thought-

provoking volume," but he also cautions that sensible readers "will keep Occam's Razor fresh

in mind as the contributors' uncritical adulation of Whedon as auteur quickly cloys" (143). The

principle of Occam's Razor states that an issue or problem should be presented in its simplest

form; in other words, convolution should be avoided. So Erisman conflates unnecessary

complexity with contributors' praise of Whedon's texts, praise that "cloys" or becomes

wearisome and monotonous through excessive use. Yet the reviewer finds merit scattered

throughout the anthology, specifically citing Laura L. Beadling's "The Threat of the 'Good

Wife': Feminism, Postfeminism, and Third-Wave Feminism in *Firefly*" and David Magill's "'I

Aim to Misbevave': Masculinities in the 'Verse" as examples of "persuasive essays" (143). Other

essays Erisman finds noteworthy are Lorna Jowett's "Back to the Future: Retrofuturism,

Cyberpunk, and Humanity in *Firefly* and *Serenity*" and J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael

Richardson's "Reavers and Redskins: Creating the Frontier Savage." Though he compliments

these four essays, Erisman quickly returns to his own cloying charges, arguing that many of the

essays have genuine possibility but fall short of reaching it: "one wants to say to the authors, as

the *New Yorker* used to remark after a particularly portentous newsbreak, 'Exhale!'" (144). *Exhale*

is an accurate verb for the review's conclusion where Erisman shares his concern about how

Whedon scholars treat Whedon himself: they "unfailingly [speak of Whedon] in saccharinely

awe-struck fashion" (144). Though he grants that Whedon undeniably is "a talented, even

gifted, writer-director, and deserves acclaim for his achievements," Erisman insists that the

creator of *Buffy*, *Angel*, *Firefly* and many other texts is "not, however, one who (in the words of

one of Spider Robinson's characters) 'freed the slaves, built the Pyramids, and cured yaws'"

(144). Apparently, some of his concern arises from an apparent lack of credit given to both

Whedon's entertainment predecessors and creative teams; Whedon works in relation to and in

collaboration with other artistic talent, and they deserve their own credit. Erisman is correct, yet

he fails to mention that several authors—e.g., Mary Alice Money, Neil Lerner, and Barbara

Maio—extensively do that very thing. "In short, over-extended analyses and overblown

admiration notwithstanding," finishes Erisman, "*Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity contributes to

the growing pool of Whedon studies; however, approaching it with healthy skepticism will

broaden its usefulness" (144). And an ideal place for creating such skepticism while still

enjoying the "pleasure of the text" is in a classroom, possibly why Dr. Scott Rogers of Weber

State University recommends the anthology to students in his English 4810: Television as

Literature course.[73]

Considering several reviews of both fans and scholars indicates that a clear consensus on

the quality of the essays and their significance to a range of audiences remains open for

discussion. What *is* very clear, however, is that all of the reviewers are engaged in the

communal nature of discovering truth and making meaning. Though I do not personally know

any of the reviewers I have cited, I wouldn't hesitate to accept, given an opportunity or

invitation, to sit around a table and dialogue with all of them. Among other reasons, Palmer's

epistemological model assumes community because singular or narrow definitions of truth

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[73] Currently, Rogers' syllabus can be found at <http://faculty.weber.edu/srogers/archive/FA09/2810-4810/4810.pdf>.

breed fear and hate, intimidation and manipulation—or simple name calling. As Palmer notes, Jesus' disciples met objections to the spreading "gospel," but they addressed those objections with open communication; they talked passionately *and* listened intently. Truths began and continue to emerge from this historical and on-going conversation among Christians. Truths about *Firefly* and *Serenity*—and Whedon's other texts—are no different. So just as patriotism does not necessarily mean blind or uncomplicated devotion to a nation, scholar-fannish love does not necessarily mean blind or shallow admiration of a text. Again, truth is not always reached immediately or agreeably; it is often negotiated over time and sometimes remains either elusive or ambiguous. But the epistemology, the way of knowing remains: truth is communal.

WHEDON STUDIES: TRUTH IS RECIPROCAL

re·cip·ro·cal (rĭ-sĭp′rə-kəl)—performed, experienced, or felt by both sides
---The American Heritage Dictionary

As Palmer understands it, the truth is reciprocal and mutual in nature, not "out there" somehow hiding from or evading us; it does not arrogantly or standoffishly wait to be sought. In most spiritual traditions, the truth pursues believers. Believers are not always patient or obliging enough to be found, though. In fact, honest believers will admit that they are "the evasive ones," writes Palmer (83). Yet they need only to first trust that truth will find them and then actively wait. This way of knowing strikes me as profoundly similar to the writing process. At every stage of my dissertation research and writing, for example, I have driven myself to find truth(s) about the rhetoric of fandom, academia, fan-scholardom, and scholar-fandom. Even so, the moments at which I experienced the most clarity and felt the most confident were

the moments created by the synergy born out of talking with other readers and writers. In the midst of my many drafts, I had much advice from cohorts—some trained academicians, some self-educated close readers. And it was often in conversation with them that any truth that can be found in these pages found me. Though I worried much of the time, frustrated that I could not translate my inarticulate feelings and educated guesses into words, what I knew at a primordial, speechless level eventually found its way to voice, my community of readers and writers a conduit to articulation. On many levels, Whedon scholar-fans demonstrate this reciprocal and mutual nature of truth, even if they, like many believers, at first evade what they will come to know rings true.

Returning to the topic of Levine and Schneider's indictment of Whedon scholar-fandom and Lavery's response, I am struck by how "natural" and obviously "right" it seems to defend something or someone one loves and to do so proudly, unashamedly. It seems just as natural and right to refuse, early in one's exploration of a text or the development of a relationship, to completely dismantle (or decimate) in pursuit of an objective, dispassionate truth. Rather than impugn Whedon scholars for impotent scholarship, Levine and Schneider might have themselves "put down the instruments of [academic] pursuit long enough to allow truth to find [them]" (Palmer 83). Doing so could have led them to a very different way of constructing their argument, of determining their scholarly posture. However, the indictment remains and echoes throughout the Whedon Studies community. I find these echoes in book reviews such as Fred Erisman's critique of *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity; in conference presentations such as Dee Amy-Chinn's address to the Media, Communications, and Culture Conference; and in casual conversations with fellow Whedon scholars. No matter how well-deserved, praising Whedon

and his creative teams and celebrating the products of their artistic labor remains

overshadowed by the charge that in general Whedon scholars are blinded by their affection,

(willfully) ignorant of any flaws in the texts. In other words, not the fact that Whedon

academics study television, film, and webisodes but the fact that they do so "inappropriately"

results in the charge against them. Their Ivory Tower allegiance is questioned, the "rigor" of

their work rendered questionable. Are they merely and inherently fans "passing" as scholars?

I'm reminded of the fear people can have of "wolves in sheep's clothing," a fear that

because of my faith-based upbringing I associate with religion. This same upbringing nudges

me to consider another biblical metaphor that might actually allay the fear of "fans in scholars'

clothing": graduating from milk to solid food. Scattered throughout the Bible's New Testament,

authors use milk to symbolize nascent understandings of the gospel: "I gave you milk to drink,

not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it" (*New American Standard Bible*, I Cor. 3.2),

and "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to

teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and

not solid food" (Hebs. 5.12). The first text suggests that one must be able to digest milk—or

basic concepts—before one can be expected to stomach heartier sustenance—more complex

ideas. In other words, a maturation process is required; milk is for babies, and solid food is for

toddlers, teens, and adults—unless. Unless one loses sight of the importance of milk to an

adult's diet, of fundamental principles to a complex theory. Angela McRobbie might argue, for

instance, that the scholars represented in *Reading* Sex and the City need to remember and apply

some of the basic tenets of feminism. As the metaphors of milk and solid food relate to Whedon

scholarship, I wonder if Levine and Schneider's criticism was simply hasty, making their

statements too early in the development of Whedon Studies. Of course, even years later discussions of the "rigor" of Whedon scholarship linger (and may always linger); incessant praise of the *Buffy* creator and his creations—particularly the characterization of Whedon using his texts for activist purposes—continues to be challenged. For example, the questions "Are Whedon's texts feminist?" and "Do Whedon's texts fairly represent people of color?" are still being debated in informal chats and in published treatments. These private and public conversations represent what Palmer might consider active waiting, what the believer does while anticipating being found by truth. My own experience may shed some light on this reciprocal process.

As many Whedon scholars argue, from the earliest episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it appeared that Joss Whedon was crafting noteworthy narratives. Foreshadowing in the episode "Doppelgängland" (3.16) seemed especially promising for lesbian viewers. When a spell goes awry, Willow meets her vampire doppelgänger, observing, "I'm so evil. And skanky. And I think I'm kinda gay!"[74] The following year, the subtext of a relationship between Willow and Tara was introduced in "Hush" (4.10). Before and after the episode aired, popular media responded with provocative headlines such as the *New York Post*'s "Kiss Each Other Girls, The Ratings Are Down" (Kaplan 114) and *TV Guide*'s "*Buffy* Creator Titillates the Audience" (Ausiello). But it became obvious very quickly that the couple was not going to be exploited simply for ratings, so the media's attention diminished. As an avid viewer during that same time, I noticed that while Willow and Tara's interest in one another was emerging from subtext

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[74] A more formal and extended version of this section has been published as the book chapter "Complicating the Open Closet: The Visual Rhetoric of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Sapphic Lovers" in Beirne's *Televising Queer Women* (2008).

to text, the actors Alyson Hannigan and Amber Benson were building their careers by, among other choices, interviewing and posing for popular magazines. Being a fan who followed the actors' moves outside of the television series, usually by lurking on fan blogs and message boards, I discovered that Hannigan was to be featured in an issue of *FHM* and Benson in *Stuff*, both of the publications hyper-masculine men's magazines. I rushed out to the local newsstand to thumb through the glossy pages. What I found stunned me.

