

Homefires Burning: Domestic Space in the Noir City of *Angel*

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We wrap ourselves in the city as we journey through it [...] drawing it around us like a cloak of many colors: a disguise, a refuge, an adventure, a home. (Wilson 159)

The “Noir legacy” (Abbott) of *Angel* (1999-2004) and its allegiance to the L.A. noir of classical Hollywood is well-established in the series’ urban aesthetic and narrative expressions. Dystopian fictions as well as urban theory predominantly imagine Los Angeles as an impersonal, transient, labyrinthine space in which privatized enclaves of privilege are juxtaposed against the carceral city of segregation, surveillance, and militarized policing. Whether labeled a theme park simulacrum of the real (Soja, Baudrillard, Dimendberg) or as “Fortress L.A.” (Davis 225), this city is not typically depicted as a place where people *live*, lacking as it does “connectivity and community” (Dear 132). Similarly, Richard Dyer notes the homelessness at the core of film noir: that settings are in public space rather than domestic; that no significant personal encounters occur in homes; and when homes *are* shown, they tend to be the “abnormal” homes of villains (19). This noir fiction is reinforced by urban reality: “In 1984, the city [of Los Angeles] was dubbed the ‘homeless capital’ of the U.S. because of the concentration of homeless people there” (Dear and Flusty 58).

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As creator/producers, Joss Whedon and David Greenwalt complicate these perspectives by situating *home* as a recurring geographic and emotional presence within *Angel's* noir city. Amidst the surrounding (and occasionally intruding) darkness of a demonic world, home is meant to be a sanctuary in *Angel* (as it was in the suburban Sunnydale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* [1997-2003]). Production designer Stuart Blatt and his team,¹ including set designer Andrew Reeder and set decorator Sandy Struth, devote considerable energy to the show's *mise-en-scène*. Their work evokes warmth, individuality, and community in the homes of Angel, Cordelia, Lorne, and Wesley² through a deliberative décor of rugs, pillows, exposed brick, warm wood, framed art, painted walls, and lamp glow.

These formal elements create an alternative, interior city space behind the noir-inflected presence of *Angel's* exterior settings where “hotels, motels, brothels, hospitals, casinos, warehouses, [and] sewers” comprise a city where no one comes to find a home (Jacob 77). Just as the noir city and its characteristic hard-boiled detective figure mirror each other—shadowed, liminal, solitary—L.A. and the titular detective of *Angel* are intimately connected. Roz Kaveney makes this symbiosis explicit when she states that “Angelus/Angel’s lifespan corresponds to that of the modern metropolis” (83). If the metaphorical and literal dark exterior spaces of the noir city parallel the detective protagonist (and his fellow urban inhabitants), how does *Angel* rewrite the noir city through its counterpoint presence of tasteful, cozy, textured domestic interiors? These home spaces analogize the show’s characters as only urban exteriors once did for the denizens of film noir. Whedon previously built a similar environmental subjectivity into *Buffy*. In “The Summers’ House as Domestic Space in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” Lorna Jowett describes, for example, the femininity of Buffy’s room as a “gendered space equipped with recognizably ‘girly’ items such as soft throw pillows” and the Summers house itself “as the key site of domestic ritual.” Jowett also explains that the “penetrability of the Summers house reinforces its gendering as female and it becomes a ‘safe’ arena for expressing emotion.” Opening up this subjective spatiality, *Angel* characterizes the domestic environments of both male *and* female characters through ritual, the free expression of emotion, penetrability by outside forces (necessitating battles to protect it, just as in *Buffy*), and quite a few throw pillows.

This kind of narrative and spatial design merge in *Angel* in significant ways. For example, the dominant genre influence of film noir in *Angel* crosses over into vampire conventions, which is clear when Paul Arthur points out that the “living and the dead commingle in noir as in no other Hollywood product before or since” (160). This merging extends to set design as well. *Angel*’s home environments in the first four seasons visualize an alternative to what Ian G. Klein describes as the “domesticated workplace” (2) of *Angel* Investigation’s Season Five relocation to Wolfram & Hart, where the team’s personal and professional spaces are blurred. Klein focuses on the Charles Eames-inspired set design of the law firm, which I suggest brings the urban outdoors in. The “raw materials—concrete, steel, wood, and glass” that remix “the elements of homes to create an office” (Klein 10) behind the necro-tempered windows of Wolfram & Hart are actually more typically found on architectural exteriors. Material form has a narrative function: the noir city of Los Angeles operates under “the gaze of surveillance” (Dimendberg 36) at both rooftop and street level. The prevalence of maps and cameras in film noir, as well as the use of high angle rooftop perspectives, frame this gaze. In his visual and spatial analysis of the interiors of Wolfram & Hart, Klein alludes to the same presence of surveillance as a “living theater” for Team *Angel* in which the Senior Partners are free “to observe how they operate” (10). The site’s spacious design features, such as “its wraparound balcony, a two-sided elevator, [and] an open lobby” (Klein 5), facilitate both a mobile camera-eye and a clear line of sight for surveillance within the diegesis. It is this building-within-a-building design that offers a visual, spatial, and narrative parallel to *Angel*’s “city underneath a city” (Upstone 103). The specific production design of the Wolfram & Hart interiors and the controlling gaze it implies brings that city indoors, disguising its dark heart with light and airy contemporary sleekness. In the dominant noir of the first four seasons, *Angel* could move undetected on (or beneath) the streets, could activate his own aerial gaze from rooftops where the camera framed his sight as a point-of-view shot (“The Thin Dead Line” 2.14), and could be impervious to any reflective surface (cameras, mirrors, glass), courtesy of his vampire nature. Once he becomes the CEO of Wolfram & Hart and where, not coincidentally, his home is transformed from a personal repository of memories to a corporate penthouse, *Angel* seems

