Transformative Souls and Transformed Selves: *Buffy, Angel* and the Daimonic Tale

James Reynolds

Introduction

This essay explores one of the most significant factors in the continuing appeal of *Buffy* and *Angel*[1]—the features of the sacred they employ in narrative arcs of character development, and the ritualistic interaction this creates with fans of the television shows. I argue that *Buffy* and *Angel*'s deployment of the idea of the soul produces a distinctive approach to identity, and I here use the concept of the daimonic as a framework for textual analysis. Their distinctive approach to identity begins with the idea of the soul as an essential self that can be separated from the body and relocated. These transportable identities support particular types of narrative, and thus help in recognising why these shows continue to appeal. These divisible and changeable selves also help us to understand the Buffy-verse's style of horror. In combination, these features help us appreciate not only the ritual of watching and re-watching, but also the ways in which *Buffy* and *Angel* bring the religious themes of ancient, spiritual traditions into popular culture and fandom—with vital contemporaneity.

The Millennium: A Transformative Moment

The first step in explaining the continued attraction of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (henceforth *BtVS*) is recognising what it captured in its cultural moment. Launching *BtVS* on television in 1997, Joss Whedon and his creative team were looped into the re-circulation of the ancient idea of the soul, via their inversion of the vampire trope—reconfiguring the monster's soullessness through the character of Angel, the vampire *with* a soul. Stacey Abbott writes that Angel is but "one in a long line of sympathetic, reluctant vampires,"[2] but through him the makers of *BtVS* tapped into a wider resurgence of the soul in fantasy fiction. This dynamic is epitomized in the hugely successful Philip Pullman *His Dark Materials* novels (1995-2000)—with the animal daemons of its characters being external expressions of an inner self—and in the torn soul of Voldemort in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* book series (1997-2007) and films (dirs. Columbus, Newell, and Yates, 2001-2011). Both these series showed similarly sustained creative play with the ancient idea of the soul as an emblem of essential self, separable from the physical body. Beyond these daemons, horcruxes, and ensouled vampires would lie an explosion of work that elided psychology to fold identity back into spirituality via the fundamental question posed by the existence of the soul—the nature and/or possibility of eternal life.

Speculations on immortality are appropriately millennial, given that such moments bridge past, present, and future. However, the September 11, 2001 attack upon New York's Twin Towers brought the apparition of soullessness front and center through its apocalyptic inhumanity. Millennial hope gave way to millennial terror. Yet the resurgence of the soul in fiction that *BtVS* and *Angel* both served and helped to produce seemed to receive extra momentum through the wars and revolutions that ensued. It is not surprising that both *BtVS* and *Angel* ultimately end in apocalyptic battles against ancient evil, reflecting their relevance and helping pave the way for the return of religion in fiction—by acting as a gateway to narrative experiment with the sacred across multiple screen and print platforms.

It is important to note that this dynamic has continued and evolved elsewhere, and that the ensuring popularity of such apocalyptic and eschatological themes is one aspect of their extensive relevance. For example, like *BtVS* and *Angel*, *Battlestar Galactica* (Glen A. Larson and Ronald Moore, 2004-2009) would deploy a "coherent cultural backdrop" of religious tropes to amplify "the central conflict of the series"—the massacre of humanity by their cybernetic enemies, the Cylons—"to the level of a holy war."[3] Angel, the love interest of Buffy and protagonist of *Angel*, embodies a duality of divinity and monstrosity through his vampiric condition—an experiment that stimulated subsequent reconfigurations like Stephanie Meyer's 'vampire-lite' *Twilight* novels (2005-2008) and films (dirs. Hardwicke, Weitz, Slade and Condon, 2008-2012).[4] Charlaine Harris's Southern vampire mysteries (the Sookie Stackhouse novels 2001-2013, and their television adaptation by Alan Ball as *True Blood* 2008-2014) would offer more culturally specific, even hyper-American takes on the tropes of supernatural beings like vampires, werewolves, and faeries. Lauren Kate's *Fallen* series of novels (dir. Hicks: 2009-2012; film adaptation 2016-) would bring angels to the table, as would the television series *Dominion* (2014-2015), and Cassandra Clare's *Shadowhunter* novels would effectively return the dynamic to the pan-supernaturalism of the Buffy-verse, with teenage vampires, werewolves, angels, demons, faeries, and warlocks playing out their complicated romances and inter-dimensional conflicts against the New York City skyline (2007-; film adaptation dir. Zwart: 2013; television adaptation 2016-). While *BtVS* and *Angel* undoubtedly played their part in parenting these and other works, the key difference is that the soul is intrinsic to, and underpinning of, the narrative arcs and character transformations of *BtVS* and *Angel*. Indeed, it gives these shows form and style, not just content. It seems, then, that this aspect of the sacred is central to their ongoing appeal.

The continued attraction of *Buffy* and *Angel* remains very much in evidence. Josh Stenger cites Boyd Tonkin's survey of the situation when *Buffy*'s last episode aired in 2003; "1200 dedicated websites testify to the show's hold on near-obsessive fans," Tonkin wrote. In turn Stenger remarks that the show's "fiercely loyal and highly participatory fan base endowed the programme with a popular-cultural significance that far surpassed the size of [its television] audience."[5] Katherine Schwab, writing in 2015, looked back to this moment when Buffy "went off the air," remarking that in 2003 "its cult status was still very much nascent." However, she shows that this fan base was significant enough to subsequently support "novels, comics, video games, and spinoffs, not to mention fan sites, fan fiction, conventions, and inclusion on scores of 'Best TV Shows of All Time' lists." Consequently, Schwab says, "hundreds of scholarly books and articles have been written about *Buffy*'s deeper themes."[6] Prominent and continued academic interest is shown through the journal *Slayage*, launched in 2001 by David Lavery and Rhonda V. Wilcox, and joined by yearly conferences since 2004.[7] But interest outside academia is also sustained. Lucy Mangan wrote in *The Guardian* that "Twenty years on, the brilliance of [*Buffy*] remains undimmed. It paid to watch and rewatch then and now, two decades later."[8] In 2018, Fox CEO Gary Newman admitted that the company discusses revivals of *Buffy* "frequently,"[9] and Joanna Robinson, writing in *Vanity Fair*, shows how its meaning continues to develop. The "entitled, misogynist rhetoric" of Season 6 villains Andrew, Warren and Jonathan importantly foreshadows the recent surfacing of rank sexism and abuse in multiple areas of society, around the world.[10] Understanding the use of the soul in these series is a key element in explaining this continuing appeal.

