

“Let’s Go to Work”: The Legacy of *Angel*
A *Slayage* Special Issue

Edited by Stacey Abbott and Simon Brown

Introduction

“I kinda want to slay the dragon”: *Angel* and Its Legacy

Stacey Abbott

On the 5th of October 1999, the first episode of *Angel* (1999-2004)—“City Of”—was aired, launching a series that would run for five years and produce 110 episodes on the Warner Brothers Network (WB). While often overlooked in comparison to its parent series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Angel* serves as a significant nexus point for cult and horror television of the 21st century, bringing together genre and televisual influences of the past and reconfiguring them to suit its own narrative and thematic ambitions, which subsequently laid the groundwork for many shows that would follow in its wake. Following the vampire with a soul on his quest for redemption on the

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Noir streets of Los Angeles, the series functions as “an extension of the Buffyverse,” offering a rich expansion of what Matthew Pateman describes as “one of the most successful tele-mythopoeic worlds” (131), while also standing as a distinct, self-contained series that, according to AmiJo Comeford and Tamy Burnett, “provides viewers with a sophisticated, complex narrative and cast of characters, which together create a thought-provoking, high quality, and, yes, entertaining television experience” (1). While clearly indebted to *Buffy*, from which it drew its title character (David Boreanaz) as well as fellow demon hunters Cordelia Chase (Charisma Carpenter) and Wesley Wyndam-Price (Alexis Denisof), *Angel* drew from a tapestry of classic examples of TV horror, such as *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (1974-1975), *The X-Files* (1993-2003, 2016-2018), and *Millennium* (1996-1999), in its exploration of the shadowy (literally and thematically), nocturnal, and morally ambiguous worlds of monsters, both supernatural and human. Presented from the point-of-view of a vampire torn between his blood lust and his conscience, *Angel* knowingly unsettled clear-cut distinctions between good and evil, questioning—sometimes challenging and occasionally undermining—conceptions of morality, valor, heroism, altruism, and redemption. In this manner, *Angel* exists within an established tradition of serialized, sympathetic vampire texts that includes James Malcolm Rymer’s *Varney the Vampire* (1845-1847), Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* (1976-present), Dan Curtis’ *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971), and the Canadian television series *Forever Knight* (1992-1996), *Angel*’s most direct progenitor as it told the story of Nick Knight, an 800-year-old vampire looking for redemption by working the night shift on the Toronto police force (see Giannini “*Forever Knight, Angel, and Supernatural*”). *Angel* built upon the legacy of these often tortured vampires to weave a tale of redemption and atonement, against a backdrop of pending apocalypse.

Angel came to an end in 2004, airing its final episode “Not Fade Away” (5.22) on the 19th of May. The show’s conclusion came at a transitional moment for television. The early 21st century saw the increasing proliferation of channels and multimedia platforms, which gradually led broadcast, cable, and pay channels to prioritize targeting committed audiences over high ratings. This contributed to a shift away from the stigmatization of cult or genre TV toward the recognition of their value due to their loyal followers. For horror on TV, this transition meant that horror transitioned from cult TV to one of the

most ubiquitous and visible genres on global television. This is particularly evident in the WB/CW's long-running horror series *Supernatural* (2005-2020), which came on the air just one year after *Angel*'s cancellation and serves in many ways as a natural successor, equally preoccupied with monsters, masculinity, redemption, and apocalypse. While *Angel*'s small and loyal fandom kept the show going for five years, it was cancelled in its fifth after having generated the required 100+ episodes for syndication. In contrast, *Supernatural*, which began its life with a small audience, has been given room to build its fandom and has continued on the air for fifteen years, surpassing 300 episodes. *Angel*'s horror pedigree is significant but interwoven within a matrix of generic associations, while *Supernatural* and the many horror TV series that have followed in *Angel*'s wake have been able to flex their horror muscles and overtly declare their allegiance to this often disreputable genre (see Jowett and Abbott 10-15).