Though I considered *Buffy* a feminist text then, I sensed some cognitive dissonance when in my mind I placed the magazine images—images that challenged my belief about what *feminist* means—along side Whedon's self-proclaimed feminist agenda for the series and the depiction of the budding lesbian characters.[75] In several of the *FHM* photos, Hannigan wears a black bra and panties. Her long, red, tousled hair frames her face and gives her a "bed head" look. Her makeup, applied heavily, distinctly marks the difference between Hannigan and her character Willow who appears in more natural earth tones. In other photos, the actor dons sheer, white, thigh-high hose with a baby blue garter that matches lacey bikinis and ribbed bustier. The harsh lighting, the cool colors of the backdrop, and the black and blue lingerie draws attention to Hannigan's porcelain skin. In nearly every photo, she gazes up, above the eye level of the camera with shiny, slightly parted lips. In *Stuff*, Benson is placed against a backdrop of red curtains and a red, carpeted staircase and dressed in black, boy-short underwear and a lacey bustier. The dim lighting complements Benson's rich, brown skin. Her hair is coifed like a lion's mane, and she poses kneeling or bending over at her hips, pouring her breasts toward the floor. She stares directly into the camera, straight-faced and bedroom-eyed. I

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[75] Taking the entire *Buffy* series into consideration, it may be more accurate to refer to Willow as bisexual.

was speechless; I didn't know how to articulate the dissonance I felt. I just had a "gut feeling" that something wasn't right. There was some kind of truth floating among these static images and the more conservative moving images of the characters who, without exception, were costumed in modest, nouveau hippy apparel—long, flowing skirts and long-sleeved, high-necked shirts often in geometric or floral prints. But what was that truth?

Over the next several years, I waited. I actively waited by collecting more magazine articles and pictures, by thinking about why and how the print and television images might be communicating with each other, by reading about the visual representation of women, and by following research paths into critiques of pornography (Linda Williams' *Hard Core*) and theories of visual pleasure (Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"). The truth seemed to be reaching the tip of my tongue and the tips of my fingers; I was almost ready to begin talking and writing.

Finally, one summer while in graduate school, I enrolled in a visual rhetoric course. As I began the readings for the class and continued to venture into other scholarly sources, coherent ideas and words started to flow. In *The Celluloid Closet* and *Up From Invisibility*, Vito Russo and Larry Gross, respectively, instructed me in the history of media representations of people with same-sex orientation. Roland Barthes tutored me both in how photographs work and how images and text work together. Annette Kuhn helped me understand how important visual depictions of women have always already been to the feminist movement. I learned the significance of fans, with much help from the media, conflating the identities of characters and the actors who portray them. And from many visual rhetoricians—Jay Bolter, Helen Burgess, Jeanne Hamming, Mary Hocks, Michelle Kendrick, Robert Markley, and Anne Wysocki,

particularly—I discovered that images and the text or dialogue that accompanies them can and do converse across mediums, creating messages that necessitate critical readings. I had actively waited, and I was being found—and not necessarily by a comfortable truth.

I sat down at my computer to commit to screen what truth I believed had found me. First, I used sociology, media studies, literary criticism, and theories of visual rhetoric to describe and explore my primary sources: *Buffy*, *FHM*, and *Stuff*. Next, I tried to demonstrate the importance of reading the television and magazine images, the dialogue and printed text in conversation with each other. To strengthen that reading, I turned to more theory to argue that neglecting the exchange of ideas among the dissonant images, text, and audiences might deny the intricate interaction of cross-media images and text, ignore fans' blurring of actor/character identities, and ultimately dilute Whedon's feminist intentions. All of that—the interaction of actors, characters, images, and text—led me to question and complicate, extending Vito Russo's work, the idea of an open media closet or equal opportunities for visual representation. In the end, I called for resistant readings of "questionable" content like the *FHM* and *Stuff* magazine spreads and for even more critical readings that could lead to entirely new kinds of content. My thesis—the present truth—was clear to me: the "vision" of *Buffy*—what is seen and what is understood—is complex, and because the series traverses media, it raises the stakes for writers and directors, actors, critics, and fans in that each group shapes the cultural productions of the other.

The result of such a truth was disappointing to both the fan and scholar in me, but the result was also an honest one—even freeing in some ways. What I saw and understood was that Whedon and his creative team, as hard as they may have tried, never could have made *Buffy* in

a vacuum, never could have made the series as if it were removed from the histories Russo,

Gross, Kuhn, Williams, and many others record. As much as Whedon himself may have wished

he could fashion a progressive, culture-changing storyline about two women in love, he had no

choice but to work within the long-established, ethically-complicated sphere of entertainment

media. But even this fact did not acquit Whedon's role in the backward-moving messages about

women generally and lesbians specifically.

Just as I require the composition students I work with to do, I forced myself to answer

the most difficult questions of all: "So what?" and "What now?" As murky as the answers to

those questions seemed at the time, answers *did* exist, I realized. Linda Williams suggested one

of many to me. When she began writing about filmic bodies, Williams thought one of her books

should contain a short chapter on pornography, short because pornographic films would

demonstrate "a *total* objectification of the female 'film body' as object of male desire" (xvi,

original emphasis). Williams found, though, that that claim was far too simplistic. In *Hard Core*,

she argues that the traditional positions of feminists—to celebrate or condemn pornography—

leaves little room for real dialogue. In fact, those two polarized positions have completely

ignored the complexity of the genre, especially as it developed in the 1990s to serve the desires

of marginalized and "non-traditional" viewers such as people who identify as gay, lesbian,

bisexual, transgender, and queer and heterosexual women. Instead of debating, pitting two

positions against each other, Williams believes that we need to "come to terms with

pornography" by not viewing it simply as misogynistic (though, much of it is) or denying that it

is art (though, much of it is not) but by attempting to define what it is and why it continues to

be so popular (5). Her belief, I saw, related to the truth that had discovered me: though *Buffy*'s

message *is* feminist, the photographs of Hannigan and Benson and the text that accompanied those photos created quite a formidable affront to the feminist message, a message that scholars and fans still rightly but somewhat excessively praise rather than complicate.[76] As Rebecca Beirne notes, the show is neither homophobic nor friendly to the homosexual perspective; it is also neither agonistic toward nor amicable to Whedon's feminist agenda ("Queering the Slayer-text"). Instead, the series demonstrates the slippage of images. Just as letters and words, as signifiers, are not the objects they represent, so static or moving images slip, a deconstruction that makes impossible a fair representation of anyone. I had answered the "so what," but the "what now" remained. Where did we—writers and directors, critics, fans, and scholars—go from there?

First, I decided, we could continue to recognize what Whedon and *Buffy* do well. In a review of *Buffy*'s seventh season, *AfterEllen.com*'s Sarah Warn mourns the end of one of network television's most admired cult series and what the audience lost: a lesbian couple they could identify with and celebrate ("DVD Release"). *AfterEllen.com* is one of few online media sources that hailed *Buffy* for bringing about several important firsts for lesbians on television, including one of the longest, most passionate kisses between two female lovers not merely expressing curiosity. Warn describes these firsts as giving lesbians much coveted and rarely granted visibility. She notes, "When the series ended in May, 2003, we knew lesbian visibility on TV would suffer[;]. . . it makes me long for the days when lesbian and bisexual women could watch . . . and find an interesting, likeable, well-developed lesbian character like Willow . . ."

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[76] See Mary Magoulick's "Frustrating Female Heroism: Mixed Messages in *Xena*, *Nikita*, and *Buffy*" for a notable exception.

More than being lovable or complex characters, Willow and Tara hopefully altered the trodden path of American television: "We *changed* the world," exclaims Willow in the last moments of the series finale "Chosen" (7.22). True. More than any other network series up to its time, *Buffy* realized quite a few milestones. It also did not conceal the flaws that come with being human. As Warn believes, the characters were humanized, normalized to persuade viewers to be more accepting of sexual attraction and love between women: "network television will never . . . be able to stuff the lesbian genie back into the bottle . . ." ("How *Buffy* Changed the World"). As the slippage of images implies, however, Warn's statement is debatable.

I believed then as I finished my graduate seminar paper and I believe now as I type these words onto my laptop screen that the invisibility of normality constantly challenges homosexual—or heterosexual or gendered or racial or classed or religious—visibility. As a result, I knew that Whedon scholars also needed to acknowledge what *Buffy* in juxtaposition with *FHM* and *Stuff* did *not* do: give each lesbian viewer the model she desired. When that is the truth that finds a fan or a scholar, a fan-scholar or scholar-fan, it can be a difficult truth to accept. It's then much easier to spout off dismissive statements such as, "Relax, it's *just* a TV show." Yes, it is *and* no, it's not. Like Todd Ramlow, I neither follow nor accept the suggestion that what is popular is "'just' entertainment or ephemera." Popular culture accomplishes "real cultural work" that in too many cases upholds a dominant, closed-minded ideology: "The refusal to consider any social or political import to popular culture demonstrates how ideology functions through media to promote certain social and cultural values as 'natural,' and to make particular political investments and disseminations transparent" (Ramlow). *Buffy* does, in fact, do cultural work, work that is laudable. But *FHM* and *Stuff* do cultural work also.

