NO CHICK FLICK MOMENTS: 'SUPERNATURAL' AS A MASCULINE NARRATIVE

April R. Boggs

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2009

Committee:

Esther Clinton, Advisor
Jeffrey A. Brown, Advisor
ABSTRACT

Esther Clinton, Advisor

This thesis examines the CW Network series *Supernatural* (hereafter SPN) as a revitalized masculine text. SPN as a masculine narrative is representative of 21st century conceptions of gender. Part of why it succeeds on the CW (a network aimed at 18 to 34-year-old women) is because it does not adhere to stringent binary thinking on gender. The show has only two main characters, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, both of whom are meant to be all-American blue collar heroes. Though they are based in this traditional masculine image what sets the brothers apart is the way SPN has updated this very image to apply to contemporary mores.

The first chapter examines the brothers’ roots in traditional heroic masculinity, applying a structuralist method of analysis to determine the heroic and narrative forms being used. Axel Olrik’s *Epic Laws of Folk Narrative* establish the dual-hero narrative tradition from which SPN is derived. Next, I dissect each brother’s individual narrative, utilizing Jan de Vries’ classical hero pattern for Sam and my own traits of the “new American folk hero” for Dean. Continuing in my effort to link the brothers to their traditional roots, I use examples from both folk and popular culture to show the progression of the two hero types in American culture.

In the second chapter I explore the genre of SPN and how it affects the presentation of masculinity in the series. The main genre of the series is that of the road narrative and thus my discussion of genre is framed by an exploration of the road narrative. By using the road narrative as the basis of my discussion I am able to discuss the inclusion of conventions from other genres hybridized within the show such as dramatic themes and character positioning while maintaining a consistent structural base of the main genre of the series.
The final chapter serves to discuss changes in the American masculine road narrative through a comparison between SPN and Jack Kerouac’s own road narrative *On the Road* since the novel served as one of the inspirations for the series and can provide historical comparison.
Sweetheart, this ain't gender studies. Women can do the job fine. Amateurs can't.

Dean Winchester, “No Exit”

I sometimes say it's "the epic love story of Sam and Dean," but that's just to tease Eric.

Sera Gamble, _Sequential Tart_

Dean: I can’t do this without you.
Sam: Yes, you can.
Dean: Yeah, well, I don’t want to.

“Pilot”
This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Kim Manners, one of the main creative forces on

Supernatural and someone who has influenced the way I see the world since 1993.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If I were to say that I began this thesis in the fall of 2007 I would be lying to myself. The truth is (regardless of whether I realized it at the time) the formation of this thesis truly began in January of 2007. After listening to two friends wax rhapsodic about “those Winchester guys” for months I finally gave in to their urging and decided to give *Supernatural* a try. Two and a half years later I find I would be remiss if I did not thank my Canadian “little sis” Moya Hillam and the fabulous Adrienne Lopes for introducing me to this show and encouraging me through all the months of stressing, writing, ranting, and writer’s block. I would also like to give a shout out to my “big sis” Shannon Bryan for always knowing when I needed a smile and sending me care packages to keep my spirits up.

Next, of course, I would like to thank my family (a.k.a. Team Thesis) for their support, encouragement, and slave labor research assistance. Mom, Dad, thanks for putting up with my particular brand of crazy. I would especially like to thank my older brother for answering my random questions at all hours of the day and night. Thanks for being a bro, Chris.

I would also like to thank Sarah “Dame Helen Mirren” Lafferty, my co-conspirator and confidante for being my unofficial third thesis committee member and knowing how to marathon like no other. Thanks are also due to my fellow POPC grad students Ben Philips, Ora McWilliams, Stephanie Plummer, Justin Philpot, and Mike Lewis for making sure I ate, left the office/apartment once in awhile, and had some great laughs.

Finally, this thesis was fueled primarily by copious amounts of coffee and I would like to thank the wonderful crew of baristas at the Bowling Green Starbucks for keeping me caffeinated and listening to me rant about muscle cars and masculinity. You guys are rock stars.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................ 1

CHAPTER I. THE CONVERGENCE OF THE CLASSIC HERO AND THE NEW AMERICAN HERO ............................................................................................................ 7

Supernatural as an Epic Narrative.............................................................................. 9

Sam Winchester as the Classic Hero ......................................................................... 14

Dean Winchester as the New American Folk Hero ................................................... 20

Traits of the New American Folk Hero Figure.......................................................... 22

CHAPTER II. THE ROAD NARRATIVE .......................................................................... 34

Family as Identity ...................................................................................................... 36

We Know This Road.................................................................................................. 39

The Muscle Car Mystique.......................................................................................... 41

Winchesters in the Wild, Wild West.......................................................................... 46

I Love You Like a Brother......................................................................................... 50

Gender-bending Horror.............................................................................................. 55

“In the Beginning” There Was Mary......................................................................... 57

Supernatural and Generic Hybridity ......................................................................... 65

CHAPTER III. SAM AND DEAN GO “ON THE ROAD” WITH JACK ....................... 67

Dean Doesn’t Ride Shotgun....................................................................................... 67

Divided We Fall......................................................................................................... 69

Our Symbiosis is Fuckt.............................................................................................. 75

Seeking the Father...................................................................................................... 77
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confession is the Essence of Male Friendship</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean’s Guide to Overcompensation</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Winchester vs. Third Wave Feminism</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean’s Dionysian Desires</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Take Your Anemic Alternative Pop and Shove it Up Your Ass”</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in the Shadow of St. Dean</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Journey is a Trip! Spirituality on the Road</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS: SAM AND DEAN AND THE NEW MASCULINE NARRATIVE</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FILMOGRAPHY</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NO CHICK FLICK MOMENTS: ‘SUPERNATURAL’ AS A MASCULINE NARRATIVE

When my undergraduate project group assembled its presentation on the new merger between the WB and UPN television networks – big news in the world of a mass communications student – we had a good laugh over the list of shows which would survive the merger and the list of new shows in development. Of the shows that would survive there were a few listed as “on the line” because while they had a small following the network was not really certain what their place would be in the newly minted CW Network. One of those shows, Supernatural, passed my notice at the time as I had a hard time understanding how a show with two blue collar men as main characters could survive on a network whose target demographic is 18 to 34-year-old women.¹

Supernatural (hereafter SPN) did survive past that first season, though, growing in popularity as the seasons progressed.² Its presence still seems to confound the network and more often than not network-wide promos will only include a split second of footage from the show amidst numerous clips from their flagship series Gossip Girl, 90210, One Tree Hill, and America’s Next Top Model. In the midst of feminine-dominated primetime soap operas with teenage and 20-something casts it is curious that a masculine narrative like SPN could survive so long – especially with its lack of continuous romantic entanglements and use of only classic rock for the soundtrack.

When I say “masculine narrative” I am referring to the gender of the narrative itself. While a narrative may be targeted at a certain gender demographic or contain characters of various genders, the story itself can also have a gender. This gender is evident from where the focus lies in the narrative both thematically and in the main characters. A masculine narrative

¹ As stated by the CW’s website, cwtv.com.
² At the time that I began writing this thesis, episodes had only aired through the 3rd episode of Season Four and my discussion of the series will reflect this.
emphasizes the experiences of masculine characters (those exhibiting mainly characteristics of 
the male gender). For example, the relationships focused on in a masculine narrative would more 
often be male homosocial relationships or else romantic relationships (hetero or homosexual) 
seen from the masculine character’s side of the relationship. This gives the narrative a masculine 
gendered perspective from which to convey its story.

Gender and the concepts of what is “masculine” and what is “feminine” vary from culture 
to culture. As Roger N. Lancaster states in *The Trouble with Nature: Sex and Science in Popular 
Culture* “it seems hilariously ethnocentric to imagine that everybody of all cultures is guided by 
the same emotional compass (185).” Therefore, the uses of “masculine” and “feminine” within 
the context of this thesis will specifically reference American concepts of gender. As Lancaster 
argues, gender is culturally determined and emotions play a large part in various definitions of 
genders. For the masculine gendered narrative, construction of the male homosocial 
relationships, in particular, are a defining characteristic. Just as definitions of gender are fluid 
cross-culturally and in terms of what Lancaster calls “folk genders,”3 so are they fluid across 
history. It is in not only the characters as individuals but also in their relationships to one another 
that we can track changes in cultural conceptions of gender over time.

SPN as a masculine narrative is representative of 21st century conceptions of gender. Part 
of why it succeeds on the CW is because it does not adhere to stringent binary thinking on 
gender. The show has only two main characters, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, both of 
whom are meant to be all-American blue collar heroes. Though they are based in this traditional 
masculine image what sets them apart is the way the show has updated this very image to apply 
to contemporary mores.

---

3 Lancaster uses this term to categorize such groups as transsexuals and unreconstructed anatomical intersexuals who wish to be defined as such (222).
In order to show what changes the brothers represent we must first determine where they remain consistent to their character types. In chapter one, I seek to establish Sam and Dean Winchester’s roots within traditional heroic masculinity. SPN is a dual-hero narrative with equal focus given to each of the main characters and a narrative balance maintained between them by having one serve as active and the other as passive within a given scenario. The Winchester brothers’ roots as traditional masculine figures come first through their relation to the hero figures that have come before them. I am using “hero” in this case to refer to the. The brother’s story follows the epic narrative form as outlined by Axel Olrik in his *Epic Laws of Folk Narrative*, firmly rooting them in an established narrative tradition. Through Olrik’s law set we can see the set precedent for a dual-hero narrative. Sam’s story is inspired by the classic hero form while Dean’s firmly cemented in what I call the “new American folk hero” form. Together they combine into a dual-hero narrative that shares the characteristics of each of their forms.

Though as a television series the narrative can be regarded as popular culture, the characters and stories from which SPN has descended originated in American folk stories. Along with describing in detail how SPN fits Olrik’s folk narrative form and how Sam Winchester follows the classic hero pattern of Jan de Vries, I define my “new American folk hero” form using examples from both folk and popular culture to show Dean Winchester’s character type lineage. In the style of Lord Raglan or Jan de Vries’s heroic life patterns I have determined a list of characteristics which can be ascribed to the new American folk hero, highlighting which are derived from older heroic forms and which are unique to this new heroic form.

While SPN’s narrative is born of the epic form there is also genre which must be taken into consideration when exploring the use and representation of gender within SPN. Like any

---

4 Reprinted in Alan Dundes’ *The Study of Folklore* (p. 129-141).
5 As described in his *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*.
postmodern text, SPN utilizes generic hybridity to tell its story. The plot of the series surrounds the two adult brothers traveling around the country in their big black 1967 Chevrolet Impala hunting demons, ghouls, vengeful spirits, and other supernatural entities. In the first episode it is revealed that they have been doing this since their mother was killed by a demon when Dean was four and Sam was six months old. They began under the training and guidance of their Vietnam vet, ex-marine\(^6\) father but for the majority of the series it is just the two brothers and their car with a revolving door of secondary and tertiary characters.\(^7\) The brothers’ lives are part road trip and part warzone with smaller battles being waged while a greater war (all signs seem to point to the apocalypse) is looming. However, with so much of their lives spent in close quarters and in these stressful conditions it is no surprise that the root of the narrative lies in the brothers’ relationship with each other.

In the second chapter I explore the genre of SPN and how it affects the presentation of masculinity in the series. The main genre of the series is that of the road narrative and thus my discussion of genre is framed by an exploration of the road narrative.\(^8\) By using the road narrative as the basis of my discussion I am able to discuss the inclusion of conventions from other genres hybridized within the show such as dramatic themes and character positioning while maintaining a consistent structural base of the main genre of the series.

While the focus of this thesis is masculinity, it is not really possible to discuss the masculine independent of the feminine. By dividing study in such a manner one can lose sight of how even within a gendered text another gender can have a considerable presence. One of the

---

\(^6\) According to Dean in episode 2.09, “Croatoan”, John Winchester was a corporal in the 2\(^{nd}\) Battalion, 1\(^{st}\) Marines, Echo company. In episode 1.09, “Home”, his medals from Vietnam are visible in his journal.

\(^7\) Their father, like every single other character on the show, has since been killed off and was only in a few episodes prior to his untimely death at the end of the first season and beginning of the second.

\(^8\) When I use the term “road narrative” I am not just referencing “road films” but rather narratives in any medium (book, TV, film, etc) which uses the main characters’ road travel as a framing device.
biggest modernizations of the masculine narrative that takes place in SPN is the use of female characters are controlling elements within the narrative. The redemption of what I call the “sacrificial female” in the character of Mary Winchester, in particular, helps to revitalize this narrative form. Normally a mere plot device, SPN has made the sacrificial female into the root of the narrative itself as well as a source of many of the assumed masculine traits of Sam and Dean. Though she begins the series appearing to be little more than background, Mary has since become one of the main forces which shapes the Winchester brothers’ story. Beneath the seemingly male-dominated narrative of SPN we can see a universe which is ultimately controlled by the feminine as much as the masculine.

The final chapter serves to discuss changes in the American masculine road narrative through a comparison between SPN and Jack Kerouac’s own road narrative On the Road (hereafter OtR). SPN has its roots in the masculine forms of OtR, creator Eric Kripke himself citing OtR main characters Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty as the Winchester brothers’ namesakes (Keveney 1). The two duos share some similar traits of both character and narrative. However, as there is a great time disparity between the two texts what is more pertinent for this comparison is to point out those areas in which they differ. The events which inspired OtR occurred in the late 1940s with the book actually having been written in 1951 whereas SPN began in 2005 and runs (for the most part) in “real time” with the dates of the events in season intros and finales always coinciding with the air dates. This leap from a mid-20th century to an early 21st century text allows us to see the changes in the representations of masculinity between these two eras and therefore see how SPN has updated the American road narrative. This chapter closely compares both characteristics of the two duos as well as events within their narratives to determine where these changes in cultural conceptions of gender lie and what sets SPN apart as
something new. Ultimately what I seek in this thesis is an exploration of SPN as this revitalized masculine narrative with the intent of showing what these heroes represent in the 21st century. By the end of this writing I hope to show that while it is no *Gossip Girl*, the revitalized nature of gender in SPN makes it more accessible to CW’s 21st century audience.
THE CONVERGENCE OF THE CLASSIC HERO AND THE NEW AMERICAN HERO

There are many structuralist approaches to the epic hero tales of European myth and legend. It is my intention to draw inspiration from the points system of Lord Raglan\(^1\) and to utilize the Epic Laws of Axel Olrik and the Hero Pattern of Jan de Vries to create a new structuralist approach for the examination of the lives of American folk heroes. I will then apply this hybrid structuralism to the narrative of the Winchester brothers to show how they fit into the American heroic paradigm.

Coming from this basis of *On the Road*, it is easy to see how the Winchester bros. derive many of their characteristics from the overall American heroic tradition. The romanticized themes of independence and fraternity that are core to their story are essential aspects of the American heroic image. Tracing back through popular culture and into the folk traditions of America, it is easy to see the roots of the Winchesters’ masculine image and where they fall into this tradition.

For a show so heavily based on American folklore and urban legends it comes as no surprise that the two protagonists would fall in line with American folk hero tradition. Sam and Dean are just “two dudes in a muscle car, traveling cross-country,”\(^2\) embodying something of the American spirit. Their roots can be traced back to outlaw heroes of the Wild West, back when the country was still new and just beginning the search for its sense of self. These figures were romanticized in Western films, oral tradition, and the penny dreadful and dime novels of their time despite their penchant for operating outside the law.

Sam and Dean likewise often find themselves on the wrong side of the law despite their good intentions. They’re wanted men – wanted by the FBI in this case – and regularly have to

---

1 I am referring to Raglan’s “The Hero of Tradition” reprinted as an article in the book *The Study of Folklore*.
2 “Supernatural: Tales from the Edge of Darkness”, Season 1 DVD featurette.
resort to illegal means in order to continue their hunting lifestyle. The brothers defraud credit card companies on a regular basis and yet the audience roots for them because they’re portrayed as loveable hustlers. In this case the ends justify the means, even if the ends involve fraud, theft, breaking & entering, and other such crimes. This is reminiscent of the outlaw heroes of the Old West. Characters such as Billy the Kid and Jesse James were and still are celebrated figures in American culture despite having been wanted criminals in their time.

The main difficulty in discussing the heroic narrative(s) of the brothers Winchester lies in the simple fact that the narrative is still in progress. As of right now the show has not yet drawn to a close, making it impossible to examine through the end of SPN’s heroic narrative arc. Nevertheless, a definite heroic pattern has emerged which I intend to examine.

There are only two main characters on SPN; Sam and Dean Winchester. Each fulfills the role of a heroic figure and both serve as leading characters for the heroic narrative. However, each follows his own heroic path which, though entwined with his brother’s heroic path, follows its own distinct pattern. American heroes often appear in duos and it is my argument that Sam and Dean are, in fact, two different hero types coexisting within the same narrative. Sam’s path is more that of the classic hero and begins in his infancy with his symbolic “birth” as the demon Azazel’s son through his consumption of the demon’s blood. Dean’s path is more that of the American folk hero with whom he shares various characteristics. Combined, the boys’ tale adheres to the Epic Laws of Folk Narrative as suggested by Axel Olrik and thus SPN becomes a

---

3 At the time of this writing the show has been signed on for a fourth season.
4 Azazel, a.k.a. “The Yellow-Eyed Demon”, is the first “big bad” in the series. The name Azazel is taken from a demon mentioned first in Lev. 16:8 as the one to whom to deliver the scapegoat. His name appears in various forms in different texts. Some alternate spellings of his name translate to “Angel of Death.” The use of Azazel as the lead villain of Seasons One & Two serves to foreshadow both the darkening of Sam’s character as well as the suggestion that Sam could potentially be the anti-Christ.
hybrid story, one in which the ancient and the contemporary converge to create something altogether different, what is in fact a new epic for the new millennium.

*Supernatural as an Epic Narrative*

We must first turn to the narrative of SPN itself. In order to establish the series as a true epic hero tale, we can compare it to Axel Olrik’s Epic Laws of the Folk Narrative. Olrik established a series of “laws” or rules which outline the structure of an epic folk narrative according to themes, forms, and characters which have repeated over time. What follows is a breakdown of SPN’s overall narrative structure in relation to these laws.

According to the *law of two to a scene*, only two characters may be the focus of the narrative at a time. In the case of SPN, Sam and Dean are the only main characters. Though other characters may come and go in the narrative, the brothers are the only ones allowed to remain indefinitely consistent. All of the secondary characters on the show either die or eventually disappear; it is only a matter of how many appearances they’ll manage to get in before their inevitable grisly death/disappearance.

Following this, the *law of twins* applies to two characters within the narrative that fulfill the same role simultaneously. Sam and Dean appear together as hunters and as the heroes of the narrative. Because they are both elevated to the major roles of heroes, they are also subordinated to the *law of contrast*. Sam as a character is grounded in the realm of the mind. He is colder and much more calculating, he does the most research, and he went to college. Sam relies on his mind above all else. In contrast, Dean’s realm is the body. He is much more headstrong and passionate and prefers working with his hands to doing research. He is also the more hedonistic of the two. He is sexually promiscuous, gluttonous in regards to food, and he prefers the

---

5 Laws taken from Axel Olrik’s article “Epic Laws of Folk Narrative” in *The Study of Folklore*. 
entertainment aspect of popular culture, as seen in his encyclopedic knowledge of horror films. Sam is about the plan, Dean is about instant gratification. They fulfill the same hero role but they operate through different means.

In accordance with the law of concentration on a leading character and the law of the single strand, the series’ narrative remains focused on the two brothers. Although the entire Winchester family is deemed important and the importance of family is an overarching theme of the series, the storyline remains tied solely to the brothers and their experiences. Any flashbacks shown within the series in terms of the overall story arc have always involved the brothers, so we have not seen any flashbacks of either John or Mary Winchester without the brothers included. It is their story and their lives remain the focus of the single strand of narrative development.

Another of Olrik’s laws, the law of opening, states that the epic begins with calmly and builds towards excitement. The series opens with a calm domestic sequence with the Winchester family turning in for the night: Mary and Dean in bed, John asleep in front of the TV, Sammy tucked in his crib. This is followed by the dramatic event of Mary catching the demon Azazel in the process of feeding Sam his blood, Mary is ultimately killed and the house is burnt down. After Mary’s death we have calm again as we are brought to the brothers’ present day reunion. There is a certain inherent narrative tension from the beginning of the show as the brothers fight deadly beings each week while trying to locate their father and reconnect. As the series goes on, the tension builds as the brothers (and the audience) learn more and more about themselves and the specifics of the dangers out there. In Season Three the drama hits a crescendo as the dangers and revelations pile up: Dean has sold his soul in exchange for Sam’s life and hasn’t got much time left to live, Sam has demon blood and could potentially “go dark side,” the brothers are on the FBI’s most wanted list, there are legions of demons who are either in favor of Sam or out to
kill both brothers, and so on. What began as a rather claustrophobic story focused solely on the problems of two brothers has grown to a tale of epic proportions in which not only their lives are at stake but everyone else in the show’s universe. As the series is not complete, the law of closing is not yet applicable, so I will not address it beyond acknowledging that as the converse of the law of opening it requires the story to return to a state of calm. As the series is currently at three of a proposed five seasons, one could hazard a guess that this is the mid-point in the story and that we will see a turn back toward the calm perhaps near the end of Season Four and most certainly within Season Five (unless the CW Network deigns to give it a seven season run in which case the writers will have to re-map their story arc to allow for two more seasons).

The laws of repetition and patterning as well as the ideal of epic unity all tie together in that they are aspects of the story which serve to highlight a significant part of the narrative for the audience. In terms of the two laws, ideas or events are either repeated or appear in a familiar pattern as a way of, essentially, catching the audience’s attention. SPN utilizes these techniques in multiple ways. In the episode “Hell House” it is revealed that the symbols written inside the haunted house were not really put there for supernatural or occult means but rather were just an attempt by some kids to scare their friends. Hints are dropped within the episode so that the audience may pick up on this fact. Near the beginning, Dean notes that he’s seen one of the symbols before but cannot quite place it. The symbol in question is the logo for the band Blue Oyster Cult (hereafter B.O.C.) spray painted on the wall by the perpetrators because it looked fairly occult-ish. Dean spends a good portion of the episode attempting to remember the symbol’s meaning and in the meantime both visual and audio clues are given to the audience. Two B.O.C. songs are played in the soundtrack, Dean examines a B.O.C. album in the record shop, and there is a B.O.C. poster on the wall. The repetition of B.O.C. not only hints at the
symbol’s true meaning but draws the viewers’ attention towards its importance in terms of the episode’s mystery.

