

Hybrid Genre and Character Representation: Noir, Fantasy, and Fantasy Noir in

Constantine, Pushing Daisies, and The Dresden Files

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

English

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

Genre is an important part of the television industry, as it helps both producers market their texts and consumers better interpret the television they consume. By combining genres, producers can create new stories and more dynamic characters to please audiences. A recent combination that has come into being is fantasy noir. Such examples of this genre are *Pushing Daisies*, *Constantine*, and *The Dresden Files*. These shows take recognizable elements from both genres and meld them together to create a stronger story.

While the general population does not support texts such as *Pushing Daisies*, *Constantine*, or *The Dresden Files*, the fans who do have found something that they can be highly dedicated to. It is my intention to bring to light the ways in which fantasy noir creates new interpretations of old archetypes, to examine the ways gender roles change in this mixed genre as compared to its components, and to suggest some of the possible reasons that fans build cultural communities around these three texts despite their short lifespan on prime time television. I propose that this genre is one in which fans build strong cultural communities around characters.

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Introduction

As a story telling species, it is no surprise that as society has progressed, so has our ability to share in the experience of narrative. We have books, motion pictures, television, and, most recently, online streaming. While we have varying methods of sharing stories, the tales themselves follow similar patterns and conventions, such as the ones outlined in Joseph Campbell's hero's journey. In other words, storytellers follow genre conventions as a basis for their works.

Genre has become an invaluable tool, as Jason Mittell explains in his article "A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory." He implies that industries, audiences, and academics all use genres for different reasons. He says that "Industries rely on genres in producing programs, as well as other central practices... Audiences use genres to organize fan practices... personal preferences, and everyday conversations and viewing practices" (3). This system of classification makes it easier for audiences to decide if they are interested in a particular story and helps industry leaders to determine the success or potential success of certain products. Louis Giannetti in his book *Understanding Movies* also suggests that genre is "a recognizable type of movie, characterized by certain pre-established conventions... [with] a ready-made narrative form" (577). Even Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan discuss genre in their book *Looking at Movies*. They suggest that "as a form of cinematic language, genre involves filmic realities—however stereotyped—that audiences can easily recognize and understand, and that film distributors can market" (102). Television is one such medium where genre is a controlling factor in production. However, this repetitive structure, especially in episodic

television serials, can become boring to viewers. Therefore, writers use experimentation in order to come up with new ways of engaging audiences.

In order to create new entertainment then and disguise this repetition, storytellers use hybrid genres to keep viewers on their toes. Barsam and Monahan suggest that “filmmakers are rarely satisfied to leave things as they are. Thus, as with all things cinematic, genre is in constant transition. Writers and directors, recognizing genre’s narrative, thematic, and aesthetic potential, cannot resist blending ingredients gleaned from multiple styles in an attempt to invent exciting new hybrids” (101). In *Modern Genre Theory* David Duff suggests that a hybrid genre is “The process by which two or more genres combine to form a new genre or subgenre; or by which elements of two or more genres are combined in a single work” (xiv). This combination of familiar tropes and elements from one genre with another creates a new and more dynamic story for viewers. An example would be the fantasy noir genre that will be discussed here; the use of a fantasy staple, magic and clear tropes, with a noir underbelly and storyline generates a text that is complicated and exciting for viewers. Just when the noir story gets predictable, fantasy brings in a new obstacle that is more difficult than the traditional pretentious thug or mobster. When the fantasy in a work gets too whimsical, noir brings in a real world sensibility and harsh reality. Together the story is a mixture of suspense and action, something audiences can delight in.

The draw of fantasy or magic is that writers can supply resources to their characters without much explanation. In mythology, fantastic elements allowed narrators to create powerful role models, such as Hercules, who were born with gifts that helped them succeed. In the 1800’s the infusion of science into literature brought us monsters

such as Frankenstein's monster or Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; characters that brought up questions of morality and the true limits of trying to play God. Today's society enjoys a wide range of fantasy sub-genres, including a genre called magical realism. The point of magical realism is for the fantasy aspects to be muted but present, and for the storyline to follow that of a traditional romance, where the knight in shining armor saves the day. In "The Magic of Television: Thinking Through Magical Realism in Recent TV," by Lynne Joyrich, it is believed that "magical realism has [therefore] been seen as a form that gives voice to the disempowered (by imbuing with power that which is not acknowledged as part of the rational—and economically rationalized— world)" (Paragraph 4). Magical realism seeks to give strength to ordinary people. This is because the ordinary is common life, and viewers wish to relate with hero's.

Contemporary viewers enjoy both the grittiness of 'reality' as seen in both reality TV and the new style of gritty drama like *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* while simultaneously being drawn to fantasy texts such as the hugely popular *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *True Blood* texts. Fantasy noir seeks to capitalize on both these trends as well as reinvigorate each through combining them. While we see the value in a hero like Hercules, we also know that such a perfect strong man is impossible to achieve. To represent the common man, we turn to a different genre.

A genre that better suits ordinary people, yet propels them into extenuating circumstances, is film noir. Roger Ebert's list a "Guide to The Film Noir Genre" starts off with "A French term meaning 'black film' or film of the night, inspired by the Series Noir, a line of cheap paperbacks that translated hard-boiled American crime authors" (1). The 1930's created the genre as a coping mechanism against WWII and the Great

Depression. Barsam and Monahan explain the history of noir briefly in their book. They suggest that “The same war that helped delay the arrival of film noir also helped give birth to the new genre by exposing ordinary Americans to the horrors of war” (86). They suggest the news reels at the time laid out the dark destructive nature of the human spirit, encouraging Americans to look at the world differently. Noir resonated with the American people because it embodied the exact feelings they were battling at the time. Noir was about everyday people, working on dark city streets, fighting for their lives against organized crime and dark shadowy figures. These stories questioned morality just like the science fiction and fantasy stories of the past, but in a different way.

Noir is actually itself a combination of previous film conventions melded together to create a distinctly American style. German expressionism is the first ingredient in noir. Foster Hirsch, in his book *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*, explains that “The Expressionist artist embraced his madness, converting inner demons into images of tumult and breakdown which radiated terminal bleakness” (54). Barsam and Monahan also discuss the expressionist style, saying that “Expressionist films were characterized by extreme stylization in their sets, décor, acting, lighting, and camera angles” (176). The point of expressionist film was to be unsettling, confusing, and at times frightening. It relied heavily on shots with strange angles, jarring movements, and tilted cameras that made scenes feel off balance. Expressionist film makers left Germany to escape Nazi control, and ended up in Hollywood. They brought some of the elements of this expressionist style into the films they made, using this “extreme stylization” to create visually stunning works.

Another German Style that influenced noir was their realistic cinema. Barsam and Monahan suggest that the best example of this style is F.W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* which "Changed the way shots were framed, actors were blocked, and sets were designed and built, thanks to Murnau's innovative use of the moving camera and the subjective camera" (177). Both of these camera styles were meant to capture things as they really were, giving audiences the feeling that they were actually present in the moment of the story. By freeing the camera from the traditional tripod method of filming, filmmakers were able to take their cameras out into the world and document reality. This influenced noir's honesty, and directors often filmed on location in dark and dirty city streets for an authentic feel.

Finally, the American gangster played an influential role in the development of noir. Americans started to feel connected to the gangster character. Hirsch suggests that "During the Depression, the gangster emerged as both a living presence—his activities chronicled in the news—and as a folk hero" (58). Hirsch also says that "The gangster, especially as embodied by such charismatic actors as James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson, was a figure of vitality and enterprise, a man who carved for himself a life of glamor and power that offered vicarious satisfaction to thwarted Depression audiences" (60). The gangster would become a form of anti-hero, who would later transform into the noir protagonist.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what noir is, as Stephen Sanders proves in his collection *The Philosophy of TV Noir*. He says that "It has long been a matter of dispute whether [film noir] is best described as a remarkable cycle that began in the early 1940s and lasted until nearly the end of the 1950s, a distinctive visual style with roots in

Germanic expressionist cinema and French surrealism, a highly fantastic sensibility and point of view reflecting American hard-boiled fiction, or all of these” (2). Noir was not about what a man should and should not do in the name of science, but instead what a man should or should not do in the name of his own conscience. This style glorified the little guy and encouraged seduction and desire. Elements of noir can still be seen in today’s television; focusing on subjects like crime, the dark underbelly of America’s cities, and ordinary people struggling to clear their name of the horrors for which they are accused. It is an homage to that hard-boiled sensibility, laced with mystery and danger; a truly American genre that has subtly transitioned into today’s television.

Today, television producers seek to create texts that go beyond one specific genre. The reason for this interest in multi-genre texts is that it opens up new possibilities for writers to explore interesting situations with characters. Barsam and Monahan say that “genre’s evolve, changing with the times and adapting to audiences expectations, which are in turn influenced by a large range of factors—technological, cultural, social, political, economic, and so on” (102). Hybrid genres are a part of this transformation. Their appeal is clear: they provide the necessary tools to explore concepts in new ways. Steffen Hantke, in his article “The Military Horror Film: Speculations on a Hybrid Genre,” does a beautiful job of explaining how the hybrid of horror and the war film work together. He says:

Both genres share basic thematic concerns, but representational and generic registers differ. What can only be articulated metaphorically within the codes of realism can appear as palpable physical reality in the modes of the fantastic. The

bottom line of war films— “war is hell”—applies to military horror films as well. The only difference is that, in military horror films, it really is. (702)

One genre influences the other, providing a literal visual reality to what would normally be a metaphoric concept. As Hantke says, hell becomes a reality in the military horror film, as horror provides ghosts and monsters to the foreboding sense that everyone in war will die. In fantasy noir, the realism is provided by noir in the form of hard-boiled detectives and femme fatales, and fantasy supplements this by making those characters or their antagonists into literal monsters.

Fantasy is a genre reliant on magic and highly recognizable archetypes. The protagonists of fantasy works are often males, although this has been changing in recent years, with strict moral codes who represent a perfect hero. Joyrich suggests that fantasy is also a mobile genre, able to infiltrate into other storylines and reinvent the spaces they take over (paragraph 5). In contrast, noir focuses on anti-hero's. Barsam and Monahan suggest that “Film noir fed off the postwar disillusionment that followed prolonged exposure to this intimidating new perspective” (87). The genre is built around characters who are dubious in nature and a visual style that inspires fear. When these two genres combine, the magic of fantasy breathes life into the underbelly of noir city streets. Noir is a breeding ground for fear, for the monsters that would normally lose in a fantasy situation. This hybrid genre creates a new type of anti-hero, one who has the personal code of the fantasy hero but who is undesirable like the noir protagonist. Shows like *Star Trek* and *The X-Files* have demonstrated viewers' interest in television that moves beyond reality, while *Miami Vice* and *Hawaii 5.0* have had success as examples of television noir. Injecting fantasy into noir or adding noir elements to a fantasy show

expands the creative tools that writers have at their disposal. Some shows that are an example of this fusion are *The Dresden Files* (2007-2008), *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009), and *Constantine* (2014-2015). Before examining each text for its relation to each genre, it is important to have some understanding of each show. This is provided here.

The Dresden Files

Originally a book series by Jim Butcher, *The Dresden Files* television series started life on the SyFy channel. Similar to the books, the series follows Harry Dresden, a professional wizard who lives and keeps shop in Chicago. He works both on his own as a private paranormal investigator and for the police department by request of his friend Lieutenant Connie Murphy. Harry faces fantastical monsters of all kinds, and uses his magical gift in order to protect the innocent who come to him for help. Here is where the similarities between the books and the television show end, as the show started with major liberties relating to the content and only at the end of the season tried to copy some of the adventures that Harry faces in the book. In chapter two, these variations are explored in more depth, specifically in terms of Murphy's character. Another topic that will be covered in the epilogue is the show's afterlife as an object of fan devotion and creation, as the show only produced one season. For now, important aspects of the plotline will be foregrounded.

