The Shell She's In:
Fred, Illyria, and Thoughts on Bodies

Tony Kemerly with Victoria Morgan

In her 2019 work "Is There Sex After Gender? Ungendering/'The Unnameable," Judith Roof proposes the following question: "Can we conceive of a world of interpersonal relations without gender?" (50). Roof's question is especially salient, both for the individual and society, when gender is viewed in its generic sense, as a binary, meaning it is therefore possible to reframe Roof's question as "Can we live in a world without binaries?" Reframing so would seem prudent, for Roof states that binaries are resistant to change (50), an idea further supported by Margaret Wetherell, who described them as a "constraint [to] creative thought" (399). Consider these limits to binaries while pondering the fates of Winifred "Fred" Burkle, brilliant mathematician and physicist, and Illyria, Old One and God King of the Primordium, from the fifth season of the television show *Angel* (1999-2004). Roof and Wetherell's comments regarding binaries are important, as a binaristic structure compels society to hierarchize characters like Fred and Illyria, resulting in certain attributes being relegated to one body and other attributes to the other. Division of this type illustrates both the arbitrariness of the relegation of attributes and the power inherent in relegation of individuals to varying positions of power within society.

Tony Kemerly received his Ph.D. in Biomechanics at the University of Mississippi and is a Professor of Exercise Science at High Point University. While he was hired to teach Human Anatomy and Biomechanics, a shift in focus and an M.A. in Communication Studies has led to his teaching a course called "Who Am I: Locating the Self in the Whedonverse," as well as others that focus on the perception of bodies in popular culture.

Victoria Morgan graduated from High Point University in 2018 with a major in exercise science. She is now attending Methodist University to pursue her doctorate in occupational therapy.

One such binary to be examined in the essay as it relates to bodies and the binaries they are placed within by society is body-objectivity / body-subjectivity. The importance of body-objectivity or body-subjectivity is illustrated by Nick Crossley, who queried whether the body should be studied as lived and active or as acted upon and inscribed from without (99). Crossley argues that the inscriptions of objectification upon a body articulate a message that affects that body's interactions with others as well as the way one feels able to interact with others. The ways that bodies may interact with one another is explained by Rosemary Joyce, who states that the human body is an object that conveys clear meanings within its culture of origin and through those meanings, identities are assigned (142). Consider then, the inscriptions and their concomitant articulated messages that are placed upon Fred. While she has a body nearly identical to that of Illyria, the articulations upon Fred's body are not the same. Fred presents as many things: intelligent, serious, focused; but despite the strength and power inherent in these personality traits, Fred's *body* is coded in a traditionally feminine manner through, as Calvert describes, "Fred's revealing and often-skimpy outfits" and her "light, perky Southern tones" (""The Shell I'm In"184) and as such it is articulated, in a sense, by society with the expectation that that body will reflect the adoption of a normative feminine gender performance.

The relationship between Fred and Illyria and its potential insights into the intricacies of the perception of bodies and those bodies' concomitant power is especially relevant to the question of binaries, for while Fred and Illyria share a similar physical appearance, the differences between the two in expectations of action, attitude, and interaction are as apparent as the chasm between the life and death that separates their existences. While Fred and Illyria certainly look alike, through the actions and interactions of the two characters, it could be argued that Fred and Illyria represent the differences in power and agency between the individual viewed as a body-object and the one viewed as a body-subject. Examining Fred and Illyria through the lens of body subjectivity allows for an understanding that while Fred is not Illyria, Fred does prepare the way for her as seen in the flashes of rebellion against her body-object status. It is in this way that Illyria gives the viewer an option for rebellion where one may not have been previously considered. The traditional

representations of gender found in popular culture push society to cling to the categorizations that through their structure enable and create oppression. The focus of this article will be to examine the means by which Illyria as body-subject and Fred as body-object give society the option of rejecting the structural categorizations that bind it into predetermined roles through a reclamation of the power and agency lost in the process of bodily hierarchization.

Molly George suggests that relegation to body-object status as a result of specific performance expectations implies that associated bodily objectification is fundamentally a property of interaction (339) and a common and insidious means of interaction occurs in the form of stories, which in society today consist of the media messages from television, film, and other sources. A number of scholars have argued that stories and storytellers provide the normative roles assigned to women and men and are tremendously important contributors to the construction and maintenance of stereotypes (Sylvester 4; Lauzen, Dozier and Horan 201). The danger of utilizing stories to impart the expectations of gender to society is that storytelling incorporates a "precise vagueness" (George 326) that places limits and boundaries on the person in an objectified body without being prescriptive about these limits. For this reason, Fred's intelligence is countered with a childlike silliness; her scientific focus, with a degree of flightiness. Furthermore, despite her hidden strengths, Fred's coding throughout the show as the embodiment of sweetness, compassion, and innocence (Battis 125) through sweet smiles and batted eyelashes somehow makes her in need of protection by the hegemonically masculine body-subjects of Angel Investigations.