This post-*Angel* period also saw the rise of a sub-genre of vampire TV, equally responding to a growing permissiveness on television with regard to gothic horror. While some of the series, including *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017), seem more indebted to *Buffy* and *Twilight* (2008-2012), others opted to focus on the conflicted and morally ambiguous vampire-protagonist in the manner of *Angel*. Since 2005, these vampires have steadily populated television screens in the form of: Henry Fitzroy in *Blood Ties* (2007), Mick St. John in *Moonlight* (2007-2008), Mitchell and Hal in the British *Being Human* (2008-2013), Aidan in the American/Canadian *Being Human* (2011-2014), Klaus, Elijah, and Rebekah in *The Originals* (2013-2018), and Nandor, Lazlo, and Nadja in *What We Do in the Shadows* (2019-). While some see the televised vampire as overly familiar and domesticated, a marker of the genre's transition to the mainstream, I would argue that these series, like *Angel*, envelope the vampire within traditions of horror, melodrama, and humor to unpack what it means to be human in an increasingly complicated world in which the lines between good and evil, right and wrong are challenging to navigate.

In fact, this legacy of reluctant vampires now extends to the zombie. *Angel*'s first-person vampire narrative is a key forerunner to Liv Moore's first-person zombie narrative in the CW's *iZombie* (2015-2019). When Liv (Rose McIver) wakes up in a body bag and realizes that she is a zombie that must live on brains, she initially decides, like *Angel* at the beginning of "City Of," to forego family, friends, and

love, choosing a life of isolation, loneliness and brooding, for fear of hurting those around her (“Pilot” 1.1). Sound familiar? When her secret is discovered by her Medical Examiner boss, Dr. Ravi Chakrabarti (Rahul Kohli), he encourages her to use her zombie condition, which includes receiving visions of the life of the person whose brains she has eaten, for a better purpose by solving their murder: eat the brains, solve the crime. It is at this point that Liv begins to engage with the world around her again, surrounding herself by a new chosen family. Liv is an engaging fusion of Angel—the monster searching for meaning to his existence—and Doyle/Cordelia—the bearer of the visions that fuel his mission. Like Angel, Liv makes sense of her undead existence by solving crimes and helping the helpless—both human and zombie, and in so doing “reaching out to people, showing them that there’s love and hope still left in this world” (Doyle to Angel “City Of” 00:08:42-47). This speech by Doyle (Glenn Quinn) to Angel perfectly encapsulates Liv’s mission of tolerance and self-sacrifice, as she attempts to show the world that humans and zombies can peacefully co-exist. She is every bit a Champion in the tradition of Angel, Doyle, and Cordelia.

The legacy of *Angel* is, however, not restricted to vampire and zombies on television and extends to a multitude of TV series both in and out of the Whedonverse, bearing the influence of *Angel*, thematically, narratively and/or stylistically. For instance, *Angel*’s choice to locate its series Big Bad not within an individual monster but in the inter-dimensional law firm Wolfram & Hart is extended to *Dollhouse*’s (2009-2010) Rossum Corporation, both offering a critique of global corporate capitalism (see Giannini, *Joss Whedon Versus the Corporation*). As Ian Klein has argued, the fifth season’s Wolfram & Hart set is notably echoed in the design of the Dollhouse, a result of Stuart Blatt’s contribution as production designer to both shows. Furthermore, Dollhouse manager Adele DeWitt (Olivia Williams) draws her acerbic wit, elegant fashion, and moral flexibility from W&H’s Lilah Morgan (Stephanie Rothman).

The casting of *Angel* alum J. August Richards (Charles Gunn) in the first episode of *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-) (“Pilot” 1.1), directed by Joss Whedon, seems to deliberately associate the new series with the pedigree of the Whedonverse through what Jeffrey Bussolini describes as “intertextuality of casting.” Richards’ portrayal of Mike Peterson, an average working man and father who agrees to a physical

upgrade that gives him super strength via the Centipede Serum, possesses echoes of Gunn's cerebral upgrade, in which Gunn has the law downloaded into his brain ("Conviction" 5.1). Both men come to learn that physical and mental improvements, offered in response to masculine insecurities and doubts about their self-worth, come at a high price. Both men lose their individual agency as they become pawns used by a form of institutional evil in the shape of Wolfram & Hart and Hydra, and their personal choices for self-betterment lead to injury and death to innocents; a high price that they have to learn to accept. Gunn's subsequent decision to atone for his choices that lead to Fred's death by sacrificing himself to serve the mission ("Underneath" 5.17) and later to go out fighting on the streets of LA ("Not Fade Away") is echoed in Peterson's decision, once liberated from the Centipede Project, to find redemption by protecting the innocent and helping the helpless ("Beginning of the End" 1.22). Peterson, as the transformed Deathlok, continues to fight the good fight and embody the selfless heroism of Charles Gunn and the team of Angel Investigations.