to lose the mission. This blurring of home and work, as outlined by Klein, likewise blurs Angel's vision and his path. The warm domestic interiors of the first four seasons are a necessary refuge from the urban noir exteriors, each a counterbalance to the other, where Team Angel can access the healing power of home and define their identity within it and by it. Therefore, this study will navigate the domestic space of four central figures in Whedon's vampire detective series through specific domestic practices—ritual, community, and sanctuary—in the production and set design where objects and décor frame an alternate legible text in the noir city.

We cannot think about what home signifies in the film noir genre—or in *Angel*—without also accounting for its place within the city. *Angel's* noir L.A. challenges the impossibility of home as a refuge in the urban spaces of postwar America as typically portrayed in Hollywood's detective cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. The series does this by contrasting Blatt's individualized interiors with the city's exterior shadows of *Angel's* violent urban narrative. Such a simultaneous co-existence in the noir city as is visible in the Whedonverse is impossible in the film noir cycle of postwar cinema, where there are

spaces of entertainment, dining, travel, and lodging, whose function is to provide for those literally, and also metaphorically, in transit. They substitute for what cannot be obtained in a world where nothing is 'settled,' where the family home is unimaginable because it would depend on relationships (economic, sexual, and nurturant) that in noir narratives are not yet finalized and perhaps never will be (R. Barton Palmer 73).

In the serialized, often cruel world that Whedon and Greenwalt create for their characters, nothing in the 'verse is 'settled,' but *Angel's* *mise-en-scène* offers the possibility of security. *Home* means something here. It is where identity and yes, soul, are made material and tangible through colors, objects, design, and the human interactions that animate domestic space beyond the "demonization and estrangement" (Farish 130) of the noir city outside.

In his comprehensive study of film noir, *More Than Night* (1998), James Naremore examines the nighttime *mise-en-scène* of the noir city and notes its ultimate emptiness. Here, “the city streets are weirdly deserted” amidst “vacant warehouses, abandoned houses, and streets devoid of cars” (Naremore 249). The specificity of *Angel*’s nighttime urban noir takes these same locations and fills them with the material detritus of an industrial and commercial wasteland. In “The Thin Dead Line,” the opening scene tracks two scared teenagers running from the looming shadow of an undead policeman framed by a canted camera angle on the graffitied concrete structures around them. Chain-link fencing, razor wire, steam vents, overflowing garbage cans, empty bridges, alleys, and tunnels form a barren Los Angeles—the only people visible are these homeless teens and the monster chasing them. Homelessness is also at the root of “Hero” (1.9) in which a half-breed demon clan hides in an abandoned brick building with haphazardly boarded-up windows on a deserted street where nearby buildings are dark depopulated shells. Around them we see a city of steam, metal barrels, burned-out cars, litter, derelict warehouses, and rusted fire escapes. In contrast to the lived-in domestic interiors under discussion here, *Angel* presents its urban exteriors through heavily industrial spaces: the port of Los Angeles with its cargo containers and gantry cranes (“Hero,” “Provider” 4.12), the oil derricks on the fringes of the city (“Long Day’s Journey” 4.9), and dimly-lit lots piled high with the ghosts of L.A.’s ubiquitous car culture reduced to wrecked hulks stripped for parts (“Judgement” 2.1; “The Shroud of Rahmon” 2.8). It is the juxtaposition against this outside world that gives *home* its true character in the City of Angels.

I Love What You’ve Done with the Place: Four Domestic Locales in *Angel*

The style, mood, and decorative design of the domestic spaces inhabited by Angel (David Boreanaz), Wesley (Alexis Denisof), Cordelia (Charisma Carpenter), and Lorne (Andy Hallett) create significant meaning through the interaction of characters and environment in the noir homeworlds of the series. Indeed, the production design in Season One reveals the most

about Angel in this way. As a vampire who has lived for over 240 years, across continents and decades of diverse taste cultures during the evolution of the arts, furnishings, fabrics, and décor, he has cultivated for himself not just a superhero “Batcave” (“City Of” 1.1) but a personalized habitat that is both refined and earthy. It has evolved somewhat from *Buffy*, where his first apartment was fairly featureless, with book shelves, opaque screens, bare concrete walls, and one pale carved Chinese statue on display in a glass case (likely a souvenir of Angelus’ Boxer Rebellion experience in 1900, seen in *Angel*’s “Darla” 2.7 and in *Buffy*’s “Fool for Love” 5.7). His subsequent lair in the Crawford Street Mansion was his least livable home, seeming only to contain an oversized fireplace as a backdrop to some of his more fraught moments with Buffy.

