

**“Through a glass darkly”:
Reflection, Representation, and Mortality in “Eternity”**

Bill Hughes

Optics is perhaps the ruling science of the Gothic mode. Themes of light and darkness, obscurity and illumination, flourish in the genre, resonating with Edmund Burke’s explorations in his 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry*, which was contemporary with the rise of the Gothic novel, and with the central symbol of Enlightenment itself (with which Gothic narratives always contend in various ways). Gothic monsters come with conventions that help act as genre markers; one of the most familiar of these conventions is an optical one: the vampire’s lack of reflection in mirrors. Vampire fictions continually play with the attributes of the vampire as passed on from folklore or established as conventions in prior narratives; the aversion to sunlight or garlic, the vulnerabilities to sacred symbols, and so on, are all discarded, modified, or rationalized in various ways in each incarnation.¹ Given the centrality of optics in Gothic narratives, one such attribute, the motif of non-reflection, is likely to be of particular interest and significance.

Sam George has explored this theme in an insightful and wide-ranging essay. She points out that the lack of reflection is not a characteristic of the folkloric vampires of Eastern Europe; it appears to be a literary invention that first appears in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), though there are connections between vampires and the associated optical phenomena of shadows and also with “the origins of art” and “broader notions of reflection and reproduction” (56-7).² The absent reflection takes on added significance when the medium of fiction is film or television, where that very medium plays with light as

Bill Hughes researches the interrelation of the dialogue genre and English novels of the long eighteenth century. He also researches contemporary paranormal romance. He is co-organiser, with Dr. Sam George, of the Open Graves, Open Minds Project at the University of Hertfordshire. He is co-editor (with Dr. George) of *Open Graves, Open Minds: Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present* (2013) and *In the Company of Wolves: Werewolves, Wolves, and Wild Children* (2020).

its material and where optical effects such as shadow or illumination become formal properties of the art work.³ It is these connotations of reproduction and representation that I will pursue in this article, with regard to the role reflection plays in the episode “Eternity” (1.17) from the shadow-haunted, deliberately *noir*-ish TV series *Angel* (1999–2004). Joss Whedon and his team, among the most ingeniously inventive of vampire storytellers, play with this trope fruitfully.

As I have indicated, the reflection trope is significant in vampire fiction and as a result “Eternity” can be seen as a keystone in the broader narrative of *Angel*. The series is characterized, as was its predecessor *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), by a distinct unification of story arc and dominant thematic concerns; as Stacey Abbott says, it offers “complex and ambitious narrative arcs and exciting interplay of genre conventions, but it also stands as a site of unusual experimentation with the televisual form” (*Angel* 83). The episode is metafictional in various and subtle ways; certain self-reflective ideas about how the series works, or represents things, are expressed obliquely alongside the more obvious themes that the reflection motif dramatizes. *Angel*, and “Eternity” in particular, explores the implications of the humanized vampire with even more subtlety than *Buffy*, taking on exactly that humanity and its relation to monstrosity in ways that are more dialectical than a simple pair of antinomies. “Eternity” employs the metaphor of reflection in several ingenious ways—as self-examination, as inverted duplication, as representation—to dramatize important points about reification, autonomy, and commodification and to question techniques of fictional representation. The episode’s importance for the series is that it highlights the precariousness of *Angel*’s existential choice of a moral rejection of monstrosity. It also reveals the depths of solidarity of *Angel*’s team and that *Angel*’s fragile humanity rests on sociality despite his isolation.

One key theme of “Eternity” is how vampirism can represent the yearning to transcend ageing, particularly as experienced by women. Sam George highlights a powerfully relevant moment in *New Moon* (2006), the second of the teen vampire novels of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series (72). The young female protagonist, Bella Swan, dreams that she is face-to-face with her grandmother, who has been long dead. Behind her is her lover, the sparkling vampire Edward Cullen. She suddenly realizes:

There was no Gran. That was me. Me in the mirror. Me—ancient, creased and withered. Edward stood behind me, casting no reflection, excruciatingly lovely and forever seventeen. (3)

As Bella dreams of her lover, the promise of eternal youth takes on a central importance. A similar promise also plays a key role in the episode “Eternity,” albeit in a very different way, but sharing the implicit, unacknowledged envy of the vampire by the human lover (as will emerge below). About *New Moon*, George comments:

Edward [...] will neither age nor experience the overbearing strangeness that Walter Benjamin identifies as “the estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror,” a strangeness akin to that felt by an actor “before the camera.” The mechanical portraiture of film makes of the actor’s soul a transferrable commodity; Edward’s non-reflection may liberate him from this market.⁴ (72)