Another way the show uses the repetition/patterning techniques is in terms of the “special children.” Sam is one of several children who was force-fed demon blood as an infant and later developed some sort of psychic ability (each one different). Though it is later learned that there are several generations of special children, the significance of Sam’s generation (those born in 1983) in terms of the overall story is shown via a pattern. The pattern consists of people born in 1983 whose nurseries caught on fire the night they turned six months old. Though this pattern is later seen to be inconsistent – not all of the children lost a parent(s) to fire – in the beginning it is used to show the audience that there was more to Sam’s visions than originally suspected and to also hint that his abilities were somehow related to both Mary’s death and Azazel.

The *ideal of epic unity* states that any plot element used within the story serves to illuminate an overarching theme of the story, in this case the relationship between Sam and Dean. One example of this would be the episode “Simon Said” in which the brothers encounter Andy Gallagher and Ansem Weems, two twins separated as infants who also happen to be “special children” like Sam. While Andy has grown up to be a kind-hearted person who tries not to use his mind-control abilities for evil, Ansem has grown bitter and twisted, exhibiting very little respect for others’ free will. This episode takes place during the beginning of Sam and Dean’s fears about Sam’s abilities causing him to become evil, after John tells Dean that he will either have to kill Sam or save him one day. Andy and Ansem’s tale parallels the Winchesters’, ending with Andy killing Ansem in order to stop him from hurting or killing anyone. This drives home the fear of what Dean might have to do should Sam ever lose control, but it also shows that Andy, as one of the psychics, was able to control himself and not go dark side. On another level,
Ansem’s brotherly love for Andy had become a stalker-level obsession in that he worshipped Andy and wanted his life, his crush/ex, and his amiability with people. This obsession helps drive him into madness and ultimately results in Andy killing him. However, it is suggested that a combination of Ansem’s different upbringing and lack of loving familial reinforcement contributed to him obsessing over Andy the way he did. So while obsession between brothers is denounced, at the same time the case emphasizes the importance of Sam and Dean’s close relationship and the notion that their close bond will save them. In the end, Andy and Ansem’s story fits into the narrative as a means of highlighting the importance of Sam and Dean’s relationship.

In the logic of sage, Olrik suggests that any themes presented within the narrative exert an influence on the plot in direct proportion to their extent and weight in the narrative. The theme of family is the driving force of SPN’s overall story and is harkened back to again and again. Individual cases that the brothers take on often have some basis in family (the deceased is attacking their surviving family, the impetus for the supernatural being’s dastardly ways is rooted in family, etc). The plot also focuses on both the brothers’ relationship with their father and on their relationship with each other. These familial relationships are the driving force of the narrative. They give us new plot points (like Dean selling his soul and having a year to live), they give us character development (like the brothers’ reactions to John selling his soul),6 and they allow for the story to be what it is (if Sam and Dean did not have each other, Sam might be evil and the brothers could both be dead by now).

The use of tableaux scenes is another trait of the epic narrative. A “tableau” in this instance, as Olrik says, is a “sculptured situation” referring to a moment in an epic narrative

---

6 In episode “In My Time of Dying,” Dean is dying in a coma so John trades his soul to Azazel along with the Colt that can kill anything in exchange for Dean’s life.
which is particularly striking or artistic. An example of a tableaux scene in SPN would be the two parallel death scenes in “All Hell Breaks Loose Pt. 1” and “Mystery Spot.” In the former, Sam is stabbed in the spinal cord and Dean catches him, holding him in the middle of the deserted ghost town street while he dies. In the latter, Dean is shot by a mugger on Wednesday in the hotel parking lot (this time not waking up to find the timeline reset and his brother alive) and Sam holds him while he dies, both collapsed in the middle of the parking lot. Both scenes make use of close-ups of the brothers’ faces as well as an aerial shot, which minimizes Sam and Dean in comparison to their surroundings. This use of tableaux is intended not only to parallel these scenes but to ensure that Dean’s Wednesday death in “Mystery Spot” is particularly emotionally poignant as it is intended to be separate from Dean’s more comical series of Tuesday deaths earlier in the same episode.

All of these laws as proposed by Olrik function together to create an overall epic narrative out of a weekly television series. By obeying the laws of the epic narrative, the overarching plot of the show remains an epic hero narrative despite the individual case-based nature of the individual episodes. The self-contained plots of the “monster-of-the-week” episodes function as parables, reflecting the greater mytharc of the series and weaving the hero tales of both Sam and Dean into one overall tale.

*Sam Winchester as the Classic Hero*  
Sam’s life fits the epic hero pattern as described by Jan de Vries. De Vries’ pattern is divided into ten parts and although the continuing nature of the narrative prevents me from

---

7 I’m using the term “classic hero” to refer to the hero type referenced by Lord Raglan and Jan de Vries and generally traced back to classical mythology or earlier.
8 The hero pattern I am using is taken from Jan de Vries’ book *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend.*
fitting Sam’s life into the entire pattern, I will still demonstrate how the younger Winchester’s life fits de Vries’ pattern.

Part one of the pattern of the epic hero is the begetting of the hero, generally characterized by a) the mother being overpowered by a god and b) the father as a god. In Sam’s case the begetting is symbolic and involves a demon in place of a god. When Sam is six months old, the demon Azazel steals into his nursery and forces him to ingest the demon’s blood. Mary remains the mother but Azazel has now used his blood to place himself as the father. When Mary attempts to stop this she is overpowered by the demon, pinned to the wall, and dragged to the ceiling with her abdomen sliced open.\(^9\)

The next part of the pattern is the birth of the hero, which often takes place in an unnatural way. After the symbolic begetting, John enters the nursery in time to see Mary aflame on the ceiling, her blood dripping down onto the infant Sam. John removes Sam from the crib and gives him to Dean to be borne from the flaming house to the Impala. Sam is, in effect, symbolically born from the flame in the arms of his new primary caregiver, Dean. Thus begins Sam’s life as we know it in the series.\(^10\)

The third part of de Vries’ pattern involves the youth of the hero being threatened. In “Something Wicked” when Sam is still little, the Winchester clan goes hunting a \textit{shtriga} (an Eastern-European witch that feeds primarily on the life essences of children). John leaves the boys alone in their hotel room one night and Sam’s little kid whining finally gets to Dean, causing him to leave the room to vent his frustrations in a game of pinball. Upon his return, Dean finds Sam in the clutches of the \textit{shtriga}. By good fortune John arrives and saves Sam from the creature. Though the boys are regularly threatened by supernatural creatures, this incident from

\(^9\) Episode 1.01 “Pilot”
\(^10\) Episode 1.01 “Pilot”
their childhood is specifically highlighted as important in shaping their relationship. An entire episode is devoted to Dean’s guilty flashbacks to the attack as well as his attempts to finally kill the *shtriga* now that they’ve reencountered it. Two boys at the hotel where the Winchesters are staying are targeted by the *shtriga* this time and Dean seeks to redeem himself for failing Sam in the past by helping the older boy, Michael, save his own little brother. Over the course of the episode, Dean explains to Sam that his guilt – exacerbated by John’s admonishments – at leaving Sam in their hotel room when they were kids is a contributing factor to his obsession with protecting his younger brother and one of the reasons why he sees taking care of Sam as his duty in the family.

Part four of de Vries’ pattern discusses the way in which the hero was brought up. The hero reveals particular features of his personality when he is younger, as well as his strength, though the child is often very slow in his development. In Sam’s case this can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, Sam as a character is known for his intellectual abilities. However, it is not until he reaches age nine that he figures out the truth about his family’s lifestyle. On the other hand, Sam develops psychic abilities thanks to the demon blood he ingested as an infant. Yet, his abilities don’t actually manifest themselves until he’s in his 20s, about six months before Dean picks him up at college.

Part five of de Vries’ pattern is the hero acquiring apparent invulnerability, which often comes hand-in-hand with some sort of weakness. In the episode “Croatoan” it is revealed that Sam’s demonic blood gives immunity to the demon virus, so he is immune to the demonic biological warfare eviscerating the populous in Rivergrove. However, the point is often driven

---

1 Episode 3.08 “A Very Supernatural Christmas”
2 Episode 1.05 “Bloody Mary”
3 Episode 2.09 “Croatoan”
home on the show that Dean’s emotional instability is his greatest weakness, something that the
demons and creatures they go up against regularly take advantage of.\textsuperscript{14}

Next, the hero defeats some sort of monster or is sometimes a great monster slayer.
Again, this can work two ways in Sam’s life. The Winchester brothers are hunters – this is the
premise of the show – and they regularly defeat various supernatural creatures. At the same time,
one could point to Sam killing fellow hunter Gordon Walker as an example of the hero slaying
the monster. Gordon is held up in the show as an example of a hunter who is too caught up in the
hunt and has lost sight of his humanity. Once he learns about Sam’s supernatural connections
and psychic ability he begins to hunt the brothers. In “Bloodlust” he is kidnapped by a vampire
and turned into a vampire himself, changing him from a metaphorical monster into a
supernatural one. When Sam kills Gordon – in self-defense – he is slaying the monster that
Gordon has allowed himself to become. There is a continuing concern in the series that either
Sam or Dean will allow himself to finally lose that last shred of humanity and become monstrous
like Gordon. In this episode, Sam slaying Gordon’s newly vampiric form is significant because
of the continuing concern that Sam’s demon blood could potentially lead him to become one of
the very evils that they fight. Once Gordon is turned he embraces the darkness and throws out
what principles he once had in his quest to destroy Sam. In killing Gordon, Sam is symbolically
rejecting his own potentially monstrous future.\textsuperscript{15}

At this point in the pattern the comparison begins to stumble. This may be because Sam’s
story is not yet complete, the show is not yet finished, and thus we cannot know what the ending
will look like. Even so, not every hero follows the complete pattern so even if the rest of Sam’s
story deviates, his life still follows enough of the pattern to qualify. However, I wish to examine

\textsuperscript{14} In episode 3.11, “Mystery Spot,” the Trickster claims that his reason for making Sam repeat Dean’s death in the
time loop and then live without him for months was so that he could see how much of a weakness Dean is for him.
\textsuperscript{15} Episode 2.03 “Bloodlust”
the remaining elements of the pattern in terms of Sam’s life to see which of the events that have occurred fit into the heroic pattern.

Parts seven and eight of deVries’ pattern concern the hero winning a maiden after overcoming great dangers and the hero’s expedition to the underworld respectively. These could both, theoretically, be applied to the episode “Mystery Spot.” In this episode, the Trickster forces Sam to relive the same Tuesday over and over again, each time being unable to prevent Dean’s various deaths. When Sam realizes that it is the Trickster’s work and threatens him in an effort to call it off, the Trickster lets him wake up on Wednesday only for Dean to be killed yet again without Sam repeating the day. Sam lives for several months without Dean, hunting down the Trickster and killing every other supernatural being in his path. At the end of his journey, the Trickster finally acquiesces that Sam isn’t learning to adapt to life without Dean and breaks Sam’s time glamour. Dean is no maiden, but Sam’s sheer tenacity wins his brother back in the end, wearing the Trickster down to the point where he gives Dean up. This follows Sam’s journey through the time distortion, a symbolic descent into the underworld comparable to Theseus’ journey through the labyrinth. Sam essentially needed to journey through a labyrinth of time and then descend into the darkness in order to defeat the Trickster and win Dean back.

The ninth part of the pattern regards the hero being banished as a youth, only to return later to be victorious over his enemies. When Sam is a teenager he gets into a fight with John over whether or not he can go away to college (he has a full scholarship at Stanford University). The fight ends with John declaring that if Sam’s going to leave then he had better stay gone, essentially banishing Sam from the family unit. Years later (due to a continuity error, there is some discrepancy about whether it was 2 or 3 years) Dean seeks Sam out at Stanford because John has gone missing. This, followed by Azazel’s murder of Sam’s girlfriend, propels Sam back
into the “family business” and gives him the opportunity to return to the family unit, made complete when, upon his return, John accepts Sam almost as though he hadn’t left. Having once been banished from the family, Sam makes his return and defeats his enemies alongside his brother.16

The final part of the pattern is the hero’s death. Death is a flexible thing in a heroic tale involving the supernatural. So while Sam’s final/primary death has yet to occur, he has already died. In “All Hell Breaks Loose Pt. 1” (hereafter AHBL 1), Sam is stabbed in the back by another bearer of demonic blood and dies in Dean’s arms. In “All Hell Breaks Loose Pt. 2” (hereafter AHBL 2), Dean sells his soul to a crossroads demon in order to revive his brother bringing Sam back to life.17 So while Sam has technically died he is alive now and his final/primary death has yet to be seen.

Another interesting note about Sam’s death also comes from de Vries’ article, specifically his comments on the role of the rite de passage in the hero’s life. He outlines the maturation of the hero as resulting from the child’s “death,” allowing for the life of the man to begin, usually proceeded by an unbridled virility which needs to run its full course and afterwards to be canalized. Prior to the events of AHBL, Sam is depicted as emotionally immature in certain respects. At the beginning of the series he is very much like the angst-ridden teenager who ran off to college in the first place. Also, though he isn’t promiscuous in the way that Dean is, he is seen getting some of the “unbridled virility” out of his system in the episode “Heart” in which he has an extended sex scene with a female werewolf in human form. After AHBL, Sam lets go of most of his emotional immaturity.18 He carries himself more like an adult, his disposition is more solemn, he stands straighter, and he no longer hides behind multiple

---

16 Episodes 1.01 “Pilot” and 1.16 “Shadow”
17 Episodes 2.21 “All Hell Breaks Loose Pt. 1” & 2.22 “All Hell Breaks Loose Pt.2”
18 Episode 2.17 “Heart”
layers of clothes. In essence, Sam’s literal death serves as the death of Sam the boy and his resurrection serves as the beginning of his life as Sam the man.

*Dean Winchester as the New American Folk Hero*

Whereas Sam is a classic hero, Dean is an altogether different sort of hero. He is the other half of the Winchester brothers duo, and following the *law of contrast*, his own life follows a different pattern than his brother’s, though they are intertwined. Dean Winchester is a hero in the American folk figure tradition, a folk tale character type that has carried on over time throughout American popular culture. Dean is a hero in a very human sense and he wears his flaws on his sleeve.

The earliest American folk hero figures were born of the westward expansion.¹⁹ With the westward migration came new culture and new ideas. Settlers moved west seeking this amorphous notion of an “American Dream,” looking to the undeveloped western lands for new opportunities and prosperity. Throughout America’s history, the west has been touted as a “land of dreams,” all the way through the modern births of Las Vegas and Hollywood and their promise of fame and fortune.

I assert that a unique feature of the American folk hero figure is that he is a direct response to this westward migration. His eastward movement and sense of alienation can be seen as a backlash against the “manifest destiny” mentality, the notion that going west would lead to the happiness that Americans sought. The hero’s eastward movement implies that the westward expansion did not lead to the promised prosperous life. The hero’s journey away from the west

---

¹⁹ The westward expansion of the United States was born of a belief in “manifest destiny” which held that the United States was divinely ordained by God to expand westward across the North American continent. The phrase “manifest destiny” in terms of westward expansion was originally coined by columnist and editor John L. O’Sullivan in his editorial “Annexation” in the July-August 1845 issue of *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review.*
indicates an abandonment of the concept of the west as the home of the American Dream and the notion that the riches to be sought will bring the happiness that the hero seeks. The hero, having found nothing but dire straits in the territorial lands, moves back towards his or her roots and in so doing seeks an American Dream that was perhaps forgotten in the fervor of the pioneers. Years after the pioneers, Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo, the protagonists of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (a novel based on the real-life road trips of Hunter S. Thompson and Oscar Zeta Acosta), would drive through the desert of the west seeking the lost American Dream of the west. Rather than finding the dream they end up lamenting the decline of American culture, in effect leading the reader to question what is left of the American Dream.

The hero in this case is rarely tied to a singular location. He is not one to settle in one place for very long as his journey is one of self-discovery and it is a journey that keeps him from being too tied to the society that he feels alienated by and suspicious of. Society rejects the hero for not settling into the life prescribed for him and the hero rejects society right back for attempting to force him into a mold.

The American folk hero seeks a form of justice but he usually seeks it outside of the law. The renegade, outlaw status adds a level of infamy to these figures yet they are not generally portrayed within folklore as evil in any way. They operate according to their own system of right and wrong because they feel betrayed by and distrustful of the laws of their society and those who uphold them.

American folk heroes are not blessed men born of a god, nor do they usually come from affluence. They are blue collar people, often beaten down by the system, who must make their living through hard work. This sort of work engenders them to other blue collar figures and encourages a sense of fraternity. The American folk hero does not feel connected to a sense of
community but does feel an individual connection to his own associates and loved ones. The hero represents a romantic individualism common in American culture; the idea that people can start at the bottom and, through hard work and tenacity, carve out a place of notoriety for themselves in the world. We see it all the time in the celebration of such public figures as Oprah Winfrey, Mark Wahlberg, or Jewel. The American hero usually starts from small, humble, or “underprivileged” beginnings and works his or her way to the top, becoming more admirable because he or she did not begin with access to great resources.

Though plenty of folklorists have examined the classic hero’s life pattern and traits, there is no equivalent of Lord Raglan’s or Jan de Vries’ hero lists for the new American folk hero. Therefore, below is compiled a list of traits that can be ascribed to American folk hero figures and traced through popular culture to Dean Winchester. Included are examples of other hero figures in American culture (both folk and popular) who share these traits as well as a discussion of how Dean Winchester in particular fits this structure of the American folk hero. Though some of these traits are unique to the American hero, others betray his classical roots.

Traits of the New American Folk Hero Figure

1. The hero is male.

This is trait is not necessarily unique to the American hero but is more often than not the standard in American culture (heroines being more common than female heroes). The American hero figure is usually male and is usually meant to be an example of an ideal masculinity. The failure of masculinity perceived in other male characters around him serves to

---

20 This is not to suggest that all celebrities are heroes but rather that our culture celebrates people who work hard to climb their way up the socio-economic ladder and overcome adversity.

21 As Thomas Gramstad explains in his article “The Female Hero,” a hero who is female and a heroine are two distinctly different character types and not to be confused with one another based on gender.
emphasize his superior masculinity. One such example would be the *Bill & Ted* films. Bill & Ted’s achievement of a successful masculinity is emphasized by the failure perceived in their fathers due to both fathers’ failed marriages to their sons’ peer, Missy, and in Mr. Logan’s displacement of his own feelings of inadequacy onto his son. (A notable exception to the idea of a male hero would be Thelma Dickinson and Louise Sawyer of *Thelma & Louise*, a film which combines many of the traits of the American folk hero narrative to create a similar story for women.)

2. The hero’s story consists of a journey to seek the American Dream. A repeating theme within American culture is that of the ever-elusive “American Dream.” That dream is never clearly defined, although one notable attempt was that put forth in our Declaration of Independence which states that man is entitled to the inalienable rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Though the dreams of the individual vary, certain ideas have been suggested to embody the American Dream throughout our history. In seeking this dream, however, I contend that as a country we are also seeking our identity. The country is still young in the grand scheme of things and in our very short time we have experienced not only expansion but also industrialization. With the ever-changing structure of the country comes a fluctuating sense of national and social identity. Figures like the gangsters Bonnie & Clyde feel betrayed by the state of things and seek their own ways of life on the road. Characters like Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* take to the road to seek solace from social woes. The specifics of what the “American Dream” entails continues to change and the hero continues his journey in search of some sort of happiness in his independence.

3. The hero travels into the east.

---

22 *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure, Bill & Ted’s Bogus Journey*
Throughout our nation’s history, the concept of a “pursuit of happiness” is often characterized through Westward Expansion. The idea of Manifest Destiny propelled settlers westward in pursuit of their American Dream, the idea that new land would bring new opportunities. However, “Go west, young man”\(^{23}\) was no guarantee and our newly industrialized populous began to feel alienated from society and betrayed by the west. Thus, American folk heroes came to be characterized by their rejection of the west. These heroes made it a point to travel east, instead, in search of an identity that felt lost and the dream that had been guaranteed. This eastward movement is apparent in older folk figures and is still present in our popular culture heroes of today. Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid headed east to New York when things began to go badly for them out west (something which, in the movie based on their lives, is playfully portrayed through a series of still images set to jovial music). Likewise, Wyatt & Billy in Easy Rider make a trek eastward on their choppers seeking both financial and spiritual fulfillment.

4. The hero drives a classic car.

A Marxist complaint during the onset of the industrial revolution was a lack of satisfaction from one’s work.\(^{24}\) With the introduction of such production systems as the assembly line, workers had become mere laborers (as opposed to a craftsman). Instead of creating something from start to finish that s/he put her/his heart and soul into, s/he simply existed as a cog in the greater machine, continually contributing one menial, repetitive task all day long. The American hero’s classic car, a descendant of the cowboy’s steed, is a reaction against the industrial compartmentalizing. The hero’s relationship with his car – necessarily a classic for the purposes of upkeep – is key in that his maintenance of it creates a symbiotic relationship with the vehicle. He may not have built the car from scratch, however by working on it himself he achieves the

\(^{23}\) Phrase originally coined by John Soule in the Terre Haute Express (1854) but popularized by Liberal Republican Party founder Horace Greeley.

\(^{24}\) This is one of the aspects of Karl Marx’s Theory of Alienation from his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts.
post-industrial equivalent of that satisfaction in a job well done. The car becomes an extension of the hero as well as a symbol of his masculine power. An example of this duality of man and car in popular culture is that of Driver, Mechanic, and the ‘55 Chevy in *Two-Lane Blacktop*. The two men are traveling eastward, racing their Chevy on various tracks along the way. There is barely any dialog between them in the film aside from the occasional comment on how the car sounds because their relationship with each other and the vehicle is so absolute.

5. The hero travels in a pair with another hero or in a group. Quite often, the American folk hero is one half of a heroic duo, such as Driver and Mechanic in *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Wyatt & Billy in *Easy Rider*, or Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. However, it is also not unusual for him to be partnered with another kind of hero. This is another trait that is not necessarily unique to only American heroes since, as I noted earlier, Olrik’s Laws of the Epic Narrative allow for a heroic duo. In this case, a more classic hero like the one illustrated by Jan de Vries serves as a counterpoint to the American folk hero, creating a narrative balance between two points and a struggle with the ambiguity of “right” and “wrong.”