As for Angel’s home in the first season of his own show, Dustin Dunaway claims that this “apartment is intentionally Spartan. Few things symbolize a ‘home,’ save for some items of Asian décor” (21-22). However, this observation overlooks the tremendous individuality designed into the space. These details were placed with great care by set decorator Sandy Struth, who researched what life for Angel’s human self, Liam, would have been like in 1700s Ireland and conveyed this through “a lot of picture of castles and things” (Holder et al. 43) to reflect his past. She also informs us that Angel “collected masks. He collected books. He collected a lot of things that represented his passage of time. And I had a lot of nice things about London, because he had spent a lot of time in Europe. But then you’ve got to have stuff from the forties and fifties. Because he was alive then, or in the thirties. It really gave you freedom to pick up stuff that he just might like. And that was a lot of fun, because you wanted to give his history” (Holder et al. 43). Angel’s home is the picture post card of a world traveler as well as a time machine of a very long life—and the production team presents this materially through *mise-en-scène*.

The dense visual details Struth describes are clear in the basement apartment below Angel’s first detective office. Here are the rich textures of exposed brick, fringed silk, golden wine goblets, Old World art, bound volumes, intricate metal candlesticks, leather upholstery, antique maps and scrolls, a rocking chair, a steamer trunk, the deep yellow glow of a globe-shaped lamp on his bedside table, and fabrics (rugs, pillow covers, throws,

blankets) in the ornate flora of European tapestry as well as the bold geometry of Native American patterns. A color palette of browns, blacks, deep reds, soft greens, cream, and gold imbues Angel's living space with comfort, informality, and eclecticism in rooms that look understatedly expensive. Sara Upstone focuses on the "Otherness in *Angel*" in a way that echoes the alienating experiences of film noir city dwellers in the narrative and the aesthetic of the "show's very style, its dominant night-time location, [which] reflects not only Angel's photophobia, but also stresses LA's darkness: that Angel is just one of many isolated figures dwelling in its shadows" (103). While this holds true in the exteriors, Angel does not 'dwell' there—he goes home to interiors arranged with the coziest possible accoutrements (particularly in this first, decidedly non-Spartan apartment): comfy leather arm chairs, lamp light to read by, and warm fabrics with sensuous, stitched tapestry patterns to curl up in (as Cordelia does in "Parting Gifts" [1.10] and as Faith Lehane (Eliza Dushku) does in "Sanctuary" [1.19]) These personal decorative details and the domestic spatial practices they make possible are also a challenge to Richard Dyer's reading of the noir city and its detective protagonist: "the hero is denied an environment of safety, coziness, or rootedness" (19). Later in the series, in room 312 of the Hyperion Hotel, Angel's home environment reflects its 1920s Art Deco origins. Working with Stuart Blatt, set decorator Sandy Struth explains how they "went to the thirties (for Angel's new digs), and Angel's apartment has all this wonderful thirties furniture, and it's a little lighter. And his art has gotten a little brighter" as he transitions from Season One into the Hyperion (Holder et al. 226). With this attention to décor, Angel's suite becomes a home. The walls are painted a deep chocolate brown, set off by blue-gold patterned wallpaper inserts, framed landscape paintings, a plush sofa, a free-standing antique globe, a wet bar with metal shaker and glass tumblers, and a kitchenette. Up until he moves into the suite at Wolfram & Hart in Season Five, Angel is clearly the classicist of the group.

In contrast, Wesley Wyndam-Price is the modernist. First seen in "Redefinition" (2.11), Wesley's apartment is stark in its dark-light design, dominated by its deep grey painted walls contrasted with gleaming white wainscoting, built-in cabinetry and shelving, and floor-to-ceiling pillars. His furnishings are sleek and straight-edged in patterned greys, curtains

are black-and-white plaid, candlesticks are gleaming silver, and grey-black throw pillows are striped and textured. What Edward Dimendberg calls “the systematic elision of color from the representation of urban actuality” in film noir (12) is suggested at first glance by the grey-hued monochromatic color scheme here, but a closer look reveals that Wesley’s décor is accented with decorative touches that bespeak his urban cultural tastes as well as his cerebral nature. He has an abstract sculpture in gleaming onyx, long sets of leather bound volumes organized by color (red, gold, black, brown) on his shelves, and ornamental bowls and vases of dense red glass that adorn his coffee table and end tables. His London background (as a former member of the Watchers’ Council) is made visible in large panoramic prints on his walls—with simple white mattes and black frames—where we see the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, and Tower Bridge. The European provenance of his association with the Council is also made clear by the antique swords mounted on his living room wall. His motorcycle days as a “rogue demon hunter” (“Parting Gifts”) are also imagined by black-and-white photograph of a bleached white highway curving off into the distance, taking a sharp right turn in the deep background of the shot, a visual reflection of his sudden detour into Angel Investigations after Doyle’s (Glenn Quinn) death in “Hero” (00:14:40-41). Wesley’s home is not just aesthetic but thematic in its dominant grey-white pattern, particularly so when Lilah Morgan (Stephanie Romanov) confronts him in Season Three about his morally ambiguous position—having stolen Angel’s son and being estranged from his friends at AI—when he ends his relationship with her. He explains his decision: “There is a line, Lilah, black and white, good and evil,” to which she reminds him that, when you mix black and white, you always get grey, “no matter how much white you put back in” (“Habeas Corpses” 4.8, 00:09:04-22).