Harry's early life is a wave of turmoil and deception. His mother, a high-ranking witch in the magical community, dies when he is young, and he spends most of his youth traveling around with his street magician father. While Harry's father discourages his son

from using the power he has been born with, Harry's uncle Justin Morningway is keen to see the boy taught proper magic. The two stand at odds about Harry's education until one night Harry's father dies suddenly. Morningway wastes no time in assigning Harry a tutor for his magical skills. Harry is introduced to Hrothbert of Bainbridge, a wizard whose soul is trapped in his own skull. Harry starts calling Hrothbert Bob, and he becomes a sort of second father to Harry (another gendered aspect of the show that will be discussed in more detail below). Though viewers do not get to see much of Harry's childhood, it is clear that Morningway is not a loving and compassionate soul. It is no surprise then, that when Harry discovers his father's killer, he mercilessly kills the culprit, his own uncle.

It is while visiting his uncle before an important event in the wizarding community that Harry finds a voodoo doll with his father's ring around it. Harry immediately realizes that Justin has used magic to kill Harry's father. Harry immediately confronts his uncle, and they argue, until he takes up the voodoo doll and kills Morningway. It is a rule in the magic community that wizards do not kill another being using magic. Harry's actions bring him in front of The High Council, the governing body of the magical community. Since Morningway was already being investigated for suspicious activity before his death, The High Council decides to be lenient on Harry. They allow him to keep his life, but he is placed on probation, constantly being watched by the council in case he does anything like this again.

This leads to the present day where Harry works out of his apartment as a private investigator for supernatural occurrences. He has an ad in the phone book, but it is rarely taken seriously. He works with Murphy on cases that do not make logical sense. He must walk a fine line between investigating crimes and keeping off of The High Council's

radar. His probation officer is called Morgan, a soldier who works under Mai—a High Council member. Harry’s biggest struggle is balancing his probation with the fact he needs to solve cases where the villains use magic in unlawful ways.

The Dresden Files is the best example of a fantasy noir, because its use of fantasy conventions complements the noir detective story so well. Harry is a wizard, but also a detective, and while his cases can often start out innocently with lost objects or suspected scams, they end with life or death fights and at least one dead body. Fantasy then complicates this plot further, with things like necromancers, demons, and dragons. Like a true fantasy, Harry is born with this power that will ultimately save the day, but just like a noir hero, his power is not always an advantage for him and does not guarantee that he knows what he will be facing ahead of time. The show is a perfect fusion of a noir style plot and atmosphere with an overlaying touch of fantasy, a subject that will be explored further in chapter 1. One thing this text handles poorly is the transition from book to screen when it comes to female representation, something that will be discussed in chapter 2. Among the three texts examined here, *The Dresden Files* presents the most harmonious blending of both genres.

Pushing Daisies

The show *Pushing Daisies* summarizes itself neatly in an introductory recap that happens before most of the episodes of the second season. The show, narrated by an unknown party, is explained as:

This is the story of a pie maker with an extraordinary gift: he could bring dead things back to life. Though the pie maker's gift did come with a caveat or two: first touch life, second touch dead again forever. He used this gift to bring his childhood sweetheart back to life. This would mean they could never touch. Together with a private investigator named Emmerson Cod, the trio solve murders, which is much easier when you can wake the victim. Or is it?

The pie maker is named Ned, and while this recap is a slight oversimplification of the general plotline, it states most of the important events of the first season. The pilot of the show puts everything in the clearest perspective. It lays the groundwork for all the other episodes, and does a fantastic job of establishing relationships early on in the series.

In the pilot episode viewers meet Ned and his childhood sweetheart Chuck as young children, with Ned's first discovery of the power that will rule the rest of his life. His mother has a heart attack in the kitchen, and Ned revives her, simply by touching her face. One minute later the father of his childhood sweetheart dies of inexplicable causes. The first touch brings life, but if he does not touch that person again, after a minute someone else will die in their place. This is compounded by the second lesson; when Ned's mother kisses him good night she dies for the second time, and he cannot bring her back. Second touch death forever.

Now orphaned, or in Ned's case nearly so, Chuck and Ned are separated. Ned is sent to boarding school by his father, who then proceeds to create a new life without him. The boarding school leads to culinary school as Ned realizes his talent for making delicious pies, and in the present day he owns his own restaurant called The Pie Hole.

Working at the pie shop with Ned is Olive, a perky, excitable woman who has a romantic interest in Ned. He never seems to reciprocate her feelings. He never tells Olive about his power, which is possibly the reason she does not respect Ned's personal space. Rejection does not stop Olive from being a major force in Ned's life, as she plays an incarnation of the femme fatale (a subject discussed more in depth in chapter 2).

Emmerson Cod enters the picture accidentally, while chasing a suspect for one of his cases across some rooftops near the restaurant. His suspect falls and dies in Ned's arms, only to be revived. Ned must kill him again, but this is all done in front of Emmerson. As often is the case with shady detectives, instead of outing Ned to the general public, Emmerson makes a deal that will be mutually beneficial. Ned will come with him to the morgue in order to interrogate the victims of crimes. Once they know what has happened, they will kill the victim again with Ned's second touch, and then collect the reward money for finding the true culprit. The men then split the money evenly, and move on to the next case.

It is this deal that leads Ned and Emmerson to Chuck's funeral. In the time they have been separated, Chuck has spent her years taking care of her aunts Lily and Vivian, locked in the house with them. Once bright stars in synchronized mermaid swimming, both aunts were spurred into seclusion by a freak accident which took Lily's one eye. After years of seclusion, on a whim Chuck enters a contest for a chance for a cruise around the world and wins. She is strangled to death in her cabin, and news of her death becomes widespread. When Ned hears the news he races to her funeral, although he does not want to solve her murder so much as offer her the chance at a life with him. Chuck accepts Ned offer, and the show takes off from there. The pair can never touch again,

which is a difficult thing to agree to in a relationship. They learn to adapt to the fact that they will always have barriers between them. Chuck immerses herself into every facet of Ned's life, from working at The Pie Hole to worming her way into helping with cases with Emmerson. She provides a breath of dignity to the interrogations, asking personal questions that the men never think of and actually lead to the solution of the case.

The group solves murders for multiple reasons. The men are mostly motivated by money; Ned's pie restaurant does not exactly bring home enough money to keep the doors open, and Emmerson is portrayed as greedy and insensitive. The women seek justice; Chuck knows what it is like to die and often asks questions that relate to last wishes, and Olive enjoys the thrill of the hunt. Each shows skills that are relevant to the case, such as Chuck's vast knowledge of foreign languages, Ned's ability to wake the dead, Emmerson's skill at finding out information, and Olive's determination to succeed at anything. When they come together, the crimes can be rather odd, but their hard work always pays off.

Stylistically, with its bright colors and upbeat soundtrack, the show relates more to the fantasy genre, or something like a romantic comedy. However, the plotline of each episode and the characters presented in the show fit comfortably into a noir plotline. The ways in which the show navigates using a noir story in a fantasy setting will be explored in more depth in the first chapter. This show also has a remarkably strong female cast, who work in highly progressive roles despite their superficial resemblance to noir stereotypes of femininity. These women will be discussed more in chapter 2.

Constantine

The most recent of the three shows, *Constantine* premiered on NBC in the fall of 2014. While there was promising interest in the television show, especially on social media, it was quickly dropped by NBC. Craig Byrne discusses that “Although recent streaming events and positive-sounding meetings made it sound like NBC’s adaption of the DC/Vertigo comic book *John Constantine: Hellblazer*, titled *Constantine*, might have a chance at a second year, executive producer Daniel Cerone has now confirmed it is at least not in the cards for NBC,” (“It’s Official: NBC Says ‘no’ On *Constantine* Season 2” 1). Based on the comic book series *Hellblazer* by DC comics, *Constantine* chronicles the adventures of John Constantine, an “exorcist, demonologist, and master of the dark arts.” Fresh out of a mental institution and on American soil, John is interested in hunting down demons and other bad spirits. He relies on an old friend, Chaz, to help him as he crisscrosses the United States searching for monsters. The pair also pick up a female psychic, Zed, who has been seeing visions of John for months. She feels it is her duty to help John in his mission, despite the fact that John claims he works alone. There has been a rise in demonic activity since John has come to America, a foreboding sense that the end of days is close at hand. Each mission gets more difficult as the stakes rise higher on their crusade for the mortal plane.

Along the way John receives advice from Manny, or as he is known in the Judeo-Christian religion, Emanuel. Manny is an angel tasked with keeping track of John. While angels cannot interfere with humans, nor can they impart wisdom on what is coming, Manny does a rather good job of speaking around the subject. He urges John to look

beyond single isolated incidents to the bigger picture; the darkness is becoming stronger day by day. Manny helps in minor ways, but mostly he is a source of frustration for John. While Manny tries to encourage John to fight in the name of God and to seek forgiveness, John continues to resist the path to redemption. Viewers see that John is still a little bit of a skeptic, even though he talks to angels and fights against demons.

An example of the dangers John faces is found in the episode “A Feast of Friends.” Here John and an old friend Gary battle a ravenous African demon that devours victims whole. The only way of successfully destroying the demon is to lock it in the body of one man and let it completely devour him until he is gone and the demon is sent back to hell. Gary and John have a tension-filled relationship, as Gary is a flighty drug addict with a respect for John that John feels is unwarranted. John feels it only just that Gary takes on the role as the sacrifice, so that he may die a hero like he always wanted. While other people would think this insane or would demand John find another way, Gary unquestioningly accepts. He says it himself: “there’s no better way to go out: a mage like John Constantine.” Once they have completed the ritual to capture the demon, John brings Gary back to the cabin. They are locked in a room together, with John sitting next to Gary until the man dies.

While magic and religious mythology are key contributors to the plotline of *Constantine*, the show itself visually looks more like a noir than a fantasy tale. The opposite of *Pushing Daisies*, *Constantine* has fantasy characters involved in a noir story in a different way than previously seen. As will be discussed in chapter one, John Constantine is the quintessential noir anti-hero. While Chaz and Zed fight valiantly for the moral high ground, John is self-serving. As Sanders suggest in “Sunshine Noir:

Postmodernism and Miami Vice” the noir protagonists “are men whose pasts involve a range of indiscretions, problems, bad judgements, and character flaws” (187). Having caused a child to go to hell, an avid smoker and alcoholic, spunky, and insensitive, John Constantine is a perfect example of this definition of a noir protagonist. The gendered conflict between Zed’s pious nature and John’s pessimism will be explored in chapter 2.

Conclusion

In his book *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, Christopher Vogler says that “All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies. They are known collectively as The Hero’s Journey... Used wisely, these ancient tools of the storytellers’ craft still have tremendous power to heal our people and make the world a better place” (1). It is clear by the subject matter that each of these texts falls into the realm of a fantasy television show, which relies heavily on the different pieces of The Hero’s Journey. Beyond that, the choices that have been made in cinematography, *misè-en-scene*, and other areas of film study will prove that these shows are more expansive than the limiting nature of a single genre. They are also progressive texts which create new gender roles and examine characters for more than their literary contribution to the plot line. Although each falls victim to some reductive or limiting views of women, overall the texts do a good job of exploring how the hybrid genre opens up different possibilities for escaping the reductive female stereotypes common in each genre separately: the damsel in distress and the evil witch on the one hand and the femme fatale and dutiful woman on the other. These shows

did not have long runs on network television, and so some of the problems with poor female representation could stem from a lack of time and space to develop these characters.

While the network television stations did not find value in these texts enough to renew them, the fans of such shows and those who carefully examine them will find the fusion of genres create intrinsically captivating stories. The fanbase of each of these shows is fiercely loyal. They have related something about these works to themselves, and for that reason they discuss them extensively, celebrate any new information they can gather, and petition for more material to explore. Fans create extensive online spaces devoted to news, fan artifacts, commentary, etc. as they revel in the joy of being emerged in a community. The examination of these fan-based cultural communities is a task too extensive for a work this size, but is a path worth working towards in the future. The interpretations these fans come up with in order to connect to the texts is worth exploring, because it gives us insight into how texts affect consumers on multiple levels. While it will only be hinted at here, the next step in this journey is to tackle the fan communities these texts have spawned.