6. The hero operates outside of the law to seek his own brand of justice. The American folk hero is independent and usually suspicious of society in some way. Born of this is the hero’s personal sense of right and wrong. This hero still acts in the interest of what is good and righteous but he does it according to his own rules. He sees the law as being misguided in some way or at least not operating in terms of the true right and wrong and thus he must subvert it to ensure the right thing is done. The hero’s independent lifestyle is also seen as being counter to what the community expects of him and thus he is often forced to operate outside of society. Unlike some other heroes like the British Robin Hood, the American hero does not seek to change the system or rejoin it, he merely rejects it. Marshall, the hero of *Eerie, Indiana*, and
his friend Simon must work in secret in order to reveal the bizarre truths of their town because
the rest of the townsfolk live in a state of willful ignorance. Driver and Mechanic must continue
to switch out their license plates so as to stay below the radar as the law enforcement does not
approve of their racing and, thus, their society does not approve of their relationship with the
Chevy.

7. The hero’s story often ends dramatically and suddenly.
Again, this point is not unique to American heroes but nevertheless fits to the grand spirit of
Americana, the American folk hero’s story often ends in a drastic manner, possibly with the
hero’s death (for example, in a hail of gunfire – Bonnie & Clyde, Butch & Sundance). The
ending, however, does not need to include death to be either dramatic or sudden, as is seen at the
end of Two-Lane Blacktop when the footage of Driver speeding off down the race track is
slowed down until the film melts, the cross-country race that served as a narrative propellant
within the film never resolved.

8. The folk hero has a nemesis, often a mirror figure within the law.
As a result of the folk hero’s outlaw/outsider status, there is usually a character in the narrative
who serves as a representative of society’s perspective. This nemesis figure seeks to put an end
to the hero’s wanderings and to punish the hero for his rejection of society. Often, this figure of
opposition is a representative of the law. The man in the boater in Butch Cassidy and the
Sundance Kid, whom Butch & Sundance suspect might be renowned lawman Joe Lefors, serves
in this nemesis role. He tracks them across the land for a good portion of the film, determined to
put an end to their lawlessness and displays the same sort of tenacity that we see in Butch &
Sundance.

9. The folk hero goes by an alias rather than his given name.
Folk figures – both American and otherwise – often use a nickname or alias that is ascribed to them rather than their real name. This alternate name is usually either bequeathed to them through their infamy, such as with outlaw figures of the old west like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (whose real names were Robert LeRoy Parker and Harry Longabaugh), or else chosen intentionally in order to maintain a low profile.

10. The folk hero comes from a blue collar/working class background.

The emphasis in our society on the virtue of the “working man” is born, again, from our post-industrial environment. The blue collar worker is seen as someone who still truly “earns” the good things in life via the sweat of his brow. The American folk hero isn’t a man on Wall Street who gained his place in life by crunching numbers and stepping on those around him. The American folk hero is a man who worked hard with his own hands to achieve his place in life. Hooker and Gondorff in *The Sting*, as well as all of their associates, come from working class backgrounds and use the cons they pull as their reliable source of income. None of them lives particularly richly, they simply maintain their current livelihood through illegal means. Gondorff does not have anything so plush as an apartment, living in a room off of a carousel which he maintains.

11. The hero operates outside of the so-called “normal” society from which he feels alienated.

Going hand-in-hand with the idea of the hero as an outlaw we have the notion that as the hero feels alienated by what his society has become he must reject it and live independently of the community in order to achieve true contentment. The greater community does not approve of the drug use of Wyatt & Billy in *Easy Rider* or Raoul Duke & Dr. Gonzo in *Fear and Loathing*. Therefore, they must exist on the fringes, on the outskirts of their societies in order to maintain
their desired way of life and continue on what they see as their spiritual journey. As the song “Me and Bobby McGee” says in Two-Lane Blacktop, “freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.”

12. The hero copes with the world around him through sarcasm and humor. The American sense of humor is often characterized by heavy use of sarcasm and irony. This snide, “snarky,” attitude is present in many American folk heroes, the quips gaining notoriety for the hero as well as serving as a coping mechanism. This observational-gallows combination is a result of the alienation that the hero feels. This has especially made itself apparent in American action heroes like John McClane of the Die Hard series as they are expected to make snarky or derisive comments throughout the course of a film.

Dean Winchester is a prime example of the American folk hero. He comes from a humble background, the son of an ex-Marine who co-owned an auto shop in Lawrence, Kansas. He is a man who travels in a ’67 Chevy Impala with his brother Sam, his classic hero counterpart. He maintains a symbiotic relationship with the car, working on it himself and hardly ever letting Sam drive. He refers to the car as “baby” and within the show it is used as a visual representation of his emotional state. In the Season Two opener, “In My Time of Dying,” the car is totaled but Sam insists on keeping it for Dean to rebuild because he refuses to believe that Dean won’t recover from his injuries. As the season begins, Dean uses the rebuild of the Impala as a sort of catharsis while he grieves for his dead father. At the end of “Everybody Loves a Clown,” Sam confronts Dean about not vocalizing his despair over his father’s death, so Dean unleashes all of

---

25 “Me and Bobby McGee” by Kris Kristofferson is one of the few pieces of music heard in the film. It is played over the betting scene when Driver and Mechanic decide to race GTO east to D.C.
26 This is evident in the reliance on quips and catchphrases in the dialog of various American action heroes, such as Captain Hiller commenting “Welcome to Earth” after punching an alien in Independence Day or John McClane sarcastically recalling his wife’s invite to “Come to the coast, we’ll get together, have a few laughs…” while hiding in the ventilation system of a building being held hostage by gun-toting villains.
27 The Impala has been referred to on several occasions by fans and writers alike as the third character on the show.
the anger and grief that has built up inside him by this point in the series by beating the wrecked Impala with a crowbar, the shattered state of the car representing his shattered emotional state.\(^{28}\)

The brothers traverse the country on the show, however they seldom make it out west and the few times they have been to California something horrible has happened, causing them to high-tail it back eastward. The west coast represents everything falling apart for the brothers, a promise of happiness that only ever turns out to be empty.\(^{29}\) The series opens with Dean – the folk hero – collecting Sam – his classic hero counterpart – from the false safety of California to begin their journey as a duo as they reconnect and attempt to relearn who they are now that they are adults. As the show goes on, they are caught between what they want for themselves out of life and the hunting lifestyle they were raised with. Once it becomes apparent that they have no choice but to live their lives as hunters, questions are raised as to what that really means for the two of them and their life on the road.

Since the general populous in the world of SPN is unaware of the supernatural things that the brothers hunt, their lifestyle necessitates operating below the radar. They use aliases, fake IDs, fake credit cards, and hustling (billiards and poker) to get by. They also switch out the license plates on the Impala when their FBI wanted status reaches significant levels. To the audience of the show and to the brothers they aren’t actually criminals, just two hunters trying to get by. However, to the outside world, as represented by FBI Special Agent Victor Henricksen, they are a dangerous pair of psychos who need to be locked in a maximum security prison for life. Over the course of two of his appearances, Agent Henricksen puts forth his own theory on the Winchesters: the way he sees it, ex-Marine Vietnam vet John was a “paramilitary survivalist

\(^{28}\) Episode 2.02 “Everybody Loves a Clown”

\(^{29}\) Sam ran away to California and got a girlfriend only to have the demon kill her, while in San Francisco Sam sleeps with Madison in “Heart” and then has to shoot her when they can’t cure her werewolf nature, John goes hunting in California with Bill Harvelle and has to kill him, thus putting a damper on any future relations between Winchesters and other hunters, and so forth.
type” with some serious occult issues who trained his sons to be perfect soldiers.\textsuperscript{30} He also suggests that John molested Dean and that he in turn molested Sam as a form of psychological control.\textsuperscript{31} Henricksen’s image of the Winchester family is more like something out of an episode of \textit{Law & Order} than what the audience sees and it gives good insight into what an outsider might make of the brothers.

While Henricksen’s character serves to add a sense of realism to the narrative – both through his viewpoint and in the sense that the brothers are seeing some of the consequences of their criminality – he also serves as a lawman parallel for Dean. Henricksen operates with the same headstrong passion and sense of righteousness as Dean, almost serving as an image of what Dean could have been in another life. In “Jus in Bello,” after Henricksen has finally learned the truth about all those dead bodies and grave desecrations the brothers have left in their wake, he is even shown getting along with Dean and working with him on battle strategy while the demons have them under siege in the police station. This is a significant moment for both characters because at this point in the series Dean has killed Azazel,\textsuperscript{32} the demon who messed up his family and propelled him into hunting, and Henricksen has caught and released Dean, the man he had spent the last several years of his life tracking down (while Sam was also on the FBI most wanted list, Dean had more charges against him and had been on law enforcement’s radar for longer). Both men have come to turning points in their lives and now find themselves relating to one another in a way they never would have expected.

Though Dean exhibits exhaustion with the hunter lifestyle at times and it is hinted that he would like to settle down one day, he also harbors a great distrust of what he sees as “normal” society. He doesn’t see himself as a “civilian” – hasn’t since he was four – and he has difficulty

\textsuperscript{30} Episode 2.12 “Nightshifter”
\textsuperscript{31} Episode 3.12 “Jus in Bello”
\textsuperscript{32} Episode 2.22 “All Hell Breaks Loose, Pt. 2”
relating to the civilian lifestyle, especially since his knowledge of the supernatural goings-on of the universe means that he knows what lurks behind the white picket fence façades. As the series goes on, it becomes clearer and clearer that the brothers will never fit into what is considered “normal” society. However, because of his acceptance of this Dean seems to be the best, of the two brothers, at being able to adapt to any situation. While Sam can play the sympathetic ear, Dean is good at flirting, being friendly, and surviving. This is probably best exhibited in the episode “Folsom Prison Blues,” in which the boys are in jail.\(^{33}\) It is clear throughout the episode that Sam is uncomfortable but Dean takes to the environment like a fish to water, hustling card games and manipulating the social structure for his own ends. In this episode we also see Dean’s coping mechanism, his humor, at play. Throughout the series, Dean covers any discomfort he feels with jokes and sarcasm, often responding to Sam’s attempts at serious conversation with teasing and one-liners. Although Dean does not belong in normal society and experiences discomfort from it, he has the ability to temporarily adapt to it if he must to continue on his journey.

While Dean certainly looked up to John as a kid, his other heroes came from popular culture. When Sam first started to question their family’s lifestyle and inquire into what it was their father really did, Dean looked to the heroes in popular culture for an explanation. He tells Sam that John is like a superhero, hoping to ensure his brother that no matter how else their father may behave, he is doing good deeds in the world.\(^{34}\) In another episode, “Bad Day at Black Rock,” Dean compares himself to Batman after his streak of good luck leads him to defeat Sam’s captors.\(^{35}\) It is fitting that Dean would choose Batman, in particular, since he is the one major superhero without any actual superpowers. Batman relies on his human mind, body, and tools

\(^{33}\) Episode 2.19 “Folsom Prison Blues”
\(^{34}\) Episode 3.08 “A Very Supernatural Christmas”
\(^{35}\) Episode 3.03 “Bad Day at Black Rock”
rather than “super-strength” or anything like that to bring bad guys to justice. This is his way of avenging his parents’ deaths. Dean, as the audience well knows, got into the hunting business as a result of his mother’s death.

Dean may look to the Dark Knight for inspiration but his main popular culture hero is Steve McQue. On more than one occasion in the series, Dean compares himself to McQueen. In “Folsom Prison Blues” he attempts to allay Sam’s fears about being in prison by comparing them to movie characters: Dean as McQueen in The Great Escape and Sam as Clint Eastwood in Escape from Alcatraz. Dean’s idolization of McQueen is a reflection of the type of masculinity he performs. Dean tries to project himself as a “man’s man,” as evidenced in the pilot when he responds to his reunion with his brother with a request for “no chick flick moments.” As far as stars go, Steve McQueen is considered an example of the masculine ideal in our culture. With roles in such films as The Great Escape, The Magnificent Seven, and Bullitt as well as his real life love of motor vehicles and racing in real life, McQueen’s reputation as a cool-headed master of his domain is the same kind of image that Dean tries to project, right down to the leather jacket.36

Dean’s performance of masculinity also derives from other pop culture film heroes. In “Hollywood Babylon” Dean quotes the character John McClane from Die Hard. The traits of the new American folk hero figure are prominent in both the action and horror genres of popular culture these days, from the sarcastic humor through the working class background (McClane is a police officer) to even the journey (McClane is trapped in what seems to be a perpetual journey in the series which starts with an ill-fated trip from New York to California). As a horror movie aficionado (and as a character in a horror-based television show) it is not hard to see the

36 Dean references McQueen in episodes 2.07 & 2.19. The series references him again with the episode title for 3.01 “The Magnificent Seven”. Jo Harvelle also mentions McQueen in 2.06 “No Exit” when describing her hero worship of her father (in this episode Jo is temporarily harboring a crush on Dean).
influence of the horror movie heroes on Dean. McQueen began his career in the cult horror film *The Blob* – in a classic car, no less. More specifically, Ash Williams of the *Evil Dead* series certainly serves as an inspiration for Dean with his sawed-off shotgun, blue work shirt, smart mouth, and inability to memorize mystical texts.37

The balance of the classic and the folk hero in SPN, as seen through Sam and Dean, is characteristic of the American folkloristic identity in that the combination of the old and the new are representative of American culture overall. This hybridity of themes and eclecticism of hero forms is indicative of our society’s postmodern take on the hero. Though the nature of the tale is epic, Dean’s story keeps Sam’s grounded in reality, allowing for maintenance of those human qualities which appeal to our culture.

37 Whereas Sam seems to have memorized all of the exorcism they use, Dean still needs to have a print version readily at hand as is shown in episode 3.04 “Sin City” when he fails to recall the basic exorcism beyond the first few lines.
THE ROAD NARRATIVE

Most patterns of the heroic life include a journey of some kind as one of the hero’s major accomplishments.¹ Yet for some heroes the journey itself is the whole story. In these instances what we have is a “road narrative,” a story which uses the main characters’ travel upon the open road as a framing device. The journey in this case serves a different purpose than the journey in a classical hero’s story. It changes the focus of the story and makes it a more introspective one, choosing to explore our society through the more intimate lens of the narrative’s heroes.

The journey in a road narrative often lacks a specific end-goal or destination. Even if one is suggested, it is rarely reached by the end of the story because, as the characters learn, that initially proposed goal is not the real narrative reason for the journey at all. When Jack Kerouac was still in the brainstorming phase of writing *On the Road* he saw that this would be the purpose of his own journey:

“Two guys hitchhiking to California in search of something they don’t really find, and losing themselves on the road, and coming all the way back hopeful of something else.”²

I suggest that road narratives are about family, alienation, and unrequited love. Thus, there are only three possible outcomes. The first is that one hero matures beyond the other’s company and must part from him, though the parting is bittersweet. The second is one leaving the other, effectively abandoning him to his miserable lot in order to move on towards the next conquest. The final possible outcome is perhaps the least tragic; although it includes the deaths of both heroes, at least they go out together.

*Supernatural* (hereafter SPN) has its roots in family. The main characters are brothers, first brought on the road by their father because of what happened to their mother. Sam and Dean

---

¹ Joseph Campbell, Lord Raglan, and Jan deVries, for example, all include a journey in their respective patterns of the heroic life.
often appeal to their familial bond when justifying their actions or trying to persuade the other towards a certain course. Dean is adamant from the first that maintaining his family is the most important goal in his life (with the prime directive being to protect Sammy). They also use this familial tie when explaining the lengths they would go to for each other, “you’re/he’s my brother” being one of the most common explanatory phrases uttered on the show. The truth, however, is that the reasoning runs deeper than that. The bond that Sam and Dean have runs deeper than their fraternal tie. As a result of the lives they lead, they have formed a codependent relationship. While they can survive without one another, they can only truly function at their best when they are together.

SPN is also about alienation in several respects, including alienation from society, alienation between family members, alienation from the Powers that Be (i.e. the authoritarian forces of the narrative), and others. Sam and Dean are in constant search for themselves and where they fit in the universe beyond their “hunting gig.” Dean’s identity issues stem from his constant emulation of their father. Having come to terms with the fact that he spent the first 23 years of his life following his father’s orders without question and serving as a substitute adult within their family long before he ever reached legal age, Dean tries to determine what kind of person he has become and what that means in the grand scheme of things and, more importantly, in relation to Sam.

Finally, SPN is notable for the problematic bond that exists between the brothers. Each, at times, feels as though the other takes him for granted.³ For better or for worse they are partners on their journey and must muddle through somehow. They function best in their roles as

³ In “Shadow” Dean discovers that Sam complained to Meg that his brother ignores his needs and doesn’t consider his opinion. Upon John’s return in Season One, Dean is shown to feel helpless and insignificant when Sam and John are fighting. In the finale, “Devils’ Trap,” Azazel preys on Dean’s fear that his family does not need him the way that he needs them.
men and as hunters when they are together and getting along. Their frustrations and their stubbornness drive them apart – often literally when one of them runs off on their own (like Sam in “Hunted” or Dean in “Time is on My Side.”) After spending nearly their entire lives in close quarters, the brothers understandably harbor some bitter thoughts towards one another. These feelings have been highlighted in certain episodes with Sam’s predilection towards venting about his brother to strangers (Meg when he thought she was a hitchhiker, a psychiatrist he is supposed to be interviewing in “Asylum”) and Dean’s insistence on reminding Sam of his “abandonment” of the family and how Dean was the one charged with holding their family together over the years (for example, in “Everybody Loves a Clown” when Dean reprimands Sam for only obeying their father after he dies).

Family as Identity

American hero narratives often take place on the road. At the heart of every road narrative is a search for identity. The heroes have an initial goal for their trip but in the end the trip becomes one of self-discovery.4 The hero(es) of the American road narrative are products of the westward movement in the U.S., the ideal of “manifest destiny.”5 There is a sense of the characters feeling alienated from those very ideals. The westward movement was supposed to be a means toward the elusive American Dream, a dream the characters have yet to achieve it. Without a tangible sense of what that dream, that ideal life, is, the characters are at a loss as to what makes them who they are. So they hit the road seeking the means to a new identity and a new American Dream.

---

4 The film Y tu mamá también is an example of this in that the boys think they are going on a road trip to a beach with the older woman to sleep with her. In the end, however, the trip forces them to reevaluate their relationship and who they truly are to one another.

5 “Manifest Destiny” according to Webster’s New World Dictionary = “the 19th century doctrine postulating the continued territorial expansion of the U.S. as its obvious destiny […]”
One way this identity is sought is through family. Hero figures are often adrift in the world, lacking any solid, loving, supportive family structure (the hero’s abandonment is suggested by both Lord Raglan and Jan de Vries’ patterns of the heroic life discussed in the previous chapter). If the hero begins the story with a family at all, then that family will be lacking basic familial functions. Family members will be either mostly absent or coldly distant at best, abusive and hateful at worst (once again, I defer to Raglan and de Vries). In the case of SPN we have a mix. Mary, the brothers’ mother, died when Sam was a baby, leaving only their father, John, to raise them. He is secretive (he does not reveal everything he knows about Azazel nor the existence of his storage lock up before his death) and somewhat distant (evidenced by his absence in most flashbacks to the brothers’ childhood). John isn’t abusive but his single-minded focus on hunting and his paranoia made him less than the ideal father for the boys.

Creator Eric Kripke has always maintained that the series is about family (such as in the DVD featurette on Season One in which he explains the show’s origins). In truth, it is about a “non-traditional” family. As the show opens, Sam has been away at university for a couple of years, having run off after a fight with John. Dean shows up to retrieve Sam, with whom he has not spoken since he left, in order to help find their now-missing father. As the series goes on, Sam and Dean must not only try to reconcile themselves with the man who raised them, but they must also become reacquainted with their family as it now stands (the two brothers and “Uncle” Bobby) and learn how to properly function in this modern familial unit. Trust and loyalty

---

6 “Uncle Bobby” is a hunter friend of John Winchester’s who owns an auto salvage yard in South Dakota. He has apparently known the Winchesters since Sam and Dean were kids (enough for a 9-year-old Sam to refer to him as “Uncle”) and recently has begun to act as a surrogate father figure for the boys in the wake of John’s death.
become reoccurring issues as the show goes on with the limits of Sam and Dean’s loyalty to one another versus a more society standard moral code being tested on a regular basis.  

The lengths that Sam and Dean would go to for one another exceed a normal person’s limits. At this point in the series, both brothers have died (Sam in “All Hell Breaks Loose,” Dean in “Mystery Spot” and “No Rest for the Wicked”) or been on the verge of death (particularly incidents like Dean’s heart attack in “Faith” or the car wreck in “Devil’s Trap” and “In My Time of Dying”) more than once, with the survivor doing all in his power to bring his brother back (selling their souls, killing supernatural creatures, utilizing a shady faith healer, and so forth).

As one of the pivotal moments in the Winchester family story, Sam’s departure for Stanford has more than one interpretation within the narrative. In Season One, Sam suggests that the reason he needed to leave was because he felt stifled living under John’s rule (starting with the pilot). This is understandable considering his perpetual position as the last in a 3-person chain of command. On the surface, Dean seems to bear a striking resemblance to John in terms of preferences and priorities. Sam’s leaving could also be interpreted as a symptom of fear. Before Sam is nine, he has no knowledge of what is really going on in his family’s lives. Dean tells Sam that John is a traveling salesman as a way of explaining their transient lifestyle. When Sam discovers the truth he is terrified (“A Very Supernatural Christmas”), though it is implied that he had suspected for awhile before confronting Dean with the contents of their father’s hunting journal. The rest of Sam’s childhood, then, is colored by fear. He didn’t know his mother but he knows that his mother’s death is tied to the monsters that John hunts. Though Dean tries to

7 For example, when Sam (possessed by the demon Meg) goes on a violent, murderous rampage, Dean refuses to shoot his brother to stop him. Although Sam’s body is killing innocent people and causing havoc, it is doing these things because it is controlled by Meg. So for Dean, it is still his brother and Dean refuses to kill him even if it means innocent people are getting hurt or killed. (Meg has used a brand to lock herself in Sam’s body so Dean is unable to perform an exorcism).
convince Sam that their Dad is a superhero\(^8\) – the “best” – it must be hard for Sam to trust a father who is so absent both physically and emotionally.

