

Professional Wrestling, the Myth, the Mat, and American Popular Culture
Preface

Those who take popular culture seriously have come to expect the slings and arrows (sometimes in the back) of more highbrow colleagues. Even serious students of critically praised PC manifestations like *The Sopranos* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are accustomed to losing the respect of stuffy Renaissance literature scholars or “nasty brutish and short” Alexander Pope aficionados.

Those who boldly go to the mat, applying the powerful methodologies available in the 21st Century to the “nobrow” (John Seabrook’s term) performance “art” of professional wrestling, risk more than just backbiting, however; they invite complete disgrace. The more seriously they grapple with their sweaty subject, the more intellectual energy they expend, the more ignominy they seem to warrant.

Marc Leverette’s *Wrestling Nation: The Myth of the Mat in American Popular Culture* should be sufficient enough cause for its author’s permanent banishment from the academy. On the strength of this first book, which not only offers a discerning media ecology of wrestling and limns the future of wrestling scholarship but manages, in a comprehensive first chapter, to provide an aerial view of turn-of-the-century “perceptions of popular culture,” should earn Leverette expulsion beyond civilization, there to spend his declining days among those fellow barbarians—subhuman cretins like Roland Barthes—with whom he shares a passion for wrestling.

When caught by family members staring in wonder at an episode of *Smackdown* in my own living room, I have been known to rationalize that I was “doing research.” No one in my family believed me for a minute, for I was, of course, lying. I am no wrestling scholar. But Marc Leverette is—and a cogent, often funny, and very observant one at that. *Wrestling Nation* accomplishes what all good criticism hopes to achieve: it changes the way we will hereafter experience its subject.

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