



Roz Kaveney

A Sense of the Ending: Schrödinger's Angel



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(1) Joss Whedon has often stated that each year of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was planned to end in such a way that, were the show not renewed, the finale would act as an apt summation of the series so far. This was obviously truer of some years than others – generally speaking, the odd-numbered years were far more clearly possible endings than the even ones, offering definitive closure of a phase in Buffy's career rather than a slingshot into another phase. Both Season Five and Season Seven were particularly planned as artistically satisfying conclusions, albeit with very different messages –

Season Five arguing that Buffy's situation can only be relieved by her heroic death, Season Seven allowing her to share, and thus entirely alleviate, slayerhood. Being the Chosen One is a fatal burden; being one of the Chosen Several Thousand is something a young woman might live with.



(2) It has never been the case that endings in *Angel* were so clear-cut and each year culminated in a slingshot ending, an attention-grabber that kept viewers interested by allowing them to speculate on where things were going. Season One ended with the revelation that Angel might, at some stage, expect redemption and rehumanization – the Shanshu of the souled vampire – as the reward for his labours, and with the resurrection of his vampiric sire and lover, Darla, by the law firm of Wolfram & Hart and its demonic masters ('To Shanshu in LA', 1022). Season Two ended with Cordelia's renunciation of love, glamour and freedom from mortal pain for the sake of her duty; with the arrival of the unknown quantity, Fred; with the information that the Wolf, the Ram and the Hart have power in many dimensions; and, at a moment of happiness, with the revelation of Buffy's death ('There's No Place Like Pirtz Glrb', 2022).

(3) Season Three ended with Connor's betrayal and imprisonment of Angel and Cordelia's ascension to become a Higher Being ('Tomorrow', 3022). Season Four, at a point when the show was struggling for renewal, culminated in a major plot twist: Angel's decision, in order to save Connor's sanity and Cordelia's comatose life, to accept a deal whereby he took over Wolfram & Hart's LA office and wiped his friends' memories of Connor and much of their lives for the previous year and a half ('Home', 4022).

(4) It will be noticed at once that each of these slingshots was to some extent misleading. Darla had been raised as a human with a capacity for being redeemed – by a further irony, her eventual redemption was as a vampire. Angel's concern with the Shanshu got briefly in the way of the daily grind of his mission. Buffy's death was impermanent.

Cordelia's self-sacrifice was betrayed by the Powers That Be. Angel's removal of Connor from the fight, his saving of Cordelia and even the memory wipe were temporary phenomena, while the deal with Wolfram & Hart turned out to be precisely the temptation and trap it seemed; sometimes the expectation of further revelations is itself deceitful.

(5) In the light of all of this, how we assess 'Not Fade Away' (5022), the finale of *Angel*'s fifth and final season depends radically on whether this finale is in fact the end. Joss Whedon has stated, repeatedly, that this ending was in most respects what it would have been had the show been renewed for a sixth season. Further, Whedon – and also writers David Fury and Jeff Bell – have indicated, both generally and in detail, the theme and some of the plot arcs of a sixth season that would have followed this finale.¹ With vague talk of some future project that would unite at least a few members of the *Angel* cast – at the time of writing, James Marsters (Spike) has indicated, interviewed on the Australian television show *Rove Live* in early July, that talk of four television movies is more than a rumour – the status of 'Not Fade Away' as definitive concluding statement is uncertain. If, as seems moderately likely, it is in fact the last of *Angel*, it has to be treated one way; and if the future projects come to fruition, another. It is, as my subtitle states, the creation of Schrodinger's *Angel*, who at this point in the game is neither undead nor dead. Whedon had the option of a more definitive statement, but preferred this. 'Did I make it so it could lead into an exciting sixth season? I did', he said to *AngelNews*. 'But it's still a final statement if that's what it needs to be.'

(6) Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that there will be no canonical addition to *Buffy* and *Angel* set at a date later than the battle against overwhelming odds in an alley behind the Hyperion Hotel, a spot which previously saw the final death of Darla, the birth of Connor and the rising of the Beast. In this case, the charge of Angel, Spike, Illyria and the already mortally wounded Gunn is a suicidal death charge, a recognition that, in a world ruled by untrustworthy Powers and the Senior Partners, the path of the hero is to go down fighting.