While Joss Whedon's decision to film a small independent production of Shakespeare's romantic comedy *Much Ado about Nothing* (2012) was in response to his experience of filming the massive Hollywood blockbuster *The Avengers* (2012), the casting of Amy Acker and Alexis Denisof as Beatrice and Benedict positions the film within Whedon's televisual universe and *Angel* in particular. Those who felt the pain of loss when Fred (Acker) and Wesley (Denisof)'s romantic coupling was snatched away from them by Fred's death and transformation into Illyria ("A Hole in the World" 5.15) were knowingly rewarded by their casting in *Much Ado*. This film not only offers the romantic resolution to Fred and Wesley's story but also brings to the Shakespearian romp an emphasis on physical slapstick comedy, reminiscent of Wesley on *Angel* but this time performed by both Denisof and Acker, each delivering tour-de-force physical comedy. The film features a series of extreme comic pratfalls that nostalgically call to mind some of Denisof's best performances in *Angel*, offering a romantic return to the innocence of *Angel* in its early days (Abbott "Nobody Scream...or Touch My Arms").

Looking beyond the Whedonverse, we continue to see echoes of *Angel* on television. The Hyperion Hotel, home to Team Angel from Seasons 2-4 and possessing a "storied legacy of murder and mayhem dating back to [its] construction in '28" ("Are you Now or Have you

Ever Been” 2.2, 00:12:28-33), seems to be the natural ancestor to The Hotel Cortez in *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015-2016). Both are 1920s art-deco-styled Hollywood hotels with dark histories of secrets, paranoia, suspicion, fear and monsters. The *Angel* episode “Are you Now or Have you Ever Been” unravels this checkered history by seamlessly moving between past and present, revealing that a demon has been haunting the Hyperion for decades, fueling paranoia and violence to feed its insatiable hunger. The twelve-episode season of *Hotel* similarly shifts between time periods, exploring multiple legacies of trauma and horror that permeate the hotel. Like the Hyperion, the Cortez is also haunted, this time by the ghost of serial killer H. H. Holmes, who manipulates the hotel’s inhabitants to maintain this legacy of misery and violence, but like the Hyperion, it is the culture of paranoia and distrust exhibited by the living that is the hotel’s greatest evil.

While the connection between *Angel* and *Hotel* is embodied in writer/producer Tim Minear, who wrote “Are you Now” and served as executive producer on *Hotel*, the casting of James Marsters in *Torchwood* (2006-2011), is another example of “intertextuality of casting” and brings with it allusions to *Angel*. Even before Marsters’ contribution to the series, *Torchwood* contained certain key similarities with *Angel*. Captain Jack and *Angel* share immortality, a propensity for self-sacrifice, a tendency to be tortured, and taste in long, flowing black coats. After all, as *Angel*’s Lorne reminds us, “it’s all about the coat” (“Judgment” 2.1, 00:13:24). In the second season of *Torchwood*, the homosocial banter that underpins so many scenes between Spike and *Angel* in Season Five (see Abbott *Angel* 63-82), that expresses both a competitive edge and repressed sexual attraction between the two vampires, was transformed into overt homoeroticism and sexual charge between Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) and James Marsters’ Captain John in *Torchwood* (“Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang” 2.1).