In "New Moon Rising" (4.19), Willow tries to explain her growing interest in Tara to Buffy. Flustered when the situation begins to feel awkward, she summarizes, "It's complicated." Just because the conversation among *Buffy*, *FHM*, and *Stuff* proved complex, I decided, it did not have to lead only to obfuscation; the conversation was not indecipherable, the audiences paralyzed. I recognized and still recognize that problemitizing opinions, hypotheses, and theories could and can lead to more and more resistant readings, hopefully brand new texts, and even fresh theories. The construction of such novel theories is what feminist scholars such as Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, and Jackie Stacey have been trying to accomplish from the very beginning of their work. They have advocated for media transformation—change in the form of more options, more choices for female actors and spectators. I came to hope, as Jay Bolter suggests, that media could evolve, that some texts could become in themselves cultural and societal critiques, not replicates of prevailing norms (34).

Truth had found me. Correction: truth*s* had slowly but surely and firmly got hold of me. I had learned that for "[w]hatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (Barthes 6). In other words, what exists *there* in a photo, on a television or film screen, in text or dialogue, on a website, in a music video or video game; what is leaf for leaf inseparable is what all of us—creators, producers, fans, and scholars—are responsible for and what should drive all of us to question the media we consume—even or especially our most beloved texts. If we do so, if we commit to critical consumption, truth will find us, and we will find it. And that truth will be the power we need to defy any representation that attempts to define based solely on tokenism, stereotypes, and even archetypes.

As I have already noted, neither in the biblical narrative nor in everyday life does truth seem to arrive immediately, lucidly, or completely: sometimes the truth is milk, and sometimes it is solid food. The truth about Whedon's texts is no different. Truth continues to emerge, continues to find the scholars who patiently but actively seek to be found by truth. This reciprocal process makes sense, especially because this same truth is both personal and communal. The texts resonate with (academic) audiences, resonate deeply enough to keep fans and academics searching. The texts may never stop saying what they have to say, so the search goes on. Some questions remain to be sufficiently answered and some remain to be asked.[77] In the meantime, Whedon scholars can rest assured that their active waiting will not be in vain; the truth of the texts they study will find them. As Palmer maintains, truth is reciprocal.

WHEDON STUDIES: TRUTH IS TRANSFORMATIONAL

> **trans·for·ma·tion** (trāns'fər-mā'shən)—a marked change,
> as in . . . character, usually for the better.
> ---*The American Heritage Dictionary*

In the final paragraphs of his essay, Parker Palmer summarizes a better way to teach, to learn, and to live, a way to change the world and to create a space where all humans embody what we understand to be truth; where we come together, asking "others to check, correct, confirm, and deepen" what we think we understand; where we simultaneously seek and expect to be found by truth; and where individual and communal transformations are plentiful (83). These transformations are the result of a concerted effort to disavow the dominance and privileging of a purely objectivist way of knowing, an epistemology that "gives us the illusion that we will always be the changers and never the changed, always the transformers and never

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[77] For a dialogue among Whedon scholars about (contested) racial truths in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly,* and *Serenity*, read in succession Edwards, Emmons-Featherston, Rabb and Richardson, and Curry.

the transformed" (83). To be transformed, then, means to experience discernible and affirmative changes in character, even the mapping of one character onto another. These metamorphoses—whether subtle or blatant—happen all around us, occurring when a smile alters a mood, when listening assuages dissention, when acceptance diffuses hostility, when a choice rewrites a myth.

In "Chosen" (7.22), the last episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s seventh season, Buffy believes that she finally understands how the most powerful enemy she has ever faced might be defeated. Though she has depended on the help of her friends and family—Giles, Angel, Willow, Xander, Anya, Spike, and Dawn—many times before, Buffy understands that even this band of strong and willing fighters will never defeat the present foe. The First, the premier evil, has shown Buffy through trials and many errors on her part that she cannot win. Yet averting apocalypses has always been her duty, has defined her and every Slayer before her. According to lore, she is *the* Slayer, the one woman at a time in the whole world who is endowed with the power to fight the forces of evil, to maintain equilibrium between human and demon dimensions. Only upon her death is the next Slayer called, are Buffy's mystical powers transferred to the "potential" Slayer. It is her distinctiveness that ultimately sparks Buffy's battle plan: she and the ancient myth itself must be transformed. Her supernatural power must be shared rather than contained; there must be Slayers—plural—rather than the Slayer—singular.

Just as Buffy rewrites the myth of the Slayer, so the scholar-fan has the opportunity to rewrite the myth of the academy, the Ivory Tower. The scholar-fan (as well as the fan-scholar) has the possibility to bridge discourses and communities, to bring more value to both identities. Of course, an academic-fan could simply code-switch as he or she moves in and out of fan and

academic circles. He or she could simply choose to identify as a scholar and deny or hide the fan

identity while participating in the usual denigration or (dis)passionate, objective "study" of the

fan. Or he or she could move to the center of the poles, even if that means embracing an

ambiguous, liminal identity and engaging in the on-going, sometimes heated conversations

among fans and scholars as they wrestle with what it means to be one or the other or a hybrid of

both.[78] This center is not idyllic; the fan-scholar and scholar-fan bring their engrained, objectivist

epistemologies with them. As Palmer cautions, "objectivism has persisted because it is really

about power rather than knowledge—about who controls meaning . . ." (83). So this center, to

be truly transformative, requires sharing power rather than assuming and hording it. It requires

fans and scholars not only to *look* at one another but also to be *seen* by one another. It requires

fans and scholars to abandon the fear that by sharing with, looking at, and being seen by the

other they both will have to change, be transformed by the other. Yet transformation does not

entail total identity loss. This center, rather than erasing distinctions, provides a space in which

distinctions can be exchanged and celebrated, where fans and scholars concurrently teach *and*

learn. In fact, in many ways this center always has and always will exist.

Like every day, today I followed my morning routine: awake to the radio alarm, which

is set to National Public Radio (NPR); make my bed; putter around the house doing small

chores; shower; and finally, catch Garrison Keillor on NPR's *The Writer's Almanac* before leaving

the house for the day. This morning the topic seemed particularly apropos as I was about to sit

down to continuing writing this dissertation.

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[78] In composition circles, this space might be called a "contact zone." As Mary Louise Pratt defines them, contact zones are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34).

"Today is Bloomsday," Keillor explains, ". . . the day on which James Joyce's *Ulysses* takes place, in 1904." Named for main character Leopold Bloom, Bloomsday has become a world-wide celebration for those who admire Joyce's literary works. On this day around the globe, Joyceans, as they call themselves, participate in a vast array of activities to commemorate their favorite piece of literature, including readers' theatres. According to Keillor, "Dublin has a long tradition of hosting celebrities, politicians, and international diplomats to do these dramatized readings." But readers' theatres are just the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Keillor continues:

> In fact, in Dublin, Bloomsday is not just celebrated for a day—it's a weeklong extravaganza. There are *Ulysses* walking tours, where a person can retrace the steps of the fictional Leopold Bloom, as well as literary-themed pub crawls, musical acts, and museum exhibits. There's also an annual Messenger Biker Rally, where people dressed in Joyce-era clothing ride old bicycles along the route that Leopold Bloom would have walked, and there are large-scale Irish breakfasts and afternoon teas devoted to *Ulysses* devotees.

This "weeklong extravaganza" is nothing more than a fan convention. While to many people labels matter (and they do), the fact is that a literary society and a fan club are, in the scheme of things, barely if at all different. As I state above, distinctions are important—even minor ones, yet the similarities between Joyceans—quite a few of them literati (see Clarity)—and Whedonians and Trekkies and Browncoats are abundant and rich. The space where fandom/fans and scholardom/scholars meet: this is where the most exciting and relevant meaning-making and knowledge creation can occur, meaning and knowledge that arise out of

hybridity, hybridity in Deweyan terms. John Dewey believed life is learning and research is the study of experience (Clandinin and Connelly xxii-xxiii, 2; see Chapter One). Life, education, and experience cannot be separated, and when they are, it is an artificial separation, an unnatural cleaving. Parker Palmer's work echoes Dewey's philosophies—the very reason I choose to build on Palmer rather than other scholars. Both Palmer and Dewey insist that education that does not acknowledge the whole student is not authentic education. In the context of this dissertation, then, for fan-scholars and scholar-fans there is no truly whole existence without *both* cultures and *both* discourses, cultures and discourses that are ever-negotiated, ever-enriched by both.

A glimpse of this mutually beneficial relationship, this blended identity can be caught in many an academic book. In the opening pages of *Fan Cultures*, for instance, Matt Hills introduces readers to his twelve-year-old self, a boy so enamored with his favorite science fiction hero that he attempts to read John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado's *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, the first critical investigation of the series. The "precocious" child never finishes the semiotically thick text, but he does peek into a "(theorists') world where television [is] something important and deserving of analysis" (*Fan Cultures* 1). Many years later, Hills—now the theorist himself—observes that his youthful desire to write stories about *Doctor Who* (1963-1989) and Tulloch and Alvarado's desire to analyze it emerge from a common belief: television is an enduring medium that through particular programs does considerable cultural work. As a result, the series becomes for both the fiction-writing boy and the criticism-writing scholar the same fertile source from which their creative acts derive.

Writing for *The New York Times* in 2008, Margo Jefferson poses this rhetorical question: "Why does the common reader pick up a scholarly book?" She declares that every reader has his or her particular "passions: military history; this or that ancient civilization; Monk, Messaien or Monteverdi." However, readers also have limited amounts of time; whether they are scholars or simply self-educated citizens, they can't afford to invest in thick academic tomes for the sheer joy of reading, so why should they try? "Passionate scholarship lets you surprise yourself. . . . A real scholar sets your own associations loose," answers Jefferson. The insinuation made "between the lines" is that much scholarship is *not* passionate, does *not* let readers surprise themselves, does *not* set readers' personal associations free. That kind of scholarship, according to Jefferson's definition, is not composed by "real scholars." Even as a trained academician, I feel much the same as the readers Jefferson describes; I don't have time for impenetrable, impractical theorizing. As a writer, I aim to be the "real" scholar who encourages readers to freely associate, to make their own connections, their own meanings. Fortunately, in addition to good writing teachers, I have students and fans to thank for helping me keep the language of my own scholarship as grounded as possible, my research relevant to the lives of as many people as possible. These are the consequences of scholar-fandom: the pleasure of reading, the joy of meaning-making.