Souls and Soullessness

In seasons 1-3 of *BtVS*, we can identify wide-ranging experiments with the portability of the soul, and the change of identity that its absence signifies. Neither *BtVS* nor *Angel* engage with the idea of the soul in any critical depth, but rather use it as an emblem for selfhood, as we shall see. Character transformation, consequently, can be achieved at the flick of a switch—something that occurs in the span of many discrete episodes[11]—because if you remove or replace the soul-self, you trigger another identity, or animate another body or object. This is perhaps most remarkable in the case of Angel, born Liam in 1727 and turned into a vampire at the age of 25. In his undead form, he takes the name 'Angelus' and wreaks havoc on humankind until he is cursed with the return of his soul, and thus his conscience, and becomes 'Angel'.

The high stakes for the characters involved provides excitement for audiences, while the sheer variety of transformational strategies creates the pleasure of re-inventive storytelling. More importantly, the strategy of deletion, augmentation, switching or restoration of personality articulates and consolidates the vocabulary of a distinctive approach to identity by the show's writers, who deploy flick-of-a-switch transformations as a means to both expose character and build appealing narrative arcs culminating in the recuperation of self. Lynn Schofield Clark writes that "analyzing why certain stories in the media hold appeal" for teenagers requires that we separate "the obvious from the inferential meanings and pleasures that young people may draw from popular culture."[12] The pleasure of *BtVS* and *Angel* comes at least in part from their inferring a great deal regarding what Schofield Clark describes as "contemporary culture's unresolved conflicts over teenage life … as well as religion's role in society." These shows, she writes, express a "relativistic approach to belief " that is not limited by the tenets of "organized religion," but which nevertheless relies on "a romantic notion still central within Christianity: that of the individual's need for community and her capacity for transformation."[13] It is this particular capacity which requires our attention here.

From Season 4 of *BtVS* and Season 1 of *Angel* onwards, character transformations increasingly dominate larger narrative structures. Where a single-episode transformation entails the recuperation of identity by the end of that episode, later series would follow individual transformation across multiple episodes, and even entire seasons. We might say this approach was seeded by the appeal of Angel's transformation back into Angelus in *BtVS* Season 2—powering a step change in narrative quality from Season 1. Angel's overnight transformation gives ironic truth to the trope that that love changes everything as Buffy must change course to destroy Angelus, whom she realizes was unleashed the night they first have sex.[14]

Both *BtVS* and *Angel* would subsequently explore variations of such reversals—particularly their pacing—across season narrative arcs. Buffy dies (again),[15] and S6 contains the revelation that she—her soul—ascended to some kind of heaven. Her body remains behind, which we know because we see its decay reversed when her soul is called back to it through magic.[16] Season 2 and 3, and Season 5 and 6, end and begin with Buffy's most immediate transformations—death and rebirth—metaphorical and literal. S6 bravely probes the slower transformations of neglect, with Buffy multiply distracted and largely oblivious to the decay of her relationships, and particularly her best friend Willow's arc of

transformation from a mild-mannered Wiccan into the murderous 'Dark Willow', addicted to destructive magic.[17]

Buffy's other vampiric love interest, Spike, has his identity split by the insertion of a mind-control chip in Season 4 and undergoes another immediate transformation when he is re-ensouled.[18] But Spike continues to act unconsciously as a mind-controlled sleeper agent for the 'First Evil' (Season 7), constituting his fourth identity split. Spike's fifth split—from his body—when he returns as a ghost in *Angel*.[19] positions him at the apogee of divided identity, and we can but lament that such complexity did not result in a *Spike* television series.[20]

These examples illustrate a certain level of device-saturation. This storytelling convention grows outward from Angel's capacity to switch identities but we should note that immediate transformation is reiterated visually in each episode via the computer-generated transmogrifications of each vampire's "doubled face" when they shift into their fearsome feeding (or perhaps their 'natural') mode.[21] Crucially, the portability of the soul seems to underpin a veritable parade of fascinating character transformations, positioning this sacred trope, again, at the heart of these shows enduring appeal.

The Soul and the Trials of Selfhood

The soul may facilitate appealing creative play, but its centrality may also introduce critical problems. Scott McLaren describes its operations in the Buffy-verse as it switches between functions of metaphor, morality, and identity. His analysis first helps to explain how the soul—by acting as a "Platonic object that comprises human identity and will"[22]—creates the principle of portable identity which underlies the transformations described above. It is effectively a shorthand term for identity, which permits us to accept the idea of an instantaneous character switch or transformation. By the same token, the vacuum created by the absence of this soul-identity allows us to believe in the possession of the body by other entities. This connects these narratives to the idea of the possession of the body by alien souls, forces, even military machinators. McLaren argues further that the soul operates variously here as "a metaphor or a reified organ for moral choice."[23] Soulless or possessed characters are licensed to commit acts outside of the accepted morality, allowing swift reincorporation into the moral framework once the soul-self returns. As McLaren's analysis shows, *BtVS* and *Angel* use the soul as an index both of identity and of moral capability.

