

James Reynolds: The Daimonic Tale and the Re-watch Ritual: Monstrous Duality and Joss Whedon's New Horror Tradition

Whedon was not alone in contributing to the millennial return of the soul in *Buffy* and *Angel* – think Philip Pullman's daemons, JK Rowling's horcruxes. While the soul is well-trodden in Whedon Studies, the folding back into religious tropes and traditions it foreshadows (Galactica/Caprica's poly-versus-monotheism, Meyer's migrating souls, Kate/Clare's Nephilim, Dominion's angels) suggests further study.

Stimulated by *Buffy* and *Angel's* sheer re-watchability, I argue that these central character narratives take us through a ritual experience mirroring the structure of the "daimonic" tale. We desire to repeat this experience, which thus becomes a personal tradition, due to the daimonic tale's intrinsic structural relationship with the idea of separation from an "essential" self.

The daimonic tale centres on "The Solitary" – initially naïve, affluent, and hubristic – whose subsequent isolation and fall drives him or her into death, and rebirth – becoming "the daimon's master instead of the daimon's thrall" (Stefan Zweig). Tellingly, the term's etymology is "the verb daiomai, 'to divide, lacerate'" (Agamben). Whedon's restorable souls and other separations from self (the body-snatching vampire, The Visions, the downloaded identities of the 'Dollhouse' – even Slayer-ness itself) behave like daimons; not as an essentialising presence, but as external forces which operate to possess the subject in a march towards self-knowledge, regardless of suffering or consequence.

Indeed, it is the the duality of consciousness saturating these narratives which makes them monstrous; their horrors of the split psyche go beyond a moral failure to integrate the Jungian Shadow (Riess), and possess greater truth than the monsters 'outside'. Whedon's daimonic tales thus retain considerable pleasure when re-watched – because they reboot horror as us – as our self- and other- alienations, split psyches, as our amoral and inexplicable drives. By compelling a new horror tradition that is fundamentally a ritual of re-watching, these series may even be driving, daimonic experience themselves.