When the characteristics of fans are mapped onto scholars and the characteristics of scholars are mapped onto fans, transformation can occur. And that transformation can occur in both the heart of an individual enthusiast or academic and the heart of a community of fans or academicians. When fans commit to shared power and knowledge, when they are willing to be changed by the other, when they see that neither is "in charge," authentic education, in a

Palmerian paradigm, is possible. It is then that popular culture and academia will itself enter into a truly reciprocal and beneficial relationship. In other words, truth can be, should be transformational.

"BUT, BUT . . .!": A COMPARISON AND REFUTATION

As Parker Palmer argues, a "gospel epistemology" means that truth is personal, communal, reciprocal, and transformational. Yet some may wonder, is such an epistemology necessary or even possible, especially as it relates to scholar-fandom. A closer look at academia and specifically a consideration of interdisciplinarity may suggest some answers.

In many ways, academic-fans can be compared to interdisciplinary scholars, themselves ever more common yet still somewhat suspicious, liminal figures in academe. The interdisciplinary scholar is one who adheres not to the theories and methodologies of one discipline but to the best theories and methodologies of several disciplines. As such, this rhetorical scholar, a mixed breed, is often viewed by discipline-devoted intellectuals as an academic poacher, the connotation of which remains narrow-minded and negative. Again, in his review of *Neil Young and the Poetics of Energy*, Cotton Seiler calls William Echard's book an example of jumbled methodologies and over-enthusiastic interdisciplinarity (see Chapter Five). Though he objectively and without judgment notes that the musicologist and scholar-fan is "a breed . . . that is determined to put on speaking terms the discourses of formal musical analysis and cultural studies," and praises what Echard accomplishes, Seiler cannot conclude without interposing a *but*, a *however*: "these scholars do not abandon the tools of classification and hermeneutics in which they were trained . . . The quest of musicologists like Echard for the sources and patterns of musical meaning-making is to be applauded, *even* if the results can

show some methodological incoherence or interdisciplinary overexuberance" (emphasis added). It seems that Seiler finds interdisciplinary studies a form of "coloring outside of the lines." Feyerabend might say Echard is simply engaged in intellectual play, finding answers where the typical—trained, obedient—musicologist would not even look. As a self-identified academic-fan, Echard argues from that identity that "rarefied investigations" of music cannot, in and of themselves, ever fully explain what it is rock fans experience in body and soul when exposed to the "lascivious magic" of their beloved music. As a musicologist-fan, then, Echard believes he inhabits a space in between and that this intermediary role suits any research "concerned with questions of perceived expressive intensity and affective response" (3). Echard, the scholar, admits that he needs the fan, insists that the fan needs the scholar. This reciprocal relationship is not unlike the purpose of interdisciplinary studies in the academy: to move beyond narrow perspectives, to admit that our academic faith needs exercising, to acknowledge that we are in some if not many ways blinded by our own points of view and (mis)perceptions.

In "The Blind Men, the Elephant, and the CT Scanner," Robert G. Evans argues that the age-old parable of the sightless gentlemen and the land mammal "suggests that disputes among scholars arise not so much from errors of fact and argument as from differences of perspective—incomplete perceptions, each from a different angle of view, of a more complex reality" (12). To see more clearly, more completely, Evans proposes the analogy of the CT scanner, a device that by joining two-dimensional snapshots from many angles creates a three-dimensional image. Interdisciplinary research is the academy's equivalent of the CT scanner, claims Evans; I contend that scholar-fandom can play a similar role in academe. However, "the normal dynamics of university-based research . . . pull instead toward disciplinary solitudes"

(12) just as scholars may feel pulled toward distant observation rather than intimate engagement with fans, fan-scholars, and scholars' own fannish investments. To be truly interdisciplinary, though, research cannot simply put theories, methods, and experiences from various fields side-by-side; they must be integrated, like the image produced by a scanner. It turns out that academics know quite a bit about how competing points of view can be amalgamated: "The first and most critical step is recognition of mutual interdependence" (14). Those who hold different perspectives must come to see that they *need* the Other, that the Other is, in fact, *me*—the I. In the model of scholar-fandom I voice here, academic-fans recognize, as Echard seems to, that they *need* fans—even or especially the fans within themselves.

In academia, once scholars from various disciplines acknowledge their dependence upon each other, they must then grasp that trying to retell or give even greater detail to their individual, disciplinary perspective(s) is "generally futile, if not actively counterproductive" (Evans 15). This act of listening rather than speaking rings especially true for academic-fans who should listen to fan-academics. In turn, fan-academics should listen to academic-fans. Instead of trying to be heard, each must seek the necessary ingredients for learning to hear and understand a different viewpoint than one currently holds, ingredients such as time, respect, kindness, and patience. In more clichéd terms, each must walk in the shoes of the other: "You have to get inside the other's way of thinking and identify the basic assumptions, typically so basic as to be unspoken. But it can work if all involved want it to" (15). According to Evans, the "wanting to" in academia often requires incentives or rewards to motivate scholars or researchers to work across their departmental boundaries. Unfortunately, extrinsic incentives are not always effective and can be scarce. I can safely say there are very few if any

institutionally extended, extrinsic incentives to foster conversation among scholar-fans and fan-scholars. Sometimes, notes Evans, the incentives that are extended discourage rather than promote interdisciplinary communication and research. Though it might be expected otherwise, very few academics actually attempt "to understand another's perspective out of mere intellectual curiosity" (15), the very thing higher education claims to promote. If scholars do not want to talk to, much less understand, the disciplinary frameworks of other scholars, why would they ever want to talk to or understand fans?

Apparently, there is only one real reason that "cross-border" discourse arises: when a scholar—or any person—is faced with a duty or a dilemma that cannot be completed or solved using only the conceptual framework with which he or she has finished a task or resolved a problem in the past (Evans 15). And even then, rewards and punishments can help. Otherwise, insists Evans, there are no good reasons to invest time dialoguing with other departments:

> Those turkeys can't tell a spear from a rope! The proper focus of research should
> be on the shape and size of spears, their mechanical properties, their chemical
> composition. Abstract notions of "elephant-ness," some alleged "emergent
> properties" arising from the combination of insights from different disciplines,
> are too fuzzy and ill-defined to be worth engaging the time of a serious scholar.
> They do not fit into the conceptual categories that we are all particularly adept at
> manipulating, or respond to the research methods in which we are expert and
> others, typically, are not. We have all spent a lot of time and effort acquiring
> certain types of specialized intellectual capital; these tools then dictate the way
> we see the world. (15)

Mostly, though, academics keep their elitism or prejudice behind closed office doors or contained to talk roundabout their own department's water cooler. We are usually too civilized to yell at each other or throw literal punches. Instead, we plunge deeper and deeper into our own fields of study, our own professional organizations and publications. We aspire to publish in high-status journals such as "*Spear: The Journal of Elephantology*, where papers are [reviewed] . . . by 'peers' who share the same narrow focus and pointed convictions" (15-16). Of course, the standards for acceptance to *Spear* are very strict; the reviewers, our peers, are also "the guardians and enforcers of disciplinary conformity. Without them, how can we maintain intellectual rigour, identify excellence and allocate research grants to the right people (people like us)" (16)? In other words, how would we know who we are if we blend our identities, if we engage in Feyerabendian play, and why should we be expected to share our knowledge, our chances at public recognition, and our funding opportunities?

Though Evans may sound like a lone voice crying in the wilderness, he is not. Mark C. Taylor echoes similar ideals in his recent *New York Times* essay "End the University as We Know It." Taylor insists that higher education is the Detroit of formal learning. Based on an assembly-line, mass-production model, U.S. colleges and universities are quickly running themselves into the ground, reproducing students in the images of their professors even as the job market remains saturated and requires skills most graduates do not come away with. Instead of encouraging collaboration, says the Columbia University religion department chair, the academy promotes more and more narrowly focused degrees; students are over-specialized. "If American higher education is to thrive in the 21st century," posits Taylor, "colleges and universities, like Wall Street and Detroit, must be rigorously regulated and completely

restructured. The long process to make higher learning more agile, adaptive and imaginative"

must start with the following first steps:

1. Restructure the curriculum . . . . The division-of-labor model of separate

   departments is obsolete and must be replaced with a curriculum

   structured like a web or complex adaptive network. . . .

2. Abolish permanent departments . . . and create problem-focused

   programs. . . .

3. Increase collaboration among institutions. . . .

4. Transform the traditional dissertation. . . . develop analytic treatments in

   formats from hypertext and Web sites to films and video games. . . .

5. Expand the range of professional options for graduate students. . . . the

   knowledge and skills they will cultivate in the new universities will

   enable them to adapt to a constantly changing world.

6. Impose mandatory retirement and abolish tenure. . . . Tenure should be

   replaced with seven-year contracts, which, like the programs in which

   faculty teach, can be terminated or renewed. . . .

With over four hundred comments that represent a wide range of responses to his proposal—

some laudatory, many critical, a few hostile—academics are clearly debating the hypothetical

outcomes of Taylor's vision.[79]

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[79] Ironically and apparently unbeknownst to those who posted comments, the respondents engage in the very type of conversation Taylor calls for: interdisciplinary dialoguing and collaborating to solve a problem. Parker Palmer might cite this online exchange as an example of the communal nature of truth.

