

After the Break:  
Serial Narratives and Fannish Reading

A dissertation  
submitted by  
Anne Moore  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
English  
T U F T S U N I V E R S I T Y  
May 2012

Adviser: Joseph Litvak

Abstract:

Borrowing freely from reception studies, psychoanalysis, narrative theory, and queer theory, *After the Break* presents a model of the engaged serial reader as a fan: one who reads with intense affective investment in both the figure of the author and the narrative world, and does so as part of a community of readers. Each chapter features a Victorian novel and a contemporary serial television show. Juxtaposing these narratives illuminates how their simultaneous status as a series of parts and a coherent whole elicits a set of excessive, “fannish” responses that are shaped by this simultaneity: affection and resentment, desire and satiation, ending and always beginning again. Devoted readers find ways to remain critically engaged with the narratives they love even as they’re inescapably reminded of the myriad ways that these texts will inevitably fail them.

Since the formal and affective excess of the serial is central to my argument as a whole, I begin with an analysis of the connection between the serial’s formal excess and the imaginary relationship between the reader and writer that is established over the serial’s run. I then shift my attention to the narratological issue of textual boundaries, showing how the disrupted and disruptive limits of the serial are impossible to fix, and how this quality lends the serial its uncanny power over readers. In my third chapter, I examine this power more closely, especially focusing on the ways that serials elicit compulsive reading. I end with a coda that considers *Twin Peaks* as an example of the serial’s inevitable failures, and how this “failure” is key to the form’s ability to worm its way into reader’s heads.

### Acknowledgements:

Just as serial interpretation happens among a community, so did the process of writing this dissertation. At times, that process felt endless, and I came to intimately know the desire for closure I refer to so frequently in the following pages. These are the people who helped me to appreciate the journey and had faith that the story of my dissertation would one day end.

First, thanks to my writing group: Carolyn Croissant, Claudia Stumpf, and Cynthia Schoolar Williams read drafts both early and late. Without their help, I would have become bogged down in my unshakable conviction that I can and should say *everything*. If this dissertation is no longer a sprawling, monstrous thing, my readers have these three to thank.

Thanks, too, to my larger community of friends and family who engaged in endless conversations about television, novels and the details of readerly pleasure: Alana Kumbier, Tom Dodson, Ben Owen, Christopher Willard, Nino Testa, Molly Wilder, Kristina Aikens, Amy Woodbury Tease, Selene Colburn, Isaac Butler, Sarah Wright, Crow Cohen, David Gramling, and Domenica Ruta.

Many thanks to my second academic community at the International Society for the Study of Narrative, especially Sean O'Sullivan, Kelly McGuire, Antje Anderson, Jean Wyatt, and Robyn Warhol. Since my first year attending as the graduate assistant organizing the conference, I have been warmly welcomed and confronted with ideas both challenging and beautiful.

I began my graduate career at the University of Vermont, and am deeply grateful to the faculty there for taking me seriously until I could learn to do so myself, especially Valerie Rohy, Lisa Schnell, Mary Lou Kete, and Robyn Warhol.

At Tufts, I have received guidance both generous and rigorous, and have been consistently pushed to make my ideas simultaneously more complicated and easier to understand. I am especially grateful to my dissertation committee: Joe Litvak, whose incisive readings helped me to trust my ideas while also seeing where they were falling short; Sonia Hofkosh, who always brings my attention to the nuances of the reading process and brings that nuance to bear as a reader, John Lurz, whose last-minute arrival coincided with a much-needed delivery of clarity; and Robyn Warhol, without whose encouragement I would never have gone to graduate school in the first place, and without whose support I certainly wouldn't have stayed.

To my family: my parents Ellen and Thad Moore, my sisters Kate, Fernanda, Jessie, and Lisa, and my brother Sean, as well as my in-laws, Fran and Larry Brown and Tami and Steve Lucker. Thanks for support, love, and a bracing combination of qualities that reminds me daily of the productive value of a both/and approach to life.

A special thanks to Bubbe Fran for her endless free childcare, and to Claudia Stumpf, my emotional Sherpa. Without their help with the daily minutiae of life, I'd have given up long ago.

But most of all for Ariel and Izzy—I can't wait to see what the next installment of our story brings us.

## Table of Contents

Introduction—Caution: Spoilers Ahead.....	1
Chapter One—Serial Excess: Writing, Reading, Feeling.....	30
Chapter Two—The Serial Uncanny: Closure, Repetition, Boundaries.....	77
Chapter Three—Serial Addicts: Addiction, Detection, Compulsion.....	122
Coda—Serial Failures: <i>Twin Peaks</i> and the Pleasures of Being a Loser.....	166
Works Cited.....	183

### Caution: Spoilers Ahead

“I have always loved to read.”

When I first applied to a graduate program in English Literature, this is how I wanted to begin my personal statement. The image of myself, under the covers with a flashlight, long past my bedtime, seemed to me the logical precursor to a future devoted to the study of literature, particularly narrative fiction. I was promptly disabused of this notion by the first friend to whom I showed my essay. Her objection (the same one I now pass along to my own students) was that it should go without saying that I love to read; my job was to show my future professors that I could demonstrate the kind of critical distance that would transform me from a mere reader to a critic.

But here’s the thing: I *have* always loved to read, and that love provides the energy for my critical work. Although I can’t make this claim for other critics, I know I could never write about a text I didn’t love—I would get too bored, the process would be unbearable. To be clear, when I say “love,” I mean something different from unstinting acceptance and affection—I mean an excess of feeling, both positive and negative. I mean the kind of response to a text that you feel compelled to share, whether it’s an angry response to a poor film adaptation of your favorite novel or the result of an online quiz that tells you which Jane Austen character you most resemble.<sup>1</sup> I mean the excessive, embarrassing response of a fan.

---

<sup>1</sup> FYI: I’m Marianne Dashwood.

Fannish reading follows the pattern of enthusiasm: loud, infectious, earnest, and concerned with style but never itself particularly stylish.<sup>2</sup>

One of my aims in this emphasis on the “feeling” of reading is to take seriously the affection for the imaginary worlds of fiction that brought most of us to literary study in the first place. Where does that love come from? How is it created and sustained? What are its consequences, both positive and negative? And how do stories grab hold of us so hard that we can’t stop talking about them, past the point of good taste and reason? In order to answer these questions, this dissertation examines Victorian serialized novels and postmodern serial television shows, focusing specifically on the similar responses that these seemingly distinct forms elicit in their audiences.

I base my argument in two theoretical traditions—media/cultural studies and queer theory—all with an emphasis on narrative form. The thread of cultural studies initiated by Henry Jenkins which focuses on fan communities offers an invaluable model for considering the intense affective investment displayed by groups of readers. Jenkins and the critics who have followed him such as Matt Hills and Jonathan Gray look at a wide range of texts and focus their analysis on the habits and patterns of groups of readers, with special emphasis on how hierarchies of taste are disassembled, reassembled, and maintained among these groups. As this emphasis on the behavior of readers suggests, their methodology is rooted in anthropology more than literary study. Jenkins, for instance, only includes

---

<sup>2</sup> This is as good a place as any to point out that the footnotes are the “official” space of excess in this dissertation. I am not only analyzing the excessive interpretive energy of the fan, but am also performing it—as I will go on to argue, it’s impossible to critically engage with a serial narrative without excess. The footnotes, more than any other space in this dissertation, embody the excess of fandom.

descriptions of the shows in question in order to give context for fannish responses to them. By pairing Victorian novels with television shows, I shift my focus to the relationship between the narrative structure of the serial and the excessive response of the fan. Especially in my first chapter, I consider contemporary responses to texts from both periods, but I do so in order to examine what texts do to readers, not so much what readers do to texts.

At the same time, I hope that my examination and performance of enthusiastic reading will demonstrate how the positions of scholar and fan are not as different as they might at first appear to be. In the field of media studies, the theoretical positions of the scholar and the fan have a relatively intertwined history, beginning with Jenkins's landmark study *Textual Poachers*. In it, he claims fans' communal interpretation as a model of resistant, counterhegemonic reading, arguing that fans "raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions" (18).<sup>3</sup> As this language suggests, Jenkins sees the reading habits of fans as explicitly political, and he illustrates how science fiction television fans in particular create an alternative interpretive community with a value system which often clashes with that of the big corporations such as Paramount and Warner Bros. that own and ostensibly control the texts in question. At the same time, he argues that fan communities are in part formed by redefining the boundaries of "good taste," and that their championing of the "low" form of television is a "conscious repudiation of high culture or at least of the traditional boundaries of high culture and popular culture" (18).

---

<sup>3</sup> In formulating this argument, Jenkins builds on Michel de Certeau's concept of reading as "poaching," as laid out in *The Practice of Everyday Culture*.



One of the most striking elements of *Textual Poachers* is the implicit analogy he draws between queerness and fandom. Throughout the book, Jenkins uses rhetoric that would be immediately familiar to queer readers. He opens *Textual Poachers* with a list of negative stereotypes about fans, as represented in both fiction and nonfiction: they are infantilized, effeminate or desexualized social misfits who cannot accurately distinguish the difference between fantasy and reality. Ultimately, he argues that since fans endanger cultural hierarchies of taste, they “must be represented as ‘other,’ must be held at a distance so that fannish taste does not pollute sanctioned culture” (19). In this way, fannishness becomes analogous to an oppressed identity that must be more accurately (and respectfully) represented. I disagree—the stereotypes are right, we are dorks. That’s the point. The move from shame to pride doesn’t make sense here because shame is part of the pleasure of fandom—we love these texts, but also love to hate them (and hate ourselves for loving them). The “excessive” fan reader is the ideal reader of the serial, the one who picks up on the structural directive to read “too much into” the story. At the same time, Jenkins anticipates Michael Warner’s critique of identity politics in *The Trouble with Normal* when he notes how fans use the categories of “high” and “low” culture “as a way of policing the ranks and justifying one’s own pleasures as less ‘perverse’ than those of others” (19). Queer theory offers a way to remove the scare quotes from Jenkins’s use of the term “perverse” and consider the collective interpretive work of fan communities through the political lens of perverse desire. I rely largely on Eve Sedgwick’s recent work on shame as well as her construct of reparative reading in order to provide this framework.

By focusing my argument on the behavior and responses of readers, I'm following the pattern established by the two other trans-historical examinations of the serial form: Jennifer Hayward's *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera* and Robyn Warhol's *Having a Good Cry*. Hayward examines the behavior of "active audiences," arguing that the extended publishing schedule of serials allows audiences the opportunity to influence the direction of the narrative, and that serials create a "storytelling paradigm of an interactive interpretive process, one that influences the narrative produced" (15). Hayward casts her net even wider than I do, examining Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* alongside the daily newspaper comic strip *Terry and the Pirates* and the television soap operas *One Life to Live* and *All My Children*. Ultimately, Hayward is most concerned with the politically progressive potential of audience involvement, particularly in terms of questions of identity and representation. Since serials are always attempting to increase their audiences, they must "incorporate those Others whom most cultural representations elide" (20). She sees an audience's increased power over the direction of a narrative as an analogue for political power, particularly in this register of the representation of marginalized populations.

While I share Hayward's focus on the behavior of reading communities and their political potential, this exchange of power between reader and text goes both ways. As much as active audiences might influence a text, serial texts in turn keep their readers under the influence of an endlessly compelling storyworld. The loaded language of fandom (rather than the more value-free term "active audiences") exposes this double bind of the serial reader—just as a serial depends on fans for its success and survival, fans also depend on the serial as a source of obsessive attention

and pleasure. After all, the fan is not just active, but fanatically so—she is compelled to return to the text again and again, and this language of compulsive return has characterized critical responses to serials since Thomas Arnold railed against serial novels in an 1837 sermon as “dwelling upon the mind, and distilling themselves into it as it were drop by drop, [...] coloring even, in many instances, its very language and affording frequent matter for conversation” (39). The fan may have some power over the direction of the narrative’s future, but as Arnold’s use of the language of addiction suggests, she is also held under its sway.

A more recent comprehensive look at serial narratives across time and format is Robyn Warhol’s *Having a Good Cry*. As her title suggests, Warhol uses the notion of “popular culture” as a way to break down the historical divisions between “high” and “low” culture. Although some of the texts she considers have long since been canonized, such as Trollope’s Palliser series and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, they were all initially released within the same popular register as other, less “legitimate” texts that make up Warhol’s study such as *One Life to Live* and a set of extremely popular serialized commercials for *Taster’s Choice* brand coffee.<sup>4</sup> With this broad historical and generic scope, Warhol examines the connection between popular forms and gendered affect, considering the ways that specific effeminate or anti-effeminate affects (the yawn, the climax/undertow, the thrill) are called into being by formal elements of the text. I follow Warhol’s feminist narratological example by considering the link between formal elements and gendered responses, but focus my argument on the single narratological issue of the serial gap; specifically, I argue that long-form, ends-oriented serial narratives are defined by the gap between

---

<sup>4</sup> Starring Anthony Steward Head, *Buffy’s* Giles!

installments, which elicits an excessive, compulsive, and ultimately queer set of affective responses in their respective reading publics.

### **Unpopular popularity**

In this reading of Victorian novels and television serials as paired popular forms, I champion an approach Judith Halberstam describes as “low theory”: “a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples that refuse to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the high in high theory” (16). Although the Victorian novel is hardly the most eccentric genre, my interest in the responses it evokes in a reading public is rooted in its origins in low culture. As much as I hope reading this dissertation might inspire future scholars of Victorian culture, I am more interested in making the world safe for fans of the Victorian novel: taking seriously the insights of the reader who is brought to tears by Little Nell’s death, who stays up past her bedtime to discover the Moonstone’s thief, who sports a cross after reading *Dracula*. As such, part of the goal of this introduction is to present a set of terms that will create a bridge between the productively difficult language of literary theory and the more “grassroots” terms of popular media criticism. I argue throughout that serials are constructed around a both/and model of interpretation and desire—I take a similar approach to the distinct disciplines of literary and media studies, attempting to incorporate as many useful terms as possible from both fields, and hopefully illustrating that the disciplines are not so distinct as they might appear.

While the cultural power of canonization has shifted novels into the realm of high culture, both serial novels and serial television are historically poised in the gray area between high and low culture of the middlebrow. From Austen to Eliot, 19th-

century novels were often preoccupied with transcending their humble origins in popular culture. Eliot's essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" displays a particularly harsh critique of contemporary fiction, arguing that these "silly novels," with their idealized characters and unrealistic conflicts, reflect badly on women as a whole and convince men that women's "knowledge remains acquisition, instead of passing into culture" (316). *Middlemarch*'s broad swath of characters and focus on the events that follow the presumed "happy ending" of marriage can then be read as a corrective to the limited imagination and scope she saw in her lowbrow peers. Moreover, the reader's increased investment in the serial world becomes a way, from this perspective, that Eliot might offer more complicated characters and a more deeply realized world. The respectable serial novel can thus escape its embarrassing association with the penny dreadful and turn its attention to higher concerns.

Contemporary critics were similarly preoccupied with the cultural value of the novel; David Skilton sums up the consensus on the form's value, arguing that "since the late eighteenth century the novel had been greeted with antagonism by evangelicals and Utilitarians alike, as a danger to the reader's moral and mental well-being, and with grudging acceptance by the more open-minded, as a form far inferior to poetry and drama, and fit only for ephemeral amusement" (17). When praise for the genre did come, it was often cloaked in dismissive and gendered language: E. S. Dallas described the novel as "gossip etherealized, family talk generalized" (qtd. in Skilton, 3). Although he goes on to argue for the moral value of this broadened perspective, the novel's domestic focus associates it with "the narrow aims of small people" (3). Élite publications such as the *Saturday Review* encouraged readers to give the novel a break, assuring them that "in the hands of some writers, [novels] have

almost risen to the dignity of the drama and the epic, and have become models of thought and style to all who came after them” (17).

Ironically, postmodern serial television attempts a similar move, borrowing legitimacy from the form of the novel. Middlebrow arts criticism such as that found on Salon.com emphasizes the similarities between long-form serial television and novels in order to convince their readers that television is a culturally legitimate form.<sup>5</sup> I hope to reverse this trend of prioritizing already-canonized forms in order to gain some reflected glory; instead, I give precedence to the form of the television serial over that of the novel in order to highlight the novel’s origins as a piece of popular culture and, more importantly, to transport some of the enthusiastic energy of popular culture studies to the Victorian novel. In this way, I hope to bring my readers’ attention to the question of what makes something popular. And, why do the readers who contribute to a text’s popularity themselves so often feel, in the most seventh-grade way possible, unpopular?

Television has come to occupy a more respectable position in the critical canon since *Textual Poachers* was published, albeit one that is still informed by this marginal, fannish energy. For instance, David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox have established a kind of cottage industry of anthologies such as *Seinfeld, Master of Its Domain: Revisiting Television’s Greatest Sitcom* and *Reading Deadwood: A Western to Swear By*. The work of television auteur Joss Whedon has even inspired an entire scholarly journal, *Slayage*. While the establishment of TV studies as an academic field is hardly

---

<sup>5</sup> For instance, a 2003 interview with novelist George Pelecanos explains his decision to participate in the denigrated genre by praising *The Wire*’s similarity to a novel: “Everyone enjoys describing ‘The Wire’ as ‘novelistic’ (including Simon, Pelecanos and many critics) and that’s apt, with its layered story lines and characters — including a steady stream of supporting roles — so fully formed they seem sprung from a viewer’s psyche.” (Kerry Laueran, “‘Novelistic’ TV”).

news, this genre of scholarly work remains deeply informed by and invested in the logic of the fan, as demonstrated by the knowing, punny titles of Lavery's anthologies. For readers who don't already know the shows well, the titles' jokes won't make sense. In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins wears his fannish credentials on his sleeve, outlining in his introduction how "approaching popular culture as a fan [gave him] new insights into the media by releasing [him] from the narrowly circumscribed categories and assumptions of academic criticism and allowing [him] to play with textual materials" (5). He has continued to advocate for this balance between academic and fannish concerns, naming his personal blog "Confessions of an Aca-Fan" and using it as a site for academic production as well as more typically fannish purposes such as posting links to his "favorite things."<sup>6</sup>

My goals are not unrelated to Jenkins's, but nor are they identical. At this point, few cultural critics need to be convinced of the merit of any of the television shows I address here,<sup>7</sup> and the Victorian novel certainly doesn't need another champion. What I hope to show is how serialized popular narratives are formally constructed in such a way that readers have little choice but to engage with them as fans if they want to engage with them at all. The pressure of the marketplace invests serial narratives with an urgency to be loved that creates a set of affective responses in readers that spin out of control into the messy, embarrassing excess of the fan.

The serial, either Victorian or contemporary, doesn't just want you to keep reading: it

---

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Miller's masterful examination of Jane Austen's narrating voice, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, is similarly grounded in Miller's own position as an Austen fan. He examines the connection between Austen's imaginative hold on readers and gendered position of the reader, opening the book with a brief moment of direct address that clearly speaks to other Austenophiles: "All of us who read Jane Austen early—say, at eleven or twelve, the age when she began writing—were lost to the siren song of her voice" (1). Although this book is rarely considered in the same breath as *Textual Poachers*, Miller, like Jenkins, foregrounds his own experience of textual fandom as a way to examine the affective element of reading.

<sup>7</sup> Well, maybe *Battlestar Galactica*...

wants you to tell all your friends, to be unable to shut up already about the new narrative world you just discovered.

If the ideal of academic writing is “critical distance,” then I’ve dismally failed. A more accurate description of what I’m looking to accomplish here would be “critical closeness.” My affection for these texts is unmistakable—and impossible to hide. Like the texts I study, this dissertation is (for better or worse) an example of formal excess: examples pile up on one another, and for every close reading I include, two were left behind.<sup>8</sup> This impulse toward excess is, as I argue, built into the experience of serial reading, and this dissertation is no exception to that rule. I approach these texts as a fan, and the informal tone is based in the assumption that shared enthusiasm is central to the creation of an interpretive community.

### **It’s Play/time: Structure, Time, and Affective Overload**

The excess of the fan first manifests itself temporally, based in the sheer amount of time it takes to make one’s way through a serial narrative. In order to keep up with a serial from installment to installment, the reader must form an interpretive bridge across this temporal break, which often happens through participation in a community of readers. The contemporary practice of reading, writing, and commenting on online episode recaps of serial television shows<sup>9</sup> is similar not only to the reviews of serial novels that were published as those novels were being

---

<sup>8</sup> For instance, if you’re interested in ten single-spaced pages of notes on Josie Packard as an instance of aesthetic and political failure in *Twin Peaks*, I can be contacted at 210 East Hall, Medford MA 02146.

<sup>9</sup> The popular website *Television Without Pity* started by offering recaps of the teen soap opera *Dawson’s Creek* (Ariano and Bunting, 304). In the decade since the genre of the recap came into vogue, it has become a widespread form of critical and fan engagement. Composed by established critics as well as amateur fans, recaps offer a summary of the events of an episode, usually accompanied by explicit and implicit criticism if only in the form of “snark,” or sarcastic commentary on the show’s failures of consistency or realism. Like a popular movie review, recaps often have an evaluative end, and frequently finish with a grade.



released, but also to the Victorian practice of community reading, from “penny readings” for people too poor to buy the installments (and probably unable to read them) to subscription groups to family reading groups. Through means such as these, the framework of reading extends beyond the time it takes to consume a single installment. Furthermore, the reader necessarily sees herself as part of a larger reading public, one that shares the simultaneity not just of reading, but of waiting for the next installment to see what happens next. Although not all serial readers engage in these practices of mutual interpretation, they must make the connection between installments in order to follow the story, and thus continue to engage with the text on some level during the serial break.

The most remarkable similarity between the Victorian novel and the contemporary television serial is their shared structure: a series of episodic parts building toward the promise of a complete whole. Serial reading thus becomes a profoundly doubled experience, structured around a logic of both/and rather than either/or. The episode or installment is both complete in its own right and only a part of a larger, as yet unknown whole. Each part is marked as a coherent object by its title or its material appearance (such as the flashy covers of Dickens’s monthly installments or the opening credits of a television show), while at the same time it gestures toward the finished version which will have its own power as a material fetish (the glossy finish and special features of a DVD box set or the social capital signified by a leather-bound book). The reader is focused on the immediate pleasure of the middle and the ever-fading promise of the end. Interpretation oscillates between mastery over what has passed, as experienced when recognizing a “callback” to a previous episode or deciphering a clue to one of the serial’s open

questions, and recognition that the end can never provide the satisfaction she hopes for. The reader considers the writer a friend who has introduced her to a fictional world and characters that provide pleasure over the course of months or years, but also an enemy who forces those characters into unsatisfying circumstances and finally takes them away altogether when the story inevitably ends. The writer, too, both loves and hates her readers, as they provide the money and attention that allow the narrative to keep going, but also vociferously complain and either withdraw or threaten to withdraw their attention when things don't go their way. Because the serial is always open to revision, no position is permanent, and the reader and writer are both constantly refiguring their relationships to the text and each other, each occupying the other's position as well as her own.

Since so much of the interpretive work of a serial occurs in the absence of the narrative itself, Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader-response is a particularly useful model for thinking through the experience of serial reading for the individual reader. In "Interaction Between Text and Reader," Iser argues that the meaning of a narrative is found not on the page (or the screen) exactly, but in the space between the page and the reader, and "must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism" (106). In order to make sense of a text, a reader must traverse the "blanks and negations" that structure it, using her own experience as a background by which she "concretizes" the empty spaces in the text, from gaps in time or perspective to a particular character's unstated motivation. In this way, "the gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves" (111).

In other words, in order for meaning to “happen,” the reader has to project part of herself into the text, using preexisting knowledge from both intertextual sources and personal experience to “form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending” and thus “experience the text as a living event” (*The Act of Reading* 37, 128). This “projection” is often used as evidence for the fan’s dangerous disconnection from the real world—the joke of William Shatner’s famous *Saturday Night Live* skit in which he screams at a convention full of fans to “get a life!” hinges on the fans’ inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality.<sup>10</sup> Iser’s framework, however, offers a less pathological way to consider the fan’s relationship to the fictional world. It’s not that the fan can’t distinguish between the real world and the fictional one, but that the fictional world offers an arena where the fan can establish a ludic relationship with the author, characters, and setting.

### **Of *Star Trek* and snark: Paranoid and Reparative Reading**

When the text is transformed into a site for play, it is also a source of pleasure; in a serial, that pleasure is doled out piecemeal, more or less reliably. If we think of the text in this way, Melanie Klein’s theories of infant development through a series of stages become especially useful for understanding the dynamic nature of serial reading. Klein argues that the infant first splits the mother into two opposed ideal objects—a Good Breast that is endlessly nourishing and always present, and a Bad Breast that withholds nourishment, possibly to keep food for itself. The child imagines violence against the Bad Breast, and is then filled with paranoid anxiety that retribution will be visited on her as punishment. The Oedipal complex is

---

<sup>10</sup> The full text of this skit can be found at <<http://snltranscripts.jt.org/86/86hgetalife.phtml>>.

characterized by this paranoid position; the child is jealous that the father will steal the mother (or has already stolen her), and is filled with destructive impulses toward both parents as well as terror that her desires will be found out.

Klein departs from Freud, however, in her refusal to see the Oedipal complex as the end (or even the *dénouement*) of the story. Instead, she argues that the persecutory anxiety of the paranoid position is followed by the feelings of grief and mourning which make up the depressive position. This second position “includes the variety of processes by which the ego feels it undoes harm done in phantasy, restores and revives objects” and forms the mental “place” from which the infant projects good qualities into the object as an attempt to make up for her imagined violence to it (48). Importantly, neither the depressive nor the paranoid positions are permanent states. As the spatial metaphor of a “position” implies, the child and then the adult continue to move among the paranoid, depressive, and reparative positions throughout life; remaining in any one position, even the reparative, is unhealthy.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick uses Klein’s framework of paranoid and reparative positions as the basis of her argument for a reassessment of paranoia’s value in literary criticism. In “You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You,” she claims that academic discourse is currently mired in a paranoid reading mode, to the point where possible insights that might be gained from the depressive or reparative positions are either discounted as naïve or never considered in the first place. According to Sedgwick, the “hermeneutics of suspicion” have become “a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities” (125). Criticism has thus become a project of exposure more than one of exploration, and

counterhegemonic criticism values the illumination of systems of power more than the discovery of ways to operate outside of those systems. Sedgwick instead proposes a practice of reading that uses the sense of despair induced by paranoid reading as a starting point for analysis, rather than a goal. What might happen, she asks, if we turned our attention away from the endless recursive loop of how texts support hegemonic systems of domination? What new possibilities for the purposes and processes of criticism might emerge?

Although Jenkins does not share Sedgwick's psychoanalytic framework, the fannish behavior he describes fits perfectly with her notion of reparative reading. In his essay "Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," he argues that, for fans, "consumption naturally sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable" (41). Jenkins focuses on fan fiction—creative work by devoted readers that expands the limits of the story world by placing characters in new situations, introducing characters from other narratives in the same genre, building on subtextual elements (usually romantic pairings between characters), and/or offering implicit criticisms of the source text by exposing perceived inconsistencies (for instance, the racism, sexism and heterocentrism that pervade supposedly liberal utopian futures like *Star Trek*). In this way, fans quite literally project their energy into the text in an attempt to address aspects of the narrative that seem to have "failed" in some way. Jenkins argues that a central motivation for fan fiction writers is revision or "correction" of the source text: fan writers add to the narrative in order "to make it more responsive to their needs, to make it a better producer of personal meanings and pleasures" (40). Ironically, only by supplementing and altering the narrative can fans return it to a state of imagined "purity."

Although Jenkins argues that fan reading is exceptional in its blurring of the categories of consumption and production (reading and writing), the serial form demands this kind of reparative “hyper-reading” from all its readers, not just those engaged in marginal fan communities. Fans who respond to the text by creating material artifacts like costumes, videos, or short stories might be the most obvious examples of the way the category of “reader” blurs toward “creator,” but the casual reader who comes up with a theory as to what “really” happened to Tony at the end of *The Sopranos* is doing the same kind of creative work as a writer of fan fiction, just to a lesser degree. These creative, performative fans thus move beyond the question “what’s going to happen?” that provides so much of the interpretive energy between installments for serial readers to the question “what did happen?”, reading the narrative’s history as more of a springboard into possible interpretations than a static, unchanging source of facts. Interpretation, then, might be considered by these fans as a project akin to renovating a house: they might knock out divisions between sections or make additions, but the motivation for the project is always “improvement.” Even if the interior is unrecognizable at the project’s close, it’s still understood to be the same house.

Working in the register of criticism rather than creative writing, the website *Television Without Pity* has taken perceived “failures” as its starting point, as seen in its tagline: “Spare the snark, spoil the networks.” “Snark” is the paranoid perspective of the site’s recappers and contributors, and is characterized by a series of strategies that place the fan in a combative, superior position: sarcasm; demonstrations of familiarity with the tropes that organize the genre or television more generally; and a high value placed on accuracy and mastery—not just getting the details of the show

right, but articulating criticism through intertextual references to other shows. As the tagline's Biblical reference suggests, part of snark's purpose is to punish wayward writers or network executives, either for underestimating their viewers and programming substandard content or for "jumping the shark"—abandoning previous claims to aesthetic purity or authenticity for commercial appeal.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, this "snarky" perspective is not limited to postmodern audiences. In a review of *Our Mutual Friend* published after its fifth installment in *Sharpe's London Magazine of Entertainment and Instruction*, the reviewer, known only as "The Bohemian," performs a knowing, sarcastic reading of the novel which is based in his capacious knowledge both of Dickens's previous novels and wider middlebrow culture.

We [...] cannot say that we admire the illustrations, which are weak as water: compare them with those of "Phiz" and—but we will spare the feelings of a "rising" young artist. As regards the tale itself, there is evidence that a master-hand has lost neither its descriptive power nor the observation of former years; at the same time there is rather more mystery and "sensation" than we had hoped or expected to find from the gifted author of the "Pickwick Papers." Apropos, we observe that Miss Annie Thomas, who seems have made "a hit, a palpable hit," with her last novel—"Denis Donne"—has dedicated the work to Charles Dickens.

While the Bohemian does not refrain from praising Dickens, he does so in a combative manner that always comes back to demonstrating his mastery over the text and the genre: his use of scare quotes around "sensation," for instance, indicates

---

<sup>11</sup> The phrase "jumping the shark" is itself an excellent example of the intertextual nature of snark: the phrase refers to an infamous *Happy Days* episode in which Fonzie jumps over a shark on his motorcycle. According to "fanon," this is the moment when the show transformed into a parody of itself. See [tvtropes.org](http://tvtropes.org) for a more thorough explanation.

the familiar snarky position of knowing dismissal, as does his comparison of Dickens to a lesser author.

Through these twinned modes of critical engagement (fan fiction and snark), fans offer a concrete example for Sedgwick's argument for reparative reading—one that is particularly valuable since it does not preclude or deny the pleasure of paranoia. Since Sedgwick's essay is so invested in both defining reparative reading as well as explaining the potential pitfalls of paranoia, it can be read as making an argument for reparation at the cost of vigilance. My hope is that this dissertation might showcase one place where both reparative and paranoid reading are already happening simultaneously, and will thus offer a practical example of how critics might adopt the creative energy of the reparative position without abandoning the incisive, revelatory edge of a really good paranoid reading

### **Finish up, already! Or, What's so Important About Closure.**

One of the most notable structural similarities between the Victorian novel and the serialized TV drama is their nearly identical relationship with closure: each form is constituted of a series of short installments working toward a promised (but never absolutely assured) end. It is this emphasis on the final moment of closure which distinguishes the serials I examine here from the many other serials from both the Victorian and postmodern eras such as serialized poetry (Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, considered by Hughes and Lund in their still-definitive study of the Victorian serial), novel series (such as the Patrick O'Brian novels Warhol examines in *Having a Good Cry*), newspaper comics (such as *Terry and the Pirates*, considered by Hayward), soap operas (released serially but do never building toward a final ending), or film sequels



and triple-decker novels (read sequentially, but in “installments” much longer than those of a television serial or serialized novel).

The serials I consider in this dissertation mirror one another because they have the same doubled, troubled relationship with ending. Each installment comes with its own moment of purposely unsatisfying closure, all of which build toward a final moment that comes to gain more and more weight and narrative importance over time. In this emphasis on closure, I’m building on the psychoanalytic reading offered by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, where he argues that stories are a version of Freud’s fort-da game, but the object of mastery is not the loss of the mother but the prospect of death. Brooks puts desire for mastery at the heart of narrative most clearly in his definition of plotting: “that which makes a plot ‘move forward,’ and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and a portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning” (xiii). One could of course argue that literature has long since troubled (if not abandoned altogether) any “promise of progress toward meaning,” but most critics agree on closure’s power to elicit a desire (however futile) for mastery.

In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, for instance, D.A. Miller challenges Brooks’s totalizing view of closure, arguing that closure is part of a push-and-pull game between “narratability” and “non-narratability,” and that although novels build toward narrative closure, they are “never fully or finally governed by it” (xiv). However, the organizing power of closure resurfaces in *The Novel and the Police*, his examination of surveillant power in the Victorian novel, where he sees the expulsion of the figure of the police at a novel’s end and the accompanying restoration of social order as central to reinscribing that social power. In *Come as You Are*, Judith

Roof sees narrative writ large as a force for heterosexual ideology, figured most clearly in the longevity and power of the heterosexual marriage plot, but inherent even in narratives that attempt to disrupt that telos, which end up reinscribing the queer narrative as a disavowed definitional Other. Whether closure is figured as a force for psychic support or for social oppression, theorists tend to agree that it gives readers a feeling (real or imagined) akin to the pop-psychology use of the term: mastery and an ability to “move on.” Of course, as anyone knows who has had a final conversation with an ex-lover or friend in the hopes of gaining “closure,” resolution is rarely the result (if even the real goal) of such a conversation.

Serials complicate these arguments about closure, particularly since they feature so many small moments of closure throughout. Of *Middlemarch*'s finale, for instance, Miller argues that the narrator (and by extension the novel) is condemned “to worry about closure, which, under the sway of both a moral imperative and an intellectual doubt, must be at once definitive and inconclusive, simple and problematic, supremely real and perhaps impossible. It oscillates undecidably between negating the narratable and being negated by it.” (189-90). Curiously, Miller never explicitly alludes to the role of seriality in creating this double bind.<sup>12</sup>

*Middlemarch* was published serially, and the oscillating nature of the finale resembles that desire which has kept the reader returning to the text throughout—the balance between the promise that there will always be more to know and the dream that we might finally know everything. In other words, the doubled nature of desire exposed

---

<sup>12</sup> Robyn Warhol addresses this same oversight in *Having a Good Cry*, when she observes that “Miller, the most form-sensitive of all narrative critics, doesn’t even mention seriality in his close analysis of the narrative movement of *Barchester Towers*” (80). The new set of observations and questions that arise when the text’s seriality is brought into the equation make as good an argument as any for the consideration of the serial as a genre distinct from the novel proper.

by the problem of narratability in the long-form novel is not just a moral issue in *Middlemarch*, but a practical one as well.

Miller does obliquely refer to the novel's serial format once, when he observes that "the moral necessity of a finale is evident, as an attempt to make explicit biographical wholes out of what can seem, in the novel proper, only serial instances." (192) For the reader who encountered *Middlemarch* in Blackwood's, the different pieces of characters' biographies would not just *seem* like serial instances, but would be quite explicitly serialized, each separated by a considerable temporal gap. The doubled nature of *Middlemarch*'s finale, then, is both by design and a necessary byproduct of the novel's mode of distribution. After so many monthly rehearsals of closure, how could the final concluding gesture be anything but fraught?

This disruption of closure is one central focus of my argument because it forms the textual origin of the serial's queerness. The tortured dynamic of the imaginary relationship between the reader and the writer is rooted in the tension between the reader's participatory power in between installments and the centralization of authority that comes at the serial's end. The extended format of the serial means that the seeming unity of each episode is held in irresolvable tension with the demands of the larger narrative, and the conclusions offered by each episode become more contingent the longer the narrative goes on. At the same time, the double format of the serial makes the reader inescapably aware that the satisfaction offered by closure is necessarily incomplete, thus pushing her to focus simultaneously on the more transitory pleasures of the middle. As Miller demonstrates so ably in *Narrative and Its Discontents*, the "coherence" offered by

closure is always illusory, but the relentless centrality of closure to the serial form makes readers unavoidably aware of the seductive pull of the illusion of mastery, even as they're equally aware that this mastery is impossible.