If the design of Angel’s home is in the classicist mode and Wesley’s the modernist, Cordelia lives in the sunshine of California romanticism. From her building’s Spanish-influenced exterior to the summery colors inside, Cordy’s apartment has a soft yellow paint scheme amidst a wealth of windows and natural light. Her living room is dominated by a large arched window, while an area rug in shades of peach, cream, and pale green brings a floral pattern into the room. Outdoor light sources brighten

the tiles (of cobalt, white, and yellow) framing her fireplace and illuminate the stained glass window in her dining room (which includes French doors, visible in the party scene in “She” [1.13]). Her dining room (a site for both food and research) contains a generous table and chair set with a matching wooden sideboard, its shelves displaying ceramic housewares in pale yellow with artisanal blue-green leaf and vine designs. Cordy’s kitchen is painted and tiled in soft white, has a pale green linoleum floor (where Fred eats peanut butter directly from the jar in “That Vision Thing” [3.2]), a vintage white stove, and a black-and-white tile backsplash, while her bathroom is bright with sea-themed framed prints. Her bedroom is feminine, with a rose-colored fabric headboard and floral-printed curtains. The production and set design of these objects and rooms renders identity and ownership in material terms. Juliette C. Kitchens reminds us of this when she notes that the Whedonverse underscores domestic space “through the subjectivity of objects” (5) and that “we fight to protect home” (3). So, when Cordy walks into this apartment for the first time (“Rm W/ a Vu” 1.5), she declares, “It’s perfect and beautiful and so me. I need it” and is, therefore, willing to do mortal battle with the malevolent spirit of Maude Pearson (Beth Grant), to stake her claim there (00:23:51-54). Cordelia’s identity is reflected in this living space and signals her proper arrival to a Los Angeles far removed from the struggling-actress squalor of her first apartment—with its brown tap water and cockroaches. Its sunny interiors are a refuge from the dark urban work of Angel Investigations while its resident ghost, Dennis, provides a protective and nurturing presence for Cordelia.

Far from the sun, but nevertheless deemed a “loving haven” (77) by Valerie Estelle Frankel, is the subterranean nightclub-fronted residence of Lorne. Adjacent to the vivid neon pinks and blues of Caritas, Lorne lives in a much more subdued, elegant apartment whose entertaining amenities include a bed and a wet bar in the same room. There is a Shangri-L.A. vibe in both his work and home spaces in Caritas, where the glam interior is an oasis carved out of its resolutely downtown, seedy front entrance and its dark back alley. Stuart Blatt recalls that Joss Whedon imagined this club as the “kind of place that maybe Dean Martin would have hung out in” so the designer showed him sketches of “something that would look like a swanky Las Vegas lounge from maybe like the

seventies” (Holder, et al. 208-209). Stan Beeler further connects the *mise-en-scène* of Caritas from Lorne’s musical expression and clothing style to “the tradition of Camp,” reflecting Los Angeles as a site of an entertainment industry defined by exaggerated performativity while simultaneously rejecting the “film-noir ambience” outside (89).

In addition, Lorne’s adjoining apartment—its objects and aesthetics—aligns with the cultural context of the quintessential bachelor pad presented by Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy* magazine in the 1950s-60s, itself a mediation of (gendered) performance. This affluent postwar habitat was designed around entertaining and consumption in a domestic space for the pleasure of what Elizabeth Fraterrigo calls a “leisure-oriented masculine identity grounded in a world of posh residences and urban excitement” (751) with an emphasis on “ease and serenity” (755) in its mod-con comforts. Like Wesley’s home, there is a modernist aesthetic to Lorne’s décor, but with more decadent touches in keeping with his identity as an entertainer. But because Lorne’s sexuality is never specified, the retro-sensual décor of his home automatically diverges from the ways in which “*Playboy* appropriated modern design as a masculine idiom” that drew attention to “the bachelor’s heterosexual identification” (Fraterrigo 758). The naturally-textured grasscloth wallpaper—a “decorating staple of the 1960’s and 1970’s” (“Grasscloth Wallpaper”)—his platform bed, sinuous pale blue-grey glass sculpture, and black teak headboard are joined by the kind of decorative flourishes eschewed in the hetero-bachelor domain celebrated by *Playboy*. His semi-circular vintage cocktail bar is set off by a bold metallic backdrop of copper, silver, and gold. An ice bucket in “sea-foam green,” a color never found in the postwar bachelor pad (Fraterrigo 758), sits on the bar and a large framed print of a centuries-old sailing vessel at sea hangs on the adjacent wall (the latter object suggesting Lorne’s identity as a voyager, having ‘sailed’ across dimensions from Pylea to his adopted home in the seaside city of Los Angeles). On the other hand, the “masculine aesthetic” (Fraterrigo 758) of postwar males’ penthouses and the single-man city apartments of film noir—in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Double Indemnity* (1944), for example—do mirror Lorne’s dwelling as a non-procreative domestic space. Although the pregnant Darla (Julie Benz) is our first window into his home (being brought there in both “Offspring” [3.7] and “Lullaby” [3.9]), she is

eventually exiled to the alley behind Lorne's bedroom wall to give birth. The form and function of Lorne's domestic space are uniquely Lorne. Unlike the "bachelor pad within the office" (Klein 8) we see in Angel's Season Five penthouse, which lacks any personal touches, the *mise-en-scène* of the Caritas apartment visualizes the possibilities of an alternative bachelor identity. Lorne is coded as queer—from his nonjudgmental use of pronouns ("Shiny Happy People" 4.18) to his "perfect execution of queer divahood" (Lorrie Palmer 196) in "Over the Rainbow" (2.20)—and the way in which "he is Other as a green demon" (Frankel 77) translates his transgressive identity through his décor. Until he reveals his nomenclature in "Belonging" (2.19), Lorne is initially only referred to as 'The Host,' a case of function following form.

