



“Live in the Lie for a While”: Closure in *Angel: After the Fall*

Thomas Johnson

Abstract:

In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud argues that comics is "a medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator" in the process of "closure" (65), wherein the "human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (66). This presentation examined how issue eight of the *Angel: After the Fall* miniseries, written by Brian Lynch and with art by Nick Runge and colors by John Rauch, is a prime example of this phenomenon.

Angel, the television series, leaves the viewer without full closure; "Not Fade Away" ends *in medias res* as a way of reinforcing the show's central theme that the fight against evil is eternal. In many respects, *After the Fall* seems to offer the reader the closure that the television finale lacked. However, by bringing Wesley Wyndam-Pryce back from the dead in a non-corporeal form, the comic miniseries also complicates the apparent resolution of the character's arc as depicted in "Not Fade Away." In order to "mentally construct a continuous, unified



reality" (McCloud 67) out of Wesley's death scene in "Not Fade Away" and his ghostly entrance into an ethereal realm at the beginning of *After the Fall* issue eight, the reader must reconcile a change in medium and an almost four-year gap in production, even though the scenes take place mere moments apart in the narrative timeline.

The presentation further illuminated the contrast between the role of closure in a temporal medium like television and an atemporal medium like comics by comparing Wesley's death scene in "Not Fade Away" to his confrontation in *After the Fall* issue eight with a demon masquerading as his lover, Fred. Wesley's death takes place over a finite amount of time, and thereby offers a form of what McCloud calls "automatic electronic closure" (65) that forces the viewer to either accept or reject the deceptive comfort Illyria offers Wesley in his final moments. On the other hand, the atemporal nature of comics allows the reader to linger on Nick Runge's depictions of Wesley's mirage for as long as the reader wishes. By continuing to read the issue, the reader refuses, just like Wesley, to "live in the lie for a while" (Lynch). This presentation argued that the reader, by participating in the kind of closure that the medium of comics affords, affirms the principle of existential authenticity that is paramount to *Angel* in all its incarnations.

An expanded version of Mr. Johnson's Mythmoot III presentation will be included in a collection tentatively titled Joss Whedon and Comics, edited by Valerie Frankel, that is forthcoming from McFarland.