

## Bronwen Calvert

### Inside Out: Motherhood as Demonic Possession in *Angel*

[1] *Angel* (1999–2004) is now generally acknowledged as a version of television horror (Hills and Williams 203; Abbott 45; Jowett and Abbott 9-10), though for some time it was more often analysed in terms of its representation of and borrowings from *film noir*. Since this particular series has a vampire as its title character, and its plots are peppered with various kinds of demon activity, it is all the more noteworthy that its horror elements were initially downplayed in criticism. This perhaps reflects developments in critical ideas about horror and television, and horror on television. It has been argued that, if television horror is possible at all, it is necessarily diluted by the demands of scheduling, networks, and the family audience. Such restrictions have had an effect on the way horror is defined; Matt Hills, for example, argues that “TV horror is not ‘really’ horror precisely because it cannot go all-out to scare audiences” (115). However, Stacey Abbott argues that in fact horror on television “has a long history” and cites the examples of “made-for-television horror films . . . as well as long-running horror serials and anthology series” running from the 1970s onwards (*Angel* 45).



[2] There are some specific ways in which we can categorize television horror. On one hand, the “restrained, suggestive ghost story” underplays visually excessive representations of horror (Wheatley 22); on the other, genre hybridity allows horror to incorporate different kinds of narratives and permits more graphic presentation, including spectacular scenes of violence and gore (Johnson 3-7; Abbott 48). *Angel* falls between these two descriptions, and, as Abbott notes, “sits at a pivotal moment in which American television . . . is readdressing its relationship to horror, or more broadly its relationship to graphic displays of body horror” (46). For the most part, the series underplays its versions of horror, but *Angel’s* genre hybridity does allow horror to be combined “with action, comedy and melodrama” in different episodes (Jowett and Abbott 9), and allows more graphic versions of horror into the narrative. One version of horror represented consistently in *Angel* is that of the image of monstrous motherhood in relation to images of pregnancy and birth. In examining the representation of monstrous motherhood in *Angel*, I offer another example of how this particular television series succeeds in producing a convincing version of horror within the boundaries of television drama of this period. By situating the motif of the monstrous mother alongside other horror motifs such as demonic possession and the vampire, *Angel* is able to displace the expected blood and gore of the horror film onto the concept and image of the possessed and “evil” pregnant woman.

[3] It is perhaps surprising, since *Angel* is so often seen as a narrative “about” masculinity, that a good part of its five seasons focuses on female bodies. This is less surprising when the focus is understood as a linking of the female body with the monstrous. Specifically, *Angel’s* narrative follows, in detail, monstrous pregnancies, which are depicted as demonic possession, or as body invasion, while the mothers are portrayed as unnatural and threatening. The pregnancies are played out in Seasons 3 and 4 before a fairly consistent team of *Angel* Investigations: *Angel* himself, founder member Cordelia, former Watcher Wesley, together with Gunn, Fred, and Lorne.

[4] The representation of “monstrous” mothers in *Angel* echoes Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous-Feminine*, which examines the representation of woman as monstrous in several horror films. Creed posits a specific connection between motherhood and monstrosity in horror films, commenting that “when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions” (7). Creed’s examination of the monstrous-feminine is in the context of Julia Kristeva’s theories on abjection, and she notes that

[D]efinitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection—particularly in relation to the following religious “abominations”: sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration; decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest. These forms of abjection are also central to the construction of the monstrous in the modern horror film. (8-9)

[5] Kristeva’s theory of the abject likewise makes particular note of the place of “the border” in relation to abjection. Abjection is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (13). In the horror film, as Creed notes, “that which crosses or threatens to cross the border is abject” (11). These border(s) include those between human and inhuman, good and evil, normal and supernatural (11). These border(s) are always in evidence in *Angel*, where characters cross between good and evil, dead and alive, human and monster, and sometimes appear to spend more time on or close to the border itself. This is obviously true of Angel who, as vampire, is neither dead nor alive, and whose character incorporates a further aspect of the monstrous in his alter-ego Angelus. It is true of other key characters, too (for example, Wesley, Fred, Gunn) who cross from good to evil, from heroic to villainous, and back again over the course of different story arcs.