George compares Edward’s eternal youth to that of Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray. My analysis of “Eternity” returns to the themes touched on here of the allure of eternal youth and the commodification of the actor. A brief summary of the premise of the episode may help: it concerns a TV actress, Rebecca (Tamara Gorski), whose career is on the wane because, it is suggested, of her age. Angel (David Boreanaz) becomes her bodyguard, but there is also a dawning of intimacy between them. Rebecca’s anxieties over age and her career distort their relationship after she becomes aware of his vampirism and this leads to the threat of his monstrous *alter ego*, Angelus, emerging as the reflection as inverted duplication of himself. I also want briefly to allude to what George has to say about Wilde and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), where Dorian Gray is similarly subject to an inverted duplication of himself in the famous portrait. Wilde, a contemporary and associate of Stoker, is a significant reference point; George argues that his “themes around mirroring, reproduction, reflection and a lack of soul, find their way into the supernatural machinery of *Dracula*” (72). Here, the themes of immortality and representation intertwine (and Dorian Gray has a certain vampiric quality), and the mirror is the center point of this.

Representation, as what is assumed to take place in the realist work of art, is often seen as akin to or synonymous with reflection. In “Eternity,” this connotation is suggested immediately in the opening of the episode through Cordelia’s terrible acting in the feminist drama *A Doll’s House* (1879), from that most realist of dramatists, Ibsen. Thus both the theme of realism and a female-centered narrative are announced from the start of the episode. Even the opening joke plays with genre expectations of realism and fantasy: from Wesley (Alexis Denisof) and Angel’s apprehensive and horrified conversation we are led to expect the manifestation of the monstrous; we get instead a comic realist depiction of them suffering through their friend Cordelia’s misrepresentation of Nora Helmer. Thus the episode opens with alternating close-ups of Wesley and Angel’s grim faces, the two in tense dialogue over ominous background music:

Wesley: We’re doomed.
Angel: Maybe we can make a break for it.
Wesley: Impossible.
[...]
Angel: That’s it then—we’re trapped. (00:00:01-00:00:14)

The focus jumps to reveal that they are not, in fact, facing some monstrous threat but are seated in a nearly empty theatre. The camera pans around to Cordelia (Charisma Carpenter) on stage. She is overacting hammily, emoting inappropriately and gesturing exaggeratedly, transforming Ibsen’s realism into melodrama. She forgets her line (00:00:16-59). Bad or unpersuasive acting—distorted reflection—is itself a central theme in the episode. Janet K. Halfyard argues that incompetent performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* is often an index of the authenticity of the performer. Thus the artifice of a skilled actor adopting the role of one performing badly becomes itself a reflection of the character. Cordelia’s performance of this naturalistic classic spectacularly lacks verisimilitude; we may conclude that this indicates an essential benignity. However, this certainty will be overturned at the end of the episode, when she freely adopts a manipulative strategy (though for benevolent ends) and displays a corresponding felicity in acting.

Significantly, the screenplay highlights Nora's lines on ageing: "Many years from now, when I've lost my looks [...] When Torvald is not as devoted to me," says Cordelia as Nora (00:00:23-58). Ageing, particularly as it affects the image of women, is a dominant concern of the plot (the anxiety over lost youth is, of course, prefigured in *Dorian Gray*). Nora's lines suggest, too, the yearning for eternal love, that which the *Twilight* books and Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) film promise, and which is part of the appeal of much contemporary vampire romance. The overcoming of time, of ageing and transience, is central to the allure of the contemporary sympathetic vampire.

Ernst Bloch has something pertinent to say about women's anxiety over their appearance in the mirror, revealing a dialectic between the commodification of bodies and the utopian desire to transcend physicality, themes this episode explores. Bloch says, "Grooming is soon learnt and fleeting. The woman, the [job] applicant show themselves [...] from their best side. Which means from that side which is most readily marketable. The ego changes itself into a [...] saleable, even sparkling commodity" (*The Principle*, 1: 339). (Note the use of 'sparkling,' which takes on a certain resonance where contemporary glamorous vampires are concerned.) Bloch adds, "The glass does not even reflect the way he wishes himself to be but simply the way he is wished to be" (1: 340). Bloch argues that we, in grooming ourselves before the mirror, interiorize what is demanded of us by our masters. In the case of actors, especially female ones, these masters are the network or studio bosses, who demand youth and beauty.

I have already established the themes of this article: the near ubiquity of the non-reflection trope in vampire texts, its association with realism and representation, and the suggestion of its connection with utopian desires of transcending ageing and mortality.⁵ The writer of "Eternity," Tracey Stern, signals through the opening scene not only that this episode has some relation to the realm of Ibsenite realist drama, but that the narrative is also concerned with acting and with the authentic self (as in questions over which is Angel's/Angelus's true nature). These themes are then further developed in the episode.

