Spring 2019

Society's Changing Values: A Cultural Perspective on the Sexualizing of Male Villains and Antiheroes in Film and Television

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Society's Changing Values: A Perspective on the Sexualizing of Male Villains and Anti-heroes

in Film and Television

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English Honors in the Discipline

May, 2019

Table of Contents

Introduction

As human beings, many of us are attracted to what we cannot, or should not, have. We are inclined to have that last slice of cake, to venture into unknown territory, or to fall in love with someone we know will disappoint us. We are told, "That's impossible," so we want to prove that it *is* possible. In real life, however, we may not always act on the rebellious thoughts at the forefront of our fantasies. Instead, those fantasies may be channeled through fictional media, such as movies and television shows.

Most people appreciate a well-written villain or anti-hero. These are the rebels—the characters who refuse to be ruled by social standards. People in today's Western Culture have a high interest in such characters, often preferring to get lost in their worlds as opposed to that of the traditionally perfect and infallible hero. Watching a film from the perspective of flawed or gray characters can be a far more interesting and layered experience than looking through the eyes of a character who is always kind and just.

Perhaps it is a matter of relatability; as people, we can never hope to live up to the standards of fictional heroes like Superman and Harry Potter. Yet, we can understand and empathize with the plights of characters who ventured down a dark path because they lost someone they loved or simply wanted justice for a wrong committed against them. In some cases, we identify with these characters, love them, and perhaps even root for them to an extent.

However, what about the vast number of villains and anti-heroes who are romanticized, and even sexualized in our culture? Popular culture has led fans to not only empathizing with dark characters, but often idolizing them as well. This is not only a discussion of flawed characters who have the best intentions; it includes those who may commit truly unforgivable acts, possibly with little to no remorse. They may be murderers, rapists, or master manipulators.

The following sections will explore the concept of villainy in Western film and television, as well as how our sexual and moral standards have changed over the centuries. In addition, I will analyze two film characters—Captain Jack Sparrow from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise and Loki from the Marvel Cinematic Universe—and two television characters—Lucifer from the FOX and Netflix series *Lucifer* and Damon Salvatore from the CW series, *The Vampire Diaries*. These characters are all portrayed by conventionally attractive actors and are adored by fans, no matter how dysfunctional—and sometimes downright evil—they may seem.

Captain Jack Sparrow is a pirate with his own set of moral standards that no one can quite decipher. While not devoid of compassion, he is also quick to turn on allies when it suits him best. Loki, played by Tom Hiddleston, is a beloved character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. He is charming, witty, good-looking, and is the object of many a fan's romantic fantasy. Yet in *The Avengers*, he acts as the main villain and massacres hundreds of people for power. Lucifer is the literal manifestation of the devil in his world, hardly above cruel and selfish actions despite his partnership with a local detective. Damon is the ultimate vampire bad boy who walks the thin line between good and evil, between self-hatred and self-absorption.

None of these men would make for the healthiest companionship in real life, but the film and television industries continue to develop such characters, and audiences continue to love them. There is something truly seductive to people about dangerous or tragically flawed characters, especially if they are portrayed by someone conventionally attractive in a manner that is relatable or sympathetic. Their lack of emotional availability and willingness to take what they want despite potential consequences seem like they should be repulsive to audiences; yet, the opposite is true. Our society's fascination with anti-heroes and attractive villains has become more and more pronounced in the 21st century as Western Society has moved away from Puritan ideals. This

suggests that Western society's changing ideals of sex and morality have helped to boost the development of the pop culture phenomenon concerning sexualized villains and anti-heroes. They have created a culture that allows us to revel in the darkness like never before. Evil is sexy, even if we only embrace it in our wildest fantasies.

Pre-Discussion: The Thin Line Between Good and Evil

Before we can delve into the nature of the four main characters mentioned above, we must first establish what makes a hero, a villain, and an anti-hero. And just as importantly, how does society itself make the decision to differentiate between them?

The tale of good and evil is a theme that has endured in many different cultures for centuries. In Western culture, the Old English epic story of *Beowulf*, in which a hero with superhuman strength rescues the Danes from evil monsters and gains fame and fortune, is almost universally known. Some of the society's most beloved fairytales like *Cinderella*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, and *Hansel and Gretel* all feature their heroes confronting an evil force of some sort, whether it be a witch, a devilish imp, or a wicked stepmother.

A villain is often considered the "antagonist" of a story—the foil to the main character, or "protagonist." However, while a villain of a story is almost always considered the antagonist, an antagonist may not always be a villainous character. Similarly, a protagonist may not always be heroic. An antagonist generally exists as a challenge for a protagonist to overcome in an effort to achieve some goal—whether or not that goal is virtuous or well-intentioned is irrelevant.

When they hear the terms "hero" and "villain," on the other hand, most people think of good and evil, light and darkness. The widely accepted definition of "hero" is someone who has been recognized for exceptionally noble and selfless deeds, like those who have sacrificed for their country, or protected or cared for those in need, possibly at the expense of their personal desires. In contrast, a "villain" is believed to be someone who breaks the rules and disregards other people's well-being for their own gain.

The anti-hero, on the other hand, lies somewhere in between these two categories. Anti-heroes may play sympathetic roles in fiction—they may even have good intentions. However, they

tend to have flaws not commonly associated with the traditional hero, like cowardice, a lack of morality or empathy, or selfishness. The four characters in this paper are all similar in that they play this role to varying degrees. They are neither truly heroic nor truly villainous; they have sympathetic qualities, but as one might expect from a villain, they often act on their own selfish desires without considering the impact they have on the people around them.

This type of character has had a place in society for centuries, but the tendency for film and television producers to glorify and sexualize them has grown. I would argue that, often, people feel drawn to anti-heroes for a few reasons. Due to their flaws and weaknesses, anti-heroes tend to be more relatable and sympathetic than traditional heroes. In addition, they can demonstrate vulnerability in very real ways, meaning people may root for them even if they make poor choices. So, the first step film makers and television producers take to invest viewers in dark characters is to play on the human capacity for empathy. Audiences respond to characters who feel the emotions we feel, who must endure the tragedies and hardships of humanity.

Most recently, the use of attractive actors and the glorifying of dark behavior acts as a way of attracting audiences on a sexual or sensual level. Because this is a relatively new development in media, however, it poses the question of what caused this boom in the popularity of sexy anti-heroes. Is it a reflection of a change in the audiences?

This development appears to reflect not a change in the people themselves, but a change in cultural values, our society's ideas of the concepts of good and evil, and the way we view and respond to our own inner dark side. While many of Western culture's classic "good versus evil" stories are told in black and white, like Superman against Lex Luthor, the idea of true villainy is subject to bias, personal experiences, and social expectations. A character who commits an act deemed evil and villainous in one culture may appear sympathetic in another; the standards of right

and wrong may differ between groups of people, thereby affecting the standards of hero and villain (Hoffman 3). As a result, the term "villain" has, throughout history, been used to define otherness in a person or figure and to separate them from the socially accepted norms (Kendrick 3).

Some of the most popular and well-known struggles between good and evil today occur in film and television, a business that has flourished over the last century. Motion picture technology in the U.S. started taking off in the 1880s, and within the next 30 years, movie theaters began appearing all over the country. Like with literature and other forms of media, films have a history of exploring themes that are relevant to the fears and values of the time. One of the most well-remembered early films, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D.W. Griffith, is known for its mistreatment of women and of the African American population, going so far as to paint them as villains and the Ku Klux Klan as heroes. Even during the time, this film caused a significant amount of controversy, despite being largely successful. In today's climate, such an overtly racist or sexist spectacle would likely cause an even greater storm.

African Americans are not the only ones who have been victims of stereotyping and othering by Hollywood. Latin Americans, the disabled, women, LBTQ, and other groups have faced such treatment as well over the course of film history. Views of World War II and the Cold War helped produce villains like the Japanese from 1942's *Across the Pacific* and Communists in films like *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962).

Media not only reflects, but also reinforces ideas. Whether or not film producers intend to convey a certain message or not, the works they create can teach and help shape cultural values as much as they examine pre-existing ones (Toplin 53-54). Fictional media, especially in mainstream film industries, has long placed real-life adversaries or outside groups of the United States into villainous or "other"-type categories to draw the line between protagonist and antagonist. Even if

they do not necessarily play the villain, those who represent different cultures or deviate from the social norm rarely act as the hero, instead appearing in a stereotypical or negative light.

Villains in fiction can also represent forces beyond our control and some of our deepest fears. They have taken many different shapes in popular culture over the years, from forces of nature and monsters to power-hungry tyrants and seducers. In media, the traditional villain often lacks any genuine capacity for love or sympathy, which solidifies the sense of otherness that they project. The "good triumphs over evil" theme often paints its fictional worlds in black and white, and it serves to satisfy those who prefer a happily ever after. Even today, the theme remains a popular one in iconic franchises like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

All these series draw a stark line between good and evil: Frodo versus the One Ring, Harry Potter versus Voldemort, the children of Adam and Eve versus the White Witch. The One Ring was created to corrupt and destroy, to take the darkness in human beings and use it to make them surrender to greed and possessiveness. Voldemort is prejudiced, power-hungry, and merciless, caring for no one and nothing aside from his own personal gain. Thanks to the lengths he seeks to gain power and immortality, he has an inhuman appearance that further demonizes him. Meanwhile, the White Witch, while elegant and beautiful, practices cruelty for the sake of cruelty and rules over Narnia without regard for her subjects. While audiences may still find entertainment in these forces of darkness, none of them are necessarily created to be relatable or desirable. Their motivations seem alien, foreign, and "other" to everyday average humans, which makes them difficult to root for.

In the 21st century, however, the character once thought of as the "other" has more and more often become the hero, or the glorified anti-hero. Some of the darkest villains are created

with the intent for an audience to sympathize with them and even care about their motivations and desires. For instance, while the Maleficent of 1959's version of the *Sleeping Beauty* fairytale made evil choices simply for the sake of evil, Disney changed its approach to the character in the 2013 live action version, *Maleficent.* The new film focused on the villain's perspective of the story instead of the princess and her fairy guardians, giving Maleficent a more human appearance and a tragic backstory to go along with it. Instead of placing a curse on Princess Aurora simply to be cruel, the updated version of Maleficent casts the curse as an act of vengeance against the king, who betrayed her and cut off her wings when she gave her love and trust to him. Eventually, she grows to not only love the princess, but also save her from her treacherous father.