While it is clear that Illyria, God King of the Primordium in *its* original form is a serpent-like creature that is, for all intents and purposes, genderless/nonbinary, for the purposes of this piece, Illyria will be viewed according to the body *she* presents to both the viewer and those with which she interacts. The rationale for a "she" reading of Illyria is similar to that found in Bronwen Calvert's 2017 article "'Great, she's super-strong and she can alter time,'" where Calvert states that the narrative and emphasis on Illyria's body "highlights an unwillingness of the other characters to accept her un/non-gendered status" (26). Furthermore, a "she" reading is appropriate, for with the exception of the few seconds that her "true

form" is shown to the viewer through Wesley's reading of an ancient text, Illyria's portrayal in her Season Five story arc consists of a female actor in a female-coded body that is referred to in the feminine by every other character. Finally, a "she" reading will be utilized because despite the current gender revolution, cultural institutions as well as individuals still tend to adhere to a gender binary in which certain behaviors and attributes are assigned to individuals of differing genders (Rahilly 341; Shea and Renn 83).

"Handsome Man Saved Me From the Monsters": Fred as Body-Object

Fred is a much-loved character that displays strength in her role, but she is a character in a story, and stories serve as a social construction of a society's values, attitudes, and ideologies (Beerman 201). With these social ideologies in mind, it is difficult for a character like Fred to completely separate from her body-object status, as she is a character in a body coded as feminine and such bodies, according to Grogan, et al., are simultaneously and continuously viewed according to naturalized gender expectations that encourage women to adopt and maintain a dominant standard that as a patriarchal construct, often objectifies women (18). Socially ingrained objectification takes the form of directives such as the following: Be nice. Be deferential. Be pretty. Be smart, but not so smart as to be threatening to men. Be tough, but again, not so much as to challenge the fragile male ego. Have a personality, but do not become a person. Iris Young describes this connection as, "the Other, the inessential correlate to man, as mere (body) object that firmly positions itself as merely an object under his control" (31). Pressure to adhere to this point of view objectifies that body as a product of a power relation that is exerted over it by society (Foucault *Discipline and Punish,* 25-26).

So, while the question would seem to be, "Why does one accept such objectification that places them in an inferior social position with less power?", a better question would be, "Can a person in a woman's body avoid being objectified?" Unfortunately, the answer is not a positive one, especially when one considers Foucault's words describing the power

inherent in phenomena similar to body objectification. He states that such power marks a body so forcefully that it reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives, inscribing them with a social truth that must be recognized by the individual who is inscribed and the society reading the inscription (*Power/Knowledge* 39). Therefore, in the case of Fred, her relegation to body-object status exists independently from what she does or does not do. Fred certainly demonstrates strength in numerous ways: for instance, through her ingenuity as an inventor, by saving herself from a "Billy-infected" Wesley through a lovely mix of ingenuity and violence ("Billy" 3.6, 00:27:23-00:29:50, 00:37:00-00:38:15), through her strength in bringing the rest of the Angel Investigations crew into the fight against Jasmine, in her judicious use of a flamethrower in "A Hole in the World" (5.15, 00:01:36-56), and in the strength she shows prior to her death. However, as Kim and Sagas (127) argue, as a person in a woman's body, those rejections of normative gender expectations are lessened because she is looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified in a way that influences every social interaction and makes it difficult to move that body away from a position of objectification and toward a direction of body-subjectivity. This is evident in Fred, through what S. E. Smith argues is a thinly veiled fragility born of an unstable mental state that lies beneath the surface, and as a result, she "needs" to be protected. As such, she is an object in the way the male characters are not. There is no evidence of Fred and any female character fighting over a man, but there is a major story arc built around Gunn and Wesley fighting over Fred. Even worse, as argued by Siegel and Calogero, this type of repeated and constant objectification encourages society to view girls and women as objects, driving them to regard their appearance as central to a sense of self, thus pushing them to adopt a third-person perspective that necessitates monitoring how they appear to others (115).

The difficulty Fred faces can be understood through the work of Erica Reischer and Kathryn Koo who view the body as a metaphorical text that can be read as a symbol of the social world it inhabits (300). Being a text upon which social meaning is inscribed, the body is subject to a common vocabulary that allows society to decipher the meaning of said

body. This is the root of the objectivity of Fred and the subjectivity of Illyria. Society knows how to interpret Fred's body, but not how to do the same with Illyria's. As a result, Illyria's body is able to create a social meaning, whereas Fred's is pushed into an already established role. The placement of Fred's body into an expected performance is where objectification occurs and serves as the root of its subordination. Franzoi argues that the existence of a socially constructed and therefore expected norm categorizes behaviors as socially appropriate or socially deviant for those performing an expected role that leads to the objectification of the person in that body, pushing that person toward becoming an object of discrete parts in the eyes of society, to be judged on their aesthetics or their adherence to that prescribed norm (417). Therefore, escaping from this cycle becomes difficult because the objectifying behaviors that have been assigned through an expected performance are first and foremost accepted and absorbed by society, thereby becoming a foundational piece of one's social identity.

According to Molly George, the naturalization of this phenomenon has occurred through the media's insidious use of a Foucauldian surveillance to create an atmosphere of bodily expectation that pressures the person in the objectified body to adopt a socially approved ideal, and as a result body-object status becomes simultaneously demoralizing and unobtainable (331). This pressure then pushes a character like Fred into a socially expected performance of femininity in the form of her general demeanor of girlish quirkiness and bodily carriage including giggles, hunched shoulders, shortened gait, and feminine wardrobe that decreases the likelihood of strong, powerful, character in a woman's body being that way from the start. Therefore, even in shows like *Angel* that are filled with powerful, capable women doing great things, the seeds of that objectification are present to allow an audience to be comfortable with the idea of a need for a character like Fred, who despite saving Angel in the episode "Through the Looking Glass," needed a "handsome man" to save her from the monsters (2.21, 00:19:48-51).