[6] Borderlines are also evident, together with overtones of horror, in real-life accounts of pregnancy and childbirth, in which women “remark on the uncanny [sic] sense of ‘doubling’ and ‘splitting’ in reproduction. . . . Hence pregnancy is a ‘liminal’ or ‘marginal’ state” (Fischer 79). Iris Marion Young comments on this “split”: “the pregnant subject . . . experiences her body as herself and not herself” (160). As Carol Pateman notes, women’s bodies are not perceived as “enclosed within boundaries” (or borders) but as “permeable[;] their contours change shape and they are subject to the cyclical process of birth” (quoted in Clover 90-1). It is noted that some expectant mothers imagine the baby as a “parasite” and feel anxious about changes to their bodies—as Lucy Fischer puts it, their “corporeal transformation” (83-84), a phrase that might well come from a horror narrative. Historically, the pregnant female body has been imagined as troubling and threatening. As Rebecca Kukla points out, “[t]he powers of the womb were both awesome and dangerous, for while the womb, unlike any other piece of the human body, was able to generate and nurture the human form, it was also easily permeated and corrupted and capable, once corrupted, of creating monsters and deformation” (6).

[7] These perceptions of the female body link with the presence of the “monstrous-feminine” in horror narratives, although I agree with Creed that this “speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or female subjectivity” (7). However, bodies in horror narratives *are* seen as “permeable”: they change shape, are invaded, and transform. The “monstrous” is often represented as coming from within (see Boss 19; Brophy 8-10). What Carol Clover calls the “possession film” often links

demonic possession with pregnancy, includes images describes as “reproductive,” and focuses on the female body (81, 85). Creed views the horror film as an imaginary space where, among other things, the primal scene can be reworked “in relation to the representation of other forms of copulation and procreation [including] grotesque bodily invasion [and] scenes which explore different forms of birth” (17). The pregnant body is imagined “as a site of resistance, as an object of horror, or as profoundly Other” (Arnold 158). This gives rise to conflicting representations, since “[o]n the one hand, the pregnant woman is passive, traumatised by her ‘condition’; on the other hand, her body is powerful” (Arnold 160).

[8] Within the scope of *Angel*’s “television horror” it has been noted, by Matt Hills and Rebecca Williams in particular, that “abjection” and other representations of “the monstrous” are “often visually and narratively restricted” but that the series “depicts processes of abjection in more complex ways than arguments drawn from horror-film theory would predict” (204-5). Hills and Williams argue that “abject bodily fluids” are used within the narrative of *Angel* “as stand-ins for images of actual bodily dismemberment and disintegration...” (208). I agree that the use of “monstrous” imagery is necessarily limited within the context of television narrative of this period, and that *Angel*’s “television horror” has its visual limits. Detailed evaluation of the UK scheduling of *Buffy* and *Angel* demonstrates some of the “problematic” restrictions placed on television series that are categorized as suitable for a family audience (Hill and Calcutt 60; Burr). However, I see in the presence of the “monstrous-feminine” within *Angel*’s narrative a short-cut to horror thanks to the use of suggestion and displacement. Through the motifs of monstrous pregnant bodies and demonic possession the series is able to reference the visual language of horror films that depict demonic or alien birth, and depict what Creed defines as abjection and “abomination” in bodies that are split, invaded, and out of control.

[9] *Angel*’s narrative follows several demonic pregnancies in which mothers are shown as ancient or goddess-like, as possessed, as monstrous, and as vampiric, again recalling Creed’s monstrous-feminine (v). These images can also approach the “archaic” in Creed’s and Kristeva’s terms: the “archaic maternal figure . . . the generative, parthenogenetic mother—that ancient archaic figure who gives birth to all living things” and who is also “the abyss . . . from which all life comes and to which all life returns”; a figure imagined as both creator and destroyer (Creed 24, 25). In *Angel*, representations of “monstrous” motherhood, including versions of the “primal scene” and images of the “archaic mother,” recur and are played out with several different characters, but these representations have some striking similarities. In the two major depictions of demonic pregnancy, involving the characters Darla (a vampire) and Cordelia (a human who has developed some supernatural powers), the presentations of conception, gestation, and birth have definite connections with horror and the “monstrous-feminine.” As Jes Battis points out, physical/biological motherhood is consistently represented as problematic in *Angel*, in contrast to “symbolic and extended-family motherhood—as personified, for example, by Cordelia’s role as the crew’s unofficial ‘mother’—[which] is presented as positive and life-affirming” (par. 6).