Today, villains, morally ambiguous characters, and anti-heroes all make darkness seem so appealing. The film and television industries may use attractive actors and suggestive themes to help sexualize their characters. Yet, dark behavior in the characters we love speaks to us all on its own, thanks to a common human desire for power and freedom. This can apply to many facets of our lives, from work and friendships to sexual relationships and personal values. The desire in humans to break the rules and defy social expectations is not new—but it is something society has tried to repress for many years through its own moral ideals.

Our society's ideas of good and evil have been shaped throughout the centuries by religious beliefs. The most famous battle of good and evil known in Western Culture may well be that of God and his adversary, Satan, whom some know as the Devil or Lucifer. Many believe that those who are selfless and virtuous will be rewarded by God, while those who give in to temptation and act out of selfless impulse are doing so under the influence of the Devil.

In particular, religion has helped lead to a powerful stigma regarding sexuality and certain sexual acts. One's sexuality and sexual acts have long been closely tied to his or her identity and

moral character. Evidence suggests that the general public made this same connection between sexuality and identity as early as the 1700s, meaning that such views have endured in Western Cultures for at least 300 years (Foster XII). The Victorian Era, in particular, is well-known as a time of silence and extreme sexual repression; but the repression of sexuality has had a presence all throughout history and continues to influence today's cultural values.

In the 1930s and '40s, still the early days of film, the industry enforced The Motion Picture Production Code, which prohibited the use of sex, profanity, drugs, the portrayal of religious figures as villains, and even mixed race relationships in films (Dixon 130-131). Today, the film and television industries know that sex and violence sell, and they are not afraid to use this knowledge to their advantage. They question and even poke fun at religious ideals—for instance, the titular character of the long-running television series, *House M.D.*, is well-known for his ability to see only the worst in humanity and denial of the existence of a loving God, suggesting that, "People can do good things, but their instincts are not good. Either God doesn't exist or he's unimaginably cruel" ("One Day, One Room").

Societal values in the 1930s and 1940s led to the production of romantic films like *It Happened One Night* (1934) and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947). Remarkably chaste in comparison to the types of films produced today, these two films thrived on the tension between their leads, with minimal touching or reference to sexual encounters. In *It Happened One Night*, romantic leads Ellie and Peter fall in love despite Ellie being married to another man, but sleep in the same room in separate beds with a sheet hanging between them until her marriage is annulled.

One of the earliest films to include nudity and sex was the Czechoslovakian film, *Ecstasy*, in 1933. During that time, it was considered extremely controversial, and the American film industry did not begin to follow this example until years later.

In the 21st century, raunchy romantic comedies like *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008) and *The Forty-Year Old Virgin* (2005) appear on viewer screens, unconcerned with vulgarity and subjects of casual sex out of wedlock. Television and films became more sexualized and violent far earlier, however, as the Motion Picture Production Code was repealed in the late 1960s. Shortly after the MPAA Ratings System was put into place in 1968, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) was released, initially with an X rating for its nature of sexual content. The decades that followed saw a shift in the movie industry, in which producers were willing and able to move toward the violent, the profane, and the risqué to varying degrees.

This is a vast change from 18th century New England, in which the only socially acceptable place for sex was the marital bed between man and woman. The common belief during this time was that there could be extensive consequences for those who failed to control their sexual urges (Foster 10). However, while men who abused their power were considered to be a problem, the law only administered mild punishments, if any at all, to white men for offenses like rape (Foster 55). A woman, on the other hand, could not avenge her own rape without having the blame placed on her (Foster 55-56). Society expected women to be gentle and submissive, while men took on the dominant role; yet women were simultaneously seen as a sexual threat to men, who were considered vulnerable and easily persuaded (Foster 54).

Sexual oppression in the 1700s applied to both men and women, but women, believed to be untrustworthy at the time, were oppressed even further. A common conception pervaded that time period that women had higher sex drives than men, that they were cunning and deceitful, and that men needed to protect society from those dangers (Foster 69-70). There are multiple other theories to explain why women specifically have been expected to suppress their desires (or not have any desires at all), but it is a standard that has remained ingrained in society throughout the

years (Baumeister 167). While expectations between men and women have historically had their differences, 18th century society also held men to a certain high standard that placed their very reputations and domestic lives on the line. For instance, a court in Massachusetts would grant a divorce in the case that a man abandoned or committed adultery against his wife, as a man who failed to control himself was considered unfit to act as head of his household (Foster 23). Even if the woman in the relationship committed adultery, society often still considered the husband partly responsible because he failed to take care of his wife's needs (Foster 24).

So why was adultery considered so blasphemous, while people held the bond of marriage so high on a pedestal? According to the Bible, God created marriage in Genesis, at the very dawn of humanity, meaning that marriage was likely not only the socially accepted pinnacle of adulthood in the 18th century, but also the joining of a man and woman both spiritually and physically under the rule of God. To break that bond meant to betray Him, and it was the type of offense that could bring ruin upon the individual.

In 18th century Massachusetts, sexual restrictions also applied to interracial and homosexual relationships. A white man and woman engaging in sexual intercourse out of wedlock may have been forced to pay a fine, but this was a fairly small price to pay compared to the punishment an African American man might receive for having sex with a Caucasian woman (Foster 129). In addition to a fine, the African American may have been subject to a beating or whipping and possibly sold away from their colony (Foster 130). While not as harshly received, same sex acts were viewed as "moral failings" from which people should repent and reform (Foster 156 and 160).

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Society's ideals of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality 300 years ago may seem foreign to the people of today's version of America and other Western countries, but whether people realize it or not, those values still influence our culture.

However, while religion has been an important aspect of Western Culture for hundreds of years, the 20th and 21st centuries have begun to see the secularizing of society. According to the Public Religion Research Institute, almost a quarter of Americans identified themselves as unaffiliated with any religion in 2016. In turn, although Protestant and Catholic faiths made up the majority of the nation in the 1970s, they now make up less than half the population ("America's Changing Religious Identity"). Religious diversity in the United States has grown over the years and continues to grow, which plays a part in changing the current cultural values of the land.

While cultural changes can occur over centuries in a society, do people themselves ever truly change? According to *The History of Sexuality*, "Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by its hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and direct, perverse" (Foucalt 47). By this argument, society today is no more chaotic than it was 100, or 200 years ago. The difference is that, now, society has allowed people to feel freer to express themselves on an open level. It is not as a result of repression that our society is obsessed with sex and violence—it is in spite of it.

The question is, why does any of this matter? The presence of religion and a God (or multiple Gods) in fiction has endured as far back as history records story-telling. If Western Cultural media reflects the current views of the collective society, it is understandable that writers and artists would have found ways to convey religious ideas in a society with religion so deeply ingrained in its culture. The hero stereotype people imagine today is often the handsome young man with no physical or emotional flaws and the strength of ten men for fighting monsters and

dragons. The hero may have some power given to him by God or other spiritual entity, which he may use to become a source of light and goodness for others.

Traditional heroes are flawless because they can complete their journey only by following the rule of God (Porter 11). Human beings in real life are incapable of living without making mistakes and committing acts considered sinful; it is a simple truth that most people must learn to live with over the course of their lives. However, in fiction, people have the freedom to create characters who live up to such a moral ideal. Only a character who was kind, brave, and just could take on the shining role as a true hero. By this logic, the hero is the social ideal and a role model for the common citizen, albeit a possibly glowing moral standard that no ordinary flawed human could hope to attain. The hero represents the types of behavior one should conform to if they hope to find acceptance in a given society; meanwhile, the villain represents the exact opposite—the behavior to avoid (Hoffman 6).

The popular trend today includes making villains less evil, or at least more relatable, while making the heroes a little less good. Critic Lynnette Porter argues that in today's society, people's attitudes default to cynicism and the expectation that everyone has a dark side, making perfect heroes unidentifiable (Porter 28). The "us versus them" attitude still persists in some areas of Western Culture, but the prospect that there exists one source of all evil in the world has become a less popular notion. Since the mid-20th century, the line between the hero and villain in film and television has blurred, allowing all types of characters to demonstrate facets of both good and evil (Porter 53).

People make pre-judgments every day in their ordinary lives based on their own cognitive biases without having sufficient information. As a society, we may be quick to condemn the criminal, the liar, or the murderer. However, television and film media allow us the extraordinary

ability to see the world through the eyes of such a person. With the right amount of character development and a proper motive, a writer can make even the most dastardly villain worthy of sympathy. At that point, viewers can start recognizing what connects them to that character, rather than what divides them.

Part I: Captain Jack Sparrow

The type of character known as the "other," as discussed in the previous section, can be any outcast, either visually or behaviorally, whom the audience and characters may not fully feel able to trust or identify with. Captain Jack Sparrow is a prime example of an anti-hero defined by his otherness thanks to his pirating lifestyle. Jack may not be part of a particular well-known minority group that commonly faces othering by the film industry; however, pirates are figures who are often stereotyped in fiction, as well as viewed as "other" or villainous figures due to their notoriety for violence and pillaging. They are not considered trustworthy or virtuous by audiences, meaning Jack, at the very least, is not a traditional hero.

Johnny Depp, who played the role of Captain Jack for five movies between 2003 and 2017, has been largely recognized as a sex symbol and a popular Hollywood actor. Jack, however, is not exactly your typical dashing, swash-buckling action hero, nor does he necessarily have the stylish charms of some other anti-heroes. Instead, he is a jagged and awkward character, unsteady on his feet and a bit too fond of the alcoholic beverage.

The producer, Jerry Bruckheimer, and the writers who worked on the films made Jack to appear as little more than a bumbling fool at first glance, but it takes a closer look to see the full picture of his character. Because of Jack's outwardly silly and off-beat personality, he is almost always initially underestimated by everyone he meets in the first movie. When he rescues Elizabeth Swann from drowning in *The Curse of the Black Pearl* upon his arrival in the town of Port Royal, Commodore Norrington plans to have him executed for piracy despite his good deed. When he sees that Jack's only tools are a pistol with one shot and a compass that does not point north, he notes, "You are without a doubt the worst pirate I've ever heard of" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*).

Although Jack is eventually caught and imprisoned by the guards, Elizabeth's capture by Captain Barbossa forces Will Turner, the blacksmith who loves her, to strike a deal with the pirate to go rescue her. They hatch an elaborate plan by Jack to take control of the royal navy's fastest ship, The Interceptor; as they sail away after deceiving the entire crew, one of the officers stands next to Norrington and muses, "That's got to be the best pirate I've ever seen" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*).