Reflection may be used as a figure for introspection. Thus the mirror shows us ourselves, causes us to examine our selves and "reflect" upon what we are. We examine and interrogate our own authenticity, but we are also confronted with the physicality of our body and, often, the realist limitations imposed by that corporeal

burden. Vampires escape this—ageless but imageless. Bloch, though speaking here on the utopian hopes of transcending death in religion, can also elucidate the eternity of life promised in fiction by the vampire's gift of blood; he wonders "Whether such overarching [...] into the postmortal sphere [...] was the opium of the people or rather a strengthening of the sense of the infinite value of their own souls and thus a strengthening of the will not to be treated like cattle here and now" (*The Principle*, 3: 1108). Thus, in this dialectical approach, this hope of eternity may have a politically critical dimension that works against its being ideologically numbing.

For Bloch and other thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School, realism has its limits, particularly when it takes the form of a positivism that merely claims to record things as they are and is unable to conceive of transcendence of that reality. It becomes reactionary, as with the cruder forms of naturalism that emanate from Ibsenism. This narrow realism is in contrast to the utopian force of the imagination, celebrated in Wilde's version of Romanticism, whereby the mirror reflects something *other* than Caliban. I am referring here to Wilde's aphorisms from the preface to *Dorian Gray*:

The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass (3).

Thus, for Wilde, the bestial and philistine Caliban of the bourgeoisie rages at the mirror for both revealing his bestiality and for not reflecting his values. The mirror as realistic text exposes the concealed monstrosity of bourgeois life; in its Romantic mode, it reaches beyond that mode as utopian transfiguration. Art can manifest the *potential* real, the utopian Not-Yet-Conscious of Bloch where, in Wilde's words, "Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose" (*The Decay of Lying* 181). Wilde is playing with two senses of "realism," whereby genres of fantasy can reveal the real, or the potentially real, in ways that a realism which merely records the given factual cannot. This utopian dimension is central to "Eternity." There are other senses of "realism" involved, too, particularly the slippage between "realism" as truth-telling and as

something that bars the imagining of alternative possibilities, as when we are admonished with “let’s be realistic about this.”⁶

The realism of Ibsen’s play is that particular manifestation known as naturalism. Raymond Williams points to the dual nature of high naturalism in the late nineteenth century: “The dramatic speech [...] in Ibsen [...] is never limited to flat representation of probable conversation, but uses many devices to reveal, indicate, or at least suggest the inner pressures which limit or influence or distort what can, in this mode, be said” (*Culture* 176). This mode later breaks down into expressionist symbolism and fantasy: the “dreams, nightmares, breakdowns, conditions of extreme exposure” (177) that emerge in Strindberg or Wilde’s *Salomé* but which also co-exist alongside gritty *noir* realism in the generically hybrid *Angel*.

It may seem arbitrary or forced to make these connections, but Wilde’s epigrams on Caliban have something characteristically lucid to say on the uncertain role of representation in the art of modernity—something which a series as knowing as *Angel* explores.⁷ However, certain themes about representation, first raised as a prelude to modernism, have persisted into contemporary culture.⁸ The intertwined connotations of “reflection” and “representation” always make available a return to discussion of what narrative is actually doing—a discussion about realism and reality—and this episode has cleverly, consciously exploited this linkage. Just as the vampire has proved an endlessly versatile figure, so the non-reflection trope can serve as metaphor for those issues, as I argue it does here. It has significant dramatic weight where it first appears during the scene where *Angel* fights off an intruder in Rebecca’s home, and it is this motif which is returned to during the highly-charged crisis of *Angel*’s confrontation with Rebecca.

Many episodes of *Angel* experiment with modes of reflection (that is, in the sense of representing reality) in inventive ways, accounting for the bewildering and inconsistent shifts in genre throughout the series.⁹ This experimenting with form, taken into consideration with my account above of the recurring employment of the non-reflection trope in vampire narratives, exemplifies how the protean nature of the contemporary vampire can facilitate this sort of exploration so that the series becomes much more than a self-regarding exercise of postmodern vanity. *Angel* is a platform for trying out different techniques of mimesis in a period that is tired, or suspicious,

of naturalism, and that is one of its many virtues as vampire television. *Angel*, then, is not only generically hybrid like many shows which Catherine Johnson labels “telefantasy”; it self-consciously exploits that hybridity more than most.¹⁰ It faces its own image in the mirror, representing and refracting the very idea of reflection.