[10] The scenes of conception in *Angel* recall the visual language of horror films that depict demonic or alien birth; as previously noted, it is likely that the reason such scenes are not in themselves monstrous is that they are part of a television narrative of a particular period (Hills and Williams 205). However, it is possible to analyze these scenes as transgressive, and the behaviour apparent in both scenes of conception does

introduce ideas of deviance or “monstrosity.” Darla becomes pregnant after she and Angel have sex (“Reprise”/ “Epiphany” 2.15-16) and for regular viewers of the series this is certainly a transgressive and dangerous moment, for it is established as a “rule” of the series that if Angel experiences “perfect happiness” he will lose his soul.<sup>1</sup> Angel, however, experiences “perfect despair” with Darla, and this seems to introduce the notion that their child (when its existence becomes known) is “evil.” The encounter has overtones of incest, also defined by Kristeva as “abject”: Darla made Angel a vampire and is therefore his “sire”; though I hesitate to call her his mother since in this narrative both male and female vampires can be sires, she is certainly his *parent*. Their history told throughout the series does reveal a perverse family—grandparent, parent, and child – in Darla, Angel and Drusilla (who was sired in turn by Angel).<sup>2</sup> As vampires, they are also “abject”—they disrupt and subvert boundaries and, in Creed’s view, the female vampire also represents the archaic, potentially castrating mother, thus positing a special role for Darla and Drusilla (22).

[11] Cordelia becomes pregnant after having sex with Connor (“Apocalypse, Nowish” 4.7), and I read this as an equally problematic moment. Connor is Angel and Darla’s child, who, after his birth in Season 3, reappears in the narrative towards the end of that season as a teenager after a childhood spent conveniently in a demon dimension. Connor is already symbolically identified as Cordelia’s surrogate child: after his birth (“Lullaby” 3.9) she was often seen holding him and looking after him and was particularly concerned with his safety. In addition, Cordelia and Angel became identified, to a certain extent, as the child’s parents because of their bond and love for each other, Cordelia taking Darla’s place as mother. Cordelia, who is amnesiac at the beginning of Season 4, tries to recall her past by looking through photographs; one shows her with baby Connor and prompts her to ask, “Am I a mom?” (“Slouching Towards Bethlehem” 4.4). Thus the position of Cordelia as mother, and specifically as *Connor’s* mother, is emphasized. This is reinforced by the reactions of the rest of the group when Cordelia’s pregnancy is revealed. Fred’s comments highlight her unease at the relationship; she makes the point that “Connor’s Angel’s son” and while she stops short of calling Cordelia his mother, I would argue that the implication is there (“Players” 4.16); and this is emphasized too when Lorne refers to her as “Mother Love” (“Inside Out” 4.17).

[12] Cordelia herself recognizes this: although she kisses Connor (“Supersymmetry” 4.5) she acknowledges that it was a mistake, in part because, as she tells Connor, “there’s a picture over there when you’re a baby; it’s only eight months old”. What she does not say is that she is in the picture too, clearly cast in the role of mother, but this seems implicit in her location of her unease in that image of herself and baby Connor. (This sense of unease was also felt by fans of the show, whose internet postings questioned Cordelia’s motivation for sleeping with Connor, even though some advanced the mitigating circumstance that it did seem that the world was about to end. While it became evident that Cordelia behaved as she did because she was possessed by an evil demon, the general, persistent feeling among fans can be summed up in the Season 4 Review which originally appeared on the *City of Angel* website, in which Cordelia seducing Connor was dubbed “the most disturbing storyline on the show ever”). Once “evil” Cordelia becomes stronger, she too acknowledges her maternal role; after she is revealed to the audience as the controller or “Master” [sic] of a powerful Beast, she kisses it with the demand, “Give Momma some sugar” (“Salvage” 4.13). I also note that writer Steven S. DeKnight plays with the notion of primal scene in “Apocalypse,

Nowish" when Cordelia and Connor are seen, not by their child in the classic Freudian manner, but by father-figure Angel who is outside, looking through the window.