Although he often plays the fool (and may make some extremely reckless choices), it becomes clearer and clearer throughout the duration of the first film that Jack is more intelligent than he seems. This, combined with his tendency to place his own interests ahead of the interests of others, makes him a dangerous enemy. Although Will and Elizabeth are the heroes and central characters of the movie, Jack manipulates and drives the story from every angle. While he often serves as comic relief for the audience, he also serves a valuable purpose as former captain of the Black Pearl. Captain Barbossa and the ship's crew have endured a curse for ten years that they need Will to break, and it is only Jack's knowledge of this that leads him to join forces with Will to rescue Elizabeth.

While Jack seems to develop a fondness for Will and Elizabeth, he mercilessly uses them to his own ends so he can take the Black Pearl back from Barbossa. Before the climax of the film begins, Jack notifies the royal navy of the crew's whereabouts and appears just as they are about to spill Will's blood to break their curse. Because the curse grants them immortality, Jack warns them about the navy ships waiting for them and bargains with Barbossa to earn back the Black Pearl and his Captain title. Will, angered by the betrayal, says, "You planned this from the beginning. Ever since you learned my name" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*).

Jack does not deny the accusation, but later turns on Barbossa as soon as the members of the crew leave to kill the threat outside while they still have their immortality. While Jack and Will fight against Barbossa and the few crew members who stayed behind, Elizabeth arrives to help and asks Will, "Whose side is Jack on?" to which he simply shrugs and replies, "At the moment…" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*).

Due to Jack's choice to help save Will and Elizabeth, Will repays his unlikely friend by saving him from a grisly execution at the end of the film and allowing him to escape to his ship. So, despite Jack's questionable ulterior motives, he is ultimately rewarded with his ship returned and his life spared. He wins the day and achieves the goal he set out to reach at the start of the story, as any action hero would.

Like many male anti-heroes in popular culture today, Jack is rewarded for helping to save the day in the first movie without consideration for his earlier bad behavior. At the end of the film, when Elizabeth's father condemns Jack and says, "He's a pirate," Will retorts, "And a good man," as if to say that because Jack helped defeat Barbossa, an entire movie filled with manipulation and deceit is easily forgivable (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*). Because Jack's selfishly motivated choices have no lasting consequences on the other main characters, the audience can easily forgive them as well. Rather, they are left free to enjoy Jack's outwardly carefree, fun-loving nature without feelings of guilt or discomfort.

This is a tactic that writers in film and television seem to use commonly today. Although anti-heroes are not new in fiction, the glorifying of their behavior is a fairly recent development. Some of Western Culture's most famous anti-heroes and tragic heroes were created in the 1500s and 1600s by William Shakespeare. Hamlet, for instance, is a famous anti-hero who meets his downfall in an effort to exact revenge on his uncle for the murder of his father.

What separates Hamlet from a hero like Beowulf or an average comic book hero today, however, is that his flaws ultimately hinder him, causing his death. He follows the path of vengeance in his story rather than the path of patience and kindness, and it kills him and his entire family. Although he does, in some capacity, achieve his vengeance by killing his Uncle Claudius, Hamlet's story turns into a tragedy rather than a victory.

The difference between this type of protagonist and some of the modern characters I discuss here is that they are loved and often rewarded for their flaws, while Hamlet is punished for them. While Shakespeare leaves his audience with some ambiguity about whether or not his pursuit of revenge is just, it is Hamlet's violent, volatile, and manipulative behavior that ultimately destroys him. He brings an extensive amount of pain and ruin upon the rest of his family, and while readers and viewers can feel sympathy for the character, it might take an incredibly skilled writer to adapt the play and diminish his questionable choices.

Making a villain or anti-hero attractive for an audience is not simply about making the character sympathetic or understandable; as indicated in the case of Jack Sparrow, whether or not characters face realistic consequences for their mistakes can play a large role in glorifying and sexualizing them. Hamlet faces those consequences; Jack, however, does not. Based on this analysis, it is reasonable to deduce that audiences love characters who demonstrate some semblance of humanity. However, they also love characters who have the freedom to get away with breaking the rules now and then.

People who enjoy analyzing great works of art and exploring all the beautiful and ugly sides of humanity may turn to the tragedies of Shakespeare. However, the average person who wants to be entertained, to be lost in a fantasy and forget their daily life, may turn to these characters who represent freedom and danger. Those who need some time to escape reality after a

long day may love characters they can relate to, but some may not be interested in seeing the potential grim realities of human error on their television screen.

Rather, protagonists like Jack Sparrow play on the very real human desire to shun the rules and live unhindered by limitations. For many, this is both an erotic and sensual prospect, which allows people to imagine and fantasize about such a way of life instead of facing reminders of the cruelty and loneliness that plagues the real world. Developing technology and cultural changes have allowed people to embrace this kind of entertainment like never before.

The creators of the *Pirates* franchise glorify Jack's behavior by removing the threat of lasting consequences. Adding to this, however, they also use his persona and his interactions with other characters to sexualize him. An "othering" quality that Jack possesses is his appearance—his makeup, long hair, and many accessories give him a look that would be uncommon for someone to see on the street in real life. That said, he also has numerous features and movements that give him a feminine rather than masculine appeal. He does not exude the kind of rough masculine sexuality that, for example, Jason Momoa does in his portrayal of DC's Aquaman. Jack Sparrow is lean and average-sized rather than large and muscular, he has softer facial features, and his movements are fluid and light as one might expect of a woman rather than a man.

So, why do Jack's feminine qualities add to the sexualizing of his character? It turns out that studies have been done indicating that many women feel more attracted to men with more feminine physical attributes than masculine ones. According to one study performed on facial attractiveness, some women may feel attracted to highly masculine features because it indicates male health and strength on a biological level (Holzleitner 2). On the other hand, high masculinity is also associated with violence and a lack of interest in parental responsibility, meaning some women will look for gentler, more feminine qualities in a long-term partner (Holzleitner 2). More

feminine male characters indicate a heightened sensitivity, receptiveness, and sensuality that highly masculine characters do not. With this in mind, it is reasonable to believe that Jack's feminine features and mannerisms would appeal to fans. Therefore, the attractiveness of Jack is not only sexual, but romantic as well.

One blatant method that the creators of *Pirates* use to sexualize Jack is through his relationships with the other characters. In *The Curse of the Black Pearl*, Jack interacts with multiple women, all of whom slap him across the face as soon as they see him. This was likely a choice made for comedic effect, but it also serves as a small gesture to establish Jack as a womanizer. A common staple of bad boy characters is their lack of attachment and inability to settle down with one partner; they may be emotionally unavailable like Sherlock from BBC's *Sherlock* or have a tendency to destroy potentially healthy relationships in their lives, like Matt Murdock from Netflix's *Daredevil.* Audiences see very little of Jack's romantic/womanizing adventures onscreen, but acknowledging that they exist in this manner sexualizes his character and adds a playboy aspect to his anti-hero persona.

Jack's appeal to the women in his life is further explored in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, in which Elizabeth develops an attraction for the scheming pirate while enlisting his help to find her fiancé, Will. While there is little doubt that Elizabeth truly loves Will and sees a future with him, she shares a chemistry with Jack that ultimately becomes a source of tension between all three leads. When Elizabeth arrives in Tortuga to find Will, she discovers from Jack that her love has been taken captive by Davy Jones. Jack explains to her that they need to find the chest of Davy Jones to save him, even though he is more interested in using it as leverage to secure his own freedom.

She sets off with him and his crew, and after a flirtatious encounter with him, Norrington approaches her and says, "There was a time I would give anything for you to look like that while thinking about me" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*). Elizabeth first pretends not to understand the meaning in his words, only to then dismiss him and say, "Don't be absurd. I trust him, that's all" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*). Elizabeth's discomfort in spite of her denial suggests that she may feel some attraction for Jack early on, even if she refuses to admit it.

This is further supported when Jack shares his secret with her—that his compass has the special power to lead the person holding it to his or her greatest desire. After Elizabeth boards his ship and sets off with his crew, more than one occasion occurs in which Elizabeth holds Jack's compass, staring at it in disgust upon the realization that it points in his direction. Although the second time this happens, Jack deduces that the compass is pointing toward him because she is standing on top of the chest they need, the film leaves Elizabeth's true feelings at least partially up for interpretation.

In one of Elizabeth and Jack's rounds of flirtatious banter aboard the Black Pearl, he tells her that eventually she will admit she wants him because, "You long for freedom. You long to do what you want to do because you want it. To act on selfish impulse. You want to see what it's like. One day—you won't be able to resist" (*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*). This suggests that Elizabeth's feelings for Jack are reflective of the human desire for freedom, to not be bound by rules, regulations, and expectations. Even if she knows she wants to spend the rest of her life with Will and the safety and security he could offer her in a relationship, she still feels a pull toward Jack's wild, unpredictable nature. In the same scene, Elizabeth tells Jack that she believes

he is a good man at heart, and that when he has the opportunity to do the right thing, he will take it.

In the end, it turns out that both characters are correct about one another. Near the finale of the film when the kraken attacks the Black Pearl in search of Jack, Jack escapes on a boat and leaves Will, Elizabeth, and the crew to die. However, he has a crisis of conscience and returns to help when they need him the most. Elizabeth, on the other hand, cruelly and unexpectedly uses Jack's change of heart to her own advantage. Using a kiss as a distraction, Elizabeth chains Jack to his ship and sacrifices him to the kraken hunting him so that she and the rest of the crew can escape.

By leaving Jack behind in this scene, Elizabeth also leaves behind her feelings for him and his lifestyle in a more metaphorical sense. However, in betraying him, she also taps into her own dark side. Jack's response, rather than anger or disbelief, is a knowing smile as he calls her, "Pirate," before she walks away (*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*). Although Jack is ready and willing throughout the duration of the film to sacrifice Will to Davy Jones to save his own life, Elizabeth shows in this scene that she is capable of similar cruelty to protect herself and the man she loves.

The nature of Elizabeth's feelings about Jack arise at least one more time within the original *Pirates* trilogy. At the end of *The Curse of the Black Pearl*, Jack jokingly points out to Elizabeth, "It would never have worked out between us," a line that Elizabeth repeats to him during their farewell in last minutes of *At World's End*. Although Jack almost seems mocking when he utters the words, Elizabeth says it wistfully with the hint of a smile on her face, showing how their dynamic has changed thanks to the challenges they faced together. This indicates that there is an

awareness between the two characters that, despite their attraction, a genuine relationship would have been doomed to failure.

Jack Sparrow functions as a charming anti-hero because, while he is clumsy and untrustworthy, he is more competent than he first appears and never quite crosses the threshold from rebellious and mischievous to careless and cruel. He enjoys the freedom to do as he pleases and makes self-serving choices without the burden of damaging ramifications that the same type of person might face in the real world. He uses traits that that qualify him as an "other" character to his advantage, almost allowing him to take on the role of an action hero in spite of his questionable morals.