In “Eternity,” Rebecca, the TV actress whose career is faltering as she becomes older, has been famous since she was fourteen; it is “refreshing,” she says, when she meets someone like Angel who does not know her and does not care about her fame (00:07:45-53). He has saved her life, and she seeks to hire him as her bodyguard—in part, it seems, because they are attracted to each other. At first, he refuses, spoiling Cordelia’s dreams of an acting contract in television. Ominously, Wesley’s explanation for this refusal underscores the fear of Angel’s dual nature that haunts both Angel and his companions: “He’s afraid of getting close” (00:10:14). Angel’s curse means that emotional closeness may lead to the moment of pure happiness which will trigger his reversion.¹¹

The non-reflection motif appears when Angel protects Rebecca from a masked intruder in her apartment; the wall is mirrored and Rebecca notices his lack of reflection. Angel crashes through the window to tackle the intruder who has burst in from the opposite side. They fight. The intruder escapes as Angel is trapped under fallen furniture. He emerges, and we are given a close-up of him in profile, turned slightly towards Rebecca. The camera zooms out. They both turn to the mirror. Only Rebecca has a reflection. They turn to face each other. There is a close-up of Rebecca, facing Angel. The camera cuts to Angel’s face, which bears the expression of someone caught out. Then, a cut to Rebecca’s face, which is almost accusing. Neither of them has spoken yet. There is knocking at the door and concerned shouts from (presumably) neighbors. Rebecca turns her face aside. The camera focuses on Rebecca looking at Angel, then zooms out to show her in profile, with the mirror dominating the background. Again, only her reflection appears. The scene ends with a cut to Rebecca’s face, slightly awed (00:12:20-55). After the police have gone, Rebecca appears to be alone. “I know you’re still here,” she says, and Angel appears (00:13:54-59). Rebecca’s recognition of his vampiric nature is obvious to us and now to him. He says, “I’m not what you think,” seeking to reassure her by denying his monstrous Otherness (00:14:05). But what exactly *is* he? Does the non-reflection, by being an absence

of revelation, reveal to Rebecca a monster or a savior? Angel is, of course, ambiguously both of these.

This ambiguity, as Stacey Abbott persuasively argues, is an existentialist one that refuses a simple alternation between monster and ensouled human (“Walking”). Angel[us] is a being constantly on the verge of transition between two states but one irreducible to an essence; a being who chooses freely to escape the reification that his brute material blood lust calls him to. The episode works to complicate the duplicated inversion of Angel/Angelus, asserting the autonomy of a being who can overcome that dichotomy. Rebecca, however, would rather see him as unambiguously and essentially vampiric, categorizing him as a monster defined instead against a list of those familiar attributes from film and literature and which paradoxically offers her salvation. To Angel’s negation of his monstrosity, Rebecca replies, “You’re not? Because ... no reflection. Dark, private office. Instantly knowing those letters weren’t written in blood. I guess, what I’d be thinking, is vampire ... which is impossible” (00:14:05-22). Rebecca thus recognizes Angel’s impossibility, his belonging to a realm other than that of realism, whether that of the supernatural or that of the media industry. She continues, “Bela Lugosi, Gary Oldman ... they’re vampires.” Angel: “Frank Langella was the only performance I believed, but . . .” (00:14:22-29). Thus Angel evaluates the credibility of various actors representing vampires, drawing our attention once more to acting and authenticity. And the notion of the real appears again:

Rebecca: This is real. (*half smiles*) You’re real [...] How long?
[*Angel tells her.*] Two hundred years? But
you look— (*she touches him; they exchange
tender glances*)

Angel: You’re really not afraid. (00:14:29-15:14)

However, Rebecca has a greater fear than the absence of Angel’s reflection: the reality of her own. “The series is in syndication, she’ll always be there,” says Rebecca later of the character she has played, now frozen into the eternity of endless replay through the circulation of recorded and rebroadcast episodes. “Looking younger and better and sweeter than me—forever” (00:22:31-39). The very eternity of the media that circulate her image spurs her fears of impermanence. Oliver (Michael Mantell), Rebecca’s agent, replies: “Nobody stays young

forever.” The camera is on Rebecca’s face as she nods bitterly, then looks over Oliver’s shoulder. The camera cuts to Angel, who looks at her. It cuts back to a close-up of Rebecca’s face bearing an ambiguous expression of desire (00:22:59-23:12). Her attraction to Angel is compounded with the temptation of eternal youth.

Throughout this episode, we see characters making evasions and telling lies to each other in order to maintain sociality; clumsy efforts at tactfulness that are, in effect, bad acting—for instance, from Angel and Wesley to Cordelia after the performance as they avoid saying how bad they had found her acting. This kind of distortion, an unfaithful reflection of the truth, maintains harmony and social relations. It is an example of what Jürgen Habermas calls “strategic action,” in contrast to the authentic rationalism of “communicative action”; here, though, it is benevolent and a means of social cohesion.¹² To lie in this manner, to act badly, is human; to represent things faithfully may be monstrous, as will appear.

