

Take-Home Final Exam

English 6650/7650: Cult Television | Dr. Lavery

Respond to the queries/prompts below with fully developed, articulate, well written, informed (cite series and readings) essays totally not less than 2,000 words.

You may meet your word limit by answering one question or two or three or even ten. Thus: you could answer #6 with 1,250 words; #8 with 250 words; and #10 with 500 words, or respond to #3 with 2,000 words. Any combination is acceptable.

Think of all these as open-ended "leading" questions. They do not have prefabricated "correct" answers.

You may remember that my motivation for including this course requirement was to give you practice in these kind of exams. Since this is a take-home, in order to approximate the conditions of timed qualifying and comprehensive exams, I ask you—on the honor system—to spend only four to five hours in the actual writing of this exam. I will assess it accordingly, putting my Grading-a-Timed-Piece-of-Writing Prescription Lenses on. (You may spend as much time as you like in preparation for writing.)

Please e-mail your exam to me by **the end of the day, May 6th** (david.lavery@gmail.com). Put all your responses in the same file and name it with your last name.

1. Once upon a time, cult television (indeed cult media of any kind) was presumed (in keeping with the original religious meaning of its name) to have limited mass appeal—to be esoteric rather than exoteric. Is this still true?
2. What obligation do the makers of a cult series have to fans?
3. What role do performers play in the development/success of a cult television series? Does the presence of a star with cult street cred or a cult of personality guarantee cult status?
4. What role do auteur (Whedon, Abrams, Moore, Lynch, Kripke) play in the development/success of a cult television series? Does the presence of a creator with cult street cred or a cult of personality guarantee cult status?
5. What is the relationship of badness (what Steven Duckworth calls “the sheer crappiness of the series and the crappiness it attributes to the universe” in his essay on *Blake's 7*) and cult tv?
6. What role does genre hybridity/genre bending play in cult television status?
7. Does “brilliant but cancelled” status (the name of a website on the subject) actually enhance cult status? Is it possible for a television show to gain cult status largely through nostalgia?
8. Why is the fantastic, the “left of real” (J. J. Abrams’ term), such a fertile ground for cult television?
9. Does cult television exhibit a unique approach to character investment?
10. Are “B.Y.O subtext” shows (Joss Whedon’s phrase) ipso facto cult shows? Why or why not?
11. What role do self-referentially and/or intertextuality and/or metatextuality

and/or seriality play in cult television? **[You may consider all of these, one of them, or any combination of them.]**

12. Is it still true that your standard issue television cult work, in keeping with the tradition, “represents a disruptive rather than a conservative force”? (Bruce Kawin—with cult movies in mind).

13. Compare/contrast cult television and cult film.

14. Discuss the effect of the emergence of multiple platforms for television viewing (iTunes, Hulu/Fancast, webcasts, DVDS, etc.) on the nature of cult television?

15. According to Jones and Peartson, “Cult television’s imaginary universes support an *inexhaustible range of narrative possibilities*, inviting, supporting and rewarding close textual analysis, interpretation, and inventive reformulations.” Why is this the case?

16. Why has cult television come to be distinguished by its “hyperdiegesis”: “the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text . . .” (Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* 137).

17. Are Umberto Eco’s characteristics of a cult film (originally formulated in an essay on *Casablanca*) applicable to cult television? (See slides 7-12 of this Power Point: http://davidlavery.net/Courses/Cult_TV/Power_Points/The_Cult.ppt; Eco’s essay is also available on the Resource DVD.)