

## **Pernicious Pregnancy and Redemptive Motherhood: Narratives of Reproductive Choice in Joss Whedon's *Angel***

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Joss Whedon's *Angel* features several story arcs in which the bodies of female characters are put at risk, taken over, or completely destroyed by unsolicited co-option of their bodies for the purposes of reproduction. The deaths of three of *Angel*'s central female characters, Cordelia, Fred and Darla, result from such coerced participation in biological reproduction. Although the use of Fred's body for the rebirth of Illyria does not resemble traditional pregnancy, I consider her experience as comparable to those of Darla and Cordelia, as all involve the use of the female body to produce (monstrous) life.

The monstrous pregnancies that ultimately result in the deaths of Cordelia, Fred and Darla are all entered into unwillingly and unknowingly. Thus, the violence that these pregnancies enact on female bodies can be read as a 'pro-choice' commentary that acknowledges and emphasizes the physical harm and loss of identity that women might experience when coerced into reproductive roles. However the potential for these narratives to act as feminist commentary on the need for women's reproductive autonomy is undermined by Darla's character arc, in which maternal sacrifice is used as a means of redeeming one of the franchise's most compelling female villains. In this paper, I will explore these implications through a comparison of Darla's pregnancy narrative with those of Cordelia and Fred, drawing on and adding to existing analyses of all three character arcs. Specifically, I will examine how the construction of Darla's motherhood as redemptive, in conjunction with both the association of her maternal sacrifice with the possession of a 'soul', and the construction of Fred and Cordelia as blameless for their own fatal pregnancies constrains the possibilities for feminist readings of these characters' story arcs.