What will be handled in this paper is the discussion of what fantasy noir is and does in a thematic sense. In Chapter 1, I plan to lay out the different conventions of both the fantasy and noir genres, and the ways in which fantasy noir borrows from these older systems. The goal is to exemplify the ways that fantasy noir is a sum of its parts and prove that it is a legitimate genre with new potential in television despite the early cancellations of these three shows. Chapter 2 will be an in-depth examination of why this genre is so interesting and its ability to adapt and evolve in new and unique ways.

Specifically, I will be focusing on the use of female characters in each work to demonstrate the ways in which this genre can be exceptionally progressive. Traditionally female characters in television (and other media) have had limiting potential for growth over the course of a narrative. This is exemplified easily in the fantasy and noir genres specifically. Film noir provides female characters with the potential for growth, unlike fantasy or noir would alone. The afterward will be a place to lay out future possible areas of study, as the genre continues to grow and evolve. A discussion of the ways in which fans are studied and how to apply that to these texts will be presented, as well as potential implications of studying the fans across different social media platforms. Even though the material is limited, these texts have a wide-reaching effect that is worth exploring further.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Every well-known genre has specific conventions that are used by viewers to identify it. Noir is a fairly recent construct from the fear of the Depression and World War II era, relying on high contrast lighting, seedy detectives, and seductive femme fatales. Sanders suggests, in his introduction to the book *The Philosophy of TV Noir*, that “In addition to its importance as a cultural phenomenon, noir television is particularly valuable in dramatizing situations and experiences that raise philosophical questions about how to live, what kind of person one should be, and what, if anything, gives meaning to life” (1). Noir is an American construct, and as such it resonates with the hopes and fears of the country, no matter what generation is watching.

While noir conventions will continue to be discussed throughout the chapter, it is important to remember how difficult the genre is to define. In the book *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* by James Naremore, it is suggested that noir is “Associated with certain visual and narrative traits, including low-key photography, images of wet city streets, pop-Freudian characterizations, and romantic fascination with femme fatales” (9). This suggests both a narrative and visual set of conventions that are often associated with noir. In *Looking at Movies*, Barsam and Monahan get a little more in depth with their analysis. They suggest that

Noir movies employ lighting schemes that emphasize contrast and create deep shadows that can obscure as much information as the illumination reveals. Light

sources are often placed low to the ground, resulting in illumination that distorts facial features and casts dramatic shadows. Exterior scenes usually take place at night; those interior scenes set during the day often play out behind drawn shades that cast patterns of light and shadow splintering the frame. These patterns, in turn, combine with other diagonal visual elements to create a compositional tension that gives the frame—and the world it depicts—a restless, unstable quality. (88)

These two definitions show the ambiguity of such noir conventions as dark city streets and fatal femme fatales. The genre is mobile, with multiple interpretations of the same visual style, but also some rather specific standards that must be present. Without high-contrast lighting, defined by Louis Giannetti in his book *Understanding Movies* as “A style of lighting emphasizing harsh shafts and dramatic streaks of light and darks” (577), a noir does not have the same effect on the audience. Therefore, scholars such as Frank Krutnik suggest that “noir has suffered ever since [its conception] from a rather impressionistic manner of its formulations: it is notoriously difficult, for example, to provide a cogent and unified definition of the film noir” (x *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, and Masculinity*). While noir is difficult to define, fantasy has rather easy conventions to recognize.

Fantasy has been around almost as long as storytelling itself; mingling with myth to create tales of adventure and suspense. Campbell says in his prologue that

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not

be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the
inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation.

(The Hero with a Thousand Faces 1)

Cultural traditions, self-interpretation, and even the sciences have all come from the power of mythology. This mythology has a basic structure, one that Campbell lays out and then Christopher Vogler interprets in his book *The Writer's Journey*. It is a never ending cycle of being called to action, facing death itself, and returning home a changed warrior. The battles can vary depending on the creator; from Chinese dragons to futuristic cyborgs, but the point is the same. In the end, the hero is all of us, maturing to the point that death is not an end, but a transition into another state of being.

In literature the blending of genres is creating more spaces for the writer to explore character development, social issues, and create a better connection with the audience. Traditionally television has been ruled by strict genre divisions, such as sitcoms like *Friends* or dramas like *Law and Order*. Recently, audiences have seen a deviation from this as shows like *The Office* represent a hybrid genre. A hybrid genre takes elements from both of its components and melds them together to create a new viewing experience. In the case of *The Office*, comedic timing and satire combine with documentary style filming to create a mockumentary poking fun at corporate America. While some genres have been combined with great commercial and critical success, including *The Office*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *The Hills*. However, two genres that have been crossed in several shows recently but have not yet found long-lasting or critical success are noir and fantasy. Even with genres so polar opposite in nature, with fantasy embodying the bright happily ever after and noir remaining in the dark and depressing

shadows of hopelessness and despair. It is possible to combine them seamlessly into a new genre, a place where each brings something of value to the table. The result is more dynamic characters and a new fictional reality.

Even though this hybrid genre of fantasy and noir is still in its infancy, there are a handful of shows that demonstrate the benefits of mixing these two opposing genres and even though they were not long running successes, each has spawned an ongoing cult community of fans. Some television shows that are good examples of fantasy noir are *Constantine* (2015), *The Dresden Files* (2007), and *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009).

Commercial success for these shows has proven elusive, but there is clearly an audience interest of niche or cult communities. These fans engage deeply with their chosen texts and can offer insights into reception of future endeavors in this genre. These three shows retain attributes from both genres and show the ways in which both of these genres meld to create new kinds of stories. By recognizing the two distinct characteristics of fantasy, the three distinct characteristics of noir, and the characteristics of the amalgamation of the two, a viewer can better assess these works thoroughly.

Fantasy

A clear signifier of the fantasy genre is the use of magic or magical beings in the work. Fantasy exists in the realm of magic, allowing for a wide range of things to happen that would not in real life. This means that magic controls everything about the world: people have magic, animals have magic, and even everyday objects can be imbued with it. Most magical beings are derived straight from mythology, often encompassing

multiple myths from different continents. Characters like Hercules, the Cyclops, and Smaug are clear examples of magical characters occupying the same space as everyday people. Magic is also a tool that the main characters' use in order to deal with situations of grave danger. In the case of John (*Constantine*), Harry (*The Dresden Files*), and Ned (*Pushing Daisies*), the characters all use magic for similar purposes: to aid in resolving unsolved cases that stem from the magic surrounding them. The types of magic present in each work can differ, but all involve some fantastic element. In *Constantine* Christian religious practice is combined with voodoo and witchcraft, in *The Dresden Files* traditional wizard spells and potions are employed, and in *Pushing Daisies* the Midas touch is given a morbid twist.

In *Constantine*, both magic and Christian mythology are used as fantasy elements. John relies on a solid knowledge of the occult and specific religious rituals from Christianity in order to stop the rising darkness. For a man so against religion, John knows an extensive collection of Catholic exorcism rites. He is familiar with a wide range of spells, he relies on a map scryed with the blood of a psychic, and has even given his best friend immortality. He faces demons, witch doctors, and even the occasional black wizard as antagonists. John fancies himself a petty dabbler in the dark arts. The magic that exists in his world is as much a part of him as it is a part of the darkness around him.

In *The Dresden Files* the magic that is a part of Harry's world is apparent by the tools he uses. From staffs, to shield bracelets, to spell books, the fact that all of these things work for him is a testament to the magic he possesses. His number one adviser is a ghost. Harry uses magic circles to capture monsters, tracking spells to find suspects, and

even a voodoo doll in extreme situations. The High Council, the governing body in Harry's world, is made up of magical beings as well. Magic is a power that people in Harry's world are born with, and most magic users feel like elitists, but they are just as often the antagonists in *The Dresden Files* as they are positive forces. One of the characters seated on the council is a dragon disguised as a human being, and her intolerance and rage are unsettling for someone supposedly protecting the world. There is no way to separate magic from Harry's reality.

Pushing Daisies is a fantasy because the main character is a necromancer and uses his powers to solve murder cases. The ways in which Ned uses his power, or tries not to use it, cause him the most problems. Ned bakes his pies with rotten fruit that he regenerates to save money on produce. When he revives a person, they retain the injuries of their death, yet function mostly as if they were healed. One such character is a woman who was harpooned to a spotlight. The light eventually reduced her to a blob of goo, yet she was able to use Morse code to communicate with Ned. This character is an example of fantasy providing the medium for the character to come to life. While the thought of reanimating the dead itself is impossible, there are examples of similar things happening in stories like "The Princess and The Frog" or "Hansel and Gretel." There are also other aspects of the fairy tale style present in the work, such as a disembodied omniscient narrator who helps to guide the story along, and the use of visually striking bright colors in the work, however the magic used in the show is by far the most prominent aspect.

While each of these shows employs some aspects of Campbell's notion of The Hero's Journey, each also deviates from it to some degree. Especially since these three texts are hybrid genres and must also deal with noir conventions as well, they are missing

some of the steps along Campbell's path. For instance, there is often a lack of crossing the first threshold, since these characters already live in the magical community full time. Instead they pass over into the normal world briefly to collect their assignment and then return to their fantasy realm. Campbell also suggests that the hero will face a death and then rebirth, but in noir the death is often the end of the story altogether. In the case of television serials, it is important that the main character does not die, so the death Campbell suggest becomes a theoretical one and the reward is often worth less than the sacrifice. These characters already have a mentor figure who accompanies them like a sidekick on their adventures, so they rarely meet an old mentor along their journey. Instead they consult with the old wise man multiple times throughout an episode.

The wise old man is one of the many pieces of the hero's journey that is present in these works. The wise old man is often the one who calls the hero to action, and this call comes in the form of some event which cannot be ignored. All three characters face such a call at the beginning of each episode. For Harry, John, and Ned the call is a case they cannot ignore, a reason they have to venture out and fight. They also face a string of trials as they collect clues and evidence against their opponents. None of these characters have an easy time acquiring information, often having to fight to move forward. Campbell suggests that every hero faces a literal death, but Vogler would suggest that the death can be emotional or even intellectual; the death of a previous way of thinking in order to believe the truth is also a death for a main character. At the climax of each episode Harry, John, and Ned all face situations that could physically kill them, but they also face the death of their previous assumptions.

Another one of the characteristics that signifies a fantasy work is the clearly identified archetypes, Christopher Vogler gives a clearer comprehensive list in his work *The Writer's Journey*, and lists as most recognizable the “hero, mentor (wise old man or woman), threshold guardian, herald, shapeshifter, shadow, [and] trickster” (32). They are the benchmark for any story, but in particular a fantasy narrative, where they are clearest. The use of clear archetypes helps in the process of remembering, back when oration was the natural way of passing down stories. Though the names may have changed, so long as the characters were recognizable, it was easy for storytellers to build new tales around the hero's journey. In the present day these archetypes create the groundwork for memorable stories, while offering the potential for new interpretations of these characters.

For example, the wise man, the guiding force of all hero's, is an important factor in the fantasy narrative. It is important that the wise man (sometimes called the magician) be someone who imparts wisdom, even though that wisdom is a bit ambiguous. Vogler says that “the relationship between hero and mentor is one of the richest sources of entertainment in literature and film” (47). A clear example is Dumbledore from the *Harry Potter* series. The wise headmaster of the school makes decisions that directly affect Harry, because he has confidence that the boy can handle it. When Harry feels lost or confused, Dumbledore steps in to provide clarity on situations. In the first book, Potter spends a great deal of time in front of the mirror of Erised. Dumbledore finds Harry Potter and explains the use of the mirror to him. By doing this he is providing Potter with both real world advice—it's not good to dwell on the past and forget to live— and practical advice for facing off against the main antagonist of the work. Dumbledore is also building a rich relationship with Potter, in order to further their bond. The mentor or wise man can

also serve various literary functions. Vogler lists teaching, gift-giving, and inventing as some of the things the mentor also does, but most importantly, the mentor can be an external conscience for the hero (*The Writer's Journey*, 50). This is the case in all three of the fantasy noir texts.

