



## Stacey Abbott Walking the Fine Line Between Angel and Angelus



[1] Much of the discussion and analysis of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has focused upon the show's moral complexity in its representation of good and evil. Joss Whedon's world is a world of grays rather than crisp black and white oppositions. The character Angel, the vampire with a soul, was one of the earliest introductions of this ambiguity into the series. The slayer and her friends were forced to accept that a vampire could be good. Difficult to accept but not as difficult as a loving boyfriend who can turn evil over night . . . again embodied in Angel. He offered the young Slayer, her friends and the audience a lot to think about in those first two seasons. While initially morally complex, as the series has developed and explored the far reaches of moral ambiguity through the actions of all of the Scooby Gang, Angel's representation seems too neatly split across polar oppositions: the good Angel versus the evil Angelus. These two sides of Angel have been described by Beth Braun as "tortured soul" and "soulless demon" (90) and by Mary Alice Money as "soulful vampire extraordinaire" and "evil über-vampire" (98-99).

[2] Rhonda V. Wilcox suggests, in "Every Night I Save You: Buffy, Spike, Sex and Redemption," "[that] since Angel is good because he possesses a soul, he still represents an essentialist definition of good." This is in contrast to the vampire Spike, who, she argues, "owns no human soul, yet repeatedly does good; if he can be seen as capable of change, capable of good, capable of *love*, then he can represent an existentialist definition of good" (paragraph 15). Angel's soul would seem to make him one in a long line of sympathetic, reluctant vampires, from the nineteenth-century *Varney the Vampire* through to Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows* and Nick Knight in *Forever Knight*, an "essentialist hero" whose goodness in his case is determined by his possession of a soul. Richard Greene and Wayne Yuen further suggest that "since plenty of persons with souls do harm others," as demonstrated by Warren in season six of *BtVS*, what differentiates Angel from the traditional vampire is that because he "has a 'good' soul, he has no desire to harm people" (paragraph 2).

[3] While these readings of Angel's character on *BtVS* are sound, the *idea* of a vampire with a soul is a complex concept that has been more fully explored on the new series *Angel*. On *BtVS*, Angel's strict embodiment of an opposition between

good and evil is largely a result of the fact that Angel is a significant, but peripheral love interest for Buffy. His existence is defined in relation to her. For instance, in a flashback in "Becoming", it is revealed that the good Angel is in Sunnydale purely to help Buffy on her mission and it does not take long to become apparent that the evil Angelus only remained in Sunnydale to torment Buffy. This clear-cut image of Angel helps Buffy cope with her feelings for him. She is able to love Angel because he has a soul despite all of the evil things Angelus has done to her, a fact that she holds up as her reason for being unable to love Spike.

[4] It is only when Angel is moved from peripheral love interest to the central protagonist of a new series that his representation breaks from strategically polarizing his good and evil sides.<sup>[1]</sup> In *Angel*, as a means of developing the character to sustain its own serial narrative and to shape future narrative arcs, the many ways in which Angel and Angelus merge are examined. Angel does not necessarily possess a particularly 'good' soul but rather that what differentiates Angel from the other vampires, and which is the subject of much of the narrative arc of the series, is the fact that he has become a curious hybrid between human and vampire and through this hybridity he must constantly choose not to harm people. <sup>[2]</sup> The curse did not determine his 'good soul' but rather put into play a conflict between vampirism and humanism that fuels Angel's identity, despite his soul. In this article I want to look at how the series *Angel* undermines the distinction between Angel and Angelus and presents the hybrid Angel/Angelus as a self-defining existentialist protagonist struggling within himself to make the right choices, for the greater good, the good of his friends and for his own benefit, within an increasingly complicated world in which it is often impossible to distinguish right from wrong.

[5] Jean-Paul Sartre argued in "Existentialism and Humanism," that if God does not exist then man's existence pre-dates his essence, i.e. "before it can be defined through any conception of itself." Humanity must define itself through choice and action, rather than assume the possession of an essentialist quality. Sartre claims that "man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing but the sum of his actions, nothing but what his life is" (28, 36).