McLaren, in fact, argues that "Angel's quest for redemption" of crimes he cannot be held morally responsible for diminishes the credibility of his character.[24] This is particularly important because Angel's transformability is a crucial underpinning for the many other explorations of character transformation in the Buffy-verse. It is likely that the terms of Angel's separations in identity will permeate and shape other areas. Consequently it is essential to further understand Angel's transformations, in detail: if they lack credibility, others might too. The problem McLaren outlines points the way; why do Angel and Spike experience traumatic guilt for the crimes of other entities? This trauma has much to do with the "psychological continuity"[25] of sharing memories, whether vampire or human. Additionally, even when the soul is restored, the vampire body still needs blood. Angel has an embodied experience of Angelus's legacy of violence, and he "is repelled by his own unquenchable thirst for blood,"[26] repeatedly demonstrated by his unwillingness to drink it openly. Angel does not bear moral responsibility for the crimes of Angelus; as Amy

Kind argues, "identity alone is not what matters for moral responsibility," [27] but, nevertheless, culpability is precisely what Angel experiences.

To appreciate this fully we must explore the origins of vampirism in the Buffy-verse, that is, the process of siring. A vampire entity enters and possesses the body of a human when that human—as they expire—drinks the siring vampire's blood. This vampire entity is not random, but assigned; whenever Angel's soul absents his body, it is always Angelus that comes to possess the flesh. The creation of a vampire, therefore, is an act connected with particularity to the human life that is destroyed. The same principle is seen in Darla's second coming. This intimate relationship, I suggest, comes about because the human victim must participate in siring by drinking blood—in other words, part of the process has an element of consent. A voluntary, participatory act is involved; in the same way "explicit permission" is required for Buffy-verse vampires to "enter a private home."[28] Even though Angel did not commit the crimes of Angelus, he knows on some level that by swallowing Darla's blood—an act of physical acquiescence and complicity—he enabled them. Siring in the Buffy-verse thus constitutes both murder and a contract of invitation to a demon—an act of surrender signalling abandonment of the soul. Retrospectively, this surrender will be interpreted as participation, producing intense remorse and feelings of culpability for the unleashing of the vampire, even if not for their crimes. Again, Angel is continuously reminded of this culpability "through the physical reality of his vampirism" and his continued "thirst for human blood."[29] Stacey Abbott's perspective summarizes the situation neatly: "*Angel* undermines the distinction between Angel and Angelus and presents the hybrid Angel/Angelus."[30]

Beyond the historical index the soul creates for the moral status of Buffy-verse characters, we also need to consider the conceptual index of identity it introduces. Taylor Boulware argues that the removal and replacement of identity in Whedon's *Dollhouse* "neatly embodies a rejection of essentialist identity."[31] In *Dollhouse*, Whedon disturbingly presented a gallery of prostitutes whose memories are wiped clean, and programmed to order with new, fantasy personas. But in the case of vampire identity, the retention of the memories of the original human host acts as an antagonistic and deterministic form of essentialism. As Boulware writes, drawing on Judith Butler, "it is the very process of subordination that creates the subject."[32] These dynamics run in both directions, with human memories defining the trajectory of the newly installed vampire, and vampire memories defining the mission for the returning soul on ethical terms like redemption, and atonement: after all, "Regaining one's soul means regaining one's conscience."[33] The "core self" of human memories operates as a "social and structural violence" of limitation for Angelus—he is clearly repulsed by Angel's mental continuum and feelings.[34] By the same token, the memories Angel inherits of Angelus's atrocities are equally repulsive.

This causes both Angel and Angelus to experience the most intense duality, illustrated perhaps no better than in *Angel* where the two meet face-to-face in a drug-induced coma they share with Buffy's fellow vampire slayer, Faith.[35] With a soul that "doubly hybridizes his vampire existence,"[36] Angel/Angelus provides the supreme exemplar of separation not only from, but also within, identity. This gives significant amplification to the theme of split identity and hence the crucial importance of Angel's transformation narrative in establishing credibility for other character transformations. Indeed, this baseline of credibility sculpts the reality principle of the Buffy-verse so distinctly that we might ask whether or not what we are actually discussing here is the Angel-verse. The transformations

of Buffy and Angel themselves are therefore of paramount importance – as it is through these more complex lenses that simpler character transformations appear less predictable. Willow going from good-witch-to-bad-witch or Giles descending from responsible-educator-to-dissipated-drunk may be straightforward character inversions on paper. But they do not feel perfunctory or contrived because *BtVS* and *Angel* set the terms of a mutable reality based on the idea of the soul, and its other transformations are filtered through those terms.

Schofield Clark, we may recall, notes that the religious backdrop of these shows is "relativistic,"[37] but we should also remember that fictional realities require sufficiently solid foundations if we are to recognise characters changing from one state to another. The soul cannot provide this coherent reality on its own, without reference to contextual terms. Therefore, from death in the hell mouth in Season 1's "Prophecy Girl," to the death of the hell mouth in Season 7's "Chosen"[38] these transformations are set against what Naomi Alderman and Annette Seidel-Arpaci call "a great deal of inspiration from Christianity"—angels, demons, crucifixes, holy water, prophecies, apocalypse, redemption, exorcism, hell, heaven, the chosen—with Willow bringing Judaism, Paganism, and Wicca to the table.[39] The soul sits amongst these fragments of religion, gluing them together and creating a relativistic but coherent horizon, while continuously offering the possibility of immediate character transformation.