(7) It can be argued, not least by Jennifer Stoy, that this ending contradicts much of what *Angel* has always stood for.² A death charge that will inevitably leave parts of LA despoiled by demons and dragons is, in this view, a piece of self-indulgent existentialist nonsense in which Angel chooses defiance over practical solutions, chooses to affront the Senior Partners by wiping out their immediate support network – the Circle of the Black Thorn – at the cost of never being able to do anything else good again and, incidentally, signing away his Shanshu and murdering the heroic Drogyn in order to do so. Remarks by Whedon and Fury that, had Season Six happened, it would have been a *Mad Max*-like tale of coping with the aftermath of apocalypse strengthen this argument.

(8) In this reading, the ending of 'Not Fade Away' is an example of what can be called 'Superhero Exceptionalism', the idea that superheroes are exempt from normal considerations and entitled to ignore consequences. Part of the ongoing polemical debate within comics has always been precisely this question – Spider-Man learned at an early stage that 'with great power comes great responsibility', but other superheroes, from the Hulk to Batman, have lived constantly in far greyer areas. As a self-confessed comics geek, one of whose post-*Angel* gigs has been taking over scripting 'The Astonishing X-Men', Joss Whedon will be as obsessed with this debate as any other comics creator or fan.

(9) This view is not without merit; the considerations that have to be weighed against it have, in part, to do with the way that Season Five in general, and its last two episodes in particular, either completes various long-running story and character arcs or, if some form of the show continues later, at least moves them into a radically new phase. This is particularly true of those arcs that deal with Angel and with characters that are in some sense versions of Angel.

(10) The show *Angel* has always been about earning redemption one day at a time, by slow increments and by helping individuals in trouble case by case, precisely the opposite of attempting redemption by a single gratuitous heroic act of defiance. It is

particularly significant, then, that – sent off by Angel to have one last perfect day – Gunn goes to see Anne at her refuge for the homeless and helps her lift charitable donations onto a truck. Anne, it is worth remembering, has a long history as a minor character in this universe – vampire wannabe, slave in an industrial hell, reborn activist tricked by Wolfram & Hart and menaced by zombie cops. Repeatedly saved from supernatural jeopardy, she has become a constant example of both doing mundane good one day at a time and of the point that to save someone is to save the good works they might subsequently do. To bring her back, three years after we last saw her, is clearly intended to establish a plot point: we are deliberately reminded of the core mission of Angel Investigations.

(11) It is particularly appropriate that it is Gunn who goes to her, the one of the core team most obviously compromised and for a while corrupted by involvement with Wolfram & Hart. As the musical themes associated with him on his first appearance in Season One indicate – they are variations on Angel’s own themes – he is also the one most like Angel in some ways. One of the major arcs of Season Five is Gunn’s progressive corruption and then recuperation. He allows Wolfram & Hart to install legal knowledge in his brain and almost at once becomes capable of legal chicanery (‘Conviction’, 5001); he is also the member of the Angel Investigations team chosen to have direct communication with the Senior Partners through their Conduit in the White Room (‘Home’). He is tricked into signing the customs form for the sarcophagus that will destroy Fred and does so as the price of regaining his legal expertise when it begins to slip away (‘Smile Time’, 5014). During Fred’s painful death Gunn confronts the Conduit, which has taken his own face, and is rebuffed when he asks for Fred’s life:

Gunn: I didn’t come for a favour. We can make a deal.

Gunn 2: [*disdainfully*] Deals are for the devil.

Gunn: You want someone else? A life for hers. You’ll get it. You can have mine.