This type of subordination happens to Fred throughout her time at Angel Investigations. She is not a weak character. She runs her own lab. She is strong and powerful. All of these things are true, but they are undermined by subordinating events. For every scene where Fred destroys

a bug monster by hitting it with a bus, there is a scene where she engages in self-deprecation that removes her agency, such as in describing herself to Angel as "Nutty-'ol-goonie'bird-up-in-her-room-doin'-nothin'-but-moochin'-off-Angel Fred" ("Fredless" 3.5, 00:03:55-59). So then, for every scene where Fred's intelligence, courage, or strength is on display there are scenes and episodes that commodify her as daughter, damsel, lover, or inspiration, as the situation demands. It is here that the objectification occurs, for each time she is relegated to one of these objectified positions, the normative gender expectations are reified, and she is relegated back to a body-object that is "also" strong or smart.

When considering Fred, a question that must be asked is why it takes her death and the birth of an entirely different entity to create power and autonomous agency in what is essentially the same body? The answer lies in society's tendency to naturalize bodily-based gender norms so that even the idea of challenging them is anathema. In a perfect world, society would undoubtedly agree that the performance of gender chosen by each individual should exist according to the person's own desire; however, the reality for a large portion of society is much different. The fault line of societal acceptance in regard to redefining what is and what is not allowed for the person in a woman's body is delicate, in that the gender expectations ascribed to the woman's body have already been created, and as such, modifications to it are neither needed nor appreciated. Thus, from the viewers' introduction to her in Pylea, Fred is placed in a position where her default existence was one of dependence on protection against harm. In order to combat this othering of the person in a woman's body, it is imperative that a rejection of body-object status occurs, so that focus can be retrained from attention on and identification with aspects of a body that are objectified by others and judged for their beauty and thus become indicative of that object's overall worth.

The "Girl" in Question: Illyria and the Rejection of the Norm

In an interaction with Wesley shortly after her "birth," Illyria paces the room, walks in circles, eyes darting around, frantically searching for a way out. In this scene, Illyria screams to Wesley, "It's too small. It's too

small. I can't breathe. I can't live within these walls. I can't breathe. There's no room for anything real…There's not enough space to open my jaws. My face is not my face. I don't know what it will say" ("Underneath" 5.17, 00:21:30-50). With those words, Illyria eloquently encapsulates the frustration of having one's body defined by naturalized social controls that remove agency and simultaneously push the person in a woman's body into body-object status. This realization borne of frustration is vital to gaining body-subject status because it instigates a renegotiation of gender norms previously assumed to be non-negotiable. This renegotiation occurs because, as George suggests, while on the surface society has become more accepting of a strong woman, in everyday reality, dominant notions of femininity still resist a femininity that threatens the dominant ideals and thus relegate the person in a woman's body to body-object status (326).

The relegation of the person in a woman's body into a body-object pressures her to engage in behaviors that are considered to be consistent with the expectations that have been placed upon her body. Rejecting these behaviors elicits a threat of punishment by the dominant group for not meeting socially constructed expectations, for halting the cycle of reiteration of social gender roles. The threat of punishment is prevalent because these expected gender performances are vital to the maintenance of the binary, which reinforces the idea that gender is not just an individual attribute or social role, but rather, is a situated accomplishment forged by social actors (West and Fenstermaker 21). This means of considering gender is reminiscent of Judith Butler's words when she refers to gender as a reiterative practice, so that when a woman properly performs gender, it is a reproduction of cultural perspectives of gender-appropriate behavior; so each time a woman acts in a manner congruent with societal gender performance, the cultural norm is reinforced (526). This type of seemingly innocuous "normalization" is a technique of power designed to mold or shape individuals to comply with specific social demands or criteria (Manley, Palmer, and Roderick 308), which then reinforces a requirement on women to reform and shape their embodiments to conform to normative constructs of femininity (Fox-Kales 54).

In this case, Fred, despite her expressions of strength and power, is operating within a binary constructed by the society in which she exists.

Therefore, with this type of mindset vis-à-vis gender, it would be difficult for those around her to see her in a different way. However, Roof argues that this thinking about gender within a binary is problematic in that it adheres to a specific narrative that is akin to heterosexuality, which then creates a connection between a specific gender performance and heteronormativity, thus making it difficult to live outside of the prescribed binary without acquiring a label of deviant (51-52).

It is here that the importance of Illyria's body-subject status for the person in a woman's body is seen, for Illyria serves as an important signpost in popular culture. Popular culture typically functions less as a vanguard and more of a conservator of the familiar (Roof 59). In the case of Illyria, her rejection of the gender binary and its concomitant objectification of women and subsequent dismantling of the typical ebb and flow of power inherent in that system, represents a rejection of that familiar because of a "she" reading of her character. So despite the fact that Illyria is clothed in a skin-tight, form-fitting leather carapace that certainly codes her body as that of a woman, her obvious physical power and her change in demeanor from that of Fred allow her to turn the tables on the males around her. This, in turn, allows her to seize power from them through her turning Knox into a chattering fool and her physical domination of the men of Angel Investigations. Thus, she does not slip back to the familiar and reinforce the gender binary (Roof 59). Illyria's cultural importance comes from her rejection of the expected acceptance of a degree of subordination by the person in a woman's body in exchange for not having to endure complete domination (Manley, Palmer, and Roderick 306). Illyria's rejection of the gender binary and claiming of a body-subject status removes the ability of those with socially granted power, typically the hegemonically masculine, to have agency over her access to power.