[6] That the series *Angel* has links to existentialism is supported by the relocation of Angel to Los Angeles, as well as its adoption of other conventions from the detective film and *Film Noir*, most notably the reinvention of the character Angel as an LA detective surrounded by the visual trappings of both genres (Jacobs). The series largely takes place at night, which is equally a Noir and Vampire genre convention. It often uses the chiaroscuro lighting associated with *Film Noir* and constantly emphasizes the city location through repeated uses of establishing shots of the bright lights of the city throughout each episode and in particular in the credit sequence, which features a montage of urban locations superimposed over images of the night life of the LA landscape.<sup>[3]</sup> This presentation of the city captures what Andrew Spicer describes as the Noir city's "fundamental ambivalence." It is "dangerous, violent, squalid and corrupt but also exciting and sophisticated, the place of opportunity and conspicuous consumption" (67).

[7] Robert Porfirio, in his analysis of existentialist motifs in *Film Noir*, argues that while the genre was not directly influenced by existentialism, it was influenced by the American hard-boiled school of fiction and the "symbiotic relationship they had with the French existentialist writers" (83). For instance, according to Andrew Spicer, the adaptations of Cornell Woolrich, the most existential of the hard-boiled writers,

"show paranoid protagonists, adrift in the cities that are monstrous, hallucinatory and actively malevolent" (67). Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward further suggest that in films such as *The Dark Corner*, the protagonist is not concerned about working and living outside the law, but rather that it is his inability "either to discover or to control the underlying causes of his distress, that is mentally intolerable" (4). The idea of characters being lost within a city that is "monstrous, hallucinatory and actively malevolent" is one that is made literal through the series' 'demonisation' of Los Angeles. While Angel both protects the lost and needy from the city's demons, he is often presented as being adrift and under threat himself, instigating the crisis of the Noir protagonist unable to control the events of his life.

[8] Of course, *Film Noir* and the detective film are not the only generic allusions that *Angel* draws upon. The series is, in fact, a curious hybrid of genres, but most significantly in terms of its representation of Angel and the urban landscape, between the *Film Noir*/Detective genres and the superhero narrative such as *Batman*. While Angel often circulates within the hidden underworld of LA, this is usually counterbalanced with images of him looming over the city, acting as its guardian. Again in the credit sequence for the series, the images of the lost and suffering of the city are juxtaposed with Angel bursting onto the scene to save the day. While this hybridized presentation of the city and the character Angel explains certain inconsistencies within the series' relationship with *Film Noir*, I would argue that this is fundamental to Angel's character development. The dramatic arc of the series is structured around this generic tension as Angel is regularly pulled down from his position as the empowered hero, watching over the helpless, and into the morally ambiguous, labyrinthine underworld of the Noir city where events and actions are random and "the only certainty is death" (Walker 22).

[9] Robert Porfirio outlines certain motifs that recur within *Film Noir*: the non-heroic hero; themes of alienation and loneliness; choice; man under threat of death; meaninglessness, purposelessness and the absurd; chaos, violence, paranoia; and sanctuary, ritual and order. I would argue that all of these motifs recur across the series *Angel*. In his battles against the evil law firm Wolfram and Hart, Angel is constantly embroiled in a chaotic and violent battle and like the Noir detective he alone finds sanctuary within the confines of his office or home. Furthermore, with the launch of the new series, the character Angel is introduced as being alone, stripped of the community to which he briefly belonged on *BtVS* and, as Porfirio argues, the character is intensely aware of this loss. While much of the series involves the rebuilding of a new community of similarly alienated souls (Doyle, Cordelia, Wesley, Gunn, Fred, Lorne and Kate Lockley) all of whom are damaged or in need of redemption like Angel, a theme that is not usually associated with *Film Noir*, each season sees Angel stripped of his friends and forced to go it alone. In season one, Wesley and Cordelia are put in the hospital in order to isolate Angel; in season two Angel fires his staff; and most dramatically of all, season three ends with Angel locked within a steel coffin and dropped to the bottom of the ocean while his friends have each gone their own way.<sup>[4]</sup> It is through the series' expression of the motifs of the non-heroic hero, choice, meaninglessness, purposelessness and the absurd, however, that the series explores more fully the complexity of the vampire with a soul and places Angel on the path to an existential realization.