[13] With the pregnancies that result from these "primal scenes," the notion of the mother possessed by a demonic child is played upon, in particular with Darla in Season 3. Various scenes situate Darla as mysterious, sinister, and terrifying, as when she visits a shaman to discover how she could be pregnant ("That Vision Thing" 3. 2). Darla is initially framed in this episode as the "bad mother": she confesses that she has done everything possible to "get rid of it"; she displays her pregnant belly and cuts herself without hesitation to provide blood for the ritual. The shaman presses his bloody hand onto her belly but is thrown aside by some invisible force and is unable to answer her question, "What is this thing growing inside me, and how is it possible?" except to say that "this is not meant to be." The "impossibility" of her pregnancy is interpreted as monstrous and fearful; whatever she carries in her belly has (evil) power of its own. On her return to LA, Darla is obviously evil and almost excessively vampiric; she feeds on an entire busload of people, and references to her unslakeable appetite are made prominent, if slightly parodic (as when Cordelia refers to the fact that she's "eating for two now" in "Offspring" 3.7). In addition to her constant hunger, Darla is physically powerful, as Angel reminds the gang when he tells them, "Don't underestimate her. The woman's stronger than all of us right now" ("Offspring"). This, again, invokes the idea of motherhood as monstrous, as a condition that bestows excessive appetite and unnatural physical strength. There is also the association of blood with the pregnant Darla, both in the blood used by the shaman and in the human blood Darla feeds on; again, horror tropes are present within the television narrative.

[14] The positioning of Darla as monstrous mother is emphasized by the assumption that the impossible child she is carrying is also monstrous, summed up in Lorne's remark that "if it's alive, it could be anything" ("Offspring"). This monstrosity is itemized as the gang swap suggestions about how best to kill the child once it is born (a list including a flamethrower, a mallet, and a net "in case it skitters" ["Quickening" 3.8]). All, including Darla, think of the child as evil; Cordelia calls it the "evil love child" while, echoing Fischer's listing of women's experiences in pregnancy (83-84), Darla names it "my little parasite" ("Quickening"). However, once the child's heartbeat and, more significantly, its *soul* are detected, there is a shift in the attitudes of fear and suspicion towards Darla and the child, while at the same time the balance of power shifts towards the male. The child is normalized through the medical process of ultrasound, carried out by Wesley within the hospital ("Quickening"), and I see this as the beginning of a shift in perception away from Darla's "parasite" and towards Angel's *son*. Darla is repositioned, fairly typically, "erased to make way for the one true person—the fetus" (Clark 147). Yet at the same time, sympathy is generated for Darla with the "ensouling" she experiences through her unborn child, and with the various dangers that threaten them both.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the three linked episodes, "Offspring," "Quickening," and "Lullaby," there is also a movement from the idea that nothing that Angel and Darla create can be good (as Angel says in "Offspring") to Darla's final declaration that "this child is the only good thing we ever did together" ("Lullaby"). There is a parallel transformation of Darla from monstrous mother to another kind of archetype, the holy mother, who is carrying an impossibly conceived and "miracle" child, and is willing to die to protect it and to ensure that it has a chance at life. Darla is thus humanized through the child she carries, and she is also feminized (as noted by Lorna Jowett)—as Cordelia observes, "she looked

helpless, like a mother" ("Offspring")—and she becomes part of the "family" of Angel Investigations as everyone in the team tries to help and protect her as well as the baby.

[15] Darla's ability to feel love and joy is connected to the baby's soul which she shares; her fears about giving birth are that the connection she shares with the baby, and by extension with humanity, will be severed, making her monstrous once again: "I don't have a soul. It does, and right now that soul is inside of me, but soon it won't be and then I won't be able to love it. I won't even be able to remember that I loved it . . ." ("Lullaby"). In light of this, how might we read her sacrifice at the end of "Lullaby," when she stabs herself with a stake to allow her baby to be born? In one way this can be seen as a recognition of that shared humanity, and a wish to act out of love for her child while she still has the capacity to feel it. Her actions can also be read as a rejection of her monstrous vampire self, and a blow against the monstrous-feminine. However, such an interpretation is complicated by Darla's past history as a soulless vampire who is shown feeding on babies and children as well as on adult humans; indeed, in the past she has anticipated the killing of children with delight—"They sound just like little pigs. Have you brought me some?" ("Five by Five" 1.18)—and in various flashbacks is seen to procure a baby to tempt the ensouled Angel into feeding on "the innocent" ("Darla" 2.7) and to prey on the vampire hunter Holtz's wife and children ("Quickening," "Lullaby"). Darla the vampire repeatedly refers to the "filthy soul" Angel was cursed with ("Five by Five," "Darla"), and initially fights against the knowledge that she shares her unborn child's soul ("Offspring"). Therefore, for Darla the vampire, the feelings of love and the inability to feed that she experiences are coded within the narrative as monstrous and unnatural.