And it is here that the queer valence of the form becomes most apparent. Serials remind us of the persistence of desire, even for the things we should know better than to want. The reiterated moment of closure in the serial brings readers back, again and again, to the promises of the marriage plot, of heteronormative futurity. The questions that drives so many serial readers forward are primarily focused on sex and death: “will they or won’t they?” or “who done it?” Serials expose the impermanence of the satisfaction of closure while simultaneously reveling in the pleasure that comes from wanting its promised security. And figuring out new frameworks for desire even as you’re faced with the fact that you’ll never get what you thought you had always wanted seems to me to be an unmistakably queer position.

### **Preemptive recaps**

Each chapter examines a pair of narratives, one serialized novel and one television series. In order to highlight the structural similarities between these seemingly distinct forms, I have arranged each chapter thematically rather than separating my readings of the two texts. Each chapter makes a discrete but related argument about the both/and structure of serial reading, ultimately claiming the serial as a distinct literary form, one with its own affective and political consequences.

Since the formal and affective excess of the serial is central to my argument as a whole, I begin with an analysis of the connection between the serial’s formal excess and the imaginary relationship between the reader and writer that is

established over the serial's run. I then shift my attention to the narratological issue of textual boundaries, showing how the disrupted and disruptive limits of the serial are impossible to fix, and how this quality lends the serial its uncanny power over readers. In my third chapter, I examine this power more closely, especially focusing on the ways that serials elicit compulsive reading. I end with a coda that considers *Twin Peaks* as an example of the serial's inevitable failures, and how this "failure" is key to the form's ability to worm its way into reader's heads.

In my first chapter, "Serial Excess: Reading, Writing, Feeling," I consider the affective element of seriality—how does the excess of the serial form call into being a response that is characterized by a similar excess of both hatred and love? I focus my argument on two extremely different texts, Dickens's serialized novel *Our Mutual Friend*, published from 1864-1865 and the television show *Battlestar Galactica* which aired on the SciFi network between 2004 and 2009. I begin by showing how both these texts utilize the gap between installments to elicit an active, engaged response from their readers, especially those who encountered the narrative upon its initial release. I use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization of queer shame in order to show how the interrupted circuit of recognition between the author-figure and the reader places the reader in an abased and shaming position.

I examine the effects of this dynamic in three ways: first, I consider figures of excessive, fannish readers in the texts themselves and show how those figures are punished for their unrealistic attachment to imaginary worlds—just the same behavior demanded by the lacunae of serial gaps. In this way, the reader is encouraged to shamefully identify with these figures of "bad readers." I go on to examine the phenomenon of the "recap" as an example of the way fans respond to

serial texts with a mixture of hypertrophic interpretation and hyperbolic emotion: instead of heeding the text's warning to behave, fans become even more invested in the pleasures and pains of resistant reading. Finally, I turn my attention back to the attempts to centralize authorial control, focusing on extra- and intratextual authorial performances of interpretation. Outside the boundaries of the text, Dickens and Moore use spaces such as prefaces, commentary tracks, and public readings as ways to demonstrate "correct" interpretive methods. Within the narrative, the conclusion becomes a space where authorial power is shored up, and figures of excessive, "bad" readers are shut out of the master narratives of heteronormative reproduction.

In my second chapter, "The Serial Uncanny: Repetition, Closure, Boundaries," I turn my attention from politics to genre, using *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dracula* to make an argument for the long-form serial as a genre unto itself, one that crosses media boundaries but is distinct from the novel, the soap opera, or the procedural drama. More than these other forms, the serial is caught between the irreconcilable demands of the part and the whole. While the distinctive demands of the television serial are acknowledged within media studies criticism, those of the serial novel are often lost by literary scholars who encounter these novels as a single text. I attempt to reverse this tendency here, reading *Buffy* and *Dracula* with the emphasis on their shared status as a series of distinct parts. Since *Dracula's* serial publication is rumored but impossible to prove, it functions as an uncanny double to the serial, self-consciously imitating the form so that it might inspire the same kind of excessive interpretation and affective over-identification. In this way, I illuminate the link between the unfixable limits of the serial text and its uncanny power over its readers.

Unlike single-shot narratives, serials have their own distinct death drive, facing early cancellation if they lose too many readers. The text's anxiety about this possibility manifests throughout in the form of blurred boundaries: between inside and outside, self and other, fiction and reality, and past and present. This confusion over limits provides the formal origin for the "bad boundaries" of fannish reading. I begin the chapter by outlining these formal strategies in some detail, focusing on the different ways that uncanny repetitions disturb the boundaries between installments, texts, and even the reality-status of the text itself. I show how the "previously-on" prefaces that are a formal marker of serial television work as markers of a show's various anxieties (especially regarding the acquisition and retention of new readers), and then demonstrate how *Dracula* features regular repetitions that serve an identical purpose, emphasizing the text's segmentation and establishing an insatiable desire for more. I then consider characters in both texts who disturb textual and thematic limits, first examining how Joss Whedon incorporates *Dracula* into the text of *Buffy* in his own act of fannish reappropriation, rewriting textual boundaries in order to claim his own authorial mastery over the serial form. In unearthing this deceased figure, Whedon builds on the tendency toward resurrection that suffuses the serial form. I examine matched instances of returns from the dead in *Buffy* and *Dracula*, and show how these moments demonstrate the serial's unresolvably troubled relationship with closure, ending the chapter with a reading of the excessive, obsessive analytic habits of *Dracula* scholars, showing how these habits are rooted in the formal elements I described.

In my third chapter, "Serial Addicts: Addiction and Detection," I dig into the nature of the fannish obsession, using the theoretical apparatus of drug addiction and

recovery to think through the compulsive relationship with reading that the serial form demands. Building on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of "reparative" reading, I outline a similar concept of "recovering" reading. By using the model of addiction, I hope to emphasize the pleasure—and the power—of the paranoid reading model while simultaneously offering up another possible position. I structure my chapter around two serialized detective stories that centrally feature drugs and addiction, Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* and David Simon's *The Wire*, showing how totalizing knowledge comes to occupy the place of the drug in both. In doing so, I illustrate how serials force their readers to come face to face with the inexorability of narrative desire and at the same time expose the insufficiency of any answer to deliver the illusory "payoff" of the addictive process.

Ironically, the two narratives' differing perspectives on the pleasures and pains of addiction upend the commonplace assumption of a clear division between Victorian stodginess and postmodern freedom: only in the postmodern landscape of *The Wire* is drug addiction seen as a personal and social problem. *The Moonstone* aligns the pleasures of detection with the pleasures of drug use; both activities create a feeling of suspense as the reader or user waits for her next "fix." Different addictions have an additive relationship in both *The Moonstone* and *The Wire*: more detection means more drug use, not less. While Collins is ultimately less concerned with the answer to the crime of who stole the Moonstone than he is with the ongoing process of detection, *The Wire* offers an ends-based critique of the relationship between addiction and detection.

After outlining a series of aphorisms that define "recovering reading" and show its connection to the serial form, I turn my attention to the depiction of



smoking in *The Moonstone*, demonstrating how Franklin Blake's addiction to tobacco has a pleurably additive relationship with his "detective-fever," in that both activities expose the way that desire is pleasurable in itself, not only as a byway on the way to relief. I then turn my attention to *The Wire*, showing how a single instance of virtuosic detection is returned to repeatedly throughout the narrative, also linking detection with addiction. *The Wire*, however, emphasizes the costs of this dogged pursuit of satisfaction. Every time the text returns to the notion of McNulty as an isolated hero-sleuth, it demonstrates more clearly how the pleasure of an addictive "payoff" is not only illusory but damaging to the larger community. Finally, I focus on a series of characters who illustrate the power of addiction and recovery in these texts: Miss Clack and Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone* and Bubbles in *The Wire*.

I end the dissertation by turning toward the present with a coda titled "Serial Failures: The Pleasures of Being a Loser." Here, I focus on the 1990-1992 television show *Twin Peaks* as an example of the centrality of failure to the serial form. In its simultaneous status as a notorious ratings disaster and originator of a new television genre, *Twin Peaks* is a perfect example of the way "success" and "failure" are bound up in one another in the serial form. I utilize Judith Halberstam's theorization of queer failure in order to argue that failure and loss are central to the canonical "success" of a serial text, in the registers of both "high" and "low" culture. Economic failure is central to a narrative's attainment of cult status, but even narratives that achieve mainstream success depend on unanswerable questions, unfixable systems of meaning, and other narrative "failures" in order to attain the devotion that keeps them alive, however transiently. By shifting my attention to the serial's inevitable failures, I hope to show how the serial's relentlessly both/and

structure keeps the reader deeply invested in the question of pleasure, but forces her to reimagine the nature and shape of that pleasure, and to admit that it might take an unexpected or even unrecognizable form.

## Chapter One

### Serial Excess: Writing, Reading, Feeling

“No one thinks first of Mr. Dickens as a writer. He is at once, through his books, a friend.”

-Charles Eliot Norton, qtd. in Collins

A few months ago, I was at a coffeeshop in Cambridge, MA with a large group of people; while I knew some members of the group well, others were merely acquaintances. After we'd been sitting there for a while, a man walked in whom I recognized but couldn't quite place, so I figured he was probably part of our group. I gave him a big “hi” smile, only to realize that I didn't in fact know him at all—it was Jim True-Frost, the actor who plays Lieutenant Pryzbylewski on *The Wire*. As soon as he returned my smile with blank unrecognition, I felt, for lack of a more precise term, like a total nerd.

The question I was left with was this: why does fandom feel so humiliating? Why does my affection for this character, which, among other things, serves as a way for me to bond with other fans of *The Wire*, become embarrassing when I'm face-to-face with the actor “behind” the character? But, then, why wouldn't it be? Few things are more humiliating than caring about something too much, especially something that doesn't, or can't, love you back. In this as all things, I'm deeply influenced by the thinking of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, especially her most recent work on affect. If, as Sedgwick argues, shame is produced by a “reaction to the loss of feedback from others” then reading offers what might be the clearest example of that broken loop (36). Not only does the reader build deep affection for the fictional

characters, but she also develops an imaginary relationship with the author of the text. If we see writing as (at least in part) a form of communication between an author and a reader, that communication is necessarily broken by both time and space, and the affection offered by one is always, necessarily, unmet by the other.<sup>13</sup> This feedback loop of identification and shame is even stronger in a serial narrative, since the serial gap forces the reader to project so much more of herself into the story. Furthermore, since the story takes place over such a long expanse of time, the reader becomes even more invested both in the characters and in her imaginary friendship with the author. In this way, the text becomes a kind of affective repository for the fan, a place where she can project more and more feeling, both positive and negative, hoping the text will “give back.”

The shame of queerness is also based in unrecognition—a queer relationship (real or imagined) is unrecognized by the state, and often by one’s family of origin, the object of affection, and even frequently oneself. And, as Michael Warner argues so convincingly in *The Trouble with Normal*, if recognition does come, it is all too often at the cost of disavowing the queerest parts of oneself and one’s community. It’s this dynamic of identification and disavowal that creates perhaps the greatest parallel between fans and queers—for every fan, there’s some final limit at which things transition from “cool” to “pathetic”: trading cards, costumes, live-action-role-playing. Part of why I find the pairing of Victorian novels and contemporary television so useful is that this distinction is currently absent from Victorian fandom.

---

<sup>13</sup> The communication is technically between the implied author or “author-function” and the implied reader, but I use the more embodied terms here on purpose; while the reader and writer are always imaginary for their opposite numbers, the desire, resentment, shame, and affection that characterize the imaginary relationship are felt by the actual people involved in the reading exchange.

Because the Victorian novel occupies “high culture,” a space like Dickens Universe is considered to be one where criticism is produced, while a *Star Trek* convention is, at best, an object for critical study. As much as I hope to bring the enthusiasm and energy of fandom to criticism of the Victorian novel in this dissertation, I hope also to show how the Victorian novel is already producing criticism of this queerly excessive brand, sometimes despite itself.

In this chapter, I will examine the “imaginary friendship” between the reader and author that is elicited by the serial gap—how both reader and author become over-invested in their imagined relationship and respond with similarly excessive displays of feeling. I will examine the consequences of this uneasy exchange of affection and aggression between reader and author in two radically different serial narratives: Dickens’s serial novel *Our Mutual Friend*, which was released in monthly installments between 1864-65, and *Battlestar Galactica*, a serialized science fiction drama that aired on the SciFi (now SyFy) network from 2003-2009.

As I argued in the introduction, the serial break is marked by both increased interpretation and feeling. This excess of feeling is not only directed at the storyworld, but also (and usually in a more tortured manner) at the author. In *Modes of Production of the Victorian Novel*, N. N. Feltes claims that the popular conception of Dickens’s genius was rooted in the surplus value of each installment, which was more the result of the part-production model of serial publishing than it was the product of any particular narrative innovation. Since each piece of a serial becomes its own fetishized object, offering an all-too-brief glimpse into the fictive world, that narrative universe becomes an object of greater desire for the reader with each successive installment. Furthermore, the continuous flow of narrative “prolongs

while measuring the months of shared intimacy” with the author (Feltes 14). By sheer force of the amount of time it takes to read a serial narrative, especially during its initial release, the authorial voice becomes integrated into the reader’s daily life, occupying the position of a friend’s.<sup>14</sup> However, this “friendship” is strikingly uneven, for both author and reader. Although devoted fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* refer to creator Joss Whedon by his first name, odds are he doesn’t know theirs. At the same time, since serial narratives are produced for mass audiences, the writer’s success depends on his/her ability to sustain the reader’s attention and affection. The writer isn’t producing for some imaginary audience, off in the distant future of the finished book, but for a very real and immediately present fan base, many of whom don’t hesitate to give immediate and vocal feedback when they’re dissatisfied. Although writers and fans both express a great deal of affection for one another, that affection is always counterbalanced by hostility and resentment.

One way that the excess of feeling structurally inheres in the serial (thus pushing the serial reader toward the hysterical edge of fandom) is in the narrative’s continuing presence in the reader’s life over an extended period of time. Charles Eliot Norton, in his panegyric on Dickens, described the author as “not so much the guest as the inmate of our homes,” and based this sense of intimacy on the way families mark time with his work (qtd. in Collins, 1). He writes: “[Dickens] keeps holidays with us, he helps us to celebrate Christmas with heartier cheer, he shares at every New Year in our good wishes” (1). Although 21<sup>st</sup>-century television serials are

---

<sup>14</sup> In their foundational work *The Victorian Serial*, Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund argue that “a work’s extended duration meant that serials could become entwined with readers’ own sense of lived experience and passing time.” (9) The world of the narrative would thus become entwined with the reader’s imaginative experience of daily life. Since the author was the provider of this imagined world, he too would occupy a central position in the reader’s imaginary landscape.

less assiduous than Dickens or their soap predecessors about observing holidays, the narratives often foreground the passage of time. And, as the endlessly reproduced versions of Dickens's *Christmas Carol* suggest, the affectionate register of fannish reading opens the text up as a space for near-endless interpretation, performance, and play.

Furthermore, the ongoing publishing cycle of the serial allows the reader to potentially influence the direction of the narrative while it is still in progress, or at least to believe that she might have that power. In *Consuming Pleasures*, Hayward illustrates this dynamic with an anecdote: when Chapman and Hall decreased the number of illustrations in *The Pickwick Papers* after its initial illustrator Robert Seymour committed suicide, they claimed this decision was based on “a suggestion ... from various influential quarters,” thus suggesting to readers that they too might be able to influence the shape or direction of a serial (23). From Sherlock Holmes to *Star Trek*, the history of serial narratives is marked by interventions by groups of readers, usually hoping they might influence or save the narrative they love.<sup>15</sup>

This slippage between reader and writer works both ways. Victorian public readings and 21<sup>st</sup>-century DVD commentary tracks both show authorial figureheads in the process of reading in a manner that mirrors the habits of their fans. Even as the author-figure retains the final word over questions like intention and what the story is “supposed to mean,” his performances of passivity in relation to the text position him as another reader among readers. For instance, the authorial responses

---

15 Organized reader feedback often serves as a moment of genesis for fan communities, particularly when they commit themselves to saving a narrative from cancellation. Sherlock Holmes readers famously organized to revivify Holmes after Doyle killed him, and the figure of Holmes retains an active and loyal reading community to this day. *Star Trek* fans first became aware of themselves as a coherent group when the network threatened cancellation after the first two seasons. After the show was cancelled, these same readers went on to organize the first fan convention—an institution that serves as a cornerstone of organized fan communities to this day.

to popular criticism that litter both novels' prefaces and DVD commentary tracks indicate that serial authors avidly read popular criticism, thus making them members of the same reading public as their fans. The author is thus simultaneously a member of the reading public *and* the founder of the discursive community.<sup>16</sup>

As comingled as the positions of writer and reader become in the middle of a serial, the ending features a break between the two positions, which then overloads that point in the story with affective power; often, this excessive feeling shows up as resentment and anger. Consider the series finale of *LOST*, which infuriated many fans in its refusal to "tie up" so many of the open questions that had structured the narrative up to that point. At the same time, the focus of the finale was thoroughly affective, shifting attention and narrative weight to the relationships between the characters rather than the scientific or philosophical questions that had driven so much of the series. In her review of the episode, tellingly titled, "A Disappointed Fan is Still a Fan: How the Creators of *Lost* Seduced and Betrayed Their Viewers," *New York Magazine* critic Emily Nussbaum argues that the final episode was "almost radically crowd-pleasing, designed to be viewed with the fan brain, not the critic brain," especially in its focus on emotional reunions between romantic couples. The meaningful difference between a critical and fan perspective here seems to be whether a viewer watches "rationally" or "emotionally"—as if these two categories could ever be meaningfully separated.

---

16 I'm working with Foucault's notion of the author-function here, as outlined in "What Is an Author?" Although Foucault excludes novelists from his definition of "founders of discursivity," I would argue that fan fiction and performance constitute a discursive community. Using Radcliffe's relationship to Gothic fiction as an example, he claims that a novelist only "put into circulation a certain number of resemblances and analogies patterned on her work" (114). Unlike genre work, however, fan fiction must conform to all the diegetic constructs laid out in the original work, thus establishing a much closer relationship than just "resemblances and analogies."



At the same time, the emotionally charged title of Nussbaum's review makes it clear that the "critical" view is hardly dispassionate—it's just characterized by negative, rather than positive emotions. It's hardly surprising that Nussbaum's rejection of an amateur perspective in favor of what might be considered professional fandom also breaks down along gendered lines: the "fan brain" she criticizes embraces soap operatic plots, for instance, instead of focusing on the twisty questions of the masculine science fiction plot. The "disappointed fan" is then the one who has the "correct" gendered desire for the show. Nussbaum simultaneously rejects and participates in the charged emotional reaction typical of fandom, but her disavowal of "the fan brain" suggests that the position of the fan is too shameful to claim without qualification. When the term "fan" is read without modifiers like "disappointed" or "devoted," however, it becomes clear that the fan is not in fact the reader who meets every narrative development with blind love and acceptance, but the reader who reads with an abundance of feeling, both positive *and* negative.

In this way, both reader and writer become deeply invested in an imaginary friendship based on their shared responsibility for making meaning in the text. However, the fundamental asymmetry of this relationship cannot be avoided—"Joss" has no idea who I am, just as Jim True-Frost didn't recognize me when I saw him. The endings of serial narratives often work to remind unruly, excessive readers of their "proper place" in this relationship, thus transforming the queer excess of the middle into a more recognizable form, one that more often than not takes the shape of a traditional marriage plot, accompanied by the reformation or rejection of any figures of queer, excessive readers. The insistent parallels between these figures and actual fans places those fans in an abased position in relation to the text—ashamed

at her depiction in the text, but thrilled at her recognition within it, not matter how negative that attention might be.

### **Serials are Frakking<sup>17</sup> Huge: Filling in the Blanks**

The increased demands on the serial reader are particularly apparent during the middle of the story, when readers engage with the narrative both creatively and critically, searching for clues to its central mysteries, but also exploring more open-ended questions like the ongoing relationships between characters. Both *Battlestar Galactica* and *Our Mutual Friend* are typical serials in that they demand reader participation by structuring their narratives around gaps. The physical and temporal spaces between installments are these gaps' most obvious location, but the reader is also required to fill in content between and within installments in order to make the narrative cohere. Since the plot of *Our Mutual Friend* is so complicated and multi-layered, a serial reader must display especially sustained effort in order to follow the events of the story from month to month. The plot follows at least four main threads: the stories of John Harmon, the titular "Mutual Friend," and his attempt to woo the willful Bella Wilfer; Lizzie Hexam, the beautiful river-girl pursued by a terrifying schoolteacher and a rakish (but eventually reformed) lawyer; the social-climbing Veneerings and their machinations for power; and the fate of the Harmon Fortune, willed to Noddy Boffin, the "Golden Dustman." The connections between these narrative threads are often tenuous at best, and new characters are introduced throughout, making it even more difficult for the reader to keep track of the entire narrative.

---

<sup>17</sup> "Frakking" is a term from *Battlestar Galactica* that offers the writers a way around the ban on cursing on network cable television. It's become a linguistic "in-group" marker among serial television fans, especially fans of science fiction and fantasy. Did you get it?

Even for a Dickens novel, the plot of *Our Mutual Friend* is labyrinthine. The first installment sets up the novel's pattern of moving among vastly different settings, giving few clues as to how these scenes might be connected, and thus demanding a great deal of effort on the part of the reader. The first chapter features the lowest rung of British society, two figures in "a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance," dragging something (later revealed to be a body) up from the depths of the Thames. The scene then radically shifts in chapter two to the Veneerings' dinner party at the opposite end of the socioeconomic spectrum. The action of the two chapters is linked by the revelation that the body recovered in chapter one is the "man from somewhere" who gives chapter two its title. However, since their burden is never explicitly named in the first chapter, this connection would be easy for the reader to miss. Iser's construction of reading across blanks outlined in the introduction suggests that it's only by forming an interpretive bridge across these vast gaps of character and setting between the two chapters that the reader can make the story cohere.

The installment ends with an image of an interpretive community forming around this open question of the "murder" of John Harmon that clearly expresses the ambiguous position of the reader in the reader-text exchange—characters who read become less important than stories themselves, even as Dickens makes it quite clear that the continuing survival of this story depends on the readers' attention and conversation:

Thus, like the tides on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men, the Harmon Murder—as it came to be properly called—went up and down, and ebbed and flowed, now in the town, now in the country, now among palaces,

now among hovels, now among lords and ladies and gentlefolks, now among labourers and hammerers and ballast-heavers, until at last, after a long interval of slack water it got out to sea and drifted away.” (40)

Like the installment, the conversation about the Harmon murder crosses social divisions; everyone is a potential “reader,” even the presumably illiterate “ballast-heavers.” Dickens’s ambivalence about the power of the reading public is clear here—although the “lords and ladies” and “labourers and hammerers” would be having the conversations that keep the question within the “knowledge of men,” the subject of the sentence is the murder. The readers become a conduit for the action of the text’s open questions, even though they are more literally the actors in the scene: the “long interval of slack water” would be a result of a lag in their conversation during the interval between installments. Even as the economic success of the serial depends on their action, the text pushes back against that readerly power, nesting the anonymous characters within prepositional phrases: “among lords and ladies and gentlefolk,” “among labourers and hammerers and ballast-heavers.” At the same time, the aside that the murder in question “came to be properly called” the Harmon murder suggests that the savvy reader reads “improperly” or sees more than what is explicit on the page, and is thus able to discern that Harmon has in fact not been murdered at all.

In his essay “The Cup and the Lip and the Riddle of *Our Mutual Friend*,” Gregg Hecimovich argues that reader participation is central to the structure of the novel’s plot, which follows that of a riddle. The practice of publishing riddles and acrostics in weekly periodicals “exploded with the advent of affordable serial magazines in the eighteenth century,” and persists up to the present day, from

crossword puzzles to online games based on popular serials.<sup>18</sup> The initial serial publication of *Our Mutual Friend* featured a slip of paper covering the first paragraph that offered a clue as to the hidden threads of the plot, thus framing the narrative as a series of mysteries to be solved, not unlike the riddles and verbal games that pepper Dickens's novels and personal correspondence (Hecimovich, 956). The note reads:

The Reader will understand the use of the popular phrase OUR MUTUAL

FRIEND, as the title of this book, on arriving at the Ninth Chapter (801).<sup>19</sup>

Before the story even gets started, the reader is already thinking ahead to the ninth chapter (three months away)—waiting for a clue or an answer, anticipating the gap and encouraged to think in it. Furthermore, the act of lifting the paper in order to read the text beneath it sets up the reader as an active participant in the creation of the narrative from the very beginning. As she navigates the questions of the first few paragraphs (Who are the figures in the boat? What's their relationship? Most importantly, what are they dragging up from the surface?), she must creatively project herself into the text, scanning for clues and filling in blanks. Or, as Hecimovich puts it, the opening page “forces the reader into the role of a riddlee, trying to find meaning in the accretion of clues” (960).

---

<sup>18</sup> The *LOST* experience, an online game sponsored by Sprite, is the best example of this kind of narrative-based puzzle. Viewers gleaned clues from both episodes and fake advertisements for fictional organizations within the diegetic world (Oceanic Airlines or the Hanzo foundation) and used them to solve online puzzles and gain more information about the larger puzzle of the series' overall plot. Although the game itself is no longer available, its developers Hi-ReS! have a website that offers an overview of the game's structure and rules which can be found at <http://hi-res.net/awards/thelostexperience/>.

<sup>19</sup> As Hecimovich points out, the note has received little critical attention over the years, and was omitted from scholarly reprints of the novel as late as the Everyman's Library edition of 1994 (955). It is present in the 1997 Penguin Classics edition, but relegated to an endnote. Given the practical limits of novel publishing (and the unique and interruptive nature of the inserted note), it is unsurprising that the note was elided from bound versions of the narrative. However, the lack of a temporal gap between the clue and its “solution” in a bound novel casts this elision in a more positive light. After all, if the reader only needs to turn to page 83 to find the solution, the “riddle” hardly seems worth the time.

Hecimovich singles out four characters who serve as interpretive models for the reader: Silas Wegg and the Analytical Chemist exemplify analysis—the position of the riddler, while Mr. Venus and Jenny Wren exemplify articulation—the position of the riddlee. In order to solve the riddles of the plot, the reader must both read closely and between the lines like the first pair, as well as put the pieces back together in order to make something new, following the example of Jenny Wren and Mr. Venus, with their dust-heap dolls and rearticulated skeletons. Hecimovich's use of Wegg as a positive example is complicated by the narrator's clear disdain for the character, which is mirrored both by other characters and by Wegg's discursive function in transatlantic popular culture, as suggested by an August 1882 *New York Times* article, reprinted from the *London Observer* in which he is compared with other “grasping old knave[s]” who charge exorbitant prices for celebrity swag. Wegg does serve as an example of the reading practices demanded by the novel, but with implications that suggest a far more complicated dynamic between implied reader and implied author than Hecimovich's praise of the need for the reader's “imagination” suggests. While the reader might recognize her own behavior in Wegg, it would be difficult if not impossible for her to fully identify with such an unpleasant character.

Although Hecimovich focuses on the increased interpretive effort required of the reader, I would argue that this pattern calls for greater affective investment as well, and that this emotional effort is necessarily connected to the process of interpretation. By demanding a mode of interpretation that so closely mirrors that of the characters, the reader must project herself into the fictive world in much the same way Wegg inserts the Boffins' names into his revised versification, altering

popular ballads so they directly address his employers.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the reader recognizes her own activity in the behavior of the characters, and the authorial judgment of the characters is, by extension, also a judgment of her. At the same time, in her attempt to riddle out the answers to these questions, the reader necessarily establishes an imaginary relationship with the implied author as partners in the process of meaning-making. In the moment of connecting the dots between and among the different installments and plot threads, the reader and Dickens himself become the mutual friends of the novel's title.

At the same time, the partnership of a riddle is inherently uneven. One can't tell a knock-knock joke without someone else there to answer "who's there?", but the joke's always on the listener—more often than not, the joke sets the listener up to have her expectations confounded by a pun or deliberate misunderstanding. This "joke's-on-you" mentality exemplifies the hostility that underlies the "mutual" friendship of the novel. John Farrell argues that the interpretive partnerships throughout the novel work as examples and celebrations of mutuality, which will hopefully translate to political action for the novel's readers. Characters such as Wegg, however, show the threat of mutuality: readers who try to take control over the direction of the narrative or attempt to make money from a novel that isn't "theirs." Dickens's fight for stricter copyright laws is one concrete example which suggests that his celebration of mutuality only went so far—as much as he and his

---

<sup>20</sup> For instance: "Beside that cottage door, Mr. Boffin,/ A girl was on her knees;/ She held aloft a snowy scarf, Sir,/ Which (my eldest brother noticed) fluttered in the breeze./ She breathed a prayer for him, Mr. Boffin;/ A prayer he could not hear./ And my eldest brother lean'd upon his sword, Mr. Boffin,/ And wiped away a tear." (60)

readers were both invested in imaginary friendship and collaboration, Dickens certainly was not interested in sharing any of the novel's profits.<sup>21</sup>

This question of reader participation is trickier in a filmed medium like television than in a novel. While critics such as Richard Gerrig have used reader-response models to analyze film and television, Iser focuses on the experience of reading—part of the process of projection into the text is the creation of visual images that fill in the cognitive blanks of a particular scene or character.<sup>22</sup> In serialized television, much of the process of projection happens through the construction of the plot and frequent intertextual references, as well as through more formal elements such as camerawork and manipulation of the narrative timeline. *Battlestar Galactica* is a particularly good example of the way that serial television demands active readership, in that its narrative is constructed in such a way that the reader is forced to project meaning into a series of jarring narrative gaps. The show is a “re-imagining” of a classic/campy genre series from 1980, and thus, from its inception, has privileged a reader familiar with this earlier show. The new incarnation retains elements of the original premise but casts its villains, the Cylons, as robots gone wrong in the tradition of *Blade Runner* or *The Matrix* instead of as an invading alien force. The narrative begins with a surprise attack by the Cylons that nearly wipes out the human population and places the story within a clear eschatological framework. The story then follows the small group of survivors as they head toward

---

<sup>21</sup> For example, his “quarrel with America” was predicated on the problems of international copyright law, and particularly his perception that he was “the greatest loser by the existing Law, alive.” (Moss, 9)

<sup>22</sup> In *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*, Gerrig argues that the shared experience of “being transported” by a narrative links all modes of engaging with narrative worlds: “Readers become ‘lost in a book’; moviegoers are surprised when the lights come back up; television viewers care desperately about the fates of soap opera characters; museum visitors are captivated by the stories encoded in daubs of paint. In each case, a narrative serves to transport an experiencer away from the here and now.” (3)



a mythic Earth, constantly pursued by the Cylons. As they make their way toward Earth, the lines between human and Cylon become more difficult to distinguish, and the series ends as an origin story of the colonization of Earth<sup>23</sup> in which humanity has descended from a Cylon/human hybrid.

The show occupies a space between a mainstream and a fan tradition, airing on the SciFi<sup>24</sup> network, but garnering mainstream attention and praise for the ways it, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, “transcends both its genre and its source material” (Jensen). Furthermore, the show’s cinema-verité style and its use of well-known film actors Edward James Olmos and Mary McDonnell as its leads lend it more mainstream caché than most science fiction television narratives. Its rhetorical techniques then call to established science fiction fans even as the show disavows its connection with those fans through its claims to “legitimacy” and its attempts to “rise above” its generic origins.

At the same time, the show’s temporal structure pushes the reader to use strategies more familiar to a fringe audience, especially mastery over the narrative’s increasingly complicated history. Building on the show’s dialogic relationship with its predecessor, each episode begins, after the recap and the teaser, with a series of iconic images from the miniseries pilot displayed over text that gives a brief description of the show’s premise.<sup>25</sup> Although this description changes each season,

---

<sup>23</sup> Technically, they settle on an unknown, unnamed planet—the “real” mythic Earth they were attempting to reach was decimated by a nuclear holocaust. They name the second planet they find Earth as well, thus reversing the reality relationship between diegetic and extradiegetic worlds. In other words, our world is a copy of theirs, not the other way around.

<sup>24</sup> In the show’s final season, the network changed its name to “SyFy,” presumably to divorce itself from its association with nerdy, obsessive fans. Needless to say, this move didn’t really work.

<sup>25</sup> These images also explicitly refer to “apocalyptic” moments in US history, most notably the shot of the grief-stricken president taking her oath of office on the equivalent of Air Force One. Following the pattern of the show’s dialogic relationship to its forebear, its relationship with US history is clearly allegorical.

it always ends by referring to one of the structuring central questions of the text.<sup>26</sup> In this way, every episode is placed squarely in the context of the trauma of its originary apocalypse. Unlike many shows, which use the opening credits to introduce characters, the narrative's history is the point around which the reader must orient herself. For a novice reader, the credits serve as a kind of incomplete recap, giving some mastery over the plot, but leaving her in the dark as to the smaller issues that would orient her more thoroughly. However, any sense of narrative coherence or ease that the initiated reader might feel is promptly destabilized by a sped-up flash forward through the events of the episode to come in which the main plot points are displayed in erratically cut glimpses in the space of ten seconds. In this way, this reader is placed in the position of the knowledgeable fan (one who is in on the backstory) by the recap and the credits, but that sense of mastery is undercut by the immediate reminder of her lack of knowledge. As a result, both fans and casual readers are structurally encouraged to project themselves forward into the narrative, to imagine possible counter-narratives, to mine past episodes for clues—in short, to read like fans.

The end of season two offers the most extreme example of this push toward fan reading strategies when the diegetic and formal conventions of television collapse in a way that blurs the established boundary between reader and text, encouraging the reader to project herself into the text. In terms of plot, the story makes an

---

<sup>26</sup> In season one, this prologue read: "The Cylons were created by man. They rebelled. They evolved. They look and feel human. Some are programmed to think they are human. There are many copies. And they have a Plan." In Seasons Two and Three, the fourth sentence is deleted, but the promise of an organizing Plan remains. By the fourth and final season, however, the promised revelation is smaller and more manageable: "One [unknown Cylon] will be revealed." Once that character's identity is known, the promise is only that the fleet might find a way Home (the word floats on its own after the other text has disappeared). Throughout the series, then, reader expectation is directed toward an ever-diminishing set of answers, and the complicated nature of the story ensures that the answers to these bigger questions will never arrive, and will fail to satisfy even if they do.

unprecedented temporal leap forward, skipping over an entire year of story during which the fleet settles on an inhospitable planet, New Caprica, where they think they will be safe from the Cylons. This disrupts the narrative's expected trajectory in two ways: not only is the journey toward Earth abandoned, thus negating the show's status as an origin story, but also the generic concerns of science fiction are abandoned for domestic ones. This narrative disruption is echoed on the formal level: the season finale is extended to an hour and a half, and at just the moment when the episode would normally end, the largest ship in the fleet explodes. The scene cuts to a long shot of the explosion from space, and the fourth wall breaks down as a piece of shrapnel from the explosion hits the camera, pulling the reader into the diegesis. Furthermore, the shrapnel hitting the camera serves as a callback to the moment in the miniseries when the Cylons first demonstrated their total technological dominance over humans. The appeal to the fan's knowledge of the text encourages the reader to see herself as part of an exclusive community to which she has been invited by her friend, the author.

The temporal leap encourages the reader to scramble to fill in what might have happened in that lost year, creating alternate stories as if she were writing her own piece of fan fiction. Jenkins argues that the earliest *Star Trek* fan fiction writers, who were mostly heterosexual women, would refocus the story "around traditional 'feminine' and contemporary feminist concerns, around sexuality and gender politics, around religion, family, marriage, and romance" (51). The elided year on New Caprica follows this gendered split between narratable and non-narratable action, picking up the thread of the story only when the military conflict between the humans and the Cylons begins anew. New Caprica becomes the marginal space of

these domestic concerns—when the narrative begins again, most of the changes that have happened follow the thematic concerns of Jenkins’ fan writers: characters have unexpectedly married, the relationship between two major characters has disintegrated while other formerly antagonistic characters are now friendly. By passing over this span of time, the show simultaneously maintains its focus on traditional science fiction concerns (war with the Cylons, the Fight for the Survival of Humanity) and encourages its readers to speculate about the domestic and emotional lives of its characters during their “off-screen” time. The show thus pushes its readers to participate in the dominant narrative and create new stories to augment or challenge that narrative. Instead of poaching, we’re invited to come and hunt.