While most of society gives lip service to equality, it is at best a half measure, as patriarchal control is supportive of equality as long as it does not involve a loss of power for themselves, and Wesley's actions upon meeting Illyria are indicative of what typically happens to the person in a woman's body when she attempts to reject the gender binary and the power structure that accompanies it. Illyria's initial interaction with Wesley in "Shells" (5.16 00:00:42-59) firmly embodies her as an ideological and

behavioral counterpoint to Fred. Unlike Fred, who is polite and engages in the expected niceties of femininity, Illyria remains utterly indifferent to Wesley's presence until she is ready to acknowledge him. Wesley's first action upon recognizing that Fred is indeed gone and Illyria is now inhabiting her "shell" is to attempt to kill her by hitting her in the head with an axe and upon that failure, to begin to attempt to convince her to return to the place from where she came. The symbolism of these acts that attempt to undo change and bring back the old cannot be overlooked. In a powerful demonstration of body-subject status, Illyria, rather than being acted upon, moves toward Wesley, interacts with him, finds him unworthy of her attention, and upon her tiring of the interaction, with a dismissive turn of her back and a tone of annoyance states, "Bleat at me no longer. We're done" ("Shells" 00:01:29-30). With that, Illyria highlights the power inherent in body-subject status.

The interesting thing about Illyria is that through her constant rejection of everything expected of her by others, she highlights the fact that no one ever demonstrably "accepts" the body-object/subordinate role; instead, as Foster argues, there is the expectation that the person in a woman's body is already there and thus her representation is predetermined (300), and to ignore it results in discomfort for the rest of society because their expectations have been disproven. As a result, the person in a woman's body is burdened with the expectation of a specific gender performance norm with the promise that it will be respected and appreciated; however, as is often the case with social norms, performance of the norm does not always equal acceptance. The pressure on the person in a woman's body claiming body-subject status to revert back to social expectations of the socially objectified body is represented visually and linguistically by Illyria in a scene from the episode "Underneath." . In this scene, Illyria is on the roof with Wesley after she has become enraged by the oppressive environment that she perceived to be trapping her. She is surrounded by darkness, with the only illumination coming from the lights of the city, a symbolic representation of the ubiquitous influence of patriarchal control and normative gender expectations. In an attempt to soothe her and possibly convince her of the absence of such control, Wesley says, "The walls don't press in as much if you don't see them," to which Illyria replies, "But they're still here" (00:35:18-23). Illyria's ability

to recognize the existence of the invisible walls controlling her ability to interact as she pleases is indicative of the walls that surround the person in an objectified body. The power of these walls, while able to be overcome by those with body-subject status, is much more impenetrable for the individual with body-object status. However, it must be noted that achieving body-subject status is a battle that never ends, for the attempt to reconstruct and strengthen walls occurs in relation to the strength of the resistance to the person's rejection of body-object status.

Illyria illustrates a necessary price to having a body-subject position when during the interaction on the roof with Wesley she says, "All I am is what I am" ("Underneath" 00:35:29-30). Unlike the body-object who is expected to overlook those that oppress them within society, Illyria's statement shows a recognition of the power, agency, and status that accompany those who oppress within society. Foucault describes how this power could result in a removal of agency; therefore, this type of power should never rest in the hands of any one entity, and when power does rest in the hands of a single entity, as in the case of gender role expectation and inequality, frustration inevitably ensues (*Power/Knowledge* 98). It is not surprising then, when Illyria rages, "I'm trapped…on a roof. Just one roof…in this time and place, with an unstable human who drinks too much whiskey and called me a Smurf" ("Underneath" 00:35:43-54). Her words encapsulate the frustration inherent in those who have gained body-subject status by rejecting normative expectations and their concomitant relegation to body-object status, and who are then pressured to give up their agency and power and revert back to the unprivileged aspect of an arbitrarily constructed binary in the name of social norms and social harmony.

The performance of a set of "correct" behaviors for a specific body is required so that an understanding of a "proper" performance of the woman's body can be achieved so that both women and men in society will know what to expect from one another and therefore all concerned will be comfortable. We get a humorous glimpse of a disruption of this expectation and the discomfort that follows in Illyria's interaction with Angel and Connor("Origin" 5.18, 00:15:01-05):

Illyria: Your body warms. This one is lusting after me (*to Angel*).
Connor: Oh, no. I—It's—It's just, uh—it's the outfit.

In this exchange, Illyria rejects the objectification of her body through an overt verbal acknowledgement of it and therefore, by directly addressing the male who is sexualizing her, asserts her body-subjectivity.

Unfortunately, adhering to society's normative gender constructs in the name of social harmony positions men as avatars of the ideal against which women are judged, giving them body-subject status. The body-subject orientation of the person in a man's body places the person in a woman's body in the position of the perpetual Other, valued, primarily, in their relations to those, specifically, in men's bodies (Lauzen, et al. 202). Therefore, conformity places the person in a woman's body in a position that does not allow for the opportunity for an expression of a true self. As a result, objectification becomes easier. An example of this is represented in a confrontation between Illyria and the men of Angel Investigations in the episode "Time Bomb" (5.19) when they are attempting to remove her power, thus making her more "controllable" and less "dangerous" (00:36:21-40). Illyria is in a room that is designed for fighting—for proving the strength and agency of oneself, yet she is expected to submit. She is told that the device will not kill her, it will *safely* drain her energy.