Yet other misrepresentations are more culpable. Cordelia unconvincingly acts having one of her visions in order to achieve her strategic motives of making contacts in the culture industry (00:10:38-55). This is accompanied by the eerie music which normally accompanies her prophecies; thus, the production itself is complicit in her illusion-making whilst drawing our attention to the machinery of representation and undermining the realism effect. Cordelia is motivated by her desperate ambition to succeed in the world of television in which Rebecca is trapped; “I’d do anything,” she says “to live in her world,” revealing the utopian temptations of the celebrity world that Cordelia has been seduced by (00:11:14-15). Here, the episode “Belonging” (2.19) is noteworthy. In that episode, as Cordelia auditions for a commercial, her director subjects her to misogynist humiliation, cynically reducing her to an object that must satisfy male desires and the needs of the market. The episode dramatizes her commodification and the souring of her naive aspirations by the culture industry.

In “Eternity,” Rebecca’s agent Oliver similarly lies and commits evasions—even to the point, it transpires, of staging the plots from which Angel protects her. These fake plots are part of the strategic action driven by the culture industry. The stalker is a stuntman, trained by the mass media to perform illusions; the bullets are blank, and he

has been hired by Oliver: “we share representation,” says Rebecca of the stuntman, playing on the meaning of that word (00:26:28-29).¹³

Rebecca’s own manipulativeness emerges in the climactic scene where she drugs Angel and attempts to seduce him so that he may transform her and grant her eternal youth. The importance of the mirror motif is reasserted in this powerful scene. Angel and Rebecca are on the sofa, moving closer; the scene is charged with eroticism, but Angel is obviously intoxicated from the drug she has slipped into his drink:

Rebecca: Don’t you think after all this time, you deserve some happiness?

[. . .]

Rebecca: You can have what you’ve been craving all these long empty years ... we both can ... forever.

Angel: What are you saying?

Rebecca: You know what I’m saying ... (*exposing her neck*) do it ... We won’t have to be lonely, either one of us, ever again.

[. . .]

Rebecca: I wasn’t afraid, was I? When I looked into the mirror and you weren’t there [...] I understood.

Angel: No, you weren’t afraid. You looked into that mirror and all you saw was yourself. That’s all you ever see, Rebecca, and that’s what really frightens you. This isn’t about the way the studio, the network, or your fans see you. It’s about how you see yourself. Your own reflection has been corrupted into something unrecognizable.¹⁴ (00:30:25-32:10)

Unrecognizable to whom? Angel’s rebuke surely misses something in its focus on Rebecca’s egocentrism. Rebecca’s gaze into the mirror invokes her longing for eternity, but this moment surely *is* also about how the studio, network, and fans see her, recalling Bloch’s point about commodification. Angel continues, “You think you want to stay the same? What you really want is to make it disappear” (00:32:11-16). That is, Rebecca yearns for the absence of reflection, for a condition where

she has escaped the human reality of ageing but also from the reification that Bloch describes.

Angel then grabs her, forcing her towards the fridge: “A big decision, Rebecca—eternity,” then forces blood into her mouth (00:32:31-33). What Angel insinuates is that immortality is, in fact, Hell; that authentic realism is reconciling oneself to the human, to the mortal, and, implicitly, resisting seduction by the fantasies of mass culture. Yet, of course, *Angel* the television series is itself sustained both by that fantasy world, with the allure of its perfectly beautiful cast, and by the wish fulfillment promised by the fantasy genre itself: the immortality, super powers, and enhanced sensuous receptivity of the vampire state, for example.¹⁵

Angel’s voice then changes, becoming harsher and cynical, signaling the metamorphosis into Angelus, his evil *alter ego*. In fear, Rebecca cries imploringly, “I just wanted us both to be happy.” Angel(us) replies, “But I am happy; [and now we see his vampire face] perfectly happy” (00:33:19-36). This phrase signifies Angel’s transformation (as fans will know), but takes on extra significance here in an episode which itself is reflecting upon happiness and utopian possibilities.