### **Our Mutual Frenemy**

This invitation to mutually construct meaning in serial narratives is double-edged. An established and active fan base gives an author more creative freedom in that publishers or networks are more willing to allow them to take narrative chances, trusting that a celebrity author will be able to maintain his readership. Dickens’s decision to publish *Our Mutual Friend* in monthly installments was a good example of this kind of choice—he had not published in this format since *Little Dorrit*, and it was economically riskier than the more popular method of weekly installments in a periodical that could also depend on the power of other stories to draw readers and advertisers. The creators of *Battlestar Galactica*, too, used the show’s sway on the SciFi network (and with its flagging parent network, NBC) to extend its narrative in previously unseen ways, from interstitial online “webisodes” broadcast between

seasons, to *Caprica*, a soap operatic spinoff described by Moore in a panel at the 2010 Comic-con as “*Dallas* in space.”

However, just as an established fan base lends a writer more creative and economic power, it also threatens the narrative’s future with the constant possibility that readers might at any moment abandon the text. The changed ending of *Great Expectations* is perhaps the best-known example of this imaginary public’s power to alter the direction of a narrative. Even as the mutual nature of the serial lends the reader more interpretive freedom, the text pushes back in the form of negative figures of fannish reading. Active readers like Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend* suggest that this affection between reader and writer is laced with hostility, and that this hostility increases as the reader becomes more active.

As I outlined above, *Our Mutual Friend* is littered with moments of “mutuality,” where the reader is encouraged as a co-creator of meaning in the text. However, the figure in the text that performs this behavior of active reading most explicitly is hardly a positive role model. From the first moments of his introduction, Silas Wegg is presented as a bad reader and a bad writer, and this “badness” is rooted in his tendency to either read too literally or to “read too much into” things, and then re-present his interpretation for consumption by other readers. In his tendency to take established texts (from popular ballads to the “story” of the house where he has placed his peddler’s cart) and revise them to suit his own goals, Wegg prefigures Jenkins’ textual poachers. Like them, he “raid[s] mass culture, claiming its materials for [his] own use, reworking them as the basis for [his] own cultural creations and social interactions.” (18) He reads and writes with a combination of interpretive and affective excess that mirrors the habits of the typical fan.

From the first moments he is introduced in the novel, Wegg is identified by his excessive reading and writing habits. The sign he places in front of his cart illustrates both his reappropriation of the formal elements of popular literature (the ballad and the serial) as well as his misapprehension of his own power and importance. The sign reads:

Errands gone  
On with fi  
Delity By  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
I remain  
Your humble Serv<sup>t</sup>:  
Silas Wegg      (52)

By composing his sign in verse, Wegg aligns himself with the authors of the ballads that make up his trade, and establishes himself as a writer, if only in his ability to play with formal conventions. For instance, the location of the line breaks on the sign lends it a double meaning, according Wegg more power even as he shills for work. First, the break in the middle of “fi/ Delity” gives away Wegg’s actual reluctance to pledge fidelity to Boffin, while the rhyme fi/by shows off his status as a “literary man.” Furthermore, the break “By/ Ladies and Gentlemen” implies that it is the ladies and gentlemen who will serve Wegg, rather than the other way around. Even though reading between the lines will alert a savvy reader to Wegg’s machinations early on, Wegg is also given power within the text through this imitation of Dickens’s own techniques—just like Dickens, Wegg is a writer who uses breaks to co-create meaning with his readers.

Wegg’s status as a writer is always linked to his activity as a reader. It’s as a reader that he is first hired by Boffin, and it’s his misreading of the relationship with the “Ladies and Gentlemen” who live in the house where he keeps his cart that has

led him to advertise himself as an errand-boy in the first place. This imaginary relationship is perhaps the clearest example of Wegg's tendency to overstep his social and textual position, and where his reading habits most clearly mirror and model the excessive tendencies of the fannish serial reader: projecting his desire onto characters so thoroughly that their "real" lives cease to matter. He over-reads the few errands a year he is asked to run for the residents of the house to the point where he convinces himself that "he was one of the house's retainers and owed vassalage to it and was bound to leal and loyal interest in it." (53) The narrator does not hesitate to put Wegg in his place, however, immediately pointing out that his "knowledge of [the house's] affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong." (53)

Wegg's relationship to the larger social world in the novel is introduced through this dynamic of imaginary recognition. His fantasy of a relationship with Our House and its residents is congruent with his ongoing method of relating to the world: he invents a personality for every person who passes by his stall and alters his reaction in response to that invention:

He saluted all his regular passers-by every day, as he sat on his stool backed up by the lamp-post; and on the adaptable character of these salutes he greatly plumed himself. Thus, to the rector, he addressed a bow, compounded of lay deference, and a slight touch of the shady preliminary meditation at church; to the doctor, a confidential bow, as to a gentleman whose acquaintance with his inside he begged respectfully to acknowledge; before the Quality he delighted to abase himself; and for Uncle Parker, who was in the army (at least, so he had settled it), he put his open hand to the side of his hand, in a military manner which -that angry-eyed buttoned-up

inflammatory-faced old gentleman appeared but imperfectly to appreciate (54).

As long as Wegg's interpretive activity remains within a self-contained imaginative loop, he can pride himself on his observant nature. It's when he has to make the leap from fantasy into reality that he begins to wreak havoc in the narrative. His initial hostility toward Boffin arises from the difference between Boffin's actual and expected responses. When Wegg first sees Boffin, he asks himself if Boffin has enough social standing to merit "invest[ing] the motions of a bow" in him. Rather than reinforcing the position of abasement Wegg has come to "delight" in, Boffin addresses Wegg as "sir," thus undoing Wegg's fantasy. If we read Wegg as a figure of the fan, it would seem that Dickens is highlighting the sado-masochistic element of the relationship between fan and writer. In this scenario when a writer gives the fan the recognition and power he wants, that fan immediately becomes resentful and takes his revenge accordingly, particularly through monetary means. As long as the "real" world and the "imaginary" one remain distinct,<sup>27</sup> however, the reader's imaginative activity does not pose a threat nor does he open himself up to the threat of disappointment. It's when the line between reader and writer becomes blurred that the reader's power starts to become dangerous.

Dickens's obvious disapproval of Wegg's habit of creative revision suggests that he would not take kindly to the kinds of creative intervention that characterize contemporary fan communities. Furthermore, his hostility to unauthorized copies of

---

<sup>27</sup> I'm using scare quotes here because it's important to acknowledge that this is all happening within the diegesis. The "real" world is the world of Dickens's invention, and that's what the reader is discouraged from attempting to alter. It would be possible to extend this argument to claim that Dickens is implicitly arguing against social action by encouraging the reader to keep his imaginative work so fully within the boundaries he has laid out, but for the purposes of this chapter, I am more interested in concentrating on textual power.



his work is well known. At first glance, the authors of *Battlestar Galactica* seem to occupy the opposite position, and have historically been quite open to narrative intervention by fans. In a 2005 interview with *Newsday*, Ronald Moore celebrated the possibilities opened up by fan writers, saying of his time writing for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “I always loved it when writers went into strange nooks and crannies and turned the universe upside down in ways that we couldn’t. ‘Wouldn’t it be great if Kirk and Spock were lovers?’ We can’t do that, but it’s great that somebody can.” (qtd. in Scott, 222) One would think, then, that *Battlestar Galactica* would celebrate active readership, and in some ways it does. As discussed earlier, the finale of season two elides the details of many character-based changes in the story—in the single unbroken pan that marks the passage of a year of diegetic time, the reader is left to puzzle out a number of questions: How did the friendship between Lee and Starbuck end? How did the resistance to the Cylons develop? When did Lee get so fat?

However, many of these questions were ultimately answered within the show’s ever-expanding official canon, either during flashbacks in later episodes, or through the seemingly endless interstitial narrative stream of the *Battlestar Galactica* universe. The webisode series “The Resistance,” “Razor Flashbacks,” and “The Face of the Enemy” resemble fan-authored narratives in both form and content. They were released online, and have much lower production values than the regular episodes of the show, thus physically resembling fan-produced videos. Even more striking is their narrative similarity to fan fiction: they all fill in narrative gaps.<sup>28</sup> “The Face of the Enemy” particularly resembles a piece of fan fiction in the lengths to

---

<sup>28</sup> The TV movies *Razor* and *The Plan* are similarly fannish in their emphasis on narrative gaps in the original text: each offer another version of events from the series, this time from a marginal perspective.

which it goes to correct queer characters' invisibility during the show's more legitimate run. "The Face of the Enemy" not only features the show's sole positive depiction of a same-sex relationship, but it goes out of its way to demonstrate the characters' open-mindedness regarding that relationship: they ask solicitous questions and grant underlings slack in a way that does not match up with their behavior during the show's "normal" network content. Like closeted teenagers, characters in *Battlestar Galactica* can only be openly queer on the internet. Moore's manner of keeping readers in line differs from Dickens's in form, but not in its effect—instead of openly mocking the queerly overinvested reading habits of his fans, Moore beats them to the punch and ensures that their concerns remain ghettoized in the marginal form of supplementary texts.

As this system of reward and punishment suggests, the unruly elements of fannish reading are clearly coded as queer within the text of *Battlestar Galactica*. For instance, although Baltar is heterosexual, his sexuality is decidedly non-standard—not only is he non-monogamous, but he consistently plays "sub" to his Cylon "dom" love interest. Tricia Helfer (the actor who plays his maybe-imaginary girlfriend, Six) is considerably taller than he, and many of their scenes together feature her physical dominance over him: she pushes him against walls, punches him, and teases him sexually while he interacts with other characters or tries to work. Since Baltar's fannish tendencies are so tied up with his relationship with Six (he projects into an imaginary world in order to see or have sex with her), his investment in fantasy is also an investment in perversion.

### **Readers as writers: the fan-tasy of mutuality**

One of the most famous negative figures of the fan is *The Simpsons*' Comic Book Guy. As *The Simpsons* became more popular, fans inevitably emerged who claimed that the show had “jumped the shark”: that it had abandoned its previous commitment to artistic integrity for commercial appeal. While Comic Book Guy began as a generic nerd caricature, the episode “The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show” marked his transition into negative mouthpiece for disaffected fans. After the cartoon-within-a-cartoon premieres a slick new character meant to boost ratings, Poochie, Comic Book Guy voices the complaints about the character that are echoed throughout the show with what would become his trademark line, “Worst episode ever.” When he complains that “as a loyal viewer, I feel that they owe me,” Bart responds immediately, with all the authoritative power of the show's writers behind him: “What? They're giving you thousands of hours of entertainment for free. What could they possibly owe you? I mean, if anything, you owe them.” The joke falls flat, perhaps because the punitive force behind Bart's words outweighs the text's commitment to humor. It's more important for the reader to understand his place—he is there to be entertained—than it is, at least in this moment, to actually entertain him.

This example of the uneasy exchange of feeling and power between author and reader is the flipside of the positive fantasy of mutuality that makes up serial reading. When fans start to form into communities, they also gain more voice and power, and that power can chafe against the imaginary friendship between reader and writer. Episode recaps illuminate this dynamic with particular clarity.<sup>29</sup> By re-

---

<sup>29</sup> A recap is technically different from a review, in that it's more focused on plot summary while a review generally has a more coherent argument. Despite this difference, the term “recap” is used indiscriminately for episodic commentary on contemporary television serials. For my purposes here,

narrating the story, the recap writer puts herself on more equal footing with the author, and the more elaborate the recaps, the more narrative power the fan-author claims. While recaps also have an evaluative goal, the writer's opinion of the show is usually expressed through the recap's tone and a letter grade rather than through a specifically articulated argument.

Jacob Clifton's *Battlestar Galactica* recaps on the fan website *Television Without Pity* are a particularly good example of this brand of popular criticism that exists in between fan fiction and academic criticism. As his recaps become progressively more elaborate, his affective investment in the narrative increases as well; this is reflected both in his language and his grading system. In his earliest recaps, he clearly occupies the position of a reader, identifying himself as a fan and describing the episodes using extradiegetic frames of reference, such as naming his "favorite part of the clang-clang intro" and speculating about future plot developments.

As he continues, however, his recaps become less removed, and his position as a reader starts to look more like that of a fellow writer. For instance, his recap of the fourth-season episode "The Ties that Bind" begins with a moment that fills in character development gaps as thoroughly as any piece of fan fiction:

Brother Cavil hurls himself, naked, from the pod and onto the floor. He is slick and white. Cavil has always hated resurrection. That moment between life and death, that moment when God reveals his face, is nothing but pain for model One; every time he sees that light, and hears that singing, is harder for him. It hurts.

---

these I focus my attention on those recaps in which the analysis of the episode is sublimated under the primary goal of plot summary, since these essays most clearly show the fannish impulse to retell the story.

Clearly, the goal of evaluation has been eclipsed by Clifton's desire to retell the story, to fill in the gaps. As with Jenkins's fan fiction writers, reading has slipped into writing, consumption into production. This is where the fantasy of mutuality comes closest to reality—not only is Clifton rewriting the story, but he's doing so for his own not insignificant reading public.<sup>30</sup>

His investment in the fantasy of mutuality might help to explain why Clifton's reaction to perceived failures in the show is so emotionally loaded. As Clifton's recaps come to resemble fan fiction, their evaluative purpose becomes muddled by his clear emotional investment in the show. At first, the episode grades vary, but by the fourth and final season, every episode gets an A+<sup>31</sup> with the exception of the mid-season and series finales, which received a B and an unprecedented F.<sup>32</sup> The punitive intention behind that failing grade can be seen quite clearly in the recap's tone—referring to his disappointment in the finale's exposition-heavy plot, capitulation to the standards of the sci-fi genre, and its retrogressive politics, his response is more personal than critical: “I can't get around it, and I can't get past it.” Even so, he reassures his readers (and himself?) of his affective connection with the authors, asserting, “I love the people who have worked so hard to create something so beautiful, that has informed so much of my life for so many years.” His anger seems rooted in the notion that the show owes him recompense

---

<sup>30</sup> Again, the episode posts are sadly missing, but Clifton is well known enough to be name-checked as an example of how recaps can be “unbelievably long artistic masterpieces” on Myles McNutt's fan/academic website *Cultural Learnings*. Clifton was also invited to write an essay for a collection of critical fan essays on the show, *So Say We All: An Unauthorized Collection of Thoughts and Opinions on Battlestar Galactica*.

<sup>31</sup> For the fourth season episode, *Sine Qua Non*, he initially gave the episode a more tepid grade, but then changed it to an A+ after taking his requisite three days to write his elaborate recap. Retelling the story in his own words and adding the “missing pieces” inevitably improved his opinion of it.

<sup>32</sup> The grade for the finale was later changed without explanation to a C—the conspiracy theorist in me thinks this change must be connected to the site's purchase by the Bravo network, but I have no concrete evidence of coercion.

for “so many years” of devotion. At the same time, however, the depth of his imagined friendship with the writers keeps him from fully “breaking up” with the show. He’s not angry, he seems to want Moore to know, just disappointed.

His connection to the show over such an extended period of time forms the basis for this imagined friendship. As Dickens did for Charles Norton, the creators of *Battlestar Galactica* have become “the inmate of [Clifton’s] home,” not least because he has returned regularly to the narrative every week for six years and built a wealth of creative and critical work in the space in between these episodes. When that exchange ends, particularly in as problematic a fashion as *Battlestar Galactica* did, the uneven nature of the imagined bond is exposed, and the friendship is revealed to have always been virtual.

### **Writers as Readers: Commentary and/as Performance**

Although the unevenness of the writer/reader exchange is clearest from the perspective of the reader, the writer is also invested in the fantasy of mutuality, and the imaginary friendship that accompanies it. Dickens and Moore are not alone among serial writers in their ongoing interactions with fans. As early as *Clarissa* there has always been a productive connection between the writer’s desire to, in Dickens’s words, “commune” with his readers and his impulse to control their responses. Richardson’s correspondence with Mrs. Bradshaigh and his inclusion of a series of instructive “morals” in later editions of *Clarissa* show how this coercive drive can grow as a text’s production history lengthens.<sup>33</sup> This impulse seems linked to the ongoing nature of serial production, both in the longevity of the reading/writing

---

<sup>33</sup> See Florian Stuber and Margaret Doody’s “The *Clarissa* Project and *Clarissa*’s Reception” for a more detailed analysis of the contemporary reception of *Clarissa*, particularly with regard to Richardson’s concerns over how readers would interpret his tale.

process and the idea, however illusory, that the reader might hold some influence over the direction of the narrative.

This wish for textual control helps to explain the author's complicated position in relation to the reader and the contradictory impulses of affection and aggression that characterize the fan/author relationship in the serial. In *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves*, Malcom Andrews argues that "Dickens could use serialization as a means of intervening regularly in the lives of his readers, thereby creating in them a degree of reliance on himself [...] that matched his reliance on their affection and attention." (16) Although Dickens was special case among Victorian authors in terms of his desire for his readers' affection and friendship, the ongoing fact of serial reader commentary means that authors can access critical feedback on their work at any point, and are always aware of the danger of losing the precious attention that keeps the serial going.<sup>34</sup> Economic success or failure depends on a single moment for a bound text: the reader only has to buy the book or film once, and can even neglect to finish it while still fulfilling her role in the capitalist exchange. A serial, on the other hand, needs more than just initial consumers—readers must return to the serial week after week or month after month in hopefully increasing numbers if the serial is to be considered a success. The author thus needs

---

<sup>34</sup> This mutually dependent relationship is based in part on the threat of cancellation, which is much greater for contemporary television shows than it was for Victorian novels. For the most part, Victorian novels were commissioned for a pre-ordained length which was known to the audience, since the number of weekly or monthly parts was often part of its advertising campaign. An American televised serial, however, might go on forever, and the greater the show's popularity, the less likely it becomes that the next season will be the final one. For a writer like David Chase, who wanted to end *The Sopranos* but was convinced by HBO to keep the series going, this often manifested as disdain for the readers who had built up affection for his sociopathic hero. In an interview excerpted on the *Entertainment Weekly* website, Chase makes his rejection of his fans quite clear, saying: "The way I see it is that Tony Soprano had been people's alter ego. They had gleefully watched him rob, kill, pillage, lie, and cheat. They had cheered him on. And then, all of a sudden, they wanted to see him punished for all that. They wanted 'justice.' They wanted to see his brains splattered on the wall. I thought that was disgusting, frankly."

to stay in the reader's good graces in order to keep publishing, and this power manifests as a simultaneous desire to connect with that reader and to punish her. As a result, the writer often positions himself as part of the same reading community as the fans, even as he claims unified and singular power within that community.

It's in the phenomenon of authorial commentary that the writer's doubled position as both authority and fellow reader becomes most apparent. Postscripts, prefaces and DVD commentary tracks are frequent spaces for direct and sometimes contentious contact between reader and writer, and they offer a space where the writer can respond to readerly feedback. The creation of an authorial figurehead is central to the establishment of a cult text<sup>35</sup>, but maintaining that position becomes more complicated as the narrative expands and reading becomes a more collaborative process. Dickens and Ronald Moore take opposite positions regarding their claims to a preexisting vision for their respective creations, but both their authorial commentaries suggest a similarly vexed relationship with authorial power: each performs a double role as a member of his own reading public and the authorial figurehead for that public. Given a chance to speak directly to their audiences, both Dickens and Moore oscillate between equating themselves with their fellow readers and reasserting their authorial control. The fantasy of friendship and mutuality operates on both sides of the divide between reader and writer, reaching a peak during the serial's extended middle and then lapsing into aggression when the uneven nature of the relationship is exposed, most often at the narrative's end.

---

<sup>35</sup> In *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills lays out a number of "family resemblances" among cult texts, including "auteurism, endlessly deferred narrative, and hyperdiegesis." (131) The *auteur* "acts as a point of coherence and continuity in relation to the world of the media cult," and acts as a kind of tentpole around which the group of fans can organize themselves and understand the source text as a coherent unit (132).



This similarity between the two authors is particularly notable because their approaches to the question of the author's control over the creative process are so different. While Dickens spends much of the postscript reassuring readers that, despite all appearances, he did have a Plan for the novel from the outset, Moore happily admits moments of invention throughout the series, pointing out how coincidences of production or casting led to decisions that would greatly influence the plot down the line.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in the commentary for the pilot episode "33," Moore and Eick admit that the writers decided on the spur of the moment to place the Cylon double agent Sharon on Caprica with Helo—a decision that profoundly affects the way the story unfolds up until the finale.

In contrast, Dickens uses authorial commentary to reassure his readers that, unlike "many readers," he could "perceive the relations of [the story's] finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom." (798) Hayward argues that Dickens's relationship with the plot was not so clearly planned in advance: building on the work of F. X. Shea, she suggests that Dickens changed the initial trajectory of the story from a version in which the Lammles, rather than Venus and Wegg, were responsible for the plot to separate Boffin from his inheritance (59). Dickens's documented last-minute decision to add the chapter about Venus after over-writing "The Marriage Contract" (which depicts the Lammles' wedding) shows an uncanny similarity to Moore and Eick's decision to place Sharon on Caprica—in both cases, the demands of serial production led to decisions which altered the narrative's endgame. Furthermore, Dickens reminds his

---

<sup>36</sup> Moore's self-effacing authorial position is counterbalanced by its contrast to the constantly reiterated claim in the credits of the first and second seasons that "They [the Cylons] have a Plan." Even if Moore and the other writers improvise the plot as they go, the characters themselves are credited with a long-term vision for the future of the narrative.

readers throughout the postscript of his established fame not just as an author but as the originator of serial novels when he refers to himself as “one who revived [serial publication] in the *Pickwick Papers* after long disuse, and has pursued it ever since.” (798) Building on the metaphor of the weaver at his loom, Dickens seems to imply here that not only did he weave the cloth, but he invented the loom itself.

These opposed relationships to authorial power make Moore and Dickens’s shared commitment to shaping reader response that much more noteworthy.

Although Moore disavows narrative omniscience, his commentary is also littered with knowing references to how “the audience” will respond to a particular scene.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the sheer volume of commentary functions as a way for Moore to make sure his intentions as a creator are a central element of fan interpretation. Beginning with the second season, Moore recorded an audio commentary for every episode—these were published on the show’s official website, along with a video blog by co-creator David Eick and interviews with the actors. Moore’s podcast stands out from the others in its intimacy—while Eick interviews other members of the cast and crew, Moore’s commentaries are constructed as conversations and are much more popular among fans. They function in a similar fashion to Dickens’s prefaces—if Dickens had included an explanatory preface for every installment, instead of just for each novel. Unsurprisingly, Moore’s commentary has become a kind of “final word” in online debate over the specific episodes. In her essay

---

<sup>37</sup> For instance, in the episode commentary for the pilot, “33,” Moore resolves the possible controversy over Six’s reality status with the argument that “the audience is smart. They’re going to pick this up. They know that sometimes there’s a convention that a character is going to see a character that other people don’t, and that that’s not really new under the sun. You don’t really have to lead them by the hand. And then you’re balancing that with the network’s concern that you don’t alienate new viewers.” In this way, he simultaneously establishes a bond with the audience as members of an in-group who “get it,” while also shaping the potential critical debate by moving intertextuality to the center of the discussion.

“Authorized Resistance: Is Fan Production Frakked?” Suzanne Scott examines the *TWOP* thread “Chain-smoking and Apologies” that specifically focuses on the commentary, noting how “fans’ consumption of the podcasts is intimately bound up with the acceptance of Moore’s word as law and the occasional desire to flout that law.” (219)<sup>38</sup> Even among more negative and antagonistic groups of readers, such as the *A.V. Club*’s *T.V. Club* section, readers such as Not Gary Higgins use Moore’s podcasts as evidence of the show’s creative and aesthetic failures, writing: “Even Moore himself admits there was no real idea of where it would all go, which is why he shouldn’t have laid out the pieces of a ‘big picture’ puzzle when he hadn’t even seen the front of the box.” (“Daybreak, part 2”, 3/22/2009) Whether readers love or hate an episode, Moore’s commentary sets the terms of the debate.

Part of the appeal of Moore’s podcast commentaries, and the main element that sets them apart from the standard audio commentary tracks that accompany most films and at least selected episodes of nearly all television shows released as DVD boxed sets is their chatty intimacy. Moore recorded the tracks in his home, and auditory evidence of that domestic setting is present throughout, from Moore shooing away his cats to the intermittent contributions of his wife, identified jokingly as “Mrs. Ron”—notably, not the more formal “Mrs. Moore.” Furthermore, his remarks on the show itself come just as frequently from the position of a fellow reader as they do from the more authoritative position outlined above. The clearest example of this elision of the boundary between Moore and the show’s readers comes during the series finale, when Moore is reduced to tears during the death of a

---

<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the old episode threads on *Television Without Pity* were deleted after the show ended, so I have to take comments from other forums and cite work that was published while the show was still being aired for direct quotes from *TWOP*.

central character. It's on the level of affect that Moore aligns himself most with his readers, defining fans as "people who love the show as much as you do."

(Commentary, "Daybreak, Part 3")

The characters become a third term between reader and writer, and a repository for the increased affect experienced on both sides of the reader/writer exchange; Moore continually refers to his fidelity to the characters when explaining or justifying his choices in his commentary. It's unsurprising, then, that Dickens uses a similar strategy to connect with his readers in the postscript to *Our Mutual Friend*, speculating as to "my friend Mr. Bounderby[s]" probable opinion on the Poor Law and referring to the Boffins as fellow passengers on the train during the railway accident he experienced while writing *Our Mutual Friend*. Like his readers, Dickens is bound to his characters by a bond of familiarity and affection.

Dickens's desire to connect with his readers on a personal level is well documented<sup>39</sup>—although textual commentary was one way to forge that bond, his public readings offered an even more explicit opportunity to simultaneously bridge and reinforce the gap between author and reader. Like Moore's podcasts, the public readings not only served as a pedagogical example of how to accurately read the novels, but formed a fantasized bond of intimacy between Dickens and his reading public as fellow readers. By simultaneously performing the roles of reader, Author, and character, Dickens aligns himself with his readers, but also claims mastery over all three positions.

---

<sup>39</sup> For instance, in the preface to *Little Dorrit*, he refers to his ongoing relationship with his readers in terms that are usually reserved for friendship: "Deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us, I add to this Preface, as I added to that [of *Bleak House*], May we meet again!" (6)

As theatrical as Dickens's embodiment of his characters was (and this theatricality was of course a great part of their appeal), the Readings also reproduced the more prosaic forms of reading with which many members of Dickens's audience were already quite familiar. Andrews points out that "those unable to read knew Dickens's texts only as a series of oral performances, whether in the form of a solo recitation or condensed into a stage adaptation" (51). Subscription reading groups and family reading circles also offered existing models for the public consumption of Dickens's work. Readers were used to public or semi-public performances of popular serials, and these occasions would build on sense of communal readership engendered by serial publication. Dickens's choice of props marked the Public Readings as a performance of reading as such, from the copy of the book which he had as a prop, but never actually read from, to his paper-knife which, according to Susan Ferguson, "served to associate Dickens with the reader encountering the book for the first time and actively cutting open the pages of the text." (736) Like Moore's cigarettes and cat-herding, Dickens replicates an intimate scene of reading that resembles, at least in part, the reader's familiar setting.

At the same time, Dickens's interpretation held a different caché than the reader's own amateur performance of reading. For instance, Victorian journalist Kate Field, in her *Pen Photographs of Charles Dickens's Readings*, cites the readings as not just "delightful," but "instructive." (xix) This clearly supports Ferguson's claim that "Dickens's dramatization of his own works, then, particularly in light of the repeated dramatization of them as plays by others, can be seen as a presentation, quite literally, of the 'author-ized' version of the works" (739). While Dickens and Moore bond with their readers through these signs of similarity—particularly the setting of

reading—they balance that by reasserting their own authority. Unlike any other fellow reader, Dickens and Moore occupy singular and hegemonic positions, and their self-described ideal positions in relation to their narratives show this fantasy of total control: the director of a theater who has total control over every element of the show and the factory owner who can show “how the sausage gets made.” Dickens and Moore clearly desire intimacy with their readers, but seem less enthusiastic about the loss of control that might accompany that overture.

### **Not-so-great expectations: closure and affect**

The ending of the narrative marks the place where the fantasized friendship between reader and writer begins to break down in earnest. Without future episodes which a reader can speculate about or attempt to change, that reader is reminded who has final control over the narrative’s content. At the same time, if the end is poorly received, this can influence the narrative’s long-term reception by fans and critics alike. Unsurprisingly, then, this is a time when emotions run particularly high on both sides of the reader/writer exchange. If we follow Feltes’s argument about the reader’s affective attachment arising in part from the fetishized value of the installment, then it follows that the reader’s emotional “investment” in the narrative and the characters should also be understood in economic terms. The ending becomes the moment of promised “return” on the reader’s investment of time, attention, and money. When that return inevitably isn’t as great as the readers had hoped, they frequently react with hostility. The author will often attempt to contain that hostility by punishing or reforming figures of wayward readers.

Since *Battlestar Galactica* and *Our Mutual Friend* are constructed around specific open questions, the endings of both narratives carry with them an elevated promise

of return. The penultimate review in *The London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* focuses on this anticipation, noting that “there is no diminishment in our interest in the characters,” and going on to describe the installment’s plot in terms of the resolution or suspension of the different threads of the plot, noting with anxiety and anticipation that Eugene’s final fate remains unresolved, as do Bella’s and John’s. The final sentence of the review emphasizes this question of suspense, complaining that “we are left to bear our impatience for the rest of the story as best we can” (10/5/1865). Here at the end of the narrative, the question of what comes next becomes more overloaded with meaning than in any previous review.

Dickens’s tetchy response in the novel’s postscript suggests that, although specific complaints about the hairpin turns at the novel’s close were not widespread (Hayward 72-73), he had a different reading of the narrative’s reception. Although he begins with a mild castigation of the “class of readers and commentators” who “would suppose that [he] was at great pains to conceal exactly what [he] was at great pains to suggest” and thus underestimate his literary prowess, his defense of the reality-status of the Harmon Will seems more attuned to possible reader criticism.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary reviews “placed high value on Dickens’s construction of a ‘realism’ that privileges familiar characters and settings,” and Dickens’s insistence on the actual referents of the Harmon Will seems to speak directly to that anticipated criticism (Hayward 70).<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have not been so kind to the novel’s close. Hilary Schor, for instance, notes that “all problems of closure—value, reward, and the promise of future happiness—seem concentrated in this novel, and seem, moreover, to topple unpleasantly on readers’ heads, like so much matter in a finally overfull closet” (178).

<sup>41</sup> Henry James’s criticism of *Our Mutual Friend* as “poor with the poverty not of momentary embarrassment, but of permanent exhaustion” set the stage for the modernist rejection of Dickens, and is based on this same complaint of a lack of realism. The bulk of James’s complaints focus on the hyperbolic characters and twisty plot: “among the grotesque characters who occupy the pages before

However, his treatment of reading itself in the narrative's resolution shows this ambivalence toward active interpretation most clearly. Dickens's advice in the postscript to have faith in the vision of the "weaver at his loom" seems a little disingenuous when one considers how hard the reader has to work to keep the threads of the plot connected over the course of nineteen months. The novel's end, however, is a resounding assertion of authorial power in the reader/writer exchange. Bella is rewarded for her transformation from a resistant to a passive reader, and Wegg is expelled from the narrative altogether.

At the beginning of the novel, Bella's defining characteristic is her refusal to participate in the narrative that was laid out for her since she was a baby: that she would be willed to John Harmon "like a dozen of spoons," as a condition of his inheritance (45). Her rejection of this preordained narrative makes her seem at first to be an early model for feminist reading techniques, which is why her "training" at the hands of the Boffins smarts so much for contemporary feminist critics.<sup>42</sup> Her submission to the unlikely machinations of the plot is aligned with her submission to patriarchal power, thus aligning Dickens's authorial voice with the larger social script and lending it more power.

The scene of the wedding itself is a turning point in the depiction of readerly activity in the novel. Both Bella and a clear stand-in for Wegg succumb to the dreamy passivity of the fairy-tale wedding scene. When she and her father arrive at

---

us, there is not one whom we can refer to as an existing type" (469-70, qtd. in Collins). Dickens's anxiety in the postscript seems to be based at least in part on his troubled relationship to the changing definition of realism.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, Lyn Pykett points out that Bella's desire for wealth makes her morally repugnant; her conversion thus depends on the way that "the plot permits her to have the object of her original desire at such a time as she no longer desires it" (176). Hilary Schor argues that Bella must abandon not only desire, but a sense of herself as anything other than a commodity: "this novel's apotheosis of female identity is to separate them from any identity at all, to imagine themselves already sordid possessions, hoping only for redemption by someone more 'worthy'" (185).



Greenwich so she can elope with “Rokesmith,” their happiness “drew after them a gruff and glum old pensioner to see it out” (649). The pensioner is aligned with Wegg by his two wooden legs, and he too is inspired by the vision of strangers to flights of fancy, comparing Mr. Wilfer to the cherubs in the church architecture and remembering his own romantic past. However, his relationship to the narrative is much more passive than Wegg’s: not only is he “drawn after them” as if in their wake, but he sticks himself “like wax” to Bella and John and “present[s] himself to be swallowed up” by the church.

At the same time, he does need to participate in the wedding for it to happen, and Dickens’s description of the wedding scene puts the reader in the position of this pensioner:

Who taketh? I, John, and so do I, Bella. Who giveth? I, R. W. Forasmuch, Gruff and Glum, a John and Bella have consented together in holy wedlock, you may (in short) consider it done, and withdraw your two wooden legs from this temple. To the foregoing purport, the Minister speaking, as directed by the Rubric, to the People, selectly represented in the present instance by G. and G. above mentioned (650).

This moment of direct address is striking, particularly the directive to “withdraw your two wooden legs from this temple.” The participation of readers with wooden legs, although it might once have been necessary, is clearly no longer needed once the story moves into the familiar tropes of closure recognizable from the marriage plot. Fully passive now, the pensioner stares after Bella and John and Mr. Wilfer as they leave “with a narcotic consciousness of having dreamed a dream” (650).

This dream-state characterizes Bella's relationship to John and her position in the novel from this point forward, suggesting that her "correction" also revolves around this move from activity to passivity. The passage of an unnamed amount of time in the space between the penultimate and final installments, during which Bella goes from being pregnant to having a baby old enough to talk, gives their whole marriage a dreamy quality. Like the first chapter's temporal ambiguity, placing the action of the novel "in these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise," the final installment begins after "the winds and tides rose and fell a certain number of times, [and] the earth moved round the sun a certain number of times" (13, 735). In this final installment, however, the answers are delivered through explication rather than the process of "riddling" that characterizes the novel's beginning. When John is approached in the street by Mortimer Lightwood and his doubled identity as well as his suspicion in the Harmon Murder is finally exposed to Bella, her position as a resistant reader is fully undone:

Bella was in the state of a dreamer; perfectly unable to account for her being there, perfectly unable to forecast what would happen next, or whither she was going, or why; certain of nothing but the immediate present, but that she confided in John, and that John seemed somehow to be getting more triumphant. But what a certainty was that! (743)

She is no longer interested in revising or rewriting the narrative she's faced with, but trusts implicitly in a coherent source of narrative authority.

Bella is rewarded not only with praise from other characters, but by her ability to continue into the narrative's future, in stark contrast to Wegg. Not only is she incorporated into the generically familiar marriage plot, and thus included in a

larger group of stories that will continue to be told, but she moves into the house that Wegg had previously peopled with imagined characters. The heterosexual marriage plot is thus linked to a procreative future that is explicitly distinct from the playful, contentious relationship with power and ownership that characterizes fannish reading. This juxtaposition is made even more glaring when Harmon bans Wegg from the property altogether, telling him that he and his stall are unwelcome “outside these windows,” and thus preventing Wegg from (mis)reading their lives like he did those of the previous occupants (768). After Wegg asks for monetary recompense for his lost “patronage” as well as for “how the tone of [his] mind may have been lowered by unwholesome reading on the subject of *Misers*,” Harmon has Wegg deposited in a scavenger’s cart outside the door (768). Wegg’s unforgivable sin, the one that has him physically coded as garbage, is asking for money, presuming a level of power beyond his position in the plot.

And this is of course Wegg’s great problem: he overestimates his acuity as a reader and his importance to and power within the plot. When he finds the will, he assumes that he can see “the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom.” (798) By using Wegg as an authorial foil, Dickens can both reject totalizing closure and reassert authorial power at one fell swoop. The out-of-left field quality of the ending of Boffin’s plot, while it certainly reinscribes Dickens’s power as an author, also demands that the reader remain radically open to new possibilities. Anything might happen, so readers should let go of the idea that they ever could have foreseen the narrative’s Plan.