### **Angel as Vampire**

[10] While Angel is clearly presented as a hero, a champion, the series takes great pains to present him as a problematic one. He makes mistakes, his personal

obsessions get in the way of his mission,[5] and most importantly we are never allowed to forget that he is a vampire. Angel's vampirism is foregrounded in the series, no longer as part of the tragic irony of his love affair with the Slayer nor simply in the threat of Angelus' return, for which his colleagues Cordelia and Wesley are always prepared, but through the physical reality of his vampirism. The series emphasizes the demands of his vampire body and that he must continually overcome these restrictions and *choose* not to give in to his hungers.

[11] Firstly, Angel is confined to shadows. On *BtVS*, he similarly avoids sunlight but this was primarily achieved by his mysterious appearances at night rather than by drawing attention to the sun's lethal effects. Two exceptions to this occur in "Earshot" (3018) and "The Prom" (3020) when, in both cases, Buffy inadvertently opens the curtains in Angel's mansion and lets the sun into the room forcing Angel to jump out of the way. The effect of these scenes is to emphasize how different they are and the hopelessness of their relationship, prefiguring Angel's departure from the series and Buffy's life. On *Angel*, however, he is constantly seen during the day but avoiding direct light. Two episodes in the first season, "In the Dark" (1003) and "I Will Remember You" (1008), particularly draw attention to this by briefly allowing Angel to emerge into the sunlight through magical means, reminding us that he is usually trapped in the dark. Oz comments on Angel's unnatural pallor. In both cases Angel *chooses* to return to the shadows and his vampire existence. In the first case it is because he doesn't feel that he has yet atoned for his sins and in the second because he believes he can do more good as a vampire.[6]

[12] The second way we are reminded of Angel's vampirism is his thirst for blood. In the first episode of the series "City Of" (1001) he saves two young women from vampires but sends them away when they try to thank him as he is clearly drawn to the blood from their wounds. Doyle warns him that when he drank Buffy's blood, he regained a taste for it and must therefore reconnect with humanity in order to avoid giving in to this thirst. In "Somnambulist" (1011), Angel has vivid dreams of attacking people and drinking their blood, which turn out to be telepathic images of the actions of one of his vampire offspring who happens to be in LA. While the narrative reassures the audience that these images originated elsewhere, the episode ends on a disturbing note when Angel admits to Cordelia that the dreams weren't nightmares, he enjoyed them (despite possessing a soul). In "The Shroud of Rahmon" (2008) as Angel goes under cover as a Vegas vampire taking part in a museum heist, the mystical energies of the shroud they are stealing drives everyone in its proximity insane. This brings out the vampire in Angel, causing him to threaten Gunn, hit Wesley and attack and drink from the police officer Kate Lockley. While it is later revealed that his attack on Kate was a ploy to save her from one of the others, Wesley and Cordelia express concern that this may have awakened his blood lust. The episode implies that their fears may be well founded as it ends with Angel all alone in his room, vividly flashing back to the moment he drank from Kate. Finally, in "Sleep Tight" (3017), his pig's blood is spiked with the blood of his son Connor causing Angel to drink blood like an alcoholic falling off the wagon. His thirst is unquenchable, he becomes increasingly violent and he even describes Connor as smelling like food. In this manner, the series reiterates that Angel's soul or guilt for his crimes has not taken away his thirst for human blood, but rather he *chooses* not to give in to it.

## Flashbacks to Angelus

[13] While reminding the audience of the physicality of Angel's vampirism, the series

further emphasizes his past as Angelus. While Angelus makes a brief, although memorable appearance in the second season of *BtVS*, Angelus is a very real and constant presence on Angel. In "Enemies" (3017) in *BtVS*, the effectiveness of Angel's performance as Angelus in order to trick Faith is unsettling to both the audience and Buffy because it undermines the separation that has been established between the two sides of Angel's character (with and without soul). In "Eternity" (1017) on *Angel* that separation is completely shattered when a drug that simulates 'perfect happiness' briefly unleashes Angelus showing that the "über-vampire" is merely lurking beneath the surface of Angel's goodness. While Angelus' obsession with Buffy was an inversion of Angel's love for her, in "Eternity" Angelus simply says what Angel's been thinking but is too good a friend to say. He ridicules Wesley's masculinity, and mocks Cordelia's acting. Wesley admits in this episode that Angel walks a fine and unenviable line.