Several months later, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* featured "The Canon of College Majors Persists Amid Calls for Change," a piece that responds to and elaborates on Taylor's position. Writers David Glenn and Karin Fischer remind readers that the terms *major* and *minor* are fairly new to academia, supposedly being used for the first time in a Johns Hopkins University course catalog in 1877 (A1). In other words, the concept of undergraduate degrees that for the first two years focus on general education before turning in the final two years to specialized courses is a "modern" invention. While there are some exceptions—e.g. interdisciplinary degrees such as women's studies, American studies, and environmental science—"the top 10 bachelor's-level fields of study in 2006-7 were the same as those of 1980-81, albeit in a different order" (A1). Glenn and Fischer note that "Taylor is not the only prophet of radical curricular change": among Evans and Taylor is found Robert M. Zemsky, chair of the Learning Alliance for Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Zemsky promotes a progression that would include, like some European Union models, a three-year undergraduate stint combined with a one- to two-year master's degree. In this plan, intense specialization would take place at the master's level and at every level the curriculum would be structured about a particular problem or challenge—natural resources, global healthcare, and the like.

Based on responses to both Taylor's *New York Times* piece and Glenn and Fischer's article in *The Chronicle*, it seems there are many more dissidents than adherents for an interdisciplinary, problem-based shift in the curriculum of higher education. James C. Garland, a former president of Ohio's Miami University, argues that just because a major's title has not changed does not mean that the major itself has not experienced significant transformation (Glenn and Fischer A8). For example, the English major of today is not the English major of fifty

or one hundred years ago. In the literature track, the canon is no longer dominated by the West or by male authors. In the composition and rhetoric track, pedagogies have moved from a current-traditional approach to more rhetorical, narrative, and feminist approaches, among others. From Garland's perspective, then, departments have adapted and will continue to adapt from within. The more radical models seem to ignore that each major has "core concepts [that] take years to master," insists Garland. The smorgasbord sampling of a cross-disciplinary education is simply too shallow for Garland's tastes. Also, Taylor's suggestions for how to handle tenure and promotion in this novel paradigm would likely create fear, panic, and exhaustion among faculty. After all, one's position would be reevaluated every seven years, so a sense of job security might seem elusive. And James D. Duderstadt, a past president of and current professor at the University of Michigan, echoes and validates Evans' contention that strong incentives are still in place to keep disciplinary blinders intact: "Promotion policy isn't aligned with [interdisciplinary] work." Duderstadt also admits that "because people are stovepiped by their disciplines, its' hard to get a dialogue going" (qtd. in Glenn and Fischer A8). So while many academics are sure that radical changes will never occur, others continue to prophesy. Coupled with the current financial crisis in America and American higher education, the increase in knowledge and availability of information may itself force change. As Susan Albertine of the Association of American Colleges and Universities notes, "it's not wise to think that you can just package [this explosion of new information] and hand it to students. They've got to be able to navigate on their own through an incredibly rich landscape of knowledge" (qtd. in Glenn and Fischer A8). Education remains essential, but that education must also be relevant to students and ultimately to society.

If nothing else, scholars such as Evans, Taylor, and Zemsky are creating a conversation

in which all of academia must participate because there is no denying that while changes can

occur within disciplines and departments, those changes occur much slower than information

and local, societal, and global challenges assail us. Even more than contributing to this

conversation, participants need to listen to each other; true dialogue assumes that speakers are

not talking all at once. Whether academia admits it or not, the disconnected system of

knowledge and meaning-making that the Evanses, Taylors, and Zemskys are concerned about

is very likely slipping away as I type these very words. Just as the CT scanner arose out of a

demand for clearer and more detailed pictures of the body, so more interdisciplinary research

may arise out of a demand for clearer and more detailed pictures of life. The problem is that

while engineers daily work toward producing even more precise, three-dimensional imaging

machines, scholars rarely work toward fostering even more integrated learning. As an

economist, Evans confesses that academic specialization and exclusivity "looks [to him] like

product differentiation and barriers to entry. These behaviours seem to be as effective

competitive strategies in the market for ideas as they are in commodity markets" (18). For an

institution that vehemently resists the metaphor of higher education as a business—where

students are customers and teachers are costumer service representatives—academia does little,

it seems, to behave in ways that support the unspoken tenets foundational to an undergraduate

and/or graduate education, namely free inquiry and critical curiosity. Academic career

advancement sometimes appears more important than intellectual inquisitiveness and authentic

learning. In other words, the student eventually becomes the narrowly-trained, narrow-minded

scholar instead of the renaissance learner, the *homo universalis*, the polymath; as a result, the world experiences a great loss.

Fan-scholars and scholar-fans are positioned to be the "interdisciplinarians" of their discourse communities, if they will only embrace that role. More than their polarized peers, they have the distinct possibility to see the value of fans, academics, and their hybrids as well as the value of popular and academic cultures. Fan-scholardom and scholar-fandom could change both cultures: they could renovate the academy by tearing down dividing walls while maintaining its "rigor," and they could make over fandom by stripping away its defensive veneer while preserving its Feyerabendian playfulness. Fan-scholardom and scholar-fandom could transform the way academics write and fans read and ultimately transform the way we all live.

CONCLUSION

Slowly but steadily, scholar-fandom can act as one of many catalyzing agents for change in the academy, opening it up, blurring the lines between "academic elite" and "Everyperson." The scholar who studies the object of his or her fandom does not act alone in this demolition and reconstruction effort, though. The walls that run the circumference of academia are crumbling as all types of information are made more and more public and accessible, especially via the internet. From my stance as a participant in both worlds—an academic and a fan—the academy stands to lose much of its audiences if it refuses to listen and to respond enthusiastically to the changes that are already in motion. Academia can horde its knowledge or can participate in and even influence the democratization of knowledge. As *Wikipedia* and *Citizendium* founder Lawrence Sanger argues, experts are still needed. In fact, they may be

needed now more than ever as information increases while the skills needed to decipher, sort, and choose reliable information declines. Admittedly, those of us who teach may be fearful, even at an unconscious level, that we will work ourselves out of careers, out of particular jobs if we agree to "let down the gate" between the Ivory Tower and Main Street. Yet what good is the "expert" if he or she is completely removed from the public and unwilling to learn from others as well as invite others into learning? If that happens, if academia cloisters itself rather than fully engaging with popular culture, education will again become a goal for or simply an expectation of only the most privileged in our society. The ideals of democracy demand otherwise: education must be for everyone. That ideal is one reason why the research and writing of most fan-scholars and scholar-fans remains so accessible to a broad audience and may even explain why such academic anthologies that consider popular culture texts move to publication so quickly: being engaging and readily available, such collections and their authors bring deeper meaning, more thoughtful and critically composed meaning to the artifacts of our everyday lives.

Chapter Seven

EPILOGUE: SCHOLARLY HYBRIDITY, A BALM AND TINCTURE

"The starting point of critical elaboration
is the consciousness of what one really is,
and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of
the historical process to date which has
deposited in you an infinity of traces,
without leaving an inventory. The first
thing to do is to make such an inventory."
---Antonio Gramsci,
Selections from the Prison Notebooks

"In the ethics of strangers . . . respect for rules
is all, and the opportunities for discretion are
few . . . in the ethics of intimacy, discretion is all,
and the relevance of strict rules is minimal."
---Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*

I am here at the end, yet I sense that this is only another beginning, even as I write and refine this epilogue, the final act before the curtain closes on my doctoral performance. I take my bow with the above epigraphs in my ear and in my mind's eye—knowing myself a little better, despite and because of the academy, and in the preceding pages sharing the story of how I came to the spot on this, life's stage. It is a story that clings to and pulls away from my discipline and its genres, that praises and chastises academia, that accepts and questions the private and the public Self. It is the story of a *whole* person with reasons and emotions, an objective and subjective pose, a story that will continue to say what it, what she has to say.

I am a hybrid—an academic and a fan, a scholar and Christian. I am body and soul and mind. I am objectivity and subjectivity, distance and proximity, reason and emotion, reserve and intimacy. I am an inventory of stories. And this text is my declaration of liminality and independence.

I am Shadowland. I am Discretion and Freedom from "strict rules" (Bauman 116).

I am Wonder, the truth spoken in love.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

It was years ago now, early one summer. I was rummaging through a very large basket of reading material in some friends' guest bathroom. I dug up health magazines, women's magazines, backpacking magazines, and then I ran across an issue of *Spectrum*. *Spectrum*, published by the Association of Adventist Forums, is more like an academic journal than a magazine. With the goal of a stronger, healthier church body, it features articles that encourage critical thought and open communication about issues related to the denomination I belong to. An article title drew my attention: "Are We Guardians of Truth or Seekers of Truth?" Then I recognized my own colleague's name in the byline. In the essay, Chris Blake suggests, "Guardians serve God and fear him. Seekers serve God and enjoy him. Guardians talk of historic truths. Seekers live out present truth. . . . Guardians interpret literally. Seekers recognize irony, audience, symbolism, and context" (28). When I finished reading, I felt challenged to consider truth from a slightly different perspective than I had before. As the binary of guardians versus seekers continued to tug on my brain's sleeve throughout the summer, I began shaping my own question, one based on my intellectual and spiritual journey: What does it mean to "speak the truth in love" (*New American Standard Bible*, Eph. 4.15)? Little to do with guarding and much to do with seeking—with wonder—I have decided.

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I am the oldest of two children—daughters. To be exact, I am three years and nine months older than my sister Cynthia. Even before she came along, though, I displayed the

characteristics of a first born: I wanted to be other children's superior, a desire that sometimes culminated in biting and pinching them to bring them into submission; I wanted to be right; I wanted to be in control; and I wanted to be noticed and included by adults. By the time Cynthia was born, I was well-prepared to be the big sister I wouldn't wish on an enemy. While my birth order manifested itself in many ugly ways as we grew up, I recall a particular time in college when I insisted on guarding instead of seeking.