The production design surrounding Angel, Wes, Cordy, and Lorne (props, décor, color) makes material their individual natures. Likewise, though, it visualizes the emotional connections between them for those moments when they come in from the noir city outside.

"Let's Eat": Community and Connectivity through Rituals, Hosting, and Nights In

When Angel is consigned to the ocean deep by Connor (Vincent Kartheiser) in "Tomorrow" (3.22), he dreams of a bounteous dinner table around which his urban family pass bowls and platters of home-cooked food ("Deep Down" 4.1). Angel feels blessed by the banquet and the company, encouraging everyone to dig in: "Let's eat" (00:01:34-35). The camera sweeps over the white linen tablecloth to frame pineapple-spiked ham, mashed potatoes, vegetables, fresh rolls, green salad, and gravy (which Lorne informs Connor is contained in a "boat," reminding us where Angel really is at that moment and who put him there). And, until the floor begins to flood under Angel and the nightmare of his submersion returns (and he realizes that no one will pass any food to *him*), this domestic ritual might remind viewers of their own memories of shared meals at home.³

Ritual is a recurring point in *Angel* and is echoed in similar scenes of friendship, community, connectivity, and leisure activities that the Fang

Gang engage in throughout the series. In the homes of Angel, Wesley, and Cordelia, this practice sets them apart from Hollywood's typical depiction of the noir city in which "a basic domestic ritual like eating is transferred from family to public eating place" such as a lunch counter or diner (Dyer 19). These kinds of commercialized locales are "non-places [which] involve people in transit, unengaged because the anonymity of the crowd disconnects their sense of self [...] places where life—and identity—are on pause" (Pugh 63). Rather than this static pause of life and identity, the domestic spaces in *Angel* are frequently the locus of significant narrative momentum, through scenes of emotional bonding as well as through the "fight to protect home" (Kitchens 3) when invading demons appear. In this way, the group finds communal identity and sense of self through the kinds of family ritual (hosting meals, game nights, parties, and even quiet moments where inner selves are bared) which are missing from the hard-boiled detective cinema of 1940s-1950s Hollywood noir.

The first of these rituals occurs in "Parting Gifts" when Wesley is welcomed into the Angel Investigations family (and as a series regular) through the hosting of breakfast—Angel serves up scrambled eggs, toast, freshly-cut fruit, and orange juice to Cordy and Wes. The *mise-en-scène* here includes a medium-shot in which the camera is positioned just above the kitchen table, next to which Cordy is making coffee on the stove. Angel's hand enters the right side of the frame to lay down cutlery wrapped in a green cloth napkin for Wesley, who is lingering near the stairs, poised to exit for more rogue demon hunting but clearly wishing to be invited to stay. Pale green glasses, plates, and a pepper mill are near the napkin while a bowl of colorful fruit dominates the foreground of the shot. The dialogue in this scene indicates the ritual nature of this event. Cordelia informs Wes, "After a long night of fighting lurking evil, we get eggs," adding that Angel is a "good cook" (00:41:03-14). A full shot follows, encompassing the whole kitchen and emphasizing the physical closeness of the three characters cocooned within their cozy domestic environment.

When food and drink are served at home, it signifies family and emotional connectedness among people. Whether it is one-on-one or in a group, domestic hosting functions in *Angel* to define character through environment in a way that contrasts with the dark city/dark soul subjectivity on display across the exterior city spaces of the show's Los

Angeles setting. It is no surprise that Cordelia—the show’s beating heart for the first three seasons—does this with the most pizzazz. At her apartment, she brings coffee and sandwiches (“To Shanshu in L.A.” 1.22) and cinnamon-infused blood (“Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been?” 2.2) to Wesley and Angel, as she hosts work meetings after their first office is destroyed (“To Shanshu”). Cordy’s house-warming party in “She” exposes Angel’s comedic but perfectly-timed dance moves as well as Wesley’s complete lack of game with the opposite sex even as he waxes rhapsodic over the “genius” mini-Reubens she is serving to her guests (00:01:11-15). What separates Cordy’s domestic space in *Angel* from that inhabited by women in film noir and in some other corners of the Whedonverse is the autonomy it represents—an independence she enacts based on her determined ownership of the space. Frankel points out that “Whedon’s heroines, or occasionally male heroes, reclaim the home repurposing it as a place of safety and sharing it with the lost” (75). The way that Cordelia repurposes the haunted residence she acquires is to make it a home: decorate it, invite people over, and share it with its ghost (the formerly lost Dennis Pearson). In “Disharmony” (2.17), she scolds the men (Angel and Wesley) for their intention to “bust into my house and kill my friend without giving her a chance to explain herself” when the newly-vamped Harmony Kendall (Mercedes McNab) is her guest (00:58-00:01:02). Girlfriends painting each other’s toenails while wearing fluffy bathrobes? That spells home. Finally, it is Cordelia who spins as positive the gang’s move into the creepy Hyperion as their new base of operations: “I mean, a few throw pillows, what’s not to love!” (“Are You Now” 00:42:56-58). Food and drink, and their link to the objects and sets designed into the series’ *mise-en-scène*, particularly situate the domestic space presided over by Cordelia Chase as both personal and communal.