[16] Cordelia experiences demonic pregnancy three times in *Angel*. In Season 1 she plays the stereotype of the overprotective mother for comic effect when she is impregnated by a demon after a one-night stand ("Expecting" 1.12). She becomes the mother who can see nothing wrong with her child (though she may be carrying seven demon babies, she asks "Are they healthy?"); yet she also represents monstrous motherhood as she acts wildly and dangerously to protect her children. In "Epiphany" (2.16) Cordelia is again "impregnated by demonic powers" (Rambo par. 6) when her body is used as a host for the offspring of the Skilosh demon. In both episodes, Cordelia becomes the damsel in distress who must be rescued by Angel and the team.

[17] Season 4, like the previous season, presents an extended narrative of pregnancy and motherhood, in which Cordelia's performance of evil is paralleled with her performance of motherhood. The audience is let in on the fact that she has "turned evil" well before the other characters are aware of this, and, as with Darla, her pregnancy is also a secret shared by the audience. This pregnancy, however, is framed as a part of her newly discovered monstrous nature. She reveals her pregnancy to Connor as a way of binding him to her, and she makes a point of this when she tells him, "We're connected. You and me. Forever" ("Calvary" 4.12). At the same time, she makes Connor physically touch her belly, which is also revealed to the audience, a sign demonstrating the truth of her claim; this scene also parallels and recalls Darla's encounter with the shaman in Season 3. The pregnancy, however, is the last of a series of revelations about Cordelia—the audience have already seen several events that work to confirm her evil nature. In this way, her pregnancy becomes the implicit reason for her actions; thus, she is monstrous *because* she is pregnant.

[18] Therefore, evil or “badness” is linked with pregnancy and “possession” in the investigation and explanation of Cordelia’s transformation. Cordelia is now a “bad, bad girl” (“Players”), and this is explicitly linked to her mystical or demonic baby. Creed discusses the “archaic mother” in the context of Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979), and her discussion works, too, in the context of Cordelia’s pregnancy. The “archaic mother” is “constructed within patriarchal ideology, as the primeval ‘black hole,’ the originating womb which gives birth to all life . . . the point of origin and of end” (Creed 27, 17). The archaic mother with all power over life, death, and birth (including her own) is clearly invoked in *Angel*, where it is emphasized that “the big nasty inside of Cordelia is going to give birth to . . . itself?” (“Inside Out”). The evil that possesses Cordelia’s body is also temporarily housed within Cordelia’s body as the baby that she is giving birth to. There are parallels here with religious-inflected cinema horror (such as *Rosemary’s Baby* [1968] or *The Seventh Sign* [1988]), which situate the mother as a passive servant for a higher power, “a vessel for a superior being” (Arnold 158). As a result of her demonic pregnancy, Cordelia becomes an “empty” body, a vessel for the embodiment of the goddess-mother brought to life in her “baby” Jasmine.<sup>4</sup>

[19] Throughout Season 4, monstrosity becomes part of the viewing pleasure as Charisma Carpenter performs evil in the persona of a well-known “good” character. It should also be noted that the representation of Cordelia as embodying motherhood with her displays of pregnant flesh is linked to—and dependent on—Carpenter’s real-life pregnancy, which also raises issues of performance. While Julie Benz as Darla is not pregnant in real life, and the shaman has to perform his ritual on a fake belly covered by a white smock, Charisma Carpenter is able to display her naked belly without special effects, recalling the way Gillian Anderson’s pregnant belly was used as spectacle in *The X-Files* episode “Ascension” (2.6) in which Anderson’s character is abducted by aliens (Badley, “Rebirth” 162). While Carpenter’s pregnancy is not of itself a “special effect,” it becomes subsumed into *Angel*’s narrative and is displayed as part of that narrative. In a sense, the pregnant actor herself becomes “monstrous” and disruptive; Carpenter’s pregnancy disrupts the series narrative. The parallel Darla/Cordelia storylines in Seasons 3 and 4 invite neatly parallel readings of monstrous motherhood, but real-life events must also be taken into account when considering the links between these story arcs. Carpenter’s real-life pregnancy influenced the narrative development of Season 4 in crucial ways, as has been noted by writers Tim Minear and Steven DeKnight.<sup>5</sup> The original plans for Cordelia to be Season 4’s “big bad” had to be altered because of the timing of her pregnancy, so not only did the pregnancy have to be incorporated into the narrative and become the representation of the “evil” possessing her, but also the writers had to develop the character of Jasmine, because Carpenter was due to give birth before the final episodes of the season could be shot.