This ability to take narrative chances is counterbalanced by Bella’s profoundly uninventive marriage plot. Dickens uses the marriage plot as a kind of

proxy for his own narrative power, thus opening up the possibility for unexpected twists. Bella's narrative, which started off in a less traditional direction, finally ends in an unsurprising way, while Boffin's story, which looked like a more typical narrative of corruption, ends with an unexpected twist. In both these cases, the reader's attention is drawn to Dickens's ability to predict and manipulate generic expectations. His capitulation to the patriarchal imperative of the marriage plot is central to that process; by following the rule that links closure with reproduction, he can break the less established generic rules of the mystery.

The end of *Battlestar Galactica* similarly relies on dominant social narratives, particularly the narrative of imperialism, in order to reassert authorial power at the final moment. The reversion to these overly familiar narratives of domination is particularly surprising since the show's first three seasons were so invested in overt anti-imperialist political allegory. The racist overtones of the finale are unavoidable: not only do the remaining members of the fleet land in Africa, where they meet pre-verbal humans who are literally chucking spears and decide that they will bring them language and "the best of themselves," but one of two remaining women of color among the central characters must be throttled to death on the bridge before this colonization can occur. While the show might have been committed to complicated readings of race, gender, and imperialism through its earlier seasons, nearly all of this room for open or counterhegemonic interpretation is shut down in the finale.

In much the same way that Dickens uses the character of Silas Wegg as a warning for overly ambitious readers, Moore demonstrates his troubled relationship with his fans through the ultimate fates of two characters who embody the different elements of fannish reading. Fey scientist Gaius Baltar performs the interpretive

method of fandom, becoming deeply over-invested in imaginary narratives and splitting his time between a “real” life on the ship and a dream life that may or may not be real, while over-achieving technical officer Felix Gaeta enacts the affective element of fannish behavior, veering between naïve adulation of celebrity and resentful attempts to redirect the narrative away from its preordained conclusion. Through the final narrative outcomes of these two characters, readers get a clear sense of which form of fannish behavior is preferred: Baltar is redeemed when he becomes willing to follow the Plan of an all-powerful God and is thus welcomed into the heteronormative future, while Gaeta is executed for attempting mutiny against the parental dyad of the Admiral of the military fleet and the President of the civilians.

The punitive edge of the ending for the queer fan is reinforced by the resolutely heterosexual nature of its ending, particularly its emphasis on the redemptive “nature” of reproduction. The question of reproductive sexuality is central to the plot from the beginning, from the Cylons’ obsession with sexual reproduction to the central position of the human/Cylon hybrid child Hera in the story’s conclusion. Although the Cylons have already mastered an alternative and highly efficient method of reproduction, they become obsessed with heterosexual reproduction, seeing it as part of “God’s plan.” The religious views of the Cylons are often presented as extreme and a little ridiculous, but this one is ultimately backed up by the plot, and it is suggested that only a bond of heterosexual love can produce offspring. Although we witness many human/Cylon sexual pairings (not least the frequent and athletic sex between Baltar and a number of Cylon women), only the monogamous, married, heterosexual couple Athena and Helo is able to conceive a

child. In the conclusion, that child comes to represent Humanity Itself, and it is revealed in a scientifically specious coda that Hera is “Mitochondrial Eve”: the earliest known ancestor of all humans. Although the marriage plot doesn’t occupy quite as central a space in the ending of *Battlestar Galactica* as it does in *Our Mutual Friend*, the link between closure and the formation of reproductive heterosexual couples is firmly entrenched.

Gaeta’s fate reinforces the insistently hegemonic framework of *Battlestar Galactica*’s endgame, both in terms of its heteronormativity and its sound rejection of fannish intervention. Gaeta’s expulsion from the narrative, like Wegg’s, is a direct result of his attempts to steer it away from its original course. In this way, he showcases the negative affect that characterizes fandom, which is inextricable from the imagined friendship between the reader and the object of fannish attention. Like a fan fiction writer, Gaeta attempts to “correct” the direction of the story, staging a mutiny against the heterosexual parental dyad of Admiral Adama and President Roslin, whose promise of Earth has brought the fleet to a desolate wasteland. Throughout the episode, he’s spoken of with open derision by every other character on the show, and pitted against the more glamorous and popular characters. This, combined with the underhanded methods of the mutiny, makes it increasingly difficult to identify with Gaeta, even though he was acting out the anger that many fans were publicly expressing after the show had taken so many false narrative directions.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> The blurring between the “inside” and “outside” of the text suggested by the homology of the figure of the reader and the actual reader is a result of the unfixability of the serial’s narrative limits, an issue I will explore in more detail in chapter two.

It's his unwillingness to have faith in the wisdom of the patriarchal authority (Adama, but also God, and by extension the author-figure) that leads to his punishment, but his final meal before dying at the hands of a firing squad reveals the nature of his desire most clearly. After his fate has been sealed, thus ensuring that the narrative can proceed safely toward the imperial Eden of the habitable planet they do find, Gaeta finally gets the fannish recognition he's desired, having tea with Baltar and discussing his childhood dream of becoming a scientist. Baltar's final phrase to Gaeta, "I know who you are, Felix," holds out the hope that if fans only have faith that the end of the narrative will deliver on its impossible promise of satisfaction, they will be rewarded with the recognition they desire. The immediate cut from the sound of the gunshot that kills Gaeta to Moore and Eick's names tells a different story, however. Gaeta tries to change the direction that the story has been on since its first episode, and is repaid with death, indicating to fans that her attempts to change the course of the story will meet an unhappy end. The gap between the reader and the writer, the fan and the author-figure, is central to the experience of fandom. Just as the "payoff" at the end of a serial is always better in our imagination than reality, the "friendship" between the author-figure and the fan also only works in an imaginary register.

### **Conclusion: Fans are So Gay**

In the podcast commentary for the season finale, "Mrs. Ron" remarks wistfully while watching Baltar walk off with Six to their future together farming on Earth that "he doesn't have to be ashamed anymore." It's unclear exactly what shame she's referring to—the character's drive to conceal his childhood poverty? His history in the show as a self-centered villain? His perverse imaginary sex life now

replaced by monogamous heterosexual commitment? Or is she referring to his transformation in this final episode from a stubborn, resistant reader to one whose perspective lines up neatly with that of the authorial figurehead? One thing is clear: Baltar's newly acquired freedom from shame is intrinsically linked to his capitulation to the heterosexual demands of the marriage-plot ending.

Baltar's redemption works as the opposite number to Gaeta's and Wegg's humiliation and rejection because the defining element for both characters is that queerest affect, shame. All these characters present the reader with versions of herself with whom it becomes more and more affectively difficult to identify, at least until they, like Baltar, fall in line with authorial intent. At the same time, the reader can't help but recognize in herself the very characteristics that mark them as objects of humiliation: their excessive attachment to imagined and impossible objects of desire. The rehabilitation or humiliating expulsion of those characters that most resemble fans reinforces the author's power and reminds the reader of her proper place in the fictive world.

Fans don't take the hint, but they don't retreat from the texts they love, either. The author gets angry because the fan wants an impossible kind of pleasure, responds by creating characters that make fun of those fans, hoping perhaps that fans will react by disavowing that kind of excessive, embarrassing behavior. Instead, they respond with even more excess. In *The Trouble with Normal*, Michael Warner shares an anecdote about a gay and lesbian magazine from the late 1990s called *Hero*, which "had one purpose: to give gays and lesbians a magazine without sex" (41). The editor's reason for starting the magazine, he said, was that he wanted to be able to show his mother his writing without the danger that she might accidentally run



across a phone-sex ad or some other embarrassing signifier of the stigma of gay sex. Throughout *The Trouble With Normal*, Warner brilliantly lays out the problems of this approach—by cutting themselves off from the more abject, shame-soaked elements of queer culture, mainstream gay and lesbian activism reproduces the very hierarchies it hopes to upend.

When I read this anecdote, though, I'm left wondering about the mother. Is there a way for this writer to connect with his family of origin without reproducing an ethically suspect system of sexual stigmatization? Can he share his creative work with his mother, knowing full well the very real possibility of her shaming rejection? It is here that we might learn most from the position of the fan. Fans have found a way to rally around an abject relationship, but still fully invest themselves in the experience of pleasure and love. Even when an author responds to fannish excess with humiliating caricatures, fans respond by going to see him speak in, for instance, full Klingon costume. Perhaps most provocatively, they refuse to let the hostility directed toward the fan from the author-figure deter them from their commitment to reframing the text in their own ways, making it reflect their own desires. Nor do fans hesitate to criticize the text, even as they remain emotionally attached to it (as any regular reader of a fan-authored message board can tell you). The shame of serial reading is, of course, that Dickens or Joss Whedon or Ron Moore never cared about you the way you cared about him, but the endlessly productive interpretive energy of fans helps us to see the possible pleasures of a love that is always unrequited.

## Chapter Two

### The Serial Uncanny: Closure, Repetition, Boundaries

“Ah, well, poor girl, there is peace for her at least. It is the end!”

He turned to me, and said with grave solemnity: —

“Not so; alas! not so. It is only the beginning!”

*Dracula*, 177.

“You think you know? What you are, what's to come? You haven't even begun.”

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,

“Buffy Vs. Dracula”

How is one meant to read a serial text, anyway? For Victorian serials, the answer seems obvious at first—we should look at the novel as a whole. After all, they were published for posterity in leather-bound novels, free from the interruptions of advertisements or neighboring stories. However, the recent historical turn in Victorian studies suggests that these missing paratextual elements are indispensable to the text's overall meaning.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, each installment was structured with the temporal gaps that preceded and followed it very much in mind. The contemporary monthly reviews of specific installments of *Our Mutual Friend* evaluate each piece on its own, and the material distinction of each bound installment, complete with cover art and its own set of advertisements, also highlights the installment's status as an independent part. In sensation fiction, the break between installments often occurs

---

<sup>44</sup> See Andrew King's "Sympathy as Subversion: Reading Lady Audley's Secret in the Kitchen" and Emily Steinlight's "Anti-Bleak House: Advertising and the Victorian Novel."

just as a key piece of information is introduced, secret is revealed, or character is placed in danger, thus encouraging readers to return for the next installment.

Although the power of these breaks becomes more difficult to see when the novel is read as a whole, serial reading necessarily gives more power to the parts.

The meaningful textual unit for television serials is even harder to determine, perhaps because the question of “posterity” is still being sorted out. Should we consider each episode as a separate text? Episodes usually address a clear narrative concern and have a coherent beginning, middle, and end. Weekly reviews and recaps address single episodes, and fans can refer to them by title. On the other hand, the glossy DVD packaging that preserves the text for posterity encourages the reader to think of the season as the coherent unit of the text, and most TV serials have seasonal concerns, from temporal (24’s “daily” seasons) to structural (*LOST*’s “flash-forward” or “flash-sideways”) to thematic (*True Blood* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for instance, both feature a different central villain each season). In his essay “Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television, and the Season,” Sean O’Sullivan uses the season as the dominant unit of the text, claiming that the framing device of an annually shifting credits sequence “is a direct descendent of Dickens’s serial numbers” in that it offers teasing glimpses of the story to come that can only be made sense of retrospectively (71).

And of course, as my habit of referring to these shows by their title suggests, one can also consider the entire series to be the meaningful textual unit, as Robyn Warhol does when she examines Trollope’s Palliser series and the soap opera *As the*

*World Turns* in her analysis of seriality and affect, *Having a Good Cry*.<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Gray extends the reach of the serial text even further in *Show Sold Separately*, where he argues that para-texts (trailers, packaging, promotional tie-ins) “are not simply additions, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them” (6). For instance, in some markets, the unexpected sight of a *Battlestar Galactica* character shooting herself in the head was followed by an advertisement for the KFC “Frak pack” that featured splashing condiments which offered a darkly comedic visual echo of the violent scene that immediately preceded it. The boundaries of the “whole” text are unfixably expansive.

I don’t propose to offer a definitive answer to the question of the serial unit in this chapter. Instead, I want to reverse the tendency to think of these texts as unified wholes, and instead show how the limits of the serial create a framework which destabilizes narrative truth. Put simply, what happens when we upend the canonical and historical precedence of the novel form and read novels as if they were television shows instead of the other way around? Unlike a bound novel or a film, a serial rarely has an “established running time.” Even Victorian serials contracted to run for a predetermined number of installments might be discontinued mid-stream for lack of readers or as a result of the author’s death.<sup>46</sup> The serial’s endpoint is thus

---

<sup>45</sup> In March 2010, Netflix Instant began grouping shows by series rather than season; most series are now listed as a single text, and a viewer must navigate through earlier seasons in order to watch later episodes. Although they began by only changing the format of heavily serialized dramas such as *Veronica Mars*, all series (even profoundly episodic ones like *Family Guy*) now follow this format, suggesting that for Netflix, at least, seriality has become the dominant television form..

<sup>46</sup> For instance, in “Sympathy as Subversion: Reading *Lady Audley’s Secret* in the Kitchen,” Andrew King reveals that Braddon “considered abandoning the tale but was persuaded to continue through the enthusiasm of her readers” (61). Furthermore, Wilkie Collins’s preface to *The Moonstone* suggests that a lack of readers might have doomed that story to a premature end. Dickens’s unfinished final novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* differs from other half-finished posthumous novels in that its first

always up for grabs; the contingent end of the episode holds the potential, however dim, that it will be the end of the story altogether. At the same time, the end of the story is never final; it might be unwritten by another volume in the series (as when the marriage that ends *Phineas Finn* is dissolved by the bride's death in between books and the hero is free to marry again in *Phineas Redux*) or one of the rampant adaptations one might find on stage while a serialized novel was still being released.<sup>47</sup> As I will go on to show in my examination of *Dracula*, these conditions of serial publishing begat a set of tropes that were also used in novels that were not published serially as a way to create suspense and entice readers to come back for more, thus making the novel's "afterlife" more likely. While it's beyond the scope of this project to fully examine the long-term influence of the serial form on the modern novel, it does seem safe to say that the contingent nature of narrative "fact" in the serial has influenced the novel's troubled relationship with claims for truth.

The difference between serial novels and their "bound" counterparts is thus one of degree rather than kind—critics from D.A. Miller on have argued quite convincingly that closure cannot deliver the relief that might accompany mastery over the truth of the text, but the near-endless rehearsal of closure in the serial makes the reader uncomfortably aware of both her desire for mastery and the fact that she will never achieve it. The force of narrative suspense increases the reader's desire for the end's promised relief, but the contingency of that end destabilizes any relief it could deliver. This concern with boundaries and desire brings us inevitably to

---

half was already published at the time of his death, thus making it impossible for editors to impose closure after the fact.

<sup>47</sup> In *Charles Dickens*, biographer Donald Hawes writes that Dickens "deplored some of the performances and the liberties taken with his stories, especially the practice of putting them on the stage before their serialization was completed and writing endings of the adaptor's own devising" (150).

Freud, whose theory of the uncanny offers a clear way to think through the serial's power to hold its readers in its thrall—just as uncanny experiences remind us that we don't know our own pasts as clearly as we think, the uncanny elements of the serial keep the narrative's past from remaining static.

Furthermore, the fan's complicated relationship with textual limits suggests a deep anxiety over where the story begins and ends. In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins argues that there are two main brands of fannish responses to a text, a feminine approach that focuses on “the elaboration of paradigmatic relationships,” and a masculine one that seeks out “moments of character interaction as clues for resolving syntagmatic questions” (109). In other words, “feminine” fandom attempts to expand the boundaries of the narrative universe by writing fan fiction or engaging in narrative play, while “masculine” fandom is more invested in mapping the existing contours of that universe and creating artifacts like wikis or schematics. Both kinds of fannish behavior, however, are focused on the limits of epistemology: working together to figure out or expand the body of knowledge of a fictional universe.

This epistemological anxiety isn't just confined to the behavior of readers; the text, too, attempts with neurotic frequency to provide what Freud would call “binding” energy.<sup>48</sup> For instance, “previouslies”<sup>49</sup> guide our attention to specific elements of the narrative past, eliding the fragmentary nature of the serial and encouraging readers to believe in the overarching unity of the text, despite the fact

---

<sup>48</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argues that excitation, either positive or negative, creates “unbound” energy in the consciousness of the subject, and that “unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *diminution*” (4, italics in original). The narrative and psychic mastery which is the object of the fort-da game, then, keeps excess feeling under control. Serials' relationship to mastery nicely literalizes Freud's metaphor—when the serial is literally bound into novel form, its anxiety-producing excess is (imperfectly, neurotically) brought under control.

<sup>49</sup> This is the dominant term used within fan communities for the montages that open each episode of a serial, so named for the repeated phrase “previously on [show's title].”

that the longer the serial goes on the less likely any kind of big-picture cohesion becomes. Even when these explicit paratextual markers are missing, serial narratives frequently loop back on themselves in order to accommodate new and seasoned viewers simultaneously. All this repetition blurs the story's limits, and each new installment comes to feel like a re-reading.

In this chapter, I will argue that the episodic break is the defining element of the serial as well as the sign of its overwhelming anxiety. Essentially, I am arguing for the serial as a unique genre, distinct from the novel or the episodic television series or the soap opera. As a result of its uniquely precarious production mode, the serial has a distinct death drive, which is expressed through its anxiety over limits—between inside and outside, self and other, fiction and reality, past and present. These unfixable limits provide the formal origins for the fan's "bad boundaries," the quality that leads to the kinds of excessive readerly activity described in the previous chapter. In odd contrast to the logic of repression, a serial wears its uncanniness on its sleeve, with repetition and compulsion explicitly woven into the fabric of both story and discourse. It seems only appropriate, since my argument revolves around the Freud's notion of the uncanny, that the central figure in this chapter should be the vampire. Like the serial, the vampire straddles limits, and like the serial, the vampire refuses to die.

I will focus on two texts, Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, and Joss Whedon's 1997-2004 television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I choose these narratives not only because they feature the uncanny central figure of the vampire, but also because they both initiated groundswells of interest in vampires and set up

rules that unofficial sequels went on to imitate.<sup>50</sup> In this way, they instantiate a serial continuation that extends beyond the final limits of their own narrative worlds. In the same way, *Buffy*'s status as a clear inheritor of the mythology outlined in *Dracula* puts the two narratives in an eerily productive relationship with one another.

*Dracula*'s return in *Buffy* shows how even the ending is insufficient to contain a serial narrative—a serial can rise from the grave of closure or cancellation. At the same time, this “success” is profoundly double-edged; the longer a narrative goes on, the more open it becomes to accusations of “jumping the shark,” or abandoning earlier claims to authenticity and quality for crowd-pleasing tactics that place economic motives above concerns for story quality.<sup>51</sup>

Another central element of my argument in this chapter is clear in my choice of texts: by focusing on *Dracula*, a novel whose serial publication is rumored but impossible to fully historically verify, I am arguing that seriality is a textual phenomenon as much as a historical one, and attempting to reverse the ahistorical tendency to read serialized novels as unified wholes. Although *Dracula* was initially published as a bound novel, it bears all the markers of a serial. In “Vampiric Typewriting: *Dracula* and Its Media,” Jennifer Wicke argues that *Dracula*, the first mass cultural figure of the vampire, stands in for the uncanny power of modern

---

<sup>50</sup> In *Hollywood Gothic*, David Skal traces the different iterations of the *Dracula* story, from *Nosferatu* through the Hammer *Dracula* films of the 1970s through Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 adaptation. *Buffy* not only inspired followers in its serial format and niche appeal, thus forming the backbone for the brief success of the “netlet” WB (Daniels and Littleton, *Season Finale*), but also created the template for later successful supernaturally themed narratives, from *Charmed* to *True Blood* to *Twilight*.

<sup>51</sup> In my coda, I will more fully explore the centrality of failure to the serial form. In it, I argue that all serials are doomed to fail eventually—the weight of expectations becomes too high, the pressure of maintaining an audience leads the story to develop more and more questions, and the breadth of the narrative universe means that no answer will fully account for everything that has been raised. This readerly position of constant oscillation between desire and disappointment is perhaps the queerest element of the serial—as a devoted reader, you have to realize that you want something impossible, that you must become open to new ways of desiring.



technology, and that Dracula's focus on consumption aligns him with economic and sexual anxieties both. Although Wicke reads the novel's "nineteenth century up-to-date-with-a-vengeance" use of telegrams, phonographs, and newspaper clippings as markers of its modernity, I will show how the novel's narrative structure uses the High Victorian form of the serial to hammer home the story's consuming power. By abiding by the dominant tropes of serial narratives—systematically included recapitulations, formulaic situations, coincidence, readerly expectations, and resistance to closure<sup>52</sup>—*Dracula* retains the serial's uncanny power to hold readers in its thrall. Thanks to the sometimes unbearable suspense engendered by the serial gap, readers are consumed by the serial as they engage in the work of consumption, which Wicke describes as not at all "the work of shopping, but a form of cultural labor, including the production of meanings" (477).

As I argued in chapter one, that "work" of producing meaning happens in an extreme register for serials, sometimes threatening to engulf the original story. In this chapter, I will primarily focus on the retrospective tropes of recapitulation, formulaic situations, and resistance to closure as markers of the serial text's unremitting anxiety over its own limits. I will then show how this anxiety plays out in the connection between these formal elements and the demand for collective interpretation. By demanding a group of readers rather than a single one, the serial attempts (with varying success) to stave off its own inevitable "death."

### **The Uncanny Valley between Past and Present**

In the end, the power of the uncanny is all about how unsettling it is to transgress boundaries. After all, the return of the repressed upsets us because it breaches a limit

---

<sup>52</sup> Robyn Warhol outlines these "typical features that set serial narratives apart from other long, realistic narrative fiction" in *Having a Good Cry* (79).

we had assumed was static, the limit between the present and the past. As Freud goes on to show in his examination of the different forms of the uncanny, each revolves around the destabilization of a presumably coherent opposition. The return from the dead not only confuses the presumably coherent boundary between life and death, but also reveals the split nature of the unconscious: we want death and we want to avoid it, both at once. Freud's narrative of his own involuntary return to the red-light district of a strange city disrupts the boundary between known and unknown: he thinks he knows the way out, but he only knows the way back. In every instance Freud cites, the element of involuntary repetition lends the object or experience its uncanny power; we think we have overcome a particular mode of thinking, only to see it return with new force, disrupting and making suddenly incoherent the boundaries of the self.

The doubled gaze of the serial, directed both forward and back in time, pulls the past into the present in much the same way, making the “past” of the narrative just as mutable as its future. In order to make sense of a serialized plot, the reader must simultaneously take into account all the relevant information that has passed thus far (which might stretch over years), while also anticipating how these events might affect the story to come. The hairpin plot turns that characterize serials show how even moments with which we thought ourselves intimately familiar are suddenly open to revision—Franklin Blake stole the Moonstone!; Tigh is a Cylon!; Noddy Boffin was faking his corruption!; Buffy has a sister!<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> This uncanny instability of the serial past remains true even upon re-reading, when connections that were previously invisible come to light thanks to the reader's foreknowledge. For instance, I recently attended a theatrical screening of the *Battlestar Galactica* pilot miniseries. Unsurprisingly, the theater was full of devoted fans, most of whom were presumably familiar with the events of the pilot. The extended opening shot of the series features a mild joke in which a civilian tour guide says “hi” in

In his book-length study of the uncanny, Nicholas Royle describes the link between the maintenance of boundaries and the phenomenon of the uncanny in the following terms:

[The uncanny] is not “out there” in any simple sense: as a crisis of the proper and natural, it disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside. The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality. [...] It would appear to be indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or “coming back”—the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat. (2)

When the boundaries of a text are destabilized, the coherence of the text itself is called into question—in a serial these disruptions nearly all occur at liminal moments, particularly at the beginning and end of the textual unit, whether it’s the episode, the chapter, the season, the installment, the novel, or the narrative as a whole. I will go on to examine the connection between unstable textual limits and contingent meaning in the following ways: first, I will consider how the narrative recapitulations at the start of each episode or installment disrupt the sense of mastery implied by the gesture toward closure that immediately preceded it and make the unit of the serial text impossible to fix. Then, I will consider the way these texts play with established narrative conventions, repeating formulaic plot elements with elements of difference in attempts to subvert the previous narrative under the umbrella of the new one.

---

passing to the crustiest of the ship’s officers. However, the theater exploded in laughter, knowing (unlike the characters or even the writers at the time the show was first aired) that these characters are fellow Cylons (robot-human hybrids). This laughter, I think, comes as a reaction to the scene’s uncanny power: we’re returned, just for a moment, to our position before we knew the secrets of the story. Even when we think we know a serial inside and out, it can still retain this power to surprise.

Not only does the serial undo its own history through constant and unremitting revision, but the form renders generic history similarly unstable, even as the narratives of the past also inevitably shape any story one could possibly tell. I will showcase this dynamic by closely examining the moment when Joss Whedon revivifies the figure of Dracula in order to retrospectively incorporate Stoker's narrative into his own. Finally, I will examine the way that gestures toward closure refuse to hold in serial narratives: even after a serialized story ends, the machinery of the form continues to work on the narrative universe, extending the story-world into monstrous perpetual motion. The story cannot "die only in its own fashion," and is taken up by other writers or extended into perpetuity (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 47). The most obvious extension of the fictional universe happens through the activity of fan fiction, but continuing critical engagement with the text, whether amateur or academic, similarly extends the boundaries of the narrative world. Here, I will primarily focus on the critical apparatus that has arisen around *Dracula*, particularly the excessive and explicitly interpretive footnotes of the *Norton Critical Edition*.

### **Repetition, Compulsion: Previously on *Dracula***

A question: if you watched two episodes of the same television series or read two installments of the same long-form narrative without seeing the title, how would you know that they're part of the same larger narrative? The connection between the two fragments would presumably become apparent once one element from the earlier episode reappeared: a character, a particular relationship, a plot point, the setting.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Although one might rely on recognizing the actors in a television serial, daytime soap operas have historically changed actors without explanation, relying on the reiteration of the plot points to make up for the possibly disruptive effects of this change.

These narrative recapitulations stitch the pieces into something that looks more like a coherent whole. When the temporal break between installments is removed (and the need for explicit reminders of who's who vanishes), narrative recapitulations instead work to disrupt the episodic limits of the story, undermining any sense of closure that might have come at the end of the last episode.

This destabilization of narrative limits can occur even in episodes that stand on their own quite successfully. For instance, the classic *Buffy* episode, "Hush," begins without the standard "previously on" segment, suggesting that the reader will receive any necessary information to catch up with the story during the episode itself. "Hush" was considered strong enough as a coherent narrative to be submitted for (and win) an Emmy, and it has a clear beginning, middle, and end. The story features a plague of silence which strikes the town and is then defeated by Buffy's literally finding her voice. The thematically appropriate failure of language which closes the episode reinforces its Aristotelian unity. After discovering each others' "secret identities," Buffy's new boyfriend Riley confronts her with the phrase, "I guess we need to talk." She responds, "I guess we do," and they sit in uncomfortable silence for an extended beat which remains unresolved; the scene cuts to the black screen of the closing credits. This gesture of aesthetic closure helps the episode feel complete—it has a clear aim, and each part of the story speaks to that goal of exploring the possibilities and limits of silence.

However, the opening scene of the following episode disrupts that sense of wholeness, bringing the reader's attention back to the narrative's status as a group of incomplete parts. As the episode begins, the very same moment that offers clear aesthetic closure in "Hush" is transformed into an opening for a new set of plot

concerns. Buffy's and Riley's conversation is the last scene of the "previouslies" montage, which then bleeds into the beginning of the next episode: the pause plays out until Buffy says "somebody should speak before one of us graduates." What had served as a clear final aesthetic marker is thus transformed into the barely acknowledged beat that begins the next round of narrative action. For the viewer who is watching the series in its original temporal format with an enforced gap of almost a month between episodes, the aesthetic closure stands in tension with the plot-based cliffhanger of Buffy's and Riley's developing relationship. For the viewer who encounters the series "after the fact," however, the opposite is true—she can rush forward to the next episode, but will thus miss the power of the episodic gesture of closure. For this second reader, each ending serves as a potential beginning, and the impulse engendered by the form is to binge on multiple episodes or even seasons in a row.<sup>55</sup>

This push toward narrative binging highlights the relationship between narrative recapitulation and the economic insecurity of the serial form. Warhol argues that "at any given moment in the serialized text, the narrator is speaking to a range of possible audiences, from the devoted reader who remembers every detail from parts that were published weeks, months, and even years earlier, to those whose first entry into the [story] is the present installment." (78) One can only assume, however, that the long-term goal of the serial author is to encourage as many readers as possible to shift their allegiances and become "devoted readers," since it is these devoted readers or "serial addicts" who will guarantee the long-term success of

---

<sup>55</sup> The viewing features of Netflix Instant further encourage narrative binging with a button that pops up at the end of each episode asking the viewer if she wants to watch the next episode. In this way, the single episode is always presented as insufficient on its own.

this and future narratives by the same author and/or publisher. In-text recaps and previouslies are visible signs of the mutually dependent relationship between reader and text: the serial depends on “hooking” and retaining viewers, while the reader keeps coming back for more hoping for but also dreading the totalizing knowledge that might accompany the narrative’s end. In other words, the repetitions that characterize the “previously” call attention to the knowledge that episodic closure is by definition incomplete; the installment to come won’t actually cure the craving instantiated by the last one’s suspenseful ending. The feeling of being “in the know” caused by the thrill of recognition that the serial addict might feel in response to a previously is undercut by the incomplete nature of the installment. Since it’s this incompleteness that necessitates the previouslies in the first place, any sense of mastery the reader might experience is always accompanied by a reminder of her abject position in relation to her desire to know more about the story-world. No matter how much knowledge she gathers, it will never be enough to satisfy.

*Dracula* is littered with similar recapitulations, which clearly mark it as formally serial. Although the most recent Norton Critical Edition, published for the novel's centennial in 1997, lists 1899 as the “first American publication of *Dracula*, as serial and book,” David Skal’s *Hollywood Gothic* tells a more complicated story:

In the time-honored tradition of the penny-dreadful *Dracula* seems to have made its first appearance on American shores in serialization. And, indeed, at least one of the publisher's 1899 advertisements touted the book as having “much success in England, and as a serial in America.” But the precise form of this serialization has proven maddeningly elusive. The copyright office has no record of deposit copies. None have ever surfaced in rare book circles or

on the auction market. Previously published claims that the serial appeared in the New York *Sun* are simply not supported by the microfilm record. And the possibility that the serial was printed in any newspaper becomes problematic in light of common publishing practice. Newspaper serializations of novels were typically published in weekly chapters either in Sunday editions, or in weekday installments during the week, but never in combination. To publish a complete serial in twenty-seven sequential days was a practical impossibility. (68)

I quote this passage at length because it illustrates the uncanny nature of *Dracula's* seriality so clearly: the text is both missing and an “impossibility,” yet Skal still claims both here and in the Norton Critical Edition that this serial edition of *Dracula* existed. Skal might have taken his cue regarding *Dracula's* potential serialization from the novel itself, which opens with the assurance that “how these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them” (5). Throughout the novel, one cannot help but see the insistent marks of serialization, particularly as they are “made manifest” in the chapter breaks.

The clearest textual sign of serialization is the cliffhangers that end each chapter, followed almost immediately by a brief recap of the relevant elements of the story at the open of the next. This pattern appears immediately, and the first chapter ends by emphasizing Jonathan's near-total lack of agency within a story that already seems to be spinning out of his control. Like the reader, he's subject to Dracula's machinations:

When I could see again the driver was climbing into the calèche, and the wolves had disappeared. This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful



fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon. We kept on ascending, with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending. Suddenly I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky. (20)

The passage is littered with markers which all gesture toward the (missing) temporal chapter break to come. Just as the reader at the beginning of a serial narrative has no clear sense of the story's longevity,<sup>56</sup> the length of Jonathan's journey "seem[s] interminable." The building tension of the constant ascent "with occasional periods of quick descent" mirrors the structure of the chapter and the novel to come, while also harking back to the generic expectations of sensation fiction. Furthermore, Jonathan's "sudden" consciousness of Dracula's mansion with its black windows and broken battlements undermining any possible sense of welcome gives the chapter's close an extra narrative punch, instilling in the reader an uncanny combination of desire and fear to see what happens next.

Establishing the novel's pattern of suspense and recapitulation, the first two paragraphs of the next chapter feature explicit reminders of the action that has just passed. First, Jonathan notes that he "must have been asleep" during the ride over, reminding the reader of the castle's sudden appearance as if from nowhere (20). As

---

<sup>56</sup> Even if the novel was advertised as running for a predetermined length of time (as Dickens's novels usually were), circumstances could always interfere with the story's successful completion, as was famously the case with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

he gets out of the calèche, he remarks of the driver that “*Again* I could not but notice his prodigious strength” (21, emphasis mine). In this way, the reader is not just reminded of the specific detail of the driver’s uncanny strength (which will of course appear even more disturbing after the driver’s identity as Dracula is revealed), but is further aligned with Jonathan, since he’s also playing narrative catch-up. Furthermore, the chapter opens with the title “Jonathan Harker’s Journal—(continued),” but the chapters themselves have no titles. Since each of the disparate texts (diary entries, letters, newspaper articles, etc.) that makes up the novel is separately labeled, this reminder of the break between chapters highlights the text’s segmentation, the defining quality of the serial.

This pattern of heightened anxiety and repetition at the chapter breaks continues throughout the novel, most notably after Lucy’s initial death, when the chapter closes with Van Helsing’s ominous warning that “it is only the beginning!” followed by an injunction to “wait and see.” The following chapter features an explicit recap of the events of the narrative so far, with Van Helsing asking John Seward, “were you not amazed when...” followed by a summary of Lucy’s illness, decline, and death scene. If Stoker had no need to “hook” new readers with each chapter or keep them coming back, then why end with a cliffhanger? Along the same lines, if he had no need to catch up lagging readers, then why offer these scenes of repetitive exposition?

Even if he did not publish the novel serially, it seems that Stoker used the serial form to encourage the reader’s engagement with the story and thus strengthen its imaginative hold over its readers. As I argued in chapter one, the gaps in serial narratives encourage readers to project themselves into the story, filling in narrative

and temporal lacunae. In “Broken on Purpose,” Sean O’Sullivan argues for the *formal* importance of the gap to serial narrative. The art of the serial, he claims, “calls attention to itself as an array of parts; it is the art of fracture, of separation, and it is the art of the energy required to stitch together those pieces, just as the art of poetry requires a persistent process of breaking and reconnecting sounds” (59). By claiming the serial’s poetic lineage, O’Sullivan argues for a method of understanding the serial as a formal type, not solely a means of production. *Dracula*’s emphasis on the chapter as a distinct unit of meaning highlights the novel’s segmentivity, leading the reader to “stitch together those pieces” in just the ways O’Sullivan describes.

Although O’Sullivan compares serials to poetry, one might instead make the parallel to drama. In much the same way that drama is defined both by formal elements (stage directions, dialogue, etc.) and circumstances of production (performance, or at least its possibility), the serial’s emphasis on repetition as well as its concern with gaps and temporality both work to distinguish it as a coherent genre, one whose markers can be replicated across means of production. Even if *Dracula* was never released serially, it was clearly constructed with the serial in mind—one might consider it a “closet serial,” the sibling of the closet drama.

We can understand this strategy of formal seriality both historically and psychoanalytically. From a historical perspective, seriality can be seen as part and parcel of the technology of mass culture that Jennifer Wicke places at the center of the novel’s uncanny power. Although serial publication is associated with the Victorian era over the modern one, its regularity and tight association with newspapers and other elements of modern print culture make it perhaps the most “mechanized” form of publication, and thus fit nicely with Wicke’s argument that

“nineteenth-century diaristic and epistolary effusion is invaded by cutting-edge technology” (470). At the same time, the novel’s serial structure increases the narrative’s ability to grab hold of a reader’s mind and refuse to let go, and this ability is at the core of the novel’s ability to transfix readers to this day. The serial form is ideal for creating suspense in a narrative because of its structural relationship with compulsion. *Dracula* is concerned not just with consumption but with compulsive consumption, and seriality is the perfect way to make that concern appear on the levels of both story and discourse.

### **Into Every Generation a Slayer is Born...**

While the repetition in *Dracula* function to emphasize the narrative’s fractures, it comes to serve the opposite purpose in *Buffy*, preserving the illusion of totality. In *Dracula*, the cliffhangers give a clear sense of division between the parts, even as they also push the reader to keep moving forward through the text as quickly as possible, seemingly eliding that division. While the formal effect of this trope is a “demonic” repetition that is particularly uncanny when the narrative is consumed many episodes at a time, the strategy is based in a concrete anxiety around retaining viewers.