Angel's transformation narrative defines him almost from the outset. Sired by Darla, Liam firstly turns into Angelus. When Liam's soul is returned to the same body, then Angel is created. With a vampire body, he can no longer be Liam, but with a soul, he can no longer be Angelus. Restored thus, Angel is effectively a "curious hybrid between human and vampire:" retaining the vampiric, blood drinking body and memories of Angelus, tempered by the original soul of Liam.[40] These, then, are the three states through which we understand Angel in seasons 1-3 of *BtVS*. Although *Angel* rehearses these states in greater depth, in order for the character to progress the narrative arc must promise a further state. This is duly introduced at the end of *Angel* Season 1, with the promise of a return to a human existence if Angel fulfills the Shanshu prophecy.[41] Buffy's transformation narrative is initially structured by teenage realities—including love, and running away from home—until Angel leaves for Los Angeles at the end of *BtVS* Season 3. Buffy follows the education system up to graduation, and begins her transition into adulthood by starting university in Season 4, much as her compatriots do. But it is not until the end of Season 4 that Buffy begins to properly experience the same kind of forces that Angel does. Her mature transformational arc properly begins with her prophetic dream encounter with the primordial first slayer, Sineya.[42] Having taken the essences of Giles, Willow and Xander into her body to defeat Adam, Buffy unwittingly triggers a relationship with the hallowed source of the slayer's power. In Seasons 5-7, this leads to her greatest challenges: self-sacrificial death, unbridled lust, and ultimately a fight to the death with evil itself. Buffy's maturity narrative moves her from teenage transitions to her near-apotheosis, though coming ever closer to mythic status does not mean Buffy gains the abilities she needs to deal with her complex adult life.

Buffy and Angel seem to be headed in opposite directions, she towards the mythic, he towards the mundane. Their heroic trajectories seem to contrast, but the real-world obstacles they face—money, work, and caring for others—are shared. However, the crucial similarity in their transformational narratives is the soul. Angel is promised a human life,

which he sacrifices for a greater good even at the risk of death and Buffy is offered an enhancement of power by the shaman who created Sineya, which she too rejects as it will strip her humanity, even though without that power she will likely die.[43]

Indeed, by the final episode of their final series, both Buffy and Angel have embraced self-sacrifice, and attain the identity of spiritual warrior by choosing to accept death rather than betray their cause. The transformation narratives of Buffy and Angel root their respective series in narratives depicting the epiphanies of spiritual ascent—narratives that trickle that credibility down towards a multitude of smaller transformations. Structurally speaking, these are rites of passage: the recuperation of self after facing tests, returning to normality at a higher level of being, or deeper understanding of the world.

The Daimonic Narrative

As tales of on-going transformations, these texts therefore take on the qualities of daimonic narratives—a vital point in appreciating the role of the sacred in the enduring popularity of *BtVS* and *Angel*. In exploring this point, I here draw on Austrian critic and writer Stefan Zweig's interpretation of the classical concept of the daimonic, as expressed in part two of his 1925 analysis of European culture, *Master Builders: A Typology of the Spirit*, which focuses on Friedrich Hölderlin, Heinrich von Kleist, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Titled *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, the German word *dämon* has been variously spelled by his translators as 'daimon' and 'daemon', but here I use 'daimon' (as do Eden and Cedar Paul in their 1930 translation), a notion distinct from both the idea of the 'demonic', and the aforementioned 'daemons' of Pullman's work.[44] It is important to consider the term fully for, as Philipp Kneis shows, there are not only spelling discrepancies and homophonous confusions, but competing notions of the daimonic.[45] Bernhard Greiner usefully illustrates how, in classical Greece, the daimon was a "value-neutral" higher spirit, connecting the human subject to the divine on a path that could lead "to happiness or unhappiness." For Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, he writes, the daimon was laden with value—representing "the laws laid down for each human being at the moment of his birth." And for Zweig, the daimonic force is "aorgic," or the "drive towards boundlessness,"[46] which, for those most susceptible to it, can lead "into the abyss."[47] Its force, Zweig says, is as if "nature had left in each individual soul an inalienable, restless part of its own original chaos," which drives the individual "out of himself" and "into the infinite."[48] Carl Jung would later develop a special relationship with the concept.[49]

Multiple inflections of the daimonic can be read into Angel, Buffy, Cordelia and Spike as they march towards self-knowledge and destruction—with viewers accompanying them on a daimonic rite of passage through death and rebirth. Much like Zweig and his heroes, daimonic energy draws us "into the self-destructive poetic madness" of these characters.[50] Each subject of Zweig's analysis was "hounded" out of a "cosy existence" "by an overwhelming and in some sense supernatural power," and were thus "[d]isconnected from their times," and "misunderstood by their cohorts."[51] Additionally, they "themselves do not know their path, their meaning, because they are in transit from an infinite distance into infinity."[52] These culturally disconnected and socially isolated figures were driven by unknown forces into destruction but also towards self-discovery.

Cultural disconnection, misunderstanding and hounding into discomfort and isolation apply to many core characters at the onset of their transit "into infinity." Buffy's 'valley girl' identity shatters when she is made the slayer, exacerbated by her parents' divorce,

expulsion from school, and relocation from Los Angeles to Sunnydale. Liam is a drunken rake, uncaring that his debauchery breaches social acceptability, and leading to rejection by his father. William is rejected by the love of his life, and both his poetry and romantic aspirations ensure he is a laughing stock in society. Cordelia—mean-girl-cheerleader-snob—must leave Sunnydale to struggle as an actress in Los Angeles, where her riches-to-rags narrative reduces her social capital considerably. These stories follow the pattern of being driven into destruction and reinvention: an archetypal, religious narrative pattern of death and rebirth. Cordelia's burgeoning spirituality results in her ascent to a higher plane[53] before her rebirth in Season 4 and actual death in Season 5. Liam and William experience crises of rejection that drive them into the arms of their sires, the death of vampirism, and the rebirth of re-ensoulment. Buffy also dies and is reborn (twice). These features combine to make these character narratives daimonic.