The first season of *Daredevil* (2015-2018), which featured *Angel* writers Drew Goddard and Steven S. DeKnight as creator and showrunner (of Season One) respectively, is also highly reminiscent of *Angel* with its narrative of a nocturnal avenger who chooses to stalk the night time urban landscape to protect “the weak ones lost in the night” and hunt “the things that prey on them” (*Angel* to Doyle in “In the Dark” 1.3 00:38:47-50). While the Marvel comic predates *Angel*, and both *Daredevil* and *Angel* are indebted to *Batman* (see Halfyard), the

show's noir visual style and its morally gray examination of heroism, vigilantism, and obsession position *Daredevil* as a natural grandchild of *Angel*. In contrast to many of the vampire series that followed *Angel*, which deliberately developed narrative means to avoid shooting at night—either through the use of magic (*The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*) or the re-imagining of vampire allergies to sunlight as a more manageable sensitivity to sun (*Moonlight* and *Being Human*)—*Daredevil*, like *Angel*, makes excellent use of night cinematography to convey the richness of the nocturnal urban landscape. Both series feature exquisite chiaroscuro to convey the darkness in which the heroes become embroiled but also the potential for light; as Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery note, “you have to know where to put the light to see the darkness, to see in the dark” (225). Chiaroscuro is the clash of light and dark and both shows repeatedly follow their protagonists, Angel and the Devil of Hell's Kitchen (Charlie Cox), into the dark in order to pull them back into the light. Here chiaroscuro becomes the language through which both series explore themes of obsession. *Daredevil*'s obsession with bringing down the nebulous property developer and criminal kingpin Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio) in Seasons One and Three—at the expense of losing his closest friends and colleagues Foggie Nelson (Elden Henson) and Karen Payne (Deborah Ann Woll)—is one such foray into the dark from which the Devil must be rescued, evoking Angel's blinkered obsession with W&H in *Angel* Season Two that leads him to fire Cordelia, Wesley and Gunn so that he can pursue his obsession without intervention (“Reunion” 2.10).

While *Daredevil* inherited *Angel*'s film noir legacy via Goddard and DeKnight, the comic stylings of *Angel*-writer Ben Edlund, embodied in “Smile Time” (5.14), in which Angel is transformed into a puppet, found its natural home in *Supernatural*—a show that like *Angel* episodically oscillates between horror, melodrama, and comedy. “Smile Time” deliberately undercuts Angel as a figure of masculinity, power, and heroism by presenting him as a puppet “made of felt” whose “nose comes off” (00:25:08-12). Edlund's contribution to *Supernatural* in episodes such as “Ghostfacers” (3.13) and “Monster Movie” (4.5) similarly reframes the show's traditional horror/road movie aesthetic through the intrusion of differing narrative and aesthetic forms that consciously disrupt the series' more dramatic leanings. “Ghostfacers” re-imagines *Supernatural* as a reality ghost-hunting TV series in which the hapless ghost hunters Harry Spangler (Travis Wester) and Ed

Zeddemore (A.J. Buckley), first introduced as amateur investigators in “Hell House” (1.17), now returned as stars of their own show, are confronted by real ghosts and subsequently contrasted with the “real” hunters Sam (Jared Padalecki) and Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackels). The episode offers a delightful parody of the conventions of reality television as well as found footage horror tropes. “Monster Movie” is *Supernatural’s* black and white episode, offered up as a loving homage to Universal horror films, where the brothers investigate a series of murders that seem to have been committed by Dracula, The Wolfman, and the Mummy, but turn out to be a shapeshifter with a taste for classic horror. In this way, both episodes parody horror and the role of the “hero” within the genre while simultaneously signaling *Supernatural’s* place within a rich genre heritage. They also embody the rich evolution of Edlund’s creativity, wit, and generic experimentation.

These anecdotal examples of influence and intertextuality remind us that long-running shows like *Angel* not only leave their trace through themes, narrative, character, and visual style but through the legacy of the creative people—writers, directors, actors—who made *Angel* the richly textured, morally complex series that it was. So to see the legacy of *Angel* we need to look to the work of David Greenwalt (*Grimm* 2011-2017), Tim Minear (*American Horror Story* 2011- present), Drew Goddard (*Cabin in the Woods* 2011), Jeffrey Bell (*Alias* 2001-2006), Stephen S. DeKnight (*Spartacus* 2010-2013), Skip Skoolnik (*Salem* 2014-2017), Elizabeth Craft and Sarah Fain, (*The 100* 2014- present), Marita Grabiak (*Wonderfalls* 2004-2005), to name just a few. *Angel’s* shadow is long and its impact through these individuals is rich.