The previouslies on *Buffy* speak to two audiences simultaneously, attempting to assuage combating anxieties. For new viewers, the previouslies are meant to catch them up on the action so far, assuring them that they are armed with sufficient information that they will be able to navigate the plot twists of a single episode without getting lost, hopefully liking what they see enough to return for the following installment. With the aid of the previously, the episode can be viewed independently from the ones that preceded it. For returning viewers, the previouslies serve an opposite purpose, reassuring them that the series has a larger unity and

coherence, even perhaps extending so far as the other shows that share the same narrative universe (spin-offs, etc.).<sup>57</sup> Throughout a show's run, the changing nature of the previouslies shows how these concerns vary over time, as the concerns over unity of the episode vie with the unity of the series as a whole.

Put another way, the previouslies expose the narrative's anxious, unstable borders. More than any other form, the serial has an inescapable death drive. If we follow Peter Brooks's argument that "what operates through repetition is the death instinct, the drive toward the end," then the serial is unique in the unreliability of its own specific point of ending (102). Although the producer's dream might be of a series that could go on forever, revived at the opening of each episode, the prime-time serial reader generally wants an ending that is coming, but not too soon, and not unexpectedly.<sup>58</sup> Previouslies expose the anxieties around which elements might cause a series' "early death," whether that danger is a too-complicated plot or readerly perception that the narrative has drifted too far from its origins.

*Buffy*'s previouslies are a particularly useful case in point since they change so much over the course of the show, following the show's complicated production history and the changing status of television seriality throughout its run (which change can in part be credited to the show's own critical and commercial success). Unlike many of the more heavily serialized shows that followed in the wake of its

---

<sup>57</sup> In the previouslies for the fourth-season episode "The Yoko Factor," for instance, events from both *Buffy* and its spinoff, *Angel* are included.

<sup>58</sup> This is the primary distinction between soap operas and prime-time serials: while the pleasure of the soap is that it might extend indefinitely, 21st-century serial dramas are directed toward a specific implied point of closure—the answer to a mystery, either seasonal or multi-season. This trajectory toward a specific point of closure is why it makes more sense to compare contemporary television serials to Victorian novels than to soaps; soaps have a profoundly looser relationship to the pleasures of narrative mastery. While the current endangered state of the soap opera does offer the possibility for the retroactive mastery of closure, it seems unlikely that even the most devoted soap fan would be able to (or want to) offer up a comprehensive reading of forty years of daily narrative.

success, *Buffy*'s serial elements are consistently balanced with a firm episodic structure, especially in its first four seasons. However, *Buffy*'s balance of open-ended questions and episodic "cases" set the tone for a mode of seriality that resembles Victorian novels more than either soap operas or procedural dramas, the two dominant models of long-form television storytelling up to that point. In many ways, this vacillation between heavily serialized "mythology" and episodically bound "monster-of-the-week" episodes echoes the structure of *The X-Files*, but *Buffy*'s emphasis on the textual unit of the season distinguishes it from its predecessor. In *The X-Files*, issues were either resolved within the hour (a specific case, usually revolving around a particular monster) or were left unresolved for years (the romantic tension between Scully and Mulder and the ongoing and ever-more-complicated government conspiracy in which they are embroiled). *Buffy*, however, offers a different model, with a seasonal "Big Bad"<sup>59</sup> whose nature is revealed gradually over the course of the season and who is defeated in the final episode or two.

In the first season, the previouslies seem to function mainly to remind readers of the show's basic premise; almost every episode begins with the same voice-over explaining Buffy's status as a "chosen one" who will stand against not just vampires, but "demons and the Forces of Darkness." This monologue plays over a montage of stock "vampire" images: headstones, a cross, holy water, ending with a shot of Buffy glowering over a crossbow. Apparently, all the reader needs to know in order to catch up with the story is the same information that is conveyed through the credits sequence. Only two episodes feature the more informative previouslies that

---

<sup>59</sup> A term adopted by fans to refer to the central villain of each season.

later become the standard: the episode that introduces Buffy's and Angel's doomed relationship and the final episode of the season. In this way, the central serial concerns are established: the romance plot and the seasonal arc of the "Big Bad." As the show goes on, the concerns addressed in the previouslies increase in number—keeping all the relationships straight, reminding readers of characters' possible motivations, highlighting relationships that don't get a lot of screen time—but they almost always serve a similar purpose to the family trees that are featured in the front of sprawling novels, reminding the reader of the web of relationships that makes up the story.

In terms of the overall shape of the text, the serial is always trying to have it both ways—the pieces can stand alone, but they make another kind of sense only as part of a larger narrative arc. Since this sense of unity and the opposing demand that the pieces make sense separately are both so linked to the constant economic anxiety that characterizes ongoing production, the previouslies on *Buffy* are almost always missing the sense of formal play that comes to characterize the show, especially in its later seasons.<sup>60</sup> The danger of the reader losing track of the plot seems to outweigh the drive toward formal invention. In his essay "Previously On: Prime-Time Serials and the Mechanics of Memory," Jason Mittell argues that "the presence or absence of recaps [previouslies] can drastically change the way episodes are consumed and comprehended." (90) According to Mittell, previouslies are a double-edged sword for readers—while they help the long-term reader make sense of each episode by

---

<sup>60</sup> As early as season four, many of the most popular and critically acclaimed episodes of *Buffy* hinged on this formal invention. As mentioned, the episode "Hush" earned the show its only Emmy (for writing), and featured almost no dialogue. The sixth season featured a musical episode ("Once More, with Feeling") as well as an episode ("Normal Again") that took place entirely in an alternate universe.

moving relevant pieces of information into long-term memory, they also mitigate the potential for surprise.

Mittell's argument about the relationship between repetition and surprise in the previouslies is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the fourth-season episode, "Superstar," which plays out the fans' fantasy of a minor character being brought into the fold of the "Scooby gang." Jonathan, the figure at the center of the episode, lingers on the margins of the series for the first three seasons, even more of an outsider at Sunnydale High School than Buffy and her friends. Throughout the series, Jonathan is defined by his "outsider" status, whether he's threatening suicide in the high school's bell tower in "Earshot" or attempting comic book "supervillain" status in season six. In "Superstar," however, readers are presented without explanation a universe in which Jonathan is the most important man in Sunnydale (and seemingly, the world).

Since the previouslies for "Superstar" contain a scene from the previous season's "Earshot" featuring the sole confrontation thus far in the series between Buffy and Jonathan, any savvy reader will immediately and accurately assume that the following episode will heavily feature this character. However, this montage also complicates Mittell's argument that the previouslies serve as a barrier to surprise since the episode goes on to feature a very different version of Jonathan than the one we recognize. In this way, the previouslies work to intensify the reader's surprise by reminding her of how well she knows the characters and the story-world. The repetitive nature of the previouslies as well as the formulaic scene with which the episode opens (Buffy confronting a group of vampires) both lull the reader into a false sense of security that is comically undone when Buffy decides not to fight them



and turns to Jonathan for help. In this way, the previouslies create a balance between comfortable mastery (I recognize that character!) and surprise (or do I?) that emphasizes the balance between “old” and “new” that is so central to the pleasure of serial reading.

Moreover, the contrast between the diegetic “reality” of the previouslies and that of the episode proper, highlights the episode’s uncanny formal status as part and whole both. The episode works as a self-contained narrative in that Jonathan’s disruption of the diegetic reality is undone in time for the closing credits, and his character doesn’t reappear until two seasons later. At the same time, the joke of Jonathan’s role as a “superstar” will only resonate for a devoted viewer who recognizes him from his full history in the show as a put-upon high school outsider. Perhaps the biggest reason for the the episode’s status as a fan favorite stems from another para-textual element: the episode’s credits. “Superstar” is the only episode in *Buffy*’s history to feature altered credits. Usually, the credits work as another mode of narrative recapitulation, reintroducing us to the characters by showing them in iconic circumstances (Buffy staking a vampire, Willow casting a spell, etc.) and giving flashes of backstory (images of particularly popular villains, for instance).<sup>61</sup> In “Superstar,” however, these familiar images are intercut with shots of Jonathan from the episode to come, fighting monsters just as ably as any of the regular characters. The contrast between the two para-textual modes of narrative recapitulation (previouslies and credits) highlight the episode’s status as both part of the larger story

---

<sup>61</sup> The credits are used more subtly to subvert reader expectations in other ways: Dawn shows up as a major character in the credits immediately after her first appearance, adding to the sense that she has always been a major part of the narrative universe. In contrast, the character Tara is only featured in the credits as a major player in the episode in which she is unexpectedly murdered. Whether accurate or misleading, the credits generally serve to establish the baseline for the show’s diegetic reality.

arc and separate from it—the previous lies remind us that we cannot fully understand the episode out of the context of the larger story, while the credits mark it as aberrant within that context. This repetition-with-difference puts the reader in an unresolvably anxious position—she both knows the text inside and out, but knows just as clearly that she can never know enough, that the limits of the text (and her knowledge of it) are shifting and contingent.

This destabilization of the narrative past is particularly unsettling since Jonathan bears such a strong resemblance to the stereotypical fan. His continuing attempts to breach not just the central group of friends but the boundaries of the text itself (as shown in his unexpected presence in the credits) expose the reader's own not-quite-absent desire to live in Sunnydale instead of only “visiting.”<sup>62</sup> If one of the central desires of the fannish reader is mastery of the story-world, then Jonathan's arc highlights the power imbalance inherent within that dynamic: in his guise as a “superstar,” Jonathan can master every aspect of the Buffy universe, doling out relationship advice as easily as he provides necessary pieces of information about seemingly unbeatable monsters, but at the end of the day, he's still the same nebbishy outcast he was before.

When Jonathan rises to narrative prominence in season six, this episode retrospectively becomes a narrative turning point, undoing the neat sense of closure with regard to his character that the final moralizing conversation in which Buffy chastens Jonathan would convey in an episodic narrative or even an earlier, more “monster-of-the-week” episode of *Buffy* itself. Although “Superstar” ends with a

---

<sup>62</sup> In “*Buffy's* Mary Sue is Jonathan: *Buffy* Acknowledges Its Fans,” Justine Larbalestier also claims that Jonathan serves as a clear fan stand-in: her argument is only strengthened by the events of the plot in seasons six and seven (which aired after the essay was published), as Jonathan attempts to gain a more powerful place within the diegesis yet again with his attempt at “Big Bad” villainy.

sense that Jonathan has been neatly dispatched like the scores of other episodic villains that have preceded him, later turns of the plot remind the reader that any sense of closure is necessarily unsteady—closed books can reopen, and the past refuses to remain buried.

### **Buffy Vs. Dracula, Whedon Vs. Stoker, Dawn Vs. the Shark**

Jonathan's intervention in the central premises of the narrative universe prefigures a more permanent and radical revision of the narrative past: the introduction at the beginning of season five of Buffy's younger sister, Dawn. Dawn doesn't just "arrive" in Sunnydale, she's suddenly "always" been there, thus disrupting the central serial tenet of continuity. This kind of retrospective revision is rare, and goes beyond the sudden narrative turns that are a trope of serials from Dickens to soap operas. While the unexpected revelation that, say, Pip's expectations do not come from Miss Havisham, causes the reader to reevaluate the information she "knows" to be true, it doesn't change the truth-value of the narrative that preceded it. We see that information in a new light, to be sure, but we can still stand firm with regard to the events of the diegesis. Historically, more radical narrative revisions have not sat well with audiences, and are often interpreted as a mark of narrative failure. For instance, the character of Bobby Ewing on *Dallas* was revived by the explanation that "it was all a dream" after he had been run over by a car and killed in the previous season. This narrative development was meant to undo the "mistake" of that character's early death (and the actor's unsuccessful attempt to start a career outside the show), but has gone on to become shorthand for a narrative "cheat."<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> For instance, *Family Guy* (the ultimate pop culture cannibal) episode "Da Boom" ends with a shot of Patrick Duffy coming out of a shower in order to undo the disruptive elements of the nuclear disaster that the episode focuses on, thus resetting the narrative.

When *Buffy* revises its own history, however, there is no such admission of narrative failure. Instead, Whedon seems to be attempting to rewrite the rules of seriality altogether, abandoning narrative continuity for a structure that features a more playful relationship with narrative history. As mentioned, the fifth season brings with it the introduction of Buffy's sister, who is new to the viewer, but well known to the characters. Instead of receiving any kind of diegetic introduction, she merely appears at the end of the season premiere, "Buffy Vs. Dracula." Although Dawn's presence is later explained by an elaborate backstory, her initial appearance garners no explanation at all; Buffy simply has a sister, as she always has, directly contradicting what we know—that Buffy has always been an only child.

Many fans saw Dawn's introduction into the "Buffyverse" as a cynical attempt to boost the show's ratings by attracting a younger demographic,<sup>64</sup> and cite her appearance as the moment the show "jumped the shark," abandoning previous claims to quality or authenticity.<sup>65</sup> I would argue, however, that Whedon's motives were more focused on *Buffy*'s long-term critical success than on the more immediate issue of ratings. Dawn's appearance undoes the binary relationship with narrative "truth" and "fiction" established in the "it-was-all-a-dream" trope, instead creating a both/and relationship with narrative history. Although her character is new to us, Dawn has also been there all along—she has full knowledge of past events, for instance, and the characters all reside in a world that she has always occupied. In this way, the narrative's past suddenly becomes uncannily familiar and unfamiliar

---

<sup>64</sup> See Audino and Bunting, *Television without Pity: 752 Things We Love to Hate (and Hate to Love) about TV*.

<sup>65</sup> "Jumping the shark" refers to an iconic moment from *Happy Days* when Fonzie jumped over a shark on waterskis (while wearing his trademark leather jacket)—this moment was seen by fans as the first identifiable marker of the show's creative decline. The phrase has come to be widely used to mark a show's drop in quality, usually as a result of an attempt to draw new viewers. The introduction of a new character, particularly a younger character like Dawn, is a frequent sign of "shark-jumping." (See [tvtropes.org/jumpingtheshark](http://tvtropes.org/jumpingtheshark))

simultaneously. Whedon's introduction of Dawn at the end of this particular episode so clearly concerned with subverting Stoker's vampire mythology shows how he is more concerned with rewriting the rules of seriality (by making the show's "history" changeable instead of static) than with breaking or avoiding them.

This change to one of the central tenets of seriality, along with Dawn's symbolic name, suggests that her arrival brings with it the possibility for a "new beginning" for the show. Moreover, Dawn's age and possible "teen appeal" work as a reminder for readers of the show's initial adolescent setting and narrative priorities. However, I would argue that Dawn's function in the narrative is far more complicated than the mere infusion of new blood into an aging series. As much as she refers to beginnings, Dawn's real power is that she brings with her the very real possibility of the narrative's end. Dawn isn't technically a monster, but she is supernatural in origin: a mystical "Key" that can undo the boundaries between universes, given human form so that Buffy would become emotionally attached to her and protect her at all costs. Dawn's power is thus apocalyptic, but ultimately inaccessible to her. She can be read, then, as the clearest expression of the show's death drive: her centrality to season five's plot shows the narrative's will toward self-destruction.

So why does Dawn's first episode feature Dracula? Why does Whedon have to reintroduce and rewrite the history of the vampire before he can revise the serial form? Dracula's uncanny power, both as the canonical representative of the vampire mythology and as a figure that constantly upsets categorical boundaries (between life and death, human and animal, native and alien, self and other) makes him especially suited to upset the expectations of serial form and its focus on

straddling the boundary between past and present. Dracula and Dawn both upset readers (albeit in different ways) because they both rely on the logic of “everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open” (Freud, “The Uncanny,” 132).

Dawn’s status in the narrative as either friend or foe, human or monster remains unknown for quite some time, and she thus inspires significant discomfort in the viewer. Dawn exposes the unsettling truth of seriality (and of life), that we only *think* we have definitive knowledge of or control over the past. This anxiety about accounting for narrative history is clearly central to the experience of serial reading—witness the endless fan activity such as compiling wikis or producing and purchasing compendia that centers on organizing common knowledge of a show’s past. Dawn might visibly destabilize the narrative’s past, but fan activity suggests that it was already unstable to begin with. As much as her presence rewrites the rules of seriality by invalidating the narrative past, Dawn also exposes the unwelcome truth that the past is inherently unreliable. What’s more, Dawn’s status as the “Key” brings with it the threat of retrospective failure. A key holds the promise to break a code, to render it coherent. But what if it does the opposite? What if the explanation is incoherent, or worse, dull? When the “key” is a whiny teenage girl, viewers are reminded that the stakes weren’t always so life-or-death, that they’re watching a show that has as much in common with *Dawson’s Creek* as *Dracula*.

However, with the end of the show comes the dawn of canonical possibility. Since viewers place so much value on the end point of a serial, that end also marks the point when the serial is open for evaluation as a whole—if it doesn’t “stick the landing,” its possible entry into the canon is jeopardized. It’s thus unsurprising that

Dawn's arrival is accompanied by a grand gesture—one that shows mastery over the genre as well as the form and attempts to ensure the show entry into the critical canon. And what better way to mark that entry than by incorporating *Dracula*, the ultimate signifier of the vampire genre and of the uncanny power of the Gothic? I realize that Harold Bloom would rather join *Dracula* in his crypt than claim either Bram Stoker or Joss Whedon as Great Poets, but Whedon's relationship to Stoker perfectly follows Bloom's model of the anxiety of influence. Bloom outlines six strategies by which poets engage in conversation/competition with their predecessors—I will focus on the one that is most appropriately vampiric, “apophrades, or the return from the dead” (Bloom, 15).<sup>66</sup> Bloom argues that the later poet who follows this strategy holds his (and for Bloom, it's always “his”) work open to his precursor, and “the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work” (16). In other words, after reading the later poet, it is impossible to re-read the earlier one without finding the trace of his inheritor.

Speaking anecdotally, this is very much the case for “Buffy vs. *Dracula*.” After seeing the episode, it's impossible to read *Dracula* without hearing one of *Buffy*'s vampires sneer that “he's got to have his luxury estate and his bug-eaters and his special dirt, doesn't he?” Following the logic of the episode's title, the two heroes engage in a literary battle of wills over who will define vampire mythology in the

---

<sup>66</sup> His other “revisionary ratios” are: *clinamen*, a corrective misreading; *tessera*, a continuation of the previous work in a new direction; *kenosis*, using humbler terms and thus deflating the original; *daemonization*, exposing a sublime power in the original that it seems not to see; and finally *askesis*, standing apart from the rest of the world alongside the original poet, thus claiming him as part of an elite group of two.

future; unsurprisingly, Buffy emerges victorious. Whedon claims this victory by incorporating Stoker's mythology into his own. In this way, *Buffy*'s newness gives her narrative and discursive power. While Dracula might be more "famous" than Buffy, he's finally just another villain-of-the-week.

At first, it looks like Dracula's canonical power will make him a worthy adversary. Buffy is starstruck when they meet and unable to fight against those powers that differentiate him from other vampires in the show's history (shape-shifting, dissolving into mist). He even goes so far as to sneak into her room at night and bite her, and he eventually brings both Xander and Buffy under his hypnotic thrall. Buffy is only able to reclaim her free will and her trademark wit by taking part of Dracula into herself: he forces her to drink some of his blood in an attempt to make her want to become a vampire, and thus adopt the novel *Dracula*'s narrative structure, where the vampire rather than the slayer occupies the story's titular center. Following Bloom's model, Buffy's incorporation of Dracula into herself proves the key to her victory. As soon as she drinks, she gains back all the agency she'd previously lost, punning on his recent power over her when she says, "you know, I think the thrall has gone out of our relationship."

In the same way that the character Buffy is no longer under Dracula's thrall, neither is the narrative *Buffy* under *Dracula*'s, as Whedon sublimates key vampiric Gothic tropes into the "Buffyverse." For instance, the storm that marks Dracula's arrival in Sunnydale, while echoing the wreck of the *Varney* that facilitates Dracula's arrival in England in the novel, is revealed in the opener to have in fact originated in that least Gothic of settings, a beach picnic, when Willow's spell to start the fire for the friends' barbecue goes awry. His unique abilities are summarily dismissed as



“showy Gypsy stuff,” thus situating Dracula’s unique powers within the show’s long history with Romany figures, beginning with Buffy’s vampire boyfriend Angel whose soul is the result of a “gypsy curse.” Along the same lines, Buffy’s erotic connection to Dracula is written off as transference of her unresolved feelings for Angel, thus making Angel, rather than Dracula, the source of the seductive power so frequently associated with vampires. Finally, Dracula himself is given a history within the Buffyverse that outweighs the events of the novel: he arrives in Sunnydale because he has heard of Buffy, and it’s revealed during the episode that he and Anya (Xander’s ex-demon girlfriend) “hung out” while Anya was still a demon. In this way, even though the show acknowledges its generic debt to *Dracula* by having characters recognize him as famous and using classing horror tropes like a Gothic castle and theramin music to introduce him, Dracula is finally just another episodic villain; Buffy has all the staying power within the larger arc of the story.

Dracula’s expulsion from the narrative, however, is undermined by his own seriality; Buffy finds a way to outsmart his lack of corporeality, but Dracula insists on returning. Buffy stakes him—the previously and subsequently foolproof method to permanently kill a vampire—but he uses one of the powers that marks him as unique to re-form from the mist. Just when it looks like his ability to postpone the closure of death has made him impervious to Buffy’s attempts to best him, and just as he’s regaining corporeality, Buffy appears and uses her knowledge of the genre to defeat him, saying, “you think I haven’t seen your movies? You always come back,” and staking him again. When he starts to coalesce from the mist yet again, Buffy is so familiar with the tricks of his attempts at serial revivication that she snaps, “I’m standing *right here*.” Buffy’s victory isn’t quite as permanent as her smart-assed

comment suggests, however; Dracula doesn't return in the series, but he does make another appearance in the comic book adaptation of the show that appeared five years after the show went off the air. More than any of his other powers, it's Dracula's seriality that makes him a worthy adversary.

Dawn's arrival, then, must come at this point, since her uncanny power is so linked to the structure of seriality. Buffy might have defeated Dracula, but Dawn changes the terms of "villainy" the show has used thus far almost beyond recognition, bringing with her the very real possibility of the show's final end. Although the seasonal "Big Bad" is the fairly straightforward character of Glory (essentially a super-powered, evil version of Buffy herself), Dawn herself is the real threat. First, her arrival disrupts one of the central pleasures of serial viewing, mastery of the past. Throughout the season, the characters "remember" moments that never occurred within the diegesis, undermining the viewer's sense that she might ever gain mastery over the series as a whole. If Dawn is the "key" to understanding the series, the reader is shut out of that understanding. Second, Dawn's ability to break down boundaries is linked to her status as end-bringer. If she follows through on her supernatural potential in the story, that will mean the end of the flow of narrative pleasure. It's no wonder she was such a divisive figure for fans.

Dawn shows how seriality itself is the real villain of the fifth season, and it's her uncanny disruption of the logic of the serial that retains the ability to unsettle the reader, even after Buffy has dispatched the baddest Big Bad of them all. Dracula's refusal to die makes him the perfect character to stand at the hinge of Whedon's revision of seriality, since he is uncanny in just the same way that the serial form is uncanny: he straddles borders, he holds his victims in his thrall, he refuses death.

### **This Isn't Over!: Uncanny Closure**

But why does *Dracula* work as a metonym for seriality when it's unlikely that the novel itself was ever even published serially? The answer might be found in Buffy's final line to him: she doesn't remind him that she's read his book, but that she's "seen all his movies." While the novel might not have been released serially, the near-endless iteration of the story through adaptations show how *Dracula* has incorporated the most meaningful elements of serialized storytelling, using essentially the same process by which Whedon incorporates *Dracula* into the "Buffy-verse."<sup>67</sup> For instance, Stoker's use of cliffhangers is hardly original, but the cliffhangers in *Dracula* are so overt that, from the vantage point of the future, they read like parodies of themselves. For instance, chapter nineteen ends with Mina's fear that she should have not taken the sleeping draught prescribed by Dr. Seward. She worries:

I hope I have not done wrong, for as sleep begins to flirt with me, a new fear comes: that I may have been foolish in thus depriving myself of the power of waking. I might want it. Here comes sleep. Good night. (228)

As the chapter ends, the postmodern reader can almost hear the announcer's voice or title card asking "Why is Mina so afraid to sleep? Has she known the Count's dark embrace? Tune in next week, when all will be revealed!"

The cliffhanger exemplifies the defining elements of the serial: both the division between parts and the impulse to assemble those parts into a coherent whole. The troubled relationship with closure (of which the cliffhanger is perhaps the most extreme example) is how that gap remains apparent if the narrative is repackaged as a bound whole. The inability of the single episode or installment to

---

<sup>67</sup> Adaptations, while not necessarily serial, certainly demonstrate a fannish relationship between the original and the copy.

successfully stand alone keeps readers returning to a serial and is what distinguishes it from its bound counterpart. As I've already shown, this concern arises formally in the unsteady relationship between part and whole, but it often shows up thematically as well. I have chosen to focus this chapter on the figure of the vampire because its unfixed relationship with death can be read as a metaphor for the serial's relationship with closure. The serial thus offers a neat inversion of Peter Brooks's argument in *Reading for the Plot* about closure's status as an attempt to master death; unexpected closure would *be* the serial's death, the end of its potentially endless progression through time. The return from the dead can thus be read as a way of expressing anxiety over economic and narrative failure. Dracula's and Buffy's endless revivification reminds the reader of the unsteady nature of narrative truth while also encouraging and figuring the kind of communal interpretation that will ensure "deathlessness" for the text itself.

In both *Buffy* and *Dracula*, the story takes a massive central turn when it seems to end only to begin again after the resurrection of the young woman who just died. At the end of the fifth season, just before the show changed networks from the WB to UPN, Buffy sacrifices herself to save the world. Buffy's death should be the ultimate signifier of closure for the show since she's the titular heroine. Any of the other characters might be relegated to the background or even go missing from an episode, but without Buffy, there's no *Buffy*. The circumstances of the end of season five were such that the show seemed in real danger of cancellation. In her book *Season Finale: The Unexpected Rise and Fall of the WB and UPN*, WB executive Susanne Daniels describes a situation in which Whedon and the actors were holding out for the kind of per-episode paychecks that other successful shows on more "legitimate"

networks were commanding; on NBC, for instance, the casts of *ER* and *Friends* had both negotiated massive pay raises as part of their contract negotiations. Since *Buffy* had been central to the network's growing success, particularly as part of its strategy to appeal to younger viewers with more disposable income and cult fans whose attachment to the narrative world infuses almost any textual artifact with added value, Whedon was confident that he could command a similar economic commitment from the producers. He couldn't, and the show was picked up by a competing small network, UPN (253-260). According to Daniels, it was the loss of *Buffy* that led to the eventual purchase of the WB by UPN (12).

All this is to say that the fears of "serial death" were very real for *Buffy* at the end of season five, and the finale was constructed in such a way that it could have worked as a series finale as well as a season finale. This tension over the serial's brush with death is evident throughout the finale and the remaining two seasons. The previouslies for the season five finale, "The Gift" feature a montage of scenes from every episode in the series up to that point. Importantly, "The Gift" was also the series' 100<sup>th</sup> episode, which is the point at which a series becomes eligible for syndication and a possibly endless afterlife in reruns. Beyond the assurance of revivification on UPN, *Buffy*'s televisual immortality was assured. The episode's focus on its own finality, then—reminding loyal readers of their long relationship with the narrative and staging its potential ending as theatrically as possible—seems to have a clear relationship to Freud's fort-da game. By performing closure so elegantly,

Whedon reminds his readers that he has mastered it; this ending is thoroughly on his terms, even more so since it is just a rehearsal.<sup>68</sup>

However, this gesture of mastery doesn't seem to hold, since the following two seasons exert considerable effort throughout to remind readers of their connection to the first five. The previous lies for seasons six and seven refer back to earlier seasons twelve times; this happens only eight times over the first five seasons altogether. Furthermore, all the central villains in the final two seasons are returning characters from earlier seasons instead of the new threats that populate seasons one through five.<sup>69</sup> Once the possibility of cancellation has been raised, the show is more concerned than ever to cover over evidence of the breaks between parts; even though *Buffy*-the-show will now live forever, the show is now obsessively preoccupied with Buffy-the-character's close call with mortality.

In *Dracula*, a similar staging of closure occurs after Dracula vamps Lucy, and is undone by collective interpretation. Both Seward and Harker stop writing in their diaries when they think that they have seen the last of Dracula, only to start them up again immediately after Lucy's death and after each reads the other's journal. Each of these attempts at ending generates a great deal of noise within the narrative, even though a savvy reader knows full well this closure won't last long. Not only does Lucy's death occur almost exactly halfway through the novel, but it doesn't even happen at the end of a chapter. The chapters themselves are so fragmented that it is

---

<sup>68</sup> This performance of closure becomes a bit poignant in light of Whedon's rocky history with networks and cancellation since *Buffy*; his show *Firefly* had a famously troubled production history, with episodes aired out of order and an ignominious cancellation only to find fans after being released on DVD; *Angel* was unexpectedly canceled after five seasons; and his most recent series *Dollhouse* was in constant danger of cancellation as well.

<sup>69</sup> In season six, the villains are previously marginal characters from previous seasons, including Jonathan from "Superstar." In season seven, the "Big Bad" is the First Evil—an entity that initially appeared in season three as a threat to Angel, and who can only physically manifest in the form of someone who has died. In a quite literal way, the villain in season seven is the show's own history.

possible that this piece of Seward's diary would actually be his last, but it's clear that the narrative as a whole is nowhere close to ending. In fact, Seward's claim that the narrative will stop here is immediately undone by the clipping from the Hampstead newspaper that follows it, and the promise of closure just sets up another cliffhanger.

Jonathan Harker's diary also begins again at this point in a manner that highlights the relationship between the serial gap and the pleasures of communal interpretation. Jonathan's diary ends with his potential death and escape from Castle Dracula, but this initial tentative moment of closure only leaves him with more questions. With the help of a larger community, he has some hope that he might discern the serial text that is Dracula himself. He writes:

26 September—I thought never to write in this diary again, but the time has come. When I got home last night Mina had supper ready, and when we had supped she told me of Van Helsing's visit, and of her having given him the two diaries copied out, and of how anxious she has been about me. She showed me in the doctor's letter that all I wrote down was true. It seems to have made a new man of me. It was the doubt as to the reality of the whole thing that knocked me over. I felt impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful.

But, now that I *know*, I am not afraid, even of the Count. (168)

Unlike his previous journal, which the Count blocked from circulation, Jonathan's newly revived journal marks him as part of an ongoing exchange of information within a community. Because he has the reassurance of Van Helsing's letter, his own reading of Dracula becomes more reliable. And it's this potential for epistemological mastery that removes his sense of impotence.

Meaning-making in *Dracula* always happens within a community, and always in between encounters with Dracula himself. In “Black and White and Read all Over: Performative Textuality in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*,” Harriet Hustis argues that the fragmented and variable form of *Dracula* suggests that the novel is “perhaps less concerned with product (a linear, unified novel) than with process, namely, the very production of textuality in all its potential manifestations.” (18) She goes on to argue that Mina’s act of assembling all the documents together makes Dracula the character and *Dracula* the novel legible simultaneously. While Hustis focuses her argument on the troubled space of Mina as both reader and read object (after all, it’s the presence or absence of the mark of the Host on her forehead that signifies Dracula’s demise), her membership in the interpretive community is just as central to Dracula’s (and *Dracula*’s) legibility. The men in *Dracula* are notoriously ambivalent about including Mina in the process of investigation, but it’s only by reading communally that the Crew of Light can amass any information about Dracula. Furthermore, this communal reading happens through a fevered exchange of information and theories that occurs in between encounters with the “text” of Dracula himself. If, as Hustis argues, the reading of the character Dracula is meant to parallel the reading of the novel *Dracula*, then this is a manner of reading that is distinctly serial. During the final trip to Transylvania, their readerly relationship with Dracula looks especially fannish: Mina, Van Helsing, Jonathan and the rest wait for their nightly installment of information about the Count with the hope of new information about where the plot might be headed, and spend their time between “installments” working together to get their information to cohere into a workable theory.



The suspense generated by the novel's serial form also calls for communal readership. The insistent use of newspaper clippings throughout the novel gestures toward the public and synchronous reading experience that characterizes serial narratives. Furthermore, the sense that all these characters are working against the clock, racing to catch Dracula before he wreaks havoc on the British populace, creates the serial's sense of pressing immediacy. In the same way that Mina, Harker, Van Helsing and the rest rush to catch up with Dracula, the reader is reminded of how she would have to rush to catch up with *Dracula*, were she reading it in the manner that had been long typical for the genre. Jennifer Wicke argues that *Dracula's* use of multiple technologies situates it as the "first great *modern* novel in British literature," but I would argue that these multiple formats create a sense of immediacy that is tied to the part-publication process, and thus marks the novel as part of the Victorian serial tradition.

When the end comes, its finality results from the interpretive effort of a group of readers more than the details of the plot itself. Although Dracula collapses into dust, he has not been killed according to the strict rules set out by Van Helsing. They see him vanish, but as the ending of "Buffy Vs. Dracula" shows, his proven ability to take form as mist suggests that he might still return. The interpretive community, through their reading of the symbolic disappearance of Mina's scar, hold the power to deem this moment of closure "successful"—the details of the plot are hardly so certain. The birth of a son whose "bundle of names links our little band together" ensures the story's longevity past this moment of closure.

In fact, Dracula's questionable demise leaves open the tantalizing possibility that he has not in fact been vanquished at all, leaving the story open for imaginative

continuation. In *Hollywood Gothic*, David Skal recounts the relentless retelling of the Dracula narrative and his establishment as the ur-figure of vampirism. But the novel itself holds the potential for ongoing seriality, and Skal writes that “there has been speculation, on slight but interesting evidence, that Stoker may well have intended a *Dracula* sequel,” citing a conversation with writer Roger Sherman Hoar in which Stoker alluded to this planned sequel and the late revision of the novel’s ending, in which Stoker removed the destruction of Castle Dracula (71). Although the sequel remains imaginary, the novel’s problematic ending opens it up to the endlessly expansive narrative universe that is a hallmark of a cult text.

### **You Say Critic, I Say Fan**

This is the serial’s fantasy, perhaps: not only will the text live beyond its end point, spurred on by continued interpretive action on the part of loyal readers, but also that the established point of closure, however unsatisfying, will remain uncontested. The critical apparatuses of both *Dracula* and *Buffy* suggest that the reality is not so simple. *Buffy* and *Dracula* have each spawned academic journals devoted to a single text (*Slayage*<sup>70</sup> and *The Journal of Dracula Studies*, respectively), as well as a surprising number of critical anthologies for texts on the margins of “high” culture. In *Dracula*, the narrative’s metafictionality ends up spinning out of control, and the behavior of critics with relation to the novel comes to uncannily represent the behavior of the characters in relation to Dracula himself. The novel works as a self-perpetuating critical machine, and nowhere is that clearer than in the footnote apparatus to the Norton Critical Edition of the novel, edited by Nina Auerbach and David Skal. More than any other critical edition in my knowledge, *Dracula* features a massive apparatus

---

<sup>70</sup> *Slayage* began as an attempt to kick off the new discipline of “Buffy Studies,” but it has since expanded its purview to include all of Whedon’s work.

of annotation that seems designed not just to give necessary historical background but to actively and unabashedly guide reader interpretation. I don't point this out as a complaint about the edition; the tone of the critical commentary is in step with dominant trends in *Dracula* criticism, and reveals the excessive response called out by the narrative's serial form.

As early as the preface, Auerbach's and Skal's scholarly commentary is unusually interpretive: the first note on the text itself (not just the dedication) informs readers that the preface is "an appeal to the empirically based Victorian scientific method" (5). On its own, this isn't especially notable, but the notes become more aggressively interpretive as the novel goes on. For instance, later notes point out such "facts" as the observation that Dracula's "excellent German" is "the first of many tributes to Dracula's mastery of languages" (18), or, most obviously, the note that "Dracula has just made a small idiomatic error, which, despite his promise, Jonathan does not correct. Is this a test? Who is testing whom?" (26). This kind of critical work, especially Auerbach's and Skal's concern with continuity or accounting for "errors" in the narrative, resembles conversations among serial fans almost precisely.

As the editors continue to point out Stoker's errors of chronology or logic, I'm reminded of texts like *The Nitpicker's Guide for Next Generation Trekkers*, which is primarily concerned with exposing just these kinds of inconsistencies. In the introduction to that volume, self-identified Trekker Phil Farrand tells his "origin story" as a "nitpicker":

We made a game of tracking any inconsistency—technical or otherwise. Each week my friends and I would get together and try to outdo each other in

finding things wrong with the latest episode. It was all in fun and came directly from our passion for the series, but then I started wondering, “Do other Trekkers do this? Would they be interested in a nitpicker’s guide?” (xiii)

Like Farrand, Auerbach and Skal do not point out inconsistencies in order to denigrate Stoker as an author or argue against the novel’s aesthetic quality. Quite the opposite, in fact, since the publication of a Norton Critical Edition marks entry into the literary canon. Instead, the combination of enthusiasm and antagonism reads more like the kinds of excessive fan-based criticism I explored in the first chapter than a traditional scholarly apparatus, which is usually more focused on providing historical or critical background to particular scenes.

