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EXILE ON MAIN ST., HEAVEN
NO REST FOR PARADISE'S RESIDENTS IN ERIC KRIPKE'S *SUPERNATURAL*

ANNA CATERINO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

Abstract - In the final episode of *Supernatural* (2005-2020), Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles) is killed and sent to Heaven. Even though the ending is dark and unrewarding, it offers an interesting depiction of afterworlds and afterlives. Upon his arrival, Dean is told that Heaven is being rebuilt as a happier place in which life – and all it entails – can continue after death. It is precisely in this new and improved design that its nightmarish nature resurfaces. The inability to escape earthly relationships is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it prevents loneliness and may thus be seen as positive; on the other, it may disavow relief, peace, or freedom. As such, Dean's death is all but freeing insofar that he is destined to spend the rest of eternity in the company of his violent and abusive father John (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) who lives down the road. The show herewith continues to subvert religious promises of eternal happiness and salvation, reprising its original depiction of Heaven as a continuation of life on Earth and not too dissimilar from life in Hell. By dismissing its more recent criticism of corporate America, Andrew Dabb returns to Eric Kripke's prerogatives. In doing so, the showrunner creates a connection with *Supernatural*'s first portrayal of Heaven, which took on the semblance of "a place where you can relive your greatest hits" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S5E16). A prison controlled by Angels in which life and human connections are negated, but some freedom is still possible: notwithstanding the echoes of trauma, persecutors have no access to the private world of their victims. It follows that the place has nothing to do with religious cosmology, faith, or merit. Instead, in both cases, Heaven and rotten family homes (depicted as the source of corruption) become one and the same: they both are places ruled by violent fathers and their legacy, in which the consequences of self-damnation in the aftermath of desperate attempts at self-preservation remain clear. Locked and with no chance of escaping, Heaven becomes yet another space in which trauma can reverberate *ad infinitum* in the right conditions and, as such, disallows salvation. Because of this, it allows the further deconstruction of hypermasculine ideals like the Independent Marlboro Man, dysfunctional familial relationships, and the trauma that derives from them. The aim of this essay is to analyze *Supernatural*'s depiction of Heaven in light of American culture at the beginning of the new millennium, highlighting its connection to the culture of post-9/11 America. In particular, it will delve into how Eric Kripke and Andrew Dabb construct a world that is not only irrevocably tied to a specific moment in American history, but also the means by which the show deepens the rippling effects of White hegemonic masculinity within microcosms embodied by the family, presenting it as inescapable in life as in death.

Keywords: Heaven; Supernatural; Genre Television; Masculinities.

1. Introduction

At the end of *Supernatural*'s (2005-2020) third season, Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles) is mauled by hellhounds and sent to Hell. The season, cut short because of the 2007-08 Writers Guild of America strike, changed the show's mythology by shifting its genre from mere gothic into "outright Christian fantasy" (Leow Hui Min 2016, p. 98). The limitations imposed by the strike forced Eric Kripke to scrap his original idea. Rather than having Sam Winchester (Jared Padalecki) waltz into Hell to save his brother from eternal damnation, the show had angels lay siege to Hell to jumpstart the Apocalypse. Their arrival irrevocably changed the course of the show: firstly, through the introduction of fan-favorite Castiel (Misha Collins) and the subsequent dismissal of what has been jokingly referred to as "the epic love story of Sam and Dean" (Borsellino 2006); secondly, through the repeated commitment to depicting the afterlife.

Across the fifteen-year-long run, both Heaven and Hell transformed from inaccessible places into physical locations from which the characters could come and go as they pleased. This perpetual interference with divine affairs cheapened the plot, especially Kripke's musings on salvation, but also provided the show with the opportunity to deconstruct contemporary American culture of consumerism and capitalism (Giannini 2014). Even so, the first and last iteration of Heaven stand out because they ensure a sense of continuity, notwithstanding the tonal dissonance of the latter. In both cases, their appearance and the implications that derive from it cast light on the "complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions" (Miller 1982, p. 2). In doing so, they tie back to the show's initial preoccupation, namely dysfunctional families and domestic abuse as well as their psychological impact on people. After all, before all the witch-killing bullets, the gun able to kill even God himself, and the ever-higher stakes, *Supernatural* was a show about two brothers and the long shadow cast by their hypermasculine, abusive and absent father, John (Jeffrey Dean Morgan).