Each wise old man becomes a beacon of wisdom for the main characters, even when John, Harry, and Ned do not want to hear the truth. Chaz, Bob, and Emmerson embody the wise old man archetype. Hybrid genres allow for experimentation in different ways, and in the case of these three texts the genre markers are experimented with while the archetypes are what stays the same. These male relationships, which are common in fantasy, are clearly recognizable and comforting to viewers, as a sense of the familiar gives them the feeling that they relate to the story. In his article "Forever Acting Alone: The Absence of Female Collaboration in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*" Michael Mendelson discusses the power of males working together. He cites the story the "Six Who Made Their Way" and says that "all six contribute their individual talents to a series of adventures that none could undertake alone," and that "The result of this collaboration is both personal support and collective accomplishment" (119). Men are clearly supported by other men in fantasy works, specifically old wise men who offer knowledge to the hero. Mendelson also suggests that a specific set of tales in Grimms' features "Fraternal bonds, brothers or very close allies working together either for mutual benefit or at least without rancor" (113). These bonds do not have to be through blood, as Mendelson sites an example of two men who make a vow of brotherhood and support it. This collection of clearly identifiable archetypes is a signal that the work is fantasy. The wise mentor does

not have to be a father specifically, but he often has a fraternal bond with the main character or feels the need to father.

For John Constantine, this wise man or mentor is Chaz, his best friend. Chaz has a limited knowledge of the occult (John is the one with those skills), but Chaz does have the compassion of a father figure and the wisdom of a few extra years on John. As the wise man, Chaz is often the one convincing John to face his emotions, to be compassionate, and to consider the ramifications of his actions. In “The Saint of Last Resorts Part 1” Chaz constantly begs John to apologize to Anne Marie as a way of reconciling after the life changing experiences the two had together. John cannot bring himself to express the guilt he feels over his actions, instead projecting indifference, and it is this attitude that convinces Anne Marie he is worth sacrificing to the brujería in order for her to escape with an innocent life. Had John followed Chaz’s advice, things may have ended differently, but it is John’s own stubbornness, not a lack of knowledge or guidance, that decides the character’s fate.

Similarly, Bob looks out for Harry Dresden in *The Dresden Files*. Bob has committed some of the most important sins in magic usage, and has paid the price for it by the High Council trapping him inside his own skull. While Bob’s concern can sometimes sound selfish— there are many times where he is concerned with rent or what will happen to him if Harry dies— this is to mask Bob’s actual concern for Harry. At the core he is worried that Harry will kill himself trying to save someone else or that the decisions Dresden makes are actually the worst response to the situation. Just like any father figure would, Bob is looking out for Harry’s wellbeing, the things that no self-respecting hero thinks about when there is a damsel in distress or a magical beast to slay.

At the same time, Bob has been Harry's teacher for a long time and a source of constant guidance. Bob can be both of these things as the mentor figure. In an episode where Bob is stolen, Harry looks lost and confused, wandering around in a panic until they are reunited. Bob is a mentor figure to Harry, as both a father and a source of guidance and information.

In *Pushing Daisies*, Emmerson has taken on the role of the father that Ned never had growing up. Emmerson is practical; he is in it for the money. However, Emmerson is not above giving Ned love advice, protecting his friend in a fight, or providing mild emotional support. A friendship that started out of business evolved into a bond of respect. An example of this is the fact that Emmerson was as equally embarrassed to tell Ned of his lost daughter as he was about revealing the fact to his mother. It was a sign of failure for Emmerson, and he did not want Ned or his mother to think any less of him. It is also Emmerson who brings to light how interested Olive is in Ned. Up until he explains the signs to Ned, the pie maker had been living in a bubble of self-denial about Olive's affections.

Magic also creates more leeway for writers or creators. If magic is involved viewers are more inclined to believe that an animal, an inanimate object, or an elf is a wise old man. The use of magic is not a cop-out, nor does it make the material childish. An example is Guillermo Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*. While most of the characters in the film are real adults, the one who gives Ofelia guidance is the faun Pan. However, *Pan's Labyrinth* is more a social commentary on the difficulties of communist states than it is about Pan or his labyrinth. The magic in this work creates a sense of wonder in the viewer because they are willing to suspend disbelief in order to experience the world as it

is truly intended. That does not mean that the point of the journey is limited to the “happily ever after” ending of children’s stories. Magic and clear archetypes create in viewers the feeling of familiarity and wonder that only fantasy could provide, while examining real world issues.

In the case of *Constantine*, *Pushing Daisies*, and *The Dresden Files*, magic is not present to bring a lighthearted feeling to the work. Instead it is often the source of each character’s woes. This is an example of fantasy acting to create an adult atmosphere. Even though the hero is born with his magic, it brings him nothing but trouble. The use of clear archetypes is also important to the narrative, as people who make the hero more relatable. John and Harry are rather reckless on their own, and need a mentor figure to guide them. Ned is the opposite, sheltering himself from any form of change whatsoever, and therefore needs a mentor to inspire him to action. These are all adult themes which prove fantasy can support other genres without making the material immature.

Noir

Noir is more of a style than an actual checklist of identifying markers. This is exemplified in Roger Ebert’s article “A Guide to Film Noir Genre.” In the article, Ebert lists ten things that film noir is, including “a movie which at no time misleads you into thinking there is going to be a happy ending,” and “the most American film genre, because no society could have created a world so filled with doom, fate, fear and betrayal, unless it were essentially naïve and optimistic” (1). Most of this checklist discusses the style of film noir, because the style is so distinct and striking to audiences.

Especially in today's film industry, where color film has taken control of the market, it is hard to identify the visual cues that make up noir. For instance, a previous cue to a noir text was the use of high contrast lighting. Characters partially shrouded in darkness and partially over exposed by light created a certain feeling in the viewer that only black and white film could produce. The fact that color film has taken over is often the center of the debate on if film noir still exists or not.

Since color film has difficulty producing these same effects, some would assume noir has disappeared or gone out of style. The debate itself is widespread, but it is also a little skewed. If film critics were to define noir only in its contrast of black and white, they would be missing out on all of the feelings that noir brings to film. As Foster Hirsch says in *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*, "a genre, after all, is determined by conventions of narrative structure, characterization, theme, and visual design, of just the sort that noir offers in abundance" (72). In *Looking at Movies* Barsam and Monahan state that "Regardless of how it is classified, film noir has continued to flourish long past the events that provoked its birth, in part because of a universal attraction to its visual and narrative style, and a lasting affinity for its outlook" (87). They imply that noir continues to be appreciated because of its realism. Similarly, Paul Schrader suggests in his article "Notes on Film Noir," that "The Fascination film noir holds for today's young filmgoers and film students reflects recent trends in American cinema: American movies are again taking a look at the underside of the American character" (53-63). The emotional connection more than the visual style is what drives viewers to connect with film noir. Both the visual elements and the emotional nostalgia are present in *The Dresden Files*, *Constantine*, and *Pushing Daisies*.

Not only is the noir style marked by contrasts of black and white, but also by things like wide angle shots and the use of lines to create off balance compositions. Hirsch reinforces that “asymmetry, angularity, verticality are important compositional elements of noir thrillers; space is sliced up, it seems to close in on the characters as shapes converge over their heads, pressing them down to the bottom of the screen” (89). This happens in all three texts as well. *The Dresden Files* relies heavily on jarring camera movements, an effect that throws the viewer off balance much like Harry himself is thrown by the realizations of his investigations into the realm of magic. *Constantine* uses wide angle composition in order to box in the characters. High ceilings with beams that invade the character’s head room press them out of the frame. When they are not inside, an extension of too much headspace makes the characters look insignificant, as if they can no more save the world from the rising darkness than they can save themselves from being swallowed up in the frame. While *Pushing Daisies* carries more of a fantasy or romance setting based on its bright colors and whimsical décor, it also uses these same conventions. The morgue is a space with multiple converging lines, boxing in the characters and limiting their ability to move. The directors also use wide angle lenses to create the feeling of larger-than-life characters. When these camera moves it creates that same vertigo effect as a noir film traditionally has. The directors of *Daisies* were avid fans of Alfred Hitchcock, a well-known noir writer/director, and there are plenty of nods to his work, such as a dream sequence that mirrors the one in *Vertigo*. The visual styles of these texts help to complement a narrative structure that is equally noir.

Noir has its own character archetypes as well, such as the femme fatale and the hard-boiled detective, along with a plot driven heavily by crime. The most notable

archetype is the femme fatale, which will be discussed in the second chapter, but the main hero of a noir is often just as recognizable. This is especially true when it is a hard-boiled detective like John and Harry. Hirsch gives a perfect description when he says

Hard-boiled toughness was indicated by appearance, by occupation, by personal habits, and by manner of speech. Dressed typically in trench coat and fedora, a constant smoker and a heavy drinker, the hard-boiled hero was a man of the city, usually though not always engaged in criminal detection, a cop or a gumshoe. Moving through the criminal underworld with a shield of ironic and weary detachment, this self-conscious he-man figure used violence to contain violence... Though he might resort to devious means to get the job done, he was not for sale: he had a fundamental integrity. (24)

Constantine, *The Dresden Files*, and *Pushing Daisies* are all shows focused around solving crimes. In the case of *The Dresden Files* and *Constantine* the main character is the hard-boiled detective. In *Pushing Daisies*, the main character is a paranoid outsider dragged into the underbelly, but he is accompanied by this same detective. Barsam and Monahan state that “like his counterpart in the gangster movie, the film noir protagonist is an antihero” and that “Ironically, the world-weary and wisecracking noir antihero is responsible for some of cinema’s most popular and endearing characters” (87). John, Harry, and Ned are all exemplars of these traits: they are all wise cracking world-weary protagonists with tendencies towards antihero behavior.

John Constantine is the quintessential noir leading male. His gruff attitude and snappy wit distance him from all the other characters, and as an outsider he becomes more of an anti-hero than a savior. He is tracking down dark spirits, ones that usually

have killed innocent human beings or are causing destruction in the normal community. This is normally a goal for a noir character: to solve the case by dragging the bad guy back to the darkness where he belongs. Even the viewers of the show question John's morality. He is also shown smoking and drinking in almost every episode. At the end he is victorious, but the methods he has used to get the job done weigh heavily on him. While it is a victory for him, it is hard won and not without consequence, such as destroying relationships with his friends. John is a weathered and broken detective, just like Harry.

The Dresden Files has exactly the same premise, Harry must find the monsters before they find him or an unsuspecting innocent civilian. In the books Harry's quick wit is often what gets him into trouble, as he says things that offend the magical beings he is fighting and encourage them to fight harder. In the show this wit is tempered but still present. Harry has some hope for the rest of the world, he still believes in concepts like love and family, but he also knows when something appears too good to be true. He also does not fit in anywhere, both the High Council and modern society think of Harry as a joke most of the time. No one takes him seriously except Murphy, and even then she can be skeptical. Neither John nor Harry fit into society; instead they live in the spaces between the dark underworld and the normal city.

While *Pushing Daisies* does not visually fit in with the other two texts in terms of both plot and character, it holds its own in this genre. Ned, Emmerson, and Chuck all solve crimes, cases that always start with a murder and end with an intense chase scene. Emmerson, the hardened detective, is sly, intelligent, and connected to the dark underworld of people who know about crime. The villain is always introduced early, the

clues uncovered in an order that keeps the viewer guessing, and then the reveal is a rewarding payoff. Ned is a different type of noir hero. He is an everyday man who has been dragged into the underbelly by unique circumstances beyond his control. Once there his paranoia is what guides him, like it does for Frank Chambers (*The Postman Always Rings Twice*) and Guy Haines (*Strangers On a Train*). These characters are not wise to the laws of the street, so they must learn as they go and fight for their survival. Ned has a rather naïve personality, but he finds himself in situations where he must learn to adapt. The hero of a noir work is a clear archetype that fits well in a fantasy noir text.