Here she is in an environment where she is told that she can be and achieve whatever she wants if she works hard enough, yet in order to be able to exist in the world, she also must be drained of her power. Much like the person in an objectified body, Illyria is trying to fight against the removal of her power, when she states, "You want to take my power to let me live. But I am my power" ("Time Bomb" 00:36:57-00:37:03). If "power" is considered as one's ability to have body-subject status, then Illyria's statement is powerful indeed. Illyria does not wish to relent; she wants to fight and does so until she is weakened and on her knees; and for the first time in a position of subordination to the men of Angel Investigations who framed the removal of her power in the context of what is best for the "world."

It is at this point, when Illyria realizes that Angel will not allow her to keep her power despite her protests, that Illyria brings voice to this

issue. In the fight training room, Illyria addresses them all and none of them simultaneously when she states, "Change is constant, yet things remain the same" ("Time Bomb" 00:34:30-35), and in doing so, she brings to the forefront the antiquated, yet well-established reality of a lack of change to the power dynamic to benefit the side of the gender binary of the person in woman's body, despite language to the contrary calling for change. However, regardless of their attempts at the removal of her power, Illyria, is still more powerful than the men of Angel Investigations and—much like the danger sign that is behind Illyria in the scene—she embodies a dangerous revolution against the empty promises of society that uses the shackles of the gender binary to arrest progress toward equality.

Illyria's initial interaction with Wesley demonstrates a symbolic representation of the type of social control that is indicative of that applied to the person in a woman's body with normative gender expectations placed upon it. In a darkened room, Illyria's bluish skin is in stark contrast to the redness of the walls surrounding her, symbolizing her refusal to blend into her new world. Thus, she exists as the body-subject addressed in this essay. She stands and examines the room, ignoring Wesley's presence until he addresses her as Illyria, to which she responds, "My name. You would presume to speak my name? Because I am returned in the body of a human [woman], you think you can speak to me?" ("Shells" 00:01:00-11). Illyria's response to Wesley's attempt to interact with her is interesting when it is recognized that the first time she sees him is the first time she sees herself; standing before a mirror looking at the images of both of them in the reflection. Wesley looks at Illyria in the body of Fred, a woman, and as such, he sees her first in that way. Conversely, Illyria is looking at herself as who she is, Illyria, God-King of the Primordium, with gender being an unimportant, if not unknown, descriptor. The visual image of each of them seeing the same body is important: Wesley sees Illyria as an object to be labeled by gender and thus have limits placed upon it; Illyria sees the same body through the lens of the self and the power inherent in that form. With this understanding of what occurs as a result of the privilege attached to gendered bodies that exist in society today, the end of Illyria's quote, "It's disgusting" ("Shells" 00:01:11-12), articulates her outrage and frustration with the attempts at subordination

placed upon her through the imposition of gender as a means to weaken a powerful body.

The hegemonically sanctioned and mandatory gender performance that relegates bodies of certain types toward and away from body-object and body-subject status is detrimental to the identity of the person forced to engage in its production and often results in a frustration with the dogmatic and reiterative nature of the performance expected and thus required of the bodies they inhabit. Illyria demonstrates the intensity of this frustration when, surrounded by the men of Angel Investigations who want her power lessened, she hisses at Wesley before he drains her of a significant portion of her power, "I possess so much grace, more grace than this bag of sticks could express" ("Time Bomb" 00:37:57-00:38:03). Illyria's reference to her body as a "bag of sticks" is one of many examples of her language in which she views her body separate from her *self*. She does not subscribe to the expectations of a society that mark her as an object to be interacted with based on the body she inhabits; rather, she is a person, a self, with its own agency and power demanding to be recognized and respected. To Illyria, the body she is in is simply a vessel that carries the power that is within her and is unimportant for the basis of a judgment of who or what she is. In contrast, Alison Stone argues:

> Women always become women by reworking pre-established cultural interpretations of femininity, so that they become located—together with all other women—within a history of overlapping chains of interpretation. Although women do not share any common understanding or experience of femininity, they nevertheless belong to a distinctive social group in virtue of being situated within this complex history. (137)

This point of view fosters a lack of recognition of the power of the person in a woman's body. In its place, a specific portrayal of a socially appropriate femininity, rife with enough inherent weakness to keep it subordinated in order to protect the fragile ego of the masculine is expected.

Illyria, because of her constant rejection of the expectations of normative femininity, is perceived to be none of the things associated with

the person in a woman's body. While she can become all the things Fred is, it is not her default identity and the one by which others perceive and understand her; rather, she chooses to embrace it on her own terms. This choice is the locus of her constant quarreling with the symbolic stand-in for the gender normative society today, the men of Angel Investigations. Her labeling by Angel, among others, as opinionated, manipulative, and confrontational are patently inaccurate; she is simply unafraid to consistently and fearlessly believe what she, not her assigned gender role, believes, for she lives her life outside the parameters of the hegemonic femininity placed upon Fred.