Now Rebecca is faced by the monster. He threatens her with death, dwelling on the details and reveling in the idea of killing someone famous. The terrified Rebecca says, “This isn’t you.” Angel replies: “They always mistake me for the character I play—they never see the real *me*” (00:35:07-08).¹⁶ This intense scene highlights the ambiguity of the vampire and identity in general, suggesting tensions between essence and performance that again relate to Bloch’s insights on how we groom ourselves as commodities but also as social beings. But the gypsy curse that has given the vampire Angel a soul, and in turn a conscience, means that if he enjoys one moment of perfect happiness he will revert to his inverted reflection and monstrous counterpart, Angelus (the “real me”). Rebecca has wheedled this information out of Cordelia. Rebecca’s scheming dawns on Cordelia, and she anxiously admits to Wesley that Rebecca may have “tried to maneuver Angel into an exchange of body fluids in order to make herself eternally young and beautiful thus saving her failing career” (00:29:40-46).

Rebecca manages to escape as Wesley and Cordelia arrive, having become aware of the possible outcome of her manipulative

intentions; she confesses what she has done. Wesley tells Cordelia and Rebecca that the drug she has given Angel “induces bliss”:

Cordelia: As in bliss? Sheer contentment? Perfect *happiness*?
Wesley: It’s synthetic, not true happiness. [...] He hasn’t really turned. It’s an illusion—not real. (00:37:12-25)

The varieties of happiness offered by Rebecca to Angel and which she seeks in him, and also, by implication, that offered by fantasy to us by the culture industry are all rendered questionable.

Wesley calls out to Angel, “What you’re experiencing is not genuine—it’s simulating bliss. All that you’re feeling is just chemical suggestion” (00:38:05-13). This engenders further doubts about authentic happiness. It also touches on the physiological determinism that marred post-Ibsenite naturalism; Zola and his epigones placed much emphasis on the “scientific” insights in their novels, where heredity and “bad blood” determines the fate of flawed, “degenerate” characters. Naturalism is an ideology of representation that reifies human subjects by denying their subjectivity; this episode is a powerful undermining of that attitude. Angel does not have a fixed and monstrous essence, defined by physiological urges; he is an autonomous agent, thus conforming to the wider existentialist project that Abbott has drawn attention to (“Walking”).

Angel[us] jeers at them, attacking their vulnerabilities with a painful truthfulness, disrupting the illusions of sociality that benevolent manipulation veils. First, he toys with Wesley’s anxieties over masculinity (00:38:33-52). Then, as Cordelia stammers in fear, Angel[us] mocks her acting skills, recalling her drying up on stage, accurately mimicking her unconvincing and unrealistic performance as Nora and periodically reiterating her line “a time will come when Torvald is not as devoted to me” (the script is, of course, cleverly sustaining the theme of age and immortality) (00:39:00-40).

Cordelia, however, unexpectedly threatens Angel with supposed holy water; he steps back and his certainty falters: “You’re bluffing.” “Am I?” she replies. She then brilliantly improvises a fluent story of how she had previously prepared for the possibility of Angel’s turning, replete with the minutiae of realistic and credible narrative down to the detail of the daily requisition of holy water, “blessed every second

Tuesday by Father Matthew” (00:39:40-40:21). Her acting skills, ironically, only emerge away from the stage, through the strategic actions she performs to save her friends (and here, thespian competence no longer suggests inauthenticity).

Angel is overcome and chained. In the aftermath (Angel having returned to his precarious unthreatening identity), Wesley urges Angel and Cordelia to forget; to suppress and conceal; to *perform*, in other words, in order that reality may not undermine sociality (00:41:38-47). This is a skeptical, and perhaps conservative, realism that resists the allure of transcendence, whether that offered by the myth of the superhuman or those dreams of celebrity propagated by the culture industry.

This episode is a key one in the story arc, and it shows the enduring plasticity of the vampiric non-reflection trope. In conclusion, this remarkably clever deployment of the device dramatizes issues of realism and representation, including truth-telling and the ambivalent social uses of deception. It explores the commodification of youth and beauty, particularly that of women, by the culture industry, thus reflecting on TV itself; and of utopian transcendence of the here and now (though “perfect happiness” is, in the realism of quiescence, seen as a dangerous illusion). Throughout, the illusions created by the actors are superb, of course. However, acting itself—or actresses—may be bad, as Wesley suggests at one point, somewhat misogynistically: “You realize how rare that is? True happiness? And what are the odds he’d find it with an actress?” (00:16:28-34). Yet Cordelia’s *bad* acting may redeem her, granting her a freedom from the gender roles and commodification that Rebecca is still in thrall to. So the television drama *Angel* further undermines, and complicates, its own *raison d’être*.

It is not insignificant that the play featured in the opening of the episode is *A Doll’s House*; this is a series very aware of gender issues, particularly Cordelia’s self-realization throughout the series and, in this episode, Rebecca’s entrapment in notions of the female image fostered by the culture industry.¹⁷ Her strategic action in seducing Angel, her performance, makes use of feminine seductiveness. In contrast, Cordelia is terrible playing Nora (who aspires to emancipate herself from imposed feminine roles) but as a strong and courageous woman, she is magnificent.