Moreover, each of these characters' transformations is driven by an apparently external force which might be said to reflect their subconscious—the path they do not know they are on. Spike is driven by obsessive love, a force that accompanies him across incarnations, ultimately leading to a transformation resulting in spiritual ascent via self-sacrificial death.[54] He even describes himself as "Love's bitch."[55] As we have seen, Angel is driven by the consequences of Angelus's existence, which inspires continuous watchfulness against his re-emergence, and striving for atonement. Cordelia is driven towards spiritual ascendancy by visions sent by hidden powers, and also shows her willingness to die for the cause.[56] Buffy, of course, is driven by her relationship with slayer-ness—most obviously through her interactions with Sineya—and more broadly with the power, history and destiny this gift bestows upon her.

As for Zweig's poets, the essence of existence for them is "tension and stress,"[57] and a "catastrophic polarisation"[58] within the self. This is why Angel ultimately avoids being "too neatly split across polar oppositions," as Abbott suggests the character was initially on *BtVS*.[59] He exists between "two unattainable states of being: humanity and 'vampirity'."[60] Separations of self are crucial in generating this tension; indeed, "only one who has been ripped in pieces knows the longing for completeness"[61] at the heart of such tension, and the drive it produces. We can begin to see precisely how daimonic the Buffy-verse is by relating these ideas to these characters. Philipp Kneis briefly applies the notion of the daimon to Buffy and Angel, describing it as an "inner voice" offering "an alternative view of reality," or stirring up "situations" or "conscience."[62] However, we might also say it is forces of destiny, remorse, desire and prophecy that drive these characters to change. Alternatively we could note that these characters experience or address these forces as Others—Sineya, Angelus, Eros, The Powers That Be—that impose upon them from without the challenges that stimulate their spiritual evolution.

It is also important to note why the daimonic rite of passage does not suffer from narrative fatigue. It uses the power underpinning one of the West's most sacred narratives—the resurrection—to generate television-viewing habits akin to a personal, religious tradition. It can do so because the principle of the narrative is similar enough to psychological frameworks of knowledge to be coherent to the secular mind, even where the power of archetypal religious narratives of death and rebirth, transformation and spiritual ascent, is clearly present. As Schofield Clark writes, while these morally relativist shows may seem distant from "organized religion," they also allow audiences to "interpret the

intersection of traditional religion and … popular beliefs about good and evil,"[63] and this helps us to understand their enduring appeal in the secular sphere.

Split Selves and Monstrous Duality

The split identities of the Buffy-verse display just such complex and contradictory psychologies, but more pertinently, they facilitate daimonic narratives which involve audiences in characters' journeys. This is crucial in understanding not only the Buffy-verse's style of horror, but also its aforementioned continuing charm. We can stand to watch these characters go through these processes—again and again and again and again—because of the daimonic tale's intrinsic structural relationship with the idea of separation from, and within, self. This has a different appeal to abjection in horror; these stories use psychic division more than bodily expulsions to create affect. The daimonic tale provides pleasure because of the intricate interactions split-identity narratives can create. Angel goes to hell; Buffy goes to heaven. Both come back. Willow, Cordelia and other characters transform into, or host, deities and demons, but only Willow survives. For these characters the stakes of self-realisation are high. They live at the level of epiphany—unsustainable in the real world—so that their daimonic journeys can offer a unique process of individual transformation to fans willing to travel along: as you grow, the Buffy-verse grows with you. It cannot be exhausted because each time you re-watch you bring a new set of experiences to the table: new lessons to learn, a new self to recuperate. Indeed, Stacey Abbott describes the "intensive loyalty" engendered by cult television as due in part to fans being able to "write themselves into the centre" of narratives.[64] *BtVS* and/or *Angel* may even become your daimon, an almost ritualistic process of self-empowerment driven by television and, if that is the case, re-watching is a ritual, and this is sacred horror.

Indeed, a narrative of divided self makes the spectator the site of horror—probing our lacerations, triggering our own self-and-other-alienations, split psyches, irrationality, amoral and inexplicable drives. The etymology of the word daimon is "the verb *daiomai*, 'to divide, lacerate'," so for Giorgio Agamben, the daimon correctly means "the lacerator, he who divides and fractures," and therefore its power to assign fate and destiny lies in its ability to divide. It is, he argues, an essential function; "Man is such that, to be himself, he must necessarily divide himself."[65] The daimonic tale—what we might legitimately call the narrative of divided self—has additional fascination because, in reality, the monster that I am to myself is more present, truthful, hated, dangerous, and abject than the monsters outside. Therefore the divisions of self that saturate the Buffy-verse very much help to create its particular sense of the monstrous.

Dev Kumar Bose and Esther Liberman-Cuenca argue that, although *BtVS* launched with "binary qualities," its multiple uses of the "soul as a plot device" allowed "definitions of good and evil" "to become more complicated" in parallel to the show's evolving character relationships.[66] These stories remind us that (after Foucault) the self is a discourse. Even the soul, rather than constituting an essential and stable identity, is coherent only in growth. By using this sanctified trope of essential self to instead demonstrate that identity is dynamic and that we lack stability of identity, *BtVS* and *Angel* reboot horror as *us*. Our compensation is that they also show us how to live as a dynamic—in a state of tension—and not as a stasis. As Boulware suggests, it is through such awareness that we "begin to form ourselves as subjects on our own terms."[67]

The shadow side of that empowerment is that it is achieved by reworking the sacred tropes of religion, loosening still further the last vestiges of 'truth' imposed by grand narratives, and it is no coincidence that the golden age of television narrative coincides with the 'post-truth' era. This is an age of massive reinvention, in both positive and negative terms, offering a special moment of narrative creativity as well as fake news and implausible denial. It may, then, be that the personal and emotional fulfilment of the daimonic narrative lacks a properly political basis, and this, in itself, may signpost an area of further creative potential for it, and for subsequent analysis.