Sam’s leaving for Stanford, then, could be interpreted as a reactionary move based on fear. He doesn’t see the world the way John sees it. As a former Marine, John was just a normal white picket fence kind of guy before Mary’s death (as seen in “In the Beginning”) and because of his naïveté he was unprepared to protect his family from danger. Therefore, he must hunt the thing that killed his wife and learn how to protect his family from the supernatural in order to keep them all safe. Sam, who does not remember Mary or life before her, sees that his family’s way of life is rife with danger and all of the other families around him don’t have to live in constant fear of attack from the supernatural. So while in John’s opinion his hunter lifestyle is the safest, Sam sees the “civilian” way of life as being much more conducive to his own health and safety and so, in running away to Stanford, he is attempting to run from perceived danger. Both Sam and Dean struggle throughout the show between their loyalty to the family, their loyalty to each other specifically, and their desire to establish their own identities.

*We Know This Road*

A common theme in road narratives is that of the heroes verbally acknowledging the role of the road in their personal stories. The film *My Own Private Idaho* is a road narrative in which two young male hustlers go on a road trip together, starting in Portland, Oregon and moving eastward. The film both begins and ends with River Phoenix’s character, Mike, standing on a road in the middle of nowhere Idaho, talking to himself. “I know this road” he says, reflecting on how no matter where his journey takes him he always seems to end up back on that same road in Idaho. By the end of the film, disheartened by his friend Scott’s leaving him, he decides that the

\(^8\) “A Very Supernatural Christmas”
road – his road – just keeps going on forever and “never stops.” Then he collapses in yet another narcoleptic fit, only to be robbed as he lies in his road before being picked up by his brother and taken back to the trailer. Even in recognizing the futile and circuitous nature of his journey, he is still caught up in the cycle, either to continue just as before or finally self-destruct. Mike is not unique in his awareness of the road and the journey in his story.

In SPN, Sam and Dean also reflect on their time on the road, carrying a heightened awareness of it due to the amount of time they have spent living out of their car. In the first two seasons Sam explains his leaving Stanford abruptly by saying that he’s been on a road trip with his brother. However, when asked how the trip is going he gives a sparse response about how he and Dean have met some “interesting people” and done some “interesting things.”9 The poignancy of his answer is not in the details (which are lacking) but rather in the manner of delivery. Earlier on his answer is given in a sad, stumbling, reluctant manner reflecting Sam’s reluctance about being on the road again and his sadness about the event that led him there. As time progresses his answer becomes more forthright as his bond with Dean tightens and he uses deflective humor as a way of protecting his brother (such as in “The Usual Suspects” when he tells the detective that he and Dean saw the largest ball of twine in the continental U.S.).

In the Season Two episode “Croatoan,” Dean begins to show weariness from their travels. “Yeah, you know, all this driving back and forth across country, you know I've never been to the Grand Canyon?” As the series progresses the Grand Canyon becomes a symbol for the brothers’ desired departure from the “road” they are currently on, often cited as the locale they would go to were they to have the opportunity to choose their own “road” of life. In Season

---

9 Sam gives this answer to the psychiatrist in the episode “Asylum.”
Three when the brothers get trapped inside a haunted house with an amateur ghost hunting crew, Sam snidely references this while speaking to Dean: “‘Let’s go hunt the Morton House,’ you said, ‘it’s our Grand Canyon.’” Even though Dean’s death is imminent and the brothers must remain on their road in lieu of traveling to the Grand Canyon so that Dean may finally see it before he dies, the brothers have decided to cleanse an infamous haunted house – a “bucket list” activity that still counts as work.

The road itself is not the only aspect of the trip that reflects the heroes of a road narrative, however. The mode of travel can also be indicative of more than merely time era and socio-economic status. A vehicle says a lot about its driver and few places is this sentiment more explicit than in the road narrative.

*The Muscle Car Mystique*

The vehicle of choice for an American hero is, naturally, American made. The most common choice is a muscle car, an automobile designed for high performance which serves as a shorthand in American culture for everything the hero himself is supposed to represent. In American hero lore, often the car is more than merely a car but serves as a character in its own right. The car is expected to hold up its end of the narrative just as any human character would. Few vehicles serve this purpose quite as well as muscle cars.

A muscle car isn’t just something the driver owns; it is a reflection of the driver and usually serves within a narrative to highlight the status of the driver. Muscle cars are all about high performance at an affordable price. As a consequence of this affordability and hard-driving

10 The duration of the season is spent waiting out the year until Dean’s contract with the Crossroads Demon comes due and his soul is dragged to Hell.
11 “Bucket list” is the colloquial term for a list of things a person desires to do before they die, or “kick the bucket.”
12 A famous example of this treatment would be the use of the 1969 Dodge Charger in the television series *The Dukes of Hazzard.*
they require a fair amount of maintenance. Due to the attention and care the owner must dedicate to the vehicle, the relationship between man and machine becomes symbiotic. The car will only perform as well as its owner’s maintenance will allow and thus the time spent and the maintenance skills acquired reflect on both the car and the owner. The big, growly beast of an automobile only performs as well as its owner.

In Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (hereafter OtR) Sal and Dean alternate modes of transportation, but their signature vehicle – the only one either of them ever owns – is the maroon 1949 Hudson Super-Six which Dean puts a down payment on and then never finishes paying for. The Hudson, in terms of design, is a precursor to the muscle cars which were still in their primitive beginnings at the end of that decade. In the next couple years after the ’49 Super-Six the first primitive muscle cars, the Oldsmobile Rocket and the Hudson Hornet, would come out and change the image of the American hero forever. Dean Moriarty’s relationship with the Hudson is representative of its status as a proto-muscle car in that a true symbiosis does not form between them. Rather than caring for and maintaining the car the way future American heroes will, Dean merely drives the Hudson into the ground, driving like a bat out of hell, heedless of things like the speedometer breaking. This is a reflection of the way Dean drives himself into the ground, neglecting to take care of his body or his own sanity as he zooms back

---

13 The Hudson of *On the Road* has often been mistakenly referred to as a Hudson Hornet, such as in Paul Maher Jr.’s *Jack Kerouac’s American Journey*. However, the Hornet did not actually exist at the time that Dean Moriarty/Neal Cassady bought the car new in 1949 – it came out in the ’51 model year (Hanc 2007, 1). The Hornet just happens to be a more recognizable name because, as stated on PopularMechanics.com, it was a long-running champion of the early NASCAR circuit.

14 The muscle car would achieve its classic image in the 60s and 70s with such iconic vehicles as Steve McQueen’s 1968 Ford Mustang GT in *Bullitt*, Barry Newman’s 1970 Dodge Challenger in *Vanishing Point*, and Hunter S. Thompson’s 1971 Chevrolet Impala, the “Great Red Shark” of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

15 Just a few examples of muscle cars which are as synonymous with their narratives as the heroes that drive them: the red and white striped 1974 Ford Gran Torino the title characters rode in on the series *Starsky & Hutch*, the powder blue 1966 Ford Thunderbird the title characters drive into the Grand Canyon in *Thelma & Louise*, the black 1973 Dodge Charger Michael reluctantly inherits (and constantly repairs) on the series *Burn Notice*, and “Eleanor” the elusive ’67 Shelby Mustang, Memphis Raines’ personal “unicorn” in *Gone in 60 Seconds*.

16 Later on when they are forced to switch to a travel bureau vehicle his speeding actually does break the speedometer – when he drives 110mph (Kerouac 186).
and forth across the country trying to please everyone and experience everything at once. Dean feels nothing for the car because he feels nothing for himself.

An example of the idealized symbiotic relationship between man and machine is evident in the film *Two-Lane Blacktop*. In this film the Driver and the Mechanic travel across the country (west to east) in a 1957 Chevy that they’ve stripped down to the bare bones in order to make it optimal for racing (a reflection of how they as characters are stripped down, lacking even names to identify them beyond their roles in relation to the car). The characters hardly communicate with one another beyond discussion of the car’s condition and handling; even then the Driver only speaks when he’s not driving and the Mechanic only speaks when he’s not working on the car. Their relationship is expressed through the car as it is a part of them, the part that connects them.

In *SPN*, Dean Winchester’s vehicle of choice is a hand-me-down from his former mechanic father, a 1967 Chevrolet Impala. This big, black beast of a car is from the golden age of muscle cars and serves as not just a mode of conveyance but a sort of home for Sam and Dean. The Impala’s condition also reflects Dean’s physical and emotional state at any given moment. It has had a much longer lifespan than the Hudson because Dean personally works on the car, maintaining its condition and making sure that, no matter how beaten up it gets, it continues to run and serve the family. The Impala is a classic example of the American hero’s vehicle of choice in both its intimidating façade and equally intimidating engine. The car lends itself to a symbiotic relationship with Dean because of the maintenance it requires and because the handling is not as smooth as a new vehicle would be. A muscle car takes on its own personality over time and is best driven by the person who both drives and maintains it because that person will have the best understanding of its needs. However, *SPN* modernizes the muscle
car in a masculine narrative with the use of an automatic transmission. Usually, the American masculine hero’s vehicle is equipped with a manual transmission (the ideal transmission system for attempting stunt driving as it allows the driver more control). This is because the manual transmission requires the hero to frequently make use of the phallic gearshift in order to control the vehicle, allowing him more direct control of the man/muscle car relationship. In the same way that a guitar is a feminine phallic power symbol (phallic in nature, generally given a female name), so also is the hero’s vehicle. The more difficult the car’s handling, the more feminized the language used to refer to it becomes, classifying the vehicle as a “difficult woman.” Thus, the phallic gearshift is used to rein in the difficult female and establish masculine dominance. Dean’s Impala is an automatic transmission, though, so not only does it lack the controlling phallic gearshift but it implies a greater trust and greater equalization of their symbiotic relationship. The automatic transmission gives some feminine control back to the vehicle, reducing the masculine dominance and forcing car and driver into a more equal partnership.

John Winchester used to be a mechanic (from a family of mechanics) and originally purchased the Impala as a family car when he decided to propose to Mary. After Sam leaves for Stanford, John gives the Impala to Dean to drive on his own solo hunts, bequeathing him the mantle of the active hero. As Dean is then the driving force of the narrative, John starts driving a new 1986 GMC Sierra Grande pickup truck (which can be seen in “Dead Man’s Blood” and “Salvation”), which doesn’t require the same maintenance as the Impala. Once the car becomes Dean’s it also becomes a reflection of him. Dean has inherited John’s skills as a mechanic and he takes the car’s condition very seriously. At the end of the Season One finale, “Devil’s Trap,”

---

17 B.B. King is known for naming each of his guitars Lucille. Jimi Hendrix once had a Silvertone Danelectro guitar named “Betty Jean” (Cross 2005, 73-74). The cars in Gone in 60 Seconds are all given women’s names like “Eleanor” for the ’67 Shelby Mustang and “Sharon” for the ’65 Pontiac GTO (these are codenames the characters use so the police do not know what they are discussing on their radios). Dean calls the Impala “baby.”
Dean is in horrible condition having almost been killed by John (who was possessed by Azazel at the time). He has bled out a lot and is on the verge of death when the Impala, with all three Winchester men inside, is hit by a semi. In the Season Two premiere, “In My Time of Dying,” Dean is in a coma and the car has been totaled. However, John sells his soul to revive Dean and in the next episode, “Everybody Loves a Clown,” we see him working to rebuild the car, and the frame is already looking better. However, when Sam begs Dean to confront his feelings about their father’s untimely demise, Dean snaps and takes a crowbar to the Impala, beating on it and leaving significant dents in the trunk. Although Dean eventually restores the car, this sort of damage is the kind of thing that always lingers. When you rebuild a car you can pull out the dents and cover the holes and scratches but underneath the shiny black paint job you will always know that it is being held together with patches, spare parts, and bondo.18 Similarly, Dean has seemingly been restored when we see the car again in “Children Shouldn’t Play with Dead Things,” but we soon see that it, much like the Impala’s paint job, is a façade and that beneath the surface of a more or less healthy body is a severely damaged psyche. In this particular episode the brothers are hunting a zombie (made from a recently deceased college student). Dean is already angry and frustrated by John selling his soul for him and the thought of someone else bringing a loved one back to life when they should have stayed dead enrages him. “What’s dead should stay dead,” he insists to Sam, revealing that the source of his anger is that he doesn’t feel as though John going to hell was worth him coming out of his coma. He behaves especially violently towards the suspects in the case and Sam notes that his brother is psychologically “hanging by a thread.”

---

18 Bondo is a putty-like bonding agent used in bodywork on automotive vehicles which can be applied, hardened, and then sanded down to smooth over dents and scratches.
The second instance in which the symbiotic relationship between Dean and the Impala is most evident is the Season Three finale, “No Rest for the Wicked,” in which the brothers are driving off to find Lilith to try and destroy her for good. As they are speeding down the road we can see that the taillight on Dean’s side of the car is out, signifying that he is on the verge of being taken by the hellhounds. The light being out on Dean’s side gives a police officer possessed by a demon the opportunity to pull the brothers over to slow them down. However, as Dean is so close to the deadline before his soul is taken he can now see demons inside possessed bodies and is able to kill the demon before it tries anything. Though the audience does not know until after this that Dean can see the demons’ true forms the Impala still reflects it because of its symbiotic relationship with Dean.

*Winchesters in the Wild, Wild West*

As might be evident from the brothers’ last name, SPN is rife with imagery indicative of the Old West of America. Their last name, “Winchester,” is the brand name of the rifle said to have “won the west” (a phrase which has since become a slogan for the rifle company) and is the first thing on the series that indicates a connection between the Winchesters and their western outlaw forebears. The Old West heroes were early American folk heroes that came before the dual-heroes of the more recent road narratives. Men like Jesse James and Billy the Kid functioned outside of mainstream society like the heroes of the road narratives and though they

---

19 At the end of season two Sam is taken away by Azazel to compete for supremacy against other “psychic kids” that Azazel fed demon blood in their infancy in an effort to give them demonic powers to create a super soldier. Sam is stabbed to death by one of the other competitors and Dean makes a deal with the crossroads demon to sell his soul in one year’s time to bring Sam back to life. Season three’s major arc consists of Dean having only one year left to live and Sam trying to prevent him from being sent to Hell.

20 As this is his last day before the deadline is up at this point Dean can hear the hellhounds and can see demons as they truly are inside the bodies they possess. Bobby refers to it as Dean being in a liminal phase, partway to hell already but not there yet – “glancing the b-side.”

21 In “The Benders” Officer Hudak asks Dean for Sam’s last name and when he tells her she responds “Like the rifle?” This is the only instance in which the Old West imagery is directly acknowledged by the characters beyond the Colt’s origin story.
were often criminals there was a sense of them in the public mind as “lovable hustlers,” free spirits who were exerting their independence in a mainly lawless Old West.

Sam and Dean are also criminals and lovable hustlers whom the audience celebrates despite the fact that they regularly break laws – from squatting in houses to posing as government agents to credit card fraud. We forgive these lawless acts because as the audience we get to see all of the good work they do saving peoples’ lives and it allows us to overlook their criminal activities as merely “petty” or as necessities for what they do. Something SPN does differently than most narratives of its ilk, however, is to remind the audience what the main characters’ activities look like from outside their biased perspective. When Sam and Dean encounter with law enforcement officials in Season One it is mostly comical and serves as an opportunity to show off the brothers’ cleverness in escaping. However, in Season Two this is turned on its head in “Nightshifter.” In this episode we are introduced to Special Agent Victor Henricksen, the FBI agent assigned to their case. Henricksen is a descendant of the sheriffs in the Old West outlaw tales. He is like Lefors of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, a nemesis on the side of the law who will stop at nothing to track down the heroes, a figure whom the heroes cannot ever defeat but must constantly run from, emphasizing their outlaw status. On SPN Henricksen serves another purpose – to remind the audience that were we not watching the story from the brothers’ perspective we would have a very different image of them. Henricksen has been watching the Winchester family for awhile and has a very different psychological profile worked up in which the brothers (and their father) are a family of serial killers, two boys raised by an insane paramilitary survivalist father to kill according to the rules he’s outlined. He refers to Sam as the “Bonnie” to Dean’s “Clyde,” making a sarcastic reference to the brothers’ outlaw forebears. As a federal agent he wouldn’t see Bonnie & Clyde as heroic anymore than he would
see Sam and Dean that way. In “Jus en Bello,” Henricksen takes things a step further when he tells the brothers that in his profile of the family (following standard thinking on serial killers) he assumed that John had molested Dean and that Dean had in turn molested Sam as a method of control and maintaining the chain of command. Though Henricksen’s comments seem extreme to the audience who has been following Sam and Dean’s side of the story and has thus been won over to their methodology, the truth is that his profile of the Winchesters is realistic to an outsider perspective. Even as we are given the Old Western ties the show still maintains a level of realism, reminding the audience not to lose perspective about our outlaw heroes.

Aside from their name, their outlaw status, and their lawman nemesis, there are other elements in the show that link the Winchester brothers to the Old West American hero past. Sam shares a birthday with Samuel Colt, the Old West gun maker and designer of the Colt, a sort of ultimate weapon introduced near the end of Season One. The Colt, it is said, was specially made in 1835 for a “hunter on horseback” on the same night when Halley’s Comet flew overhead and the Battle of the Alamo occurred (“Dean Man’s Blood”). It is a modified version of Colt’s 1836 Texas Paterson. Along with the Colt, the brothers’ arsenal mostly consists of other firearms such as Colts, Winchesters, and Berettas. Their signature weapons are their shotguns, which they load with rounds packed with rock salt to repel vengeful spirits and slow down other supernatural entities. Salt is a purifying agent, which is why the brothers also have a tendency to line doorways and windows with salt to keep out anything dangerous. The brothers could very easily just carry around salt to throw at spirits but they use the modified shotgun

---

22 On the show the Colt is believed to be able to kill anything – not just kill but completely destroy. In the first two seasons we are told that Samuel Colt only ever made 13 custom bullets for the gun and once they run out the gun is useless. The usage of the remaining bullets thus functions as a countdown to the final showdown with Azazel. However, in Season Three Bobby, with the help of a witch-turned-demon, reconstructs the gun and devises a way to make new bullets for it, thus removing the limit of its use on the series.

23 As stated in the *Supernatural Season One Companion*.

24 The Berettas can also serve as a reference to the TV series *Baretta* starring Robert Blake as a plainclothes police officer with “unorthodox” methods who happened to drive a 1966 Chevy Impala sedan.
rounds instead, a conscious decision on the part of the writers to create a more “badass” image for the brothers. After all, what is a hero without his phallic power symbol?

The brothers’ birthplace of Lawrence, Kansas is also significant. It was chosen for its proximity to an old haunted cowboy cemetery sometimes referred to as a “gateway to hell.” It is also in a part of the country that was thought of as western before the western expansion was completed. Thus, an Old West location becomes the brothers’ eastern starting point for their journey. Paralleling the movement of the country’s population, Sam and Dean initially move westward (where things go wrong) and end up turning back eastward, seeking an end to their miseries (and returning to Lawrence twice to see where it all began).

Finally, the Impala itself can be interpreted as a symbol of the Old West. “Impala” is a type of wild horse, indicative of the western hero’s “trusty steed.” Despite the realism the writers attempt to inject into the series via Henricksen, one area in which they are willing to bend the rules is the Impala. Despite the fact that it has long since become impractical for the brothers to keep such a memorable car (swapped license plates or no), the Impala lives on in the narrative as Dean’s trusty steed. He has bonded with the car in the same way a western hero might have bonded with his favorite horse, referring to it as his “baby” and only seldom allowing Sam to drive. The Impala in many ways is the third main character on the series, as much a member of the Winchester clan as Sam and Dean, and has been with the family since the very beginning.

This continual use of Old West imagery on the series is a way of linking the brothers’ narrative back to their folk hero forebears. By referencing the Old West and the outlaw figures that populated it the writers are acknowledging the brothers’ cultural roots. They are also making

---

25 This would be Stull Cemetery (as stated by Eric Kripke in The Supernatural Season One Companion, page 11).
26 In the pilot we see John huddled on the hood of the Impala with Sam and Dean as their house in Lawrence burns. In “In the Beginning” we get to see a young John Winchester shopping for a family vehicle and, with the prompting of Dean who has traveled back in time, he ultimately chooses the Impala over the VW van Mary had suggested.
more explicit the brothers’ status as updated versions of these older American hero figures.

Though Sam and Dean share much in common with these characters, they are reflective of 21st century masculinity in their interpretation of the American hero.

*I Love You like a Brother*

In the DVD commentary for the episode “What Is and What Should Never Be,” Eric Kripke acknowledges the portion of the SPN audience commonly known as “Wincesters” – those who read a homoerotic subtext into the relationship between Sam and Dean. He theorizes that he should have recognized the inevitability of this “slash” reading since the only two main characters on the series are male. Though he does not explicitly state it, one can infer that he eventually decided to make the characters brothers partially as a way of avoiding this potential reading of the series. What he did not take into account, however, was the very nature of the narrative itself. Homoerotic subtext is a major component of the dual-hero road narrative and cannot be avoided through the mere addition of a potential social taboo (incest, in this case) since the subtext itself is based in taboo. What he then succeeded in doing was to literalize the preexisting fraternal bond between the dual hero figures within the road narrative.

It would seem that one of the most significant and common characteristics of the American masculine narrative is what I call the “brother-lovers” relationship form. This term is misleading as it is not actually referring to lovers but rather a strong, platonic, fraternal bond. It encompasses a specific type of close homosocial male relationship within a masculine narrative in which the high degree of intimacy – both physical and emotional – between the characters is excused due to the characters’ status as being “like brothers,” or simply excusing the behavior by saying it is because “he’s/you’re my brother.” The implication is that the closest platonic,
masculine, homosocial, hetero-normative relationship that can possibly exist between two men is a fraternal one.