[14] The most important way that Angelus' presence is felt is through flashback. [7] Angel has a privileged relationship with the flashback. Flashbacks are not commonly used on *BtVS* with the exception of "Fool for Love" (5007) in which Spike recounts how he became a vampire and killed the two slayers, "Amends" (3010) in which Angel comes face to face with his past victims and "Becoming Parts 1 & 2" (2021 & 2022) in which we are witness to the implementation of the Gypsy curse and Angel's first sight of Buffy. While the flashbacks in "Becoming" do show Buffy's being called as a Slayer and the difficulties of her broken home, the focus in these scenes is upon the impact of this sight of Buffy upon Angel. It is his story being told. While unusual on *BtVS*, the flashback is a major element of the narrative structure of *Angel*. Angel is constantly being confronted by figures from his past such as Darla in "Dear Boy" (2005) and "The Trial" (2009) and his many encounters with Holtz that come to dominate the third season. Each of these confrontations is conceptualized by flashbacks to the past. His noble actions in the present are, therefore, set against his history of cruelty, sadism and viciousness, serving to reinforce the need for redemption, a major theme of the series. The flashbacks also serve to flesh out Angel's character before and after the curse, highlighting the similarities rather than simply the differences between the two sides of his identity and the impact of the *choices* he has made throughout his undead existence.

[15] For instance, a flashback of Angel's life with Darla and the direct aftermath of the gypsy curse reveals that Angel returned to her (with his soul) asking to be accepted back into the fold in "Darla" (2007). While the implication on *BtVS* was that Angel had never drunk human blood between regaining his soul and losing it in "Surprise" (2013), Angel's past has been rewritten in this series to reveal that this is not true. According to the *Angel* narrative, even with his soul Angel tried desperately to maintain his vampire identity, by living, hunting and drinking blood with Darla, though choosing to kill only the "evil-doer" and as a result being abandoned by Darla. This revision to Angel's backstory serves to reposition the significance of Darla given her reintroduction on *Angel* and the role she plays in the narrative arc of season two and three. It also presents the newly ensouled vampire as suffering a conflict of identity, torn between his vampire and human self.

[16] In "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" (2002) flashbacks to the fifties reveal an Angel that is detached from humanity. He has stopped drinking human blood, but he still has a contempt for humanity that is reminiscent of Angelus but without the sadism. He is cold, uncaring and withdrawn. This contempt is briefly alleviated by his desire to help a young woman who is a victim of racial discrimination. When she later betrays him to a paranoid mob out of fear for her own life, he abandons humanity again, leaving the girl and the mob to be slowly destroyed by a paranoia

demon. When the demon mocks his attempts to help the girl by suggesting that this made her all the more rewarding to destroy, he points out that the hotel is full of people who need Angel's help. To this Angel responds by turning his back and telling the demon to "take 'em all." The demon's mocking words predict the futility Angel comes to feel for his 'mission' later in the season, while his own words and action foreshadow his decision to abandon the lawyers from Wolfram and Hart to Darla and Drusilla's hunger in "Reunion" (2010).

[17] These flashbacks demonstrate that it was not the curse and the return of his soul that set Angel onto the path of goodness, but rather it was Buffy. Through her, his mission was clear. Without her, he is alone on a path struggling to walk a fine line between Angel and Angelus and to make the right *choices* in a world where nothing is clear. It is this solitary path that forces Angel into the existential crisis that dominates the second season and recurs in season three.