Gunn 2: I already do. (‘A Hole in the World’, 5015)

(12) Forced to admit his complicity in Fred’s death, Gunn is stabbed by Wesley and rejected by Angel; ironically, only Harmony shows any compassion for him. This is the most abject point he reaches; thereafter he sacrifices himself (‘Shells’, 5016). Rescued from hell by Illyria, he is the first to confront Angel over his seeming decision to become entirely complicit with the Senior Partners (‘Time Bomb’, 5019). His reversion to the side of good is signalled in part by a return to his personal style and original image – he reshaves his head and adopts a less formal mode of dress. Gunn’s path demonstrates that good intentions are not enough, or more precisely that good intentions can easily be corrupted by vices as apparently trivial as vanity in his competence. His conversation with Anne indicates the importance of the mission for its own sake:

Gunn: What if I told you it doesn’t help? What would you do if you found out none of it matters, that it’s all controlled by forces more powerful and uncaring than we can conceive and they will never let it get better down here? What would you do?

Anne: I’d get this truck packed before the new stuff gets here. You wanna give me a hand?

We last see him mortally wounded and determined to go down fighting:

Gunn: Okay ... you take the 30,000 on the left ...

Illyria: You’re fading. You’ll last ten minutes at best.

Gunn: Let’s make ‘em memorable.

(13) Of *Angel's* main cast, Gunn was often the one least well used, partly because of uncertainties of tone on the part of the white writers about the handling of black street dialogue; Season Five gave him an arc that was an admirable counterpart to the more wobbly handling of more central characters.

(14) The major arc of the fifth season is, of course, that of its central character. The other core characters have accepted the deal with Wolfram & Hart from a combination of idealism and conceit, believing that they can make a difference from the inside and delighted by the shiny new toys they are offered: knowledge for Wesley, a laboratory for Fred, a sense of self-worth for Gunn, limitless showbiz power for Lorne. Angel knows from the beginning that he has taken the deal primarily in order to save Connor and Cordelia and that he has betrayed his friends by altering their memories. He has reason to suspect that he has been tricked by his worst enemies and no way, because of the memory wipe, of fully discussing this with his friends. The restoration of Wesley's memories – which include the extent of his failed attempts to redeem Lilah – are part of what breaks him; Angel helps destroy his closest friend.

(15) Angel's constant sense of his bad faith is reinforced by various things that happen to him in the course of the season. Earlier errors on his part – his obsession with being a champion, or a lone wolf avenger, or a good provider – have been similarly demonstrated to him over an episode or an arc. In the course of Season Five, he is magically compelled to have sex with the Senior Partners' minion ('Life of the Party', 5005), confronted with the apparent meaninglessness of another hero's struggles ('The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco', 5006), poisoned by a demon parasite into endless hallucinations of his own worthlessness ('Soul Purpose', 5010) and finally literally reduced to the status of a puppet ('Smile Time', 5014). He is specifically told that he has made the wrong choice, both by his dead love Cordelia, now an angelic messenger of the Powers ('You're Welcome', 5012), and by Buffy's comic sidekick Andrew ('Damage', 5011). Angel has to have fallen a long way for the reformed murderer Andrew to be entitled to tell him that he has been corrupted – and Andrew's judgment is confirmed by Giles in a phone call when Angel asks for help from Willow with Fred's final illness ('A Hole in the World').

(16) And yet the choice Angel made in 'Home' is not straightforwardly condemned either. When we meet Connor again, he is sane and untroubled, and manages to remain so even after discovering his superpowers and regaining his memories ('Origin', 5018). In the final episode, it is with his son that Angel spends his last perfect hours and, during Angel's fight with the Senior Partners' supercharged minion Hamilton, Connor appears and buys Angel a precious few minutes to find a way of defeating Hamilton.

(17) Part of Angel's trouble is that he refuses to listen to the person who most frequently tells him the truth in the course of this season: Spike, who reverts to his *Buffy* Seasons Two to Four status as the trickster teller of uncomfortable truths. As we see in a sequence of flashbacks, Spike has good reason to distrust Angel, who was always the alpha male of their little vampire family and who seduced the neophyte vampire William into the ways of atrocity. Spike points out to him that while it was Drusilla that turned him, it was Angelus who made him a monster. The homoeroticism that many fans have always seen in the relationship – and written reams of 'slash' erotic fan-fiction about – is at the very least closely related to this power dynamic between them; when Spike finally says 'Cause Angel and me have never been intimate – except that one ...', many fans purred with pleasure ('Power Play', 5021).