Conclusion

Many of the most horrific atrocities in history have been committed blindly in honor or pursuit of religion. In the Buffy-verse, prophecy often lays down the future to be pursued. However this sacred horror does not impose blind obedience upon, but tests the moral framework of its protagonists. As Alderman and Seidel-Arpaci argue, the many prophecies in the Buffy-verse are "evoked to tell us that they can be overcome," sending "a powerful message of individual freedom" emphasising "individual possibilities of moral choice and responsibility."[68] The daimon is essential in this choice and responsibility. It is not, as Kneis suggests, something to be emancipated from.[69] Rather, it is the presence of a "catastrophic" polarity within the self, and therefore the presence of meaningful choice and real free will.

It is ironic, therefore, that such work seems to signpost towards to a proliferation of possession narratives. Shows like *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), *Hand of God* (2014-), *South of Hell* (2015), and *iZombie* (2015-)—which (respectively) use brainwashing, visions from God, demonic hosting, and identity consumption as forms of daimon—have been cleverly reworking traditional notions of possession, splicing them with ideas of split-identity to be found in the Buffy-verse. The classic horror film *The Exorcist* (1973) has recently been reimagined as a television series (2016-). At the same time, in the U.S. "the number of official priest exorcists … more than quadrupled from 12 to 50" from 2006-2016, and there is reportedly "an ongoing struggle to keep up with the demand."[70]

If our millennial interest in the soul revealed some aspect of Western culture at that time, we may well ask what more recent interest in possession reveals. This is especially so as possession narratives seem to have little opportunity to place human choice, freedom and responsibility under the spotlight when possession ostensibly removes it. Perhaps a spate of possession narratives reveals a historical moment in the West characterised by a sense of lost control. Alternatively, it may be that the soul has simply been done to death, and other tropes from the realm of the sacred are rising to take its place. Either way, such fiction will continue to play an important role in circulating and raising the profile of the sacred within fandom, pop culture texts, and the world itself.

Bibliography

Abbott, Stacey. "Walking the Fine Line between Angel and Angelus." *Slayage* 3, no. 1 (August 2003).
http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/abbott_slayage_3.1.pdf.

Abbott, Stacey. "Case Study: *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*." In *The Cult TV Book*, edited by Stacey Abbott, 101-2. London and New York: IB Tauris, 2010.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Alderman, Naomi and Annette Seidel-Arpaci. "Imaginary Para-Sites of the Soul: Vampires and Representations of 'Blackness' and 'Jewishness' in the *Buffy*/*Angel*verse." *Slayage* 3, no. 2 (November 2003). http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/alderman_seidel-arpaci_slayage_3.2.pdf.

Angel. Seasons 1-5. Created by Joss Whedon and David Greenwalt. USA: 20th Television, 1999-2004.

Birnbaum, Debra. "Fox Boss on *Buffy the Vampire Slaye*r Revival: 'It's Something We Talk About Frequently'." *Variety*, March 13, 2018. http://variety.com/2018/tv/news/fox-boss-gary-newman-buffy-the-vampire-slayer-revival-1202725161/ (accessed May 6, 2018).

Bose, Dev Kumar and Esther Liberman-Cuenca. "Buffy, Angel, and the Complications of the Soul." In *Buffy Conquers The Academy*, edited by Melissa U. Anyiwo and Karoline Szatek-Tudor, 6-18. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Boulware, Taylor. "'I Made Me': Queer Theory, Subjection, and Identity in *Dollhouse*." *Slayage* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2013). http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/boulware_slayage_10.1.pdf.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Seasons 1-7. Created by Joss Whedon. USA: 20th Television, 1997-2003.

Dellamonica, A.M. "Stripping the Bones." In *So Say We All*, edited by Richard Hatch, 161-180. Dallas: Benbella Books, 2006.

Diamond, Stephen A. *Anger, Madness, and The Daimonic: the Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil and Creativity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Greiner, Bernhard. "At Kithaeron Mountain: Stefan Zweig's Approach to the Daemonic." In *Stefan Zweig Reconsidered*, edited by Mark H. Gelber, 139-150. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007.

Kind, Amy. "The Vampire with a Soul: Angel and the Quest for Identity." In *The Philosophy of Horror*, edited by Thomas Fahy. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010.

Kneis, Philipp. *Emancipation of the Soul: Memes of Destiny in American Mythological Television*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011.

Mangan, Lucy. "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* at 20: the thrilling, brilliant birth of TV as art." *The Guardian*, March 10, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/mar/10/buffy-the-vampire-slayer-at-20-the-thrilling-brilliant-birth-of-tv-as-art (accessed May 6, 2018).

McLaren, Scott. "The Evolution of Joss Whedon's Vampire Mythology and the Ontology of the Soul." *Slayage* 5, no. 2 (September 2005). http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/mclaren_slayage_5.2.pdf.

Meyer, Stephenie. *New Moon*. London: Atom, 2006.

Ray, Rachel. "Leading US exorcists explain huge increase in demand for the Rite - and priests to carry them out." *The Telegraph*, September 26, 2016. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/26/leading-us-exorcists-explain-huge-increase-in-demand-for-the-rit/ (accessed May 6, 2018).

Robinson, Joanne. "How *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Most Hated Season Became its Most Important." *Vanity Fair*, 10 March, 2017. https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/03/buffy-season-6-anniversary-warren-jonathan-andrew (accessed May 6, 2018).