Individually, fantasy and noir have strong conventions that are clear to recognize. Fantasy has the use of magic or magical beings and a clear archetype driven structure. Noir has different archetypes and a reliance on realistic, gritty interpretations of America. While fantasy has a happy ever after ending, noir is more realistic; not everyone gets a happy ending. On their own fantasy and noir are popular genres, but when they are combined they support each other to create a stronger storyline.

Fantasy Noir

In a hybrid genre it is important to find some form of balance. Too much fantasy and viewers may not relate to the text; too much noir and they will feel depressed. The goal is a balance in which key elements of one genre support the other. In fantasy noir the fantasy elements, magic and clear archetypes, must enhance the noir storyline and style. Some of the characters are distinctly noir, others are fantasy characters, and still others

fall somewhere in between. Each text has its own combination of these elements, and the differences between the three demonstrate the creative license afforded to those who work within such a hybrid generic space.

In the case of *The Dresden Files* the noir plotline and style are prominent, but the magic of fantasy plays a big role in progressing the story. Without Harry's magic he would be like any other detective on the street, but then again he would also not have the kinds of cases that he takes on. The power Harry has been born with already sets him in the underworld. Once there his job is to keep the peace by any means necessary, while still watching over his shoulder for the High Council. Harry uses his magic to make his investigations easier, by conjuring tracking spells, mixing potions, and carrying his staff as a weapon instead of a gun. However, the magic is just as much a cause of his troubles, since he is hunting down magical bad guys and monsters. If magic did not exist Harry would be out of a job, and so fantasy complements noir in this text by literalizing the underworld in this case.

Similarly, in *Constantine* fantasy also provides the underworld, but here noir is represented more than fantasy. John was not born with magic; he had to learn how to use it, and while he does use magical objects and spells to his advantage, he also relies on old fashioned detective work as well. For John, the villain can just as often be a human playing with forces beyond their control as the occasional demon or monster. In this case the fantasy of the work is toned down, making the noir plot more prominent and the style more important. Where *The Dresden Files* visually looks dark, it is nothing compared to *Constantine*, where everything looks as if it had been dragged through the mud a few times before filming. The balance between fantasy and noir is a little lopsided in this

work, but in a way that focuses the reader on characterization more than if a case gets solved. Here the fantasy is less but still important to the story.

Pushing Daisies is the other extreme to *Constantine*: in *Daisies* the fantasy is more important than the noir elements. The focus of the work is on the love story between Chuck and Ned, with the murders coming in as interruptions to their perfect little world. The noir in this text brings a touch of realism to the otherwise whimsical storyline. Without Emmerson there would be no cases, no dead people to wake up, and no real plot. Thus the noir element—Emmerson's hard-boiled detective role—literally drives the show. When Ned and Chuck begin a case, they are often miscommunicating about something or flat out arguing over some typical issue. As they solve the murder they resolve their problems. The noir plot of catching the crook helps them restore the balance in their relationship. It also provides some use to Ned's power. Here noir helps drive the plot along in what would otherwise be a rather boring love story. The point of creating a hybrid genre is to find some balance between the elements, so that they can complement each other well.

Each text has a different representation of the fantasy noir plot. One of the benefits of fantasy noir is this flexibility, the fact that there does not have to be a perfect balance for the shows to be successful. *The Dresden Files* is an equally strong representation as *Pushing Daisies*. The conventions from each side are clear: magic and archetypes from fantasy, and gritty realism and stylistic preferences from noir. These conventions come together to make an engaging show that embodies new dynamics and captivates audiences.

Conclusion

When fantasy and noir come together they complement each other, creating a unified blend of magical dark city streets. The amount of fantasy involved in the work, or the amount of noir, is versatile. Neither one of these genres must have control of the plot in order to create a cohesive story, either one can easily support the other. They are two genres that work well together and create new spaces for characters to develop in interesting ways.

The archetypes from both fantasy and noir are prominent, and can easily be added to or modified based on character representation. The leading males in these texts, who are either the hard-boiled detective or the innocent bystander, have already been discussed. The wise old man archetype from fantasy has also been explored. Both are present in the work. In Chapter two more of these archetypes will be examined, specifically the ones crafted for female characters. The archetypes for fantasy and noir individually are highly problematic for females, as they reduce women to objects. However, the hybrid genre fantasy noir opens up the possibility for dynamic and strong female characters who can better stand up to traditional stereotypes.

Chapter 2

Introduction

The fusion of genres in any field of study opens new possibilities for expansion. This is most evident in literature, film, and television, where the hybrid genre allows writers to explore new territory and develop unique worlds that captivate readers. Chapter 1 previously focused on the ways in which fantasy noir creates harmony between the two styles and opens new doors for different kinds of characters. In this chapter the main focus will be on some of the gender problems and possibilities that fantasy noir provides. For example, noir is known for its iconic femme fatale, a strong and independent, sexually dangerous woman who is sometimes contrasted with a dutiful housewife, if another female appears in the work at all. When discussing a fantasy work, wicked stepmothers or witches abound, opposed by a damsel in distress princess waiting patiently at the end of the story for the hero. Both structures are problematic for various reasons.

In the case of fantasy, female representation is problematic because it does not allow female characters to grow and change. Disney is a perfect example of this: few of the Disney Princesses actually change over the course of their respective storylines. Cinderella is already kind, respectful, and hardworking, and by the end of the story she wins the prince's heart by her beauty alone. She does not learn to stand up for herself; she instead has the help of the animals to escape her prison. The same thing happens in the case of Snow White; she is overly trusting, kind and pure, and her beauty is what

convinces the prince to kiss her and break the spell. Even though these movies are centered on female characters, none of these women grow or change over the course of the film. In their research study “Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses,” Dawn Elizabeth England, Lara Descartes, and Melissa Collier-Meek discuss how “The Princesses in the first three Disney Princess movies [Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty] were frequently affectionate, helpful, troublesome, fearful, tentative, and described as pretty” (562). All of these words were coded as feminine characteristics in their study, proving these characters encapsulate a female standard. Fantasy expects females to already be perfect, and to stay that way. Even the witches and evil stepmothers of fantasy do not grow or change. Again in Cinderella, neither of her stepsisters learn to apologize for their wicked ways, and the stepmother is never held accountable for her poor treatment of Cinderella (at least in the movies). A woman in a fantasy role does not grow or change. Instead she is expected to be one of two things: either the perfect representation of purity or a vile monster worth destroying.

Noir has an equally problematic structure in the form of the femme fatale and the perfect woman. In “The Harlot’s Progress in American Film, 1900-1930” Leslie Fishbein discusses the fallen woman, a precursor to the femme fatale. She explains that “The fallen woman in literature and film inhabit a closed universe with few options available apart from marriage and motherhood or social degradation” (410). While fantasy expected women to stay pure and pious until their prince charming arrived, the American Harlot was easily dragged into the depravity of a life on the street because of the society in which she lived. Once tainted, her only options were to marry someone who would accept her as damaged goods or to face social ridicule without any chance of redemption.

In this way, Fishbein suggests that “The only redemption possible for women who have been tempted or seduced is rescue by timely male intervention before ravishment” (412). A male figure was the only hope for a fallen female. She has no agency of her own, like the women who would succeed her, the *femme fatale*.

When film moved into the 1930’s and noir took hold, this tainted female became the monster of the film, as Mark Jancovich suggests in his article “Female Monsters: Horror, the ‘Femme Fatale,’ and World War II.” While many viewers would assume a *femme fatale* is an independent female with control over her own destiny, Jancovich suggests that “rather than a demonstration of the independent woman of wartime, the female monster [*femme fatale*] is actually associated with the figure of the ‘slacker” (134). To Jancovich, the *femme fatale* has no agency, she has chosen to marry for money instead of love, and now must find a way out of her situation. Where the strong women of the war years, such as Rosie the Riveter, were hard working women who stepped up when the men went off to war, the *femme fatale* decided to stay at home and selfishly lavish herself with luxury. Again, this character has nothing without the men in her life. She is not wealthy on her own, so divorce would send her into poverty and she is completely against working for her living. She seduces the leading noir male in order to help her commit a crime, the murder of her husband to escape her boredom. As Jancovich suggests, she is “a woman who is destructively dependent on her husband and on her role as his wife” (141). She is confined to her home and her man in order to survive.

While Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan feel differently about the origins of the *femme fatale*, they agree that she is a metaphoric monster in film noir. They state that “Perhaps as a reflection of men’s fear or resentment of these newly empowered women

[of the war era], film noir elevated the female character to antagonist status” (87). To scholars, and to the viewers of film noir back in the forties, these women were the true villains of the work, the ones working against the hero. If she were interpreted as strong and independent as Barsam and Monahan suggest, then this strength is portrayed as a fault: the femme fatale never gets what she wants and is often the actual killer who must be locked away at the end of the film. Her crimes do not pay the way she wishes them to. If she is the slacker as Jancovich suggests then she is unhappy, a woman locked away to look pretty for a man she does not love. Neither of these two interpretations are positive roles for women, nor are they progressive. They are confining to both the characters who live by them and the women who watch these films.

An example of this kept female monster is Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. From the beginning of the film she is bored with her life on the side of the road, with no real way out of the loveless marriage that she agreed to in order to have financial security. Jack Boozer explains how Cora represents the monster of the film in his article “The Lethal Femme Fatale in The Noir Tradition.” He says that “She merely activates [Franks] sexual energies in the cause of a lucrative alliance” (21). Once her husband is dead there is always something in the way of her happiness, the police questioning her, the robbers who try and blackmail her, and the accident that leads to trial. The first time the viewer actually sees her smile is near the end of the film, and within minutes of her decision to be happy with her lot they are in a car crash that takes her life. Boozer states that the pregnancy “opens a momentary hope of an alternative family existence. Her doomed wish for a new life is clarified just before she is inadvertently killed in a car accident that leaves her lover unharmed” (23). Cora is not meant to grow; she is meant to

be the villain through the whole movie. A female in any genre has difficulty growing or changing.

Fantasy noir has its own issues with how it handles female characters. In the case of *The Dresden Files* the main female character falls into a fantasy-style trap of being useless, a damsel in distress. *Constantine* uses its female lead to contrast the main character and provide social commentary on the pitfalls of being too one-sided about faith. Ultimately, *Pushing Daisies* has the best representation of female characters. Just as the genres were varying degrees of noir or fantasy, female representation in these texts spans the full scale of character tropes. All three texts bring to light the biggest problems with female characters, their reduction to objects, and provide varying solutions for these representations.

***The Dresden Files* and Avoiding Female Characters**

For anyone interested in the best example of a fantasy noir, *The Dresden Files*, a book series by Jim Butcher, is by far the best example. Harry is a quintessential private eye with extra support from a community existing just under the radar of the modern world. He receives help from a multitude of characters, both from the magical community and the human one, but of all these comrades, Karrin Murphy is an important one. She is not the love interest for Harry, although they have discussed dating before. As a competent Chicago police officer she is also not a constant damsel in distress. Karrin is a character who is well developed, multifaceted, and empowering to readers. So when the

television show came out in 2007 it is safe to say that viewers were expecting more of the same Karrin they had grown to love from the novels.