Within a masculine narrative, therefore, the term “brothers” has more than one meaning. There is the legal definition which indicates a relationship based on blood or marital ties and then there is the relational definition which indicates a strong emotional bond between two or more male characters. One form of masculine narrative which most commonly highlights the brother-lovers relationship is the war narrative. The war narrative is a homosocial one by default as war zones are traditionally male-only environments. Between this and the exaggerated sense of life and death brought on by the battlefield environment, the brother-lovers relationship is a common one. The unique and terrifying nature of the men’s experiences combined with the necessity of loyalty and functioning as a group lends itself to strong, fraternal bonds aided by a common understanding that are rarely found outside of this environment. Sam and Dean’s story can be categorized as a road narrative but it also carries these war narrative characteristics due to their unique occupational hazards and their removal from standard society into an isolated bubble containing an alternate social form.

That is not to say that the brother-lovers relationship cannot be found within the standard road narrative, as well. Though the death-defying aspect is commonly absent from road narratives, the sharing of unique experiences remains, as well as the removal from standard society is needed to drive these characters to a higher level of mutual understanding. In both narratives, the alternate social form in which the characters exist creates a new set of rules and

---

27 This relational definition of “brothers” is especially highlighted in the HBO war narrative Band of Brothers which focuses on the exploits and camaraderie of military unit Easy Company during WWII and explicitly uses the “brothers” euphemism within the title.

28 The war narrative connection is also made apparent by various references to John Winchester’s background in the Marines, as well as Sam’s complaints in the pilot that their father raised them “like warriors” rather than normal kids.
hierarchies which must be obeyed in order to maintain this alternative status quo. The claustraphobic nature of this social bubble removes the traditional panopticon of society and allows a greater degree of intimacy between male characters due to the removal of mainstream disapproval and homophobic thinking.

I suggest that modern American male homosocial intimacy can best be described in terms of the “bro-hug.” Bro-hugs are a reaction against the late modern fear of physical intimacy in male homosocial relationships. Homophobia and social identification of emotional intimacy as feminine in nature led to a fear of being seen as emasculated. As John Ibson indicates in his book on American men in photography, *Picturing Men*, a greater degree of intimacy and gender play have been commonplace within homosocial male relationships, historically. However, starting with the 1950s conservatism and increasing in the wake of the feminist and queer movements, everyday physical intimacy between men came to be perceived as emasculating and became a frowned-upon social habit. Bro-hugs are a reaction against this conservatism and fear of emasculation as they serve the purpose of allowing intimacy without the behavior being seen as “feminine” in nature. Not only does the common vernacular use the qualifier “bro” to differentiate the form of embrace, but the actual physical movement is often carefully choreographed so as to allow for simultaneous intimacy and distance. Generally, the embrace will be brief and often accompanied by a back or shoulder slap, the rougher touch meant to de-feminize the perceived “softness” of the embrace. It is also common for the two men to use only one arm or even embrace with one arm while clasping their other hands together between them to create an extra level of distance. The three important factors in the “de-feminization” are the

29 “Bro,” “man,” and “manfully” are commonly used as prefixes, adverbs, or adjectives within American colloquial language as a way of designating a term as being specifically masculine, especially in contrast to the assumed femininity of the original term. For example, women may “weep” or “cry,” but men shed a “single manly tear” or “angst manfully.”
brief duration, the distance, and the perceived casual nature of the embrace. Full, prolonged embraces are commonly only seen between men within the masculine narrative if they follow a long separation and/or a near-death (or, in the case of SPN, total-death) experience. The extreme nature of the situation allows what would otherwise be seen as an unacceptable level of intimacy for everyday relations. In 63 episodes Sam and Dean have fully embraced a total of three times, each occurring after one of the brothers died.30

While the minimal number of full embraces appears to not differentiate SPN from other masculine narratives, the show displays its modernization of the narrative through alternate forms of intimacy. Full-body contact would seemingly be the indicator of a greater degree of intimacy. However, just as “Americans confuse orgasms and intimacy” (according to Ibson), so do we misleadingly conflate amount of surface area contact with intimacy. Arguably, the repeated instances of alternate bodily contact between Sam and Dean are more indicative of their brother-lovers relationship than the three full embraces. During intense moments or sometimes just after a fight, the brothers often touch foreheads or one will grasp the other’s face to serve as a punctuation mark, pausing the action for a beat. Often seen within war narratives when one soldier will grasp another by the helmet, this move serves the purpose of one male character drawing the other’s focus, either due to the urgency or the intimacy of the moment.

In the example of Dean grasping Sam’s face in the episode “Hunted,” the contact is distinctly set apart from the more perfunctory contact of a moment before in which Dean checks Sam’s body for injury. The injury check is quick and efficient, just a brief stabilizing touch and visual scan to determine that immediate concern is not warranted. The face-grasp, however, is

30 In “All Hell Breaks Loose,” Dean embraces Sam when the latter is fatally stabbed and dying. In “Mystery Spot,” Sam embraces Dean after watching his brother die repeatedly within a time loop and then experiencing six months with him completely dead before the Trickster restarts the timeline. In “Lazarus Rising” the brothers embrace once Dean is resurrected after having been dead for four months.
slightly more prolonged and seems to be meant to determine emotional stability and establish for both men that they have been reunited satisfactorily. The touch combined with intense if brief eye contact is arguably more indicative of the intimacy of the relationship, as it is both unflinching and commonplace within the narrative. In fact, an increased amount of eye contact is an important part of Sam and Dean’s relationship as spoken conversations are often discarded in favor of nonverbal communication. The two men commonly converse using eye contact, facial expressions, and shrugs when they are around other people, especially anyone other than John or Bobby. They also occasionally invoke their militaristic training during hunts by communicating via the standardized hand signals for C.R.E. operations. However, the C.R.E. signals serve a separate purpose from the other nonverbal communication as they are solely intended to prevent the supernatural entity from discovering their location. The “silent conversations” amongst strangers streamline discussions, allow a greater degree of honesty between the two men, and also maintain the bubble of social separation. Whereas the C.R.E. signals are standardized outside of their experience, the looks, expressions, and shrugs are not standardized and are therefore representative of a shared understanding derived from an emotionally intimate relationship.

With this greater degree of intimacy between two male characters, the presence of the “Wincesters” within the show’s audience is understandable. The same social perceptions that have led to the lack of physical and emotional intimacy between men also encourage a queer reading of any text in which male intimacy is present – in this case regardless of additional incestuous connotations. At first glance, the sheer number of Wincesters within the fandom for SPN may seem alarming as it could be perceived as a large number of proponents of incest.

31 C.R.E. = “Close Range Engagement.” This system of hand and arm signals is standardized within military and S.W.A.T. units as a way of communicating without giving away one’s position within the combat zone. One can assume that John was familiar with this system from his time in the Marines and taught it to his sons.
However, the numbers and the ease with which viewers move towards this interpretation have nothing to do with acceptance of a sexual taboo and everything to do with the nature of the masculine narrative and our own hetero-normative society.

*Gender-bending Horror*

SPN is not just a road narrative with war narrative elements; it is also a horror narrative. Each episode is intended to function as a miniature horror film and, in fact, Kripke got his start in horror. The inclusion of this genre adds a gender-bending dimension to Sam and Dean as heroes, one which commonly manifests itself in moments of distress. Though Dean is the active hero in control of the narrative while Sam is the passive hero who lets the narrative happen to him, they both also take turns being the damsel in distress. In any given episode, if one brother is imperiled, temporarily taking the role of the damsel, then the other brother temporarily becomes his hero. These roles are frequently swapped, with the pivotal moment of one episode making Dean the damsel only for the next episode’s climax to have Sam as the damsel. Though other characters might also be imperiled within a given scene, the brothers will always save each other first before attending to outsiders as the brother in the damsel-positioning takes top priority.

I use the term “damsel” specifically to highlight the feminized nature of their positioning. This is a common practice in horror narratives, an example of which can be seen in the film *Joy Ride 2*. There are two female and two male protagonists in the film, 20-somethings who are hunted down by a deranged, murderous, symbolically impotent (his name is “Rusty Nail”) semi driver. When the main female protagonist is in the damsel position she is forced to strip down to

---

32 Kripke was the writer of *Boogeyman*, a film so bad that he mocks it in the episode “Hollywood Babylon.”
33 For example, in “Scarecrow” Dean and a local girl are both trussed up against trees for sacrifice to the eponymous scarecrow. When Sam rushes in to save the day he goes to Dean first without a second glance at the girl, untying his brother and clutching him to reestablish their connection before either of them thinks to untie the equally imperiled girl.
her underwear and put herself on display. When the main male protagonist is in the damsel position he is symbolically castrated by having his ring finger cut off. When the secondary male protagonist is the damsel he is first forced to dress in drag as a prostitute. Characters are feminized when they take on the damsel role.

More often than not on SPN, the imperiled brother will be trussed up in some fetishistic form of bondage, spread out for the audience’s scopophilic pleasure, an emphasis on display of the chest and neck. Sam, in particular, is almost never bound (either by physical restraints or demonic powers) without his head pulled back to display his neck. When Sam is attacked by the person or entity-of-the-week, more often than not he is choked in some way. This eroticized asphyxiation of his character emphasizes the fetishistic display of his neck and gives the audience a sexual power over his character in his damsel phase.

The damage that Dean sustains as a damsel, on the other hand, is symbolically tied into his role as the Dionysian figure. Dean is more often subjected to being cut, torn, rent, or made to bleed in some way. This harkens back to the practice of sparagmos in Dionysian lore. Sparagmos is the ritualistic tearing asunder of a young male by the Maenads, followers of Dionysus. In “Devil’s Trap,” Dean is pinned and spread out against a wall by the demon Azazel, who has possessed John. As the demon threatens Dean he moves in close and delivers several of his lines by whispering in Dean’s ear. Then he proceeds to tear Dean from the inside out, causing him to bleed from the chest and mouth before Sam saves him. In “No Rest for the Wicked” the Dionysian connection is even more obvious. Dean is spread-eagled on a table, pinned down by the demon Lilith’s powers and displayed in a sexualized manner once again, his crotch facing the viewing audience. Lilith lets her hellhounds into the room as Dean’s year has run out and the hounds tear Dean to pieces in grotesque, gory detail.

34 Classical Mythology: Images & Insights, p.1066
In “Mystery Spot,” the Trickster puts Sam into a “time loop” in which he must relieve the same Tuesday over and over, each time ending in Dean’s death (although the method of death changes, keeping Sam from preventing it). Eventually, Sam catches on to the Trickster’s ruse and confronts him, only to have Dean get killed on Wednesday without the time loop restarting. Sam spends the next six months hunting the Trickster and they finally have a showdown in which the Trickster concedes defeat because he says that Sam has become “Travis Bickle in a skirt.” By calling Sam “Travis Bickle in a skirt,” the Trickster compares him to a feminized version of Robert DeNiro’s murderous would-be savior of Jodi Foster’s underage prostitute in the film *Taxi Driver*, thereby suggesting that in this instance Sam is confused between hero and damsel roles as his desire to save Dean has brought forth his own need to be saved. Though it would seem as though Dean should be the damsel this time, the truth is that Sam is the one targeted by the Trickster, who is attempting to make Sam understand the futility of trying to save Dean from Hell. Sam’s emotional distress places him as the damsel this time and this positioning conflicts with his need to save his brother, disorienting him even more than the time loop.

This constant trading of hero and damsel roles combined with the highly sexualized nature of the brother who is in the damsel position at the moment is not only reminiscent of the gender-bending nature of the horror narrative but is also a necessity of the dual-hero narrative. Sam and Dean, as discussed in Chapter One, are two different hero types which have been combined within a single narrative. As a result of this, certain tradeoffs must be made their two different heroic arcs can function as a single narrative.

“In the Beginning” There Was Mary

A difficulty in the nature of a masculine narrative lies in its very nature; it is masculine. The representation of feminine characters is generally less than the quantity of masculine
characters. Additionally, the greater emphasis of the narrative is placed on the masculine characters, making it easy to assume that the lack of emphasis on the feminine would equal a thoughtless misrepresentation of femininity. This question of representation opens something like SPN up to harsh scrutiny from feminist consumers of the text. Debates are regularly waged within the series’ fandom and Fandom in general about SPN’s nature as a masculine narrative, with some feminists seeing its status as a masculine narrative as a detriment to feminine representation in popular culture as a whole.  

35 However, one should not be misled by initial appearances. Gender has come a long way since SPN’s forebears first entered American popular culture and the series reflects the overall culture’s changing sentiments. One of the ways in which SPN has revitalized the masculine narrative has been through the variety of its female characters. The female characters on SPN are not all plot devices, nor are they completely vilified. Rather, they run the gamut of character types and the presence and amount of power of the individual female characters varies from woman to woman. In this way, SPN maintains its status as a masculine narrative without destroying all modern feminist thinking.

Gender-segregation becomes especially apparent within the homosocial nature of the masculine narrative. In bringing the main male friendship of the dual heroes to the fore, the female characters can often seem relegated to the background. This is regardless of their actual representation within the narrative because with the emphasis placed on Sam and Dean it is easy to assume that anyone else is a background character (rather than a character who is not “main” but still integral to the narrative). Masculine narratives that place their heroes outside of the mainstream of society force their characters together into a fraternal bond. They are brought together via their alienation, the ultimate “us” versus “them” scenario, one especially common in

35 A quick spin through forums like those on TelevisionWithoutPity.com or Supernatural.tv will show many debates regarding the treatment of just about female character on the series.
road or warfare-based narratives. Since the heroes’ experiences are so unique to their individual narrative, they are only truly able to relate to each other and this pushes outsiders, including female figures, to the background. It is a fallacy, however, to suggest that a narrative can only be truly equal in representation if the main cast is all-inclusive.

There are several prominent female characters within SPN who, though lacking main cast billing, have left their mark on the narrative. Four female characters who have significant power within the narrative are Mary Winchester, the demons Meg and Lilith, and the reaper Tessa. Mary is the most significant in terms of modernizing the male narrative in that she is not only a fully-developed character but also the root of the narrative. For the first three seasons of the show, we know Mary only as the traditional sacrificial female. Her character at this point seemingly serves as a plot device rather than as a fully-developed female figure, compelling the Winchesters to take their initial journey and providing angst and tension for the three Winchester men. Mary’s murder by the “Yellow-Eyed Demon” (later revealed as Azazel), the subsequent fire, and John handing the infant Sam to Dean as his new responsibility are initially seen as the narrative’s starting point. Mary at this point is apparently nothing more than a sacred mother to be revered and a burning body on a ceiling to be pitied, never even seen in clothing other than the pure white nightgown she wore on the night Azazel pinned her to the ceiling and set her.

36 For example, in the Vietnam film *Full Metal Jacket* the soldiers, men who might not give each other the time of day outside of a warzone, are brought together by their roles as soldiers, the life and death scenario they have been flung into, the alienation they feel from the hollow motivations to fight they are given by their government, and the feelings of resentment they sense from the Vietnamese. Alternately, in the road narrative *My Own Private Idaho*, the characters are brought together through their shared experiences of life on the streets and their ability to protect one another from the law enforcement figures that would punish them for trying to get by.

37 The “sacrificial female” that I am referring to is a woman close to the hero (a friend or relative) who is killed off in the middle of the story for the purpose of giving the hero something to angst about or else at the beginning of the story (sometimes before the narrative actually commences) to give the hero a reason to set out to become a hero. She exists as a plot device and is only important insofar as motivating the hero. Comics writer and critic Gail Simone rails against this use of female characters in her famous “Women in Refrigerators” dissection of gender in comic books.

38 The “pure white nightgown” serves as a false visual cue, suggesting Mary’s innocence to the audience though it is later revealed that she knows more than the other Winchesters at the time of her death.
ablaze. However, SPN turns this trope on its head by bringing Mary back in the third episode of Season Four, “In the Beginning,” and with the use of time-travel developing her character from a mere plot device into a fully-fleshed person in her own right. In the course of a single episode Mary goes from being the sacrificial female to being the very root of the narrative, the strong female figure from whom the masculine narrative was born. This big reveal in a single episode strengthens the importance of references to Mary’s character and what initially seemed less significant beyond character building for the male figures has proven to be a slow-build to establishing a strong feminine presence within the series.

“In the Beginning” reveals that while John did not become a hunter until he was compelled by Mary’s death, Mary’s family – the Campbells – was a family of hunters established in Lawrence, though unknown to the residents (including John). Except for the hunting, Mary was raised in a rather traditional household, which is a far cry from the childhood that her sons would experience. She was a cheerleader, she had friends, she had a mother and a father, and she even was allowed to date. Over the course of the episode we learn that Mary, a strong-willed and independent young woman, plans to rebel against her parents (her father in particular) by rejecting the hunting lifestyle and establishing a new family with John, of whom her father does not approve. John thinks her father disapproves because he is a mechanic but the truth is that Samuel Campbell disapproves because John is a mere “civilian.”

Mary’s plans for her new family are derailed when Azazel shows up and kills both of her parents and John on the night John intended to propose. She ends up making a deal with the demon; he’ll revive only John in return for Mary’s promise to grant Azazel a favor in ten years’ time. Mary forgets this deal, walks into the nursery while Azazel is feeding his own blood to

39 Mary’s parents, Samuel and Deanna Campbell, are Sam and Dean’s namesakes within the narrative.
40 The irony of Samuel Campbell’s observation lies in the fact that at this point in the series John has returned from service as a Marine Corps rifleman in Vietnam, hardly what would normally be considered a “civilian.”
Sam, and is killed for interfering. When Mary makes the deal Azazel has possessed her father and so instead of rebelling against her father’s lifestyle she is forced to kiss him to seal the demonic deal and, unbeknownst to her, seal her family’s future as hunters. It is this deal that Mary makes which leads Azazel to be in Sam’s nursery the night of November 2, 1983 and sets in motion the course of the entire series. Through this we see that had Mary herself not been a hunter, the show as it is would not exist.

One of the benefits of this reveal of Mary’s past and her role as a hunter is that it enhances her role in the events of the Season One episode “Home.” In this episode, Sam and Dean have traveled back to Lawrence for the first time since the fire in order to extract a particularly nasty poltergeist from their old house and save the family currently living there. They know from the psychic Missouri Mosely that there is another spirit in the house but they are unsure as to its nature. The episode is devised to parallel the events of November 2, 1983, including Sam handing her baby brother to the little girl of the family and telling her to get out of the house in the same manner of John and Dean in the pilot. Just when Sam and Dean believe the house is cleansed of evil, the evil spirit attacks and it seems as though the brothers are done for when the second spirit – revealed to be Mary’s ghost – appears, swathed in flames. It seems since “real evil” had been in the house it made it easier for nasty things to get in. Mary’s spirit which had lingered behind in the house had been attempting to guard the family from the evil entities – remaining a hunter even in death. When her sons are on the verge of being killed, Mary’s spirit arrives to take on the poltergeist, apologizing to Sam before sacrificing herself to destroy the poltergeist. Rather than just remaining a memory to provide angst, in “Home” Mary gets to be active even in death.

41 Kissing instead of a handshake is a standard method of sealing a deal with a demon on the show.
In Meg Masters, also introduced in Season One, we have another rebellious daughter figure, this time on the antagonistic side of the narrative. Meg is the name used to address the demonic daughter of Azazel (Meg Masters being the name of the college student she has possessed). Meg is originally ordered by her father to help carry out his plans in regards to the “special children,”42 both serving as hitman and posing as a person for Sam to relate to as a way of driving a wedge between him and Dean. She proceeds to kill off various people including some of John’s contacts and even kidnaps John for a short time so that Azazel can possess him and trap the brothers. After the brothers exorcise her, however, her motivations change and, in distinction to Mary who became a protective figure, Meg becomes a vengeful figure. She comes back in “Born under a Bad Sign” to exact revenge on Sam and Dean, now heedless of her father’s plans. She symbolically rapes Sam by possessing him, a horrific experience which in SPN means he is aware of what his body is doing without the power to control it. Demons are known to “ride” a body “hard,” meaning they abuse the body to the point where often once the demon has been exorcised the person dies without the demon’s powers to sustain it. Meg uses Sam’s body to carry out a spree of murder and mayhem (including killing a hunter), mentally and eventually physically torturing Dean by perverting his more innocent image of his younger brother and pushing the very limits of their bond. She even comes close to literally raping Jo, a bartender and sometimes hunter the brothers know, but Dean (who at this point is not entirely certain Sam is possessed) cannot bring himself to kill his brother. When it becomes clear that her plan to get Dean to kill his brother isn’t working, Meg reveals who she really is and proceeds to

42 The “special children” or “psychic kids” are children who, like Sam, were fed demonic blood as infants and are now manifesting different powers (mind control, telekinesis, visions, etc).
inflict as much physical and emotional pain on Dean as she can manage before Bobby breaks the seal that she used to lock herself in Sam’s body.\textsuperscript{43}

Meg’s character is counterbalanced by Tom, her demonic brother and fellow offspring of Azazel. Tom, in comparison to Meg, is a blank character. He appears in just two episodes, only showing up to help in the capture and use of John as bait after Meg has done all of the other work in their father’s plans. While Meg has a lot of dialog in her scenes, often using her time to torment or taunt the Winchesters, Tom has only one line and is eventually destroyed when Dean shoots him in the head with the Colt in “Devil’s Trap.” His character’s name is never even mentioned onscreen, only in casting sides for the episode.

Though when the series opens it seems as though the “big bad” of all the villains is Azazel, we learn in Season Three that there is a greater threat lurking, the demon known as Lilith.\textsuperscript{44} She prefers to possess little girls’ bodies although she temporarily possesses a grown woman in order to trick the brothers.\textsuperscript{45} Lilith, it seems, is the demon most actively seeking Sam’s death now that he is the last remaining “special child” and quite possibly the anti-Christ. She also holds all of the soul contracts made by the Crossroads Demon\textsuperscript{46} and so when Sam interrogates the crossroads demon he discovers that the only way to save Dean would be to destroy Lilith. In Season Four, even after Dean is pulled from Hell, Sam’s main focus remains destroying Lilith. In addition, Castiel (the angel who pulled Dean from Hell) explains that Lilith is breaking the 66 seals which will bring forth the apocalypse and that the brothers must help stop this.\textsuperscript{47} Although

\textsuperscript{43} In the wake of this episode, the Winchester brothers wise up and eventually get matching tattoos above their hearts intended to safeguard them from being possessed.
\textsuperscript{44} Dean kills Azazel with the Colt and the last of the original bullets in the finale of Season Two.
\textsuperscript{45} This last possession occurs in the Season Three finale, “No Rest for the Wicked,” after we have already seen Lilith in the form of two different little girls.
\textsuperscript{46} The demon who makes deals for people’s souls and brought Sam back to life in exchange for Dean’s.
\textsuperscript{47} Although, truth be told, at this writing Castiel has yet to explain how the brothers are supposed to do this.
Mary’s deal with the male Azazel that forms the root of the narrative, it is the machinations of the female Lilith that affect the brothers’ fate now.