I don't remember the context, but I do remember Cynthia being in my dorm room and making the statement "I have something to show you." I think she was testing me to see if I was still the preachy and condescending sister I'd been for many years. "I have something to show you," she said. Of course, she wasn't *just* testing me because she was also wearing a mischievous grin. My first thought was, *What now?* She had certainly been making the most of her new-found, college freedoms. I turned to face her as she slipped her hand under her shirt and gradually unveiled her belly button. Light deflected from a shiny object looped through the skin capping her "innie." I suspect that my lips were beginning to purse and my eyebrows were beginning to furrow: a navel ring! While this piece of jewelry may be common in many circles, it was not in ours; we had been raised to avoid excessive "adornment," including the most traditional of choices—earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. A navel ring was more than a rebellious choice. Without thinking, I scolded, "Don't you know that your body is the temple of God!?" I failed the test that quickly. Cynthia rolled her eyes and turned red hot with anger—and probably hurt. "I figured you'd say that," she responded as she whipped around and let herself out.

I didn't realize it then, but as I stood there in my dorm room, seething with what I arrogantly interpreted as righteous indignation, something was moving in on me, on my heart and my mind. The being I call God communicated with me that day, inaudible words that I thought just complicated matters: "March yourself down to your sister's room and apologize." The words sounded like my mother's, the voice like mine.

"But—," I said in my thoughts.

"But—nothing."

"But—"

"Go! . . . Now!"

"Now" turned into an hour or more because I had to get over my pride and get up my courage before I yielded. I may or may not have spoken "the truth" to my sister that day, but either way I certainly didn't come close to speaking in love. I was guarding, not seeking or wondering.

Later when I knocked on Cynthia's door and said "I'm sorry," I felt my heart fleshing out and my relationship with my sister suturing itself back together. Since then, I have been more aware of being on an uncertain, often grueling but persistent journey that seeks, that wonders. Not w-*a*-n-d-e-r: to move without destination or purpose. W-*o*-n-d-e-r: to desire more, to be curious, even to speculate and doubt. "Wisdom," declares Socrates, "begins in wonder."

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Ironically or maybe appropriately, my sister first steered me in the direction of intellectual and spiritual wondering. I was in graduate school working on my master's degree when I realized that Cynthia was *polluting* her mind with *The X-Files*. To me, her choice to watch

such a *satanic* television show was the result of her *unsanctified* relationship with a *heathen*

boyfriend. (As one can see, I did not learn to wonder overnight. Nor did my judgmental

vocabulary fade quickly.) And I let her know how I felt. There was more eye-rolling when she

challenged me: "What do you know about it? Have you watched it? No!" She was right; I

hadn't watched it. Eventually, though, I did watch, with the express purpose of gathering

ammunition for return fire.

Created by Chris Carter, *The X-Files* has been called one of the greatest cult TV shows of

the century, only second to *Star Trek*. Over nine seasons that ran from 1993 to 2002, the series

follows the work of FBI agents Fox Mulder, a believer in the paranormal, and Dana Scully, a

medical doctor and skeptic. By investigating unconventional unsolved cases, Mulder hopes to

expose what he believes is a government conspiracy to conceal the existence of aliens. Scully's

superiors assign her to the X-Files specifically to act as a check on Mulder; she is to debunk his

work.

Understanding that I come from a parochial background, one might be able to imagine

that I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt when my quest for justification turned into a

fascination with *The X-Files*. About the time as this new viewing habit developed, I cracked

William Covino's *The Art of Wondering*, required reading for Modern Rhetorical Theory. My

marginal notes demonstrate that I could not help but make connections between Covino's

argument that scholars should recapture a sense of wonder and the wonderings of Dana Scully

and Fox Mulder. With slogans such as "Trust No One," "I Want to Believe," and "The Truth Is

Out There" that begged to be explored from both academic and spiritual angles, how could I

not study the series? So I did study it. In fact, the female audience of *The X-Files* became the

topic of my master's thesis, my first formal fore into fandom. As I chronicle in the prologue,

soon after *The X-Files*, *Buffy* and later other Whedon texts became a central focus of my fandom

and scholarship.

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Throughout the seventh season of *Buffy*, the story arc's villain The First, the primeval

evil—claims that its war with the Slayer is about power. And because it cannot incarnate, the

power is mostly about language. Language is literally power. I agree now that language is

power, that is has meaning. When I was in my master's program, though, I had very different

feelings. For the first time in my life, I was introduced to post-structuralist thought. In

Introduction to Literary Criticism, I collided headlong with theorists Jacques Derrida, Julia

Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, among many others. And at that time what I

understood from them was that language is not stable. It slips. It slips because it is symbolic,

and a symbol can never fully represent reality; *it* is not the thing itself. My name is Tanya, but

the letters *t-a-n-y-a* and the sounds that those letters make are not me. Slippage happens. It

simply *is*. And in its wake ripples miscommunication, misinterpretation, and

misunderstanding. Suddenly and forcefully, I experienced an intellectual crisis and then I

settled into a depression when I came to believe that language is meaningless, that life is chaotic

and random. And if language had no meaning, to me, neither did being.

Unfortunately, my undergraduate experience did not prepare me well and possibly

could not have prepared me for such a crisis. I felt alone and betrayed by my religious

education. Still, I had a choice to make. I could embrace my depression and descend into

nihilism, believe in nothing. I could ignore the post-structuralists and pretend I had not heard a

word they say. Or I could turn my crisis of faith into a search for faith. I could practice the art of wondering. So I did. I wondered about post-structuralism. I wondered about *The X-Files*. I wondered about God. I wondered about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and then *Buffy*'s spin-off *Angel* and then fandom and then how fans are a lot like Christians and then how God might work through television and film and then why I am drawn to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* so much and then why I am drawn to Jesus so much and then how, in a bizarre and roundabout way, *Buffy* has made me a better believer and then how I have learned more about what it means to "speak the truth in love." Some of my wonderings have followed paths into writing centers. Some into literature. Some into popular culture. Some into theology. Some into linguistics. But the point is this: I am wedded to the pursuit. My deepest desire is to stay on this journey of wonder.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Wonder has many antonyms, including *knowledge*. That contrast tells me that if I let myself believe I have reached full knowledge of anything or anyone, I have lost a sense of wonder and may (un)wittingly consider myself a god. According to the beliefs I still hold—both religious and academic—that will never be my role. As a result, I choose to identify as a disciple or devotee of wonder, a true and whole learner.

To arrive at this realization, to look back and see the changes that have come about in who I am and how I understand being, has had its own transformative power. Specifically, coming to understand myself as a wonderer and perpetual student has changed the way I teach and, in turn, has changed—if ever so slightly—the students who find themselves sharing a classroom with me. For me, scholar-fandom has little to do with lesson plans or course

assignments. Scholar-fandom has everything to do with a state of being—a way of researching, writing, and teaching. It is a way of knowing.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

A particular wondering path I have been on for about eight or more years now is the path that began for me with John 1.1—"In the beginning was the Word . . ."—and currently rests at Ephesians 4.15—"speak the truth in love" (*New American Standard Bible*). Part of my journey has involved embracing ambiguity, abiding the fact that we are always already limited by language because it is symbolic; a word is never in itself what it represents. My own faith community, though we do not always act in accordance with the statement, acknowledges this reality:

> Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs . . . constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to *a fuller understanding of Bible truth* or *finds better language* in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word. (Seventh-day Adventist Church, emphasis added)

Officially, Adventists recognize that human language most often if not always misses the mark. I agree; it does. Yet wondering recursively leads me back here: "In the beginning was the Word . . ." (John 1.1). In the beginning was the divine language. In the beginning was *Logos*.

Logos, from Greek, is translated not only "word" but also "dialogue," "logic," and "the power of reason." To me, then, the on-going debate between faith and reason, subjectivity and

objectivity, fandom and scholardom is muffled. Whether understood as an historical figure or as a mythological hero, everything converges in the divine-human Jesus, who is described as both type and anti-type, symbol and reality; he is simultaneously word and action, the word made flesh; he *is* "the truth spoken in love." Speaking the truth in love is more often than not *being* rather than talking, for "this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers [and sisters]" (*New American Standard Bible*, I John 3.16). Jesus, hybridity embodied.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

I appreciate this seemingly inconspicuous description of a crowd's response to the man from Nazareth in Mark 9.15: "As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him" (*New American Standard Bible*). *Wonder*, a state in which one wants to learn more about something. The people are amazed by this person, curious about him. They want to know more. *I* want to know more even as I believe that Jesus, as God, is infinite. And because he is infinite, he cannot be fully known. To know more is to know that knowing never ends. To know is to seek, to wonder about him, to wonder of him. *Who are you?* "I am the Way." *Who?* "I am the Truth." *Who?* "I am the Life." *Who?* "Rock . . . Water . . . Lion . . . Lamb . . . Lover." This seeking, this wondering is a conversation, a dialogue with truth and love embodied. There is no monologue. Monologues lead to guardianships. Dialogues, however, lead to searches, to journeys, to paths of wonder.