Although Kripke pitched *Supernatural* as "*Star Wars* in truck stop America" (Kripke 2015), he ongoingly referred to Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) by borrowing the book's premise and iconography. Some fans consider this to be "the [show's] first hate crime" (Vittoria Francesca 2024) and an uncritical approach to the source material, yet Kripke reframes the novel through horror and family melodrama, and retains its queer subtext. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty are now blood brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, who travel across the country saving people and hunting demonic monsters while searching for their missing father. The Winchesters' journey across America becomes the framework in which the exploration of post-9/11 American culture takes place (Bennett 2020). It also constructs a world in which the show's opening sequence ongoingly echoes. The woman in white burning on the ceiling, the dark silhouette in an empty nursery, and the association of John Winchester with the yellow-eyed demon Azazel haunt the narrative and construct a playworld in which hypermasculinity and the denigration of femininity and queerness are immediate and unromantic.

Not only do these prerogatives create a story that is "as rich, if not richer, than psychic children and demonic plans" (Kripke 2009), but they also shape the depiction of *Supernatural*'s afterworlds. In doing so, Heaven, Hell, and Earth create a continuum to the point that the afterlife is merely a place in which trauma reverberates and salvation cannot be achieved, at least not easily. Heaven, in particular, morphs into a desolated and unrewarding place, a prison made of memories in which, try as they might, its residents are neither at rest nor at peace. Therefore, this essay aims to examine the show's portrayal of Heaven in seasons four and fifteen in light of the "national state of emergency and trauma" (Der Derian 2009, p. 234) and Kripke's subversion of the "national fantasy" (Faludi 2007, p. 14) that emerged from the rubbles of the World Trade Center. It will explore the implication that Heaven and the rotten family home are one and the same, that is a source of corruption in which patriarchal legacy reigns supreme. Additionally, it will highlight how these depictions are tied to a specific moment in American history and how the show focuses on the rippling effects of White hegemonic masculinity, presenting these standards as unachievable and inescapable in life as in death.

2. Stairway to Heaven: American Suburbia as Metaphysical Prison

Afterworlds' "powerful sway over the imagination" (Van Vechten 1919, p. 553) has transmedially been testified for centuries. One must only think of Renaissance paintings, Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* (c. 1321), a selection of Schubert's symphonies, and Wagner's *Die Walküre*. More recently, television shows like *Good Omens* (2019-) and *Lucifer* (2016-2021) have also provided their own take on the matter, adding to a pre-existing multifaceted canon. The interest in religious cosmology and life after death does not necessarily lead to sensorily explorable representation. *Supernatural*, for example, introduced demons long before a physical portrayal of the abode of damned souls. Similarly, angels antecede the depiction of Heaven by more than a season, after an initial dismissal in episodes such as *Houses of the Holy* (S2E13). This delay allowed the show to

slowly shift its focus from otherworldly entities to their places of residence, with the occasional second-hand account thrown into the mix.

Despite the differences usually ascribed to Heaven and Hell, *Supernatural* places both realms on a continuum, which allows the show to delve deeper into the idea of afterlives as headspaces. These are places where trauma reverberates. Places in which violence is perpetrated by self-serving and manipulative entities. It is, therefore, fitting that the first insight into Heaven occurs through the "Green Room" (*Lucifer Rising* S4E22): a place lavishly decorated with Rococo paintings and in which earthly pleasures are indulged. However, when Dean Winchester is whisked away by the angel Zachariah (Kurt Fuller) for his safety, the penny drops slowly until the truth is revealed and the audience's concerns are validated. Indeed, the angels have no intention to halt the upcoming Apocalypse and wish to institute "Paradise on Earth" (*Lucifer Rising* S4E22) regardless of all the people that will get caught in the crossfire. As the lighting darkens and the colors become colder and harsher, both the audience and Dean realize that the angels' previous coercion and exploitation were not a one-off occurrence. Their request to torture the demon Alastair (Christopher Heyerdahl), Dean's older and violent lover, in *On the Head of a Pin* (S4E16) already displayed a keenness on taking advantage of Dean's status as a victim of physical and sexual abuse as well as his urge to reenact revenge fantasies that do not diminish his suffering. The same dynamics and power structures are herewith recreated anew. When the angels ask Dean to become the Michael Sword and be the harebinger of the Apocalypse, they initiate the same kind of "pyramid scheme" and "contractual agreement" (Hurst 2013, p. 40) as demons did in Hell.