Finally, in the neutral middle we have Dean’s reaper, Tessa. When Dean is in his coma during “In My Time of Dying,” the reaper who comes to collect him takes the form of a short brunette woman named Tessa. As opposed to the silent, menacing reaper of “Faith,” Tessa is a calm, understanding woman who comforts Dean while she explains to him that it is his “time” and that lingering on Earth would only lead to him becoming one of the very spirits he hunts (since spirits left behind mentally disintegrate and eventually become violent). She is very powerful and has the ability to bend Dean’s perception in order to make him comfortable with her presence. She initially makes Dean think she is a woman who is also in a coma in the hospital who comes to accept her approaching death. When Dean realizes that she is a reaper she uses logic and reason to appeal to Dean and encourage him to accept his death. Dean is just about ready to accept his death and follow Tessa when Azazel temporarily possesses her and pulls Dean out of his coma. Though Dean doesn’t remember the encounter, Tessa’s words nevertheless have a lasting effect on him. Whereas in “In My Time of Dying” Dean feels as though he cannot die because he needs to be around to protect his brother and help his father, once he sells his soul for Sam in “All Hell Breaks Loose” he is less concerned about dying and leaving Sam behind. It is only when the realization hits that he’ll be in Hell once his year is up that Dean starts to show fear of death again, and in truth it is not really a fear of death but a fear of Hell.

48 Tessa’s appearance and demeanor are inspired by the character Death in Neil Gaiman’s Sandman comic series (as stated by Eric Kripke in the Supernatural: The Complete Second Season DVD featurette “The Devil’s Road Map”).
49 Unbeknownst to the brothers at this point, John has met with Azazel in the hospital basement and made a deal to trade his own soul in order to save Dean’s life.
Though these feminine figures are not considered “main” characters on the series, their presence is nevertheless significant and each has a great deal of power within the narrative. The story is a masculine one with male heroes, yet the feminine is never wholly regarded as unimportant or completely powerless. This more even-handed approach to gender is reflexive of the revitalized masculine narrative which is in turn reflexive of changes in American society’s perceptions of gender.

‘Supernatural’ and Generic Hybridity

Though SPN is a road narrative it also displays a postmodern generic hybridity through its use of conventions from multiple genres: the war narrative, the family drama, horror, and ultimately the epic narrative. Why is this hybridity significant in the deconstruction of SPN? The series, as stated previously, is first and foremost a revitalized masculine narrative. The protagonists are both masculine heroes, their stories combining into a single epic narrative strain. By taking this preexisting epic narrative form and hybridizing these genres into a single story, the writers have created a text that does not simply reflect the heroes’ story but gives a more complete picture of where the heroes came from. In hybridizing the narrative, the writers have made the characters that surround the heroes and make Sam and Dean who they are into more than mere plot devices. Their existence amounts to more than just a passing explanation for a moment’s motivation. For example, it is important that we know who John and Mary Winchester are as people and where they came from in order to understand why they affect Sam and Dean the way they do. Without giving explanation or background for John as a character, it would be difficult to understand why Dean feels for him the way that he does. Without fleshing out John as a character it would be far too easy for him to fall into the “strict, uncompassionate, overbearing
father” caricature, making Dean’s obedience to him seem as pathetic as Sam, at his most hurtful, makes it out to be.\textsuperscript{50}

The heroes of this new masculine narrative do not exist to make a simplistic political statement and their lives aren’t distilled down to a single event and a series of anecdotes. Instead, the narrative focuses on their lives as a whole and delves into not just their actions but what motivates them. Sam and Dean’s lives take place on the road, their troubles born both of their war against supernatural evil and their internal family drama. All of these aspects of their lives must be represented and taken into account when telling their story. To reduce the narrative to a single genre would take away events and characters which give the Winchester brothers their many characteristic dimensions. Though Sam and Dean are the series’ heroes, the narrative bares all of their flaws and virtues to us at once, showing us their humanity at the same time that it shows us the epic nature of their struggles.

\textsuperscript{50} When Sam and Dean get into an argument, such as in the pilot episode when they are arguing over whether to take on the hunt John left for them, Sam’s most cutting insult is usually to imply that Dean is John’s “little soldier”, an automaton who lacks the ability to think for himself.
SAM AND DEAN GO “ON THE ROAD” WITH JACK

The quintessential road novel, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (hereafter *OtR*), is not only a source of inspiration for *Supernatural* (hereafter *SPN*) but also serves as a primitive form of the contemporary American dual-hero narrative. Brothers Sam and Dean Winchester have *On the Road*’s protagonists, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty\(^1\) to thank for their first names as well as several of their character traits and the overall construction of their journey. Though *OtR* lacks the supernatural elements that are *SPN*’s namesake, the form of the story remains similar and an analysis of their similarities can provide a better understanding of the base elements of this form of masculine narrative and how it has evolved since the mid-20\(^{th}\) century. By comparing Sal to Sam and Dean to Dean I hope to show the progression of their respective hero types within the dual-hero masculine narrative and the changes in the treatment of gender from the time *OtR* was written to *SPN*’s inception.

*Dean Doesn’t Ride Shotgun*

This form of masculine narrative is able to function is because of the two hero types represented, the active hero and the passive hero. Though the passive hero may appear at times to make conscious decisions in an effort to control his own story, in the end he is merely waiting for life to happen to him. He therefore, by default, relies on the active hero to dictate the course their mutual journey will take. The active hero, meanwhile, seeks validation through the passive hero. The active hero is the one who controls the journey, but the presence of the passive hero gives him a focus to keep him from becoming uncontained and losing the linear thread of the narrative. By having this duality of heroic types, the narrative creates a symbiotic balance of power. This balance allows the two heroes more opportunity for introspection through the

\(^1\) Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, as is commonly known, are the aliases of Jack Kerouac and his friend Neal Cassady in the semi-autobiographical novel.
consistent presence of a contrasting figure. This balance is important because if the passive hero were to ever become active, then the active hero would need to become passive in order to compensate lest he become obsolete (in which case the narrative form would become that of the lone hero who is alternately active and passive). Dean Moriarty and Dean Winchester are both active heroes, exhibiting their own “gray area”-based morality as the basis for their decision-making within the narrative. In contrast, Sal Paradise and Sam Winchester are passive heroes. Though Sal is the narrator of OtR and Sam’s relation to the demon Azazel would seem to allow them controlling positions, in reality they both let their circumstances and their fellow hero determine what path they take because leaving the control of the journey to the Dean character is a position of “safety” and, as the mild-mannered counterpoint to the “wild man” Deans, they allow fear of consequences to force their complacency.

In both SPN and OtR, the Dean character as the active hero is the driving force of the narrative. For all of Sal and Sam’s selfishness as characters, neither one would have embarked on the journey which begins their narratives if he weren’t compelled in some way by his respective Deans. Even on SPN, where Sam and Dean Winchester equally hold main character status, what the audience sees of the narrative and the movement of the characters is ultimately dictated by the Dean; both in terms of what we visually see onscreen and the movement of the overall narrative. This is because it is the Dean who controls (whether consciously or subconsciously) the life path that Sal/Sam takes. In OtR, it is only after reading letters written by Dean Moriarty that Sal makes the decision to not only meet Dean but to travel and adopt the

---

2 It should be noted that while Dean-centric episodes tend to have a minimal numbers of scenes containing Sam, Sam-centric episodes still contain an equal or near-equal amount of scenes with Dean.
“spontaneous prose” style from Dean’s letters as his novel form. Prior to this, Sal is a more traditional novelist, his first book following more in the style of Thomas Wolfe. Once their journey begins, it is Dean Moriarty who insists they search for his father and it is also Dean who chooses the routes and destinations.

In SPN, Sam Winchester has been ignoring his prophetic dreams and it is only his brother Dean’s arrival and encouragement that draws Sam back into a life on the road. At the series open, Sam is a student on scholarship at Stanford University scheduled for a law school interview. At first, Sam is adamant that he will be back to Palo Alto in time for his interview despite Dean’s insistence on the importance of their search for their missing father. However, these plans are interrupted when Sam’s girlfriend Jessica is killed in the same way as their mother, Dean once again pulling his brother from the flames. Though Jessica’s death gives Sam a thirst for vengeance, Dean is still the one in control of the journey, insisting that hunting and searching for their missing father take priority. If Sam controlled the journey then theirs would be a straightforward hunt, first for their father and then the demon that killed their mother and Jessica.

Divided We Fall

3 Dean Moriarty’s letters are based on those of Neal Cassady which were long and rambling stream of consciousness-style narratives about anything and everything, from tales of his sexual escapades to random philosophical ponderings.
4 Thomas Wolfe is the author of Look Homeward, Angel, a semi-autobiographical novel which was the stylistic inspiration for Kerouac’s own semi-autobiographical first novel, The Town and the City.
5 We learn in episode 1.09, “Home”, that Sam had been dreaming of his girlfriend Jessica’s death long before the events of the pilot but had chosen to ignore them rather than take any action.
6 The brothers initially only intend to sojourn to Jericho, California, John’s last known whereabouts for a couple of days.
7 When their mother Mary Winchester was killed, Dean was the one who carried Sam out of their burning house. Paralleling this, Dean is also the one who pulls Sam out of the burning apartment when Jessica is killed.
8 As John has been hunting the demon that killed Mary Winchester since a year after her death it is safe to assume, even in the pilot, that he knows much more about what he’s hunting and that had Sam been the active hero the series would have ended much faster.
John Leland, in his book *Why Kerouac Matters: The Lessons of On the Road (They’re Not What You Think)*, posits that the main conflict to be resolved in *OtR* is Sal’s divided personality – he must resolve his inner conflict between his “Raskolnikov”\(^9\) side and his “halfback whoremaster”\(^{10}\) side. From this Leland suggests that “A novel that begins with a fissure will set to repair it […]” As the novel progresses, however, a fissure also begins to form between Sal and Dean as Sal grows weary of Dean’s chaotic nature and laments the failure of their journey. The narrative fails to resolve this second fissure by the end of the novel and Sal leaves Dean behind in the final scene while he heads off on a date.

From the very beginning of *SPN* there is a fissure both between and within the boys. The pilot opens with Dean sneaking into Sam’s apartment in Palo Alto to entice him on a journey to find their father who “went on a hunting trip and hasn’t been home in a few days.” The fissure that exists between the brothers is due to their separation which Dean, as the active hero, puts an end to in this scene. As we learn in the pilot, Sam is in Palo Alto because he went to Stanford University on a scholarship, defying his family’s wishes. Though it might appear otherwise, this is a decidedly passive move on Sam’s part due to his motivations. Sam’s leaving for college was less about rebellion and more about his desire for safety. To Sam, “normal” and “mundane” are mistakenly equated with “safety,” something he has not felt since he found out what his father’s real occupation was at age 8. Sam was in an inactive position in his attempt to be safe: “full ride” scholarship, high quality school, pre-law program, steady girlfriend, the rest of his life seemingly planned out so as to avoid major conflict, great danger, or really any further major decision-

\(^9\) Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov is the handsome, neurotic, intellectual protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*.

\(^{10}\) Kerouac was a minor football star when he was growing up in Lowell, Massachusetts, and went to college on a football scholarship.
making.\textsuperscript{11} Dean, however, does not see Sam’s leaving as the bid for safety that it is. Rather, he sees it as an abandonment and betrayal. When Sam suggests that he could have called, Dean replies “If I would’ve called you, would you have picked up?” Dean’s low self-esteem, Mary’s death, John’s constant absence, and Sam’s leaving have left him with abandonment issues and when Sam points out that he is capable of looking for their father on his own Dean says he doesn’t want to. While John isn’t strictly missing (he just hasn’t called Dean in longer than usual), Dean is taking matters into his own hands, attempting to regroup his family and that begins with retrieving his younger brother. Dean is taking the first steps to repair the fissures in his family, most notably the one between him and his brother. As the series goes on we get the impression that Sam and Dean’s relationship was once closer. The end-goal of the narrative then is to remove the distance between the brothers and make them into a seamlessly functioning duo once again.

In addition to this divide between Sam and Dean, there also exists a fissure within each brother, a conflict between his internal and external self. Initially, the show gives the audience the impression that Sam and Dean truly are their personas through and through. Sam is the kind and sensitive one and Dean is the insensitive jerk. However, as the series progresses we see that each persona is merely a front.

When relating to people outside of their family, particularly when they interview people on hunts, Sam affects a sensitive, empathetic persona. Despite appearances, this persona does not exist because of any actual empathy Sam possesses but because through observation he has recognized it as effective for persuading or manipulating others. In reality, Sam functions based on single-minded focus; he tends to treat people as a means to an end rather than as people in

\textsuperscript{11} Azazel suggests in Season Two that had Sam been accepted into law school he would have become a tax attorney. The assumption is that “tax attorney” is the most mundane yet consistent career Sam could think of.
their own rights. His obsession with Dean has led to him regarding his older brother as more of a favored toy than a person, a treatment which is increased in the third season when Dean’s soul is about to be sent to Hell. This treatment leads to conflict between the brothers when Sam fails to take his brother’s feelings into account.

Dean, in contrast, is not terribly skilled with speaking to outsiders; relating to people outside of his realm of experience causes him great discomfort. Because their family was constantly moving when Dean was growing up, Dean developed a “short-term personality” (one based on only brief interactions as opposed to long-term relationships) to help him survive stays of only a few weeks or a couple of months in a town.12 By playing at being a callous bad boy figure, Dean is able to charm people for the duration of their short stays in various towns around the country. The breakdown comes when anything long-term is expected. Dean knows how to “hookup” with women in the short-term but he is emotionally ill-equipped to have a long-term relationship because that increased degree of intimacy makes him too vulnerable. Dean knows how to hold his own in a bar fight but he cannot relate to anyone in the long-term because no one has the same series of experiences as he and his brother.

Dean only occasionally shows his real personality around outsiders. Having the traumatic incident in his past of his mother’s brutal death and carrying his brother out of the house, Dean is often able to relate to kids who have experienced trauma and to other protective older siblings. In “Dead in the Water,” Dean is able to get the young boy, Lucas, to communicate with him via crayon drawings. Lucas stopped speaking for a year after his father died. Dean stopped speaking for a year when Mary died, and having that experience he knows how to reach out to the boy in

12 We know from Sam’s acceptance into Stanford and the contents of John’s storage locker in “Bad Day at Black Rock” that the boys attended regular schools despite John keeping them constantly on the road and living out of motels.
order to get the help they need to stop the lake killings.\textsuperscript{13} In “the Benders,” Dean is able to appeal to Officer Kathleen Hudak because she lost her younger brother the same way Dean has lost Sam and they share the same protective feelings toward their siblings.

The greatest struggle for Dean Winchester, however, is his masculine identity crisis. The hyper-masculine persona that Dean has created for himself is partly based on traits and interests he inherited from John. Dean’s clothing style, his musical taste, and his car were all influenced by John. After three seasons of Sam insisting that Dean is just John’s “little soldier” without a mind of his own, Dean begins to question the life he has created for himself. In a pivotal scene of Season Three, Dean enters his own dream world and is confronted by a demonic doppelganger. The “dark double” is what Dean’s subconscious supposes he would be like were he to go to Hell and crawl back out as a demon. The double harangues and insults him, repeating Sam’s refrain about Dean being John’s little soldier and insisting that Dean doesn’t even have a single original thought. They fight and in the midst of it Dean finally cracks and exclaims that his father was a no good bastard and that he will never become like the dark double. He shoots the double but it is to no avail as the doppelganger reveals that he is a part of Dean that is always lurking below the surface. In reality, the double is an embodiment of all of Dean’s self-loathing and self-doubt. Dean’s cocksure, confident persona, it seems, is all a ruse and beneath the façade he is simply an insecure boy who was never afforded the opportunity to develop emotionally.

Both OtR and SPN are about maturation for the heroes. Sam and Dean’s childhood prevented them from fully developing emotionally. Their experiences have isolated them emotionally from those around them and thus it remains for them to repair the fissure between them in order to preserve their symbiotic relationship. Similarly, Sal Paradise and Dean

\textsuperscript{13} In the first few pages of John Winchester’s journal (available on the show website for reference) John mentions that in the wake of Mary’s death Dean had stopped speaking for a year and become obsessively protective of baby Sammy. It isn’t until John takes him to see the psychic Missouri Mosely that Dean begins to speak again.
Moriarty’s immaturity and lack of compassion prevents them from truly ingratiating themselves to anyone, which is why their friends and lovers all eventually kick them out. Dean’s conman ways and Sal’s perceived support of that behavior alienate them from those around them because they fail to develop any level of trust amongst their comrades.

In an attempt to validate his masculinity, Dean Winchester has two failed attempts at male bonding with someone other than Sam. The first is with another hunter, Gordon Walker, whom the boys encounter on a vampire hunt. Gordon is older than Dean and has more experience hunting vampires than the brothers. Gordon’s life as a hunter began when a vampire attacked his sister when he was a boy, something which Dean feels he can relate to. He and Gordon have drinks at a bar and swap hunting stories, Gordon taking the position of an older brother or father-figure to Dean. Sam expresses displeasure when he realizes that Dean is ready to defer to Gordon’s command and accuses him of trying to replace their deceased father with Walker. Though Dean resents the implication (and punches Sam in the face for it), the fact remains that Dean has suddenly found himself floundering in the wake of their father’s death without a leader to follow. Dean must now become accustomed to his new rank within the family – from second-in-command to leader – and in Gordon he seeks an opportunity to circumvent this. In the end, however, Gordon’s sob story about his sister is tainted when it is revealed that he killed her. The brothers soon learn that Gordon is not merely a righteous hunter but a sociopath whose world view is so thoroughly based in black and white that he is unable to think in terms of Sam and Dean’s gray-area morality.

Dean’s second attempt at male bonding comes with their former nemesis, FBI Special Agent Victor Henricksen. Henricksen spends much of the second and third seasons of SPN as

---

14 Sam and Dean did not even know vampires existed until “Dead Man’s Blood” when their father explains that he had thought them extinct and so never told his sons about them.

15 John dies at the beginning of season two, removing the top of their life-long 3-tier chain of command.
one of the brothers’ main antagonists. He is the agent the FBI has assigned to the Winchester family case and originally sees John and the boys as criminally insane. However, after finally capturing Sam and Dean in “Jus en Bello” he is possessed by a demon, saved by the brothers, and forced into the knowledge that Dean had been telling him the truth all along and that the brothers are not actually the criminals he imagined. Once the police station where he had been holding the brothers is besieged, he immediately defers to Dean’s knowledge and the two begin bonding over their similarities. Henricksen is also isolated by his occupation; all of the time he has dedicated to his work has left him divorced and with no focus beyond the Winchester case. Now that he realizes the criminals that he dedicated so much of his life to chasing are not the psychopaths he thought they were, he is at a loss. Rather than taking on the dominant father/older brother position for Dean like Gordon, Henricksen serves as more of an equal. Henricksen is in many ways the FBI equivalent of Dean and their equal partnership shows many signs of functioning. However, he is killed before we get to see the partnership solidify. As the narrative functions based on the balance of Sam and Dean’s symbiotic relationship, Henricksen cannot be allowed to survive because his presence as a second active hero would disrupt the active/passive balance.

Our Symbiosis is Fuckt

“My interest in Neal is the interest I might have had in my brother that died when I was five years old to be utterly straight about it. We have a lot of fun together and our lives are fuckt up and so there it stands. Do you know how many states we’ve been in together?” ~Jack Kerouac

10 Quote taken from the “original scroll” draft of On the Road.
Sam/Sal and the Deans’ symbiotic relationships rely heavily on shared experiences to bring them together. Their shared journeys and the shared experiences within them are the source of their intimate connection. In Sam and Dean Winchester’s narrative, that journey has been shared for most of their lives and binds them together more inextricably than their blood relation. In addition to this, both partnerships and both narratives begin with a loss of some form. In OtR, Sal says that he “first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up.”17 In SPN, the narrative opens with John bringing the boys together (handing the infant Sam to 4-year-old Dean) while their mother is still burning on the ceiling. In both cases the loss of someone dear causes one of the heroes to seek stability and comfort in the other. Sam and Dean Winchester’s reconnection is Palo Alto is also presaged by a loss – just when it looks like the renewed partnership won’t take, Sam’s girlfriend Jessica is killed in the same way as their mother and this time it is a loss that Sam feels which drives him to Dean. In this way SPN parallels OtR because Sal’s loss of his wife sends him towards Dean Moriarty and Dean’s search for his father gives them purpose.

There is a character age discrepancy between the two narratives. In OtR, Sal Paradise (the passive hero) is actually the elder of the two heroes by several years. Yet Dean Moriarty takes the active role in the relationship because Sal sees him as a replacement for his older brother, Gerard, who died when he was a boy. In SPN, Dean Winchester is both the active hero and the older of the two characters.

Dean Moriarty’s younger age in OtR is a contributing factor to the ultimate failure of his and Sal’s relationship. Despite being much younger than him, Sal relies on Dean to be the commanding force in the relationship despite his immaturity. At the same time Sal is hero-worshipping Dean, Dean is trying to seek sanity from Sal and needs Sal to rein him in. Sal’s

17 In the original scroll draft of OtR it was his father’s death and not his divorce that opened the narrative.
misplaced expectations ultimately doom the relationship because as the younger man Dean was never going to mature beyond Sal.

This problem is resolved in SPN by making Dean Winchester the older brother. Sam’s reliance on Dean and his expectations of him as an older brother and active hero are more realistic. As the standing second-in-command it is natural that upon John’s death Dean mature and learn to take over the role of first-in-command, acknowledging his responsibility as the active hero. This symbiosis between the two heroes must be maintained in order for the dual-hero narrative to function. Without a proper balance, the narrative runs the risk of having two identical heroes which would serve little purpose as the characters would have no reason to react to one another.