As a result, Jack serves not only as a comical character, but as an onscreen representation of freedom, power, and sexual energy, which make him a mesmerizing and endlessly entertaining character for viewers. Jack's cheeky defiance of social expectations undeniably attracts the attention and stirs the fantasies of human beings who tend to avoid stepping outside their own social boundaries.

Part II: Loki of Asgard

Today, film makers often find ways to encourage audiences to forgive even characters' worst qualities by making them just a little bit larger than life. The creators of the Marvel Cinematic Universe have been following a similar trend with some of their characters for the last decade. Even the heroes of the franchise have disastrous flaws that might make them undesirable in the real world; one of the most notable of these is Tony Stark, also known as Iron Man, whose selfish and stubborn tendencies make him a better candidate for anti-hero status than that of a traditional hero. Although, for the most part, he has good intentions and uses his Iron Man suits for the good of others, he has an impulsive streak and a love for attention that frequently bring trouble to his doorstep. Yet, audiences respond positively to him because of his charming quips and impressive intellect. His monetary wealth and above-average intelligence put him in a unique position of power that most people can only dream of.

The anti-hero/antagonist Loki of the Marvel Universe serves this purpose to an even greater extent. Tom Hiddleston's acting career took off after his performance of Loki in *Thor*. In 2013, after the release of *Thor: The Dark World*, he took a 77 percent vote for an MTV "Sexiest Man Alive" poll, beating out even his *Avengers* co-star and onscreen brother, Chris Hemsworth (Wickman). It is clear that Hiddleston's portrayal of the God of Mischief has earned its share of popularity since its debut, but Loki is no hero—far from it, in fact. Unlike most of the heroes in the series, Loki is not human at all and comes from another realm. However, he exhibits many human qualities that make him one of the most deeply developed in the franchise. He possesses powers no known human being could ever hope to have, and to top it off, he has few inhibitions when it comes to taking whatever he wants. The idea of having the kind of power and confidence

that Loki possesses fascinates people, even when he chooses to use that power to cause pain and suffering.

The original folklore depicting Loki made him appear as a more overtly sexual figure than he is in today's media (Bassil-Morozow 92). Sex was a prominent theme of his persona, and he commonly referenced it in word play and insulting comments toward the other Gods around him (Bassil-Morozow 92-93). He was also notorious for defying gender expectations, as he was believed to have the ability to change sex, which he used to seduce both men and women (Bassil-Morozow 93).

Marvel's 21st century Loki is not muscular and manly in the same way as his brother, Thor, nor does he make any notable references to sex in the film series, nor does he have any romantic encounters. In fact, the majority of the large-budget Marvel films are fairly chaste as a general rule, containing light romance but rarely any references to sexual activity. However, like Jack Sparrow in *Pirates*, Loki's physical attributes and demeanor still help make him an attractive and sensual character.

As mentioned previously, Loki is not a highly masculine character. Similar to Jack Sparrow, Loki has delicate, angular features that are generally associated with a meeker, milder disposition (which is arguably female). He is tall but thin, often wearing skin-tight clothing that fits closely around his figure. Graceful, cat-like movements also add not only to his mischievous persona, but also to his feminine appearance—as masculine men are more well-known for having bulky, heavy movements.

Loki is cast as conventionally handsome and portrayed as resourceful, cunning, and authoritative. Many audiences value characters with complexity, whom they can relate to, and they have a growing appreciation for tortured villains like Kylo Ren from the most recent *Star Wars*

releases. They like characters who dabble in the dark side, but they also respond to characters who they feel are redeemable. Loki can be cruel and unforgiving, but he never truly crosses the threshold to monstrous. He makes witty jokes to elicit laughter from the audience—he rages over his mother's death to elicit sympathy. Tom Hiddleston increases the character's attractiveness by portraying Loki's torment and loneliness masked by glee and carelessness.

Although Loki is not human, he deals with human problems and reacts to situations with human emotions. If a character has no feelings at all, caring for no one and nothing but their end goal without reasonable cause to do so, it is more difficult for real people to understand and sympathize with them. This is why Loki's family drama as a catalyst for his need for power and control is such a crucial element of his character.

Trapped in the shadow of Thor for most of his life, Loki felt betrayed when he discovered that he was not Thor's biological brother at all, instead a frost giant Odin took pity on during war. Feeling cheated out of a chance to rule and believing Odin never had faith in him, he decided to take matters into his own hands and attempted to take over the Earth in *Avengers*. Following his defeat, audiences are able to see a more vulnerable side of Loki. Due to his inability to trust others, his relationship with Thor continues to go under strain throughout *Thor: The Dark World* and *Thor: Ragnarok*. However, in *The Dark World*, it is shown that the God of Mischief still has love for his family despite all he has done, such as when he displays a brief fit of violence in his prison cell upon learning of his and Thor's mother's death. Later, as he and Thor argue over the incident, Thor says, "Mother wouldn't want us to fight," to which Loki replies with a crooked smile, "Well, she wouldn't exactly be shocked" (*Thor: The Dark World*).

It can often be difficult to tell just where Loki's loyalties lie. The writers of the Marvel films tend to take their time drawing out his intentions, and they rarely do so in black and white.

While Loki can be both cunning and powerful, he also has the capacity to be a tremendous coward, who will gladly stand on the sidelines as other people suffer. The most notable example of this is in *Thor: Ragnarok*, when Thor becomes imprisoned on the planet Sakaar after losing a battle to his sister, Hela. Loki arrives on the planet before him and befriends the Grandmaster, who rules Sakaar, and takes no interest in speaking on his brother's behalf. They later team up to escape Sakaar, only for Loki to betray Thor again, which results in Thor leaving him behind on the planet. Not until the end does Loki decide to fully stand beside his brother so they can defeat Hela and save Asgard.

Loki's vulnerability only serves to further endear viewers to his character. On the outside, Loki is a larger-than-life supervillain with an over-the-top wardrobe and an affinity for the dramatic flair. These qualities could be enough to engage audiences' excitement and interest, but they are not enough to engage their emotions. Loki's feelings of betrayal toward his family and enduring yet complex relationship with his brother reduce his more alien qualities just enough to make him more recognizable to a human audience. While he may serve largely as a villain within the film franchise, he has more layers than other villains in the Marvel Universe like Whiplash from *Iron Man 2* or Makelith from *Thor: The Dark World.*

Even so, there must be a line drawn somewhere. Loki kills hundreds of people in his conquest for Earth, and yet audiences tend to overlook it or forgive it in favor of his more favorable qualities. Most likely, this has to do with the way Marvel chooses to portray the character. Even during some of his most despicable moments, Loki is portrayed less as a dark, evil figure and more like a playful child meddling with forces beyond his full control. In the real world, his vile actions against humanity would likely be deemed unforgivable by society. However, like in the case of Captain Jack Sparrow, viewers see very little of the repercussions of Loki's mischief. If an actor

portrayed the character Loki with fewer redeeming qualities and more emphasis on the consequences for his misdeeds, an audience might find him less attractive. Instead, he consistently walks the line between devious trickster and tortured soul, endearing him to audiences in spite of his wrong-doings.

Primarily, the Marvel movies of the last decade have served as fun, light-hearted action films. In *Avengers*, Thor tells the Avengers not to insult his brother until Black Widow points out, "He killed 80 people in two days." A beat passes, and Thor replies, "He is adopted" (*Avengers*). Death in the Marvel films is often played off in a joking manner or glossed over when the deaths consist of masses of ordinary people. When films treat the concept of death in such a way, it distances audiences from their consequences. So, while viewers may be aware that Loki massacres dozens before the above scene occurs, those deaths leave little emotional impact for audiences, reducing the seriousness of Loki's actions.

To give a contrasting example, the Marvel Netflix series explore far darker and grittier material than their flashy blockbuster movie counterparts. Season 1 of *Jessica Jones* (2015) follows the life of a private investigator with above average strength as she deals with post-traumatic stress from a non-consensual, abusive relationship. The violation Jessica experienced was not only physical, but also mental and emotional, as it is revealed that her perpetrator, Kilgrave, used superhuman mind manipulation abilities to keep her under his control. By the start of the first episode, Jessica has already managed to escape Kilgrave and is currently attempting to fit the pieces of her life back together so she can move on. However, all too soon the man of her nightmares returns and starts taunting her from the shadows by using the people around her, in hopes that he can convince her to return to him of her own will.

Kilgrave, portrayed by David Tennant, represents a villain who is both frightening and alluring. He plays a seductive role in *Jessica Jones*, not just because he has the ability to manipulate victims to his every whim, but because audiences can understand how a person with such powers could turn into someone like him. His own parents gave him his abilities through experimentation, and then abandoned him when they realized they were not equipped to handle him or his powers. He then grew up without love, without compassion, without the satisfaction of truly working hard for something he desired. Self-serving yet misguided and lonely, Kilgrave soon makes it clear to viewers that, given the proper kind of nurture, he may have learned to use his powers for a better cause and become a force for good like the other Defenders.

Jessica Jones, unlike many of the Marvel films, is a deeply personal story. So although Kilgrave manages to win the sympathy of the audience, and even charm them to an extent, he is not as easily forgivable as a character like Loki. In this series, there are no massive, glorified battles between hero and villain, no jokes to play off the deaths of innocent people. In the first episode, Kilgrave uses his mind control to force his one of his victims to shoot her parents to death after Jessica saves her. This is only the first of many atrocities we witness from Kilgrave; he never takes a life directly, preferring other people to do the work for him. However, the consequences of his actions leave a mark on Jessica and the people close to her. Audience members are witness to not only the horrors he commits, but also the gruesome aftermath he leaves behind for *individuals* rather than masses of people without names or backstory. Despite his charms, this makes Kilgrave a far more unnerving and repulsive figure than Loki.

Because of the light, comic book-style manner in which Loki's actions are portrayed, he may be more likely to get attention from fans eager to forgive his wrongs and appreciate his devious persona than a character like Kilgrave. In Loki, Marvel created a character they define as

mischievous and playful, not evil. They make light of his smug, selfish attitudes and rarely show the blood he has spilled onscreen. While they make sure that audiences are aware of what Loki has done, they also make sure the audiences never dwell on it for too long. Loki's brand of darkness can be sexy because it does not force viewers to consider the consequences of his lifestyle. Kilgrave's darkness, however, holds nothing back and serves to reflect uncomfortable realities rather than glorified fantasies.