Another important way of considering *Angel’s* legacy is its continued relevance. In 2016, I argued for *Angel’s* significance as a series that repeatedly confronts the “audience with a pending apocalypse” (*Undead Apocalypse* 4) in a “global culture that encourages notions of apocalypse or evokes a language of apocalypse through natural disasters...economic collapse...climate change...social unrest...[and] global terrorism” (6). Since the publication of *Undead Apocalypse*, we have witnessed the UK referendum on Brexit (June 2016); the election of Donald Trump as US President (November 2016); the election of Doug Ford as Premier of Ontario, Canada (June 2018); and the appointment of Boris Johnson as UK Prime Minister (July 2019); each embodying a turn to the extreme right within Western politics, seemingly in response to, but also fueling, social and political

division. In 2019, the news is filled with stories of children separated from their parents and locked up in cages at the Mexican/US border; an increase in hate crime against the LGBTQ+ community; undercurrents of racism coming to the foreground through riots, mass shootings, and terrorist attacks. These events are an indication of the seeming public sanctioning of intolerance, prejudice, and hate. Additionally, unpredictable weather systems, record temperatures around the world, and the increasingly visible melting of polar icecaps suggest that the long-predicted impact of climate change, despite the claims of deniers, is coming to a head. While part of the population is reducing plastic consumption, turning to veganism, choosing alternative energies, and demonstrating against climate change to avert human extinction (see the group Extinction Rebellion), others vocally deny climate change and block necessary environmental legislation. As a result, the contemporary landscape seems consumed by the language of social division, dystopia, and apocalypse, and thus *Angel* has never felt more relevant.

The notion of the apocalypse has underpinned the show from its very first season with the introduction of the Shanshu prophecy and its recognition that the Angel with a soul will play a pivotal role in the coming apocalypse (“To Shanshu in LA” 1.22). As the series continued, and in particular by its final season when Angel and his team take over Wolfram & Hart with the naïve intention of fighting the evil from within the belly of the beast, the notion of apocalypse shifted away from a pending cataclysmic disaster and toward the daily erosion of the will to fight the good fight in favor of an increasing pressure toward complacency and acceptance. In “Underneath,” long-running antagonist Lindsey McDonald informs Angel that the apocalypse is not scheduled to take place but has already begun—“you’re soaking in it” he declares (00:37:46). The apocalypse, as Lindsey explains, is not a battle that will be launched with a “gong” but rather it insidiously underpins a global climate of complacency and complicity:

you learn a little more how to accept the world the way it is. Well here’s the rub—heroes don’t do that. Heroes don’t accept the world the way it is, they fight it...The world keeps sliding toward entropy and degradation and what do you do? You sit in your big chair and you sign your checks—just like

the Senior Partners planned. The war's here, Angel... (00:38:12-55).

With this speech, Lindsey signals Angel's complicity in the violence and horror of the world and subsequently launches him back on the path to fighting the good fight. This statement about what a "hero" will or will not do, calls back to two other key statements in the series' history that have underpinned the show's themes and messages. These seem increasingly relevant in these troubled times. In "Epiphany" (2.16), Angel explains that he has come to understand that "if nothing you do matters—then all that matters is what you do because that's all there is. What we do—now—today ... if there is no bigger meaning then the smallest act of kindness is the greatest thing in the world"(00:38:28-00:39:10), while in "Deep Down" (4.1), he explains to Connor that "Nothing in the world is the way it ought to be. It's harsh and cruel—and that's why there's us ... We live as though the world were as it should be to show it what it can be" (00:40:08-31). Both statements signal that it is not only the job of the hero to fight the big battles but to fight the everyday ones through acts of kindness, tolerance, and standing up for what is right. *Angel* concludes when Team Angel decide to bring down Wolfram & Hart by standing up to the evil in the form of the Circle of the Black Thorn, a cabal of leaders who fuel and profit from the evil in the world ("Not Fade Away"). While the act of standing up to these evil leaders is a key element of their battle, the final episode devotes as much time to small acts of kindness, personal expression, reconciliation, and the daily effort to help those in need—Wesley tending to Illyria's wounds, Lorne singing, Spike performing his poetry, Angel connecting with his son Connor, and Gunn helping Annie load up furniture to take to the new homeless shelter. Significantly, the episode ends not with the villains falling but with images of Angel, Gunn, Spike, and Illyria standing in the rain in the alley behind the Hyperion Hotel (their home of old), preparing to meet the hordes of demons that have been unleashed upon them. This image is far more significant and lasting as a conclusion, for while there is no resolution—the episode ends as the group launches into battle—it conveys the importance of standing up for what you believe despite the odds. Even if knowing that by wanting to "slay the dragon" ("Not Fade Away" 00:41:10) you may end up losing, choosing to fight the

good fight is all that counts: “If nothing you do matters, then all that matters is what you do.”