*Seeking the Father*

Both OtR and SPN begin their journeys under the guise of a search for a missing father. The absence of the father is a common one in a hero’s life, forcing the hero to strike out on his own and learn to fend for himself.¹⁸ The fathers of OtR and SPN, however, are different from someone like Oedipus’ father who saw him as a threat (Dundes 145). Rather, when each narrative begins, the father and son’s paths have diverged for some reason and it is the son who seeks a reconnection. Dean Moriarty’s father is a hobo somewhere in Denver, Colorado where Dean grew up and while they are on their trip the men intend to seek him out. Apparently, now that Dean is grown, his relationship with his father is sparse and includes long absences.

In SPN, Dean Winchester’s excuse for seeking out Sam in Palo Alto is to enlist his aid in a search for their oft-absent father. Though John was often absent during their childhood, it is

¹⁸ Both Raglan and de Vries make reference to this. Raglan’s 6th incident in the life of the hero is that someone tries to kill him, often the father through some means like exposure (Dundes 143). Jan de Vries’ third part of the hero’s life pattern, “the youth of the hero is threatened,” recalls that often this threat is from the father exposing the child who is seen as a threat (de Vries 212).
only in the wake of Sam’s departure that John begins leaving Dean entirely on his own or sending him on solo hunts while he goes off somewhere. John was not only absent physically in the brothers’ childhood but also emotionally. He was so consumed by his mission to hunt down the thing that killed his wife that Sam and Dean do not even realize until after he dies just how invested he was in their day-to-day lives.\footnote{19 Though Dean often makes apologies for John’s behavior, both brothers are surprised in “Bad Day at Black Rock” when they discover an old storage lock-up where John kept weaponry, supernatural paraphernalia, and mementos from Sam and Dean’s childhood (Sam’s division soccer trophy, Dean’s first sawed-off shotgun).}

In each narrative a reconnection with the missing father is sought, though neither search has a true sense of urgency. In OtR, the search is assumed with a casual air and an expectation that they’ll run into the elder Moriarty at some point. In SPN Sam, the passive hero, feels some urgency in seeking their father but not because he actually desires to reconnect with John. Dean Winchester, the active hero, wants to reconnect with John but feels less urgency since they continue to get messages and orders from him along their journey. Despite the unusually prolonged absence, Dean still feels John’s presence.

Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty never succeed in finding Dean’s father and Sal reflects on this with melancholy during his and Dean’s final parting. Sam and Dean Winchester, however, do eventually reconvene with John, only for him to die before he and Sam have the opportunity to reconcile.

The father as the former active figure must never be wholly reconciled because, much as with Dean’s failed attempts at male bonding, nothing can come between the two heroes’ symbiotic relationship. Instead, the Dean figure must take on the mantle of the active hero and properly mature into his commanding role.

\emph{Confession is the Essence of Male Friendship}
As Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty travel across the U.S. alternately enjoying and rueing each other’s company, they seek a higher level of mutual understanding. Their intention is to find a complete and unfettered form of communication to bring them together. As John Leland suggests in “Why Kerouac Matters,” the ideal they are striving for is the notion that confession is the very essence of male friendship – from Dean’s detailed accounts of his various sexual escapades in his written correspondence to his conversations with Sal in the back or front seat of a car, talking about anything and everything but just endlessly talking. The problem, however, that neither man realizes before their final parting, is that they failed to reach their “greater understanding” due to the fact that they did not actually, in all of their chattering, truly confess their souls to one another. Neither man could bring himself to express the full extent of his love for the other, nor could he confess all of his insecurities and, in the end, this leads to their final parting. In the second to last chapter of OtR Dean Moriarty leaves Sal behind in Mexico with painful dysentery but rather than express to Dean his feelings of hurt, betrayal, and rejection Sal decides that Dean’s life is so complicated that he must become a sacrificial lamb. Once Sal recovers, long after he realizes Dean has left, he tells himself “Okay, old Dean, I’ll say nothing” (Kerouac 249). By not confessing to Dean his true feelings at being abandoned in a sickbed in Mexico, Sal allows a rift to grow between them. This emotional separation helps increase the divide between the two men until finally, in the last chapter, Sal leaves Dean behind on a cold New York street corner rather than rejoin him in his exploits.

This withholding is something that continually drives a wedge between Sam and Dean Winchester, as well. Even when they have moments of confession (usually in the car but occasionally in a hotel room) there are still things held back. Either one confesses but not the other or else a great deal remains withheld despite the random burst of truthfulness. Both hide
most of their insecurities and both keep their secrets, neither truly confessing his feelings and plans to the other. By not discussing their father’s dying words or his death with Sam, Dean forces a tension to build between the brothers for the first part of Season Two. When Sam realizes he is hiding something, Dean breaks down and confesses his feelings and what their father said. As a result of Dean keeping this information from him, Sam sneaks off on his own to seek the other “special children” (psychics that Azazel is after) and places both Dean and himself in danger. When Dean discovers Sam’s lie in “Time is on My Side” about his plan to keep Dean’s soul from being dragged to Hell, it causes Dean to go off on his own and continue his search for the woman who stole the Colt on his own. It is only when the brothers are honest with each other from the beginning that they truly succeed. An example of this would be in “Fresh Blood” when Sam convinces Dean to lay low with him rather than heading out to hunt Gordon by confessing his desire for Dean to behave like the older brother he used to look up to again. In order for the brothers to truly achieve complete understanding by the end of the narrative they must learn to completely confess themselves to one another or else face separation like Sal and Dean.

Dean’s Guide to Overcompensation

The image of the protagonists of OtR as “ladies’ men” is somewhat of a falsehood. Certainly the two men do their best to “hookup” in most locales and Dean Moriarty has a reputation as being particularly slick with the ladies. However, the perceived legendary prowess that the men supposedly possess is all talk. Sal does not really know what to do with a woman once he has her and Dean doesn’t know what to do once he’s had her. Though Dean does his best to arrange hookups for his friend, Sal consistently seems to fall short of expectations, often felled by his own overeager approach to sexual encounters. In one incident he even seems certain of his
abilities to show a virginal young woman how wonderful sex can be only to fail miserably thanks to his rough and eager technique.\(^{20}\) This culminates in an incident in which Dean tries to talk Sal into a threesome with Dean’s first wife, Marylou. Though Sal is greatly tempted by the prospect, he ultimately can’t go through with it.\(^{21}\) The threat of actually consummating his relationship with Dean on a sexual level – something which Sal spends the narrative avoiding – and simultaneously being judged by his role model on his poor technique end up being too much for Sal to handle.

Dean Moriarty, on the other hand, has no problem gaining a lady’s affections in the short term. His problem lies in long term relationships. Due to his nomadic nature, Dean is unable to settle down for long periods of time and grows uncomfortable when he is tied down. This leads to his grand schemes of juggling several lovers in several locales at a time. This constant division of his attentions ultimately alienates all of his lovers and causes breakdowns in his relationships.

Dean Winchester does not try for permanence with his romantic partners, instead opting for a succession of one night stands. He avoids giving anything more of himself than the bare minimum and therefore avoids the eventual breakdown that Dean Moriarty experiences. However, because all of his relationships are only sexual and temporary, Dean Winchester only has his brother with whom to seek an intimate emotional connection. He also limits himself in that the only women he can have his minimal sexual connection with are those who are willing to have a one night stand with a callous “bad boy” they most likely met in a bar.\(^{22}\) The only time that Dean ever attempts a long term relationship with someone other than his brother is during Sam’s time at Stanford when Dean assumed that he had left for good. He dates a woman named Cassie and even tells her what he really does for a living. However, he soon learns that he lacks

\(^{20}\) The Rita Bettencourt encounter (Part One, Chp. 10, p. 48 On the Road)
\(^{21}\) The favor for Dean (Part Two, Chp. 5, p. 108-109 On the Road)
\(^{22}\) Hence his offhand comment to Sam about his unfortunate encounter with a waitress in Florida.
the ability to relate to “civilians” in the long term and his relationship with Cassie only lasts two weeks.\textsuperscript{23}

Sam Winchester displays the same issues as his namesake. Though Sam begins the series showing disinterest in Dean’s philandering ways (having just lost his own long-term girlfriend), he gradually is brought around to Dean’s methodology, if only because women seem to have a habit of throwing themselves at him. Once again Sam’s status as the passive hero shows itself. While Dean has to actively seek out women for sex, Sam’s potential sexual partners are always the first to show interest and the first to make a move.

\textit{Sam Winchester vs. Third Wave Feminism}

Sam’s “lust interests” on the series are more or less interchangeable. Not only are they all petite, dark-haired brunettes who bear striking physical resemblances to one another, but they are also all products of third wave feminism. Particularly, they are products of a certain strain of feminism that seeks to differentiate itself from the negative perception of second wave feminism as “rigid and judgmental.”\textsuperscript{24} Each woman is an intelligent, independent, self-confident professional that the brothers encounter during a hunt. Notably, each woman is also the first to make a move in her relationship with Sam, making her interest clear. As the series progresses, so do the women. Sarah in Season One works for her father, an art dealer, and gets drawn into the case by the brothers thanks to her knowledge of and access to a haunted painting. As the first woman Sam shows interest in after Jessica, she serves as a transition from his time at Stanford to

\textsuperscript{23} In “Route 666” the audience learns about this aborted attempt at a relationship when Dean and Sam end up working a case for Cassie.

\textsuperscript{24} In her essay “What is Third-Wave Feminism?” R. Claire Snyder suggests that the third-wavers in many ways seek to correct problems they perceive in the second-wave (whether those perceptions are accurate or not) including the image of feminists as “antimale, antisex, antifemininity, and antifun.” She says that “third-wavers feel entitled to interact with men as equals, claim sexual pleasure as they desire it (heterosexual or otherwise), and actively play with femininity” (Snyder 5).
his journey with Dean. Though they go on a date and kiss, Sam recognizes that anything long-term could not work out because he would be uprooting her and placing her in danger.

Madison, in Season Two, is the executive assistant to someone who is the classic male executive stereotype. He regularly gets drunk and hits on her but she appears to take it in stride, taking a maternal position in his life by caring for him at work and when he’s inebriated. She also has an ex-boyfriend, Kurt, who is stalking her though she seems to be less concerned with this than perhaps she should be. Kurt is a stereotype, as well, a mechanic embodying the same “bad boy” image Dean tries to affect. However, Kurt embodies it to a negative degree. Madison, it turns out, is a werewolf. She was “activated” in this role by her neighbor, Glen, and while she originally thought the attack was only a mugging, she cites it as the source of her confidence.

The brothers play rock/paper/scissors to determine which one gets to spend time with her and in the end it is Sam who is set to “guard” Madison while Dean is the one who goes on the actual hunt. Madison shows her interest in Sam by folding her underwear in front of him and having him watch soap operas with her. When Sam discovers that she is a werewolf he initially binds her to a chair and threatens her with a gun, only to relent when he realizes that she is not aware of being a werewolf. He locks her in a closet to prove this to her and then sends Dean to kill Glen, going on an old theory of John’s that it will cure her of lycanthropy. When Sam and Madison both believe her to be “cured” of being a werewolf they have sex (with Madison initiating) only for it to be revealed that killing Glen didn’t work when Madison turns into a werewolf after their tryst. Dean then points out that they’ve run out of options and so Madison insists Sam be the one to shoot her in the heart with a silver bullet to prevent her from causing more damage with her out-of-control behavior.
In Season Four, psychic Pamela Barnes (who notably shares a first name with infamous groupie Pamela Des Barres)\(^{25}\) is an “independent contractor” with her psychic powers that Bobby calls on to help the brothers learn the identity of the being that pulled Dean from Hell. Pamela is depicted as a “wild woman” type, wearing low-slung jeans and a Ramones tank top, lifting Bobby clear off his feet when she hugs him in greeting. Her lower back is tattooed with the phrase “Jesse Forever” and, when questioned, she states that “he wasn’t forever.” She flirts blatantly with Dean and then invites Sam to join them, though Dean pointedly informs Sam that he is “NOT invited.” When Pamela performs a séance to seek the identity of Dean’s savior, Castiel (the entity that pulled Dean from Hell) warns her to turn back. She ignores the warning, saying that she doesn’t scare easily, and it is this brash decision that ultimately leads to her punishment for her out-of-control nature. Gazing upon Castiel’s true façade blinds her, stripping away her vision by melting her eyes. Castiel and Bobby both warned her to rein herself in, yet her lack of control sealed her fate. As Susan Bordo points out in her book, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*, in western culture men and women are perceived in terms of a dichotomy – men are meant to be cerebral and always in control whereas women are supposedly controlled by their bodies.\(^{26}\) Pamela is punished because she is seen by the narrative as being far too out of control of her body, a “hysterical” woman who must be “fixed.”\(^{27}\)

The Crossroads Demon also fits the third wave feminist form. She possesses only bodies that fit the same brunette image as Sam’s various lust interests,\(^{28}\) always wearing a little black dress and only arriving on her own terms rather than immediately after a summons. She calls

\(^{25}\) Author of *I’m with the Band*.

\(^{26}\) (Bordo 19)

\(^{27}\) As *Webster’s New World Dictionary* states, the etymological root of “hysterical” is “hystera” which is ancient Greek for “uterus” as women throughout history have often been thought to be the more “hysterical” sex.

\(^{28}\) Save for one instance in the flashback to bluesman Robert Johnson’s 1930 crossroads deal in which she possesses a black woman.
herself a “saleswoman” and seals her deals with a thorough kiss as opposed to a handshake or signing a contract.\(^2\) She is, however, a literal demonization of third-wave feminists since she is a demon. Her controlling figure comes in the representation of Amazon feminism, Lilith, a perversion of an angelic little blonde girl.\(^3\) Lilith, as the demon who holds the Crossroads Demon’s soul contracts, represents a return to the more politicized origins of feminism in her controlling/demonization of the third-wave feminist image. The Crossroads Demon’s punishment comes in the form of her death at Sam’s hand. When she reveals that she does not have the power to sever contracts, Sam kills her by shooting her point blank with the Colt.\(^4\) She is not simply punished but completely destroyed by Sam penetrating her brain from a physical and emotional distance with a phallic weapon which at this point has been rebuilt to last longer.

**Dean’s Dionysian Desires**

The Deans, as the Dionysian figures of both OtR and SPN, have rather hedonistic approaches to life. This is a direct result of their respective childhoods. Dean Moriarty was abused by his mother and step brothers, leaving home as a small boy to be raised by a hobo father and spending some time in a reformatory. Dean Winchester was raised on the road by John with no consistent source of income and often left at a motel to care for his younger brother alone. Neither had much and both occasionally went hungry or at least malnourished for short

\(^{2}\) By “thorough kiss” I refer to the Crossroads Demon using a prolonged kiss in which she penetrates her “customers” with her tongue as a method of violation.

\(^{3}\) “Amazon feminism,” as Thomas Gramstad defines it in “The Female Hero: A Randian Feminist Synthesis,” focuses on the image of the “female hero” – both real and fictional – and rejects the inherent “maleness” or “femaleness” of various interests and traits. Rather than a passive object, an Amazon feminist figure is *active* and just happens to be female.

\(^{4}\) “The Colt” is shorthand on the series for a gun that was custom-made by Samuel Colt to kill anything – supernatural or otherwise.
periods of time.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, both men have considerable appetites in their adulthood. They derive
pleasure not only from sex but also from a variety of outlets.

The desires for sex and food tie the Deans together as carnal figures who are centered in
the body. On the other side we have a more cerebral character in Sal/Sam. Sal and Sam both
attended university for a brief period of time and each is the more studious character of the
narrative (Sal is a writer and brings his notebook everywhere; Sam is more often than not the
archival researcher on the brothers’ hunts). While this carnality of the Deans’ at times is seen to
be hedonistic, it functions as a sign of their humanity. The Deans are more connected
emotionally to their worlds whereas Sal and Sam are more detached. An example of this
emotional connection vs. detachment can be seen in Sam and Dean’s reactions to each other’s
deaths in SPN. When Sam is killed in “All Hell Breaks Loose,” Dean sinks into a deep
depression. He stops eating – stops doing anything – and spends his time sitting around staring at
Sam’s corpse until finally he races off to the crossroads to sell his soul for Sam’s life. Dean
becomes completely unable to function in the wake of Sam’s death, unable to do anything more
than talk to Sam’s corpse. When Dean dies permanently in “Mystery Spot,” on the other hand,
Sam turns into a vengeance-seeking automaton, creating a lifestyle based in order and routine to
the point of obsession and removing himself from any meaningful contact with other people.\textsuperscript{33}

Essentially, Dean is mired in his human depression in the wake of Sam’s death whereas Sam
becomes removed from his last shreds of humanity in the wake of Dean’s.\textsuperscript{34} The Deans’
hedonism is characteristic of not only their carnality but also their humanity.

\textsuperscript{32} In “Something Wicked” Dean tries to feed Sam Spaghetti-Os for dinner which Sam complains he’s sick of so
Dean lets him have the last of the Lucky Charms cereal even though he hadn’t had any himself.
\textsuperscript{33} By “dies permanently” I am, of course, referring to Dean’s death on Wednesday after the Trickster stops the time
loop of continual Tuesdays. Though the Trickster brings Dean back to life by restarting that fateful Wednesday at
the end of the episode, it is only after Sam has lived six months without Dean.
\textsuperscript{34} This point is reinforced when Bobby (who is really the Trickster in disguise) tells Sam that they need to
completely bleed a person out in order to bring Dean back and Sam shows no remorse at the thought.
Both Deans have an appreciation for road food – the greasier or sweeter the better. Dean Winchester’s lust for pie has become a defining characteristic of the character and has even produced a running gag with Dean sending Sam on food runs and reminding him to not forget the pie (or, alternately, Sam insisting he wouldn’t forget the pie before Dean has a chance to berate him). While Sal and Sam take more ascetic approaches to eating, the Deans would never turn down a good sandwich. This is further emphasized when in each text Sal/Sam shows distress when their Dean has left food uneaten, a sure sign that something is amiss.

The Deans also crave the open road and the freedom it suggests. Having been raised outside of mainstream society, they feel most comfortable when they are outside it. Dean Winchester, in particular, also fears any permanence of locale in that his persona only functions for temporary social interactions and it is easier for him to con his way from town to town than to open himself up to anyone outside of his family.

Music is the rhythm which drives both the Deans and their respective narratives. Dean Moriarty is defined by the urban jazz music of his time and Dean Winchester is defined by the hard rock music his father passed down to him. OtR is strewn with instances of Dean taking Sal to jazz bars or putting on records when they visit friends’ homes no matter what the hour of day or night. SPN opens with Sam commenting negatively on Dean’s music selection – calling it “the greatest hits of mullet rock” – and Dean responding by putting in a cassette and saying “House rules, Sammy. Driver picks the music, shotgun shuts his cake hole.”35 The Deans, as the active heroes, assert control over the narrative with their dominance of the narrative rhythm, which I will address in more detail in the next section.

Companionship is an important craving for both of the Deans because while they shun permanence they also desire consistent sources of intimacy, love, and validation. At the end of

35 The cassette in question is AC/DC.
the day, neither actually has much in the way of self-esteem and each seeks comfort from Sal or Sam as a validation of their existence.

Dean Winchester has one more major craving on SPN that defines him as a character – his desire for horror films, especially the B- and C-grade ones. As he grew up essentially living a horror film one might assume that Dean would be averse to subjecting himself to that sort of thing anymore than is necessary. However, horror films as fantasy actually serve a cathartic purpose for Dean.

“Take Your Anemic Alternative Pop and Shove it Up Your Ass.”

The rhythm of Jack Kerouac’s unique beat generation style of writing was inspired not only by Neal Cassady’s letters but also by the urban jazz sound of the time. OtR is sprinkled throughout with various references to jazz music, the jazz form, and even musicians and songs of the time. The novel can even be said to have a soundtrack based on Jack’s descriptions of the music the characters are listening to at any given moment as well as the occasional inclusion of lyrics sung by characters here and there. This soundtrack helps to shape the overall rhythm and style of the narrative, giving the characters the spontaneity that has come to be associated with Jack’s ever-changing writing style.

SPN also is unique in that creator Eric Kripke made a point of having control over the soundtrack of the series from the very beginning, defining the tone and rhythm of both the series and the characters through his use of classic and hard rock music both within the narrative itself and overlaid on the episode recaps for season finales and premieres. For example, the song “Carry on My Wayward Son” by Kansas is overlaid on the end-of-season recaps and as a result has become both the unofficial theme for the Winchester men and the song most identified with

36 Quote taken from an early draft of the Supernatural pilot script. Kripke takes his music very seriously.
the series. The music of SPN functions in the same way as the jazz in OtR, serving to define the
Dean character as well as set the tone of the world as a whole. Though there is also a standard
instrumental score meant to establish mood in certain scenes, it is the specially hand-picked
selection of so-called “mullet rock” songs which paints the show as unique on the CW (a
network which is prone to using whatever teen pop music – from Warner Brothers’ music label –
is in need of advertising that week).

Dean Moriarty is a more chaotic character than Dean Winchester, reflective of the Tin
Pan Alley jazz tunes that fueled his antics. Dean Moriarty “plays” with Marylou and Sal to the
tune of “The Hunt” by Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray (Kerouac 105). He parties with Sal and
some prostitutes in a Mexican brothel to the beat of Pérez Prado’s mambo riffs (235). When he is
not talking he is almost always humming a tune. Dean Winchester, on the other hand, is inspired
by a mixture of rock music that varies from blues-inspired slow jams (such as Blind Faith’s
“Can’t Find My Way Home”37) to bass-thumping anthems (like Metallica’s “Some Kind of
Monster”38) and includes everything in between. The soundtrack to SPN serves as a primer for
classic and hard rock music, the bluesy roots reflecting Dean’s easy-going, cocksure, drawling
personality. Just like Dean, it can be immature and it can also be introspective. Its rhythm goes
well with his big, growling beast of a muscle car and the lyrics speak of defying mainstream
authority and living Dean’s hedonistic lifestyle and emphasize his swaggering image of
masculinity.