"Bleat At Me No Longer, We're Done"

After having her powers lessened, Illyria laments to Lorne that she is no longer able to connect with the world in the way she was previously able. She describes her new weakness to Lorne by saying, "This fate is worse than death. Condemned to live out existence in a vessel incapable of sustaining my true glory. How can I function with such limitation?" ("The Girl in Question" 5.20, 00:08:54-00:09:06). These words are a powerful indictment of the application of essentialist thought to the person in a woman's body that result in a representation of what society thinks "should" be. From this location of bodily perception, a placement of untenable expectations occurs to the woman's body, creating the illusion that the female body is an infinitely malleable object. Unfortunately, as Bartky argues, the person in a woman's body is typically not able to use her malleability to create what she desires; rather, there is the expectation that she will create precisely one product, the docile, impressionable woman living within a societally appropriate, slim, tight, small-breasted body that signifies deference not only through posture, movement, and gesture, but also attitude, ambition, and desire (28).

The fear of the unchecked rise of a new body-subject status in the person in a woman's body is a result of the dominant masculine not heeding the words credited to the Italian philosopher and sociologist Antonio Gramsci, who stated, "the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind

come to pass" (qtd in. Hoare and Nowell-Smith 556). In its attempts to enforce a strict hierarchy controlled by the execution of gender roles, the dominant masculine stands in the way of an inevitable change and thus creates the situation that it most fears. A poignant example of this is seen in the episode featuring Fred's death and the rise of Illyria ("A Hole in the World"). In this episode, when Fred's death is imminent, Wesley carries Fred back to her bedroom, and while holding her in his protective embrace on the bed, he reads to her from the children's book *A Little Princess*. As the camera pans around, the room is adorned with all the trappings that emphasize Fred's innocent sweetness such as floral-patterned furniture, patchwork quilts, and stuffed animals. The representation of Fred and the expectations of her as the person in a woman's body extends into the semiotics of the room. As Calvert argues, the combination of the soft light and its warm, red hue create a womb-like imagery (184). In contrast, once Illyria is "born," that same comforting, warming red hue becomes jarring and ominous when Illyria's bluish features are placed against it. Furthermore, the replacement of Fred's gracefulness with Illyria's jerky movements and insectile head tilt produce the impression of a perversion of what was seen before. When these images are juxtaposed with each other, the jarring nature of the transition from Fred is designed to represent the change in comfort of the dominant masculine as the person in a woman's body transitions from body-object to body-subject.

The visual representation of what is traditionally expected of the person in a woman's body, in the scenes showing Fred's death and transformation into Illyria, are certainly jarring for the separation of the person in a woman's body from normative femininity is occurring. Fred transitions from body-object to a body-subject that needs no permission to act, to be, to live its own life. When viewed through this lens, Jes Battis' words become salient: "Illyria was not, was never, going to be anything close to Fred. She was not going to renege on her evil ways and join the crew in their good fight, at least not in a way that was morally simplistic" (125). Illyria no longer feels the need to adhere to arbitrary rules placed upon her that she will abide by unthinkingly. Because of her ability to reject the body-object status that the men attempt to place upon her, Illyria has the power to be everything Fred cannot be: cold, manipulative,

ambitious, confrontational, powerful. And it is for this reason that Illyria is the "monster" that the dominant masculine feels a person in a woman's body fully accepting and internalizing her body-subjectivity that controls her actions would be. The violation of the expected adherence by the person in a woman's body to the prescribed and tightly controlled normative gender expectations of the dominant masculine causes fear and suspicion because these confrontational actions are occurring in a decidedly masculine space and they are encountering something they are ill-prepared to deal with: a person in a woman's body with a level of strength that challenges predetermined normative gender expectations (George 328; Krane 118), and the masculine deals with those who challenge the gender status quo through predictable means, namely devaluation and stigmatization (George 322). However, this type of retribution only works if the group that is being oppressed accepts it, and therein is the power of the person in a woman's body claiming her body-subjectivity.

This battle still exists because the dominant masculine is unwilling to cede complete control of body agency to the person in a woman's body and thus lessen her objectification. The dominant masculine is still trying to control something that is completely out of its control. This dynamic is evident during an interaction between Wesley and Illyria in "The Girl in Question." In his darkened office, Illyria has taken on the form of Fred, the embodiment of Wesley's love and on a symbolic level, masculinity's comfort with traditional gender norms, and pretends to be exactly what he wants her to be. With the viewer only able to see Wesley's face surrounded by blackness, it is clear that he, much like hegemonic masculinity, is uncomfortable with Illyria's performance. He knows that it is false, hollow, and staged for his approval. This is not the person in a woman's body that society and its normative gender performances want. The normative gender expectations of the dominant masculine need her to *want* to be whatever is deemed "normal." In response to Illyria's performance, Wesley whispers, begging, "Change back. Be blue. Be anything. Don't be her. Don't ever be her" (00:39:38-48). Wesley's words highlight the folly of the dominant masculine trying to force an ideologically residual gender performance on the person in a woman's body, and the reality of its acceptance by the person is waning. It is at this

juncture that the greater levels of strength and assertiveness demonstrated by Illyria would provide a challenge to traditional gender norms.

Krane argues that challenging gender norms frees the person in a woman's body to develop their own definition of what is acceptable for their own bodies (123). Whether the performance is traditional or unconventional is inconsequential; the reacquisition of personal agency, long absent from society, is the vital facet required for the development of an Illyrian body-subjectivity. Historically, the person in a woman's body has been treated as purely a body-object to be enjoyed and to be primarily concerned with the enjoyment it provides to others, but typically the masculine. With this knowledge comes the understanding that the social body is many things: the prime symbol of the self, but also of the society; it is something we have, yet also what we are; it is individual and personal, as unique as a fingerprint, yet it is also has a common meaning applied to it by society. The body is both an individual creation, physically and phenomenologically, and a cultural product; it is personal and also state property (Synnott 4). Illyria embodies this concept succinctly through her assuming the role of Fred as she demonstrates that until we die, we are always in the process of becoming ("The Girl in Question").

