

PCAS Newsletter

Popular & American Culture Associations
IN THE SOUTH

This edition of the PCAS/ACAS newsletter opens with the sad news that past president, program chair, and past newsletter editor Larry Vonalt passed away last December after a long illness.



Dr. Larry Paul Vonalt was chair of the Department of English and Technical Communication at the University of Missouri—Rolla. Larry had many interests, among them southern culture, contemporary poetry, outsider art, fine art photography film studies, jazz, the bloodlines of thoroughbred and quarter horses & Doberman pinschers, and a love of New Harmony, Ind

Contributions may be made to the Larry P. Vonalt scholarship by contacting his department.

Call for Reviews

Forthcoming issues of *Studies in Popular Culture* will include reviews of books in the field. Any scholar who wishes to review a book should contact the editor, Rhonda V. Wilcox, at rhonda_w@gdn.edu. Those whose work is unfamiliar to the editor may wish to send a CV.

Reviewers may suggest a book to be reviewed or request to be assigned one from among those sent to the editor. Reviews should be approximately 500-700 words long and should (like article submissions) be emailed to the editor as an attachment in Microsoft Word document format. Queries are welcome.

Call for News, Reviews & Announcements

PCAS/ACAS wants to publish news of its members (including recent & upcoming books), brief reviews (500-700 words) of new books by members, and announcements.

Please make inquiries about book reviews and forward news items and announcements to Geoffrey Weiss @ geoffreyweiss@cc.ucwv.edu

Book Review

Why Buffy Matters

by Rhonda Wilcox.

a review by Tamara Wilson

Over the past years, I have had the too brief pleasure of Rhonda Wilcox's company as we hurried from session to session, usually and regrettably missing each other's readings. But in *Why Buffy Matters*, I had her all to myself for two days as I read a thing or two, "once more, with [new] feeling." The introduction looks back over the years of "our magic world," establishing both the depths and the pitfalls of a *Buffy* scholar's investigations. In this text Wilcox validates *Buffy* as art, not merely social commentary and therefore "cool"—which *Buffy* is—but few in academic circles argue its cool value, while many (some in their published essays on *Buffy*), dismiss it as a fad, claiming it will fade into obscurity like Salieri. At least he wrote music – *Buffy* must battle even to be in the running with other "works of art." Fortunately, both *Buffy* and Wilcox are ready.

Wilcox first analyzes *Buffy* in "Panorama," investigating the language, myth, sex, and globalization of *Buffy*, even setting it in context with the *Harry Potter* Series. While this might seem an unusual grouping to those new to *Buffy* studies, Buffycologists are well prepared for such diversity. In the Buffyverse, life comes in many forms. Throughout the lectures composing this section, Wilcox is liberal with references to Dickens, E.M. Forster, Donne, Shakespeare, Le Guin and a wide host of *Buffy* critics, demonstrating her agility with both classic and contemporary criticism and art.

In the second part of her collection, "Tight Focus," Wilcox examines seven episodes in-depth: "Surprise/Innocence," "The Zeppo," "Hush," "Restless," "The Body" and "Once More, With Feeling." For both Buffycologists and those new to our discipline, these are the essential episodes to understand the power ("It's about the power") of Whedon's ensemble creation. "Panorama" honed my wits for the detailed battle ahead (yes, I am repeating that word). It would be easy in an analysis of these two pieces to air the platitudes of "men are bad" and, my favorite, "that which doesn't destroy us, makes us stronger." Wilcox's examination of "Surprise/Innocence" eludes these clichés, validating our common, yet individual, experience of passion and pain. Indeed, "give me time" is now my answer too. While I have always been very fond of Xander, it took Wilcox's analysis to show me the value of "The Zeppo." Largely regarded as the "everyman" figure, Xander can be over-looked, but Wilcox reminds us that we watch Xander all the time. He is not only our advocate; he is Whedon's alter ego. Where better to see the mastermind at work?

And aren't Shakespeare critics jealous? (Critics still debate Shakespeare's voice in Prospero's ending soliloquy, for example) "Hush" is the episode that brought several of my doubting colleagues to *Buffy*. No discussion is complete on the art of *Buffy* without it. For a creation that has such power of language, twenty-nine minutes of silence is a leap of, well, Buffyesque proportions. Wilcox concludes her discussion (for the moment) with "what we most fear is the silence." This assertion resonates both through the genre of horror and women's studies, leaving the reader—and Wilcox—with more to say.