[20] Within the narrative of *Angel*, there is some difference in the way that these pregnant bodies come under the control of male authorities who, it seems, have additional “powers” to discover the nature of the unborn child. Darla is unable to discover how she has become pregnant (which is, in any case, supposedly impossible for a vampire) or what her child is and must resort to questioning the shaman, who is able to tell her something more. Later, she is scanned at the hospital, and it is here that the heartbeat (and humanity) of her child is discovered. At this stage, I see Darla repositioned as, in Young’s terms, “a ‘container’ ” for the (now good) unborn child while, similarly, her pregnancy is “an objective, observable process coming under scientific scrutiny” (160). This “objective process” is also masculinized by the male shaman and

by Wesley, who wields the ultrasound machine. The repositioning of Darla as (good) mother might even be seen to begin earlier in the narrative; when she appears among Angel Investigations, their first action is to put her to bed ("Offspring"), thus enacting Young's observation that pregnancy also "becomes objectified . . . as a 'condition' in which [the woman] must 'take care of herself' " (160).

[21] In contrast to this, Cordelia's pregnancy is a secret, feminine event. Although she is seen lying in bed, this is part of the secrecy surrounding the early stages of her pregnancy; there is no suggestion that Cordelia is actually in need of "bed rest." She is never scanned and does not visit a hospital, nor does she appear in any doubt about what it is that she is carrying. She is frequently shown caressing her belly and talking about the marvellous possibilities for her child once it is born. In fact, Cordelia appears to be in complete control of her body and her pregnancy—and again this is represented as "monstrous," particularly as, at this stage of the narrative, the audience is aware that Cordelia is possessed by demonic power and that her actions are governed by this power. Especially noteworthy is the revelation of her pregnancy to the rest of Angel Investigations, at the end of the episode "Orpheus" (4.15). Cordelia appears at the top of a staircase, wearing a Goth style black dress that reveals her bare shoulders and belly and emphasizes her pregnancy, and as she descends the stairs she caresses her belly and smiles.<sup>6</sup> This moment is framed as the shock or cliffhanger ending of the episode—after her announcement and a shot of Angel's horrified face, the screen cuts to black while the soundtrack crashes its accompaniment. So the news of Cordelia's pregnancy is immediately ominous, alarming, and potentially "evil" or "horrific" as it both announces the pregnancy to the other characters and confirms for the audience that Cordelia is possessed.

[22] For Kristeva, as Creed notes, "the womb suggests the monstrous . . . [in] the definition of abjection in terms of inside/outside," and Creed also observes that "[h]orror films that depict monstrous births play on the inside/outside distinction in order to point to the inherently monstrous nature of the womb as well as the impossibility of ever completely banishing the abject from the human domain" (48-9). Creed and Carol Clover see the womb represented symbolically in horror film as "as [a] house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space," and this also links with Freud's theory of the "uncanny", as represented by—as Creed puts it—"a feeling associated with a familiar [or] unfamiliar place, losing one's way, womb phantasies, a haunted house" (55, 53). In the episode where Cordelia gives birth, the abject and the uncanny are strongly present, as is the "inside/outside distinction," which is actually named in the episode title: "Inside Out" (the title's connection with Creed's formulation of abjection and the womb is also noted by Hills and Williams, 206). The tropes associated with horror film appear with little alteration in this television narrative. The dark, "haunted" house is present in the location of Connor's hideout, which is in the meat-packing district; it is thus identified as a place of death and dismemberment, and becomes a place of sacrifice at the end of the episode when a girl is killed to enable the baby to be born.<sup>7</sup> Shots of Cordelia's belly in close-up are counterposed with long shots of the meat hooks in the ceiling in an ominous foreshadowing.