### **Meaninglessness, Purposelessness, the Absurd**

[18] It is the sense of meaninglessness of Angel's existence that pushes Angel into crisis. His return from hell and his miraculous rescue from the rays of sun in "Amends" on *BtVS* urged Angel onto his solitary path as a champion for good and gave the writers of *Angel* a narrative drive for the new series. The Powers That Be and the visions first possessed by Doyle and later passed onto Cordelia are introduced in this series as means of placing Angel at the center of a grand battle between good and evil. The overt introduction of the Powers That Be in this series seems to place the narrative more firmly within a fatalistic world and to contradict any links with existentialist thought. Sartre's philosophy was based upon the belief that there is no God and therefore no pre-determined human nature or fate. Man simply is (28). Furthermore, it distances the series from the Noir tradition that also denies the existence of any moral certainty. While in the Detective Noir, protagonists like Sam Spade and Philip Marlow work outside the law much like Angel, they do possess their own code that influences their choices. This, however, is more of a professional code rather than a moral one influenced by external forces. Frank Krutnik argues that the "private eye occupies a mediating position between the world of crime and legitimate society. He proves himself by his ability to withstand any challenges to his integrity and to his very status as the active hero (i.e.. to his masculine professionalism, or his professionals masculinity)" (92). While Angel occupies a similar mediating role between the underworld (i.e. world of evil, vampires and demons) and 'normal' society (i.e. the helpless), his position as the active hero is tempered by his brooding self-torment.[8] In this respect, *Angel* seems to be leaning toward the superhero narrative in which the hero, like Batman or Blade, may be conflicted but the moral certainty of his mission helps him find a place in the world and overcome his internal conflict.

[19] The presence of the Powers That Be and Angel's role as their champion suggest a world of meaning and order in which good and evil are defined by external forces. The sense of purpose and all-knowingness that they seem to advocate, however, is constantly undermined by the suggestion of their fallibility. Cordelia's linguistic reduction of the Powers to the "PTBs" serves to undermine their position as higher beings, while the murder of the Oracles (the voices for the PTBs) at the end of season one demonstrates that, like so many of the demons that populate the series, they are not supreme beings but rather a different race of being. Furthermore, as on *BtVS*, prophecy is always shown to be duplicitous and fallible. The prophecy that Angel will redeem himself and become human again is undermined in

"Judgment" (2001) by the assumption that if Angel kills enough demons he will gain his reward. This causes Angel to mistakenly murder another champion. Similarly, Wesley's downfall at the hands of prophecy in season three, when he comes to believe the prophecy that the vampire with a soul will kill his own son, demonstrates not only the risks in acting upon prophecy rather than personal choice, but also that prophecy can be manipulated and rewritten.

[20] Most importantly, the powers are shown to be most fallible by their absence when things turn particularly dark for Angel. There is a randomness to the moments when they intrude upon Angel's existence that undermines the notion of a grand scheme or purpose. They do not directly intervene during Angel's vengeful pursuit of Wolfram and Hart nor do they warn Angel about Darla's pregnancy or Holtz's arrival in Los Angeles. It is particularly at these moments that Angel tries to find meaning to his life and is confronted by a void. It is possible that while the PTBs seem to present themselves as higher beings, that they themselves advocate choice over a sense of pre-determinacy. In "Birthday" (3011) when it is revealed that Cordelia's visions are slowly killing her, the PTBs, represented by Skip, lead Cordelia on a personal journey seemingly to show her that she wasn't meant to have the visions but that her true path was to be a star. They suggest that meeting Angel, and the events that followed, was a glitch in her destiny. The journey, however, actually leads Cordelia to make a choice and determine her fate for herself as she explains to Skip: "I know my purpose in the world and it includes the visions. And if the Powers That Be aren't complete dumb asses, they know it too!" The absence of the PTBs during Angel's darkest moments may suggest that he has also been set upon a personal journey to determine for himself his place within the good fight.<sup>[9]</sup> Without a doubt, Angel turns away from 'the mission' and the Powers That Be in season two, in much the same way that Buffy turns away from the Council in "Graduation Day Part One" (3021) and the Slayer Heritage in "Restless," (4022) in order to choose his mission for himself. The major distinction between Buffy and Angel is that while Buffy's choices bring her closer to embracing and defining her role as the Slayer, Angel's choices bring him closer to the dark side of the Angel/Angelus hybrid.