Though the show itself has a theme song, the unofficial theme of the Winchester brothers
is Kansas’ bombastic rock anthem “Carry on My Wayward Son” which is played over the season
recaps at the beginning of each season finale. The Impala has an unofficial theme as well,

37 Played at the end of “Route 666” as Dean and Sam drive away from Cassie – and Dean’s one attempt at a long
term romantic relationship.
38 Dean hums this in “Phantom Traveler” when he’s nervous.
AC/DC’s “Back in Black,” used most memorably in “Bloodlust” when the audience gets to see the car completely restored for the first time after it was hit by the semi at the end of Season One. After these tracks the music most commonly associated with the series has actually never been featured in any episodes. Since the CW does not allow SPN a large enough budget to afford any music by Led Zeppelin, instead they reference it both in dialog (Dean teaching the little boy in “Dead in the Water” to chant “Zeppelin Rules!”) and in numerous episode titles.39

Both narratives’ soundtracks bear the tunes that can be heard in the bars their characters frequent. These are the sounds of the regular American towns the heroes of both narratives pass through as they travel the highways and byways of the U.S. While each duo spends time in cities across the U.S., much of their experience takes place in the in-between places, the rest stops along the road that are usually overlooked outside of road narratives. Their soundtracks speak to these parts of the country and reflect the rhythms of their time and therefore of their heroes. Along with reflecting the Dean character, these songs are crucial in establishing the aesthetic of the narratives. The music is meant to be evocative of the events within the narrative and the characters that enact them.

*Living in the Shadow of Saint Dean*

Both Sal and Sam were raised in superstitious environments with sainted older brothers always looming in (seemingly) the place of honor above them. Sal’s older brother died when they were kids and became sainted in the eyes of the town’s older women. No matter what he did he could never hope to equal or surpass a holy figure in the eyes of those around him. Sam had a similar experience while being raised by John. Sam’s life was, understandably, a continual series of frustrations as he was stuck in the unfortunate position of perpetually being the bottom of a 3-

man chain of command. Though Dean in many ways sees Sam as having been the “preferred” son (likely the result of Sam’s treatment as the “baby” of the family), from Sam’s perspective Dean is the favorite son in John Winchester’s eyes. Dean and John have enough in common that Sam felt like the odd man out when John was alive. Between that sense of alienation and his powerlessness in any family decisions, an image was built up for him with Dean as the son who can do no wrong and someone Sam can never hope to equal or surpass. This divide and hopelessness is increased for Sam in Season Two when he discovers that he has demon blood in his veins and is therefore literally tainted according to his family’s philosophy.

As a result of living with the memory of his brother, Sal spends his life seeking a replacement for his brother and his own profound spiritual awakening. Sam, on the other hand, alienates himself even further from his family as a result of living in Dean’s shadow. He is conflicted between rejecting his sainted elder brother and clinging to him as his connection to his humanity. While Dean avoids spirituality because of what happened to their mother, Sam craves it due to both the alienation he feels from his family and society and his own fears (not fear of the supernatural things they hunt but fear that there is no redemption for him).

This Journey is a Trip! Spirituality on the Road

In both texts, the main characters’ journeys are spiritual ones. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty traverse the American landscape seeking an ultimate spiritual connection with each other, themselves, and the world. Traces of both Eastern and Western spiritual philosophy can be seen throughout OtR, Kerouac having been raised in a very superstitious, old world Catholic faith and later studying Buddhist texts, both of which helped to form his Beat philosophy of
life.\textsuperscript{40} For Kerouac, “beat” mean “beatitude” just as much as it meant “crushed.”\textsuperscript{41} Sal and Dean are constantly seeking a more “perfect” form of communication and understanding, and this search commonly manifests itself in their long, sprawling conversations riding together in a car.

Sam and Dean Winchester, on the other hand, have a more direct relationship with spirituality. Having spent their lives hunting supernatural entities they are unsure what to make of any form of spirituality. Sam wants to have faith in something, wants to believe because he is so terrified of his life that he needs something safe and good to believe in. In “Houses of the Holy” he reveals to Dean that he has been praying since he was a kid and we see for the first time how much Sam desperately wants something to believe in. This desire is increased by the time of this episode because Sam is still uncertain as to whether his psychic powers could make him “go dark side” and because he has begun to see the cracks in Dean’s – his older brother and childhood hero’s – armor.

Dean is reluctant to believe in anything like God or supernatural forces of good because he feels as though the angels his mother always told him were watching over him have failed him. He sees the world in terms of humans, things which are evil, and things which have the potential to be evil, and has hardened himself against believing in anything that is truly good. Even at the beginning of Season Four when he learns that it was an angel, Castiel, who pulled him out of Hell, he is reluctant to have blind faith in him, clinging as he will to his gray-area morality.

Family, sex, food, music, and spirituality are all aspects of the hero’s humanity. All of these necessities come together to shape Sal/Sam and the Deans as their respective hero types.

\textsuperscript{40} This is discussed at great length both in various interviews with Jack Kerouac (\textit{Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac}) and in his various books, particularly the religious text \textit{Some of the Dharma}.

\textsuperscript{41} As stated by Kerouac in his 1967 Radio-Canada interview (reprinted in \textit{Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac}).
The way each character approaches these different needs is indicative of his hero type and the era in which he originates. Sam and Dean Winchester, as heroes of the new dual-hero masculine narrative, reflect the changes in the masculinity of their respective hero types within American culture and seek a balance between macho posturing and “feminized” sensitivity. They show that there is a growing level of intimacy between the heroes of the masculine narrative and perhaps they will get to complete their story together.
CONCLUSIONS: SAM AND DEAN AND THE NEW MASCULINE NARRATIVE

Though when I began writing this thesis the fourth season had only aired up through episode 4x03 “In the Beginning” and therefore all references to the text only go as far as that episode. As I began to write this conclusion I watched a recent episode, 4x14 “Sex and Violence.” Regardless of the fact that those subsequent episodes could not be included in the main body of the thesis, nevertheless I cannot help but make mention of 4x14 and its representation of gender in concluding my thesis.

In “Sex and Violence” Sam and Dean hunt a siren who has been working out of a strip club. Sirens, as they exist within the SPN universe, secrete a venom which increases a person’s levels of oxytocin, the so-called “love hormone”, and encourage their victims to murder their loved ones so that they can be devoted completely to the siren. The siren’s “love spell” is treated as a sexually transmitted disease within the narrative, one that can be contracted via bodily fluids (in this case, a form of spit secreted from a gland beneath the siren’s tongue).¹ Sirens can also change form and adapt to become the “ideal” of their victims. The siren in this episode takes the form of the hyper-feminine when it dons the image of each victim’s ideal “partner.” It poses as different strippers at The Honey Wagon under pseudonyms taken from Disney princesses, encouraging each man within their thrall to murder their wives (or, in one case, the victim’s invalid mother).²

When the siren realizes that the brothers are hunters it ends up targeting Dean, taking the form of his “ideal partner.” On the one hand, Dean’s macho hedonistic persona lends itself to the assumption that the siren would just become another stripper. On the other, in “Dream a Little

¹ The secretion gland is an elongated node beneath the siren’s tongue and is phallic in appearance. When the already mesmerized Dean is holding Sam down and the siren secretes venom on him, it serves as a visual cue indicating male-on-male ejaculation.
² The princess names used are: Jasmine (from Aladdin), Aurora (from Sleeping Beauty), Ariel (from The Little Mermaid), and Belle (from Beauty & the Beast).
Dream of Me” the audience (and Sam) get to see inside Dean’s dreams and it is revealed that he occasionally dreams of being married to a very maternal Lisa Braeden from “The Kids are Alright” and father to her son, Ben. However, rather than another stripper or potential wife, the siren takes the form of the perfect male partner – “the perfect younger brother” – for Dean who is already feeling alienated by Sam’s secret keeping. Sam and Dean are posing as FBI agents when they encounter the siren so it takes the form of FBI field agent “Nick Monroe” in order to avoid suspicion. Dean inadvertently shares spit with the siren and falls under his influence despite discovering what he is. When Dean attempts to kill Sam the siren infects the younger brother, too, pitting brother against brother for the siren’s affections. It is Bobby who ends up having to save the day, though he only saves them from the siren and not their preexisting problems.

Rather than posing as a hunter (which Dean might relate to with suspicion at this point, anyway) he takes the form of a potential “partner” in the literal and euphemistic sense. Dean at this point is less certain of his connection with Sam but also wholly devoted to him and so a more emotionally weak target to exploit. Dean shares his hip flask with Nick while they are on a stakeout.

It is significant, again, that it is not only a man but symbolic family figure that saves the brothers from killing one another (though it is especially interesting to note that regardless of everything, Dean was the one who was going to be ultimately triumphant in the end).
We are led to believe earlier in the episode that the female medical examiner (M.E.) that Sam has sex with might be the siren. The M.E., Dr. Cara Roberts, is single although she alludes to a husband who is no longer in the picture, implying that she can understand the men who killed their wives. “Haven’t you ever been in a relationship where you really loved somebody…and still kinda wanted to bash their head in?” Later on Dean reveals that Cara’s husband died of a heart attack. The text strongly suggests that Cara, a medical examiner for a small town who could easily orchestrate a false heart attack, killed her husband. This, again, works to try and convince the audience that Cara is the siren and not Nick. Cara is another of Sam’s third-wave women, a no-nonsense professional woman (a doctor this time) who targets Sam as a sexual conquest in her first scene and uses his evening visit to review evidence later on as an opportunity to initiate a one-night-stand. Though she succeeds in her sexual conquest, she is still punished by the text like Sam’s other “lust interests” before her both through the implication that she killed her husband and the suggestion that she could be the siren. However, we know by the end of the episode that not only is she human but also that Sam has evolved as a character to a point in which the brother-lovers relationship is also the most appealing to him so Cara, another of his brunettes, is no longer his “ideal.” This refocusing of Sam’s energies is vital because although the episode still ends on a divided note between the brothers (and a continued failure of confession) we now know for the first time that Sam has truly begun to rethink his “endgame” from his former ideal of safety through mundanity. Sam and Dean at this point in the narrative have both established the brother-lovers relationship as their ideal mode.

Nick the siren is very careful in his\textsuperscript{6} construction of an ideal companion for Dean. Instead of taking the form of a sexual or romantic partner, Nick takes the form of a fraternal partner for

\textsuperscript{6} I’m using male pronouns to refer to Nick here, despite s/he not actually having a set sex or gender, since the siren takes on a male persona around Sam and Dean.
Dean. He recognizes the need within Dean for that complete brother-lovers relationship and molds himself accordingly. He takes on the persona of an FBI agent specifically for two reasons: to put himself on equal footing with Dean⁷ and because out of Dean’s two other attempts at male bonding beyond Sam, Gordon Walker (a hunter) was a failure whereas Victor Henricksen (an FBI special agent) was a potential success.⁸ In addition to posing as FBI, Nick appears to have the same interests as Dean, such as his appreciation of the Impala and his knowledge of classic rock music. Finally, he makes sure to appear to always be a step behind Dean as well as willing to take orders from Dean. In this way he creates the “ideal” passive younger brother to appeal to Dean’s desires.

After Dean realizes Sam has had sex with Cara, he brushes him off, declaring that he’ll finish the hunt on his own as Sam has clearly failed on his end of things. However, he doesn’t work alone. He calls Nick to do a stakeout of the strip club with him, having identified Nick as the more reliable partner. Though the phone call to Sam is made from the position of power – the driver’s seat of the Impala – when Dean meets Nick he slides into the passenger seat of Nick’s Ford, relinquishing the dominant position to Nick. Dean’s face is in low-key lighting, the dimness emphasizing his position as lacking control. Nick, meanwhile, is lit in a split half high-key lighting with the other half of his face in total darkness to emphasize his dominance in the scene and hint at his duplicitous nature. While Dean and Nick discuss how the assumed female assailant is “drugging” her victims, Dean shares his hip flask of whiskey with Nick. In doing this, they exchange spit and Nick reveals that he, as the siren, can transmit the “supernatural

⁷ I say FBI would make him equal footing since Dean is unaware that Nick has seen through his ruse and thus to Dean who is posing as FBI an FBI agent would be an equal (although Dean is still positioned as the elder brother insofar as he claims D.C. jurisdiction whereas Nick is supposedly from a local field office).
⁸ We don’t actually know for sure how successful Dean’s relationship with Henricksen would have been since he is killed by Lilith shortly after changing the nature of his relationship with the Winchesters from antagonistic to friendly.
STD” through saliva and that in sharing the drink Dean has been infected. In this way Dean is punished for trying to replace Sam by enacting a metaphor for unprotected sex.9

Now that Nick has been revealed as the siren he becomes more feminized. His body language becomes more closed, he plays with a hyacinth10 while moving about the hotel room, and he speaks more softly to the brothers. While Dean has Sam in a hold, a knife held to his neck Nick displays his power over Dean by making him slice Sam on the neck. This brings back the fetishistic treatment of Sam’s neck when he is in the damsel positioning and adds a homoerotic element, not just because Nick is the one commanding the cut but also because Dean – who lacks hero positioning in this scene – is the one who is made to slice Sam, enacting the sexualized violence Dean usually experiences on Sam. After he establishes his dominance in the scene, Nick spits his poisoned saliva onto Sam’s mouth through a phallic gland in his own mouth. Despite his seemingly feminized nature, Nick exacts control over Sam through male-on-male ejaculation, making him into his love slave like Dean.

Now that they are simultaneously under Nick’s spell, the siren pits both brothers against each other, telling them that he will be with the winner “forever.” While fighting the brothers take the opportunity to verbally abuse each other, highlighting each others’ character flaws. Dean points out that Sam has been hiding things from him (although he makes this sound like something new when in fact it is pretty much standard practice for these two). Sam suggests that the reason he has kept things from Dean is because Dean is too weak to hunt Lilith and that he spends too much time wallowing in self-pity. When he mentions Dean’s angst over the souls that

9 Gordon had to take on an antagonist role towards the Winchesters and Henricksen had to die in order to maintain the balance of the narrative through Sam and Dean’s symbiotic relationship.
10 The hyacinth flower in this episode is intended as a marker of a siren’s presence. However, it serves a secondary purpose, as well, due to its mythological connotations. Hyacinthus was the god Apollo’s young, male lover in classical mythology. One day when the duo is having a discus-throwing contest Apollo, accidentally kills Hyacinthus when the wind blows the discus off course. In one version of the tale the wind changed direction because Zephyrus, god of the east wind, was also smitten with the young lad and jealous that Apollo had his attentions (Hamilton 88-89).
he tortured during his time in Hell, Dean throws his knife at Sam, throwing the first blow. They proceed to fight with Sam taunting Dean’s weakness until Dean slams Sam through the motel room door and grabs at emergency fire axe from a case in the wall. “Tell me how weak I am, Sam, tell me how I hold you back” he says and raises the axe, ready to kill the stunned Sam before Bobby comes along and stabs Dean and then the siren. As the siren is running away we can see that under his long, black overcoat he is dressed in the type of button-down shirt and jeans that Sam would normally wear, the shirt bearing a resemblance to one Sam wore in “Playthings.” This significance of this visual reference lies in the fact that “Playthings” is one of Sam’s most emotionally vulnerable episodes and the first one in which he asks Dean to kill him if he ever “go[es] dark side.” Nick, as the “ideal younger brother,” embodies obsessive love gone wrong and is killed as a result. Sam at this point in the series has let his own love for Dean enter the realm of obsession and it has made him willing to do things (such as kill and use his demonic powers) which the brothers would otherwise regard as morally reprehensible in order to keep his brother alive.

In the final scene of the episode, Bobby reminds the brothers that their fight was prompted by the siren’s magic and tries to encourage them to confess but once again they both refrain, putting up a front of being “fine.” This continued lack of confession means the increasing emotional rift between Sam and Dean remains. If they do not heed Bobby’s advice and learn to truly confess soon then they will become completely divided to the point at which their symbiotic relationship is perverted and they become antagonists.

11 The four months Dean spent in Hell were the equivalent of 40 years. While he was down there he was tortured by demons and told that if he agreed to help torture souls they would stop. He managed to resist for the first 30 years before he broke and agreed to aid in the torture in order to stop his own suffering. After awhile he began to enjoy the torture he was inflicting on the souls and now he feels guilty for it, as stated in 4x10 “Heaven and Hell.”

12 In order to kill the siren you must infect it with its own “supernatural STD.” Bobby stabs Dean in order to gets his infected blood on his knife so that when he throws it at the siren’s back it kills him.
They are the most emotionally segregated in this episode which serves as a contrast to their reaching a pinnacle of desiring a complete relationship with one another. Their segregation is due to their continued reluctance towards absolute confession. Though Sam is the one keeping secrets he is not alone in blame since once the influence of the siren has worn off Dean remains reluctant to truly confront Sam with his feelings of hurt.

Dissecting “Sex and Violence” in particular is important because it illustrates so many points which I have discussed throughout this thesis. In the first chapter I introduced the notion that Sam and Dean are a heroic duo comprised of two different hero types. The balance of the characters, something I addressed further in the second chapter with the suggestion that Dean is the active hero whilst Sam is passive, is integral to maintaining the dual hero narrative. In “Sex and Violence” we see the balance between Sam and Dean threatened by the introduction of Nick, a character who activates both brothers simultaneously and pits them against each other. Unlike in past episodes in which one brother was sent after the other, once Nick activates both brothers through his venomous saliva they are able to immediately seek out each others’ weaknesses, pitted in a fight for dominance with neither surviving emotionally unscathed. Since the brothers are aware that their anger was real it becomes increasingly difficult for them to default to a functioning relationship as they otherwise would have the turn been one-sided and more clearly supernatural in origin.

Also addressed in the second chapter was a discussion of Sam and Dean’s relationship, both in the familial sense and the homosocial sense. We see through the siren taking the form of an “ideal male partner” for Dean and subsequently Sam that the brothers have achieved an emotional stage where they prioritize their brother-lovers relationship above all else. They have

13 Such as in “Asylum” when the ghost of a deceased psychiatrist brings Sam’s rage to the fore, sending him to kill Dean who just lies back and lets him (though he is smart enough to be sure the gun Sam wields is not loaded first).
no one else and know that they can only achieve their ultimate level of understanding in a relationship with one another.

We also see a return to the concept of gender-bending in horror narrative character positioning. Along with both brothers returning to the sexualized damsel positioning during the episode there is also the siren, Nick, who embodies a literalized gender bending. When Dean is on the stakeout with Nick he is positioned as the damsel, sitting in the passenger seat of Nick’s car rather than the driver’s seat of the Impala and noticeably not wearing his leather jacket, appearing smaller this time in comparison to Nick. He shares his drink with Nick, ingesting the siren’s venom through what is essentially a supernatural “roofie.”14 In the hotel room later on, Sam is positioned as the damsel with Dean holding him by the neck and splayed out as Nick ejaculates venom into his mouth. While the brothers’ damsel moments exhibit some symbolic gender-bending, Nick as the siren embodies gender-bending through his ability to change forms. The siren lacks an actual fixed gender or sex and takes on whatever form is desirable to its victim, bending the rules of gender to its will.

In the third chapter I explored Sam and Dean’s new masculine narrative by comparing it to the older masculine narrative, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. Through this comparison I was able to explore Sam and Dean and their relationship more in depth. One topic I addressed was the notion that, as John Leland suggests, confession is the essence of male friendship. Sam and Dean are pitted against one another at the end of this episode, tearing each other down both physically and emotionally. Though they confess their frustrations with one another through the fight they still hold back their insecurities. At the end of the episode, despite the fact that both know their fight was induced by the siren’s venom, a tension lingers because both refuse to confess to the other their feelings of hurt and betrayal in the wake of the fight. The tension and

14 The colloquial term for a date rape drug.
the fissure in the relationship remain despite both brothers reaching a stage in which their
greatest emotional desire is a functioning brother-lovers relationship.

As stated earlier, in the character of Dr. Cara Roberts we see a representative of the
brunette third-wave feminist women that serve as Sam’s “lust interests.” In the third chapter I
discussed Sam’s track record with these women and how the narrative always admonishes their
existence in some way. Cara, as a possible murderer and therefore out-of-control woman is
suggested as a viable candidate to be the siren. Though we are later informed otherwise, the
damage has been done and the only times her character is revisited after her tryst with Sam are
when Dean and Nick spy on her entering a bar during their stakeout and at the very end of the
episode when Sam decides not to go back to her office to say good-bye because “what’s the
point?”

Finally, when the siren takes the form of “Nick Monroe” to entrance Dean, he appeals to
Dean’s desires (as discussed in the third chapter) to lure him into a false sense of security. When
Dean and “Nick” are in the strip club, supposedly keeping an eye out for suspicious activity, they
bond over not only their mutual enjoyment of the strip club and Dean’s beloved Impala but also
the classic and hard rock music that fuels Dean’s life. Nick dazzles Dean with his knowledge of
classic rock trivia, particularly the music of Led Zeppelin. By being able to bond with Dean over
his desires, a positive association, rather than hunting, something which Dean alternately loves
and hates, Nick is able to insinuate himself into Dean’s good graces.

All of these elements within “Sex and Violence” reinforce ideas proposed throughout this
thesis. They illustrate SPN’s nature as a masculine narrative as well as highlight the revitalized
image of masculinity and use of gender discussed throughout these chapters. Thus I return to that
initial query in which my undergraduate self wondered how a masculine narrative could survive
the merger of WB and UPN and life on the new network, CW, which caters to young women. How can an American masculine road narrative survive four seasons\textsuperscript{15} amidst primetime soap operas? It is in the revitalized nature of the use of gender within the narrative and the 21\textsuperscript{st} century masculinity that we find the answer. Though the narrative is masculine it does not adhere to stringent gender binaries in the same manner as American masculine narratives before it. The emphasis is placed on the masculine and yet female characters exact their own control over the narrative proceedings with female characters serving as the two major figures of good and evil in the series. As well, the masculinity represented within the series is one that is not afraid to inhabit characteristics that might otherwise be seen as feminine. The hero types of classical and new American as they exist within this text provide a narrative balance and serve as examples of an American masculinity that is more comfortable with male homosocial intimacy. This revitalization of the masculine narrative provides insight into the future of gender representations in American media, foreshadowing concepts of gender equality bringing a more balanced representation to narratives of all genders.

\textsuperscript{15} The Hollywood Reporter announced on February 24, 2009 that the series has now been picked up for a fifth season.
FILMOGRAPHY


“In the Beginning.” Supernatural. CW. WT05, Toledo. 2 October, 2008.


Works Cited


Keveney, Bill. “‘Supernatural’ is an eerie natural for WB.” *USA Today.com*. 17 August 2005. 5 January 2009.


Snyder, R. Claire. “What is Third Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay.” *Signs: Journal of