Rituals of ownership, hosting, and emotional bonding linked to the home are likewise enacted through leisure and homemaking activities in *Angel*. Wes and Gunn engage in a spirited match over the board game “Risk” in Cordy’s apartment (“Blood Money” 2.12) and, later, Angel and Gunn sit on Wesley’s couch playing videogames (Angel: “I’m tired of being the dead one!”) in “Billy” (3.6 00:04:40-42). Mid-century American society, as well as classic film noir, perceived the “domestic realm” in a way that “radically gendered” it, designating it as being “traditionally ‘a

woman's place” (Dixon 84). Once a space has been feminized, men dare not enter. Emotional interactions in noir between men, therefore, tend to occur in streets and back alleys, with guns and fists not conversation. In *Angel*, while there are certainly plenty of back-alley expressions of masculinity, the show's cozy domestic interiors frame moments where men discuss their romantic relationships; for example, Doyle sits in Angel's kitchen with him and confides about his first marriage in “The Bachelor Party” (1.7). These spaces are also where men reveal their vulnerability. It is in Cordy's apartment that Angel confesses his despair in realizing that the Shanshu prophecy's promise of restoring his humanity may be illusory (“Judgement”). In these scenes, staged at home, *Angel* diverges from what John Houseman described in 1947 as the ‘hero’ during that era of peak noir: “The love of women and the companionship of men are denied him” (cited in Krutnik 89). In this series, domestic space is safe for noir and safe for noir men.

Angel himself continues the repurposing of both domestic space and film noir once he has a son, frequently assisted by Lorne. In “Dad” (3.10), Angel sings the Irish lullaby, “Danny Boy,” to the baby, whom he has swaddled and placed inside a dresser drawer on his bed, when Lorne enters with a stuffed toy bear and croons some Smokey Robinson. In a later episode, “Loyalty” (3.15), Wes visits Angel's room to talk about the threat posed by Daniel Holtz (Keith Szarabajka) while the new father lights his stove to heat a pan of water for Connor's bottle. Angel folds laundry, tiny baby attire, as he waits for the water to heat up. So again, two men sit together in domestic space and discuss emotion as Angel admits that he used to be afraid of love, of its power, but that “what I feel for Connor, even that fear, Wes, it's not terrible. It's beautiful” (00:40:34-50). The barren domestic space occupied by classic noir detectives like Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart, *The Maltese Falcon* 1941) and Philip Marlowe (also Bogart, *The Big Sleep* 1946) is not how the noir city of *Angel* works. These men do not just revise the space of home, they own it.

There is one final ritual of ownership in domestic space here worth discussing—and this is overtly mirrored by the act of production design itself—and that is choosing a color for one's home. Sandy Struth hints at this aspect of choice in how the show designed Angel's Hyperion residence, saying that they conceived of the building as an ongoing

shopping opportunity, where “he got to furnish his room from the other rooms” (Holder et al. 226). The act of painting domestic interiors brings characters together and identifies them in regard to each other and their place in the world of the series. In “Fredless” (3.5), Winifred Burkle psychologically lets go of her cave dwelling in Pylea, where the walls were etched in her mad mathematical scribblings (a compulsive habit she initially continues in her Hyperion room). After finding her purpose and identity within the team, she has one last family moment with her parents and officially joins Angel Investigations by painting her graffitied walls a clean clear white with the help of her new friends. A similar familial transition unfolds in “The Price” (3.19) when Angel has to let go of Connor, lost to Quor’toth with his nemesis Holtz, and repaint his apartment after the earthquake and fire in “Loyalty.” His AI family gathers with paint brushes and spackling knives to help him. The Groosalugg (Mark Lutz) approaches Angel to suggest that “Pomegranate Mist is the wrong color for this room” and that perhaps “Sunset Splendor” is a better choice for a warrior (00:00:31-57). They all work together to patch the cracks in the walls, clean and scrub the room’s charred surfaces, debate paint swatches, and restore Angel’s home life without Connor. The violent shadowed city may mirror the typical noir detective, but Whedon, Blatt, et al. devise *Angel*’s interiors to reflect character (and, more notably, the deep bonds *between* characters) as a counterpoint to the impersonal dystopia of exterior L.A.

The House Always Wins: Sanctuary Spells Home

Those bonds, while designed into the built environment of the series’ domestic interiors, are also the source of sanctuary in *Angel*. Aside from the evolving sexual relationships of the show’s various pairings (Angel/Darla, Fred/Gunn, Wesley/Lilah), beds are a significant locus in *Angel*. Encounters with the outside world send the wounded and impaired back to domestic spaces—and the beds of their friends and urban family members—to heal and be nurtured. Cordelia endures frequent physical upheaval, much of it initiated by the transference of Doyle’s visions to her in “Hero.” In “That Vision Thing,” terrible boils erupt across her face as

Lilah arranges fake (and physically destructive) visions transmitted to her by Brain Man (Kal Penn) to coerce Angel into freeing Billy Blim (Justin Shilton) from his hell dimension prison. The production design is highlighted here, as the camera tracks low over her dining room table and its crushed black velvet table runner with a floral design in deep maroon, rose, and white, then tilts upward to frame Cordelia seated at the foot of her bed with Wes, Fred, Angel, and Gunn surrounding her protectively. The *mise-en-scène* at this moment links the domestic environment to character because in this unbroken shot Cordy finally confesses that the visions are killing her, a secret she has kept from everyone except Dennis.