But where does this critical excess come from if it’s not caused by the temporal pause between installments, as it is for the narratives examined in the previous chapter? The cottage industry of criticism around *Dracula* suggests that the answer is more complicated than just calling Auerbach and Skal “nitpickers” and leaving it at that. Faller’s description of the nitpickers’ first meeting suggests that the pleasure of this activity arises from and creates a bond between readers, a bond that is based on a kind of protective affection for the text at hand. *Dracula*’s status as a work of genre fiction can thus account for some of the tone of the editorial apparatus of the Norton Critical Edition; Auerbach and Skal point out the novel’s faults before a more hostile critic would have the chance to do so. The community in this case would be academics who take “low culture” genre fiction (horror in particular) seriously.

If Auerbach and Skal resemble an image of fandom from *Buffy*, it’s Jonathan: hyper-vigilant, obsessive, concerned with mastery. But there’s another form of

fandom as well, one that is shut out from this community of “nitpickers.” If Jonathan is the nerdy *Star Trek* fan, then Dawn is the weeping, hysterical *Twilight* fan, the teenaged girl whose investment in the narrative universe is wholly emotional, and not countered by the critical distance of the nitpicker. While Buffy and the other central members of the “Scooby Gang” spend their time researching monsters and amassing knowledge, Dawn is shut out of this activity because she is deemed too young and vulnerable. Her similarity to Mina extends to her status as a portal in the text: a channel for knowledge and power that she can’t ultimately command.

This is the serial’s edge: the unwelcome knowledge that your sense of power isn’t only illusory (the author isn’t actually your friend), but that it might at any point spin out of control and turn on you. The attempts at mastery exemplified by the nitpicker’s “masculine” brand of fan activity cover over a more abject, less tightly controlled relationship to textuality, one in which the text controls its readers, especially in its power to inspire compulsive reading and re-reading. It’s not just that Dawn’s relationship with the narrative past exposes how no amount of nitpicking can reveal *all* of a story’s secrets, but that the excesses of the serial form—both in terms of its narrative limits and the emotional response it creates in viewers—make a coherent reading of the serial as a whole perhaps impossible.

It’s this combination of excess and compulsion that makes the experience of serial reading unique, and creates the connection between the Victorian novel and the 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century television serial. In her essay “Battling Addictions in *Dracula*,” Kristina Aikens reads the novel as a “Gothic narrative of drug addiction, dependency, and loss of control,” arguing that vampirism and drug use become entangled in that “both are seductively dangerous and dangerously seductive.” (42,

41) Perhaps most suggestively, Aikens links addiction with textuality, arguing that the characters' journal entries and letters which make up the novel "reveal a compulsion toward recording and transcription that mirrors the obsessive fixation of the drug addict." (49) The vampire's connection to sexual desire has been widely explored, and the sexually explicit symbolism of the vampire myth makes this reading difficult to miss: the penetrative bite, the phallic stake, the vagina dentata of the vampire's mouth—it's almost too easy. But it's the desire for the text itself that really sinks its teeth into the reader, creating a dependent relationship with the story that plays out on the level of both story and discourse, a compulsion I will explore in more depth in the next chapter. Stay tuned.

### Chapter Three

#### Serial Addicts: Addiction, Detection, Compulsion

“This mystery works on me like liquor, and liquor makes me wild”

Gabriel Betteredge, *The Moonstone*

“For me, as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol.”

W. H. Auden

“Deductive motherfucker...”

Lester Freamon, *The Wire*

It’s 3AM. Respectable people have long since been in bed. You think of yourself as someone who’d be in bed by now, too, but you’re not. *Just one more*, you think, *then I’ll be done*. The next morning at work, your eyes are red and you’re embarrassed to tell your coworkers what you’ve been up to. Season 5 of *LOST* just came out on DVD, and you were up all night binging on the adventures of Jack, Kate, and the other islanders. *Just watch the first season*, your friends told you, *and you’ll be hooked*.

As over-the-top and modern as this description of the serial fan seems, is it so different from Thackeray’s admission that he stayed up all night to finish *The Woman in White*, or Prime Minister Disraeli’s ignoring theater tickets to do the same? Since the serial depends on gaining habitual readers in order to be economically successful, serial writers do their best to “hook” readers, parsing out just enough information to keep them coming back for more but never satisfying them fully.

More often than not, readers and critics work out this question of “satisfaction” around the issue of closure—when it comes, and in what form. The

open questions of a serial are mysteries, and the goal of the serialized narrative (as opposed to the bound or episodic one) is to extend the desire for the mystery's resolution across the length of the novel, season, or series. Even as the fan is obsessed with figuring out the narrative's central mysteries (what *is* Lady Audley's secret? *Can* you forgive her? Who killed Laura Palmer?), the pleasure of serial reading comes from extending the process of discovery as long as possible. After all, the greatest crime among serial fans comes from "spoiling" the story by giving away the ending.<sup>71</sup>

If we understand the ending as the moment of imaginary payoff, the desired solution, the thing we're waiting for, then serials are all about extending the wait for that moment. The structure of the serial thus mirrors the structure of addiction: obsession with relief from obsession. For instance, the smoker who's trying to quit knows all too well the conviction that a cigarette will cure her unbearable craving—even though the truth is that smoking the cigarette will only start the timeline of craving over again, stronger than ever. In the same way, the serial both instantiates obsession and continually advances the idea that relief is possible. Each installment comes with its own moment of formal closure, but since that closure is by definition incomplete, it restarts the process of craving rather than relieving it. With each new installment, the promise of relief is renewed—and reneged upon.

To be clear, this addictive element of seriality won't be true for all readers—sadly, the surly Intro to Victorian Novels student is probably returning to Dickens or

---

<sup>71</sup> One example of this principle in action is the fairly intricate set of rules around spoilers on the website *Television Without Pity*. Fans must "tag" spoilers in discussion forums: if the comment contains information about unaired episodes, the writer must cover the text with a black bar that the reader can highlight (if she chooses) to expose the information underneath. However, the discussion forums for different shows have varying etiquette with regard to spoilers, and many confine all discussion of spoilers to a special thread dedicated to that purpose. Breaking these rules can lead to permanent barring from participation in any discussion on the site.



Collins from a brand of compulsion more rooted in discipline than desire. While I'd like to think that even these hypothetical students might become serial addicts, I'm positing an engaged reader who is not motivated by any power beyond that contained in the text. For serials that develop over time around one or a series of indefinitely deferred questions (what Matt Hills calls "perpetuated hermeneutics"), one *has* to read like an addict, anticipating the next dose, if one wants to read at all (134).<sup>72</sup> The element of volition attracts the reader at first, but as the text goes on and she becomes more invested in both the characters and the ever-proliferating narrative twists, the voluntary element fades and returning to the text becomes a matter of compulsion more than choice. Even if this hypothetical reader finds the characters boring or the style unengaging, she comes back week after week to discover *what happens next*, hoping for answers to some of these endlessly deferred questions. Obviously, if problems with characterization or style are too egregious, the reader will stop altogether, but perpetuated questions make engagement with the text necessarily all-or-nothing. Coming and going from a heavily serialized narrative becomes difficult or even impossible, since the reader who didn't continuously follow the narrative's open questions would no longer understand (or even care) what was happening enough to keep following the story, unless forced to by some outside force like the desire for a good grade.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> In *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills proposes a number of elements that make up cult texts: endlessly deferred narrative, hyperdiegesis (a dense, seemingly "whole" narrative world), and auterism, as well as the aforementioned perpetuated hermeneutic. I agree with Hills's taxonomy, but focus more on the formal elements of the serial, suggesting that it is impossible to engage with a serial *except* as a fan.

<sup>73</sup> As my focus on the structuring power of the installment breaks suggests, I'm thinking primarily of the contemporary reader who encounters the text as it was first released. However, the marks of the serial breaks continue to inhere in the text even after it is compiled in volume form, as anyone who has found herself staying up past her bedtime reading Dickens or watching *Buffy* can attest.

In this chapter, I will examine Wilkie Collins's serial novel *The Moonstone* and the HBO drama *The Wire* as examples of the addictive structure of serial narratives. Since both of these narratives are not only serials but detective stories, they feature especially central and clearly defined perpetuated hermeneutics. After all, the genre is identified by the question "Who done it?" Not only does the detective genre offer a clear central question, but it implicitly promises a solution, and a narrative's failure to deliver on that promise can lead to fan uprising and economic failure.<sup>74</sup> While not all detective stories are serials, serials are in some sense all detective narratives, in that they're oriented around central definitional questions and the drive for answers. Both *The Moonstone* and *The Wire* make the relationship between the desire for a drug and the desire for an answer particularly clear, especially since the most masterful detectives in both narratives are themselves addicts.

Obviously, the versions of "addicted reading" offered by these two texts are grounded in their vastly different historical moments. The explosion of what Trysh Travis calls "recovery culture" in the US in the 20<sup>th</sup> century makes it nearly impossible to think about addiction without considering the widespread effects of both the "war on drugs" and twelve-step recovery culture. *The Wire* exemplifies this link between addiction and recovery, not least in its criticism of the "high" associated with narrative payoff and its accompanying feeling of mastery. *The Moonstone*, on the other hand, is less concerned with the possible social and moral consequences of addiction, instead focusing on the interplay between pleasure and frustration that

---

<sup>74</sup> *Twin Peaks* is a particularly good example of this brand of reader rebellion. David Lynch had originally planned to leave the central question of who killed Laura Palmer unanswered throughout the series, but pressure from the network combined with flagging ratings caused him to offer a solution after all. (Lynch 180). I examine readerly resentment at "unsatisfying" endings in more detail in chapter one.

characterizes addiction. In many ways, the commonplace assumption of Victorian stodginess vs. postmodern freedom is inverted; the narrative universes of *The Moonstone* and *The Wire* are both populated almost solely by addicts, but only in the postmodern narrative is the reader encouraged to see this addiction as a problem. As critical as *The Wire* is of the War on Drugs<sup>75</sup>, it uses the reflexivity of the serial structure to encourage the reader to feel guilty for wanting easy answers, instead of celebrating the position of irresolvable desire in the manner of *The Moonstone*.

In many ways, these divergent attitudes reflect the different definitions of addiction within 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain and 21<sup>st</sup>-century American culture. According to Virginia Berridge's influential study *Opium and the People*, the "addict" was another medically and socially defined deviant identity that emerged in the nineteenth century's rash of medicalization (along with the homosexual, the criminal, and the lunatic, among others). The control of opium happened over the course of the last half of the century, just as *The Moonstone* was being written: "In the 1850s, opium could be bought in any grocer's or druggist's shop; by the end of the century, opium products and derivatives and opium-based patent medicines were only to be found in pharmacist's shops" (xxix). Collins's experience with opiates illustrates their troubled position in the culture: although his habitual use of laudanum was one of the many factors that marked him as somewhat beyond the pale of bourgeois culture, it occurred within the culturally legitimized space of medical treatment.

As the division of this chapter suggests, the recovery movement has much deeper roots in American than British culture. The contemporary disease concept of alcoholism and recovery is both a corrective to and a natural heir of 19<sup>th</sup>-century

---

<sup>75</sup> In the pilot, Lt. Carver jokes with his partner that the War on Drugs can't technically be called a war at all, since "wars end."

American temperance advocacy. The period from 1870 to 1920 saw the establishment of the first wave of a holistic disease concept of alcoholism, but “most institutions for inebriates [the contemporary term for alcoholics] closed their doors with Prohibition” (Tracy 24). Alcoholics Anonymous formed in 1935 but rose to cultural dominance in the 1950s with the success of the Alcoholism Movement, in which Bill Wilson, a co-founder of AA was deeply involved (Travis 37-38). With the development of AA, the new category of the “recovering addict” appeared: the one who is both addicted and temperate.

Despite these historical differences, the serial structure of *The Wire* and *The Moonstone* forces readers to come face to face with the inexorability of narrative desire, while at the same time exposing the insufficiency of any answer or solution to deliver the illusory “payoff” of the addictive process. This pattern is inherent in the structure of the serial, particularly in the breaks between issues, episodes, or installments. As much play and conjecture as the space between installments engenders, the next installment does provide the final say, and the reader is thus waiting for the truth of the text—the answer that will resolve the open questions which arise during the period of enforced waiting between installments. As is true for most if not all Truths, serial solutions cannot possibly deliver their promised organizing power, and the answers themselves often feel insufficient or unsatisfying. When the serial detective stories of *The Moonstone* and *The Wire* are held next to episodic detective stories like the Sherlock Holmes narratives or contemporary television crime dramas, the serial’s commitment to open-ended, contingent truth becomes especially apparent.

In the case of *The Moonstone*, the relationship between seriality and addiction is brought to the forefront through the centrality of drugs to the plot as well as Collins's use of the serial structure to put the reader in the place of the addict, highlighting both her desire for closure and the impossibility of that closure to deliver the promised sense of relief. The novel's focus on a specific mystery (the theft of the Moonstone) serves as a constant reminder to the reader of her desire for an ending, but the novel's serial format continually disrupts the coherence of any possible solution. Whether the reader primarily wants a definite ending and the sense of mastery that goes along with it or an open-ended narrative that could conceivably stretch on forever, *The Moonstone* reminds her how she wants both these things, all the time.<sup>76</sup>

*The Wire*, on the other hand, uses the serial form to achieve an understanding of addiction that is always paired with the possibility of "recovery." Although *The Wire* does offer solutions to the cases that occupy its detectives (the identity of a murderer or the machinations of a drug trafficker, for instance), those solutions are positioned as beginnings of new lines of inquiry, rather than the object of the narrative. The perpetuated hermeneutics that drive the reader thus become more focused on character than plot, not just the specific characters, but also the "character" of Baltimore and its constitutive institutions. In this way, the momentum of the narrative opens into more directions than just forward—the "resolution"

---

<sup>76</sup> The "addictive" quality of sensation fiction in general, and Collins's work in particular, is addressed by a number of critics. Deborah Wynne, for instance, uses a contemporary reader's description of the monthly installments as "tantalizing portions" to argue that the sensation novel was experienced by readers as "a cycle of pleasure and torment, consumption and hunger" (22). The sensation novel became particularly controversial because of its placement in family magazines, thus making salacious content such as bigamy and murder more explicitly linked with the tamer trappings of bourgeois identity. Just as Ezra Jennings's opium addiction is linked with his skills at scientific investigation (and thus his abilities in the bourgeois profession of physician), the compulsion-inducing sensation novels were central to the success of mainstream bourgeois magazines.

promised by closure is explicitly figured as illusory, encouraging the reader to look for less resolved pleasures.

### **Reading, Addiction, Recovery**

Collins himself had a fairly blasé relationship with at least the idea of drugs—the story goes that, witnessing Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s difficulties weaning himself off of opium, Collins’s mother Margaret responded with the question: “Mr. Coleridge, do not cry; if the opium really does you any good, and you must have it, why do you not go and get it?” (Hayter 255). This attitude was reflected in Collins’s relationship with opium: he was prescribed the drug legally for a series of debilitating health problems, and although he did become physically dependent on it and experienced terrifying hallucinations like the ones described by Ezra Jennings, he never attempted to quit, nor did he seem to think abstinence a particularly desirable goal. Biographer Catherine Peters suggests that Collins’s “relationship to [opium and laudanum] was closer to the dependence of a chronic asthmatic on steroids, than to the romanticism of the ‘opium eater’ or the degradation of a heroin addict” (337). The function and depiction of addiction in *The Moonstone* follows a similarly non-judgmental track. Just as Collins was uninterested in transcending sensation fiction’s humble origins in Newgate fiction and the “penny dreadful,” he does not seem particularly concerned with transcending the addictive desire engendered by the serial form.

This implies a more positive reading of addiction than contemporary anti-drug rhetoric generally allows for. In both *The Wire* and *The Moonstone*, different addictions are seen as structurally equivalent: while a dose of opium might exert a greater pull on its reader than a cigarette or an installment of a serial novel, the movement between obsession and relief is the same. For Collins, however, this

equivalence does not tend downward, marking reading as dangerous, but upward, suggesting that opium might be as harmless as reading or smoking, and that the desire engendered by addiction is its own end. In her essay “Smoking, Addiction, and the Making of Time,” Helen Keane suggests that smoking creates “a time outside of ordinary duration,” and that addiction is “not the terrible cost of smoking, but rather an intrinsic part of its pleasure, ensuring as it does the predictable return of desire” (133). Drugs and reading both work within a logic of revelation in *The Moonstone*—reading is focused on the revelation of central mysteries, and drugs help reveal those mysteries’ solutions. Part of the pleasure of reading is the revelation of the depth of the reader’s own desire for the next installment, and the novel encourages its reader to revel in that pleasure.

*The Wire*, on the other hand, is deeply concerned with the idea of transcendence, both of desire and genre. This commitment can be seen in its critical relationship with the phenomenon of craving engendered by the serial as well as its depictions of addicts themselves, both sober and active. However, it presents this critique of addictive behavior in a manner that acknowledges the impossibility of ever fully transcending desire. In this way, the text’s critical relationship with addiction is deeply informed by the ascendance of “recovery culture” in the century that separates it from *The Moonstone*. Unlike the 19<sup>th</sup>-century teetotaler or temperance advocate, the sober addict or alcoholic remains an addict<sup>77</sup> first and foremost,

---

<sup>77</sup> One of the tenets of twelve-step recovery is that alcoholism is merely a type of drug addiction, not a separate phenomenon. Following this model, I use the terms fairly interchangeably. Obviously, the legality and historical contexts of alcohol and drugs are different enough that the substances carry different historical weight (alcohol could be manufactured locally in the US and Britain, for instance, while opiates always carry with them a trace of the foreign). However, the structure of the addictive process is the same across substances, and it’s this structural similarity I’m most interested in investigating here.

particularly since the possibility of relapse is always present. “Recovery” is a subset of addiction, then, not a distinct state.

Trysh Travis defines “recovery culture” as the widespread influence of twelve-step recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, from grassroots twelve-step organizations, to official therapeutic entities attempting to address the phenomenon of addiction, to authors or organizations deeply influenced by the central tenets of twelve-step recovery such as Oprah Winfrey or Melody Beattie (6-7). Many analyses of recovery culture focus on “exposing” the disease metaphor of addiction as a metaphor, or critiquing twelve-step recovery as a panoptic machine of self-discipline.<sup>78</sup> While these critics offer valid arguments, I’m more interested in following Travis’s lead and taking the insights of the recovery movement seriously. Twelve-step recovery literature offers some of the most coherent and widely used narratives for thinking about addiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—it seems both logical and appropriate to utilize its theoretical tools when considering the relationship between addiction and narrative. Furthermore, the positive and nuanced depiction of NA itself in *The Wire* suggests that at least some of the show’s writers are both familiar with and supportive of the basic tenets of twelve-step programs.

Perhaps as a result of the insistent pragmatism of twelve-step programs, the rhetoric of recovery is deeply aphoristic—simple phrases like “one day at a time” or

---

<sup>78</sup> These critical views of 12-step include both popular and academic analyses, ranging from the “Rational Recovery” movement, which argues that, “whether medical or psychological, the disease concept of addiction is without scientific merit” and encourages members to defy “the authority of AA, which has a terrible grip on our social service system, reaching through mass communications even those who are not members with its doctrines of disease, powerlessness, and surrender” to more nuanced analyses of twelve-step groups as Foucauldian machines that install the drug user as “the proper *object* of compulsory institutional disciplines, legal and medical, that, without actually being able to do anything to ‘help’ her, nonetheless presume to know her better than she can know herself” (Trimpey, n.p.; Sedgwick 131).



“first things first” are easily called to mind at moments when relapse looks imminent. Following that example, I have come up with four aphorisms (sadly, none quite as catchy as “Keep it simple, stupid”) that guide my thinking about the relationship between recovery and serial narrative, which I call “recovering reading”:

*Recovering reading is a subset of addicted reading.*

*Recovering reading has a double timeline.*

*Recovering reading is recursive.*

*Recovering reading is close reading.*

In the phrase “recovering reading” as well as my use of aphorisms, I (attempt to) echo Eve Sedgwick’s brilliant essay on “reparative reading,” “You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You.” Like Sedgwick, I’m interested in possible alternatives to a brand of reading that focuses so intently on a final critical destination or “payoff.” I hope that my use of the recovery model corrects for some of the necessary binarism of Sedgwick’s argument on reparative reading. As much as she claims that the paranoid and reparative positions are “changing and heterogenous relational stances,” she spends most of the essay explaining the limits of the paranoid stance. She structures her essay around a series of aphorisms that define paranoia—the actual contours of reparative reading remain vague. By celebrating the possibilities inherent in an “addicted” reading position and taking time and space to define “recovering reading,” I want to show the mutually constitutive nature of these two positions without valuing one over the other.

*Recovering Reading is a subset of addicted reading*

The first thing a sober alcoholic does at a meeting is identify as an alcoholic or addict. Not, importantly, as a “recovering” addict or alcoholic, and certainly not a

“recovered” one. Robyn Warhol reads alcoholism as more of an identity than a behavior; within the halls of AA, your status as an alcoholic is “not about what you do or even what you have done, it is about who you are” (99). Even permanent sobriety, then, will never erase the trace of addiction. Rather than framing the status of “addict” as shameful or marginal, the addict must come to terms with her “addictive thinking,” and recognize and accept her own tendency to look for a “quick fix” even as she denies herself the fix of narcotics or alcohol.

As much as recovering reading is an alternative to “addicted” reading, it’s also inevitably paired with it. As the AA slogan “progress not perfection” suggests, the addict is never “recovered”—she’s always *recovering*.<sup>79</sup> The recovering reader oscillates between “active” and “sober” reading positions, never permanently occupying either one. Serial reading, like twelve-step recovery, is a fundamentally both/and process: both invested in and detached from the fetish of the ending, looking both forward and backwards, both old and new, both “sober” and addicted. *Recovering Reading has a double timeline.*

Although the goal of participation in twelve-step programs is the ongoing accretion of “sober time” away from drinking or using drugs, members who have been sober longer are never granted more power or even necessarily more respect than newer members. The second tradition, which states that “our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern,” instead places the power of governance in the consensus-based spiritual revelation of the entire group (AA, 562). The aphorism “one day at a time,” is here used as a radical leveler, disrupting the hierarchical power of age, prestige, and even experience. Since all members have only “a daily reprieve

---

<sup>79</sup> A common joke in AA is that “they don’t call it alcohol-was-m.” The disease model of alcoholism allows for a doubled model of addiction—the addict is both addicted and recovering simultaneously.

based on their spiritual condition,” more time away from a drink doesn’t make someone better at being or staying sober (AA, 85). Just as groups are non-hierarchically structured, time itself is similarly segmentalized, with each day (or moment) as its own discrete unit, not necessarily teleologically related to the one that succeeds it.

At the same time, however, stories that make up the content of meetings often have a firm teleological framework. For instance, the standard format for an AA story has a beginning, middle, and end: “what it was like, what happened, and what it’s like now.” This clear narrative framework sets up every story as a clear trajectory toward the present “happy ending” of sobriety in AA. The endless proliferation of endings, however, ultimately has the same result as the refusal of closure implied by the focus on the single day. Months and years of accrued sobriety are a cause for celebration, but the hope is that none of these celebrations will be final—the addict is never “cured” or “graduates.” By pairing the narrative momentum toward the “finish line” of recovery with the firm conviction that recovery is an unreachable goal, the narrative framework of AA both acknowledges the subject’s desire for the pleasure of closure while also positing that closure as always incomplete.

In much the same way, for a recovering reader, elements of the story can be read out of sequence or disconnected from the perpetuated hermeneutics that drive the narrative forward. The tendency of serials to “exist[] at the crossroads of the old and the new” encourages the reader to look both forward and backwards as she reads (O’Sullivan, “Old, New, Borrowed, Blue,” 117). In order to understand jokes or character references, the reader needs to constantly look backwards in the story,

but at the same time, each episode has the shimmer and promise of the new.

Furthermore, new information retroactively rewrites what has come before, meaning that no installment necessarily holds the power of Truth. But again—it's not that the new information is *not* true, it just *might* not be true, and the reader is thus placed in a contingent relationship even with her own reading skills. The reader is constantly looking for the next revelatory piece of information but simultaneously aware that this information can't possibly deliver the narrative high she might desire. In this way, the reader oscillates between the promise of totalizing knowledge and the realization that it will never arrive.

*Recovering reading is recursive*

AA meetings themselves, for all the conversation about sensational alcoholic drama (crashed cars, ruined marriages, etc.), are surprisingly repetitive—people tell the same stories of dissipation and redemption again and again in order to cement their identities as alcoholics, and pore over the same first 164 pages of the central text *Alcoholics Anonymous*, mining it for new insights into their experience and the nature of alcoholism. This model of reading and re-reading mirrors a devoted fan's engagement with a text—a quality Jason Mittell calls “drillability,” which he names as a central element of narratively complex television programming.<sup>80</sup> A recovering reader covers the same material again and again, reinterpreting and reevaluating it based on the newest pieces of information (for instance, the revelations of the latest installment, or information about the actors or author/s). The text's past never remains static while the serial is still going, and the recovering reader remains

---

<sup>80</sup> See Mittell's “To Spread or to Drill?” at [www.wordpress.justtv.com](http://www.wordpress.justtv.com) for a more in-depth explanation of “drillability” and its connection to cult television.

interested in re-reading, trusting that the text will continue to offer up new rewards.

*Recovering reading is close reading*

“Drillability,” is of course partly just a synonym for close reading, but in the medium of television instead of written texts. Mittell’s neologism is useful, however, because it demonstrates the disruptive quality of close reading, especially with regard to teleology. When a reader drills into a text, she must necessarily stop moving forward and examine more closely the text’s current moment and history. Close reading is always re-reading—the “closeness” is achieved by traversing and re-traversing a particular scene or passage, noticing details that might have been missed on a first pass. Although the insights gained from the pause *can* be used as part of an investigative process, scanning the text for clues as to its ultimate Meaning, a reader might also linger over a scene merely for the pleasure of re-reading.

David Kurnick makes a related argument about close reading in his essay “An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice,” but about novels instead of television. He claims that the pleasure of reading has always been central to the form of the novel, and that novel-reading is by its nature promiscuous, particularly for serial readers. Since the serial is spread out over time, it’s unlikely that a reader would read monogamously, one narrative at a time. Instead, she will in all likelihood follow multiple narratives and pay attention to the surrounding material (for example, advertisements and other essays as well as the other serialized novels she might be following in other magazines) while reading. At the same time, this breadth of attention doesn’t preclude depth of interest or ferocity of attachment. Kurnick points out how this doubled situation of reading has led to “a paradox in the way we think of desire in the novel and desire for the novel: the

erotically gripped reader is understood, incoherently, to be both dilettantish and over-invested, both distracted and passionately identified” (587). For the serial reader, this can be understood as the simultaneous pleasure of the part and the desire for the whole, the oscillation between the pleasure of the moment and the pitch toward the future that so characterizes serial reading. *The Wire* shares a commitment to this “erotics of detachment,” which mirrors the twelve-step injunction to “detach with love” as a way of attempting to manage the balance between desire for control and surrender to powerlessness.

Taking my cue from Kurnick, I’ve constructed my argument around a series of close readings: in *The Moonstone*, I examine how the installment breaks force the reader to confront the intensity of her desire for closure, thus aligning her with the addict. Rather than condemning addiction, Collins encourages the reader to give in to her desire for the promise of closure, even as he reminds us that its promised relief will never arrive. In *The Wire*, I look closely at one particularly virtuosic example of detection, and then show how that scene resonates over the course of the series in ways that both reinforce and undermine the pleasure of closure. This pattern also places the reader in the position of the addict, but this time she’s an addict in recovery, simultaneously reading for the end and for the endless pleasures of the middle. Finally, I will look at figures in each narrative that both disrupt and deliver the pattern of closure: Miss Clack and Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone*, and Bubbles in *The Wire*.

### **I’ve Got a Fever: Detection in *The Moonstone***

Throughout *The Moonstone*, the process of detection is caught up with drugs and addiction. The clearest example of this connection is, of course, the circumstances of

the theft and the process by which those circumstances are revealed—Franklin Blake’s doubled dosing of opium. However, drugs make themselves felt in the novel long before the appropriately named Mr. Candy gives Franklin his fateful dose. Colonel Herncastle, the dissipated relative who leaves the heroine, Rachel Verinder, the Moonstone in his will, is both “a notorious opium-eater” and a hobbyist in “experimental chemistry.” If we read Ezra Jennings’s “bold experiment” that closes the novel (and at least part of the mystery) as another form of experimental chemistry, and an early forerunner of the kind of forensic science that will later structure narratives like Sherlock Holmes and *CSI*<sup>81</sup>, then detection and addiction are twinned bookends for the narrative—the simultaneous drives for knowledge and opium both open and close the mystery.

Furthermore, although Franklin Blake’s opium use garners most of the narrative’s attention, this use is in fact precipitated by his addiction to a less glamorous drug, tobacco. When Blake quits smoking at Rachel’s request, he suffers now-familiar symptoms of tobacco withdrawal: irritability and sleeplessness. After Blake argues with Mr. Candy over the efficacy of medicine to cure his symptoms, Mr. Candy doses him with opium to prove its effectiveness first-hand. In this way, Blake’s addiction to tobacco precipitates both his use of opium and his case of “detective-fever.”<sup>82</sup> In later episodic detective narratives like the Sherlock Holmes stories, detection is presented as a kind of substitute for drug use (detective work

---

<sup>81</sup> In “*The Moonstone*, Detective Fiction and Forensic Science,” Ronald Thomas argues that “two decades before Sherlock Holmes would appear as the master scientific detective and subject the world to his masterful, scientific gaze, *The Moonstone* successfully moved the setting for the criminal investigation from the teeming streets of the crime scene to the chemical interactions that take place in the scientific laboratory” (77).

<sup>82</sup> The “fever” model prefigures the disease-model of addiction that would come to take hold in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only in its histological nature (it’s both chronic and contagious), but in the addict’s position of powerlessness in relation to the disease. Detective-fever can infect anyone, regardless of personal will power or social position.

keeps Holmes away from the call of the needle), but *The Moonstone* instead presents the phenomena of detection and addiction as mutually constitutive, and thus additive rather than substitutive.

This “more-is-more” relationship between different addictive patterns can be seen in the continuing connection between smoking and detection for Blake. Just before they discover Rosanna Spearman’s letter and Blake’s identity as the thief is revealed, Betteredge diagnoses Blake with detective-fever, and then asks if he’s yet experiencing its symptoms: “an uncomfortable heat at the pit of your stomach,” and “a nasty thumping at the top of your head” (308). Detective-fever is here characterized by the symptoms of withdrawal, and Blake thus jokes that “the cure in this instance is to open Rosanna Spearman’s letter” (308). It’s the period of waiting for the answer (and the relief they presume will accompany it) that illustrates the depth of Blake’s and Betteredge’s desire for relief.

In a move that retrospectively seems to give away the relationship between Blake’s own addiction to tobacco and the theft of the Moonstone, Blake takes comfort in smoking while he waits for the tide to turn, so that he might uncover Rosanna Spearman’s letter. In the same way that Col. Herncastle’s opium use and his scientific experimentation are connected, Franklin Blake’s addiction to tobacco has an additive relationship with his detection work:

The interval of expectation, short as it was when reckoned by the measure of time, assumed formidable proportions when reckoned by the measure of suspense. This was one of the occasions on which the invaluable habit of smoking becomes especially precious and consolatory. I lit a cigar, and sat down on the slope of the beach. (312)



Detection doesn't take the place of smoking, but the "measure of suspense" inherent in investigation gives smoking its "consolatory" power. The negative feelings associated with unwilling waiting (impatience, resentment, frustration) make the promise of relief offered by revelation more powerful, and make the waiting subject even hungrier for whatever kind of relief might be available. The shocking revelation found in Rosanna Spearman's letter—that Blake himself stole the Diamond—and the immediate installment break that follows only increase the reader's case of "detective-fever," reminding her of her similar state of withdrawal from the object of her desire. Opium, tobacco, or solutions, one craving leads to another.

### **"Natural Police": Alcoholism, Detection, and Narrative Power**

In *The Wire*, detection's expected trajectory is undone, and the solutions to each season's mysteries (the identity of a murderer, for instance) are often revealed in the first few episodes; the open question then becomes whether the police will amass enough evidence to prosecute.

In many ways, *The Wire* isn't a "detective" show at all, and certainly wouldn't be read as a procedural drama like *CSI* or even *Law & Order*, which also concerns itself with both detection and prosecution. Instead, it's a detective narrative much more in the model of a Victorian novel, in which the reader is forced to wait for the solution(s) to a question or set of questions that become increasingly more complicated as the show goes on. Just as the *Moonstone* can be read as standing in for an ever-expanding laundry list of Victorian anxieties,<sup>83</sup> each season of *The Wire* examines another interrelated layer of corruption in the city. While *The Moonstone*

---

<sup>83</sup> These anxieties include but are not limited to: the place of women in the culture (Gruner); British imperial rule (Free); disabled bodies (Flint); class struggle (McCuskey); sexual knowledge (Hutter). Furthermore, all these anxieties are interrelated in the text—the *Moonstone* does not "actually" stand in for one of these things, but all of them simultaneously.

ends with the open question “What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone?” (472), the final season of *The Wire* loops back to the series’ beginning, with another rogue detective complaining to the same judge who set the events of the first season in motion by establishing the Major Crimes Unit.

While the episodic narrative provides both desire and satisfaction, the serial narrative is structured around a logic of additive desire, where one episode is too many and a thousand is never enough. In a serial, each solution only leads to more questions—in *The Wire*, this pattern gives rise to ever-expanding investigations and suggestions of systemic problems that resist any clear-cut resolution. As soon as the “good” candidate wins the mayoral election, we’re faced with the question of how he might navigate a corrupt system. The Major Crimes Unit arrests the drug kingpin from the first season only to see a more brutal gangster rise in his place. Every moment that promises the satisfaction of closure only points to larger and larger problems, and the reader is shuttled back and forth between a desire for closure and the constant knowledge of the naiveté of that desire.

Within the standard narrative of the alcoholic gumshoe, the relationship between addiction and detection is substitutive: detection serves as a positive channel for his destructively compulsive tendencies. In *The Wire*, however, the central character of Detective Jimmy McNulty presents a distinctly different approach to the relationship between addiction and detection, suggesting that the two phenomena are additive. McNulty’s obsessive focus on a particular crime does not distract him from his alcoholism—instead, his preoccupation with a moment of payoff (offered by either alcohol or detection) is presented as one in a series of compulsive behaviors, all of which are mutually supportive. From the pilot episode on, McNulty’s drive to

reach the “payoff” of the arrest motivates his behavior and alienates him from the other characters on the show. Initially, he seems to be the stock character of the cop outsider—the one who’s a “renegade” and “doesn’t play by your rules.”<sup>84</sup> His initial pursuit of mid-level drug dealer D’Angelo Barksdale is motivated mostly by his frustration that his own detective work didn’t translate into a conviction. He feels like he’s lost the game.

Part of McNulty’s frustration seems to arise from his recognized skill as a detective, a skill the reader is encouraged to respect and take pleasure in. In season one, McNulty and Bunk’s prowess as a detective team is established in a scene where they figure out how a young woman was murdered, communicating only through body language and iterations of the word “fuck.” (1.4, “Old Cases”) This scene is cited by fans and critics<sup>85</sup> as among the show’s best, showing the ideal of detective work: “natural police” (the chapter title on the DVD, and the complimentary term Bunk uses to describe fellow detective Lester Freamon). McNulty and Bunk are accompanied to the crime scene by the readerly stand-in of the building’s superintendent, who stares in bemused admiration as they sort out the details previous investigators missed. The camera follows their point of view through the scene, particularly McNulty’s, but only shows glimpses of the information they’re using. For instance, Bunk starts by laying pictures of the dead girl on the floor, presumably in the position where her body was found, but we have no way of

---

<sup>84</sup> On the fan website [tvtropes.org](http://tvtropes.org), this stock character is named the “cowboy cop,” after Eddie Murphy’s character in *Beverly Hills Cop*, and is characterized by his tendency to “bend the rules, rough up the suspects, ignore [his] supervisors (and the Constitution) to get stuff done.”