Years ago when I was swallowed by intellectual crisis and depression, I could have chosen any one of many paths. But if I had chosen any other journey but the journey of wonder,

I may not have ended up here at this moment because wonder gives birth to ever-increasing

wisdom.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

In its mission statement, the institution that now employs me claims to be "inspired by

faith." *Inspire*, in its archaic meaning, is both to breathe and to breathe upon or into. The very

breath of the institution, then, is faith. By being here at this school, I and my colleagues and the

students we learn with have all agreed to that claim. Saying we agree, though, does not make

the claim true. Only living it does. Academia is no different: "Faith is the ultimate glue within

academic argument," even if it "is typically disavowed and ignored in favour of the imagined

subjectivity of the rational academic" (Hills 4). No (more) pretending for me; I will keep the

faith*s*.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

In the pages of this dissertation, other than using strategies and methods that seem to

me always already multidisciplinary—rhetorical analysis, autoethnography, and narrative

inquiry—I have intentionally abandoned the usual approaches to research promoted by English

departments. I have chosen instead to wonder, to open myself and my inquiry to any

trustworthy support and to all forms of knowledge that could give me a deeper understanding

and appreciation of my own as well as others' experiences. I do not regret having made this

choice, for I come to the end of this doctoral portion of my education having had to work much

harder and listen more widely and speak more clearly because I have chosen the "road less

traveled." I believe that path of *more* rather than less resistance has and will continue to make

me a more empathetic listener, a stronger woman, a more devoted believer, a better teacher,

and a more just global citizen. This text, though just the first stone in a long path I will lay through the labyrinthine garden of knowledge and meaning, is a declaration of personal independence.

My career has yet to be and hopefully will never be solely about publishing in leading disciplinary journals "where methodologies are rigorous, highly technical and difficult for outsiders to understand, rather than in broad-based and widely accessible journals" (Evans 17). I have yet and hope never to intentionally participate in the half-joke "that the prestige of a paper is inversely proportional to the number of people who will (or can) read it" (17). I have been and will continue to be satisfied with the unclear, overgrown, wonder-filled path of the hybrid scholar, the academic who just doesn't quite fit on a departmental track. And I choose this path for myself, for the students I teach, for the array of those who find themselves on the fan and scholar continuum or any other continuum. I am happy to go first and invite others to at times follow and at times take the lead. It is a path marked not by particular assignments or lesson plans or disputes at fan conventions or academic conferences but marked by the fullness of being, one taken by a whole not a fractured person.

Innately driven to create meaning, to find patterns; compelled to seek experiences, to overcome challenges, to be competent and successful, to maintain autonomy, and to live in relationship with others; determined to both create and resolve my own cognitive dissonance, I claim the redundant (or necessarily repetitive) title *scholar-fan* as an act of respectful defiance against "the way things are" in the Ivory Tower. I call myself a *scholar-fan*, believing that the word, the identity, the discourse, and the epistemology—the rhetoric(s) of scholar-fandom—act as a balm and a tincture of change.

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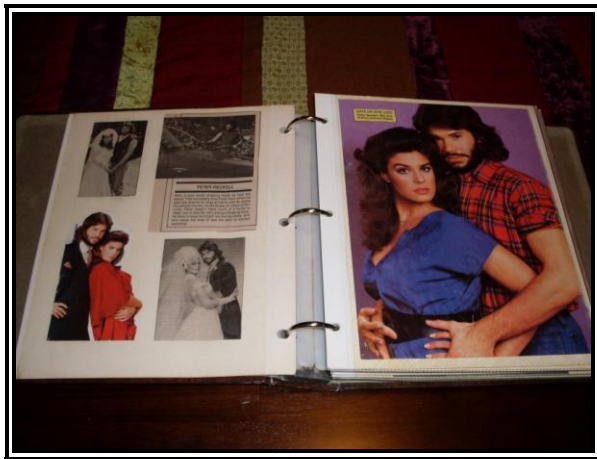
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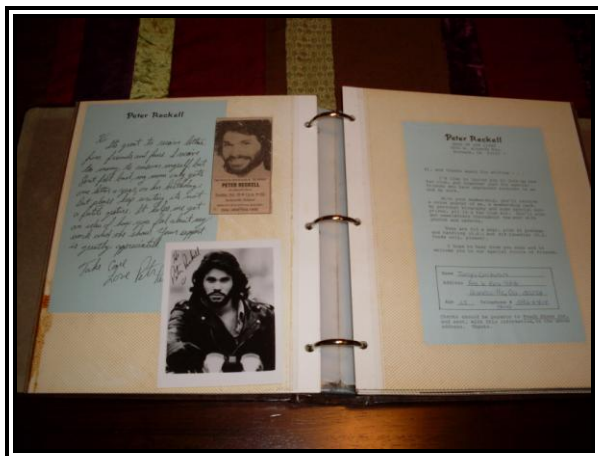
2009.

Appendix A

Below are images of pages from my *Days of Our Lives* scrapbook, including autographed

pictures I received in response to my handwritten fan letters. I was around age 12 at the time.
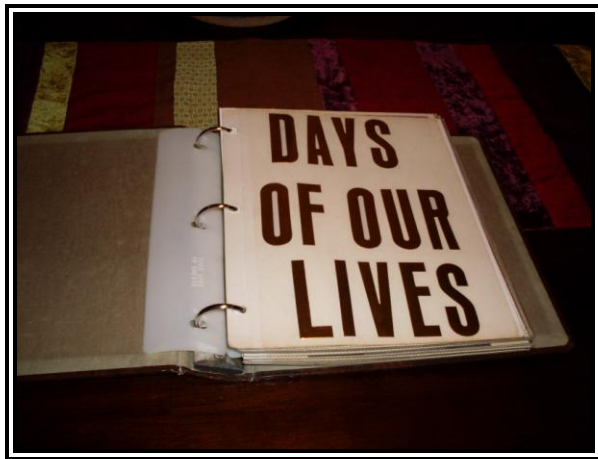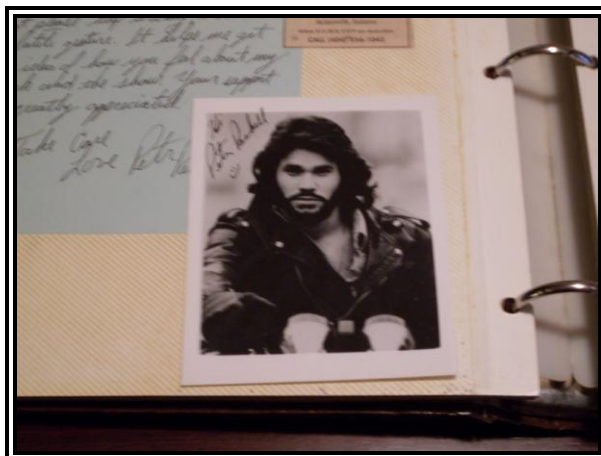

Opening page of the album.

Magazine and newspaper clippings of Hope and Bo, played by Kristian Alfonso and Peter Reckell.


Note from Peter Reckell thanking me for my letter and inviting me to become an official member of his fan club.

Autographed portrait of Peter Reckell.

Appendix B

The following emblem can be viewed on the remaining *X-Files* University website. The

phrase "Veritas Est Ibi Foris" is the Latin translation for one of the television series' slogans:

"The truth is out there." The seal is but one example of what Fussell cites as the imitation of

academia.
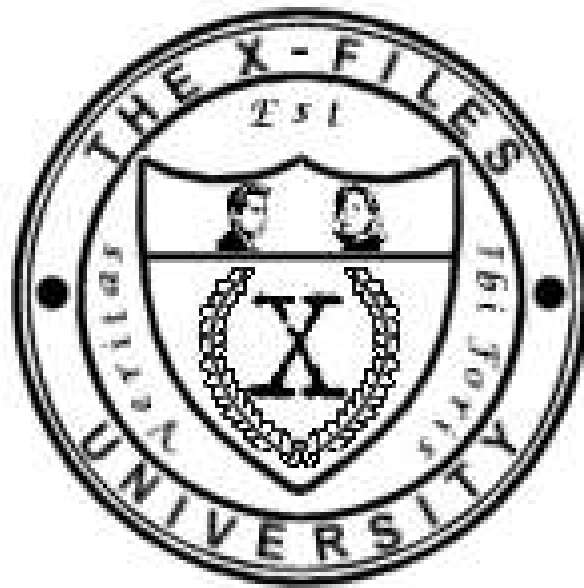
Appendix C

Following is the original call for essays posted by Rhonda Wilcox on March 17, 2000, to

the University of Pennsylvania's archive of CFPs:

CFP: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (collection; 4/21/00)

Fighting the Forces: Essays on the Meaning of Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Rhonda Wilcox and David Lavery solicit your ideas, abstracts, or

completed essays for an in-development book on Buffy the Vampire Slayer. The

series is the intersection of many contending forces—gender, generation, culture,

and more. Buffy's complex and ambivalent heroism is central to a series which is

itself complex both thematically and structurally. From its language to its

narrative arcs, from single characters to social cohorts, from pop culture allusions

to foreshadowings of Columbine, Buffy constitutes a text worthy of study and

appreciation. Possible topics range from allusions and ancillary texts to

vampires, women in production, and Xander. Please see our website at

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~dlavery/buffybook.html or contact us by email>:

Rhonda Wilcox
Humanities
Gordon College
Barnesville, GA 30204
rhonda_w@falcon.gdn.peachnet.edu

David Lavery
English Dept.
P.O. Box 70
Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
dlavery@frank.mtsu.edu

Appendix D

David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox's idea for an online *Buffy* journal was born out of the

one hundred or so rejection letters they found themselves having to send while gathering essays

for their collection *Fighting the Forces*. It was in this form letter that *Slayage* was first made

public. With Lavery and Wilcox's permission, the text of their regrets is cited here:

> 19 May 2000
>
> Rhonda Wilcox and I have now finished examining over one hundred
> and twenty proposals for FIGHTING THE FORCES: ESSAYS ON THE
> MEANING OF BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER[80] and have selected the finalists
> for the book. We are sorry to inform you that your proposal was not one of them.
>
> We both want to thank you for your interest in our project. The
> overwhelming response to the call for papers for FIGHTING THE FORCES has,
> however, inspired a spin-off.
>
> We are contemplating starting an electronic [*Buffy*] journal, similar to
> WHOOSH, the online XENA journal. It will be called SLAYAGE and will be
> edited by Rhonda and me. The journal will be refereed by an editorial board now
> in development. Each submission will be read by at least two critics, and, if
> found worthy, published on the web. The website for SLAYAGE can be found
> here: <http://www.mtsu.edu/~dlavery/slayage.html>.[81]
>
> Please feel free to resubmit your finished essays to SLAYAGE.