This is not to say that Loki is necessarily a less interesting character simply because the world he inhabits is flashier and more fancified than Kilgrave's. As mentioned above, his personal suffering and inability to trust have grounded his character and given him a human quality than may even surpass that of the morally grounded heroes like the Hulk and Captain America. It is the balance between Loki's charming villain side and his human emotions like love, envy, and betrayal that appeal to and attract audiences. If he were simply a villain with no motivations or intentions other than to spread evil create chaos, he might still be entertaining to watch, but lose the qualities that allow him to resonate with real people. Similarly, if Loki decided to permanently choose the side of peace and justice and become one of the heroes, he might run the risk of becoming a far less interesting character.

Once the villain or anti-hero in a work of fiction, especially in a long-running series of films or episodes, crosses the invisible threshold into full-fledged hero, a new problem arises. How will the writer further develop that character while keeping them fresh and interesting to audiences? In some cases, the writer may choose to kill the character off so that they can end their journey fully redeemed, like Darth Vader dies saving Luke in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. In other cases, they may attempt to find new ways to challenge the character after they become a hero or cause them to relapse into darkness.

This can work if the character still has a strong motive or end goal to keep their story fresh. For instance, Zuko from the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* starts out one of the main villains of the series, and he gradually progresses to an anti-hero and eventually a protagonist by half way through the final season. However, because his character arc followed through the entirety of the show, his development always had a clear direction, which prevented him from growing stale. Meanwhile, the ABC's *Once Upon a Time* villain Rumpelstiltskin suffered from a repetitive storyline after his character arc ended mid-season three with him earning his son's forgiveness and then sacrificing himself to save the main characters. The writers resurrected him a few episodes later, which led to a nearly endless cycle of Rumpelstiltskin trying to become a hero but betraying his loved ones due to his cowardice and selfishness. While he started out as a compelling and entertaining character, he ultimately became overused and predictable.

As a major character in a film franchise, Loki risked suffering a similar fate. Often, a character like him can only repeat the same patterns so many times before he or he starts to grow old. However, viewers continue to adore him and fantasize about him despite his lack of major character development in his most recent films. The reason is this: In *Thor: The Dark World*, Loki deceives Thor and the audiences by seemingly sacrificing his own life, only to return and take over Asgard under the nose of his unassuming brother. After such an ending, it might seem like a bold and dangerous choice to resurrect the God of Mischief. In his reappearance at the end of the film, his already successful plan to replace Odin on the throne of Asgard seems to indicate a major plot point in later installments of the film series. On the contrary, *Thor: Ragnarok* glosses over Loki's conquest in the first half hour, making room for bigger threats such as the Grand Master and Odin's eldest child, Hela.

Loki is mainly reduced to a comic role in *Ragnarok*, helping drive the plot but largely remaining on the outside of it. He shows that, despite his seemingly selfless act in *The Dark World*, he is hardly above returning to his old ways and putting his personal interests first. Allowing him to fall back on this pattern might have been devastating for his character—but somehow, it works. Because of Loki's playful, carefree attitude, the writers and producers can allow him to get way with almost anything with little consequence. *Ragnarok* is, by its very nature and arguably more than any Marvel film before it, a comedy, meaning that few of the characters need to be taken too seriously. Keeping Loki's role in *Ragnarok* light works for the movie because the movie itself is light-hearted. As long as he has his charming quips and enough brotherly moments with Thor to keep him grounded, he can remain a loveable and sexy character—at least, for a while.

Later, Loki falls early on to Thanos in *Avengers: Infinity War* in an effort to protect Thor, leaving audiences to wonder if his death is permanent this time around, or if he will cheat fate once again. However, what is clear is that for Loki's brand of evil to be sexy, it cannot be predictable. Humans have qualities that can be predictable, and they often repeat mistakes. Some of these same qualities make Loki a relatable and sympathetic character, but it is the sense of danger and recklessness surrounding him combined with his physical attractiveness that excites audiences and spawns such a multitude of fan-produced media. His air of authority, carefree lifestyle, and confidence are all traits shared by other similarly glorified villains and anti-heroes who have become the object of many a viewer's fantasy.

Part III: Lucifer Morningstar

Today, most people are familiar with the bad boy archetype in film and television, which is meant to appeal to viewers who love a bit of danger and adventure. Research suggests that most bad boy characters are composed of three main traits known as The Dark Triad: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Jonason, et al.). Narcissism refers to a character's sense of entitlement, perhaps even self-obsession. Meanwhile, psychopathy suggests a lack of empathy and little concern with manipulating others, and Machiavellianism is a trait characterized by cunning, cynical views, and self-righteousness (Jonason, et al.).

Bad boy characters may not all exhibit these qualities to the same extent, but many have them on some level. Loki, in particular, is a fairly accurate representation of all these Dark Triad traits. He shows narcissistic views in his belief that he is entitled to rule Asgard; he exhibits psychopathic tendencies in his willingness to slaughter innocent people and toy with their emotions for his own gain; and he shows Machiavellianism in his cruel and cold-hearted strategies of rising into power.

This relates to the sexualization of bad boy characters because research suggests that many women find men who exhibit Dark Triad traits more attractive than other men. This was discovered in 2013, in which a group of 128 were asked to complete a questionnaire indicating the attractiveness of Dark Triad men and control men ("The Dark Triad Personality: Attractiveness to Women"). Overall, the participants in the study found the men with traits matching the Dark Triad personality to be more attractive than the men in the control group ("The Dark Triad Personality: Attractiveness to Women"). The researchers believed that this is due to the fact that people exhibiting such traits portray confidence and a willingness to take risks, which make for better short-term sexual partners ("The Dark Triad Personality: Attractiveness to Women").

Different versions of the bad boy archetype, or characters with Dark Triad qualities, can be found in all forms of media today, although they have been known to appear during many other points in history. Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and Jim from *The Bad Boy* (1917) are just a few examples from the 20th century. However, where do these characters and their dark traits truly originate? Characters exhibiting the Dark Triad qualities have been among us since long before the days of film. The origin of the character we know as the "bad boy," however, seems to come at least in part from a place of religion, as many of our cultural values and ideas have.

Even as Western culture becomes more secular, most people are familiar with some variation of Satan or the devil, whom many consider synonymous with the beautiful archangel, Lucifer. In some versions of Christian religious history, Lucifer fell from Heaven because he wanted to stand equally with God (Rees 73). Today, the figure represents not only evil, but also rebellion and the human capacity for dark deeds. Due to his stand against God and his common affiliation with the concepts of evil, malady, and sin, many villains and bad boys are associated with his name. Similarly, demons also act as a force of evil according to Christian values; they are spirits that act as bringers of chaos, capable of tempting humans toward their own corruption and damnation (Rees 82).

In modern popular culture, bad boy characters can be well-intentioned; they can also play heroic roles in their stories, or eventually become heroes as they develop over time. They may have complicated pasts that helped to make them who they are, or they may, over the course of their journey, learn to love.

Religion tells a story that has been told time and time again ever since—the story of good triumphing over evil. Throughout history, there have been just as many instances of horrendously

ugly villains as there have been strikingly beautiful ones. It has reached a point in which both could be considered cliché tropes in their own right, despite being complete opposites. Monsters may be terrifying and repulsive like Grendel from *Beowulf* or Voldemort from the *Harry Potter* series, or they may hide in plain sight as silent killers and seducers, like the vampires in the popular novels of Anne Rice and L.J. Smith.

The devil has been portrayed in media as hideous and horrifying just as often as he, or "she" in some media, has appeared as a stunningly beautiful figure. He may appear charismatic and alluring, like Lucifer from the *Sandman* graphic novel series and 2016 Fox show, *Lucifer.* In other media, he may take on the form of a beast most commonly depicted in older literature like Dante's *Inferno.* The devil may even take on a more symbolic or intangible role that influences characters indirectly, like in the Marvel Netflix series *Daredevil.*

While other interpretations may be more popular today, one of the most well-known images of Satan or the Devil is that of a terrifying beast. This version depicts his evil and sin as something that has an external presence. The beastly form gives him a sub-human quality which repulses people immediately rather than drawing them in before the attack. Dante's *Inferno*, for instance, describes Satan as a beast with three faces and bat wings. Here, he is a prisoner of Hell, condemned to suffer from the same torment as the other souls there with him.

The image of the Horned Beast began with the Book of Revelation, and even in recent history it has found its way into children's bibles, cartoons, books, and movies. However, media has leaned away from the beast over the years in favor of the kind of devil who sits down next to you without your knowledge, or the devil on your shoulder when you have to make a difficult choice.

Paradise Lost (1667) introduced Satan as a persuasive yet tormented figure rather than a hideous monster. It appears that this set a trend for centuries to come, in which literary works portrayed the devil as dangerous not thanks to a gruesome appearance and ability to intimidate, but because he had the power to manipulate, seduce, and entice. The trope is one that has endured throughout the years in Western literary works ever since.

What makes a devil, or the type of devilish character people are familiar with today? Those who interpret the devil as evil might find some of its most recent representatives surprising. Today, the use of "devil" may have an association with evil in certain cases, but other times it may represent desire or rebellion. The Devil, known as the former Archangel Lucifer in the FOX series *Lucifer* is the most recent adaptation of the iconic character to fit this description, as well as a representation of some of the Dark Triad traits discussed above.

The *Lucifer* series begins with the titular character running a night club in Los Angeles with his demonic friend and bodyguard, Mazikeen, after having grown bored in his position as the King of Hell. However, when he witnesses the murder of a friend he helped rise to fame, he finds himself teaming up with Police Detective Chloe Decker to find and bring the killer to justice. This starts Lucifer on a path to seeking a long-term commitment with the LA Police Department and with Chloe, catching criminals and making sure they receive proper punishment for their evil deeds.

Lucifer is tall and dark with an English accent and the specific ability to draw out the deepest desires of humans. This could make for a compelling villain—the kind of villain who leads the innocent to their doom with sweet words, promises, and manipulation rather than fear and violence. However, the Lucifer in this adaptation is far from the villain of the story: bitter but not needlessly cruel, mischievous but not evil. This Lucifer, unlike some versions of the character, has little desire to cause harm for the sake of causing harm, rather choosing to indulge in the simple

pleasures of human life like parties, good food, drinking, and sex. He values freewill and the ability to do as he pleases without rules or regulations getting in his way. He is not interested in causing chaos within the human race by forcing them to commit wrongdoings. Rather than creating sinners by making humans turn toward evil, he simply serves the purpose of punishing sinners for their own evil deeds.

There is little doubt that Lucifer is a sexualized character from his introduction in the "Pilot" episode. Tom Ellis portrays a magnetic force of nature who leaves almost everyone he meets spellbound within moments. In "Pilot," Lucifer starts visiting a therapist, Linda, to discuss the trouble he has understanding humans and his own emotions. Instead of paying her with money, however, he attends therapy sessions in exchange for sex. In a later episode, when considering ending their sexual relations for ethical reasons, Linda explains to Chloe, "There's something about him. I can't stop myself!" ("Et tu, Doctor?" 00:27:35-00:27:40).