While Catherine Johnson finds socioeconomic determinants behind the multi-generic nature of telefantasy, the distinctiveness and

reflexivity of this hybridity in *Angel* shows Whedon and his collaborators taking advantage of that for their own aesthetic ends, performing a complex social and metatextual critique. Thus the non-reflection of the vampire becomes a device to explore the utopian temptation of overcoming death and age, and simultaneously a self-conscious and witty reflection on the nature of celebrity, allegorizing the very medium—television—through which the narrative is represented.

For Adorno, in discussion with Bloch, without the yearning to transcend death, there would be no straining beyond the realism of passive acceptance of how things are: “[W]ithout the notion of an unfettered life, freed from death, the idea of utopia . . . *cannot* even be thought of at all” (Bloch and Adorno 10). St Paul proclaims that the promise of eternity through salvation in Christ also brings a transparency and mutuality between human beings: “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (*King James Bible* I Corinthians 13.12). Our perceptions and our apprehension of truth will be heightened as the shadows of the physical world are stripped away to reveal the ideal form of reality, and the strategic manipulations that take part among mortals will be replaced by transparent, undistorted communication. But the heightened clarity that *Angel*’s immortality has given him is less enchanting. “Eternity” (1.17) ambivalently suggests the attractions of Adorno’s “unfettered life” but, in suggesting equally that there is the terrible price of becoming monstrous, a *Dorian Gray* or an *Angelus*, it simultaneously critiques the illusions of mass media fantasy and pessimistically represses the principle of hope; the only “perfect happiness” is the synthetic kind that has a monstrous mirror image.

Notes

¹ See Marcus Sedgwick’s entertaining account in “The Elusive Vampire” of these attributes and of how his own fictions adapt these traits.

² Stoker was fascinated with effects of light, as George shows, and she speculates that he may have drawn on the optical effects of the theatre productions that he was involved in (58-61).

³ See Stacey Abbott's exploration of the intimate connection between film, shadow, and vampirism in "The Undead in the Kingdom of Shadows." The centrality of optics in fantastic television is pointed out by Catherine Johnson, who says that "part of the rhetoric of fantasy is a rhetoric of vision" (147).

⁴ Citing Benjamin (232).

⁵ Post-*Dracula*, on the occasions when vampires *are* reflected in mirrors, this is almost always self-consciously exploited, often to add verisimilitude by scorning the supernatural and offering a naturalistic explanation for the creature, differentiating the narrative from superstition and legend. A frequent device is that of vampires spreading rumours about such traits as non-reflection or aversion to garlic in order to assist their concealment within society. Holly Black's YA vampire dystopia, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* (2013) ingeniously uses reflection to dramatize the introspection of the humanized vampire heroine and her fear and guilt (320-22).

⁶ For these different senses, see "Realism" in Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (257-62).

⁷ It would be fanciful to assume a direct influence here (though we should not underestimate the erudition of Whedon and his team). So, the link to Ibsen may be a happy coincidence. However, Ibsenism has felicitous links, too, with the aestheticism of Wilde (via Shaw's 1891 essay "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," which Wilde was well aware of).

⁸ As with, for example, David Reed's "vampiric painting," discussed by George (66-71); George explicitly connects Reed with Dorian Gray's demonic portrait and Wilde's paradoxes on representation (64-5).

⁹ See Stacey Abbott, "Creeped out and Comforted at the Same Time" in the TV Milestones book *Angel*.

¹⁰ Johnson says that "the tendency towards generic hybridity within television programmes has proved problematic for the study of television genre" (3).

¹¹ Angel first transforms back to Angelus after sleeping with Buffy in the *Buffy* episode "Innocence" (2.14). It is revealed that this is because a curse had been cast upon him by Jenny Calendar's people, restoring his soul and thus his feelings of guilt. But should he ever experience one moment of true happiness, that soul will vanish and he will revert to being monstrously evil.

¹² For Habermas, strategic action is opposed to communicative action, whereby actors are concerned with the fulfilment of their own goals rather than with the co-ordination of actions through common understanding. Within strategic action, Habermas identifies "latently strategic action" in contrast to "open strategic action" and, within that again, distinguishes between "manipulative action" and "systematically distorted action": "the manipulator deceives at least one of the other participants about her own strategic attitude, in which she deliberately behaves in a pseudoconsensual manner" (93, note 2). Manipulative speech for a benevolent social end obviously complicates Habermas's schema a little.

¹³ This again draws attention to the machinery of representation, for the actor who plays the stuntman is, given his small role, most likely to be himself an actual stuntman.