These details undermine biblical notions of salvation found, for example, in Luke 16:19-31 and Luke 23:43. By transforming them into a commodity, the show devalues the promises of happiness in the afterlife that the Church historically pushed forward (Michelet 1946). Even though, in the beginning, these negative conceptions arise from Dean's "distrust for things that are not real" (Grosse 2014, p. 48), such skepticism soon exposes the angels' lies and coaxing to the point of turning Heaven into a prison. It thus becomes a panopticon, made of simulations that are similar to the ones in "The Matrix" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S5E16), in which negative emotions are eradicated at the price of life. Paradise is illusionary and void of meaning – given that only "people, families… are real" (*Lucifer Rising* S4E22) – and empty, for no two people share the same space. This isolation not only reiterates earthly struggles *ab aeternum* but also brings the place closer to Hell.

The blurring boundaries are not new: in *Angels in America* (1993), for example, Tony Kushner constructs his playworld following the same precepts (Barnett 2010). They also do lead to an iconographic overlap. Hell takes on the semblance of "a thousand-mile spider web of rusty chains. Sort of M.C. Escher meets *Hellraiser*" (Rudolphs 2008) in which tied to racks and surrounded by chains, shadows, and lightning. Heaven, on the other hand, is more physical and Dantesque. It is "a place where you can relive your greatest hits" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S5E15), distant from religious cosmology and corporate imagery. In the Winchesters' case, it takes the shape of twenty-first century America, though it does not concern a single city as, for example, San Francisco "after the Great 1906 Quake" (Kushner 2006, p. 252). Instead, the world is once more shrunk to a microcosm, reduced to suburban America, long stretches of highways, the Roadhouse, and, eventually, the Cleveland Botanical Gardens. These are real places that lack the symbolic imagery of Hell but can nevertheless be traced back to the tragic events that occurred in Lawrence, Kansas, on November 2, 1983.

When the Winchester brothers are killed by a couple of hunters who want to punish Sam for his role in jumpstarting the Apocalypse, Sam and Dean wake up in Heaven. Throughout the episode, the brothers take advantage of their sojourn in the afterlife to continue their search for the absent Father-God. These choices allow the show to alternate points of view and reframe the brothers' past, revisiting their different involvement in the 'family business'. Their simulations are diametrically opposite. Sam's happiest memories convey an overall sense of freedom and selfishness. They take the form of a Thanksgiving dinner at his first girlfriend's house and an abandoned room in Flagstaff, where he spent his time after having run away from home uncaring of any punishment that may befall on Dean. Dean's memories, on the other hand, are exclusively related to his family to the point that

upon the discovery of Sam's indifference, he remarks, hurt, "Your heaven is somebody else's Thanksgiving" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S5E16). He sees his childhood home, his mother making him a sandwich, his brother as a child, and the 1967 Chevrolet Impala he inherited from his father. Given that both places are stand-ins for the traditional gothic castle and, as a consequence, morph the "ostensible sanctuary into a prison of horrors" (Knowles 2016, p. 25), Heaven takes on the same connotations also.

As such, even in the absence of torture, blood, and extreme violence, abuse can still flourish behind the very same closed doors of the home of White, respectable, and middle-class families. John Winchester may be physically absent, but the moral aberration he embodies is not. Pristine kitchens, tidy bedrooms, and idyllic familial interactions are herewith exposed as a façade as the implementation of Western ideals of masculinity and "the dominant, 'authentic' mode" (Do Rozario 2014, p. 126) creep up from the corners like rot. In a complete subversion of post-9/11 media, danger is already inside the family home rather than on the outside. Because of this, Heaven can only be a happy place when one of its residents can tap into a repertoire of unadulterated memories. The "attic's still better than the basement" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S05E16), but not for all. Dean Winchester's memories are tainted and he continues to "[clean] up Dad's messes" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S5E16) in Heaven too. Any relief granted by death and the promise of happiness in the afterlife collapse. They extend only to bruised and battered bodies, not to minds. Dean is tied once more to his duties, the feelings of failure that derive from it, and an overall loss of autonomy that negates any "exclusive claim on [his] body" (Chan 2010).

These developments climax twice. In doing so, construct insuperable barriers that cement Heaven as an unappealing and prison-like place. When, at the end of *Dark Side of the Moon*, Sam and Dean find themselves once more in their childhood home. The living room transforms, the lights get darker, and all the doors and windows are walled up, preventing the brothers' escape. As they stand there facing their mother, now a subversion of the "archaic mother" (Creed 1993, p. 7) archetype, they are literally and metaphorically trapped and cut off from the world. They have each other, but that is of little comfort too. As Mary (Samantha Smith) taunts Dean, his pre-existing insecurities, depression, and discontent all reemerge, the supposedly happy reunion between loved ones turns into something more sinister, obliterating the promises of contentedness and betterment. Ultimately, this is what Heaven is all about, and, unsurprisingly, Andrew Dabb reprises these connotations in the show's final episode.