However, the Murphy of *The Dresden Files* television show was a completely different woman. Constanza (Connie) Murphy has little screen time, is less skilled, and appears to need more help than a typical Chicago PD officer should require. What happened to Karrin Murphy when she transitioned to the screen? Part of the reason she was poorly represented could in fact be the same reasons the show did not do well: it just seemed to lack luster and support from the fan community. However, there is also a problem with the way that female characters are handled on television and our expectations for a strong female character. Television does not have the space and time to expand side characters in a work unless they spend massive amounts of time around the main character. The move from book to television was not handled well to begin with, but the transition from Karrin Murphy to Connie Murphy was handled especially poorly. From this point on I will discuss Karrin and Connie as if they are separate characters, to highlight all the ways in which these women are different based on their representation. It is important to remember that Karrin is the name the author gave the book version of Murphy, and Connie is the name that the show lists on its credits.

In a typical fantasy narrative, the female is often what is called a damsel in distress. In the case of a show like *The Dresden Files*, which relies equally on the fantasy and noir tropes, it is easy for the female character to be represented in this way. A clear discussion of such an archetype comes from Shuli Barzilai's article "'Say I Had a Lovely Face': The Grimms' 'Rapunzel,' Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott' and Atwood's Lady Oracle." In the article Barzilai says that "In both Tennyson's and the Grimms' canonical

texts, despite their formal differences, the emphasis falls on fair maidens in the situation of entrapment (tower) who are endangered by someone or something (curse, witch) and urgently need rescue (prince)” (232). This is exactly what the damsel in distress archetype is: a woman who is trapped by forces beyond her control and needs rescuing. As times have modernized the form of entrapment and the reasons have changed, but the solution always remains the same. A male must come dashing in and rescue her from her confinement. In this type of narrative, the female has no way of helping herself. She must wait for her savior. Barzilai suggests that “Lady Oracle demonstrates the tensions inherent in the interpellation of a female hero into an ideological (symbolic) order that continues to construct and value women as ‘lovely’ to look at” (250). In other words, this type of narrative reduces women to objects, like paintings, sculptures, and scenery instead of human beings. This also happens in the distinction between Karrin and Connie.

In the book series, Karrin is a strong and independent woman. The author Jim Butcher does an exemplary job of fleshing out Karrin’s character based on specific attributes that are unisex pursuits. She is a martial arts master, a strong sharp shooter, and a confident woman who looks equally good in a dress. The television show ignores these interests or belittles them. In the novels Karrin is a successful cop, a woman of faith, and a standalone woman. In the television show she is almost none of these. Instead the show projects her as a type of damsel in distress, trapped in her work and held back from succeeding because she does not know about the magical underbelly of Chicago. She must instead wait for Harry to come and solve the crimes she is trying to solve, and to rescue her from the monsters. These two women are exact opposites of one another despite purportedly being the same character.

While both versions of the character are police officers, each version has a different, and telling, focus. Both Karrin and Connie work for the Chicago PD, but in different roles. Karrin is the head of an investigation unit tracking unsolved or mysterious cases in the city— the main reason she knows and works with Harry in the first place. She is seen by readers standing up to all the big boy politics that come with a badge and gun. She is well trained in martial arts, as good a shot as any other officer, and her ability to intimidate people with a harsh glance despite her five-foot frame is impressive. In contrast, Connie is a low ranking detective, constantly seen in her Chicago PD cubical stressing over cases that cannot be solved. Each case requires Harry’s help, and the fact that Harry cannot tell her what is going on because that would be exposing her to the truth, means that Connie is often left waiting for the case to be resolved. She has no idea what has gone on behind the scenes, nor does she believe when Harry tells her everything has worked out fine. The show makes no suggestion Connie knows how to fight; every time something happens she instead reaches for her gun. Every time viewers see her, Connie is rolling eyes at Harry’s comments, to the point that viewers question why Connie calls him in the first place. While Karrin retains a strong skepticism early in the novels— something that disappears once she has fully experienced the breadth of the magical underworld— Connie treats Harry like a traveling street performer, even though she is the one who brings him to crime scenes. Connie is a means to an end for the producers in order to start the story (a damsel in distress who needs help), while Karrin is an actual ally and friend to Harry.

Faith also plays a strong role in *The Dresden Files* books that is not seen in the show, specifically the faith of Karrin. Early on Karrin is portrayed as a woman of faith,

but she does not represent the typical pious female. She goes to church, believes in God, but struggles just as everyone else does with reconciling everything she has seen as a cop with her belief in a higher power. As the book series progresses, Karrin is offered the chance twice to take up a position as a Knight of the Cross (a derivative of the Knights Templar), and she refuses because of her own insecurities and doubt. This position is only offered to people of great faith, and comes with deep religious responsibility.

The way faith is handled in the books is not suggestive of the pious female, though. Normally a pious female is an extension of Christ-like forgiveness, as Nancy Enright suggests in her article "Tolkien's Females and the Defining of Power." Such women do not fight, they forgive, but Karrin is allowed to retain her fighting spirit and is even offered a chance to use it for the forces of good. Every Knight of the Cross introduced before Karrin is male, and all of these men show a strong level of respect for her. In this text faith is seen as a different form of magic, a different source of power against the forces of evil. Connie never receives this distinction. She wears no religious symbols on her person, she never says anything outside the realm of the everyday ordinary, and audiences never meet the Knights of the Cross in the show so they cannot determine if she would ever have been offered such a position. In fact, it is the omission of this important aspect of the narrative, the Knights of the Cross, that reduces Connie to a stock female character. She cannot grow because a large part of her character development is ignored. Here again, Karrin is stronger than Connie in her faith.

The final way in which Karrin is a more powerful female character than Connie is in their independence. Divorced twice and for the most part alone, Karrin asserts her authority in the life decisions she makes. She decides if she is going to date men or not,

she tells Harry up front that she does not wish to date him, and when she is demoted late in the books for defending Harry, she is angry but takes responsibility for her actions. Connie on the other hand, is a single mother with responsibilities. There are two episodes where viewers see the most of Connie, and in both she is the receiver of actions. In the episode “The Boone Identity,” Connie is possessed by the spirit of a thief, using her specifically so he can survive long enough to trade bodies with a billionaire tycoon. She has little agency in the episode, and once over she remembers only small pieces of the event in dreams. This episode shows Connie having no control over life. In the second episode, “Things That Go Bump,” it is not really Connie; a dragon assumes her form and tries to kill Harry and a few other wizards hiding out at his place. Where Karrin is given the ability to make decisions, Connie must live with the fact that she has no control over her own life.

While Karrin is a strong female character, Connie is no such thing. It is clear that the producers of the show wanted Connie to be an object, a damsel in distress to forward the plot, instead of respecting the true spirit of the character. Connie is waiting to be saved, with no support from those around her. She has little agency, and when she is presented it is usually under the control of someone else. In this case, *The Dresden Files* represents a text that has fallen into the issue of relying on a problematic archetype. Each text has its strong suit and its weakness, and as we will see, the strength of *The Dresden Files* is not in its female representation. What was present, though, was a literary text that handled the pious female in a new and unique way, something that *Constantine* also does.

Constantine and the Perfect Pious Female

Leslie Fishbein in the article “The Harlot’s Progress in American Fiction and Film, 1900-1930” states that “the earliest fiction and film shared the assumptions of the cult of true womanhood, namely that the true woman embodies the virtues of purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity and that any fall, especially that occasioned by sexual lapse, was an irrevocable one” (409). In both fantasy and noir there are examples of a pious female character. She is often a one dimensional being, placed in the text as an example of purity; a reward for a fantasy hero and a symbol of the stifling monotony of an honest living for a noir protagonist. Examples abound, from Disney’s *Snow White*, the model of kind submissive compassion, to Barbra Morton in *Strangers on a Train* whose sweet and naive nature make light of a grave situation.

The point of the pious character is to provide an example for women of how they should act, usually related to the cult of domesticity. Fishbein says that “It is the very virtues of the cult of true womanhood that jeopardize women too passive or innocent effectively to resist seduction and sexual slavery” (410). Such women are meant to stay at home, listen to their husbands, and hold their faith above all else. They cannot handle the supposed “real world,” in truth the world of men, in which sexual desire, vice, and other temptations can derail them from the Godly path. There is no suggestion that women could be something other than a pious female, especially in the fantasy genre. When a woman does go against this norm, such as in a noir text, it is often because she is the villain or needs rescuing from her situation, such as the texts in Fishbein’s article. Similarly, In “Tolkien’s Females and The Defining of Power,” Nancy Enright discusses a

point in *The Lord of the Rings* where two female characters, Arwen and Luthien, are discussed. She says that “[Arwen’s] beauty is of a kind so high that the one viewing is abashed, as Frodo feels when he first sees Arwen at the dinner proceeding the Council of Elrond. A key component of Arwen’s beauty, like Luthien’s, is the fact that it is not simply physical; her intellectual and spiritual essence is conveyed through it” (96). Enright then proceeds to cite a description that relies heavily on physical appearance, and only suggests at the women’s intellectual and spiritual sense. In this way the women are prized first for their beauty and purity and second for their intelligence. Pious females can also range from domestic goddesses, to Christ-like figures all based on how they are portrayed, however they never seem to grow; they are doomed to remain a prop in the background.

Instead of developing or growing as most characters should in texts, a female character is often reduced to stock traits that do not evolve. The reason for their lack of development stems from the fact that a well-trained woman in the cult of domesticity is one who is both pure and frail. Fishbein suggests that a woman’s hope is a male savior. She goes on to suggest that there are a few instances where a fallen woman can still be rescued, but these instances are where men will accept her even when society itself has condemned her. This is a reoccurring theme in all genres, no matter what, the point of a female character is to be rescued, saved, or defined by a male character.

Some have tried to argue that purity in a female character is a good thing. For example, in the article “Tolkien’s Females and Defining Power,” the author Nancy Enright suggests that this kind of pious purity is a symbol of strength. In this text, the female characters of Tolkien’s works are compared to Christ, sacrificing their own wants

and needs, or the masculine drive of ambition, in order to heal those around them. Enright aims to make such characters out to be the strongest in the novels, as they sacrifice for love. One such example is Eowyn, who lays down her sword and the physical rage it has brought her in order to fall in love, in order to heal her own soul which is hurting, and that of the man who loves her. While this is a lofty goal, and elevates the importance of the female characters in Tolkien's work, it does not save them from a form of one dimensionality that is common in the pious woman.

In the case of fantasy characters, piety or purity becomes a stock trait, assigned to any woman who appears in the work— unless of course she is a witch of some sort— and she never moves beyond this one trait. In noir it is no better; usually the pure woman is overshadowed by the femme fatale, destined to chase after the protagonist as he chases after his own dark desires. Pamela Britton from *D.O.A.* is an example. She gets very little screen time, and usually only shows up in the beginning of a noir work to represent how good a male character's life was before he delved into the darkness.

The reason the pious female is such a controversial subject is because it is such a difficult stereotype to break. By making a woman perfect at the beginning of a text, they give her no room to grow. They also make it impossible for her to move from her perfect home. Maureen Murdock, in her work *The Heroine's Journey* mentions that Campbell himself, the king of the hero's journey, saw no reason for females to expand in fantasy (2-3). It is suggested that he equates the woman with the home, and therefore she is a destination, a reward, instead of a person. By equating female characters with objects— homes, destinations, and prizes— authors reduce females to the same thing, objects in the background. When examining a fantasy noir text such as *Constantine*, however, viewers

see new ways in which this previously stifling trope can be used to create confrontation in a narrative.

When viewers first see *Constantine*, it is unsurprising that Zed would likely be seen as a typical pious female character. Ultimately, she has many of the traits necessary for such a role. She is highly dedicated to her faith, so much so that it is literally unhealthy. Zed has a childlike quality to her; she sees only the good in the world, even when darkness is staring her in the face. This is especially clear when she interacts with angels. The way she approaches them, the way her eyes soften, she is basically a child at prayer with beings she cannot possibly hope to understand. Zed even sees the good in John, feeling that his work is the will of God. She is unable to understand how John can be so jaded about the things he does. For these reasons, it is clear that Zed is meant to be a pious female; she is the purity in John's world that otherwise would not be there. The fantasy noir hybrid allows the show's creators to be more complex in their representation and revisions of piety. Here Zed's piety is shown to be just as problematic and constraining as John's cynicism.

