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Kristopher Karl Woofter and Lorna Jowett (eds), *Joss Whedon vs. The Horror Tradition: The Production of Genre in Buffy and Beyond*, London: I.B. Tauris (Bloomsbury), 2018; 344 pp.: ISBN 9781788311021, £72 (hbk); ISBN 9781786735416, £62.21 (e-book).

Reviewed by: Stella Gaynor, *University of Salford, UK*

The television and film work of Joss Whedon is extensive and is explored in many areas of scholarship, ranging from examinations of particular series like *Firefly* (2002–2003) or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) (Abbott, 2009; Davidson and Wilson, 2007; Jowett, 2005) to studies that consider the 'Whedonverse' as a whole (*Slayage: The Journal of Whedon Studies*). This collection, edited by Kristopher Karl Woofter and Lorna Jowett, covers genre, gender, monsters and the psychology of Whedon's characters, via a wide range of scholarly approaches that reflect the variation, scale and span of the 'Whedonverse' itself.

The overarching aim of the book is to examine Whedon's work through his consistent use of, interrogation of and borrowing from the horror genre. All the authors in the book merge film and television horror into one plane, one level playing field, which allows the exploration of horror to be rich and detailed and without prejudice. Contributors such as Stephanie Graves and Jerry D. Metz, Jr, rightly point to critics who still distance themselves from horror and lament that any praise given to horror always comes with a caveat or excuse. Given recent discourse around the notion of 'post-horror', a term used in the press which ignores the wider nuances of the history of horror, critics still feel the need to 'elevate' some horror texts to a place where they can safely engage with the genre (Rose, 2017). This book instead makes a critical challenge to the tendency of both critics and academics to excuse Whedon's work as 'smart' before it can be appreciated or studied. Because this book examines the nuances of horror within Whedon's work by combining his film and television offerings, it provides an exploration of horror without the usual hierarchical tussle between horror film and horror television (Hills, 2005; Jowett and Abbott, 2012). Indeed, some articles combine analyses of Whedon's TV work with established horror film patterns and scholarship. Thus, Clayton Dillard's observation of 'the slasher template' (p. 17) in *Buffy* builds on work in cinema studies that addressed the popularity of the slasher film with female audiences, while Bronwen Calvert's close inspection of the uncanny location and the Gothic tradition of the past haunting the present in *Dollhouse* (2009–2010) takes a refreshing approach by examining the nuances of both horror film and television within the programme under study. Calvert makes good use of horror film examples to illustrate how Whedon draws on the very fabric of the horror genre to make television content ripe with uncanniness and unease.

The book is split into three parts, all of which address the horror genre and its methods in detail. The Whedon texts under discussion are thus considered in terms of horror concepts and conventions, industry conditions and influences and the balance of power in Whedon's works, while also taking in feminism, identity and race and notions of the self and the threats to it. The collection combines close analysis of Whedon's work with

deep knowledge of the horror genre. Recognising that television is a medium that revels in hybridity, articles explore the use of the horror genre alongside science fiction, soap operas, westerns the Gothic and the Weird: in terms of the Weird, characters are not destabilised by the past as in Gothic narratives but rather are overwhelmed by curiosity and anticipation or desire to 'transcend reality [which] they feel cannot contain them' (p. 221). The attention to industrial contexts and conditions at the time some of the programmes were made (mid to late 1990s, early 2000s) allows for an exploration of Whedon as a purveyor of TV horror that allows audiences to glimpse the horrific while remaining in the confines of various Broadcasting Standards and Practices Departments. As Stacey Abbott's article shows, Whedon walks a fine line between showing just enough horror to engage the horror fans and not too much so as to scare away programme commissioners.

While the book is (understandably) heavy with analysis of *Buffy*, it refreshingly moves away from the usual emphasis on teen allegories with contributors presenting readings of particular elements and episodes of *Buffy* that cleverly homage silent cinema (Selma Purac on 'Hush') and the musical avant-garde (Anne Golden on 'Once More, with Feeling'). With many contributors citing interviews and statements from Whedon himself, the book generally manages to sidestep any unnecessary second-guessing as to what Whedon might have been attempting to do with his work. This means that writers can get to work on detailed exploration and analyse codes and conventions, subversions of and homages to the horror genre that the works of Whedon lay out for us.

This examination of the horror in Whedon's work exposes both his deep affection for the horror genre and the complexity of the horror genre itself. Because horror is so reflexive and because horror fans seek out genre markers, I would not suggest that Whedon's prolific use of horror as examined in this book marks him as an auteur but instead as a genuinely dedicated fan of horror. The book as whole presents Whedon as a brand rather than framing him as the single author. His collective work is viewed as the 'House of Whedon' (p. 3) or even the Whedonverse. His collaborations with other creatives – such as with Drew Goddard on *Cabin in The Woods* (2012) – are explored as being as much a part of the Whedonverse as a more solo enterprises such as *Dollhouse* (2009–2010). The book engages with many horror nuances and approaches, but the overriding sense is that Whedon continues to develop horror as he relentlessly pulls the genre apart and rebuilds it in a new, Whedon-branded form. In the context of US television, the book sees the development of both Whedon and television as going hand in hand. Whedon has consistently engaged with horror and yet kept it within what Broadcasting Standards and Practices Departments will allow. The book asserts that previous constraints of television drove Whedon to develop the subtler, more nuanced horror: Whedon's own particular brand of horror.

The book is generally accessible in style and features contributions from a range of scholars, from PhD candidates to well-established writers in the field. Suitable for undergraduates and postgraduates, this collection provides a solid addition to study of the horror genre on both television and film, and in popular culture more generally.

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Ragan Fox, *Inside Reality TV: Producing Race, Gender, and Sexuality on Big Brother*, London: Routledge, 2018; 140 pp.: ISBN 9781138065567, £110.00 (hbk); ISBN 9781138065574, £29.99 (pbk); ISBN: 9781315159638, £15.00 (e-book).

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Ragan Fox's *Inside Reality TV* combines queer theory and spectator commentary with autoethnography to provide a readable and accessible account of his experience as a contestant on the twelfth season of CBS's version of the reality show *Big Brother* (2000–present). Fox chronicles his insider-perspective of the show's casting procedures, soundstage interactions and fan engagement and, in addition, sheds light on the way in which reality television producers work to 'theatrically render' (p. 7) identities of racial and sexual minorities.

Fox opens the first chapter, 'Investigating the Reality TV Paradox', with a concise critical survey of reality-TV-oriented scholarship, including Rachel Silverman's *The Fantasy of Reality* (2015). Fox positions *Inside Reality TV* as an important and necessary addition to this current body of academic work on the basis of his unprecedented access to the 'inside' of reality television production practices, as well as his autoethnographic approach. Drawing on Judith Butler's (1993) theory of performativity, Fox posits the term 'produced absence' to denote situations in which *Big Brother*'s producers construct representational voids, such as 'story editors failing to address in-game homophobia and racism and casting producers denying opportunities for a gay showmance' (p. 8). The rest of the opening chapter consists of a 'crash course' in the rules and structure of *Big Brother* as well its racial and sexual dynamics, before moving into a more generalised discussion that centres predominantly around the performance of identity and the reiterative impact of gay tropes on TV. Finally, Fox turns to the experience and representation of people of colour on reality television, in particular the on-screen