The men of *Angel* most likely to give up their beds for women in distress are Angel and Lorne, who are even joined at the level of production design when one considers their Las Vegas connection. As Sandy Struth points out (above), the decorative inspiration for Lorne's home in Caritas was the nighttime urban playground in the desert, a time when we know that Angel was also there. During the gang's rescue of Lorne in "The House Always Wins" (4.3), some of which was shot on location in Las Vegas, Angel reminisces about hanging out with the famous playboy-stars of the Rat Pack. Later the two men are connected by Darla's need for a safe place to give birth, and it is Lorne's bed that provides comfort when they are on the run from Wolfram & Hart's medieval obstetrics cabal and their ninja hitmen. Even though Holtz disrupts this domestic sanctuary by lobbing incendiary devices into it, Lorne's bed is at least a temporary shelter from the (fire)storm.

Angel's two beds of the series provide more successful refuge on several occasions, to both Faith and to Cordelia. He shelters Faith in Season One when her violent actions as a rogue Slayer, from killing Mayor Wilkinson's deputy in *Buffy* ("Bad Girls" 3.14) to viciously torturing Wesley in *Angel's* "Five by Five" (1.18), catch up with her. He gently puts her in his bed and covers her with a tapestry-patterned blanket. The homey pink box of doughnuts he brings her later is, literally, icing on the cake. Faith returns to Angel's bed (this time at the Hyperion) in the Season Four episode "Orpheus" (4.15) when she doses herself with a dangerous hallucinogenic drug, allows Angelus to feed from her jugular, and renders him unconscious so his friends can restore Angel's soul. (See Seibel in this issue.) The experience nearly kills Faith, who recovers in his bed, tended

to by Fred and Lorne. Finally, this bed is a sanctuary for Cordy's recovery after she is bitten by a hungry and hormonal Darla in "Offspring" and again in "Birthday" (3.11) when she is comatose while Skip (David Denman) takes her on a tour of an alternative existence where she is the star of her own successful sitcom (*Cordy!*). Angel's bed is her anchor, eventually pulling her back into her body when she rejects the shiny happy (and false) city that Skip shows her.⁴ Later, director Bill Norton frames this bed at its most significant in "Provider" (3.12), first in a close-up of drowsy Angel and Cordy, with Connor between them nursing from a bottle. The camera gradually pulls straight up to frame the bed in a full aerial shot. The two adults are on their sides, knees drawn up and curving inward toward each other, forming a protective barrier around the baby, more traditionally domestic than any single image in the series. As one who knows how to savor the comforts of home, Cordelia most effectively sums up the value of that private space, the longing for it when all seems lost: "I wanna be in my bed. I wanna order some Thai food. I wanna read the latest issue of *Marie Claire*" ("Over the Rainbow" 00:18:36-48).

As he does in so many delightful ways, Lorne expands notions of home and the gendered spaces of the city beyond the roles traditionally assigned to men. The production design of his home and its visual homage to the bachelor pad ideal made popular by *Playboy* magazine form a playful and somewhat ironic backdrop for his alternative performance of masculinity. The postwar bachelor lived in a space where "food preparation and consumption were couched in gendered terms" and "cooking red meat was clearly a man's job" (Fraterrigo 760). However, "the playboy refrained from baking, for in the 1950s the cake served as 'an icon of American womanhood.' *Playboy* did not attempt to refashion such a powerful symbol of femininity into a masculine enterprise" (Fraterrigo 760). Lorne has no such hang-ups. In the midst of the gang's battle with the Beast in the apocalyptic storyline that defines Season Four, he stands tall in the Hyperion lobby and tells the departing warriors of Angel Investigations, "We'll stay right here, keep the homefires burning, bake some nice healing muffins" ("Habeas Corpses" 00:26:35-42). Thus, the artfully repurposed, contemporary version of cake is an Othered male's defense of the home in the noir city. It should be noted that the only film

noir with an actual apocalypse in it is the nuclear *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), where Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) most definitely never bakes.

Conclusion

As Angel transitions, in Season Five, from a street savior to the corporate CEO of Wolfram & Hart, only his domestic space remains part of the narrative and the *mise-en-scène*. Aside from a scene in “That Old Gang of Mine” (3.3), where we see Charles Gunn sleep fully clothed on a basic bed in a non-descript room, Season Five continues the overall omission of his home from the series. Similarly, there is only a brief shot, from archival footage, of Wesley’s apartment in “Origin” (5.18) and we never see Lorne’s post-Caritas/Hyperion home. There is one significant scene in Fred’s new bedroom—a twilight orange grotto decorated in fleamarket-feminine—where she dies in desiccated agony before Illyria awakens in her hollowed-out body (“A Hole in the World” 5.15).⁵ Domestic space in Season Five is centered solely on Angel’s penthouse at Wolfram & Hart, a location that lacks the lampglow and Old-World textiles that so dominate his Season One home or the antiques and family memories (like the snow-globe he got for the infant Connor, “Loyalty”) in his Hyperion suite. Instead, it suggests mass-produced artifice—recessed lighting, polished wood, black trim, featureless abstract paintings, and a set of plain vases in muted metallic red, blue, and green—as a display of corporate power rather than as a lifetime collection of objects with emotional resonance. The only reminder of ritual and community we see in this space is in the early episode, “Unleashed” (5.3), when Angel invites Wes, Fred, Gunn, and Lorne to his home; they admire how “luxurious” it is while ordering Chinese food delivery, the fifth season’s only domestic moment among these characters (00:41:17-19). This absent domestic space of all but one of the series’ main characters, and the impersonal design of Angel’s penthouse, suggests that the urban corruption identified with film noir has finally invaded Angel’s L.A. family, no less than the pernicious influence of Wolfram & Hart itself. This invasion is architectural—the gaze of the external noir city enabled by bringing it indoors—and subversive. In Klein’s interview with Stuart Blatt, the production designer

of the series reveals that his intention was never to make the Wolfram & Hart set “feel like home for this created family” (13). It is not just that domestic space and the rituals of home (for Wes, Cordy, Lorne, and the other members of Angel Investigations) are significantly de-emphasized in Season Five, but Angel’s corporate penthouse is a material regression: now, the urban noir home *is* impossible.