[23] Towards the end of the episode, Connor wrestles with his conscience as he tries to carry out Cordelia's instructions to kill the girl sacrifice. He experiences a vision of Darla, who becomes both the voice of his conscience and the voice of his mother. Darla and Cordelia, the two "mothers," are polarized as good versus evil, but this is also turned "inside out" as Darla pleads on behalf of the innocents, while Cordelia epitomizes



evil. Darla and the girl sacrifice are linked by appearance, both in white with blonde hair (a deliberate decision, as Steven DeKnight confirms in the episode commentary), while Cordelia enters the fray in black with dark hair, looking very pregnant, and carrying a meat cleaver (which is appropriate enough, given the location). This contrasts strongly with Cordelia's appearance when she returned from heaven at the start of the season, dressed in dazzling white with blonde hair; it contrasts, too, with Darla's appearance through Seasons 2 and 3, where she is consistently dressed in black and red, with the exception of the white smock she wears in "That Vision Thing."

[24] I see this battle of the mothers as the pivotal moment of the episode. Darla's transformation into "good mother" is emphasized by her gently spoken words to Connor (assisted by Julie Benz's light and high-pitched voice), "You brought light to my shadows, filled my heart with joy and love," as well as by the suggestion that she has been sent by the Powers-That-Be to intervene. She now calls Connor "beautiful boy" and "baby," not "parasite." Her words to Connor invoke the sacrifice she made to let him live, but also conjure up parental disappointment at the actions of a child: "and this is how you repay me?" Meanwhile, Cordelia infantilizes Connor with her reference to the "big, confusing words" that have led him astray. We see Connor's choice to follow Cordelia articulated as a choice of parent: Darla is "not [his] mother."<sup>8</sup> At the end of the scene, as Darla is vanquished, she also becomes the sacrifice: the face of the nameless girl is replaced by Darla's face as Cordelia wields the cleaver and Connor looks on, his face spattered with blood. Thus, Connor not only rejects his mother, he symbolically assists in killing her.

[25] The birth scene in "Inside Out" replays, to some extent, the scene in which Darla consulted the shaman in "That Vision Thing." Here, Connor takes on the role of shaman, and administers the bloody handprint on Cordelia's naked belly. Yet because of the connections made with Darla in the preceding scene, this blood is symbolically Darla's blood, as well as that of the girl; Darla again becomes associated with the sacrifice that allows the child to be born. This in turn loops back to "Lullaby," when Darla did indeed sacrifice herself so that Connor could be born.<sup>9</sup> Hills and Williams argue that "Cordelia's depiction as a 'monstrous womb' is rendered less graphically than comparable representations in horror film" (207); however, I see the "horror" of the episode emphatically present in the grim scenes of human sacrifice and blood-letting that precede the "spectacle" of the actual birth. So although Cordelia's murder of the girl is "visually and narratively restricted" thanks to the demands of prime-time television of this period (205), the events preceding the murder are depicted at some length, including a sustained shot of the terrified girl being dragged along the floor of the former meat-packing factory. The birth itself does reference both horror and science fiction tropes (especially *Alien*), absence of gore notwithstanding, as the monstrous child "bursts" out of Cordelia in a blaze of light, and is seen as a tentacled monster before it morphs into the womanly body of Jasmine.

[26] It is notable that, while in *Angel's* narrative the mother may be powerful, strong, and dominating while she is pregnant, once the child is born, motherhood only brings death. During the birth Darla kills herself, vanishing into dust and leaving her baby; Cordelia is left in a coma after the birth of Jasmine. Even though Cordelia is also accorded the honors appropriate to a "holy mother" (she is hidden in a cathedral in "Peace Out" 4.21), her part is, like Darla's, effectively over once she has given birth. She appears to make a recovery in Season 5, returning from her coma to play the mother-figure of the group and successfully encouraging them to re-bond ("You're Welcome"

5.12). However, at the end of this episode it is revealed that Cordelia has not recovered, but has died without regaining consciousness, and her brief appearance “alive” is a gift from the Powers-That-Be. Thus, her appearance in this episode could also be viewed as monstrous and abject; like Darla in “Inside Out,” she is either a ghost or a corpse.