In the season two episode, "Stewardess Interruptus," Lucifer and Chloe track a murderer who killed two people with whom Lucifer had previously had sex. Chloe pulls out a notepad to record the names of all Lucifer's recent sexual partners, to which Lucifer replies, "You'll need a much bigger notepad" ("Stewardess Interruptus" 00:14:13-00:14:15). These are just two examples of the magnetic effect that Lucifer has on people, as well as his obsession with and casual opinion of sex. Lucifer believes that if someone truly desires something, they should feel comfortable pursuing it without hesitance or remorse. In "Favorite Son," Lucifer carelessly tells Chloe's seven-year-old daughter, Trixie, that if she wants something she should take it, which inspires her to eat part of her chocolate Birthday cake without her parents' knowledge.

Like both Jack Sparrow and Loki, Lucifer is not an outwardly hyper-masculine figure. He is graceful and languid rather than large and stalky like his older brother, and he has a keen eye for

style and materialistic things, which is a quality more often associated with the feminine than the masculine.

Furthermore, the sexuality Lucifer exudes is not necessarily fully masculine or feminine. The series most often showcases his flirtatious and sexual encounters with women, but he also implies that he is glad to engage sexually with anyone he finds attractive, regardless of their gender or sexuality. When Chloe interviews Lucifer's sexual partners to solve a crime in "Stewardess Interruptus," at least one of his partners was revealed to be a man who claimed that his time with Lucifer was the greatest night of his life. In the season three episode "Til Death Do Us Part," Lucifer goes under cover with Detective Pierce in which they pose as a suburban married couple. When they almost blow their cover at a home barbeque, Lucifer kisses him in front of several dozen people and appears to enjoy the encounter. Based on Lucifer's lack of apparent preference in gender or sexuality, this indicates that he represents neither the masculine nor the feminine, but instead the concepts of sexuality and desire themselves.

Despite his devilish and sexualized persona, however, Lucifer may be a more heroic character than any of the preceding examples like Loki or Jack Sparrow. By helping the police apprehend criminals, Lucifer saves countless lives in every episode. Although one could argue that, early in the series, he gains more satisfaction from the suffering of evil-doers than from the well-being of innocents, he still uses his skills and intelligence as a service for the greater good. While he starts out with primarily selfish motives, he develops a sense of compassion over time. Throughout the series, it becomes clear that Lucifer is not all good, nor is he all evil, and simply needs influences in his life to bring out the best in him. The people around Lucifer begin to realize as time passes that it is not a lack of caring that causes Lucifer's struggles; rather, it is a simple lack of understanding of people that challenges him. It takes strong forces for good to show him

that emotions can be an asset rather than simply a hindrance. Chloe, in particular, is the force who has the greatest effect on him.

Lucifer follows the familiar pattern of an anti-hero who becomes a better person thanks to a woman in his life. Chloe's presence in Lucifer's life not only humanizes him, both emotionally and physically, but also plays a part in sexualizing him. Thanks to his relationship with Chloe, Lucifer is not only a highly sexual character, but a romantic one as well. Part of sexualizing a character can also include opening his or her heart to the possibility of love, as this leads to the prospect of a romantic, and often sexual, relationship. Lucifer interacts with very few women in the series with whom has not had sexual relations, aside from Chloe. The unresolved tension between these two characters, from early in season one, quickly becomes a driving force in the series. As proven by other police television serials like *The X-Files* and *Castle*, anticipation of romance can often be more effective than the reward. Waiting for two lead characters to admit their feelings for one another and become a couple can be frustrating for fans, but it also keeps them coming back to watch each time a new episode airs. Lucifer's romantic and sexual desire for Chloe proves to be just as powerful, if not more so, than his constant sexual antics with nameless partners.

Chloe seems to be the one person in the world who is initially repulsed rather than fascinated by and attracted to Lucifer. This is significant because it is a common trope for sexualized anti-heroes—the love interest may have some immunity or odd quality that makes them special and draws in the anti-hero. A well-known example of this trope today is the Twilight novel and film series, in which the vampire lead, Edward, is mystified by his inability to read human lead, Bella's, mind. In Lucifer, Chloe is a skilled detective with a strong sense of justice and good nature, but most importantly to Lucifer, she weakens him in ways he cannot explain. His

fascination with her effect on him leads to a relationship that often baffles and terrifies him, and three seasons pass before he finally builds up the courage to share his feelings with her honestly.

In addition to changing his outlook on his own existence, Chloe has a special power, unbeknownst to her, that weakens Lucifer's abilities. She is immune to his power to draw out people's desires, and he soon finds that whenever she is near him, he loses his immortality and becomes physically weaker.

In the season one episode "St. Lucifer," Lucifer decides to test his powers while close to Chloe to find out if his new physical weakness is related to her presence. Acknowledging how much closer the pair have grown on a personal level over the course of the season, Chloe admits, "You make me vulnerable," as he simultaneously cuts his hand outside her view ("St. Lucifer" 00:42:16-00:42:18). The double-meaning comes through in Lucifer's reply when he slyly glances down at his bleeding hand and says, "It appears you make me vulnerable, too" (St. Lucifer 00:42:36-00:42:38).

Chloe is one of the main connections between Lucifer and humanity due to her ability to render him both physically and emotionally vulnerable. Lucifer may not truly be human, but his flaws, insecurities, and fears make him a character that average people can relate to. By living among humans and especially working with Chloe, Lucifer eventually finds he has to learn to understand them, which proves to be a great challenge. He is so unaccustomed to experiencing genuine feelings that he fails to recognize them when he does. For instance, in "The Would-Be Prince of Darkness," when a woman is murdered at a party and all the evidence seems to point to a man Lucifer convinced to try to seduce her that night, Lucifer becomes determined to prove his innocence. At the end of the episode, Lucifer and Chloe succeed in finding the real culprit, after which Chloe suggests, "You can stop blaming yourself" ("The Would-Be Prince of Darkness"

00:39:37-00:39:39). Lucifer, however, reacts with seemingly genuine confusion to her comment, assuring her that it was only his desire to punish the true person responsible for the murder that motivated him. He is so far removed from his emotions that he cannot imagine himself feeling guilt or genuine compassion for someone else's pain.

This turns out to be a common theme in the series, in which Lucifer frequently misinterprets his own feelings or the feelings of others and then further misconstrues them when his therapist, Linda, tries to help him. In the episode, "Manly Whatnots," Lucifer twists the message Linda tries to convey to him about his relationship with Chloe to indicate that he needs to sleep with her so that he can overcome his unexplainable interest in her. Initially, Linda does not believe Lucifer's claims that he is the devil, but she humors him for the sake of their therapy sessions. She plays a large part in helping Lucifer get in touch with his feelings, even when he is reluctant to do so. She believes that in order to make progress in his life, he needs to make genuine connections and find his own sense of identity.

Over the course of the first season, Lucifer does just this and his transformation becomes evident half way through season two when he lashes out at his mother verbally for suggesting they and Amenadiel return to Heaven to be a family again. In "Trip to Stabby Town," Lucifer's mother unleashes the blade of the Angel of Death on the human world in an effort to get God's attention. She first feels confused by Lucifer's frustration with her and wonders why he cares so deeply about the lives of human beings. At the end of the episode, to her surprise, he snaps at her that Earth is his home now, as it is the only place he has ever felt valued.

Underneath Lucifer's carefree, fun-loving façade exists a fallen angel still unable to let go of the grudge he holds against the Father who cast him out of Heaven thousands of years ago. He keeps a tight grip on his bitterness and rage, blaming God for the dissatisfaction he feels with his

own life. In Lucifer's reality, humanity has a general negative view of the devil concept that he feels greatly distorts what he stands for. He punishes the wicked as part of his job given to him by God, but considers it insulting and degrading that as a result, people believe he causes their suffering and wrongdoings in life. Despite what the majority of humans have been led to believe, Lucifer finds no pleasure in watching people hurt and manipulate one another. He despises that humans blame him for all the problems in the world, but most of all, he loathes his Father for casting him away. He carries a heap of resentment with him wherever he goes, desperately seeking control over his own destiny that he feels can never have with God hanging over his shoulder.

Lucifer shows that despite being immensely powerful and capable of cruelty when he believes it is necessary, he is similar to a child angry with his parents. He is not inherently evil as he seems to think his Father believes; he simply desires to have a good time and be loved and accepted for who he is. He has emotional maturity similar to that of a small child; however, he often makes the genuine, if misguided, effort to understand the people around him, even if he is sometimes more interested in how that understanding will benefit him than others.

Lucifer demonstrates a growing desire to do good and be useful to others, as shown in the episode "My Little Monkey" when he fights through his grief and remorse after killing his brother, Uriel, to protect Chloe and his mother. In "My Little Monkey," Lucifer obsesses over the belief that his only skill is hurting the people close to him, and he begins following and mimicking Chloe's ex-husband, Daniel, in an effort to become a more helpful partner. This further shows Lucifer's child-like behavior and sense of a lacking identity. While he is prone to selfishness, arrogance, and violent flares of temper, audiences latch onto his vulnerability and capacity for love, especially when it comes to Chloe.

The *Lucifer* series frequently questions standards of good and evil, not only suggesting that Lucifer himself is not the source of all darkness and corruption, but also suggesting that God may not be the epitome of light and virtue that humans believe. In the first season episode "A Priest Walks into a Bar," Lucifer crosses paths with a priest, Father Frank, who turned to faith during a period of grief. Lucifer has little respect for clergy, believing they are all hypocrites who preach about virtue but cannot possibly live up to the standards they set. However, he starts to grow fond of Father Frank as they bond over their love of music, and he becomes distraught and enraged when the priest is killed at the end of the episode.

A significant theme of "A Priest Walks into a Bar" is the idea that God has a plan for all the beings he has created, and that ultimately, it is for the greater good. Lucifer scorns the idea throughout the episode in front of Father Frank—he is convinced that God's "plan" is simply to use people to further his own unexplainable agenda and that he truly cares for no one. After the death of Father Frank, Lucifer blames his Father and shouts toward the sky: "What does it take to please you? Break your rules and you fall—follow them and you still lose? Doesn't matter whether you're a sinner. Doesn't matter whether you're a saint. Nobody can win, so what's the point?" ("A Priest Walks into a Bar" 00:37:51-00:38:05).