Despite the "ever-expanding, if less logical story" (Hansen et George 2014, p. 3), *Carry On* (S15E20) reverts to the show's initial foundations and, by shuffling some canonical events, creates an even more nightmarish Paradise, masked by promises of beneficial improvements. *Supernatural* ends with Dean Winchester committing suicide and ascending to Heaven. This time, the childhood home is replaced by a front porch, the Impala, and long stretches of road. The previous system based on memories is gone, replaced by a shared Heaven in which communality is possible. It is a less isolated place and closer to life on Earth, a "big new world" (*Carry On* S15E20) that allows happy reunions between loved ones. Even so, the revelation that Dean's mother and father live in "a place over yonder" (*Carry On* S15E20) rings as a curse, the final betrayal of a deserting lover who was once asked to pick a side and recognize the superiority of everyday life to the vague and fallacious idea of Paradise on Earth. The changes to Heaven entrap Dean and deny him any chance of escape. John Winchester –the violent father and monster at the end of the corridor– is back in his eldest son's life, well, death. As an indie-pop cover of Kansas' *Carry On* starts playing, Dean starts driving around while looking out for his brother or, perhaps, for someplace else. In the meanwhile, the realization that both freedom and peace are once more denied dawns on the audience as the cycles of abuse once more entrap their victims even in a place that usually provides salvation.

3. Highway to Hell: Hypermasculine Heroes as Jailors

Supernatural's final reveal may be the closest thing to horror after an abundance of seasons ripe with fantasy and science fiction. Not only that, it may also be one of the most skin-crawling revelations since the resurrection of Samuel Campbell (Mitch Pileggi) in season six. After all, episodes like *Pilot* (S1E1) and *In the Beginning* (S4E3) imply that the hypermasculine, patriarchal father and grandfather were both perpetrators of physical and sexual abuse. This suggestion, often criticized by fans, emerges through repeated hints and the screenwriters' reliance on family melodrama, a genre that exploits "elliptical narratives" (Elsaesser 2012, p. 444) in order to redirect the audience's attention to something that is never explicitly discussed. In addition to the gothic, a genre fit for discussing societal taboos and deviations from the White, heterosexual norm (Davidson 2012), it lays the foundations of the Winchester's attempt to find self-actualization all while escaping the oppressing environment caused by "ancestor reverence" (Harris 2019, p. 91) and abuse. The two brothers are not entirely agents of their fate. Dark inheritances and the angels' meddling hinder their search for autonomy which, in the end, is taken away once more.

In the case of Dean Winchester, this lack of progress and fulfillment stems only partially from Castiel's "I love you" (*Despair* S15E18), the subsequent use of the Bury Your Gays trope, and the failed canonization of the show's most renowned slash pairing. While it is true that Dean dies in the closet, the most striking thing is his newly found status as a prisoner. At the end of *Carry On*, when he and Sam embrace, he finds himself trapped and under constant surveillance of not one, but two emblems of masculinity: his father and his brother. The show thus returns to its origins, re-proposing post-9/11 issues centered around masculine American heroes and dangerous others. In the absence of monsters, the Winchesters' family life reverts to what it was before Mary's death and John's quest for revenge, making it impossible to misread who the real enemy is. The cultural insecurities at the beginning of the new millennium, which spilled over into fiction (McSweeney 2017), are reprised along with Kripke's original take on the matter: the presentation of the Marlboro Man as the show's main evil.

John Winchester is the embodiment of the aughts' alpha men. He is the Father, the God, and the Hero. He abandons his children and the family seat. He is, in Dean's own words, "an obsessed bastard" (*Dream a Little Dream of Me* S3E10) who represents a model of masculinity that dismisses all the other "ways through which men can live out their maleness" (Cameron et Bernardes 1998, p. 686), and actualizes his power outside of "domestic, feminine, and urban realms" (Brown 2008, p. 188). He is, by all means, the monster who lives at the end of the corridor and his actions resurface in his children's behavior –from their anger and aggression to Dean's depression. The inability to comply with the values represented by the Marlboro Man or to fulfill any of the duties ascribed to men, such as protection (Hoover 2015), has consequences. For instance, when, at age ten, Dean fails to protect his brother from a Shtriga, a witch that feeds off children, his relationship with his father becomes strained as suggested in *Something Wicked* (S1E18).