[27] In both Seasons 3 and 4, after the birth the focus of the narrative is transferred to the child. In Season 3 the narrative follows Connor’s infancy and his kidnapping into a demon dimension; the remainder of Season 4 follows Jasmine in her bid for world domination through demonic brainwashing. Jasmine, in fact, can be seen as another enactment of the “archaic mother,” both “good” and “bad” at once. She is apparently beautiful and good, described as “a beautiful ebony goddess” (“The Magic Bullet” 4.19) and is the source of all love, peace, and joy, but her true face is eaten away by maggots, and she has an unfortunate habit of eating her disciples. She plays mother even to her nominal father, Connor, calling him “sweet boy” in an echo of Darla (“Sacrifice” 4.20) and also echoes Cordelia when she tells him that “we’ll be a family. Together, as one, forever” (“Peace Out”). Ultimately, it is Connor, her father, who has sufficient strength to kill her. While Battis rightly highlights the problematic positioning of Jasmine/Gina Torres as “monstrous” *body of color* (par. 24), this must be seen to be complicated by the alterations made to the original narrative.<sup>10</sup> Here, Jasmine takes on the role of monstrous mother from Cordelia, but it is likely that Cordelia’s character would have maintained that role had Carpenter not been pregnant.

[28] The depictions of birth in *Angel* situate the monstrous mother as powerful, fearful, abject, and evil. Her monstrosity is wedded to the changes taking place in her body, which finally work to remove her from the narrative altogether. The use made of the monstrous mother calls upon an archetypal framework, as outlined by Creed, that has become firmly rooted within some conventions of horror film. That the pregnant body, in its “split” and “liminal” condition, has cultural resonances as “abject” and transgressive, as has been shown here, means that it is possible to read as “horror” a television narrative that incorporates pregnancy into a tale of demonic possession, vampirism, violence, and death.<sup>11</sup> This makes it possible for *Angel*’s narrative, through the representation of transformed female bodies, to present a version of “horror” that, while it does not rely on visual depictions of blood and gore, is nevertheless as effective in what it does as a narrative that is not restricted by the framework of television of this period. As such, *Angel* stands as an example of the creative and transgressive possibilities of horror in television series of this period, looking forward to early 21<sup>st</sup> century series—such as *True Blood* (2008-14), *Being Human* (UK 2008-13; US 2011-present) or *The Walking Dead* (2010-present)—and their bloody and overt depictions of horror.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This plot point is one that has been subject to revision; after Angel’s initial transformation into Angelus in *Buffy* (“Surprise”/“Innocence” 2.13-14) it was assumed that “perfect happiness” was code for sex itself. However, this is undercut in the encounter with Darla, and following this, Angel is allowed to be more sexually active in Season 5.

<sup>2</sup> This is a “family” who do not keep to their roles: all are lovers; Darla is Drusilla’s “grandmother,” but later she becomes Drusilla’s child when she is reborn as a vampire

in "Reunion" (2.10). As Nevitt and Smith note, the very structure of the vampire "family" is incestuous and/or narcissistic.

<sup>3</sup> Threats include the vampire cult that plan to kill her and use her blood to nourish the child, and Dr. Bethonovitch, the "expert in paranormal obstetrics" who prepares matching cages for "mama" and "baby" ("Lullaby").

<sup>4</sup> The demon Jasmine is never a baby, as Connor is in Season 3, but emerges a fully-grown adult woman.

<sup>5</sup> Discussed in interview by Tim Minear, and in DVD commentary by Steven DeKnight. Thanks to several readers who reminded me of this point.

<sup>6</sup> As Catherine Spooner notes, it is amazing nobody notices that Cordelia is evil when they are given such a huge sartorial clue.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the alleyway where Connor is born does not follow the "uncanny" in that it is neither interior nor enclosed. However, both these locations are dark, filmed in low light or at night, and Connor's birth takes place in a tremendous rainstorm.

<sup>8</sup> Compare his rejection of Angel at the beginning of Season 4: "That thing is not my father" ("Deep Down" 4.1).

<sup>9</sup> In "Inside Out" there is a further connection with Darla in the eerie, music-box score. This plays over the death of the girl/Darla, but it has already been used over the scenes of Darla's vampiric (re)birth in "Reunion" and an early shot of Cordelia's pregnant belly in "Salvage." My thanks to Janet K. Halfyard for this observation.

<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the casting of Gina Torres is significant because of its timing. Torres was working on *Firefly* until the show's cancellation, when Whedon transferred some of his *Firefly* actors to other projects. Nathan Fillion has a similarly-timed guest appearance as an evil character at the end of *Buffy's* Season 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Angel* is not the only Whedon narrative to include a 'monstrous' or transgressive maternal character. As Samira Nadkarni notes, one can read Adelle DeWitt as an example of 'transgressive mothering' in *Dollhouse* (2009-10) and this is evident, too, in the presentation of Maggie Walsh in *Buffy's* fourth season (89-90).

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