(18) Spike has, after all, always been the most obvious of Angel's shadow doubles. They share their original names – Angel's Liam is the Irish form of Spike's William – and to some extent exchanged natures on becoming vampires; the drunken wastrel Liam became the moody aesthete of death Angelus, whereas the poet William became Spike, who would rather have the instant gratification of a brawl than the drawn-out refined pleasures of sadism. Both are at their most petulant when dealing with their rivalry over Buffy: to pick but one example, Spike has the Buffybot programmed with the belief that Angel 'has stupid hair' ('Intervention', B5018). One of the completed arcs of Season Five is

the process whereby they accept that they are, and always have been, the best of friends, in spite of apparent bitter enmity and mutual betrayal, just as Angelus said they would be on their first meeting.

(19) Spike has acquired the authority needed to tell Angel the bitter truth. He chose to have a soul and chose to save the world at the cost of his own destruction. When they fight for the right to be champion, Spike beats him, simply because he is less conflicted ('Destiny', 508). Though Spike's decision, once he is solid, to replace Angel as the lone vigilante of LA's night streets is manipulated by Lindsey it is nonetheless valid, as is his later decision to rejoin the group to save Fred and then to help control Illyria ('Soul Purpose', 'A Hole in the World'). After a last resurgence of the old jealousy over Buffy in a weak comedic episode, the two vampires finally accept the immaturity of their bickering ('The Girl in Question', 5020). Like everyone else, Spike is fooled by Angel's pretence of having been corrupted but he does not believe that Angel has become Angelus – Spike would know that, he says. Once Angel has revealed his strategy and asked his friends to assist him in the destruction of the Black Thorn, Spike is the first to volunteer ('Power Play'). He never loses the chippiness that comes from suspecting he is a better man than Angel, but he decides to die, a loyal lieutenant at his side. There is a generosity to this on the part of both which is deeply attractive.

(20) This season is endlessly stuffed, as befits what was always perhaps a final season, with flashbacks and ironic continuity references.³ For example, in the simultaneous assassinations that are Angel's scheme in 'Not Fade Away', Angel trusts Spike to save a newborn from the Fell Brethren. Back in Shanghai, Angel chose to save a baby rather than stay with Darla, who condemned his decision to protect its parents with an unfavourable comparison with the detested Spike's murder of a slayer ('Darla', 2007). This back reference helps point to an important issue: the assassination of the Black Thorn is not merely a nihilistic act of defiance but a way of continuing the mission. The rescued baby stands for all the specific victims that the killing saves, and all the potential that such victims embody.

(21) The decision to raise Spike from the dead⁴ and introduce him to *Angel*, a show where he had only ever previously appeared as a villain of the week ('In the Dark', 1003) or in flashbacks ('Darla'), was originally made, not for artistic reasons, but because the Warner Brothers network insisted on the addition of this popular character as one of a number of preconditions for commissioning a fifth season. It was not a universally popular decision; admirers of *Angel* were not necessarily admirers of the later seasons of *Buffy* in which Spike became so important. In conjunction with a general background of cuts in the show's budget, the necessity of providing James Marsters with an appropriate salary meant that other characters had to be written out or forgotten.

(22) Nonetheless, by season end, artistic reasons for it had been found – one of the most touching moments of 'Not Fade Away' comes with a classic Whedon bait-and-switch, where Spike's perfect day is spent in a bar where we are led to believe he is going to brawl, only to discover that he is reading William's dreadful love poetry and improvising a new poem about the mother he turned and then dusted. This scene closes Spike's personal arc very neatly – should this episode be the last we ever see of the character – by integrating the warrior and the poet, the prickly rough with the sensitive twit he has done so much to repress.

(23) One of the show's themes has always been that self-reinvention is both necessary and morally dangerous. Lindsey, the closest thing Season Five has to a season-long onscreen villain, has always been another of Angel's shadows, as poor boy made good by doing bad. We first meet him as a self-possessed lawyer ('City Of', 1001) and only gradually realize his complexity and vulnerability. He feints at redemption only to take an improved deal from evil and be maimed by Angel ('Blind Date', 1021; 'To Shanshu in LA'). The loss of his hand re-invents him as a liminal being, since part of him is alive and part

dead, and this does not cease to be the case when he is given new hands, first plastic and then real. His feeling for Darla is in part genuine love and in part a struggle to possess something which is Angel's. When, after losing her, he attacks Angel brutally, he does so in old clothes and a truck that make explicit what we always suspected – that under the smooth surface of the LA lawyer is a working-class kid with a chip ('Epiphany', 2016).