Despite Dean's attempts at emulating his father, to the point that his car, his jacket, and his music are all John's, and Sam's own stubbornness and belligerent behavior towards the family patriarch, John's favorite son is Sam. Furthermore, Sam is also the one who follows his father's footsteps more sincerely. In *Jump the Shark* (S4E19), Dean tells his brother "I worshipped the guy, you know? I dressed like him, I acted like him, I listened to the same music. But you were more like him than I will ever be". The lines refer to Sam's worldview, though the overlap does not end there. Indeed, John and Sam are two sides of the same coin, which becomes staggeringly clear once Supernatural introduces the vessel sub-plot. The doubling between Micheal and Lucifer's squabbles mirrors the Winchesters' (Howell 2014), leading to the rise of a second patriarchal figure within the failing Father-God model. Just as Lucifer steps up to replace God, Sam steps up to replace John, reinforcing once more White hegemonic masculinity. This is presented as an inevitability because, as Joshua explains in Eden upon the Winchesters' first visit to Heaven, God "is finished" (*Dark Side of the Moon* S5E15). A new God must emerge for the Father-as-God and God-as-Father must continue,

notwithstanding possible variations. And, indeed, the overlap is complete by the end of the show. In the final episode, Sam is shown in the company of his son Dean Jr. as he introduces him to the 'family business' and, as a consequence, perpetrates the same abuse as his father.

Compared to his male relatives, Dean looks like one of those "shaved-and-waxed male bimbos in the Yves Saint Laurent and Lacoste cologne ads" that were denigrated in the cultural landscape that emerged in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center (McCombs 2003). Even though he spends most of the time trying to cut off the pieces of himself that make him "a freak" (*Skin* S1E06), he has little success and cannot occupy his father's place in a meaningful and genuine way. The ongoing implications of queerness are not exclusively the product of a cultural moment, though jokes about homosexuality are featured in episodes like *Bedtime Stories* (S3E5). There are more genuine moments either through textual or symbolic means. Observations such as "you're kinda butch. [They] probably think you're overcompensating" (*Playthings* S2E11) are to be taken honestly, especially in light of Dean Winchester's open and telling reaction. Similarly, the reliance on phallic symbols in violent scenes ultimately encourages the audience to deconstruct the "different ways of organizing bodies, desire, and erotic attachment" (Brintnall 2004, p. 71). These, together with the repeated references made to what Ahmed defines as "barred contact" (2014, p. 165), enable a reconsideration of the standard accusations of queerbaiting and a reassessment of the show.

Contemporary audiences may be more interested in "positive affects" (McDermott 2020, p. 854) and subverting the status quo. In doing so they fail to realize that *Supernatural*'s lack of explicit representations of the show's hero's queerness is less about appeasing a mixed audience (Micarelli 2021) and more about the kind of society it is trying to depict. The disavowal of queerness is clear. Not for nothing, at the end of *Swan Song* (S5E22), once Sam has embraced his fate as Lucifer's vessel and John's heir by proxy, he tells Dean "You go find Lisa. You pray to God she's dumb enough to take you in, and you – you have barbecues and go to football games. You go live some normal, apple-pie life". This imposition comes as an attempt at reinforcing the heteronormative norm, in a much more explicit way than any scene with John ever implied, which had repeatedly been presented as unattainable (Wilhelm 2020). By framing it as a dying wish, Sam traps his brother thanks to the exploitation of Dean's sense of obligation towards his family.

Because of this and *Supernatural*'s inclusion of the "crisis of longing" (hooks 2004, p. 49), Dean Winchester's reunion with his loved ones in Heaven cannot be happy. As the character finds himself trapped with his jailors, Heaven loses the "nobility, goodness, sublimity, glory, simple faith, aspiration, charity, brotherly love" (Van Vechten 1919, p. 553) generally attributed to the place. The biggest tragedy, then, seems to be that Heaven too reinforces toxic and codependent family dynamics to the point of presumably facilitating abuse and neglect. John may not appear on screen, but his presence is nevertheless felt. Like a gaping hole or an elephant in the room, his absence is cumbersome and undermines a potential celebration of American exceptionalism and militaristic sacrifice. Furthermore, as Dean seemingly runs away from John, the show seems to embrace the existence of "a hundred Deans on a hundred highways" (Knowles 2016, p. 35), incapable of finding either peace or freedom. As he drives across Heaven, ready to fall from the hands of one abuser into the hands of another, the place transforms into a funhouse with no exit, where all the trapdoors, slides, distorting mirrors, and barrels of fun merely lead Dean Winchester back to square one. Still not himself, still suffering the consequences of his father's upbringing, and, above all, still ostracized and alone.

