



ON POSSESSION

By Willow
Watson

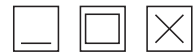
WHAT DOES THE SUBJECT OF POSSESSION MEAN TO YOU?

My obsession with possession began in 2005 with the CW's debut of *Supernatural*. The show followed the story of two brothers traveling the country searching for the demon who murdered their mother. Along the way, they encounter demons, witches, haints, and many other supernatural beings who propagate the urban legends and folklore of the United States. In this sense, it was my first education into the lore of supernatural entities beyond the stories that existed in my home.

The imagery of demon possession in *Supernatural* has clung so vividly to my imagination. In the show, I encountered possessions facilitated by both demons and angels, but it was the possessions of the infernal order which really gripped my attention. Demons, outside of a host body, existed as a cloud of black smoke. When overtaking a human host, the smoke poured in through the orifices of the nose, mouth, eyes, and ears, with complete possession manifesting in the hosts' pupils being dilated to a perfect black. This image still haunts me as a plausible visualization of what it may look like to be overtaken by a nefarious entity.

I once had a dream where I was in my grandmother's home on 116th and Continental Ave, when suddenly all of my family members had become demonically possessed. Seeking refuge, I darted upstairs to my grandmother's room, which I considered a spiritual sanctuary. I reached her room and I cried out, Grandma, the demon, it's got everyone!, to which she turned to face me, revealing her own pair of midnight eyes. Psychoanalytically, this could be a dream of me processing the isolation and fear I experienced as a closeted queer child within a conservative family dynamic. Other elements of my socialization certainly contributed to the symbolism of my dream, like the production of the "spirit of homosexuality."

From a young age, my spiritual education included the knowledge that spirits exist. My grandmother was my spiritual teacher., She taught me the Bible, and how to pray and cultivate a relationship with god. Originally born in Montgomery, Alabama, my grandmother was one of the four million African-Americans who fled the south in favor of the North, Midwest, and West during the Second Great Migration (1940-1970). She eventually settled in the Buckeye-Shaker neighborhood, and brought with her a unique blend of Southern Black Protestantism and Negro "folk beliefs." According to my grandmother's school of thought, there existed the Holy Spirit, and then there existed virtues anthropomorphized into spirits, i.e. "a spirit of protection," "a spirit of wealth," "a spirit of laziness," and "a spirit of confusion." Given that human vices could be attributed to the influence of spirits, my grandmother gave birth to the logic of "the spirit of homosexuality." This logic that sexuality, the operation of one's sovereignty as a sexual being,



has 1) a singular proper and right function, and 2) could be pervaded by the influence of an external, parasitic entity, has provided the groundwork for arguments that diminish the life of queer- and trans-embodied beings.

One of the especially insidious beliefs popularized by this framework is that queer and trans embodiments are the result of sexual trauma, and especially trauma incurred during childhood. I, at one point, was convinced that my sexuality, the way I expressed erotic love and devotion, was not of my own nature, but instead the afflictions of a possession. I was 18 when I announced to a room of my peers, college-aged evangelicals of diverse races, that I was possessed. No one really paused to stop or correct me. I eventually shed this train of discourse as I critically engaged tenants of Africana Studies, and began to formulate an understanding of white supremacy, its imagination of blackness, and even further more its indoctrination into a mythologized model of “proper humanity.”

Although I am no longer captive to the logic of homosexual spirits, I am not fully rid of the notion of possession/possessed as a valid subjectivity. Where the subjugation of spiritual captivity once lived, there is now a porous hollow which exists as a technology of incubation, possession, and birth. It is where “I” live, the seat of my subjectivity who is separate from flesh and exists as a witness and spectator to existence. Here, in this “I”, is where I trace the origin of my transness, a quality of spirit that was shaped to draw dissonance. In whatever body I may be placed, it will be a trans body, because my spirit is a reflection of the divine inspiration in its transness—dissonant and harmonious, cryptic and illegible, secret and aloft.

My transness is a possession.

Willow (she/her, they/them) is a Black transfemme writer and creative.