Here, a final film noir example from *Laura* (1944) suggests a conclusion about that impossibility through the transformation of domestic space in *Angel*’s final season. This 1940s film takes as its male protagonist’s main quest the absence of a woman. Its domestic setting signals this lack in the unhomeliness that permeates throughout. Here, film noir and the Whedonverse again merge, with a hint of the Freudian. In noir, “a sizable class of the architectural spaces bears the unmistakable residue of the uncanny—as in Freud’s mapping of *unheimlich* for objects or places that induce in the subject a compound dread of mortality as supernatural malevolence” (Arthur 166). In *Buffy*, the home-based death of Joyce Summers (Kristine Sutherland) “is most strongly located in her own domestic space (now made *unheimlich* by the situation)” (Jowett). This same *unheimlich* (unhomely) or uncanny aura resonates with the nature of Angel’s living space inside the “belly of the beast” (“Just Rewards” 5.2) at Wolfram & Hart (00:10:36-37). The absence of a permanent female presence is preordained by the “bachelor pad” designed for him there as “a place he never has to leave” (Klein 8); his isolation (as in the noir city outside) is complete. So, to unite lost women, domestic space, film noir, and production design: the missing, presumed dead Laura (Gene Tierney) haunts the psyche of the detective hired to investigate her murder. Mark McPherson (Dana Andrews) becomes obsessed, sexually and romantically, with her—which the film conveys through *mise-en-scène* and camerawork. Director “Otto Preminger spends a good deal of time panning across a series of immaculate glass shelves (the film opens with such a pan) filled with *objets d’art* in an elegant, coolly lit alcove of a very expensive New York apartment” (Christopher 157). The ostentatious display of wealth in the uncanny home where a woman is an absent presence characterizes both *Angel* Season Five and Angel’s home within it. The missing woman is Cordelia Chase. In her final appearance, in “You’re Welcome” (5.12), she is appalled by Angel’s living space (and, for

that matter, by the entire environment of Wolfram & Hart) and reads this slick corporate monstrosity as a sign he has lost the mission. By casting a glamour spell on the chilly surface of the workplace in order to hide its true face—a stage for the Senior Partners to spy upon (Klein 11)—the firm has robbed Angel of the real noir city outside which previously helped define him by its contrast with homes he designed for himself. Certainly, his domestic space in this season is the inverse of his basement apartment in Season One, as well as his room in the Hyperion. The personal objects and tactile textures in those environments made material his identity, his long memory, his soul. The unhomely décor of the penthouse clearly signals this lack to Cordelia. As she tells Angel he has been seduced, she stands between him and an oversized framed painting on the wall—a sub-Mondrian arrangement of pointless black lines and isolated geometric patches of yellow, orange, red, and a single unappealing splotch of olive green. A quick rack focus directs our gaze to this painting as Cordelia says, “They dazzled you with shiny objects and beautiful things,” glancing back at it (I hope, with irony) (00:15:24-25). She reminds him who he was, that he had once had “a light, a glimmer” showing him the way (00:18:04-08). Cordy, as we learn in the final reel, is both living and dead during this episode. The Powers That Be, she says, saw he had “slipped the track” and sent her to get him back on it (00:16:51-52). The detective hero of film noir is often trapped in the psychological and architectural labyrinth of the city (Christopher 207), as Angel is in Wolfram & Hart when Cordelia visits him, so it is fitting that the character whose domestic space once exuded the sunshine of California romanticism would be the one to light his way out of it. And this clarity carries him through the remainder of the series. When Angel says, “Let’s go to work,”⁶ in the show’s final scene, he isn’t lost in L.A.’s noir city anymore, he’s home.

Notes

¹ Carey Meyer (from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) did the production design for Episode One of *Angel*, including the office and residence. Stuart Blatt began his tenure beginning with Episode Two.

² The series provides these four characters with substantive story arcs and visual sequences set in their domestic spaces; therefore, these will be the focus of the present analysis. The outliers are Winifred Burkle (Amy Acker) and the only African American regular cast member/character, Charles Gunn (J. August Richards). Gunn's identity as a black male is framed through his homelessness in Season One, suggesting both a classed and raced subordination within the largely white story world of *Angel*. For a related discussion on the social and cultural "whitening" of Charles Gunn, see Michaela D.E. Meyer, in *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-Off with a Soul*.

³ The escape from reality in these scenes of shared family meals rings through their essential falseness. For example, in "Home" (4.22), Angel witnesses the false family conjured for Connor by Wolfram & Hart as they are seated around a dinner table in a cozy cabin in the woods.

⁴ Part of Cordelia's decision to reject Skip's offer of TV stardom is the psychic damage this alternative reality poses for Angel, who is driven mad by the visions that were once hers.

⁵ In "Underneath" (5.17), Wes sits in the dark, mourning Fred in this bedroom while Illyria stands nearby observing him in his nightmares.

⁶ "Not Fade Away" (5.2, 00:14:40-41).

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