This message has subsequently come to underpin two key series, equally tapping into the global apocalyptic landscape within which we find ourselves: *Supernatural* and Russell T. Davies’ *Years and Years* (2019). In many ways these shows could not be more different, one a long running horror fantasy series about a family of demon hunters, who are continually locked in an apocalyptic battle between heaven and hell, and the other a comparatively realist drama, set in the not-too-distant future about an extended family negotiating their way through an ever-changing social, technological, economic, and political landscape, extrapolated from the contemporary global situation. While one wallows in fantasy and biblical battles between angels and demons, the other negotiates sexual politics, transhumanism and economic collapse. Both series offer, like *Angel*, an expression of the apocalyptic discourse that defines our times, exploring the gradual erosion of our will to stand up for what is right in favor of what is easy. In “Underneath” Gunn confronts the horror of his actions when he admits that by exchanging his signature on a seemingly meaningless document for the brain upgrade, he contributed to Fred’s death: “I knew—not about Fred. But when I signed it, I knew there would be consequences” (00:09:34-40). In *Supernatural*, while brothers Sam and Dean are repeatedly choosing to fight the good fight in *Angel*-fashion, standing up to the manipulative and powerful, whether demons, angels, Satan, or God, they also recognize that their loyalty to and love of their own family often overrides the greater good. This comes to a head in Season Fourteen as their attempt to save Jack, a Nephilim conceived by Satan but raised by Sam and Dean, causes them to only see the good in him and ignore the warning signs about Jack’s power, signs that lead to a bleak conclusion when he ‘accidentally’ kills a much loved character, in a fit of anger. Sam admits to Dean: “We knew Jack was dangerous. We always knew ... I knew something was gonna—I just didn’t know it’d be this” (“Absence” 14.18). While Sam and Dean’s motivation is, perhaps, less self-serving than Gunn’s, and the long-term consequences of their kindness and love is still unknown, Sam’s admission of his own complicity echoes Gunn’s. Both recognize the immediate consequence of their actions—or lack of action. In *Years and Years*, the Lyons family, who serve as a microcosm through which the show depicts a series of cataclysmic events, including a nuclear

blast, a financial crash, political upheaval, are also forced to face the consequences of their choices, when family matriarch Muriel Deacon (Anne Reid) points out to them that everything they have been through and witnessed is in fact all of their fault, due to their complicity in the face of personal gain: “everything ... the banks, the government, the recession, America, Mrs. Rook. Every single thing that’s gone wrong—it’s your fault ... We can sit here all day, blaming other people. We blame the economy, we blame Europe. The opposition. The weather ... it’s our fault. This is the world we built” (“Episode 6” 1.6, 00:08:00-11:00). Muriel’s confrontational statement serves as a wake-up call to the Lyons family, encouraging each of them to make a stand to effect some kind of change. In their own way, they each try to “slay the dragon” like Angel. Significantly, the series does not suggest that this one family can save the world—they are in fact one among many who choose to make a stand—but the message for the Lyons family is clear: “If nothing you do matters, then all that matters is what you do”; important words for our times and a lasting legacy for *Angel*.