Such a realization of "becoming" in the dynamic sense serves to refute the static gender norms historically prescribed to the person in a woman's body. The importance of this cannot be overstated, since establishing one's identity and understanding the importance of having control over its construction are of paramount significance in navigating societal interaction. An identity assigned to a person implies an inherent meaning of that person to both themselves and to the society that the individual inhabits (Shotter 10). As such, the transformation of one's identity, be it their social identity or self-identity, is a powerful event in that individual's life, and as such, does not occur easily or without repercussion. In other words, it is not as simple as a declaration or decree, but an internal enlightenment that pushes the individual toward this epiphany.

Rarely are the characters of *Angel* defined by established hierarchies and binarisms; instead, they tend to experience ambiguous identities that become sites of internal conflict and fluid movement within categories: Wesley is a rogue demon hunter, ex-Watcher, genius, and possible

sociopath; Angel is a father, a vampire, and according to him, the most prolific serial killer in history. Illyria is no exception. She is a God-King of the Primordium, but in the body of a dead woman loved by others; she breaks traditional boundaries of either/or identification and exudes a sense of angst linked to the ambiguity this disruption causes (Hudson). It is for her ability to disrupt and stand firm in that disruption that Illyria is a powerful example of what could be in society today. She represents a reckoning for the dominant masculine and its gender norms as a harbinger of a future reality. Illyria is a specter, a shade, a vestige of everything that the team tries to disavow on a daily basis but cannot. And now she is one of them. Her reintegration into the crew represents a means by which a reincorporation of the acceptance of body-subject status can occur for the person in a woman's body. It is for precisely this reason that the body-subject status that Illyria represents is a site of struggle and resistance (Grosz 35-36). Furthermore, while the focus of this essay is on body-object status for the person in a woman's body, the beauty of Illyria is that her message of body-subject status can be applied to anyone in society who has been objectified by the bodies they inhabit and by whatever perceived "peculiar" traits exist for the body they inhabit.

According to Todd May, the body is entangled within a web of specific events and relations that, owing to its position in society, are an inescapable part of that body's destiny (523). Illyria as body-subject is a form of power that is applicable and can be utilized in everyday life to reject May's idea of a specific body destiny. The power that Illyria represents can categorize the individual, mark them by their own individuality, attach them to their own identity, and impose a law of truth upon them that they must recognize and that others recognize in them (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 192). In other words, it allows them to be in control of their own bodies and the identity created for them, their own portrayal of self, without needing the approval of others. Illyria's words to Spike, "Adaptation is compromise…to never die and conquer all is winning" ("Time Bomb" 00:07:40-42, 00:08:22-26), may on the surface seem to be overly confrontational and aggressive, but are they? How is it different than how the person with power interacts with society when their identity is concerned? It only seems aggressive because of the traditional expectations placed upon the person in a body coded for objectification

that society has become accustomed to and it is in this transition to an Illyrian body-subjectivity that an untapped power exists. The most powerful transition that the person in an objectified body must learn to make is represented in one of the most chilling, and through the lens of this essay, powerful, aspects of the Illyria story arc. After Fred's death, when Illyria rises from the spot where Fred's lifeless body had previously lain, and after a moment of self-reflection when she gives herself a cursory inspection, Illyria coldly states, "This will do" ("Shells" 00:0036-37). These three words completely encapsulate the mindset of a new powerful Illyrian body-subjectivity. No dependence on approval from an arbitrary social norm. No second-guessing. No self-doubt. It is a simple declarative statement that speaks volumes in just three words. It says, "I am enough."

Works Cited

Bartky, Sandra Lee. *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Battis, Jes. *Blood Relations: Chosen Families in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *and* Angel. McFarland, 2005.

Beerman, Ruth J. "The Body Unbound: Empowered Heroism and Body Image." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* vol. 3 no. 2, 2012, pp. 201-213.

"Billy." *Angel*: *The Complete Third Season*. Season 3, Episode 6, 2001. Written by Tim Minear and Jeffrey Bell, directed by David Grossman. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal,* vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.

Calvert, Bronwen. "'Great, she's super-strong and she can alter time': *Angel*, Visual Pleasure and the Cult Action Heroine." *Critical Studies in Television,* vol. 12 no. 1, 2017, pp. 21-34.

---. "'The Shell I'm In': Illyria and Monstrous Embodiment." *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion*, edited by Mary Alice Money, Titan Books, 2012, pp. 181-190.

Crossley, Nick. "Body-Subject/Body-Power: Agency, Inscription and Control in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty." *Body & Society,* vol. 2, no. 2, 1996, pp. 99-116.

Foster, Kevin Michael. "Panopticonics: The Control and Surveillance of Black Female Athletes in a Collegiate Athletic Program." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2003, pp. 300-323.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Translated by A. Sheridan. Vintage, 1977.

---. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon, 1980.

Fox-Kales, Emily. *Body Shots: Hollywood and the Culture of Eating Disorders*. SUNY Press, 2011.

Franzoi, Stephen L. "The Body-as-Object versus the Body-as-Process: Gender Differences and Gender Considerations." *Sex Roles,* vol. 33 no. 5-6, 1995, pp. 417-437.