Schofield Clark, Lynn. *From Angel to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Schwab, Katherine. "The Rise of Buffy Studies." *The Atlantic* 1 October 2015. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/10/the-rise-of-buffy-studies/407020/ (accessed May 6, 2018).

Stenger, Josh. "The Clothes Make the Fan: Fashion and Online Fandom when Buffy the Vampire Slayer Goes to eBay." *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 26-44.

Whedon Studies Association, The. *Slayage: The Journal of Whedon Studies*. 2001-2017. http://www.whedonstudies.tv/slayage-the-journal-of-whedon-studies.html.

Zweig, Stefan. *The Struggle with the Daimon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. New York: Viking Press, 1930[1925].

[1] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (hereafter *BtVS*) seasons 1-7, created by Joss Whedon (USA: 20th Television, 1997-2003); *Angel*, seasons 1-5, created by Joss Whedon and David Greenwalt (USA: 20th Television, 1999-2004).
[2] Stacey Abbott, "Walking the Fine Line between Angel and Angelus," *Slayage* 3, no. 1 (August 2003), http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/abbott_slayage_3.1.pdf.
[3] A. M. Dellamonica, "Stripping the Bones," in *So Say We All*, ed. Richard Hatch (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2006), 164. The question of who is soulless would be posed here through regular scenes of torture and execution, while the visibility of cyborg immortality (through potentially unlimited digital resurrection) would be juxtaposed with humanity's definitive mortality—and indefinite post-mortem destination.
[4] Whereas in *BtVS* the loss of the soul is intrinsic to vampirism, in *Twilight* this is open to debate. In *New Moon*, Carlisle tells Bella that Edward "thinks we've lost our souls." This belief underpins Edward's reluctance to turn Bella into a vampire. But it is a weak belief – and it gives way easily when Edward must make Bella a vampire to prevent her death. Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (London: Atom, 2006), 33.
[5] Josh Stenger, "The Clothes Make the Fan: Fashion and Online Fandom when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Goes to eBay," *Cinema Journal*, 45, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 28.
[6] Katharine Schwab, "The Rise of Buffy Studies," *The Atlantic*, October 1, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/10/the-rise-of-buffy-studies/407020/.
[7] The Whedon Studies Association, *Slayage: The Journal of Whedon Studies*, 2001-2017, http://www.whedonstudies.tv/slayage-the-journal-of-whedon-studies.html.
[8] Lucy Mangan, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer at 20: the thrilling, brilliant birth of TV as art," *The Guardian*, 10 March 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/mar/10/buffy-the-vampire-slayer-at-20-the-thrilling-brilliant-birth-of-tv-as-art.
[9] Debra Birnbaum, "Fox Boss on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Revival: 'It's Something We Talk About Frequently'," *Variety*, March 13, 2018, http://variety.com/2018/tv/news/fox-boss-gary-newman-buffy-the-vampire-slayer-revival-1202725161/.
[10] Joanne Robinson, "How *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Most Hated Season Became its Most Important," *Vanity Fair Online*, March 10, 2017, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/03/buffy-season-6-anniversary-warren-jonathan-andrew.
[11] A whistle-stop tour: Amy's witch mother forces her to swap bodies with her (Season 1, Episode 3); Xander becomes a human hyena (Season 1: Episode 6); Moloch's demonic identity is digitized and he is reborn a robot (Season 1: Episode 8); Sid seeks justice while cursed into a ventriloquist's doll (Season 1: Episode 9); human identities are called back to dead or reanimated bodies (Season 2: Episodes 2 and 3; Season 3: Episode 13); Ethan's Halloween costumes possess all who wear them (Season 2: Episode 6); Eyghon lays waste to Rupert Giles's acquaintance through possession (Season 2: Episode 8); Sunnydale falls under the mind-control of parasitical demon spawn (Season 2: Episode 12); Buffy and Angel have their bodies possessed by the spirits of dead lovers (Season 2: Episode 19); Joyce's Zombie God mask possesses all who wear it (Season 3: Episode 2); Buffy loses her mind when she absorbs demon telepathy via demon blood (Season 3: Episode 18), and, in possibly the grandest example of immediate, single-episode character transformation, Cordelia's vengeful wish (Season 3: Episode 9) transforms everybody in Sunnydale (except Anya) into a different version of themselves.
[12] Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47-48.
[13] Ibid., 48.