(24) As with Spike, Lindsey's doubling with Angel has a strong and occasionally explicit element of homoeroticism: Darla says to him at one point 'It's not me you want to screw – it's him', and the line is entirely knowing. Lindsey's apparent redemption comes in part from a moral qualm – he is upset to discover that his new hand has been taken from someone he once knew – and in part from an innate rebelliousness. His pride is affronted by the Senior Partners' deceit in the matter of the hand and by the competitive games he is forced to play with Lilah Morgan ('Dead End', 2018). It was redemption without all that much in the way of repentance, penance or even a firm purpose of amendment; it was by some criteria no redemption at all.

(25) One of the reasons for the startling revelation that Lindsey is the secret manipulator behind Spike's resurrection and Eve's betrayal is, of course, that Lindsey has this complicated back-story of rivalry with Angel ('Destiny', 5007). Another is that Christian Kane who plays him was a popular favourite and not a star, having largely abandoned acting for a while to pursue his musical career. Certainly the reappearance of an iconic figure from the show's past was an economic, and possibly a cheap, way of broad-brushing in a nemesis. For a while at least, it is unclear whether Lindsey is good or evil – his structural status as the season's Little Bad does not automatically determine which side he is on – though his attempts to kill Angel offer a clue. Perhaps he is responsible for Spike's resurrection to ensure that, should he kill Angel, there will still be a vampire with a soul around to fulfil the Shanshu prophecy. His attempt on Angel's life after the apparent resurrection of Cordelia – and his attempt to have Spike pre-empt any message she brings from the Powers by telling Spike she is still evil – clearly indicates that he is not, as hinted, working for Good. At the same time, his abduction by the Senior Partners to be tortured in a suburban Hell indicates that he is at most freelancing for Evil rather than a wholly owned subsidiary.

(26) Lindsey's role is ambiguous to the end, partly because he gets loaded with expository material and partly because the writers never, I suggest, sat down clearly to work out what his motivation is, or why it is necessary that Angel commission his execution by Lorne. In 'Power Play', it becomes apparent that Lindsey is very well-informed indeed about the Circle of the Black Thorn and how one goes about joining it – his actions throughout the season make most sense on the assumption that this was his intention. One of the requirements appears to be that one kill someone close to one to demonstrate ruthlessness; Angel fulfils this by conning the Circle into believing he was responsible for Fred's death/ transformation into Illyria. To kill a straightforward enemy would not seem to complete this requirement – but, as has been demonstrated above, Angel is a deal more than that to Lindsey. The implication, not fully developed, is that Lindsey was trying to buy his way into the Circle by killing Angel, and that Angel qualified as a sacrifice because of Lindsey's quasi-erotic obsession. Accordingly, the last interview between him and Angel in which, on the surface of things, Angel recruits him both as a lieutenant in the assassination of the Circle and as a successor in the struggle should things go wrong, crystallizes Angel's decision to have him killed not because of anything Lindsey says, but because of what he does not.

(27) In this reading, Angel's slip of the tongue reference to the erotic subtext between them is more than a sop to the fans:

Lindsey: You want me, I'm on your team.

Angel: I want you, Lindsey. [*beat*] I'm thinking about rephrasing that.

Lindsey: I'd be more comfortable.

(28) This conversation can be read as Angel knowingly giving Lindsey an opportunity to come clean about what he planned and why Angel's death would have been a sacrifice for him. Significantly neither Lindsey nor his lover Eve tell each other the truth during their last encounter. She fails to admit to him that she had magically-induced sex with Angel and allows him to believe that she is the one thing in his life Angel never touched; and he never explains to the woman who gave up immortality for him why this should matter. In Lindsey's head, the huge drama is between him and Angel, which is why Angel commissions Lorne, a being Lindsey sees as his inferior, to kill Lindsey once he has served his turn; Lindsey's last words are of his affront that it should be Lorne who kills him, and not Angel.