In her investigation of "Restless," Wilcox takes on T.S. Eliot as she details elements of confluence and reference between these two pieces of art. In our dreams we are both sundered and united; likewise in our readings of Eliot and *Buffy*. A discussion of "The Body" follows, and nothing is held back in this investigation—many "rules" of the horror genre, of diegetic performance, and even a number of the rules of *Buffy* itself are challenged and cast away – no-one can remain dismissive of the value *Buffy* after this reading.

In her final offering, Wilcox examines "Once More, With Feeling," mining it for all its gems of music, staging, language (both oral and body) and feeling. I left this chapter with a greater artistic appreciation for this challenging episode. Wilcox asserts that we find "the power of our humanity" in this musical piece – therefore, it is a fitting conclusion to our investigation (for now).

At this conclusion, I found myself wishing for an epilogue, but that is my only complaint. Wilcox's text is an excellent offering for those taking their first bite out of *Buffy* as well as for those of us who seek a new Slayer feast. The season guide, footnotes, bibliography, and index are all excellent tools to augment investigations by scholars and fans alike.

Tamara Wilson, Flagler College

**PCAS/ACAS Meeting 2005
@ the
Sea Turtle Inn**

President Bill Klink
&
Program Chair Donna Harper Waller.

Awards and recognitions:

- *Studies in Popular Culture* co-editors Michael Dunne & Sara Dunne presented the Whatley award for best article in *SiPC* to Marc Leverte for "Deconstructing Larry."
- David Lavery is rotating off editorship of *Studies in American Culture*. New editor Rob MacDonald presented the Stern award for best article in *SiAC* to R. T. Smith, Ted Genoways, Sarah Kennedy, & Leslie Wheeler for the collection "A Muse of Fire: Poetry and Crisis."
- The Roger Rollins American Culture award went to Kimberly Huff of Georgia State University for "The Politics of Pictures: *Blue Velvet* and the Political Sphere"
- The Ray & Pat Brown award went to Marie W. Dallam of Temple University for "The Best Emcee since Jesus: Eminem's Traditional Christian Message."
- Outgoing President Bill Klink presented Michael Dunne & Sara Dunne with an award for nine years of service as co-editors of *Studies in Popular Culture*.
- Rob MacDonald honored Linda Rohrer-Paige for her service editing *Studies in American Culture*
- Mary Alice Money was announced as the new President of PCA

**PCAS/ACAS Meeting 2006
@ the
Marriott Savannah Riverfront**

PCAS/ACAS is set to return to Savannah, GA for an exciting fall conference. With over 475 scholars ready to make presentations, the conference promises to be brimming with energy, excitement, and excellent ideas. Following the tradition of previous conferences, the 150+ panels at this year's meeting will cover a wide range of topics, from detective fiction to developing the classroom, from geopolitics to gender issues, from food to families in film, from body image to best sellers, and beyond.

Plan to attend panels on traditional PCAS favorites on Southern literature and Southern culture, the Whedonverse of *Buffy* and *Firefly*, teaching Shakespeare, and many others—three full days of panels and papers. Ever wonder about the Campbellian echoes of *Adventures in Babysitting*? Or Conrad's influence on *King Kong*? Perhaps you've wondered about the impact and implications of naming or pondered the culture of musical tribute acts. These and other questions will be answered with a myriad of thoughts and theses. From soda to superheroes and from vampires to Victorian madness, PCAS in Savannah will have it all.

Along with academic presentations, this year PCAS/ACAS will have some special sessions. On Thursday evening and Friday afternoon, writers will have readings of their creative material. On Friday night, Geoff Weiss asks conference attendees to bring rare and unusual pieces of film and television (in DVD format) to share and discuss in "Media Odds and Ends." Rhonda Wilcox will lead students of television in another of her fabulous *Buffy Studies Workshops*.

Join old friends and make new ones at The Marriot Savannah Riverfront, 100 General McIntosh Boulevard. All conference attendees should make reservations (1-800-285-0398) by September 4, 2006. All attendees must register for the conference to be included in the final draft of the program. Be on the lookout for registration materials from the Executive Director, Diane Calhoun-French.