Zed's importance in the narrative is to be a foil to John, and this position means that as John grows so must she. Where John Constantine is jaded, angry, and reckless, Zed is hopeful, soft, and considerate. The two are constantly at odds with one another, bringing Zed out of the background and up to center stage as she argues just as strongly against him. The clearest way that Zed and John are contrasted is in how they handle their past. The show does not fully develop Zed's past, but from what is revealed it was one of abuse and fear. She is being hunted by her "father" like an escaped lab experiment, not like a concerned parent. Her quiet demeanor and attention to people comes from a

past the viewers have not seen, one in which she has obviously faced physical and emotional abuse. Throughout this experience, she has remained pure, devoted, and hopeful. She sees her psychic gift as a calling to help God, even though her father believed it was a tool to use for his own devices. In contrast, John is a little more forward with the details of his childhood, the abuse he has suffered at the hands of his alcoholic father. Instead of turning to faith, John perpetuates a cycle in which the bottle becomes his coping mechanism, drugs and cigarettes his unsaid prayers, and his work the only thing he will actually try for. These two characters have drastically different ways of viewing the world based on their experiences, and instead of downplaying these differences, the show runners have decided to make this a central conflict for the pair.

It would be easy for the producers of the show to allow this contrast to play out in the background, or worse yet have Zed fall into a romantic relationship with John in the hopes of making her into a prize towards a happily ever after. Most fantasies have gone that route before, such as the Disney film *Tangled*. While the film was meant to be the story of Rapunzel, ultimately it focuses on Flynn and his reformation. Rapunzel has her eyes opened to the abuse she has suffered, but her happiness comes from falling in love with Flynn, not from finally taking command of her freedom. She escapes the tower, only to be once again confined to marriage with a man. This trope is not present in *Zed*.

Constantine is different then, because instead of falling in love, John and Zed are constantly fighting. This battle between the two is front and center in the show. They get into screaming matches easily, as John expresses the deep seated resentment he has for how dark a place the world is, and Zed continues to point out all of the light. They are visually opposites; John is a white British male with blond hair and a loud mouth, while

Zed is a Latina with thick curly black hair, dark clothing, and a watchful eye. This is a role reversal, as Latinas are usually stereotyped as loudmouths. In their article “Brain, Brow, and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S. Popular Culture,” Isabel Guzmán and Angharad Valdivia suggest that “The spitfire female Latina is characterized by red-colored lips, bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair, and extravagant jewelry” (211). They go on to suggest that these parts of the body are hyper-sexualized, a stereotype that relates to tropicalizing, making the Latin body exotic and therefore lesser than a white body. Zed does not embody most of these things; she rarely loses her temper, her makeup is in natural tones, and her figure comes in second to her eyes in screen time. Every time John and Zed are shown sharing a bed, which is usually out of some necessity and not in order to inject romance into the scene, they are facing opposite directions. Again, this is an example of how they do not agree, since neither character really sees eye to eye. John is not the only character Zed has trouble relating to because of her faith, and this becomes an obstacle she must overcome when dealing with dark forces.

Another character that Zed is contrasted against is Anne Marie. Once a dabbler like John, Anne Marie has escaped to Mexico to a monastery after the events of the New Castle incident, a botched exorcism costing the soul of a small child. She has self-imposed a life of religion on herself, mostly to make up for all of the mistakes she feels she has made. One would think that a nun would be the most pious character in the text, but even Anne Marie pales in comparison to Zed. Anne Marie is just as jaded as John is, feeling a great deal of guilt and shame at her previous life. While going from a demon hunter and occult specialist to a nun is a large change, these two episodes reveal how

little Anne Marie has actually evolved or healed. She still holds on to anger at John, she is not above using glamour and sexual advances to distract others, and she ultimately leaves John to die at the hands of a demon in order to save a child's life. Where Zed sees the good in everything, both John and Anne Marie see only the bad, an exact contrast that is clear throughout the show.

The point of contrasting John and Zed—and Anne Marie for that matter— is to prove that both methods of coping are problematic. In the realm of character development, an overly pious woman is no better than a hard knocks skeptic; neither of them is strong or successful on their own. John's constant skepticism is unhealthy, the path to an existence where everything is as dark as his own tattered soul. Such a path offers no form of redemption. The show itself makes it clear that John is destined for hell, and that he cannot be saved because he does not want to be saved. On the other side of this equation, Zed's high devotion is killing her. Midway through the season she finds out that she has a brain tumor resting on a part of her brain that could possibly control her power. John thinks she should remove the tumor, but after conversing with Manny, Zed is certain she needs her power to help the world. She decides that she will sacrifice herself for the good of mankind, causing herself more damage and pain in order to save others. This is a poor decision for multiple reasons. First, because Manny never really answers Zed on if her power was a gift from God or not—she makes that assumption based on his vague way of manipulating the conversation. Second, at the end of the season fans find out that Manny is the one actually causing the rise in the darkness consuming the world. Zed has placed her health and her trust in an angel bent on destroying the world. By following her faith blindly, she has condemned herself to a

painful existence for a cause that is counter to her morals. Neither Zed nor John are characters worth aspiring to. They both are polar extremes. *Constantine* shows how damaging and limiting these characterizations can be.

Instead of idealizing either end of the spectrum, *Constantine* attempts to create a workable middle ground in the character of Chaz. Where Zed is highly devoted to God, Anne Marie is devoted to justice, and John is devoted to his own agenda, Chaz is devoted to helping the souls they meet. Imbued with over a hundred souls killed in a club fire, Chaz has the weight of immortality on both his mind and his shoulders. He is actually compelled to use his power for the sake of others. He follows John because he knows that John finds the bad guys and because he can do the most good. However, he is just as capable of arguing with John over procedure, over right and wrong, or providing moral guidance for John. Where Zed, John, and even Anne Marie fight with one another on polar opposite sides of the playing field, Chaz stands in the middle and plays referee. As the only stable force in the show, the only compromise in a sea of extremes, Chaz is often the one who sinks into the background until he is needed. He is meant to be the moral center of the story, the average joe in a world of well-trained magic users. In this way, Chaz becomes the moral center of the work, instead of the pious female Zed. Chaz is the character that viewers can aspire to be, and more than likely should.

Typically, the pious female is a stereotype which stifles female advancement. It harkens back to the Cult of Domesticity, and the push for women to confine themselves in the home. In fantasy it resigns characters to an object, in noir it leaves the women behind as a fading memory of what could have been. Fantasy noir is a platform where these two stereotypes can then meld and grow, creating a new character who can be more

interesting. Zed is a foil to John, a main character who is not also a romantic love interest. While their viewpoints are portrayed as equally unhealthy and too extreme for modern life, they provide rich characters with which viewers can learn from. By taking an old character trope and contrasting it with the hero, writers create a strong female character who is dynamic and complex. While the creators of *Constantine* do not destroy or disavow the stereotype of the pious and pure woman, they do try to show that this is a trap not an ideal.

***Pushing Daisies* and Pushing Female Representation**

Pushing Daisies is by far one of the more progressive texts when it comes to female representation. The dynamics between all the female characters is unique in that it changes the look of standard conventions. While Olive, Chuck, and Chuck's two aunts Vivian and Lily on the surface appear to fall into the same dangerous tropes, the way in which they embody these roles smashes normal gender conventions. Of all the things that make the show innovative, its use of female characters is the most interesting. Olive is a femme fatale who actually grows beyond the usual confines of the role, Chuck is a reform narrative heroine who none the less manages to be a complex character as well, and the aunts are a symbol of female collaboration. All of these ladies work together and represent the show's progressive nature.

First of all is Olive Snook; a character who is made for uncomfortable situations and comic relief. She yearns for physical contact and attention which she does not often receive. Her clothing style is highly suggestive compared to every other character in the

show. She is one of the few characters who is dressed with plenty of bare skin and cleavage showing. Olive is actually masterful at saying the right thing at the right time to make Ned question his own security. “How will you ever know if your salvia’s compatible if you don’t kiss her?” Olive asks Ned, when he brings up the fact that he and Olive are not compatible. Ned responds in a vague sputtering way, and Olive’s face and demeanor change. She tells him “I hope you and Chuck make it work, I really do. But if you can’t, I hope it doesn’t take forever to figure that out.” The words at first seem like a concerned friend, but truthfully inspire doubt and indecision. Olive even grabs his hands as she speaks, initiating contact that is normally unwanted. Several times she advances on Ned, always when Chuck is not around to see it. This leads her to become a femme fatale when Chuck enters the picture, the first real competition Olive has ever faced.

Olive is a femme fatale, a representation of female wiles that work to seduce the main character and bring him off track. However, she is more than that. Unlike Mark Jancovich and his interpretation of femme fatales as a lazy female monster, Olive strives to be more than just a pretty face. She is just as interested in solving crimes, becoming more of a partner to Emmerson as the show progresses. She was a champion horse rider in her youth, she is a fierce competitor, and has always been an actual caring soul.

Despite the fact that she is battling over the same man with Chuck, they have moments of friendship and camaraderie, including a scene where Olive offers to sacrifice her own life to protect Chuck. In a traditional noir Chuck and Olive would be foils, and in a fantasy Olive would be a wicked step-sister, unredeemable and destined to lose out. The producers do not treat her that way though; the women are equals in the show and ultimately find true happiness in their own power and strength. Olive has the power to

make her own decisions and to walk out if she wanted to. She has plenty of suitors and options; it is her choice to stay.

Similar to Olive, Chuck chooses to stay with Ned, although her options are a little more limited than Olive's. On the surface, Chuck represents a reform narrative character. Emily Dickens, in her article "'The Guy with the Problem: Reform Narrative in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*" explains that a reform narrative character is a woman confined to the domestic sphere. Her job is not to grow or change, she is meant to reform the main character into a better man. She uses the Disney film *Beauty and the Beast* as an example of her point. Dickens states that "Although Belle begins the film with the potential for learning and growing as a Gothic heroine, the plot lapses into a pattern in which Belle must always be the teacher and her subject must always be the domestic" (82). This character is already gracious, strong, caring, and kind. Belle lacks nothing at the beginning of this narrative except a husband. The reform narrative is one in which the woman reforms her male counterpart into the ideal male. This often involves the female being captured and forced to remain in the domestic world and represent an idealistic woman. Dickens gives the example that Belle cannot leave the castle once she arrives; instead, she is confined, but this does not alter her nature in any way. She is still resourceful, kind, compassionate, and capable of standing up for herself. While the author does respect these attributes, what is argued is that Belle does not grow, nor is she given her freedom. She remains the ideal female character throughout the work, while it is the Beast that changes. The story arc of a reform narrative focuses on the perfect female changing the bestial male into a man of virtue by adapting to a domestic lifestyle.

Chuck similarly cannot escape The Pie Hole and a life with Ned, making her a reform character. By accepting Ned's offer to remain alive, she is now an anomaly in an otherwise rather normal world. Ned frets constantly over Chuck being discovered by someone and his power being exposed. At the beginning of the show he tries to confine Chuck to his apartment, he lays down strict rules as to how she can move around the house, and is adamant that his method is the only one in which she is allowed to live. Dickens suggests that "A woman's foray into the public sphere is so jolting, so unnatural, that, if it is even attempted, the men will literally die" (83). For Ned, losing Chuck would be a literal death, as he feels the public would revolt. However, Ned cannot hold her for long, and unlike the typical reform narrative heroine, Chuck escapes confinement.