[21] Angel's journey begins with Darla's resurrection as human by Wolfram and Hart, through which Angel tries to attribute meaning to his life as Angelus by saving Darla's soul. His failure to do so, as well as his inability to save her from her pending death or to stop her rebirth as a vampire, forces Angel to question the nature of good and evil, the cosmic order and his purpose within it. As Robert Porfirio argues, "existentialism is an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept" (81). This is a very precise description of Angel when he returns to the hotel after Darla has been turned by Drusilla in "Reunion." Like the protagonist of Sartre's *Nausea*, Angel's recognition of the meaninglessness of his existence produces in him an existential angst, but rather than create the feeling of nausea of Sartre's title, Angel is consumed by despair, causing him to embrace the line between Angel and Angelus and embody the hybridity of vampire and man. Drusilla recognizes this hybridity in "Reunion" when Angel arrives at Holland's wine tasting seemingly to save all of the lawyers from Darla and Drusilla. When he enters the room, Drusilla pouts and whimpers "it's not daddy, it's never daddy. It's that Angel-beast." Later, however, when Angel cruelly locks the lawyers in the wine cellar leaving them to die, Drusilla stares after him, calling out to "daddy." Angel's action causes Drusilla to recognize the Angelus in Angel.

[22] In "Redefinition" (2011), Angel withdraws from both humanity and vampirism to embody most fully the hybridity of Angel and Angelus as well as the moral

ambiguity of the *Film Noir* "seeker-hero". As Michael Walker explains in the seeker-hero noir film, the detective's investigation becomes a quest into a dangerous and threatening world where moral certainties are absent. "Even though the *noir* seeker hero solves the case, there is usually the sense at the end that little good will come of this or that the cost has been absurdly high" (12). Angel's obsession with destroying Darla becomes such a quest.

[23] The series' use of the visual style and iconography of *Film Noir* are taken to extremes in this episode to express Angel's angst as he prepares for a confrontation with Darla. Most notably, the episode is dominated by Angel's voice-over: he doesn't speak a word of dialogue throughout. He retreats to his office as a sanctuary to train and prepare for the coming battle. Michael Walker further argues that while the city is itself a character within *Noir*, "the focus is on the seedy underside of the city." As previously mentioned, the series' presentation of the city usually offers both aerial and subterranean views, drawing upon both Noir and superhero imagery. In this case, however, Angel literally submerges himself within the city's underground network of sewers, tunnels and sordid hangouts as he tracks Darla and Drusilla, murders a group of vampires to test how ready he is for battle and tortures the underworld snitch Merle for information. Visually Angel is filmed throughout the episode in distinctively high contrast lighting, expressing, in true Noir fashion, his inner nature. In every shot half of Angel's face is in shadow, suggesting his dual nature as both Angel and Angelus.

[24] This duality is reinforced when he actually confronts Darla and Drusilla at the warehouse where they are planning to hold auditions for a team of demon henchmen. As Drusilla looks at Angel she sees only a shadowy reflection of his former self and Angel is visually engulfed in shadow as he then sets fire to the women. The brutality of his actions, along with the iconic image of his smoking (for Angel only smokes when he's Angelus) suggests the presence of the "über-vampire," and yet his brooding and silence suggests Angel. He is in fact neither and he is both. Darla immediately recognizes that his crisis has transformed Angel into a new being, when she says, "that wasn't Angel, that wasn't Angelus either . . . who was that?" He is a new being of his own creation and no longer predetermined by our expectations of Angel or Angelus. That he has become something new is reinforced by Cordelia in "Reprise" (2015) when Angel comes to her for a book with a vital clue to Wolfram and Hart's destruction. He threatens her when she won't let him take the book and she articulates the primary theme of the series up to this point: "I don't even know what you are anymore." Angel suggests that he has come to his own conclusion about his identity when he responds, "I'm a vampire. Look it up." If the return of his soul has no greater purpose, Angel chooses not to deny the vampire inside him but embody both man and vampire.