<sup>85</sup> For instance, on a thread on the *A.V. Club*’s review for the final episode, “-30-” in which readers are comparing favorite scenes, commenter Steve U agrees with a previous poster that the “fuck” scene is the series’ best, arguing that the scene “was the perfect deconstruction of the popular ‘CSI’ image of impossibly competent, hi-tech crime scene investigators. It showed off the chemistry between Bunk and McNulty and gave us insight into their relationship. Most importantly, it was really fucking funny.”

knowing for certain if this is in fact his reasoning. At the same time, McNulty scans the homicide paperwork, and the camera cuts between shots of him reading and brief glimpses of information like her height and age. Considering the tendency to linger over written material in film, the brevity of these shots particularly separates the viewer from the action of detection. In this way, the viewer is encouraged toward a passive stance of admiration, enjoying the retroactive thrill of mastery as McNulty and Bunk accurately parse out the events of the murder.

This admiration is only increased by the fact that we've already seen D'Angelo narrate the shooting to a member of his crew in a previous scene, so we know that McNulty and Bunk are putting the pieces together in the right order. The *process* of detection, rather than the outcome, is the marvel. McNulty and Bunk gather evidence, for instance, by placing themselves in the positions of both the killer and the victim—looking at the pictures of the dead woman, McNulty maps out the entry and exit points of the gunshot wound on his own body, then uses his own gun to sort out the angle of the shot, which ultimately leads him and Bunk to finding the bullet and the casing that will (hopefully) direct them toward a suspect.

McNulty can imagine himself in the position of both the victim and the killer, and it's this mastery of multiple perspectives which allows him to work as an expert detective. Although the reader already knows the solution to the crime, watching McNulty and Bunk arrive at the conclusion still provides an "a-ha" moment of readerly pleasure. This revelation is unrelated to narrative closure, however. Instead, we've witnessed the next move in an ongoing game,<sup>86</sup> and the

---

<sup>86</sup> The business of street-level drug dealing is referred to as "the game," a phrase that resonates throughout the series, not only in the ludic play of the genre (see George Dove's study of detective

pleasure comes from marveling at the detectives' skill and asking the open question of where things might go next, not from enjoying sudden mastery over the narrative's past. In this way, the scene provides the spectatorial pleasures inherent in the detective genre (vicariously discovering the truth, watching a master sleuth at work) while simultaneously opening up the possibility of another set of readerly pleasures down the line. The content of these future pleasures rarely reinforces this sense of mastery, however. For instance, McNulty and Bunk's detection doesn't even lead to D'Angelo's arrest—another mid-level drug dealer takes responsibility for this and twenty other murders after he's caught for one.<sup>87</sup>

Not only does this scene lose its explanatory power through later plot developments, but it resonates throughout the series as an example of both the pleasures and problems of detection. The scene becomes a kind of floating signifier, revised and revisited throughout the series as a way of highlighting the problems of dogged pursuit of a specific Truth, even while the text remains committed to the narrative pleasures of "good police." McNulty, for instance, uses his powers of "good policing" to (unsuccessfully) prove to himself that his drunken judgment was right, to advance his own sense of social mastery in order to settle a score with his hostile former lieutenant, in an attempt to outsmart other homicide detectives after he's been cast out of the department, and (with unsettling success) to use the bodies of D.O.A. homeless men to drunkenly stage a series of *CSI*-style serial murders in an attempt to restructure bureaucratic inequities.

---

fiction and reader response, *The Reader and the Detective Story*), but in the sense that all of these characters, particularly those on the streets, are part of a larger system with rules they can't control.

<sup>87</sup> A confession: I'm so used to the conventions of the procedural drama that when Wee-bay makes his confession in one of the final episodes of the season, I assumed that it was true, even though D'Angelo had confessed to the crime in an earlier episode. The territorializing power of the trope of the end-stage confession is surprisingly resilient.

By consistently linking the pursuit of personal power with McNulty's excessive consumption of alcohol, the show seems to be following the twelve-step diagnosis of alcoholism as "self-will run riot," and suggesting that detection is driven by the same self-will (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 62). This association between alcoholism and detection is strengthened by McNulty's sole period of abstinence from alcohol during the fourth season. During this stretch of sobriety, he voluntarily resigns from Homicide in order to work as a beat cop in the Western district, abandoning the masterful "bird's-eye view" from the skyscraper where the Homicide division is housed for a more nomadic gaze focused on the details of a specific neighborhood. In this way, the show again presents the possibility of an alternative way of thinking about detection, one based in the logic of the everyday rather than in a race for a narrative finish line.<sup>88</sup>

Over the course of the series, it becomes clear that McNulty's work as a homicide detective is linked to his alcoholism, in that both positions (alcoholic and detective) are defined by the single-minded pursuit of a specifically defined payoff—either the solution or the drink. One particularly revelatory moment comes in the "cold open" of the eighth episode of season two ("Collateral Damage"), with McNulty driving drunk through Baltimore in the middle of the night, depressed over the end of his relationship with his ex-wife. Although McNulty is frequently shown intoxicated, he's far worse in this scene than he's ever been shown before, drunk-

---

<sup>88</sup> As Michel de Certeau argues in "Walking in the City," the perspective from a skyscraper "transfigures [the viewer] into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes" (92). When McNulty abandons the heights of the Homicide office building, he also leaves behind the narrative power that comes with this totalizing perspective. The tradeoff for this lack of power comes with his more intimate knowledge of the particular neighborhood where he works, and his recognition by the residents as a part of the community rather than an invasive power. When he would arrive on the scene as a homicide detective, he served as an extension of the top-down power of the skyscraper, but now he knows the residents and sees them every day.

dialing his ex-wife and slurring his words. Unsurprisingly, he takes a turn too wide and slams into a pylon. Throughout the scene, the camera shifts rapidly between exterior and interior shots of the car—the exterior shots give a removed perspective of the impending wreck, and the interior shots remind us of McNulty’s drunkenness by his slurred singing along to Irish bar band the Pogues. In the “fuck” scene, we witness McNulty’s ability to occupy multiple positions, but the viewer’s position in relation to the action is always from the outside, standing back to wonder at his powers of detection. Here, however, the viewer occupies both these focalizing positions, and the process of getting tossed between the two is sometimes dizzying. Once the viewer’s point of view matches up more directly with McNulty’s, it’s clear that vision of mastery he displayed during the “fuck” scene is only an attempt, and impossible to maintain in any sustained way.

These rapidly changing focalizing positions become particularly overwhelming after McNulty gets out of the car to survey the damage. He starts to set up sight lines for the angle of the crash, in a clear reference to his establishing sight lines in the earlier “fuck” scene with Bunk. However, McNulty’s detective work in relation to his car crash is first shown in an extremely long shot, emphasizing the reader’s distance from his perspective, and then in a disorienting sweep that follows McNulty’s estimate of the car’s original path, making him the focalizer yet again. After figuring out his angle of approach, he promptly gets back in the car and tries to take the turn again, presumably convinced that he shouldn’t have hit the column in

the first place. Of course he gets in an even worse accident the second time around, hitting his head and breaking the car window.<sup>89</sup>

The combination of McNulty's "detective" work here and the repeated shots from his drunken perspective retrospectively undermine his previous display of mastery. This is not to say he isn't Good Police, but that the act of Good Policing is linked (at least for McNulty) with an insistent driven and thus compromised perspective. From the distant space of the long shot, McNulty's attempts at detection are coded as funny and even pathetic attempts to gain some kind of mastery over his circumstances. From his own perspective, McNulty's potential payoff comes not from finding the truth (which wouldn't even make sense here: of course he's taken the turn too wide—his accident has proven that), but from the possibility of retrospectively proving that he had been right in the first place. In his book *Detection and Its Designs: Narrative and Power in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Detective Fiction*, Peter Thoms argues that the act of detection serves as a means by which characters enact power in the world, and that characters engage in detective work "out of a desire to exert control over other and sometimes (as in the fiction of Dickens and Collins in which detection becomes everyone's habit) over himself" (2). Although Thoms is not using the term "habit" to refer to addiction, his word choice is telling. In this scene, McNulty's desire to exert control, which Thoms calls "egoism," is linked explicitly to his drinking—as he gets more intoxicated, his drive to be right (evidenced even in his original manipulation of the bartender to get served a final drink) colors his

---

<sup>89</sup> McNulty's work establishing sight lines for the crash makes him resemble a film director, which resonates with one of the many critiques of self-will in AA's central text: "Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great" (61). Like the out-of control actor of AA's extended metaphor, McNulty attempts to rearrange the scene of his crash so it will match up with his desired narrative.



interpretation of evidence to the point of parody, as we see in the camera's lurching swoop, adopting his drunken POV.

### **My Heroes have Always Been Cowboys**

McNulty's alcoholism, rather than being a problem in and of itself, is presented as symptomatic of an overall fixation on "payoff": either the solution to the crime, personal power over another character, or the drink itself. Throughout the second season, the show exposes the way this fixation on a coherent solution defines the Lone Detective in the Sherlock Holmes model, and especially the stock figure of the Cowboy Cop. McNulty's alcoholism is structurally linked to his status as a "cowboy," as the other revisions of the "fuck" scene illustrate. Just as McNulty uses his detection skills to "prove" his own drunken reasoning, he also devotes massive time and energy to detective work based solely in his own personal vendetta against Lieutenant Rawls, his former boss and a committed city bureaucrat. If *The Moonstone* forces the reader to come face-to-face with her own case of "detective-fever," then *The Wire* is interested in following through on the negative implications of the illusion that "payoff" will ever truly provide relief from that fever.

McNulty's self-centeredness is used to critique the generic model of the detective hero in a episode in season two ("Collateral Damage"), when he arrives at the homicide department to inform Detectives Bunk and Freamon (who are assigned to the case) of his discovery of the details of the murders of the thirteen prostitutes whose death instantiates the season's plot arc. McNulty has been following the "stone whodunit" of the bodies in order to pursue an old grudge and ensure that City Homicide takes responsibility for them all. After working with the coroner to determine the time of death (and thus placing that death within the city's

jurisdiction), McNulty arrives at the Homicide offices, ready to inform the “official” police—those not working within McNulty’s “maverick” model—of his closer observations, and thus of the Truth of the investigation. The setup of the scene is reminiscent of the classic detective structure, where the outsider brings the pieces together in a way that the official police had been unable to see, thus highlighting his own virtuosity and their blindness at a single stroke.

However, the scene undoes McNulty’s attempts at mastery, with Freamon and Bunk not only preempting his claims of knowledge, but showing their own virtuosity with regard to the tropes of the genre, and thus exposing to the reader her own mistaken reliance on those tropes. The scene begins with a moment of misdirection: Bunk says, “you happy now, bitch?” and the camera cuts to Beadie Russell, the only female character in the scene, leading the reader to assume Bunk is referring to her. The immediate pan to McNulty redirects the reader’s attention, alerting the reader to her own tendencies to misread textual cues. McNulty swaggers in, apologizing for their involvement in the case but also touting his own largesse in his willingness to share the results of his detection with them. Again, he’s set up in an analogous position to the Sherlock Holmes figure, using his status as an outsider to present knowledge that would be missed by official channels. He begins to present the evidence he’s collected, pacing his revelations so that the “a-ha” at the end might have the greatest impact. Freamon and Bunk play along at first, saying “McNulty has a theory,” and referring to him as a “deductive motherfucker.”

Just as he’s about to launch into his full explanation, though, Freamon and Bunk interrupt him to present the results of their own investigation, which has come to just the same conclusions. Their deductive work has happened off-screen,

however, without the generic markers that have peppered McNulty's investigative process (such as shots of him brooding over a photograph of one of the dead women). We've been encouraged to see McNulty as a more effective investigator than the officers assigned to the case, not least because of his independent methods, but Freamon and Bunk's response exposes this version of the narrative as part of a generic tradition invested in oversimplifying deductive work for dramatic effect.

Their teasing response, then, mocks not only McNulty for his aspirations toward the status of "deductive motherfucker," but the viewer for believing that renegade detective work based on a goal of personal power is the most, or even the *only* effective way to do detective work. In other words, the scene is committed to exposing the lie that detective work happens "like it does on television." Their critique particularly hits home since they mock McNulty for his rhetorical style as much as his assumption that he has outsmarted them. Before he has a chance to get beyond his first revelation, they anticipate his narrative style, telling each other (and the reader) what McNulty will do next, and how he will give them the information in the way that paints him in the best light:

Bunk: But why did she get beat? He's going to ask us that like we don't already know.

Freamon: He's going to answer his own question.

In this way, the reader is called out for her investment in the tropes of standard detective narratives as much as McNulty is for wanting to participate in them and their accompanying fantasies of power.<sup>90</sup>

As much as any of these scenes of detection offer their own critiques of the payoff of fixed meaning, the potential of the serial form to complicate the detection

---

<sup>90</sup> McNulty's racial and gendered power is also undercut here, as the expectation that the white male cop will be the most virtuosic is exposed and rewritten.

process only becomes fully clear when the reader makes the connection between the different scenes. McNulty and Bunk's "fuck" scene looks at first like a grittier version of the standard scene of virtuosic detection—and it does retain that power to inspire wonder when watched again. However, its continued status as a touchstone throughout the series opens up the possibility to both enjoy the moment of revelation it offers and use that pleasure as a jumping-off point for a critique of the connection between detection and the pursuit of self-centered power. Moreover, the scene's continuing reappearance and revision offers a model for a "recovering" mode of recognition in which characters or stylistic elements return again and again, not as clues, but in the mode of the "Easter Eggs"<sup>91</sup> one might find on a web site or special edition DVD. The pleasure of recognition then comes from the reader's increasing familiarity with the fictive world and a deepening understanding of the characters and setting, without necessarily linking that recognition to any specific goal.

### **Powerlessness and the Resentful Reader**

The key word regarding the oscillating relationship between addicted and recovering reading positions here is "necessarily." The Easter-egg-like pleasures of resurfacing characters or situations aren't *necessarily* linked to any kind of endgame, but they could be. Whether an element of the story works as a clue, a red herring, or a pleasurable "callback" for fans depends both on the reader's perspective and the ongoing development of the plot. Regardless of the reader's relationship with the idea of closure, however, she still is powerless as to the timeline and delivery of that closure.

---

<sup>91</sup> This term comes from hidden links or files coded into software or websites. The lucky or savvy viewer can mine the site for hidden pleasures, unrelated to the site's primary purpose but giving a sense of surprise and/or camaraderie with the site's authors and fellow users/fans.

If the show is cancelled or the author dies, the reader has no recourse but to impose closure or try to finish the story herself. As much as the serial necessitates active reading, the reader's position in relation to text's power to inspire desire and compulsion is finally fairly passive. While powerlessness is part of the thrill of addictive reading (surrendering to rather than resisting desire), it can also inspire resentment in the addicted reader who is forced to face that powerlessness. In his study of alcoholism and recovery, *The Alcoholic Society*, sociologist Norman Denzin defines resentment as "a backwards-looking emotionality [...], a form of self-hatred that is located in the real and imagined actions another has taken toward the person" (351). He makes a direct connection between the addict's lack of control and the experience of resentment, arguing that "when powerlessness is great, resentment increases, as does alcohol use and abuse" (351). In *The Wire*, the connection between resentment and powerlessness can be seen in McNulty's ongoing campaign against people or institutions that stand in his way (Lt. Rawls, the department budget); in *The Moonstone*, Miss Clack's attempts to derail the narrative (thus postponing its "payoff") both demonstrate and inspire the connection between resentment and compulsion.

Although *The Moonstone* is constructed entirely through first-hand accounts, only Miss Clack is presented as fundamentally unreliable. Betteredge complains at times of his masters' "idleness," and Blake's testimony is compromised by his opium use, but their desire to solve the central mystery is taken as given. Miss Clack, on the other hand, refuses to believe the mystery's final solution, and is described by D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police* as "so blatantly self-betraying that a reader inevitably revises [her words] to mean something very different from what Clack imagines" (55). Miller goes on to argue that Clack's unreliability adds to the narrative's overall

monologic quality as the only narrator who strays from the moral judgments of the rest of the community. The text's disavowal of her gives thus the community a unified sense of itself—a repressed Other against which it might draw the lines of its own more capacious morality. I agree that we are discouraged from identifying with Clack, but the negative affect associated with her character might be more productively read as part of the novel's addictive structure. Periods of resentment and negative feeling associated with withdrawal from the desired object make the relief attendant at the object's return even stronger.

As readers of the single-volume edition would know, Collins claims in his preface to have written the Miss Clack section during “the bitterest affliction of [his] life and the severest illness from which [he had] ever suffered” (5). Although he does not mention his own opium use, Collins's status as an opium addict has since become well known.<sup>92</sup> While composing Miss Clack's narrative, his physical pain<sup>93</sup> was so great that he had to rely on an amanuensis, and even then it sometimes became so intense he could no longer make himself understood (Pykett 23). His act

---

<sup>92</sup> For the most part, Collins seemed unconcerned over his increasing reliance on the drug. However, there are suggestions that his relationship with laudanum was double-edged. In an 1862 letter to his physician Charles Beard, Collins suggests that he had begun to suffer signs of withdrawal when he would reduce his dose:

No confusion in my brains—but a sickness, faintness, and universal trembling—startled by the slightest noise—more nervous twittering last night—little sleep...I seem to digest after dinner pretty well—but at ight, or towards the small hours, wake as if I had got drunk...my nerves want *soothing* and *fortifying* at the same time (Peters 244).

By the time Collins was travelling with his friend Fred Lehmann in Switzerland in August of 1867, he was forced to try four different chemists before he could get his accustomed dose—which was by this point enough to kill a horse (Peters 303-304). In a later letter to a friend, Collins admits that his doctors are trying to get him to “emancipate [himself] from opium altogether” (Peters 315). All this is to say that, regardless of his desire to quit, Collins was certainly familiar with the discomfort that attends severe cravings.

<sup>93</sup> Collins attributed his ill health to “rheumatic gout” and neuralgia, but he also suffered physical side effects from other causes, such as stress, over-indulgence in rich food and wine, and possibly venereal disease. All this was compounded by the effects of his ongoing opium addiction (Pykett 22).

of writing is framed in this preface as both a compulsion and a reprieve from pain, when he recollects:

I only look back now at the blessed relief which my occupation (*forced as it was*) brought to my mind. The Art which had been always the pride and pleasure of my life, became now more than ever “its own exceeding great reward.” I doubt if I should have lived to write another book, if the responsibility of the weekly publication of this story had not *forced* me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind—to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains. (5, emphasis mine)

Like Miss Clack, Collins’s willingness to keep the narrative moving forward is troubled at best, motivated by his “responsibility” to his readers, but also by the unstated pecuniary necessity of continuing to publish. The “force” that keeps Collins writing is perhaps most accurately read as the force of the market. Although Collins’s addiction has led Tamar Heller to read Ezra Jennings as the novel’s most autobiographical character, his economic motivation expressed in this preface also aligns the author with Miss Clack, the only narrator who contributes her story for mercenary motives rather than purely “in the interests of truth” (21). Miss Clack’s financial need makes her, in her words “condemned to narrate” (206).

Contemporary reviews of *The Moonstone*, both positive and negative, focused on its emphasis on plot over character.<sup>94</sup> Miss Clack both expresses and inspires resentment in the narrative, not least through her attempts to disrupt the forward

---

<sup>94</sup> Geraldine Jewsbury, in an unsigned review for the *Athenaeum*, praises the “carefully elaborate workmanship, and the wonderful construction of the story,” while admitting that the characters “are secondary to the circumstances” (170, 171, qtd in Page). A scathing review in the *Spectator* argues that the novel offers “no person who can in any way interest us as a character, no one who is human enough to excite even a faint emotion of dull curiosity as to his or her fate,” (172) but concedes that “if readers like a book containing little besides plot, and that plot constructed solely to keep them guessing, there is no particular reason why they should not be gratified” (171).

movement of that intricate plot—instead of focusing on the theft of the Moonstone, she tries to change the novel into a missionary narrative of her attempted conversion of Rachel and Lady Verinder. One might expect the intrusion of drugs into the plot to move the narrative into more familiarly lurid territory, but Lady Verinder's laudanum drops are only referred to as "medicine," and serve to keep the narrative in stasis, hiding her illness from Rachel.<sup>95</sup> As a result of the combination of Miss Clack's unwillingness to narrate and her reluctance to stick to events that pertain to the mystery when she does narrate, the plot stagnates during Miss Clack's narrative, and she thus inspires resentment not only in the other characters, but also in a reader who's more invested in the central mystery than the marriage plot or the state of Lady Verinder's soul.<sup>96</sup>

Miss Clack's efforts to suspend narrative progress are clearest in the "meta-chapter" to which I referred earlier. Upon Lady Verinder's death, Miss Clack makes her most explicit attempt to intervene in the narrative's progress, and is prevented from doing so despite Blake's earlier promise in a footnote that "nothing will be added, altered, or removed in her manuscript, or in any of the other manuscripts which pass through my hands" (202). The presence of the footnote itself already belies Blake's promise to leave Miss Clack's narrative untouched, but this chapter bears the mark of the resentment Clack both feels and inspires most clearly. Instead of directly recounting action, the chapter consists of a summary of the correspondence between Franklin Blake and Miss Clack as to *how* she should tell the

---

<sup>95</sup> Many thanks to Kristina Aikens for pointing out that Lady Verinder's "drops" are, indeed, opiates.

<sup>96</sup> If we read Miss Clack's narrative through the lens of Judith Roof's theory of the heterosexual imperative of narrative closure, her resentful attempts to break the march toward a solution make her the novel's queerest and most wholly "serial" character, staving off the heteronormative power of closure perhaps most apparent in the marriage plot, but visible too, Roof argues, in the structural similarities between traditional closure and Freud's narrative of "successful" heterosexuality (xx).



story—first, she tries to include extracts from “precious publications in her possession” on the topic of death and salvation; then, she tries to jump ahead, asking if she might “avail[] herself of the light which later discoveries have thrown on the mystery of the Moonstone” (247). Her attempts to disrupt the mystery’s structure highlight the knowledge difference between narrators and readers, thus reminding the reader of her own lack of knowledge, power, and agency. In other words, Miss Clack reminds her readers that the narrator (who in this case occupies the position of the author) determines the schedule and shape of the distribution of the solution. Miss Clack’s disruption of the plot is thus experienced as a kind of aggression toward the reader, preventing that reader from getting the narrative “payoff” she has been conditioned to desire.

### **Ezra Jennings**

If Miss Clack’s story works like the stage of addiction centered on resentment, then Ezra Jennings’s narrative surrenders to the power of the drug—instead of attempting to control the direction of the narrative and denying the force of his own desire, Jennings works in the text both with drugs and like a drug, simultaneously initiating and demonstrating the addictive quality of detection. On the levels of both plot and structure, Jennings causes the narrative to spin out of control, showing how the process of detection cannot be as easily contained as a pattern of closure might suggest.

As soon as Jennings enters the narrative, he instigates a phenomenon of craving; the mere fact of his presence cuts off the narrative, eliciting an installment break at the first mention of his name. At the beginning of the installment that follows his appearance, Blake finds himself still unaccountably fascinated by

Jennings, and can only stop thinking about him “little by little” (328). The next mention of Jennings elicits another installment break, and he thus comes to be firmly associated with the phenomenon of craving. This association grows stronger with his next appearance, when he promises to give Blake the information he needs regarding his participation in the theft of the Moonstone, and then promptly runs off to meet with a patient—accompanied by another installment break. The reader is left waiting with Blake, who, at the start of the next chapter, describes this period of enforced patience in terms clearly associated with withdrawal:

How the interval of suspense to which I was now condemned might have affected other men in my position, I cannot pretend to say. The influence of the two hours’ probation upon *my* temperament, was simply this. I felt physically incapable of remaining still in any one place, and morally incapable of speaking to any one human being, until I had first heard all that Ezra Jennings had to say to me. (382)

Blake’s symptoms of detective fever mirror the actual signs of opiate withdrawal, not least of which is the inability to remain still (why quitting heroin is sometimes referred to as “kicking” the habit). But even on a less literal level, Blake’s obsession with Jennings’s promised answer is clear, and his discomfort at a “two hours’ probation” reminds the reader of her own even longer period of enforced waiting, and thus of her own status as a serial addict.

This mutually constitutive relationship between detection and addiction is reinforced by Jennings’s qualifications as a detective—he succeeds in solving the mystery where others have failed because he understands the experience of opium use and addiction from the inside. Only after Jennings confesses his own addiction

will Blake give him the information he needs to solve the crime, and Blake's confession of his theft of the Diamond enables Jennings to decode Dr. Candy's delirious ravings. In introducing Jennings's journal, Blake refers to it as "the venture with the opium," including both the experiment, with its connections to forensic science and police investigation, and Jennings's own account of his struggles with addiction (396). Jennings's journal opens, not with a description of the plan of the experiment, but with an account of his latest attempt to wean himself from the drug and his failure to do so.

The experiment itself is tied up with opium's addictive power from the beginning. On the one hand, it works because it presents the promise of return without compulsion—Blake is spurred into amnesiac wandering only because he has not built up the tolerance to opium of a seasoned addict like Jennings. However, as soon as he is aware of his previous use, he craves the drug's relief so badly that he pressures Jennings to dose him again before the assigned time, thus jeopardizing the experiment. The experiment's "success" in reproducing Blake's actions is clearly arbitrary; why would this first dose not inspire the midnight wanderings that offer the mystery's solution? This illusion of return without compulsion is implicit in Victorian serial novels that have a preordained ending, as well as contemporary television serial dramas that hold out the promise of an ending at some point, however far in the future it might be. Once that end comes, the reader will hopefully be no longer left wanting more, wondering what will happen, waiting for the next clue. The compromised circumstances of the opium experiment undermine that closure, however, and the series of closing gestures that follow (the marriage plot, the imperial plot, the detective plot) lose their power to "tie up" the story. As ever, the

logic of the addict undermines the possibility of closure, and we're left with the tantalizing promise: "What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell!" (472).

### **Recovering Reading**

While *The Moonstone's* open end celebrates the way that addiction brings the addict face-to-face with the inescapable fact of her own desire, *The Wire* uses an understanding of addiction that is always paired with its structural twin, recovery. The narrative bounces back and forth between the focus on an ever-retreating point of closure exemplified by McNulty's active alcoholism, and a mode of reading more centered on small moments of readerly pleasure that provide their own reward, unrelated to any mystery's endgame. For instance, when a minor character enters a local gay bar, there is a brief cutaway to the other patrons, one of whom is McNulty's nemesis Lieutenant Rawls. In a standard police drama or a soap opera, this would begin a new story line featuring Rawls's tormented status as a closeted police bureaucrat, but instead the moment is never alluded to again. The pleasure of recognition merely deepens the fictive world, opening up possible narrative pathways which the viewer is free to speculate on or leave behind. By the fifth season, these moments are even more frequent—a dockworker from the second season makes a brief appearance as a homeless person in the background, another fired dockworker harasses the mayor at a public appearance, and a junkie from the first season resurfaces at an NA meeting. The fictive world has grown too expansive to be successfully "tied up" by any closing gesture. There's simply too much information to process, and reading thus becomes a nomadic, wandering process instead of the movement toward masterful retrospective knowledge that typically characterizes the

detective genre. Only by detaching these specific moments from the show's endgame, by reading "one day at a time," can the reader appreciate these disconnected moments of pleasure.

The character arc of Bubbles, a police informant who repeatedly tries to get clean from heroin over the course of the series, links this nomadic perspective quite literally to actual sobriety. During his first attempt at sobriety, he notices the world around him in a new way and, untethered from his need for the next high, allows the details of the street and the neighborhood wash over him rather than using his observational power in the service of the state (and his addiction) as he usually does in his role as a police informant. At the same time, the show does not hold back in highlighting the difficulty of both gaining and maintaining this perspective, emphasizing Bubbles's physical discomfort while sober and eventually having him relapse and return to the pursuit of the illusion of relief offered by the next high.

He first tries to get clean at the end of the first season, and scenes from his newly sober perspective punctuate the episode when he makes this attempt (1.10, "The Cost"). Without the immediate goal of the next high before him, he's unable to process any of the information he receives. The scene begins with a shot of Bubbles's feet, highlighting his connection to the physical space of the park where he's sitting. At the same time, the background noise in the scene is much higher than usual, and conversations drift in and out of earshot too quickly for the reader to follow. The camera moves in a slow pan around Bubbles, destabilizing his perspective even as the cuts between the environment and his reactions firmly establish him as the focalizer. His destabilization is only increased by the fragmented nature of the scene, which jumps among snatches of conversations, brief moments

of aesthetic pleasure such as light through leaves or bubbles floating through the air, and Bubbles's own overwhelmed reaction. In this way, each moment gains its own value outside of any movement toward a narrative goal. Time itself becomes fragmented, and the images and sounds are associatively rather than teleologically connected. The bubbles themselves offer a visual pun for how the character drifts through the scene, buoyed by his environment instead of moving toward a specific goal in that environment or enacting his will upon it. Sobriety gives him more information about the world around him, but he has lost the overarching goal that organizes his response to the world. Instead, he's stuck on the plateau between plot points, fully focused on his environment.

It's worth mentioning that many of the details Bubbles notices in this scene have the potential for a sentimental reading, but the overwhelming reality of Bubbles's sobriety counters that possible mawkishness. He focuses first on a group of children blowing bubbles, then a pair of women walking with babies, followed by people walking dogs, then a shot of the light through the tree above him. Each shot is inter-cut with one of Bubbles's reaction, blank and a little terrified. Furthermore, the shots follow his wandering gaze, most notably when he gets sidetracked from brushing a bug away to looking down at his clean shirt—the first he has ever appeared in. The show's consistently unsentimental portrayal of children, showing them as drug dealers and murderers as well as students, sons, and daughters, undoes the potential for any easy sentimentality for the reader as well.<sup>97</sup> We're tethered to Bubbles's gaze, but disconnected from any familiar or comfortable reading position.

---

<sup>97</sup> Season four with its focus on a group of middle school children and their entry into "the game" offers perhaps the clearest example of *The Wire's* refusal of easy sentimentality. Contrary to generic expectations, it's the least "deserving" of the four who finds a possible way out of the cycle of violence and addiction by moving in with a caring foster parent.

The show acknowledges this discomfort through Bubbles's growing panic and his murmured "Oh Lord" at the scene's end, a call, perhaps, for some new organizing power. This would certainly follow the logic of twelve-step recovery, in which admission of powerlessness is followed by an attempt to establish some kind of spiritual practice.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, that call for faith doesn't work, and Bubbles quickly relapses, although he does get sober more permanently by the series' end. *The Wire's* vision of sobriety is particularly powerful because it refuses to shy away from the difficulty of both recovering reading and literal sobriety. This difficulty is the real insight offered by serial reading: rootlessness gives Bubbles the ability to see more clearly, to notice the world around him, not least because he's no longer tied to a specific and limited goal. At the same time, remaining on the street makes him restless, and thus looking for a target—especially the kind of moving target offered by drugs (or, as the show suggests, detection). In the same way, serial readers often find ourselves in an untethered, sober position—when expectations are undercut or new information forces us to reread the narrative through an entirely new framework (such as the news that Mr. Candy dosed Franklin), or when we get information about characters that suggests a whole narrative has happened off-screen and we realize the necessary limitations of a perspective that is yoked to the forward movement of the plot (like the brief glimpse of Rawls at the gay bar). At the same time, the drive to know what happens sustains our attention across the sometimes interminable length of the narrative, as it stretches over months or even years.

Although *The Wire* never hesitates to linger on the destructive aspects of addiction and the pursuit of totalizing knowledge, it never elevates one kind of

reading *over* another. After all, both Bubbles's and McNulty's forays into ongoing sobriety are accompanied by each character's partial or total retreat from the narrative. The search for meaning drives the narrative of *The Wire* and the narrative takes pleasure in that search, apparent not least in the bawdy humor of McNulty and Bunk's detective work. *The Moonstone*, too, encourages its reader to anticipate and enjoy the payoff of narrative revelation, both through the pattern of anticipation set up by the section breaks and the revelatory power of Blake's "bold experiment." At the same time, the serial structure of both narratives exposes the lie that the search for static meaning could ever be successful—that the satisfaction of a solved case or a closed narrative could ever be total. We can't help but look for a payoff, but that pursuit just leads to more and more pursuit, and the answer we receive never fulfills our need for Truth.

### **Conclusion**

In her essay on addiction and recovery culture, "Epidemics of the Will," Eve Sedgwick challenges the ubiquity of the metaphor of addiction, arguing that by the late twentieth century, there has been a development in the concept that "quite explicitly brings, not only every form of substance ingestion, but more simply every form of human behavior into the orbit of potential addiction attribution" (131). I hope that this examination of the interrelationship between addiction and serial form has instead clarified some of the benefits of the addiction metaphor, and shown how the insistent pairing of addiction and recovery does more than just advance the "propaganda of free will" (Sedgwick 133).

Ironically, it's Sedgwick's critical description of twelve-step programs that showcases the way that a "recovering" position allows for the kind of "flexible to-



and-fro movement” she advances a decade later in her argument for reparative reading (129). In “Epidemics of the Will,” she describes twelve-step programs as spaces where “the loci of absolute compulsion and absolute voluntarism are multiplied,” and the open secrets that “the behavior in question is utterly compelled” and that “one might indeed at any given moment have chosen differently” exist side by side (134-5). Sedgwick reads this movement between seemingly mutually exclusive positions solely as a sign of the hyperbolic relationship to the self that characterizes global capitalism, but I see it also as a concrete example of the necessary fluidity of the addicted position.

The serial reader/addict brings absolutes into uncomfortable proximity: she reads both for the middle and for the end; she both waits impatiently for the arrival of the *jouissance* of the “big reveal” and accepts that it will never arrive (at least not to her satisfaction); she is both “active” and “recovering” at once. In “You’re so Paranoid,” Sedgwick makes a joke about the tendency of paranoid theory to encourage the proliferation of a limited affective range, arguing that much theory assumes that once the reader’s blinders are lifted, she’ll want nothing more than to revel in this new insight: “Comes the revolution, Comrade, you’ll be tickled pink by those deconstructive jokes; you’ll faint from ennui every time you’re not smashing the state apparatus; you’ll definitely want hot sex twenty to thirty times a day. You’ll be mournful *and* militant. You’ll never want to tell Deleuze and Guattari, ‘Not tonight, dears, I have a headache’” (146). A recovering reading position allows for the kind of multiplicity Sedgwick calls for without reifying this new position into another ossified set of demands on a “good” reader. Since the recovering reader is also always an addicted reader, she has little choice but to enjoy the pleasures of

addiction, even as she recognizes that those pleasures will never satisfy. We might not be able to smoke opium with impunity after the revelations of the recovering position, but we know with equal conviction that we'll never stop wanting to.

## Serial Failures:

### *Twin Peaks* and the Pleasures of Being a Loser

“Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.”

-Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2

“The main problem with ‘Peaks’ was that, unlike ‘Hill Street Blues,’ for instance, it just never seemed to go anywhere. It’s not quite true that there was not enough of an audience for radically different network fare; it’s just that being different is not enough. In the “Peaks” case, being different, stylish and well made wasn’t enough.”

-Andrew Cretella, *New York Times* editorial, 26 May 1991

It seems only appropriate, given the serial’s tortured relationship with closure, to end this dissertation with a meditation on failure. After all, even if a serial goes out on a high note, determining its own end date and constructing a sense of Aristotelian unity that retroactively makes the series feel like a coherent whole as well as a rough assemblage of parts, it’s still *ending*, thus cutting off the addict-reader’s supply of ongoing intellectual and affective pleasure. And for television shows, this “successful” model of closure in the serial is the exception rather than the rule.

Shows are often ignominiously cancelled, and writers thus construct series finales that look like season finales, leaving readers with far more questions than answers.

Consider the end of *My So-Called Life*, with Angela Chase dangling between Jordan Catalano and Brian Krackow, now indefinitely. Or *Angel*, which ended at the very beginning of an epic battle between the remaining members of Angel Investigations

and an impossibly powerful cadre of demons. Even if the writers know the end is nigh (as Joss Whedon did in the case of *Angel*), open questions at the series' end can work both as a gesture toward hope (Maybe we'll get renewed after all!) and a slap in the face of a readership judged too demanding (You want to know what happens? Too bad.).