[14] "Innocence," *BtVS*, Season 2: Episode 14 (1998). The season finale sees Willow using magic to restore Angel's soul, bringing the flick-of-a-switch character change to its apotheosis, perhaps; Buffy thrusts her sword into Angel's body to save the world, and in doing so simultaneously destroys herself. The act causes her to reject both her secret slayer identity, and her public Buffy Summers identity, as she leaves town and recreates herself as 'Anne'.
[15] "The Gift," *BtVS*, Season 5: Episode 22, writer and dir. Joss Whedon (2001).
[16] "Bargaining – Part 1, *BtVS*, Season 6: Episode 1, writer Marti Noxon, dir. David Grossman (2001).
[17] "Villains," *BtVS*, Season 6: Episode 20, writer Marti Noxon, dir. David Solomon (2002).
[18] "Grave," *BtVS*, Season 6: Episode 22, writer David Fury, dir. James A. Contner (2002).
[19] "Just Rewards," *Angel*, Season 5: Episode 2, writers David Fury and Ben Edlund, dir. James A. Contner (2003).
[20] Unsurprisingly, *Angel* also builds series-level narrative arcs through removal, augmentation, swapping or reinstatement of identity. Absorbing Doyle's connection to the-powers-that-be abruptly redirects Cordelia's path towards the spiritual (Episode 9: Season 1). Darla returns from death with a soul (Episode 22" Season 1)—which she loses when Drusilla re-turns her into a vampire (Episode 9: Season 2). In Season 4, Jasmine possesses Cordelia's body in order to give birth to herself (Episode 17), and Connor must have his identity removed and replaced in order to be saved from his death wish (Episode 22: Season 4). In Season 5, Gunn is re-booted as a world-class attorney via psychic implants (Episode 1): the empath Lorne becomes a psychopath when his sleep is removed (Episode 5: Season 5)—and Fred is hollowed out by the demon god Illyria (Episode 16: Season 5)—which Wesley believes irreversibly destroys her immortal soul in the process.
[21] Naomi Alderman and Annette Seidel-Arpaci, "Imaginary Para-Sites of the Soul: Vampires and Representations of 'Blackness' and 'Jewishness' in the *Buffy*/*Angel*verse," *Slayage* 3, no. 2 (November 2003), http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/alderman_seidel-arpaci_slayage_3.2.pdf.
[22] Scott McLaren, "The Evolution of Joss Whedon's Vampire Mythology and the Ontology of the Soul," *Slayage* 5, no. 2 (September 2005), http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/mclaren_slayage_5.2.pdf.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Amy Kind, "The Vampire with a Soul: Angel and the Quest for Identity," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, ed. Thomas Fahy (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 95.
[26] Ibid., 86.
[27] Ibid., 98.
[28] Philipp Kneis, *Emancipation of the Soul: Memes of Destiny in American Mythological Television* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 74.
[29] Abbott, "Walking the Fine Line."
[30] Ibid.
[31] Taylor Boulware, "'I Made Me': Queer Theory, Subjection, and Identity in *Dollhouse*," *Slayage* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2013), http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/boulware_slayage_10.1.pdf.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Kind, "The Vampire with a Soul," 88.
[34] Boulware, "'I Made Me'." Boulware is discussing *BtVS*/*Angel* creator Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* here, but the analysis translates.
[35] "Orpheus," *Angel*, Season 4: Episode 15, writer Mere Smith, dir. Terrence O'Hara (2003).
[36] Dev Kumar Bose and Esther Liberman-Cuenca, "Buffy, Angel, and the Complications of the Soul," in *Buffy Conquers The Academy*, eds Melissa U. Anyiwo and Karoline Szatek-Tudor (Newcastle: CSP, 2013), 10.
[37] Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens*, 48.

[38] "Prophecy Girl, ", *BtVS*, Season 1: Epsiode 12, writer and dir. Joss Whedon (1997), "Chosen," *BtVS*, Season 7: Episode 22, writer and dir. Joss Whedon (2003).
[39] Alderman and Seidel-Arpaci, "Imaginary Para-Sites of the Soul."
[40] Abbott, "Walking the Fine Line," *Slayage.* Liam's "drinking and whoring undermines any suggestion that [Angel] possessed a particularly good or altruistic soul" to start with.
[41] "To Shanshu in L.A.," *Angel*, Season 1: Episode 22, writer and dir. David Greenwalt (2000).
[42] "Restless," *BtVS*, Season 4: Episode 22, writer and dir. Joss Whedon (2000).
[43] "The Gift," *BtVS*; "Get It Done," *BtVS*, Season 7, Episode 15, writer and dir. Doug Petrie (2003).
[44] Stefan Zweig, *The Struggle with the Daimon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Viking Press, 1930[1925]).
[45] Kneis, *Emancipation of the Soul*, 73.
[46] Stefan Zweig, cited in Bernhard Greiner, "At Kithaeron Mountain: Stefan Zweig's Approach to the Daemonic," in *Stefan Zweig Reconsidered*, ed. Mark H. Gelber (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 144.
[47] Ibid., 141-142.
[48] Ibid., 142.
[49] For a useful discussion of similarities and differences between Carl Jung's concept of the shadow and its role in individuation, and the notion of the daimonic, see Stephen A. Diamond, *Anger, Madness, and The Daimonic: the Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil and Creativity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
[50] Greiner, "At Kithaeron Mountain," 144.
[51] Zweig cited in Greiner, "At Kithaeron Mountain," 142.
[52] Ibid.
[53] "Tomorrow," *Angel*, Season 3: Episode 22, writer and dir. David Greenwalt (2002).
[54] "Chosen," *BtVS*.
[55] "Lovers Walk," *BtVS*, Season 3: Episode 8, writer Dan Vebber, dir. David Semel (1998).
[56] "Tomorrow," *Angel*.
[57] Zweig, cited in Greiner, "At Kithaeron Mountain," 140.
[58] Ibid., 146.
[59] Abbott, "Walking the Fine Line."
[60] Bose and Liberman-Cuenca, "Buffy, Angel, and the Complications of the Soul," 10.
[61] Zweig, cited in Greiner, "At Kithaeron Mountain," *Stefan Zweig Reconsidered*, 140.
[62] Kneis, for example, uses the idea to characterize the behaviour of demons like Sweet ("Normal Again," *BtVS*, Season 6, Episode 17, writer Diego Gutierrez, dir. Rick Rosenthal [2002]), but this seems to me to corrupt the term too much. See Kneis, *Emancipation of the Soul*, 73.
[63] Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens*, 74
[64] Stacey Abbott, "Case Study: Buffy The Vampire Slayer," Stacey Abbott, ed., *The Cult TV Book* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2010), 102.
[65] Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 118.
[66] Bose and Liberman-Cuenca, "Buffy, Angel, and the Complications of the Soul," 13.
[67] Boulware, "'I Made Me'."
[68] Alderman and Seidel-Arpaci, "Imaginary Para-Sites of the Soul."
[69] Kneis, *Emancipation of the Soul*, 70.
[70] Rachel Ray, "Leading US exorcists explain huge increase in demand for the Rite - and priests to carry them out," *The Telegraph*, September 26, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/26/leading-us-exorcists-explain-huge-increase-in-demand-for-the-rit/.