---

[80] Note that the final title of the collection is *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2002).

[81] Today, the site is located at <http://slayageonline.com>.

Unless we hear an objection from you, we will keep your name on a

mailing list and inform you of further developments as we find a publisher for

FIGHTING THE FORCES.

David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox

Appendix E

Following in chronological order are contributions I have made to the study of Whedon's texts and to the longevity of the Whedon scholar-fan community.

PUBLICATIONS

Cochran, Tanya R. Review of *Slayage: The Journal of Whedon Studies Association*. *FEMSPEC* 6.2
    (2005). Print.

---, and Rhonda V. Wilcox, eds. *Investigating* Firefly *and* Serenity*: Science Fiction on the Frontier*.
    New York: Tauris, 2008. Print.

---, and Rhonda V. Wilcox. "A New Frontier: Whedon Studies and *Firefly/Serenity*."
    Introduction. *Slayage: The Journal of Whedon Studies Association* 7.1 (Feb. 2008): n. pag.
    Web.

---. "The Browncoats Are Coming!: *Firefly*, *Serenity*, and Fan Activism." *Investigating* Firefly *and*
    Serenity*: Science Fiction on the Frontier*. Eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran.
    New York: Tauris, 2008. 239-49. Print.

---, and Jason A. Edwards. "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Quest Story: Revising the Hero,
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    Millennium. New York: Peter Lang, 2008. 134-69. Print.

---. "Complicating the Open Closet: The Visual Rhetoric of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Sapphic
    Lovers." *Televising Queer Women*. Ed. Rebecca Beirne. New York: Palgrave, 2008. 49-63.
    Print.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"'New Moon Rising' . . . or Falling?: The Fate of Sapphic Love on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*."

Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association in the South. Nashville,

TN, October 2000. Conference Presentation.

"Raising the Stake: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Death of Feminism." Conference of the

Popular and American Culture Association. Philadelphia, PA, April 2001. Conference

Presentation.

"'New Moon Rising' . . . or Falling?: The Fate of Sapphic Love on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—The

Sequel." Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association. New Orleans,

LA, April 2003. Conference Presentation.

"Saved by the Blood: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the Chronicles of Narnia, and the Rhetoric of

Christian Criticism." Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association in

the South. Atlantic Beach, FL, September 2003. Conference Presentation.

"Slaying Pupils, Siring Students: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the Composition Classroom."

Interdisciplinary Conference for Teachers of Undergraduates. Barnesville, GA, March

2004. Conference Presentation.

"Borrowing Her Body, Wearing Her Ways: The Rhetoric of Faith as Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire*

Slayer's 'This Year's Girl' and 'Who Are You?'" Conference of the Popular and American

Culture Association. San Antonio, TX, April 2004. Conference Presentation.

"Your Own Personal Savior . . . I Mean, Slayer: *Buffy* and Religion, *Buffy* as Religion." The

Slayage Conference on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Nashville, TN, May 2004. Conference

Presentation.

"Whedonism, or How Quickly Fan Rhetoric Gets Religious." New Voices Graduate Conference on Language, Literature, and Discourse Studies. Georgia State University. Atlanta, GA, September 2004. Conference Presentation.

"Saving *Angel*: A Case Study of the Evangelistic Rhetoric of Fans." Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association in the South. New Orleans, LA, September 2004. Conference Presentation.

"Constructing the Television Canon, or In Defense of *Firefly*." With Wendy Campbell. Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association. San Diego, CA, March 2005. Conference Presentation.

"Complicating the Open Closet: Vito Russo and the Visual Rhetoric of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Sapphic Lovers." Conference of the Northeast Modern Language Association. Boston, MA, March 2005. Conference Presentation.

"*Firefly* and *Serenity*'s Inara Serra, or a 'Good Woman' Speaking Well: Feminist Rhetoric in the 'Verse." Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association. Atlanta, GA, April 2006. Conference Presentation.

"'There's "woo" and, and "hoo." And . . . it's complicated': Cross-Media Images and *Buffy*'s Sapphic Lovers." The *Slayage* Conference on the Whedonverse. Gordon College. Barnesville, GA, May 2006. Conference Presentation.

"Fan Filkers and Documentarists: Reading *Firefly* and *Serenity*'s Browncoats." Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association. Boston, MA, April 2007. Conference Presentation.

"'And That Makes Us Mighty': Joss Whedon, His Fans, and the Rhetoric of Activism."

Conference of the Popular and American Culture Association. San Francisco, CA, March

2008. Conference Presentation.

"'What's Love [for *Buffy*] Got to Do with It?': Professor Passion and Student Self-Rule in the

College Classroom." The *Slayage* Conference on the Whedonverse. Henderson State

University. Arkadelphia, AR, June 2008. Conference Presentation.

LECTURES

"Fandom, Scholarship, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s 'Restless.'" Liberal Arts Seminar. Wesleyan

University. Lincoln, NE, Fall 2006. Lecture.

"*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Monomyth." Liberal Arts Seminar. Wesleyan University.

Lincoln, NE, Fall 2007, 2008, and 2009. Lecture.

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Panel Chair, "Science Fiction/Fantasy IV: Joss Whedon's Universe," Conference of the

Popular/American Culture Association, San Antonio, TX, April 2004.

Panel Chair, "Consumption," The *Slayage* Conference on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Nashville,

TN, May 2004.

Panel Organizer, "Constructing the Television Canon, or In Defense of *Firefly*," Conference

of the National Popular/American Culture Association, San Diego, CA, March 2005.

Editorial Board Member, *Watcher Junior: An Undergraduate Journal of* Buffy *Studies*, March 2005-

present.

Panel Chair, "*Firefly* and *Serenity*," Conference of the Popular/American Culture Association,

Atlanta, GA, March 2006.

Founding Board Member, The Whedon Studies Association, October 2008.

Editorial Board Member, *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association*, November 2008-

   present.

Secretary-Treasurer, The Whedon Studies Association, December 2008-present.

Appendix F

The following announcement and explanation appears in the *Slayage* 7.3 (Winter 2009) and can

be retrieved at <http://slayageonline.com/WSA.htm>:

The Whedon Studies Association

[1] The Dickens Society, the Wordsworth-Coleridge Association, the Flannery

O'Connor Society—for generations, scholars have been banding together to

support each other in the study of admired works of important creators. We are

using the first 2009 issue of this journal to announce the official formation of the

Whedon Studies Association, a non-profit organization devoted to the study of

the works of Joss Whedon and his associates.

[2] The word "official" is purposefully chosen. In an informal sense, there has

been an "association" of Whedon scholars since October of 2002, when

University of East Anglia at Norwich professors Carol O'Sullivan, Claire

Thomson, Catherine Fuller, and Scott MacKenzie hosted over 200 scholars for the

first international conference on Joss Whedon, focusing on his first and most

famous television show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Since then, scholars have

gathered at places as far-flung as Adelaide, Australia (convener Geraldine

Bloustien), Istanbul, Turkey (convener Tuna Erdem), and Nashville, Tennessee

(convener David Lavery and coconvener Rhonda Wilcox). The latter was the

location of the first of the biennial *Slayage* conferences, the regular meetings of

which have supported the extensive growth of Whedon scholarship. Whedon

scholarship now includes the publication of a journal (once specifically on *BtVS*,

but now open to submission on any Whedon-associated work); multiple scholarly books in any given year; articles published in a variety of scholarly venues; annual awards for the best work in the field; dissertations and theses by Ph.D.'s, M.A.'s, and honors undergraduates; a comprehensive bibliography of books, articles, and conference papers in the field (maintained by Alysa Hornick), and more. It seems only appropriate that this very active scholarship should be supported by an official association, and during the course of 2008, Tanya Cochran, David Lavery, and Rhonda Wilcox took the steps to legally establish the Whedon Studies Association.

[3] It is our hope that this organization will further the study of the work of Whedon and his associates long after the current generation of scholars is active. As a peer-reviewed journal, the *Slayage* journal—now officially the Whedon Studies Association journal—is a complex and challenging enterprise; David Lavery, who originally conceived it, and Rhonda Wilcox, the other founding editor, hope to see it continue after their eventual retirement. It should also be noted that the establishment of this non-profit organization will facilitate the literal "association," the gathering, of Whedon scholars. While the WSA still plans to arrange conferences in connection with sponsoring universities, the establishment of the WSA as a legal entity will give greater independence of decision-making, particularly in terms of choice of location (e.g., the WSA hopes to return the next conference to a hotel setting).

[4] We invite all Whedon scholars, whether writers or readers, to join the organization. Please send your name and email address to the WSA's secretary/treasurer Tanya Cochran at wsamembers@gmail.com. (Please send in your name even if you have been previously associated with the *Slayage* conference or other related scholarly endeavors.) Those who enroll in the WSA will receive first notice of new issues of the journal; information about upcoming conferences; shared calls for papers for upcoming books; announcements of association meetings; and more. In terms of the organization's finances (and, as Buffy discovered in season seven, there are indeed costs for simply existing), the WSA proposes to operate in a fashion somewhat similar to NPR (the U.S.'s National Public Radio). For anyone who can provide monetary assistance, $25.00 is the suggested contribution for those who are employed full-time; $10.00 is the suggested contribution for those employed less than full-time (presumably most students). However, we invite all devotees of Whedon scholarship to join the association, with or without financial contribution. We propose to call those who join in the first year "charter associates." We hope for hundreds of WSA scholars to gather face to face at the next *Slayage*/WSA conference in 2010.

---Rhonda V. Wilcox