Perhaps the best-known example of this latter phenomenon is the finale of *The Sopranos*, which famously cut to black in the middle of a mundane family dinner at a restaurant. *Sopranos* creator David Chase explicitly stated in an October 2007 interview that this open ending was meant to keep fans from enjoying the vision of Tony's just desserts: "They wanted to see his brains splattered on the wall. I thought that was disgusting, frankly." However, Chase's attempt to punish his fans (and presumably to shut them up about Tony already) had the opposite effect, mobilizing them and initiating a debate about Tony's fate that continues to this day. One fan's exegesis of the *Sopranos*' ending is preceded by a passage that begins with a kind of thank-you note to Chase for the finale, which "illuminated for many people the show's depth and artistic vision, the true genius of David Chase and his writes, and how the show fulfilled its early promise." For the *true* fan, then, Chase's attempt to short-circuit readerly satisfaction only reinforces the text's status as a work of genius and produces more discussion and debate than ever. In a situation reminiscent of *The Producers* or *Bamboozled*, Chase's attempt to create a failure backfires into even greater success. And many other serial "failures," whether economic or narrative (or both), have had similar results, mobilizing fans and offering unexpected pleasures. From Sherlock Holmes to *Star Trek*, the threat of cancellation provides the opportunity for fans to understand themselves as a community.

As I argued in chapter two, all serials, but television shows in particular, proceed with full knowledge that they might unexpectedly grind to a halt at any point—that they might fail. Since Victorian novels had a set running time, cancellation doesn't seem to have been as pressing a concern. Still, one wonders how many unfinished novels are lost to the scrap-heap of history. Furthermore, D.A. Miller argues in *Narrative and Its Discontents* that an overweening critical focus on closure in the Victorian novel mistakenly assumes that closure in the novel can unilaterally offer retrospective clarity. This preoccupation with closure keeps us from seeing the “possible discontinuities between closure and the narrative movement preceding it, not to mention possible contradictions and ambiguities within closure itself.” (xiii). Although Miller does not take the serial distribution of the novels in his study into consideration, the serial's near-endless reproduction of the moment of closure only reinforces his argument that Victorian novels are “never fully or finally governed by closure” (xiv). How could they be, when each installment gives readers an example of a form of closure based on dissatisfaction, not satisfaction?

At the same time, Victorian novels are structured around an expectation of closure in a much more secure manner than US serial television shows. The television serial's lack of a predetermined end date means that “failed” serials have a claim to coherence and historicity that unfinished serial novels don't. For most of the genre's life, the idea of “finishing” a television series didn't make sense in the same way that “finishing” a novel did, since the placement of the ending in a TV serial is so often decided by ratings rather than by the needs of the narrative. Only with the more recent merging of the episodic and long-form structures of the detective series and the soap opera (of which *Twin Peaks* was one of the first instances), did

“finishing” a serial television narrative become a possible goal. At the same time, the inescapability of failure for the television serial means that ignominiously canceled shows are not seen *only* as failures—the importance of the episode in a television serial means that shows such as the aforementioned *My So-Called Life* can still be seen as complete (if truncated) texts in a way that *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is not.

In “Paranoid and Reparative Reading,” Sedgwick argues for an approach to reading based on simultaneity which is especially appropriate for serials, given their doubled relationship with the promised relief of closure.<sup>98</sup> One of the elements of this argument I find most appealing is her allowance for the coinciding experiences of despair and hope that so often accompany critical engagement with a text. From a reparative or recovering position, one can watch *The Wire* and both acknowledge and decry the reproductive systems of oppression that structure life in Baltimore while simultaneously holding onto a very real feeling of hope that emerges from visions of micropolitical change for characters such as Bubbles and Cutty. Simon does not substitute individual for large-scale change, but neither does he discount the potential that these small-scale changes might have unexpected repercussions. The paranoia which allows the detective to see the destructive hand of capitalism at work leads to the depressive position of the dock workers of season two, who go through the motions of showing up for their jobs, knowing all the while that it’s only a matter of time before they are edged out by the next apartment building or shopping complex. This potentially (but not necessarily) leads to the reparative position of the recovering addict, the community organizer, or the beat cop.

In her shift from a Freudian to a Kleinian model, Sedgwick proposes a

---

<sup>98</sup> See the introduction and chapter three and for a more thorough analysis of Sedgwick’s argument for reparative reading.

practice of reading that uses the sense of despair induced by paranoid reading as a starting point for analysis, rather than the finish line. What might happen, she asks, if we turned our attention away from the endless recursive loop of how texts support hegemonic systems of domination? What new possibilities for the purposes and processes of criticism might emerge? Fan communities offer a concrete model for this critical practice, wherein critical disappointment is transformed into creative activity: the cancelled show leads to a campaign and the formation of a community; disappointment at a show's narrative or aesthetic failures leads fans to the reparative activity of creative fan activity such as fan fiction, vidding, or cosplay.<sup>99</sup>

Judith Halberstam's book *The Queer Art of Failure* raises this same question, but in a subtly different register. She opens with the question of what might be the alternative "to cynical resignation on the one hand and naïve optimism on the other" (2). Her emphasis on failure opens up the possibility of exploring the depressive position on its own terms, rather than as merely a byway en route to something bigger and better. The recursive, oscillating nature of recovering reading that I laid out in the previous chapter undoes the implied telos of reparation, but it does not fully account for figures like *The Wire*'s Johnny Fifty whom we last see homeless and drunk, living under a downtown bridge. What about the addict who never recovers?

In this conclusion, I want to more closely examine those moments of failure: both unsuccessful attempts to conclude texts, and attempts at readerly intervention or reparation that fall flat. Throughout this dissertation, I've emphasized the

---

<sup>99</sup> "Vidding" is the fan practice of making videos (usually music videos) from re-edited scenes from TV series. For the most part, these videos are used to argue for un- or under-developed romantic relationships within the fictional world of the series. "Cosplay" is the fan practice of dressing as characters from a series, usually at a fan convention. See Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* for a more thorough examination of creative fan practices and reader resistance.

importance of the serial gap, or the negative space that structures the serial narrative. It creates an excessive, embarrassing emotional response directed toward both the author and the fictional universe; it destabilizes the form of the narrative, subverting the truth-value of the narrative world while also opening that world up as a space of imaginative play; it creates an insatiable desire in readers for more, but also incessantly reminds them that no matter how much more they get, it will never be enough. This structural emphasis on negative space is mirrored by the negative emotional responses these texts call up: not just love, but shame, fear, compulsion, and resentment. The centrality of failure to the serial text foregrounds the bad affects of serial reading, and the way that anger, disappointment, and/or disavowal is an indispensable part of the pleasure the serial narrative offers to its readers. These failures become the moments when the narrative opens up and starts to offer new and previously impossible pleasures.<sup>100</sup>

### **The case of COOP**

Watching *Twin Peaks* from the distant perspective of twenty years after its release, it's difficult to believe that it ever aired on prime-time television, much less that it was wildly popular. During the show's first season, it enjoyed widespread success: its premiere earned the highest ratings seen at its struggling network ABC in four years, and the first season went on to earn fourteen Emmy nominations. Yet the series seems designed to alienate mainstream viewers, not to draw them in. The stilted dialogue, the disturbing images of violence and incest, and the byzantine twists of the plot continually prevent easy accessibility. Ultimately, these elements doomed the show to negligible ratings and early, inauspicious cancellation. The *New York Times*

---

<sup>100</sup> Following Klein, these are the moments when the "good breast" of the narrative stops offering endless nourishment.



prematurely eulogized the series when it was placed on extended hiatus in May of 1991, and barely remarked upon the two-hour finale, which garnered a mere 56-word send-off. Twisting the knife, the article ends with a reminder of the show's lagging ratings: 77th out of 85.

At the time, *Twin Peaks* was seen as a disaster. In the wake of its cancellation, the question shifted from "who killed Laura Palmer?" to "what killed *Twin Peaks*?" Popular critics' verdicts usually broke down along two lines: the plot had become too frustrating (either because it was so convoluted or simply because people were sick of waiting so long to find the killer), and the series had become too self-conscious and mannered (Dolan 30). Academics, too, focus on the show's shortcomings, or at least on the problems that characterized the second season: Martha Nochimson argues that the demands of television production adulterated Lynch's vision and led the show to abandon its early commitment to "feminine knowledge" and instead "[drew] the emphasis of the central story into a binary context in which outdated Holmesian logic marginalizes Cooper's unique Tibetan method" (156). Catherine Nickerson, on the other hand, sees the detective plot as superior, but sticks to the critical consensus of rejecting the second season when she argues that the doubled temporal structure of the detective plot is discarded when the story becomes more like a "purely forward-moving serial narrative" after Laura's killer is revealed (274). Even critics who defend the second season usually start off as apologists: Marc Dolan claims that complaints about the series arise from an inability or refusal to judge the medium of television and particularly the genre of the soap (of which he sees *Twin Peaks* as a part) on its own terms, and David Foster Wallace tempers his declaration of love for the second season with his explication of that pleasure: "the

fascinating spectacle of watching a narrative structure disintegrate and a narrative artist freeze up and try to shuck and jive when the plot reached a point where his own weaknesses as an artist were going to be exposed” (209, f.59).<sup>101</sup>

For later critics and artists who were invested in the cultural elevation of the prime-time serial, *Twin Peaks* became both an aspirational example and a cautionary tale. In *Legitimizing Television*, Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine argue that *Twin Peaks*, with its high production values and innovative design, signified “a shift that distinguished between the two poles of prime time serialization and that made one—the arty, *Peaksian* kind—the best that TV could offer while relegating the other—soon to be embodied by such fare as *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Melrose Place*—to nothing more than fluffy soap” (89). With its emphasis on long-term questions that demanded answers, especially Laura’s murder, *Twin Peaks* distanced itself from the effeminate taint of the soap, but never successfully. Instead, it became infamous in the television industry as a sign of what could happen when a show “failed to respect the sanctity of the ending, and thus trod too closely to the indeterminacy of the devalued daytime soap” (92).

This preoccupation with success is typical of the serial’s status as a commodity. The point of a serial, at least from the distributor’s perspective, is to make money for the distributor and the advertisers; each installment of a serial, either televised or written, is in some ways an advertisement for the story as a whole. The typical modes by which art is evaluated take a backseat to the text’s ability to get and keep ever-greater numbers of readers, and especially to keep those readers

---

<sup>101</sup> Wallace makes the common error of giving Lynch sole creative credit for the show, when in fact there were a number of creative forces at work, not least of which was the co-creator Mark Frost, who wrote and directed most of the second season. A full list of the crew, including the writers and directors for every episode, can be found in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*.

attentive to the commercials that break up or surround the narrative. Fans of economically doomed narratives can thus easily adopt the positions of both connoisseur and zealot—they're highbrow enough to value traditional markers of "quality," but work against the typical exclusionary logic of highbrow aesthetics, knowing that a wider audience base will ensure longevity for the story-world. At the same time, their affective attachment to the narrative gives them an increased sense of responsibility to and for its success: for an endangered television show, this commitment is often expressed as boosterism.

Fans have hysterically reacted to the potential cancellation of series for nearly as long as the form has been linked to mass publication: when Arthur Conan Doyle killed Sherlock Holmes, readers mounted what must be the first ever successful fan letter-writing campaign, eventually convincing Doyle to revivify his famous detective—or, more precisely, convincing *Collier's* and *The Strand* to offer him a convincing enough sum to do so (Wiltse 108). The model for contemporary TV fandom is *Star Trek*, the fan community of which only coalesced when the show was threatened with cancellation after its second season. At that point, fans organized a letter-writing campaign which succeeded in convincing NBC to bring the show back for a third season—which brought the number of episodes up to the minimum limit for the show to be re-released in syndication (fanlore.org). In both these cases, it was the moment of coming face to face with the very real possibility of the end that gave readers a coherent goal and purpose around which they might organize. At the same time, fan activism (such as a campaign to keep a show on the air) often exposes the delusional edge of textual poaching: the majoritarian logic of capitalism means that

no matter how good a show is or how devoted its fans, if its audience is too small it will be cancelled.

The ever-present danger of cancellation looms even for popular shows: after *LOST*'s ratings began to flag in its third season, ABC held a special press conference where executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse promised viewers and critics that their concerns would be addressed. As outlined in chapter one, the fan has a great deal of a certain kind of power within the narrative: as the imagined reader/consumer, she is the object of the story, and she has the power to radically over-read during the temporal and implied space between installments. However, that power decreases sharply in the space of the larger marketplace, where she is just another consumer. ABC went out of its way to keep viewers invested in a successful show, but this concern is inexorably tied to a show's marketability. Intensity of devotion is ultimately far less important to a show's survival than broad popularity.

This doubled relationship with readerly power can be seen quite clearly in the "buy-cott" organized by the *Twin Peaks* fan group COOP (Citizens against the Offing Of Peaks). Fan activism directed toward keeping a story alive is nothing new—the aforementioned revivification of Sherlock Holmes is perhaps the best-known example, but television shows from *Star Trek* to *Designing Women* have been kept on the air as the result of fan agitation.<sup>102</sup> *Twin Peaks* fans, however, followed a different path: perhaps realizing that any attempts to persuade the networks would be stymied by the show's abysmal ratings, the fans involved in COOP reached out

---

<sup>102</sup> This notion of consumption as "activism" reached its apex with "Viewers for Quality Television," a 501(c)3 group focused on saving endangered shows. They would conduct letter-writing campaigns in attempts to keep shows from *Cagney and Lacey* to David Simon's *Homicide: Life on the Streets* from cancellation (Swanson). As its name suggests, the group was deeply invested in the rhetoric of distinction, and was a precursor for HBO's slogan "It's not TV." In this case, the pleasure of connoisseurship is inextricably linked with the potential for economic failure and narrative death.

directly to advertisers, buying bulk amounts of the products that were advertised during the show. In an interview with *Adweek*, COOP member and advertising executive J. C. Borque summed up the logic of the boycott: to show advertisers “just how willing we are to pay for the programming we want.” With this vision of the consumer as the source of power, COOP staged events of conspicuous consumption, buying a Ford and donating it to charity and scheduling a Burger King eat-in.

The “buy-cott” mirrors the economic logic of fandom—the reader’s perceived power over the narrative’s future is always counterbalanced by the power the narrative has over the reader, not just to keep “purchasing” installments by viewing them, but also to buy the seemingly endless tchotchkes and ancillary texts associated with the show. These products ranged from official tie-ins such as Laura Palmer’s “secret diary,” written by Jennifer Lynch and published in the summer between the first and second seasons to the unofficially affiliated products by which fans might recognize one another, such as cherry pie and T-shirts that proclaim “I killed Laura Palmer.” Henry Jenkins is correct in his claim that “for fans, consumption naturally sparks production,” but consumption also sparks yet more consumption (“Fan Writing” 41). COOP’s attempt to translate consumption into decisive power over the narrative’s future shows quite clearly that the strategies of textual poaching are ill suited to gaining power within a traditional capitalist marketplace. The “activist fan” is thus pushed to narrow her scope to a marginal community, and to see the possibilities and pleasures that might inhere in failure: re-reading, solidarity with other fans, and connoisseurship, to name a few. The failure

of the show on the open market can lead fans to set up alternate systems of exchange, ones less focused on mainstream popularity.

Furthermore, the possibility of failure is central to the fan's devotion—the conviction that her attention not only offers her access to this fictional world, but might well keep it alive is a heady one. But what COOP demonstrates so clearly is that if fans are looking for “legitimate” power through fan activism, they're doomed from the start. The power to consume doesn't get one particularly far within the system of capitalism; J.C. Borque can buy a million Whoppers, but that won't convince ABC to keep sinking money into a show no one is watching. Even in the age of Comic-con, geek chic, and *Slayage*, the inevitable failure of the serial pushes its fans at some point into a marginal community, for as much as serials are constructed within the market and hold themselves to those standards, they also work in another register, with the sad knowledge that they will eventually be rejected by that market, that the market makes impossible demands. The moment when a fan community takes its long-term shape is the point when it becomes most marginal: after the blush of suspense has faded, the show has ended, and the conversation has moved from the water cooler to the internet or the convention hall. The *Star Trek* fan community is perhaps the best example of this after-the-fact timeframe: the conventions that have become a cornerstone of media fandom began in 1972, four years after the show had been canceled, not at the height of its popularity. This temporal position forces this reader to focus on the pleasures of the road not taken, the futures that never came to pass. Furthermore, this marginal, ultimately doomed popularity often creates situations in

which shows can take bold narrative chances—if no one's watching anyway, what do the writers have to lose?

### **Failure and Queer Time**

The finale of *Twin Peaks* might be the clearest example of the aesthetic potential that opens up once mainstream popularity is no longer a realistic goal. The show's commercial failure allowed Lynch and Frost to take creative risks in the finale that resulted in scenes such as Cooper's return to the dream-space of the Red Room where he encounters dead-eyed *doppelgängers* of himself, Laura, and her father/killer, Leland. If the show had remained a prime-time ratings success, images such as these would no doubt have been judged too potentially alienating for viewers, but since it had already failed, Lynch and Frost had nothing to lose. Furthermore, the final scene in the Red Room disrupts any attempts to make coherent sense. Since readers were all but assured that the story would stop here, moments such as Cooper's coffee changing from liquid to viscous to solid and back again can no longer be read as clues to a larger mystery. Instead, the slippage between forms becomes its own end, gesturing not toward the coming moment of closure, but only to itself. In much the same way, Cooper's final action of emptying an entire tube of toothpaste into the bathroom sink is particularly upsetting because it doesn't "add up"—his position as arbiter of meaning and value within the story-world has been abandoned, and nothing arises to take its place. Cooper's possession by the demonic BOB is part of moving the narrative into a place beyond the question of what might happen next—in a grimmer version of the crater in the ground where Sunnydale once stood at the end of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Cooper becomes a void at the center of the narrative universe, and questions about the future of *Twin Peaks* are not just refused but

violently rejected, reminding viewers that no answer would have sufficed.

I have argued throughout this dissertation for the serial's paradoxical relationship with closure; *Twin Peaks* differs in degree rather than kind. I have focused this conclusion on a television serial because the different production demands of TV highlight formal peculiarities that the Victorian serial was often able to avoid as a result of its "expiration date." However, closure in the novel is hardly definite; the question which ends *The Moonstone* ("What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell?") is perhaps the ideal example of the Victorian novel's inability to end, and D.A. Miller argues quite convincingly in *Narrative and Its Discontents* for the inability of closure in the novel more generally to live up to its storied expectations.

What I hope the example of *Twin Peaks* makes clear is how the serial form takes these concerns with closure and turns them up to a fever pitch. Not only is the solution to Laura's murder ultimately unsatisfying (as it must be), but it's not even properly "closure," since the narrative now faces the near-impossible task of producing yet another set of questions the reader must necessarily answer. In a way, *Twin Peaks* follows up on the rhetorical question at the end of *The Moonstone*. Imagine for a moment that instead of moving on to write *Man and Wife*, Collins was trapped in a contract in which he had to take that question seriously and write a series of novels on the adventures of the Moonstone... As much as the promise of endless stories of opium-induced derring-do might tempt the reader/addict, the actual consequences of that promise are considerably less appealing.

And this simultaneous pressure for closure and reopening helps explain the profound directionlessness of *Twin Peaks*' narrative after Leland is named the killer.



Each episode up to that point had taken place over the course of a single day, but the following episode skips ahead a week in diegetic time and features Leland's funeral as the site of a slapstick argument between the town's octogenarian mayor and his twin brother—neither of whom had ever appeared in the show before. In terms of both content and tone, the elements which had anchored the show up to that point (an overweening concern with Oedipal family ties; a balance between darkness and twee absurdity) were nowhere to be seen.

The economic failure of *Twin Peaks*, then, exposes the potential for failure that inheres in the serial form, building off the way narrative desire is constructed in serials as endless, with satisfaction always promised in the next installment. It's when a show attempts to construct a "successful" or "satisfying" ending that we get especially troubling examples such as *Battlestar Galactica* and *Our Mutual Friend*. The best example of a serial failure in the Victorian form is the famously doubled ending of *Great Expectations*. Edward Bulwer-Lytton convinced Dickens to abandon his initial ending, which featured a brief meeting between a still-single Pip and a separated-then-widowed Estella, convinced that readers would revolt. The notion of ending a story without the requisite gesture toward marriage and heterosexual futurity was deemed too risky for the Victorian literary marketplace, especially for a serial, where expectations regarding closure are even further inflated than in the bound novel. Instead, the published ending reunites Pip and Estella in the ruins of Satis House, and the novel closes with the assurance that there was "the shadow of no parting" of the two. It's only within the margins, in the space of the tale left untold, where we can see an image of a woman who is happier in a second attachment than her first. Where the queer potential of Pip's connection with

Herbert Pocket remains deliciously salient. Where characters are less interested in returning to a prelapsarian state than in wandering off into a world defined by the choices they didn't make, the possibilities that passed them by.

And it seems perfect that only Dickens scholars, or more appropriately for my argument, Dickens *fans*, are the ones who know about this alternative ending. This distinction is particularly interesting when we consider the ways that serials are packaged for consumption after the fact of their release. In order to have access to the alternate ending, a non-contemporaneous reader must read the “special features” version of the text—a Norton Critical Edition or similar source of paratextual goodies. With long-term popularity come necessary losses: only devoted fans willing to dig through the historical record will be familiar with the ephemera of Dickens' work, from the more common artifacts of original illustrations and installment breaks to the rarer items such as cover art, commercials, or concurrently published stories. This same loss occurs in the current methods by which television serials are made available for sustained viewing. Netflix Instant streaming is the format which offers the least frills and thus most resembles the form of the mainstream publication of Victorian novels. As the ease of reading is increased and the long-form serial becomes easier to view as a sustained whole, these extratextual elements are lost. For instance, the DVD release of *Twin Peaks* includes the “Log Lady intros” which were shown before each episode during its broadcast run—the removal of these interstitial texts from the show's broadcast on Netflix Instant both encourages the reader to misread the show as a unified whole, but also elides the importance of this character to the show's contemporary cult audience. Since she appears in only twelve episodes out of 34 total, Netflix Instant viewers would be much less likely to

see her character as so central to the series' appeal. When we read serials as unified wholes (in their less excessive and more canonical form), we lose the weird texture that makes them unique. We lose what's queer about the serial—and we can see quite clearly how “success” comes with unavoidable losses. Failure starts to look like a better option.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam poses the following question: “Can we produce generative models of failure that do not posit two equally bleak alternatives [futurity and positivity in opposition to nihilism and negation]?” (120) I would argue that fan communities are one place where this generative vision of failure is possible—fans spend a great deal of time invested in a kind of future, but it's a future that is always in the register of the imaginary, and, to use that most famously paranoid temporal construct, has “always already” failed. But instead of following the thread of deconstruction toward nothingness, fandom follows it to an endless plenitude, one where each narrative turn opens up another potential narrative universe, where a story is endlessly productive, and totalizing knowledge is not only impossible but beside the point. In the marginal narrative economy of fandom, it's unimportant whether Kirk and Spock actually hooked up—what matters is that they *could*.

## Works Cited

- Aikens, Kristina. "Battling Addictions in *Dracula*." *Gothic Studies* 11.2 (2010). Print.
- Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001. Print.
- Andrews, Thomas. *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Ashley. Comment. "Label Lamentation: The Growing Misuse of 'Recap' in Television Criticism Semantics." Myles McNutt. *Cultural Learnings*. 8 September 2010. Web. 8 September 2010.
- Arnold, Thomas. "Sermon IV" *Christian Life: Its Course, Its Hindrances, and Its Helps*. 32-42. *Google Books*. Web. 15 August 2011.  
<[http://books.google.com/books?id=NE2WsCut2\\_UC&pg=PA333&dq=tomas+arnold+christian+life+hindrances+1837&hl=en&sa=X&ei=X7ZPT5K6PO2B0QHPjcXGDQ&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=NE2WsCut2_UC&pg=PA333&dq=tomas+arnold+christian+life+hindrances+1837&hl=en&sa=X&ei=X7ZPT5K6PO2B0QHPjcXGDQ&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false)>
- Ariano, Tara and Bunting, Sarah D. *Television without Pity: 752 Things We Love to Hate (and Hate to Love) about TV*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2006.
- Auden, W. H. "The Guilty Vicarage." Robin W. Winks, ed. *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980. Print.
- Baker, William. *A Wilkie Collins Chronology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Battlestar Galactica*. Creators, David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. SyFy, 2004-2009. DVD.
- Battlestar Galactica*. SyFy. Web. 16 November 2006. <[www.syfy.com/battlestar](http://www.syfy.com/battlestar)>
- Berridge, Virginia. *Opium and the People: Opiate Use and Drug Control Policy in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England*. London: Free Association Books, 1999. Print.
- Blake, Meredith. "Orpheus Descending." Review of *The Killing*, creator Veena Sud. *The A.V. Club*. 20 June 2011. Web. 20 June 2011.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. Print.
- Bohemian. "Mems. of the Month." *Sharpe's London Magazine of Entertainment and Instruction*. October 1864. *British Periodicals*. Web. 10 June 2010.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1984. Print.
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Creator, Joss Whedon. WB, 1997-2002; UPN, 2002-2004. DVD.
- Carrión, Maria. "Twin Peaks and the Circular Ruins of Fiction: Figuring (Out) the Act of Reading." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 21.4 (1993). 240-247. *ProQuest*. Web. 15 August 2010.
- Chase, David. "Sopranos Creator Takes on Angry Fans." By Brett Martin. *Entertainment Weekly*. 18 October 2007. Web. 30 June 2010.

- Clary, Mike. "Save 'Twin Peaks': Only the Likes of Coop and Harry Could Generate America's First National 'Buycott.'" *AdWeek*. 29 April 1991. *Lexis-Nexis*. Web. 2 June 2011.
- Clifton, Jacob. "Blackbird Singing in the Dead of Night." Review of *Battlestar Galactica*, "Flight of the Phoenix," creators David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. *Television without Pity*. 16 September 2005. Web. 6 June 2010.
- "The Girl on the Cliffside." Review of *Battlestar Galactica* "The Ties That Bind," creators David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. *Television without Pity*. 18 April 2008. Web. 6 June 2010.
- "When Will the Work Be Done?" Review of *Battlestar Galactica* "Daybreak 2&3," creators David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. *Television without Pity*. 20 March 2009. Web. 6 June 2010.
- Collins, Philip. *Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. New York: Penguin, 1984. Print.
- *The Moonstone*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print.
- Cretella, Andrew. "Twin Peaks: Being Different Isn't Enough." *The New York Times*. 26 May 1991. *Lexis-Nexis*. Web. 6 June 2011.
- "Da Boom." *Family Guy*. Creator, Seth MacFarland. Writ. Seth MacFarland. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. *Netflix Instant*. Web. 10 May 2010.
- Daniels, Susanne and Cynthia Littleton. *Season Finale: The Unexpected Rise and Fall of the WB and UPN*. New York: Harper, 2007. Print.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Print.
- Denzin, Norman. *The Alcoholic Self*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987. Print.
- Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. Ed. Edgar Rosenberg. New York: Norton, 1999. Print.
- *Little Dorrit*. Eds. Stephen Wall and Helen Wall. London: Penguin Classics, 1998. Print.
- *Our Mutual Friend*. Ed. Adrian Poole. New York: Penguin, 1997. Print.
- Dillard, J. M. *Star Trek: Where No One Has Gone Before (A History in Pictures)*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991. Print.
- Dolan, Mark. "The Peaks and Valleys of Serial Creativity: What Happened to/on *Twin Peaks*." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. 30-50. Print.
- Dove, George N. *The Reader and the Detective Story*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1997. Print.
- Eliot, George. "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." *Essays of George Eliot* ed. Thomas Piney. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 300-24. Print.
- Farrand, Phil. *The Nitpicker's Guide for Next Generation Trekkers*. New York: Dell, 1993. Print.
- Feltes, N. N. *Modes of Production in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989. Print.
- Field, Kate. *Pen Photographs of Charles Dickens's Readings*. London: J.R. Osgood and Company, 1871. Print.
- Flint, Kate. "Disability and Difference." *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 153-167. Print.

- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie A. Finke, Barbara E. Johnson, John McGowan, Jeffrey J. Williams. New York: Norton, 2001.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: Norton, 1961. Print.
- . "The Uncanny." *The Uncanny*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003. 123-62. Print.
- Free, Melissa. "'Dirty Linen': Legacies of Empire in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48.4 (2006): 340-371. Web. *Project Muse*. 26 Feb 2010.
- Gerrig, Richard. *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: The Psychological Activities of Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.
- Gray, Jonathan. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York University Press, 2010. Print.
- Gruner, Elisabeth Rose. "Family Secrets and the Mysteries of *The Moonstone*." *New Casebooks: Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Lyn Pykett. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 221-243. Print.
- Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. Print.
- Harrison, Brian Howard. *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872*. Keele University Press, 1994. Print.
- Hatch, Richard, ed. *So Say We All: An Unauthorized Collection of Thoughts and Opinions on Battlestar Galactica*. Evanston, IL: Pop Matters, 2006. Print.
- Hawes, Donald. *Charles Dickens*. London: Continuum Press, 2007. Print.
- Hayter, Alethea. *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968. Print.
- Hayward, Jennifer. *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fiction from Dickens to Soap Opera*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995. Print.
- Hecimovich, Gregg A. "The Cup and the Lip and the Riddle of *Our Mutual Friend*" *ELH* 62.4 (1995) 955-77. *JStor*. Web. 14 June 2011.
- Hellekson, Karen and Kristina Busse. *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006. Print.
- Heller, Tamar. "Blank Spaces: Ideological Tensions and the Detective Work of *The Moonstone*." *New Casebooks: Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Lyn Pykett. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 244-270. Print.
- Hills, Matt. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- "History of *Star Trek* Fan Campaigns." *Fanlore*. 9 Sept 2011. Web. 3 March 2012.
- Hughes, Linda K., and Lund, Michael. *The Victorian Serial*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991. Print.
- Hustis, Harriet. "Black and White and Read All Over: Performative Textuality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Studies in the Novel* 33.1 (2001). 18-33. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 20 April 2010.
- Hutter, A. D. "Dreams, Transformations, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction." *New Casebooks: Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Lyn Pykett. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 175-196. Print.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "Interaction Between Text and Reader." *The Reader in the Text*. Ed. Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. 106-119. Print.
- *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Print.

- “The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show.” *The Simpsons: The Complete Eighth Season*. Creator, Matt Groening. Writer, David S. Cohen. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. DVD.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. 2010. Web. 6 February 2012.
- *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- “*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching.” *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. 37-60. Print.
- Jensen, Jeff. “Great Space Coasters.” *Entertainment Weekly* 22 Sept 2006. Web. 10 June 2010.
- Keane, Helen. “Smoking, Addiction, and the Making of Time.” *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*. Eds. Janet Brodie and Marc Redfield. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 119-133. Print.
- King, Andrew. “Sympathy as Subversion: Reading *Lady Audley’s Secret* in the Kitchen.” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 7.1 (2002). 60-85. *Taylor and Francis Online*. Web. 31 March 2011.
- Klein, Melanie. “The Psycho-analytic Play Technique”. *The Selected Melanie Klein*. Ed. Juliet Mitchell. New York: The Free Press, 1987. Print.
- Kurnick, David. “An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice.” *ELH* 74.3 (2007). *Project Muse*. Web. 20 February 2009.
- Larbalestier, Justine. “*Buffy’s* Mary Sue is Jonathan: *Buffy* Acknowledges the Fans.” *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Oxford: Roman and Littlefield, 2002. 227-238. Print.
- Lavery, David, ed. *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. Print.
- Lauerman, Kerry. “‘Novelistic’ TV.” *Salon.com*. 12 July 2003. Web. 6 February 2012.
- Lost*. Creators, J. J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof. ABC, 2004-2010. DVD.
- The Lost Experience*. Hi-ReS! n.d. Web. 17 February 2012.
- Lynch, David. *Lynch on Lynch*. Ed. Chris Rodley. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997. Print.
- McCuskey, Brian. “The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 359-375. *JStor*. Web. 20 Feb 2010.
- Miller, D. A. *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.
- *Narrative and Its Discontents* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. Print.
- *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Print.
- Mittell, Jason. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- “Previously On: Prime-Time Serials and the Mechanics of Memory.” *Intermediality and Storytelling*. Eds. Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan. 78-98. Print.
- “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television.” *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 29-40. *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Web. 30 Oct 2008.
- “To Spread or to Drill?” *Just TV*. Word Press. 25 Feb 2009. Web. 25 Feb 2009.

- Modell, Josh, Keith Phipps, Tasha Robinson, and Kyle Ryan, eds. *Inventory: 16 Films Featuring Manic Pixie Dream Girls, Great Songs Nearly Ruined by Saxophone, and 100 More Obsessively Specific Pop-Culture Lists*. New York: Scribner, 2009. Print.
- Modleski, Tania. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women. Second Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Moore, Ronald D. "Caprica Panel Highlight: *Dallas* in Space." *Hulu.com*. n.d. Web. 10 June 2010.
- Moss, Sidney P. *Charles Dickens' Quarrel with America*. Troy, NY: Whittson Pub. Co., 1984. Print.
- Newman, Michael Z. and Elana Levine. *Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- Nickerson, Catherine. "Serial Detection and Serial Killers in *Twin Peaks*." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 21.4 (1993). 271-276. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 December 2011.
- Nochimson, Martha. "Desire Under the Douglas Firs: Entering the Body of Reality in *Twin Peaks*." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. 144-159. Print.
- . *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Nussbaum, Emily. "A Disappointed Fan Is Still a Fan: How the Creators of *Lost* Seduced and Betrayed Their Viewers." *New York Magazine* 28 May, 2010. Web. 30 May 2010.
- O'Sullivan, Sean. "Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television, and the Season." *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 2 (2010). *Project Muse*. Web. 20 May 2010.
- . "Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: *Deadwood* and Serial Fiction." *Reading Deadwood: A Western to Swear By*. Ed. David Lavery. London: I. B. Tauris, 2006. 115-132. Print.
- Page, Norman. *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Penley, Constance. *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*. New York: Verso, 1997. Print.
- Peters, Catherine. *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. Print.
- Pykett, Lynn. *Charles Dickens*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.
- . *Wilkie Collins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Roof, Judith. *Come As You Are*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. Print.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Schor, Hilary. *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Print.
- Scott, Suzanne. "Authorized Resistance: Is Fan Production Frakked?" *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*. Ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2008. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- . *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- "Silas Wegg's Discovery: from the *London World*." *New York Times*. 20 August 1882. Web. 30 August 2007.



- Skal, David. *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2004. Print.
- Skilton, David ed. *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- "The *Sopranos*: Definitive Explanation of 'The END.'" *Masterofsopranos.com*. 6 December 2010. WordPress. Web. 30 June 2011.
- Steinlight, Emily. "Anti-Bleak House." *Narrative* 14.2 (2006). 132-62. *JStor*. Web. 7 Feb 2008.
- Steve U. Comment. "-30-." Review of *The Wire*. Scott Tobias. *The A.V. Club*. 10 March 2008. Web. 27 February 2012.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. New York: Norton, 1999. Print.
- Stuber, Florian, and Margaret Doody. "The Clarissa Project and *Clarissa's* Reception." *Text* 12 (1999) 123-141. *JStor*. Web. 30 June 2010.
- Swanson, Dorothy Collins. *The Story of Viewers for Quality Television: From Grassroots to Prime Time*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000. Print.
- "*Television Without Pity* Forum Dos and Don'ts." *Television Without Pity*. Glark. 16 Jan 2007. Web. 31 March 2009.
- Thomas, Ronald R. "The Moonstone, Detective Fiction, and Forensic Science." *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 65-78. Print.
- Thoms, Peter. *Detection and Its Designs: Narrative and Power in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Detective Fiction*. Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 1998. Print.
- Travis, Trysh. *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Print.
- Trimpey, Jack. "Why Self-Recovery?" *Rational Recovery*. 2003. Web. 25 Jan 2009
- Twin Peaks*. Creators, David Lynch and Mark Frost. ABC, 1990-1991. DVD.
- TV Tropes*. 2010. Web. 10 March 2009
- Wallace, David Foster. "David Lynch Keeps His Head." *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997. 146-212. Print.
- Warhol, Robyn. *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Feeling and Pop-Culture Forms*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003. Print.
- . "The Rhetoric of Addiction: From Victorian Novels to AA." *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*. Eds. Janet Brodie and Marc Redfield. Berkeley: University of California Press. 97-108. Print.
- Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.
- Wicke, Jennifer. "Vampiric Typewriting: *Dracula* and Its Media." *ELH* 59.2 (1992). 467-93. *JStor*. Web. 30 March 2010.
- Wiltse, Ed. "'So Constant an Expectation': Sherlock Holmes and Seriality." *Narrative* 6.2 (1998). Print.
- Winnett, Susan. "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure." *PMLA* 105.3 (1990). 505-518. *JStor*. Web. 10 November 2008.
- The Wire*. Creator, David Simon. HBO, 2002-2008. DVD.
- Wynne, Deborah. *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. Print.