[25] Angel however continues to search for meaning, no longer in the PTBs, but in Wolfram and Hart and their destruction; as he tells Lorne "getting to these senior partners . . . that's my destiny" ("Reprise"). Rather than accept the responsibility for his actions, that Sartre argues is the burden of existence, Angel places the responsibility on his enemies by setting himself a new mission: to win the war against Wolfram and Hart (29). Again, Angel has the meaning ripped from his existence when he goes to confront the "senior partners" in the home office only to be shown that the home office is here on earth. As Holland Manners tells him: "the world doesn't work in spite of evil Angel, it works with us. It works because of us." Angel realizes that there is no war to win, just an endless battle. Rather than turn him over completely to Angelus, as Wolfram and Hart presumably expect, this culmination of Angel's despair leads him to the epiphany that "if what you do



doesn't matter, then all that matters is what you do," a doctrine that echoes Sartre's advocacy for the responsibility of existence ("Epiphany" 2016). While the search for meaning may not be consistent with French existential thought, the realization that there is no meaning, no grand scheme but only action, is fundamental to Sartre's philosophy. It is this realization that sends Angel back to rejoin his crew and take action once again.

[26] This is not to say, however, that Angel returns to being the "soulful vampire" as his experiences in the Pylea episodes demonstrate. In Pylea, Angel finds himself in a dimension that physically segregates his vampire and human sides. While this enables him the pleasure of walking in the sun and seeing his own reflection, it also forces him to confront the unbridled demon inside him. The pure separation of his two sides reinforces the fact that on earth, Angel is the embodiment of both. The narrative trajectory of the second season of *Angel* is a personal journey that prepares Angel to accept this fact about himself and choose his own fate.

[27] Having resolved his crisis however, Angel is once again thrown into turmoil in season three with the birth and abduction of his son. Confounded by the seeming absurdity of having a miracle baby only to have it taken away, Angel embraces the hybrid human/vampire again by allowing Angel's passions and Angelus' obsessive and cruel nature to fuel his *choice* of actions when he tortures Linwood Murrow (Division President Special Projects, Wolfram and Hart) and threatens to kill Wesley for his role in Connor's abduction ("Forgiving" 3017). The repetition of this crisis reminds us that to repeatedly choose to fight the good fight, and in the process define what the 'good fight' is, is a constant struggle for the Angel/Angelus character and is a defining theme of the series. So if, as Sartre suggests, man is nothing but the sum of his actions, then Angel is the sum of his actions, for good or ill, as both the "soulful vampire extraordinaire" and "the evil über-vampire." Throughout the series Angel's character development forces him to walk this fine but unenviable line, and as a result the series challenges the distinction between good and evil in a godless world where there is only choice.

## Notes

[1] As Rhonda Wilcox commented at "Blood Text and Fears: Reading Around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" UEA, 19-20 October, 2002, it is worth noting that Buffy's representation is equally black and white in her brief appearances on *Angel*.

[2] We must remember that the soul he possesses is presumably the soul of his pre-vampire persona Liam, whose drinking and whoring undermines any suggestion that he possessed a particularly good or altruistic soul.

[3] Los Angeles is one of the dominant locations for the hard boiled novel and *Film Noir*.

[4] Season four is structured in the opposite way as it begins with the group completely separated and gradually as the season progresses they are brought back together and rebuilt as a team. The ending of the season, in which they take over Wolfram and Hart, does beg the question: what have they been rebuilt into?

[5] Obsession being a key characteristic of many *Film Noir* protagonists, while many

superheroes are equally presented as traumatized or internally conflicted.

[6] We should also note that in "I Will Remember You" Angel not only gives up a chance at humanity but perhaps his only chance at a lifetime with Buffy.

[7] This article was written prior to the start of season four of *Angel* in which Angelus once again returns. The events of season four simply confirm the observations that are made in this argument.

[8] Although Frank Krutnik does argue that Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* is atypical of the Detective Noir as most 1940s Noir "tend to be obsessed with lapses from and failures to achieve, such a position of unified and potent masculinity" (93).

[9] In Season Four, the role of the PTBs is rewritten yet again to take the narrative arc in a different direction and as a result suggests that their motives are far more ambiguous and questions whether there is a clear-cut 'good fight' to fight.

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