(29) There is a darkly humorous ruthless justice to the Angel who arranges this and accepts that the price of it is that Lorne will walk away from him and the struggle thereafter; losing Lorne's support is part of the butcher's bill he is prepared to pay. One of the structural reasons for the arrival on the scene of Illyria – 'the immaculate embodiment of rule' – is that she has been both monarch and general and can tell Angel things about being a leader that, at this point, he needs to know. Back in Season Two, a temporarily morally dark Angel talked of 'waging the war' as opposed to what Wesley and the others were still doing – 'fighting the good fight'. Now Illyria tells him through the mouth of the dead Fred that he must accept the logic of his situation again: 'So much power here, and you quibble over its price. Your conscience binds you. If you want to win a war, you must serve no master but your ambition ... (1) A true ruler is as moral as a hurricane ... Empty but for the force of his gale.' ('Time Bomb', 5019)

(30) It is precisely because Illyria is not a vampire that she is a worthwhile mirror of Angel's vampire nature, of the thing he has at the same time to accept and overcome. 'You're not looking at your friend; you're looking at the thing that killed him' (Giles in 'The Harvest', B1002) is even truer of Illyria than it was of, say, Harmony; Illyria is a long dead god/demon that inhabits the corpse of Fred and devoured her soul in the fires of her re-creation. Yet, as with many vampires, it is not as simple as that; even before the restoration of Fred's memories of her penultimate year and a half of life she is totally Illyria, yet increasingly conjoined or contaminated with elements of Fred. If Illyria were wholly and solely the creature she claims, and believes herself, to be, she would not impersonate Fred for the dead woman's parents, or offer to give Wesley a final perfect day. Both *Buffy* and *Angel* have always been shows about redemption; the reason why Wesley refuses Illyria's offer and then accepts it when mortally wounded is not that he dies having finally chosen illusion over reality, but that her offer is an outward sign of genuine inward change. In an interview at the Hyperion convention, Amy Acker said that Joss Whedon redirected the scene having realized that it was not about Wesley's love for Illyria or Fred, but about Illyria's love for Wesley.

(31) It is clear that Angel listens to Illyria, but that he does not do precisely what she says. He is, in the last two episodes, prepared to sacrifice people he likes and admires, such as Drogyn. However, his ruthlessness is the servant of his mission, not of his ego: he specifically renounces hope by signing away the Shanshu in order to preserve his cover with the Circle of the Black Thorn. He forgives Harmony for her betrayal, he judges her according to her nature, both as a vampire and as a selfish child, rather than for the personal betrayal, and implicitly accepts her argument that someone who was never trusted cannot have betrayed – she even explains, when he says he never trusted her because she doesn't have a soul, 'I would have if you had confidence in me'. Angel's decision to spare her to pursue what might be her redemption is based partly on recognition of the lost humanity they have in common, and on a ruler's sense of justice.

(32) In *Angel*, the character who has most consistently acted as Angel's shadow and surrogate is Wesley, whose story has throughout been that of 'The Man who Learns Better'. Remembered by Angel and the audience as the largely useless fop of *Buffy* Season Three, the ex-Watcher has re-invented himself as a leather-clad rogue demon-hunter without having changed his essence. The ways in which he changes are many and varied: to pick

but one, he consistently chooses Angel over earlier loyalties to the Watchers' Council, even when what appears to be his father arrives claiming to be its emissary ('Lineage', 5007). Wesley is a character whose essence is to lose and yet lose so honourably as to be admirable. He is the 'loyal servant' who betrays Angel by kidnapping his son, but does it to save him from the prophesied guilt of killing him – and in the long run, Angel has to kill Connor so that he can be reborn as the sane heroic youth of Season Five. Wesley sells his own soul to Wolfram & Hart in a vain attempt to save that of Lilah, whom he no longer loves; he finally wins Fred, only to lose her to Illyria; and it is his death that finally redeems Illyria by teaching her the meaning of human grief. Wesley's death is both the price of Angel's victory and a demonstration that the mission is about self-sacrifice.⁵

(33) In conclusion, then, we have to judge Season Five in general, and its finale in particular by the fact that they always had to serve two purposes: they had to provide both a series finale for five years of the show and lead logically to a sixth year should one be commissioned, and to further Buffyverse material should it ever be called for. These are not entirely compatible aims – the fact that the season and 'Not Fade Away' work for both as well as they do needs to be weighed against their partial failure at either.