Finally, the legacy of *Angel* can also be traced through the scholarship. When I wrote my first conference paper on *Angel*, for the Blood, Text, and Fears conference on *Buffy* at the University of East Anglia in 2002, I explored the possibility of publishing it in *Slayage*. At that point *Slayage* was still the journal of *Buffy Studies* and you could only include *Angel* if 50 percent of the essay was on *Buffy*. My essay “Walking the Fine Line Between Angel and Angelus” did not quite conform to that percentage split as it included only brief contextual discussions of Angel on *Buffy* before focusing almost exclusively on *Angel*. The editors agreed to publish the essay regardless, bending their rules for *Angel*. Since then a wealth of scholarship has emerged on *Angel*, through the work of Burkhead, Calvert, Comeford and Burnett, Foster and South, Fuller, Giannini, Halfyard, Jowett, Koontz, Masson, and Pateman, to name just a few, exploring the series from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. *Slayage* has over the years, and with the development of the Whedon Studies Association, expanded its remit to include all of Whedon’s television, comic-book, and cinematic output. It offers a rich tapestry of scholarship and has featured special issues devoted to *Firefly/Serenity*, *Dollhouse*, *Cabin in the Woods*, and *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, but there has yet to be a special issue devoted to *Angel*. The celebration of the show’s 20th anniversary in 2019 seemed like an ideal opportunity to produce such a special issue to reflect on the

significance of *Angel*. The aim of this special issue is to look back on the series with new perspectives and new approaches, explore hidden gems within its 110 episodes, revisit the scholarship that has surrounded the show, and consider its legacy.

The issue therefore begins with Lorrie Palmer's revisionist take on *Angel's* noir heritage, examining not the dimly lit alleyways and sparkling nocturnal cityscapes with which the look of the show is often associated, but rather the representation of the domestic spaces inhabited by Angel, Cordelia, and others. Tracing these spaces back to their appearance (or more often absence) in their predecessors of film noir's golden age, Palmer examines how the characters of Angel Investigations use their domestic spaces to assert and maintain their humanity within the cold isolation of the L.A. apocalypse. Continuing the theme of re-assessing the influences on *Angel*, the next three articles in the issue all focus on individual episodes in order to shed new light on both the series and the scholarship that precedes this special issue. Svetlana Seibel examines the impact of the Orpheus myth on the series via an analysis of the seminal Season Four Angel/Angelus/Faith episode "Orpheus" (4.15), while Bill Hughes considers how the series uses and re-imagines the myth of reflection in relation to literary vampire tradition, via a case study of Season One's "Eternity" (1.17). To complete this triptych, Dean Kowalski re-examines existentialist approaches to *Angel* and its characters, drawing upon the myth of Sisyphus and focusing upon the under-explored Season Five episode "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" (5.6), while opening the series to other philosophical readings. Tracking back from individual episodes to take a longer view, Catherine Pugh considers the ways in which the show engages with disability, arguing that *Angel* adopts a progressive form of representation in which impairment becomes an agent of change, a catalyst that forces characters who are or become disabled to rebuild their lives for the better and, far from becoming victims, become heroes in the fight against evil. In the penultimate article, Tony Kemerly, writing with Victoria Morgan, reflects upon the figures of Fred/Illyria and the impact of this startling and traumatic narrative turn (for the audience as well as the characters) on both gender and non-binary representation in the series. Between them Pugh and Kemerly/Morgan argue for *Angel's* intelligent and sensitive stance towards its multi-faceted, multi-cultural, multi-normative world, cementing the series' place as a significant and progressive text. Closing

the issue, and reflecting the argument laid out in this introduction, Erin Giannini examines the long-term legacy of *Angel* through a study of the post-*Angel* career of showrunner David Greenwalt, with particular emphasis on his two follow up shows, *Miracles* (2003) and *Moonlight* (2007-2008). As Giannini argues, many claims have been made, within the very pages of this journal for instance, for the supremacy of Whedon as the creative visionary behind his projects, as well as for the importance of the collective vision of the writers under his leadership. Since the end of *Angel*, those writers have fanned out across American television, bringing traces of *Buffy* and, more importantly for us here today, *Angel*, with them. Just as “Not Fade Away” ends in the middle of the story, so too does this special issue of *Slayage*. There is still so very much to say about this deeply important and frighteningly relevant show 20 years after it first graced our TV screens in a world so very different, yet so frighteningly similar to our own. Together the essays within this issue offer a glimpse into the rich world of *Angel* waiting to be explored. They are an excellent step on the road, building on the great work that has come before, but 20 years on, in scholarship terms, we still have a dragon to slay.

If nothing we do matters, all that matters is what we do, so what are you waiting for?

“Let’s go to work.” (“Not Fade Away” 00:47:15)

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