

## From *Angel* to *Much Ado*: Cross-Textual Catharsis and Whedonverse Fandom

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“Don’t give people what they want, give them what they need,” media auteur Joss Whedon has famously stated. To fans, his statement is a justification for “ripping our hearts out” by “killing” beloved characters such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s Joyce Summers and *Firefly/Serenity*’s Hoban “Wash” Washburne, among others. Like real life, these losses can be profoundly affective for viewers. Unlike real life, television often provides little or no opportunity for viewers’ healing. For this reason, it is striking that some fans have read *across* two of Whedon’s texts—one an original creation, one an adaptation—to create their own sense of catharsis. In *Angel*, characters Winfred “Fred” Burkle (Amy Acker) and Wesley Wyndam-Pryce (Alexis Denisof) became the object of ardent shipping among fans. However, the lovers—and fans—were fated for heartache. Soon after Fred and Wesley begin to share their feelings for one another, Fred’s body is overtaken by the ancient demon Illyria. While this possession is mystical in nature, it cannot be reversed—neither by science nor by magic. Devotees were devastated. Years later, Whedon cast Acker and Denisof as Beatrice and Benedick in his adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. In the final scene of *Much Ado*, the enemies-turned-lovers share a kiss. Some *Angel* fans responded to this coupling with “Fred and Wesley forever!” They had finally found the resolution long hoped for. In my presentation, I examine this cross-textual cathartic event and explain its significance to an understanding of fandom.