"Fredless." *Angel*: *The Complete Third Season*. Season 3, Episode 5, 2001 Written by Mere Smith, directed by Marita Grabiak, Twentieth Century Fox, 2003.

George, Molly. "Making Sense of Muscle: The Body Experiences of Collegiate Women Athletes." *Sociological Inquiry,* vol. 75, no. 3, 2005, pp. 317-345.

"The Girl in Question." *Angel: The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 20, 2004. Written by Stephen S. DeKnight and Drew Goddard, directed by David Greenwald. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

Grogan, Sarah, Leonie Rothery, Jenny Cole, and Matthew Hall. "Posting Selfies and Body Image in Young Adult Women: The Selfie Paradox." *The Journal of Social Media in Society,* vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, pp. 15-36.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Hoare, Quintin, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Lawrence & Wishart, 2005.

"A Hole in the World." *Angel*: *The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 15, 2004. Written by Joss Whedon, directed by Joss Whedon, Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

Hudson, Jennifer A. "'She's unpredictable': Illyria and the Liberating Potential of Chaotic Postmodern Identity." *American Popular Culture*, March 2005, http://www.americanpopularculture.com/archive/tv/shes_unpredictable.htm. Accessed 24 June 2019.

Joyce, Rosemary A. "Archaeology of the Body." *Annual Review of Anthropology,* vol. 34, 2005, pp. 139-158.

Kim, Kayoung, and Michael Sagas. "Athletic or Sexy? A Comparison of Female Athletes and Fashion Models in Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issues." *Gender Issues,* vol. 31, no. 2, 2014, pp. 123-141.

Krane, Vikki. "We Can Be Athletic and Feminine, but Do We Want to?: Challenging Hegemonic Femininity in Women's Sport." *Quest,* vol. 53, no. 1, 2001, pp. 115-133.

Lauzen, Martha, David Dozier, and Nora Horan. "Constructing Gender Stereotypes through Social Roles in Prime-Time Television." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electric Media,* vol. 52, no. 2, 2008, pp. 200-214.

"Lineage." *Angel*: *The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 7, 2003. Written by Drew Goddard, directed by Jefferson Kibbee, Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

Manley, Andrew, Catherine Palmer, and Martin Roderick. "Disciplinary Power, the Oligopticon and Rhizomatic Surveillance in Elite Sports Academies." *Surveillance & Society,* vol. 10, no. 3-4, 2012, pp. 303-319.

May, Todd. "To Change the World, to Celebrate Life: Merleau-Ponty and Foucault on the Body." *Philosophy & Social Criticism,* vol. 31, no. 5-6, 2005, pp. 517-531.

"Origin." *Angel: The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 18, 2004. Written by Drew Goddard, directed by Terrence O'Hara. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

Rahilly, Elizabeth P. "The Gender Binary Meets the Gender-Variant Child: Parents' Negotiations with Childhood Gender Variance." *Gender & Society* vol. 29, no. 3, 2015, pp. 338-361.

Reischer, Erica, and Kathryn S. Koo. "The Body Beautiful: Symbolism and Agency in the Social World." *Annual Review of Anthropology,* vol. 33, no. 1, 2004, pp. 297-317.

Roof, Judith. "Is There Sex after Gender? Ungendering/"The Unnameable." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association,* vol. 35, no. 1, 2002, pp. 50-67.

Shea, Heather D., and Kristen A. Renn. "Gender and Leadership: A Call to Action." *New Directions for Student Leadership,* vol. 2017, no. 154, 2017, pp. 83-94.

"Shells." *Angel*: *The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 16, 2004. Written by Stephen S. DeKnight, directed by Stephen S. DeKnight. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

Shotter, John. "The Social Construction of Our Inner Selves." *Journal of Constructivist Psychology,* vol. 10, no. 1, 1997, pp. 7-24.

Siegel, Jaclyn A., and Rachel M. Calogero. "Conformity to Feminine Norms and Self-Objectification in Self-Identified Feminist and Non-Feminist Women." *Body Image,* vol. 28, 2019, pp. 115-118.

Smith, S. E. "Disability on Angel: Winifred Burkle and the Hot Mess." *Meloukhia,* 11 July 2010, http://www.meloukhia.net/2010/07/disability_on_angel_winifred_burkle_and_the_hot_mess. Accessed 10 May 2019.

Stone, Alison. "Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy." *Journal of Moral Philosophy,* vol. 1, no. 2, 2004, pp. 135-153.

Sylvester, Christine. *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*. Cambridge University Press, 1994

Synott, Anthony. *The Body Social*. Routledge, 2002.

"Through the Looking Glass." *Angel: The Complete Second Season*. Season 2, Episode 21, 2001. Written by Tim Minear, directed by Tim Minear. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002.

"Time Bomb." *Angel: The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 19, 2004. Written by Ben Edlund, directed by Vern Gillum. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

"Underneath." *Angel*: *The Complete Fifth Season*. Season 5, Episode 17, 2004. Written by Sarah Fain and Elizabeth Craft, directed by Skip Schoolnik. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005.

West, Candace, and Sarah Fenstermaker. "Doing Difference." *Gender & Society,* vol. 9, no. 1, 1995, pp. 8-37.

Wetherell, Margaret. "Beyond Binaries." *Theory and Psychology,* vol. 9, no. 3, 1999, pp. 399-406.

Young, Iris Marion. *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a Girl" and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2005.