(34) Further, there were other issues. The network's demand that the show move away from strong plot arcs was less honoured than it might have been, but always created problems in a show which had moved into strong arc in its second season. The early part of the season does tend to deal in 'problems of the week', even if some of those problems, notably the fate of those earlier champions, the masked wrestlers, offer a strong symbolic resonance that implies an arc ('The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco', 5006). The handling of Lindsey in this season is weakened by this avoidance of overt arc – he drifts around the background manipulating Spike by pretending to be the long-dead Doyle (another example of his liminal status) and his real motives remain largely obscure.

(35) When Cordelia appears for a single episode, we hear her overt message to Angel, but not the secret one we are told about later; this feels like improvised retrofitting, even if it is not. The occasional appearance of what we later learn to be the Black Thorn's insignia – on the armoured cyborgs of the supposed Roger Wyndam-Pryce, for example – is not enough to prepare us for the eventual long-delayed appearance of the season's Big Bad, nor are the occasional appearances of beings we later learn to be among its members: Sebassis, Veil, Senator Brucker and so on.

(36) In the end, though, Season Five is what *Angel* has always been about. It is the story of a man whose innate nature is to be a lonely, morally equivocal brooder, whose loyalty to his friends enables him to learn from them. It is the story of a man who learns moral lessons that always prove to be provisional; it is his preparedness to go on learning that counts. Angel is in this respect a wise fool, which is why he is so often clownlike; he is a saviour in constant need of his own redemption. He also has constantly to accept the paradoxes of his own nature – in the fight with the Senior Partners' emissary Hamilton, he wins partly because he accepts the freely proffered help of his son, and partly because he drains Hamilton's strength by biting him – he is both man and monstrous creature of the night.

(37) If the last moments of the show take place in darkness and rain, this is not just noir gesturing – it is because Angel has always inhabited the moral borderland of great cities. If an entirely hostile reading of his final decision is possible, it is because Angel has always been morally ambiguous. And if the last episode of the television show, which is in the end all about him, is titled in a reference to one of the most amoral of rock bands, it is because part of the point of the show has always been to teach us sympathy for the devil.

Dedicated to the memory of Selena Ulrich.

NOTES

1 Joss Whedon has stated that a sixth season would have dealt with the chaos after the system is smashed, *Angel News*, 18 May 2004, cited at www.whedonesque.com; David Fury that it would have been their attempt to re-invent the series as *The Road Warrior*/*(Mad Max)*, 'Sixth Sense', interview by Tara Dilullo, *DreamWatch*, 118 (2004), p. 32; Jeffrey Bell has mentioned that it would have continued the arc of Illyria's acceptance of her now double nature as Illyria/Fred, *Official Angel Magazine*, 4 (2004), cited at www.whedonesque.com.

2 In conversation.

3 Perhaps the most obscure of these comes during Angel's hallucinations in 'Soul Purpose' (5010) where Fred removes his soul from his chest in the shape of a goldfish in a dirty bowl. Back in Season Two of *Buffy*, in 'Passion' (B2017), Angelus tormented Willow by killing her goldfish. The soul is the thing that stops Angel being the Angelus that does such things, and is so represented as the least of his victims. Angel's soul when restored, in 'Becoming Pt. 2' (B2022), and when removed in *Angel's* fourth season, is held in a globe that shines brightly; Angel is worried that his pragmatic compromise with evil has soiled him irredeemably – Fred talks of simply flushing fish and water away.

4 After his heroic self-sacrifice in 'Chosen' (B7022)

5 However, remarks by Alexis Denisof in interview that he likes the character of Wesley so much that he would always be prepared to play him again may indicate that this self-sacrificing death, like Spike's, may not be all it seems, 'Parting Gifts: Interview with Alexis Denisof', *Official Angel Magazine*, 13 (2004), pp. 10–16.

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