4. Conclusions

Even though *Supernatural* first dismissed the idea of Heaven, comparing it to "unicorns [who] ride on silver moonbeams, and […] shoot rainbows out of their ass" (Houses of the Holy S2E13), the 2007-08 Writers Guild of America strike led Kripke to reconsider his 'no angels' policy. This unexpected development subsequently led to irrevocable changes. The extension of

the show's mythology and fans' interest in the angel Castiel ensured the regular on-screen depiction of Heaven. These ongoingly changed according to cultural and political developments as well as *Supernatural*'s need to indefinitely reboot a show that was supposed to come to an end with season five. Heaven herewith became about angels and their factions at war with each other and, later, about rebellion and punishment. Even so, and despite the interest in a broader American context, the first and last depictions of Heaven are the most striking. Rather than providing plot twists to drag the story on for yet another season, these two iterations go back to the show's roots: dysfunctional familial relationships and abuse, recontextualized in light of the cultural landscape of post-9/11 America.

In both cases, Heaven takes the semblance of America's suburbia and highways. At their heart is the family home, a place of comfort and a prison, which undermines the perception of Heaven as a place of eternal happiness and salvation. While it is true that these rely on people's happy memories, Dabb and Loflin put their objectivity into question. Some may derive satisfaction from such an environment, while others may be more oppressed by the persistent reminder of their trauma. This is the case of Dean Winchester. His idea of Heaven is his childhood home, the one he can never go back to, the one in which domestic drama and violence are staged behind closed doors. It is a place under siege. The enemy, however, is not the unknown stranger embodied by "dark-skinned, non-Christian" (Faludi 2007, p. 208) of post-9/11 media but the hypermasculine father. The latter's presence is inescapable which, in turn, transforms Heaven into a prison akin to Hell. Forced to live with the memories of his broken childhood and to relive the abuse inflicted on him, Dean fails to find any relief and is, once more, disallowed salvation.

The horrific undertones are also enhanced by the recreation of earthly relationships of control. In *Carry On*, Heaven is no longer a product of Dean Winchester's memories though its foundations remain the same. If season five cemented the idea of a prison, season fifteen inserts two jailors. The chance to share Heaven with other people reprises the idea of reunions in the afterlife but these too are far from happy. Victims and perpetrators are forced to live close to each other, establishing the same power dynamics as on Earth. The reproduction of White hegemonic masculinity in metaphysical geographies ensures that self-actualization and freedom cannot be found in death either. Dean Winchester kills himself and, in doing so, falls from the frying pan into the fire yet again. Thus, the past becomes inescapable. Dean moves as if in a quagmire, following the currents caused by vicious cycles of abuse and poison that drips from one generation to the other. Inside the new and improved panopticon, which grants only the illusion of safety and in which fathers, brothers, angels, and a new God operate are virtually indistinguishable from any of the monsters the Winchesters hunted for most of their life. Ultimately, as the audience watches Dean drive aimlessly across Heaven, waiting to reunite with his brother, one last recognition dawns on the audience: that after fifteen years, the absent father is still the main enemy and that some monsters can neither be killed nor escaped from.

Bionota: Anna Caterino holds a BA and MA in European and extra-European languages and literatures. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Linguistics, Literary and Intercultural Studies at the University of Milan. Together with Cristina Cavecchi and Margaret Rose, she edited the collection Sir Thomas More: from Page to Stage (Emil, 2023). Her essays "'I have my version and you have yours': Fanfiction and Supernatural Fans' Road to Damascus" is included in the volume *Fix It Fic: Challenging the Status Quo through Fan Fiction* edited by Kaitilin Tonti (Vernon Press, 2024). In 2023, she received the Alexei Kondatriev award for her essay "Hell on His Mind: Dean Winchester's Journey to Hell and Back" (Mythlore, 2024).

Recapito dell'autrice: Anna.Caterino@unimi.it

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Supernatural, S4 E19, *Jump the Shark*, 2009.
Supernatural, S4 E22, *Lucifer Rising*, 2009.
Supernatural, S5 E16, *Dark Side of the Moon*, 2010.
Supernatural, S15 E18, *Despair*, 2020.
Supernatural, S15 E20, *Carry On*, 2020.