

“That Girl Hated Me. ... I Matter!”: A Roundtable Discussion in Defense of “Hated” Characters in the Whedonverses

Tamy Burnett

The idea of the anti-fan, first introduced by Johnathan Gray, is someone who expresses a strong dislike of a particular fandom. The anti-fan is as fervent in his/her hatred as a dedicated fan is passionate about his/her love for a particular fandom. Several scholars have expanded upon this idea to explore anti-fan engagements with fan objects/text in more nuanced ways than wholesale love/hate.

In the *Angel* episode “Harm’s Way,” (5.09), Harmony learns an important lesson: that being “hated” can serve as evidence of one’s impact on others—and even of one’s value. This roundtable will explore anti-fandom tendencies in the Whedonverses, through a discussion of “hated” characters—individual characters who are generally disliked—and why they are valuable. Each panelist will defend one such character, and through the discussion, we will explore their value. Each defended character plays a substantial role in his/her narrative world, and each series makes a significant investment in the development of the character(s). To dismiss these characters outright due to an anti-fandom reaction, we suggest, is too simple a reading and may be a misguided response for scholar-fans.

Dan Madsen will defend *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s Riley Finn, arguing that Riley grows from conventional (hyper-) masculinity to a man who can see strong women as partners rather than challenges to his worldview. As such he serves as an example of how men can learn to work against male privilege and be happier because of it.

Hélène Frohard-Dourlent will defend *Buffy*’s Kennedy, arguing that anti-fandom reactions are grounded in Kennedy’s representation as a queer woman who’s assertive and unabashed about her desires, which stands in sharp contrast with the way that the Willow/Tara relationship was made palatable for straight audiences.

Amanda Drake will defend *Dollhouse*’s Echo, arguing that Echo grows beyond her initial characterization as sexual, naïve object, into a living being with multiple, intersecting lives. As such she is a beautifully constructed feminist identity.

Samira Nadkarni will defend *Angel*’s Connor, arguing that his character’s development results from subjection by Jasmine/Cordelia and Angel (albeit in different ways), and that when Connor achieves growth and independence, he is participating in a repeated pattern in the Whedonverses of collating his past and present selves to create a more-fully realized present.

Tamy Burnett will defend *Buffy*’s Dawn, arguing that Dawn’s first year positions her primarily as plot device intended to motivate Buffy. When she serves that narrative purpose and then, in Season Six, fails to grow beyond her initial positioning, anti-fandom sets in, distorting viewer perceptions and obscuring Dawn’s important subsequent contributions to the series.

Following a guided discussion of these characters, the panelists will invite the audience to join the discussion and explore the value of these and other “hated” characters.