This outburst demonstrates that Lucifer understands his Father's actions and choices no better than any other human on Earth. He has no way of truly knowing which events are God's doing versus the events that play out on their own. Rather, he is left to wonder on his own just how much of his fate rests in his hands. Lucifer's job is to punish the guilty, but he fails to understand why the innocent so often needlessly face punishment as well. Lucifer's version of a perfect world is one where the people who hurt others earn retribution, while the rest of them have the freedom

to live their lives as they so choose. From his perspective, a God who allows kind and selfless people to be so violently killed is a villain.

Lucifer's deep hatred for his Father stems from his exile to Hell thousands of years prior to the series, but his questioning of his Father's motives feels familiar. Even the most devoted followers of a religion have the capacity to question their faith. *Lucifer* not only depicts a character who questions God, but one who resents his absence and seeming lack of regard for individuals' lives or happiness. This humanizes him because it paints him as a character who is not necessarily all-knowing or all powerful. Just like humanity, Lucifer simply wants to take control of his life and live on his own terms, but instead he lives in constant fear because he can never predict what his Father might place in his path next.

Lucifer's older brother, Amenadiel, is the most dedicated and loyal character to God within the series. However, even he has a crisis of faith in the aftermath of season one when he loses his angelic powers because he failed to return Lucifer to Hell. By the end of season two, he comes to the conclusion that his Father is testing him and regains his faith. By the end of season three, both Amenadiel and Lucifer consider the possibility that it is their perceptions of themselves that determine what they become rather than what their Father decides, meaning that they have more freewill than they always believed. However, this has yet to be entirely confirmed or denied in the series, and it raises questions to the audience about God's true role in his creations' lives and whether or not he can be trusted.

If all Lucifer wants is freewill and the pleasures that the physical world has to offer, it can hardly be considered villainy in modern culture. However, the producers of the series do not portray him as an almighty force for good, either. His flaws and limitations indicate that he is not

entirely trustworthy, meaning that the audience can never be certain whose beliefs are correct: Lucifer's, or those who follow God.

Although many adaptations of the devil depict the character as monstrous, grotesque, and needlessly cruel, it makes sense that a charming, alluring, and vulnerable modern version of the character would garner so much popularity. The devil is the ultimate representation of darkness and sin in Western Culture. Acts historically viewed as sinful and wrong within the culture, such as self-serving behavior and casual sex, are the norm for the antithesis of God. A century or two ago, a person indulging in life's pleasures without concern for others may not have been tolerated. Today, however, film and television producers have few qualms about playing on the sides of their audiences that love the way Lucifer loves life.

Just as audiences are drawn to Jack Sparrow's sense of adventure and excitement and Loki's lack of regard for the rules, audiences can appreciate the balance between Lucifer's own carefree nature and the sense that there are aspects of his fate he cannot control. An important part of human nature is the inherent desire to have some semblance of control over one's own life, so this is also a part of Lucifer's personal struggle that many human beings can understand. It is natural for people to long for the ability to live their lives as they please without rules and expectations hanging over their heads.

This modern interpretation of the Devil represents not only temptation, but also individuality and the importance of the self. In general, Lucifer displays very little malicious intent without a cause, desiring only to please himself and be free of his Father's influences. His uninhibited willingness and ability to pursue his desires attracts people to him. Yet, at the same time he endears them and earns their sympathy because he longs for freedom from the chains he is forced to bear, just as human beings do. The series glorifies Lucifer acting on his wicked or

devious impulses by allowing him to escape without lasting consequences, similarly to the previous examples, Loki and Jack Sparrow. However, at the same time, the show glorifies Chloe's ability to temper and tame those same impulses with her good nature and firm hold on Lucifer's heart.

To an even greater extent than Loki or Jack Sparrow, Lucifer represents all the pleasures and mysteries of a life without social inhibitions. He takes what he wants without fear of retribution or asking himself if it is right, and such a lifestyle fascinates and allures us. We resist such temptation in the real world thanks to either our religious or moral ideals, but this does not mean we never like to imagine giving in.

Devils represent desires and actions generally deemed unacceptable by society, especially according to religious standards. However, instead of attempting to dissuade people from those desires, the media creates characters like Lucifer who embody the ultimate fantasy—the ability to act on them without limitations or restrictions. This is the power that seduces audiences, the power that the creative minds of film and television are unafraid to use to their advantage today.

Part IV: Vampires and Damon Salvatore

It is not only literal versions of the Devil who have become attractive over the years. Popular culture is filled with beautiful monsters who may have some demonic significance, but who also draw people to them willingly without force. The most notable symbols of this in modern film and television include fictional vampires.

Vampires first appeared as seductive and devious creatures as far back as the 1800s, when stories like Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* first appeared. In more recent years, films and television shows have been developed from multiple works of vampire literature, like Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries*, and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series. During a surge of vampire popularity in the early 2000s, few could resist the allure of the tormented vampire bad boy or the beautiful and deadly vampire femme fatale. *Interview with the Vampire* and its sequels remain vampire classics to this day; L.J. Smith's novel series spawned a television show and two spin-offs; and *Twilight*'s commercial success led to the production of five movies and a graphic novel series. In addition, television series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood* have earned plenty of attention from vampire fans.

Today's vampires often look like ordinary humans. They live among people, whether for food, for fun, or for other personal reasons. They do not appear larger than life or monstrous to unfamiliar eyes. Often, they may appear as superhumanly beautiful, or somehow out of the ordinary with pale skin or inhumanly colored eyes. However, they look human enough that they can walk unseen in the crowd, striking from behind or manipulating their victims without their knowledge. Most notably, they represent the darkness in human beings that many of them keep hidden from society (Pollard 162). They are free from human limitations like disease, old age, and

injury. They may or may not have other weaknesses, like a wooden stake through the heart or the inability to walk in the sunlight, but their superhuman physical powers typically give them an advantage that humans can never hope to achieve.

Modern vampires attract because they need not have any fear of bullies or people in positions of power. They can walk away unscathed from car accidents and natural disasters. They have all of eternity to learn and travel without having the passage of time as a barrier. They are not, however, immune to the effects of love and loneliness, which shows not only the softness of their hearts, but also softens the hearts of their fans.

However, vampires' inhuman qualities make them outsiders in our world, which is a common theme writers and producers often explore and develop in their vampire stories. According to "Myriad Mirrors: Doppelgangers and Doubling in The Vampire Diaries," "Those vampires who choose to engage with their human emotions are further Othered by eschewing their monstrous sides and choosing to establish a (semi) permanent home within a region or community; they are uncannily situated as outsiders who also belong within the local community" (McMahon-Coleman 286). Modern vampires often simultaneously take on the heroic (or anti-heroic) and the "other" role, living among humans but keeping their distance emotionally to avoid the exposure of their true nature.

Such is the case for the Salvatore brothers in CW's 2009 television series, *The Vampire Diaries.* Stefan Salvatore (Paul Wesley), who grew up in the Virginia town of Mystic Falls during the 1800s, returns in an effort to grow close with Elena Gilbert (Nina Dobrev), an identical descendent of his long-lost lover, Katherine. He moves in with a distant relative who knows of his secret, enrolls himself in high school, joins the football team, and begins a hesitant romantic relationship with Elena. He craves a normal human life, rejecting his vampire instincts and feeding

on the blood of animals instead of humans. However, he can never truly belong to the human world—he has experienced more than any average person could over the course of one lifetime. He constantly feels the pull of bloodlust, enticing him to embrace his true nature. Most of all, if the world knew the truth about him, they would be unlikely to accept him as one of their own, instead fearing and rejecting him.

The darkness to Stefan's light is his cruel, manipulative, and reckless older brother, Damon Salvatore (Ian Somerhalder). Damon is a well-known modern vampire who has earned significant popularity due to his bad boy persona and charming one-liners. *The Vampire Diaries* revolves mainly around human Elena Gilbert (Nina Dobrev) relationships with the two vampire brothers, who both fall in love her. Initially, Damon enters the show as an antagonist—a threat to Stefan's life in Mystic Falls and his attempts to protect Elena from his vampire lifestyle. However, over the eight-year course of the series, Damon slowly graduates into an anti-hero character, and eventually into a hero despite his flaws.

Initially, Damon appears to have no interest in the normal life Stefan so desires, choosing instead to mock his brother for the way he protects and lives among humans. While Stefan rejects his vampire tendencies out of fear of becoming a monster, Damon embraces vampirism as a part of him. He enjoys indulging in the pleasures of blood, alcohol, partying, and sex without the worry of conforming to socially accepted norms. He has superhuman speed and strength to help him avoid danger and mind control powers to sway humans as he pleases, meaning he is free to be his own master without a care in the world. In this way, Damon shares similarities with the devilish Lucifer; like the rebellious King of Hell, Damon very much represents pleasure, sexuality, and desire. Although he is more traditionally masculine than Lucifer, his lack of inhibitions when it

comes to seeking out his desires reflect the modern idea of the devil as a symbol for freewill and self-interest.

In general, *The Vampire Diaries* is a highly sexualized series. The show has no qualms about referencing casual sex without real consequences, even in the case of the high school students who make up the majority of the characters. Because certain characters like Stefan and Damon are vampires, they can indulge their desires in whatever way pleases them because they cannot become ill, nor can they procreate. They are not defined by the weaknesses and limitations of ordinary humans.

The Vampire Diaries is also sexualized by its approach to the way its vampires enjoy the drinking of blood. Since the early days of vampire fiction, authors have sexualized the act of drinking blood. Vampires themselves are like sexual predators who seduce their victims and lure them willingly into danger (Greene 242). Meanwhile, both the vampire and the victim in modern fiction tend to find the act of blood drinking a pleasurable experience similar to sex (Greene 242). However, the use of vampirism to reference sex stems from the 1800s, when a stigma on sex prevented people from openly discussing it (Pollard 10).

Early vampires were often portrayed as seductive male characters who preyed on young women, but they also exuded sexuality with homosexual and bisexual undertones (Pollard 25). During that time, it was still believed that the blood determined a person's genetics; therefore, it served as a powerful metaphor for sex (Pollard 10). A vampire's fangs protrude and penetrate the skin when the vampire lusts for blood, allowing them to serve as phallic symbols without making explicit reference to sex (Pollard 18). Today's vampires are more openly sexual than they were during the time of *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, but the sharing of blood is still a significant part of their eroticism.