Chuck ends up reforming Ned by escaping the bonds that a traditional reform narrative heroine cannot. Chuck is a lively spirit, a person who wants to experience the things she had been so sheltered from growing up. There are times where she rejects confinement, like when she moves into Olive's apartment to gain some independence. An entire episode starts and ends with Chuck forcing Ned to create a new menu item, specifically a mini pie she can imbue with honey from her personal bee collection on the roof. Ned is reluctant for this type of change, viewing it as a type of sacrilege to the food that became his only comfort as a child. It does not help that the entire episode is about a woman killed by a swarm of bees. It is only through constant prodding and guilt that Chuck succeeds, convincing Ned that changing up his menu is actually progressive. Each episode demonstrates another way in which Chuck can assert her independence, while Ned must learn to work within her parameters. When Chuck says she is missing home Ned moves all her books to her apartment, so she can feel like she is home again, when

Chuck complains again he finds her a colony of bees. When Chuck is mad at Ned he has to accept this, and wait for her to feel better again. Chuck reforms Ned by escaping her bonds and proving that the world will not collapse when she does. Chuck also breaks free of her confinement with the help of Olive, a collaboration that is not the norm in any type of literature or film.

In traditional noir, the femme fatale is always contrasted with the strong working class woman. Jancovich says that “If independent working women did appear in these [noir] films they were usually presented as the female monster’s other, a positive figure of femininity” (145). In other words, there is never a time where the femme fatale and the independent working woman actually help one another. Fantasy has the same problem, as Michael Mendelson explains in his article “Forever Acting Alone: The Absence of Female Collaboration in *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*.” He says that “Regardless of where scholars look within this extensive collection for examples of females collaborating, they find compromised portraits that do little to declare the values of females at work together” (119). There are no positive stories in *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* that show women working together for the betterment of themselves or the world around them. Only clans of evil step-sisters and step-mothers are present. Even the great Joseph Campbell, in a discussion with Maureen Murdock, suggests that women are not meant to take the hero’s journey, are not meant to represent more than a home to the hero. Women are not meant to build meaningful relationships in literature, because it may upset the balance of the hero being the center of attention.

Pushing Daisies becomes an outlier in storytelling then, because almost all the women are highly supportive of each other. Despite the fact that Olive as the femme

fatale and Chuck as the independent working woman should be at odds while fighting over the same man, they go to bat for one another constantly. They rescue one another from danger and are willing to sacrifice their own safety for the others wellbeing. They learn to share an apartment together, they go undercover with one another, and they work to save Chuck's aunts from their isolation. Olive and Chuck not only help each other, they also help Chuck's Aunts Lily and Vivian.

Inspired by her rebirth, Chuck wishes to see her aunts return to swimming like they enjoyed before. She starts sending her aunts pies with homeopathic drugs in them to boost their mood, and when Olive catches wind of the caper, she becomes the delivery girl. Both Olive and Chuck wish to see Vivian and Lily reach their full potential, so they help the aunts not because they will gain anything out of it, but because they genuinely are interested in seeing Vivian and Lily happy. Mendelson would suggest that in Grimms' females would only collaborate in order to cause trouble for the hero or to harm one another. In this case the opposite is true. Neither Olive or Chuck gain anything by helping Vivian and Lily experience life, but they do so anyway because they want to be supportive. These younger women are successful, as first Vivian, and then Lily finally start to leave the house. In the last episode of the second season, the aunts return to swimming, and Olive and Chuck offer their unending support for this decision. Here women collaborate independent of the main character for the benefit of other women. *Pushing Daisies* surpasses the other texts in the use of female characters as it makes its main focus the women and their strong, independent nature. Olive is a femme fatale, but she is also a determined working woman who fights for herself instead of waiting for a man to save her. Chuck is a reform narrative heroine, but she is also capable of leaving

The Pie Hole without the world caving in. Both Chuck and Olive work together in order to get Vivian and Lily to reach their full potential, solely for the sake of making the older women happy. This shows the potential of these characters, and what is possible when fantasy and noir collide.

Conclusion

Fantasy noir is a relatively new genre, and so it has not had the time to develop its archetypes fully as of yet. However, what has been represented, especially in these three texts, is a potential to mold problematic structures into strong female characters. As this genre develops scholars will see more females represented in unique and different ways. The fantasy genre again provides morals to important characters, such as Karrin Murphy and her strong faith in *The Dresden Files*. Noir, despite the slacker stereotype, provides women who are not afraid to speak their mind or use their sexuality to get what they want. When given the independence of a solid work ethic like Olive, females become more than a monster placed in the background as a prize. Even highly problematic structures, like the reform narrative heroine and the pious female character can be seen with fresh eyes in shows like *Pushing Daisies* and *Constantine*. As the genre continues to grow viewers can expect that this type of experimentation with character tropes will also continue, and has the potential to spawn a new female stereotype that is progressive and empowering for female viewers.

Epilogue

Fantasy and noir are not new; they are highly recognizable genres with specific conventions that have been repeatedly discussed. The idea of hybrid genres is also not new. What is new is the use of these two genres together, and the unique conventions that are created by this fusion. Fantasy is often used as an escape from reality, while noir cements itself deeply in the truth of life: good guys do not always finish first. When the two worlds collide they blend seamlessly, harmonizing in a way that accentuates the interesting conventions of each genre and can disrupt the questionable aspects. In fantasy noir, fantasy takes up residence in the dark underbelly of a noir city, while the noir hero's become experts at using fantastic knowledge to their advantage. This genre is not isolated to television, but seems to develop better in an episodic way than on the big screen. The three texts discussed here were not long lived, but plenty of other examples on television are still running. These texts are part of a larger body that is still expanding and changing as the ways viewers interact with television changes. Why fantasy noir would fare better on television, and perhaps even better when delivered through online streaming, is a discussion not explored here, although I aim to offer some possibilities that can be studied in the future.

There are more examples of fantasy noir television than just discussed here, and as television continues into the next generation of viewing they may fare better than their predecessors. These texts are a beginning, a starting point, and the reason they did not receive more accolades may have something to do with timing as much as with content. Originally, noir was considered part of the horror genre, and it came out of the war and

the Great Depression. Currently the U.S. is going through a similar time, the nation is not fighting a war so much as trying to hunt and kill insurgent groups who blend in with society. The people have seen and economic recession that has done severe damage to the economy. America is still fighting back from these problems, and it could be that these times, when civil unrest, war, and economic recession are all three present, that stories about noir characters really take hold. Perhaps the combination of fantasy and noir is just enough fantasy to make us forget our own lives, while just enough noir to make us feel that we could survive. This type of work generates specific fan communities, who remain faithful to their source material.

Fans of these texts are passionate, and that could possibly be because they are already invested in the text before it airs. Originally, hard-boiled detective stories were published in the pulp magazines along with comics. As comic books became more popular, the subject matter expanded; at first they focused on superhero's, but later captured the western, horror, and even detective stories. Many of these comics died out when the Hays code came about. This is because the comic writers and producers were afraid of also being accused of illegitimate content, and created their own code to regulate comic content. When codes finally relaxed again, a return to adult content happened, and the horror comic came back into print. Specifically, comics such as *The Crow*, *HellBlazer*, and most notably *The Watchmen* started the trend. *Hellblazer* is actually the inspiration for the show *Constantine*, following the same main character. Fans of these comic books become dedicated to their text and are at least open to watching a show to see how well it relates.

The same thing happened with *The Dresden Files*. Fans of the books were willing to give the show a try, so long as it stayed true to its roots. In the case of Harry Dresden, the show ignored cannon, and many fans stopped watching. In the case of *Constantine*, fans rallied for the producers to be more faithful to the original text, arguing that John is a smoker and a bisexual, and that both elements of his character should be included. When the show was still running there were multiple petitions for a second season, despite the network NBC's reluctance to continue. A hashtag on twitter, #SaveConstantine, started, and the response was immediate. Fans began asking other fan communities online to watch the show simply to keep it from going off the air. Currently, the shows *Marvel's Daredevil* and *Marvel's Jessica Jones* are running on Netflix, and fans of those comic books are equally involved in the examination of these texts. Some fans are already invested in the show long before it is actually aired.

Fantasy noir is a perfect text to trace the development of online communities, because most of the fans of these shows have grown up with the internet as a communication medium. Before the internet, fans of a particular show would have to meet at conventions or write letters to fan clubs in order to discuss their respective texts. Fans of the popular science fiction show *Star Trek* had to wait months for newsletters to come out. They had less means of communicating, and so while there are many Star Trek fans, their methods of communicating stayed small. That changed when the internet came along. Specifically, the internet accelerated another fan community, a group of viewers following the show *The X-Files*. In an article for Entertainment Weekly, producers of the show admitted that the internet was invaluable to gauge audience reaction. They said "Carter's writers used Delphi, an early Internet service, to gauge viewer reactions to

episodes... *X-Files* 1.0 taught us 21st-century fandom; it showed us how to ‘ship’ a show” (Jensen 20). The transition from online forms and e-mails to Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and others has accelerated the ability to communicate, even when fans are waiting for episodes to come out. The rise of the internet has made fans more prominent, as they find their respective communities faster and do not need to leave their homes in order to discuss their text.

Another step in the rise of the fan community was the short film *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-A-Long Blog*. The film in three acts was not a large scale production or an Oscar worthy nominee. However, each act was released within a day of the other, and viewers were able to communicate about what they were watching in real time. The episodes were released on YouTube and the Dr. Horrible website simultaneously, allowing viewers to be on the computer and discussing while watching. They were on the blog sites and forums immediately after viewing, and these internet spaces captured viewer response. Anouk Lang does a fantastic job evaluating this fan community by its web content in his article “‘The Status is Not Quo!’: Pursuing Resolution in Web-Disseminated Serial Narrative.” Fans were also already in a fan community, as many of the viewers were supportive of the creators, especially Joss Whedon. The ability to watch a film at home, immediately after its release, sparked the new platforms Netflix and Hulu. Viewers now expect some form of instant gratification in the sense that they want their media in house at their fingertips. This also allows them to view their shows on their computers, while still on the forms or blog spots that house their fan communities. The next generation is learning to talk about texts as they are viewing.

By now it should be clear that the next logical step for evaluating these texts is to discuss their fan communities. Even though *The Dresden Files*, and *Pushing Daisies* came before this online streaming generation, *The Dresden Files* is still on Hulu, and *Pushing Daisies* was on Netflix for a rather long period. This grants fans the chance of sharing their texts with viewers who would otherwise be unaware such shows exist. Even though years have passed, these shows are still being passed around to new viewers and the communities continue to thrive online. These fans are highly dedicated to their text, as exemplified by *Constantine*. Networks now have real time feedback from their viewers, which they can use to their advantage to market and distribute content that fits the consumer's needs. Fan communities are also great places to mine for fan interpretation, as scholars strive to understand why texts become popular.

While it may be true that fantasy does attract a younger generation of viewers, it is equally entertaining for older audiences looking to escape their current life for a short time. The internet provides autonomy for viewers, in which they feel comfortable discussing their text while not disclosing age, gender, race, and economic status. The internet can make people bold, and so they express their opinions freely. The older generations also seek to teach younger viewers how to interpret the text. Some of these teachers are exactly that: literature, film, and history professors or primary school teachers. They are not seeking to publish or lay claim to their intellectual property, they are looking to share in conversations with other fans and instruct their peers on how to properly evaluate the text. The internet is giving them this platform to be constructive without ridicule, and this may be a new space for academic brainstorming before stronger scholarship comes to light.

The possibilities for study beyond this point are vast, however the most interesting path is one which examines the cultural implications of fantasy noir. There are multiple new texts that can be evaluated in the future, which means that this genre is actually growing in size. There are already scholars who are studying television shows for their contributions to culture, and prominent colleges like Harvard have classes dedicated to studying television shows in an academic context. At Indiana State University, Dr. Michael Uselan is teaching a history of comic books course, which also discusses the hero's journey and rhetoric and how that is influenced by American history. There is already a push for academic study of the fan communities online, but none of these studies have considered the fantasy noir genre. Without studying the fans of these shows, scholars do not really understand how these texts serve their communities and expand our culture. Academics will also learn how the next generation will watch television, discuss it, and interact with it. So that is the next step, to the Twitter hashtags, and the Facebook posts, to see what it is that fantasy noir is doing. Americans will know more about their culture by understanding how this community thrives.

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