¹⁴ Here, square brackets are used to distinguish my omissions from an ellipsis in the source.

¹⁵ And, with a sense of prophecy that rather than being uncanny derives from the way the writers are acutely aware of its mode of production, Cordelia calls Rebecca's show "a

seminal show cancelled by the idiot networks” (both *Angel* itself and later Whedon series such as *Firefly* [2002–2003] and *Dollhouse* [2009–2010] were cancelled).

¹⁶ In cruel mockery, Angel evokes here Rebecca’s earlier words on how her acting persona conceals her authentic self, just as later he will mimic Cordelia’s lines; as Rebecca’s adoring fans chant her character’s name, Raven, she tells Angel, “They think that I’m the character I play” (00:19:47-00:19:50).

¹⁷ See, for example, Lorna Jowett’s “Lab Coats and Lipstick . . .” and “Lindsey and Angel: Reflecting Masculinity . . .” and Bronwen Calvert’s “Inside Out: Motherhood as Demonic Possession . . .” It is also notable that Whedon went on to create the series *Dollhouse* (2009–2010), which is very much concerned with themes of the authentic self, performance, and the commodification of human beings (particularly women).

Works Cited

- Abbott, Stacey. "Walking the Fine Line Between Angel and Angelus." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, Aug. 2003, https://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/abbott_slayage_3.1.pdf. Accessed 20 April, 2019.
- . *Angel*. Wayne State University Press, 2009.
- . "The Undead in the Kingdom of Shadows: The Rise of the Cinematic Vampire." *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, edited by Sam George and Bill Hughes, Manchester University Press, 2013, pp. 96-112.
- "Belonging." *Angel*, Season 2, Episode 19, 2001. Created by Joss Whedon, written by Shawn Ryan, directed by Turi Meyer. Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [1936]." *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt, Fontana, 1973, pp. 219-53.
- Black, Holly, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*. Orion Children's Books, 2013.
- Bloch, Ernst. *The Principle of Hope*. Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, MIT Press, 1995. 3 vols.
- Bloch, Ernst, and Theodor Adorno. "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing." *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, translated by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, MIT Press, 1988, pp. 1-17.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* [1757]. Edited and introduced by Adam Phillips, Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Calvert, Bronwen. "Inside Out: Motherhood as Demonic Possession in *Angel*." *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association*, vol. 12, no. 2/ vol. 13, no. 1, Winter 2014/Spring 2015, http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/calvert_slayage_12.2-13.1.pdf. Accessed 20 June, 2019.
- "Eternity." *Angel*, Season 1, Episode 17, 2000. Created by Joss Whedon 2000, written by Tracey Stern, directed by Regis B. Kimble. Twentieth Century Fox, 2000.
- George, Sam. "He make in the mirror no reflect': Undead Aesthetics and Mechanical Reproduction – *Dorian Gray*, *Dracula* and David Reed's 'Vampiric Painting.'" *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, edited by Sam George and Bill Hughes, Manchester University Press, 2013, pp. 56-78.

- Habermas, Jürgen. "What is Universal Pragmatics?" *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, edited by Maeve Cooke, Polity, 1999, pp. 21-103.
- Halfyard, Janet K. "Singing Their Hearts Out: The Problem of Performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, June 2005, https://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/halfyard_slayage_5.1.pdf. Accessed 10 January, 2019.
- "Innocence." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season 2, Episode 14, 1998. Created by Joss Whedon, written by Joss Whedon, directed by Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.
- Johnson, Catherine. *Telefantasy*. BFI, 2005.
- Jowett, Lorna. "Lab Coats and Lipstick: Smart Women Reshape Science on Television." *Geek Chic: Smart Women in Popular Culture*, edited by Sherrie A. Inness, Palgrave, 2007, pp. 31-48.
- . "Lindsey and Angel: Reflecting Masculinity." *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion: the TV Series, the Movies, the Comic Books and More*, edited by Mary Alice Money, PopMatters Media, Titan Books, 2012, pp. 161-81.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *New Moon*. Atom, 2007.
- George, Sam, and Bill Hughes, editors. *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*. Manchester University Press, 2013.
- Sedgwick, Marcus. "The Elusive Vampire: Folklore and Fiction – Writing My *Swordhand Is Singing*." *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, edited by Sam George and Bill Hughes, Manchester University Press, 2013, pp. 264-75.
- Shaw, George Bernard. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Walter Scott, 1891.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Decay of Lying* [1891]. *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Select Critical Prose*, edited by Linda Dowling, Penguin, 2001, pp. 163-92
- . *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1891]. Edited by Joseph Bristow, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. Fontana, 1981.
- . *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised edition, Fontana, 1983.