In *The Vampire Diaries*, Damon's sexuality and his vampire urges go hand in hand. He seduces victims sexually before feeding on them, often satisfying his sexual and blood appetite simultaneously. In certain situations, the vampires on the show seem to view drinking blood as an intimate act all on its own, which is revealed in early season four after Elena becomes a vampire. After her transition, she struggles to make her body tolerate human or animal blood. Desperate and starving, Elena asks for Damon's help finding a method that will keep her body from rejecting the blood. He offers to let her try to drink his blood from his hand, but asks her not to tell Stefan, her boyfriend at the time, because, "Blood sharing is kind of personal" ("Memorial" 00:11:03-00:11:05). The scene ends with Elena drinking Damon's blood, both characters' facial expressions appearing as if they are taking part in a passionate love scene, even though literal sex is not involved.

In the season six episode, "A Bird in a Gilded Cage," two other vampires have an intimate encounter related to blood drinking. Stefan, in an effort to push Caroline to give in to her vampire tendencies, feeds on a victim in front of her with a taunting smirk on his face. Caroline relents against her better judgement and feeds on the victim as well, leading to a heated love sequence between her and Stefan. In this case, the simple act of watching one another drink the blood of someone else stimulated their sexual desires, demonstrating the connection between blood lust and sexual lust.

The vampire aspect of *The Vampire Diaries*, such as the drinking of blood and the allure of immortality and superhuman abilities, is highly sexual, but the character of Damon is the one who embodies this concept to its greatest capacity. During the first few seasons of the show, Damon is the epitome of bad behavior—so why do fans love him so? The answer to that question is similar to that of the previously mentioned characters, like Loki and Lucifer. Damon is a smug,

charming, handsome, and powerful character whose most despicable actions are shamelessly overlooked in favor of his more vulnerable and redeeming characteristics. For example, when Damon first arrives in Mystic Falls, he seduces Elena's friend, Caroline, then uses mind compulsion to keep her quiet about his vampire identity so he can use her for blood and sex. He talks down to her, manipulates her, and uses her for his personal amusement. He plays with her like a toy and throws her away once he grows bored, compelling Caroline to forget the experience but leaving her traumatized by it.

Damon violates Caroline both physically and mentally for his own amusement, but these actions never receive the attention that they deserve. Later in the season, Elena ultimately forgives and befriends Damon despite her knowledge of his treatment of her friend, while Caroline never has the opportunity to deal with the emotional repercussions of the incident. Even after she turns into a vampire herself in season two and remembers the ordeal, the situation is treated with humor rather than genuine sensitivity. She eventually tells Damon that she remembers what he did, then attacks him mercilessly in retribution. After that, however, the subject of the incident never arises again. Because Caroline has a chance at simple and quick revenge against Damon, audience members can watch the scene and nod in agreement that he likely deserved the punishment. Meanwhile, the fact that the subject is then dropped means that the viewers never have the need to stop for long and consider the potential long-term consequences of Damon's actions.

The writers of *The Vampire Diaries* exercise similar tactics after other atrocities that Damon commits throughout the show. In episode eight of season one, "162 Candles," Stefan's oldest vampire friend, Lexi, comes to visit for his Birthday. However, the day ends with Damon staking Lexi through the heart to earn the trust of the town council and make them believe he has eliminated the Mystic Falls vampire threat. Stefan almost kills his brother that night in his rage

over his friend's death, but soon after that the two vampires return to their previous status quo of casual banter and general distrust. Lexi returns to the show in flashbacks and spirit form multiple times throughout the remainder of the series, but Damon's role in her death is seldom, if ever, mentioned again.

In episode one of season two, Damon snaps when he is rejected by Katherine, the woman he has spent his entire vampire life searching for, and kills Elena's little brother, Jeremy. Luckily, Jeremy has an enchanted ring on his finger that prevents him from dying. Although this action causes tension between Damon and Elena, the animosity does not last. Four episodes later, Damon saves Caroline's mother because of his affection for her, due to which Elena tells him, "What you did for Caroline's mom… that's the Damon who was my friend" ("Kill or Be Killed" (00:37:00-00:37:07). In the next episode and moving forward, the two seem to be back on good terms. This is certainly not the last time in the series that Damon gains relatively quick forgiveness for something unforgivable, and it eventually becomes clear that Elena and Stefan can pardon Damon for almost any horrific act he commits.

Furthermore, the audience can easily forgive Damon for killing Jeremy because the latter comes back to life within minutes after being killed. Because Elena does not have to grieve the loss of her brother, the viewers do not have to feel guilty for rooting for Damon despite his potentially catastrophic choice. In the season one episode "Lost Girls," Damon carelessly transforms Jeremy's girlfriend, Vicki Donovan, into a vampire, which leads to her permanent death in the subsequent episode. While Vicki's death ultimately does have a lasting effect on Jeremy and her brother, Matt Donovan, the series does not dwell on this for long. While Vicki starts out as a major supporting character, the fact that she meets her end just seven episodes into the series gives audiences little time to grow attached to her. Perhaps if Damon were to murder a major supporting

character like Jeremy, or Elena's friends Bonnie or Matt, under other circumstances, he might be far less likely to earn forgiveness from Elena and Stefan, as well as from viewers.

Stefan and Elena continually forgive Damon for his explosive acts of violence, which makes it easier for audiences to do the same. Damon's character is somewhat similar to Loki in that he strikes a delicate balance between a dark, malicious exterior and a lonely, damaged soul. Aside from wanting to cause havoc in Mystic Falls for his own amusement, he is mainly motivated throughout the first season by his love for Katherine, who he believes is hidden in a tomb underneath the town. Unlike Stefan, who has long-since moved on from the vampire they both loved in the 1800s, Damon has fiercely held onto his feelings, unable to let go of the past. Viewers learn quickly that, although Damon tries to hide his emotions, he is actually one of the most emotionally fragile and vulnerable characters in the series.

In the season one finale, Damon admits, "You know, I came to this town wanting to destroy it. Tonight, I found myself wanting to protect it. How does that happen? I'm not a hero, Elena. I don't do good. It's not in me" ("Founders Day" 00:36:51-00:37:09). Damon's soft-spoken confession indicates not only his low sense of self-worth, but also his acceptance that he can be nothing other than a monster, even if he wants to. His enormous capacity for emotion leads him to push away the positive forces in his life, like Elena and Stefan.

Damon enjoys his abilities and the freedom that being a vampire brings him, but he also carries a desire with him that he finds harder and harder to deny as the series progresses—he wants desperately to be loved and accepted. All his life, Damon was left on the sidelines in favor of his brother Stefan by their father, Katherine, and even Elena. As a result, all he truly wants is for someone to put him first. The loneliness that comes with this makes him vulnerable, and more importantly, it allows the audience to relate to him. The creators of the show use these feelings as

well as his dark and tragic past to victimize him, whether he deserves to be considered a victim or not.

In addition, it is eventually revealed through the use of flashbacks that, as a human, Damon was meeker than his brother, Stefan. After their transition into vampires and the death of the woman they both loved, Katherine, Damon chose to let himself die rather than drink the blood of a human. Stefan was the first to give into his impulses, and he enticed Damon to give in to his. As a result, viewers become aware of the fact that Damon played the part of the hero when his brother could not, and became the dark character he is during the series due to Stefan (McMahon-Coleman 277).

Damon, who is more emotional than his younger brother, struggles to deal with the heightened senses and emotions of vampire existence. His tendency to act out and avoid genuine relationships, as a result, stems from his fear of emotional pain and heartbreak. His self-destructive actions, for him, appear as almost a defense mechanism to protect him from the crushing guilt and loneliness that would otherwise haunt him every day. Because vampires have the unique ability to turn off their human emotions when they choose, Damon spends the greater part of his life avoiding his feelings in order to continue living with himself each day.

Damon's greatest tragic flaw is his impulsiveness—his tendency to act on his first instinct rather than use logic and take other people's feelings into consideration. Throughout season two, as Damon moves on from his heartbreak over Katherine and his feelings for Elena grow, he repeatedly goes against her wishes, much to her and Stefan's frustration, to ensure her safety. Near the end of the season when Elena is about to become a sacrifice for the oldest vampire in the world, he goes too far and nearly pushes her away forever by forcing her to drink his blood so that if she is killed, she will turn into a vampire instead of dying permanently. He later regrets his reckless

actions and apologizes—but this would not be the last time Damon hurts Elena in his attempts to protect her.

Damon himself is painfully aware of his self-destructive tendencies, but he seems unsure how to change them. In the season two episode, "The Descent," Damon falls into a dark place after losing his close friend to a werewolf bite, feeling as though he deserved to be in her place. He harshly rejects Elena's attempts to comfort him and instead goes out and drunkenly explains his internal struggle to a woman who finds him on a dark, abandoned roadway. He tries to decide whether or not to kill her, knowing he should restrain himself but feeling unable to do so. "I can't be what other people want me to be—what *she* wants me to be," he tells her, almost in tears ("The Descent" 00:40:33-00:40:39). He feels resigned to his role as the evil older brother and his incapability of finding true happiness, to the point that hurting people is all he believes he can do. However, he eventually discovers that he is capable of better when Elena is by his side, and he tries to hold himself up to such a standard.

Elena's relationship with Damon, especially for the first few seasons, represents the very human capacity for darkness that many people try to suppress. Elena, inevitably, does try to suppress it. Throughout the first two seasons of the series, Elena ignores her attraction for Damon, keeping him at arm's length because of his unpredictable nature. She feels more at ease in her relationship with Stefan, who offers her a sense of comfort and security that Damon cannot. It is only in season three, after Stefan bargains with all-powerful villain Klaus and sacrifices his freedom to save Damon's life, that Elena's attraction for the elder brother begins to grow. Elena and Damon spend an entire summer searching for Stefan on their own, which allows a close bond to form between them.

Despite Elena's insistence in the first two seasons that she loves only Stefan, her feelings for Damon seem to spiral out of control as season three progresses. When describing her relationships with both brothers, she says, "Damon just sort of snuck up on me. He got under my skin and no matter what I do, I just… I can't shake him" ("1912" 00:29:07-00:29:16). The season ends off with Elena turning into a vampire right after she decides that she still loves Stefan and wants to be with him. However, as a vampire with a new-found desire for excitement and danger, it is not long in season four before she begins to question her decision.

While human, Elena feels attraction for the wilder, darker vampire brother but is ashamed of those feelings and afraid of letting Damon hurt her. However, becoming a vampire allows her to tap into her own dark side and experience the freedom that comes from her new powers and immortality. While Elena's presence in Damon's life brings out the human side that endears audiences, Damon starts to bring out Elena's wilder tendencies, which she eventually comes to accept as a vampire. When she becomes a vampire and accepts her feelings for Damon, Elena loses some of the timid, soft nature she had as a human. She dresses more suggestively, poises herself more confidently, and embraces the highly sensual and physical connection she has with Damon in a way she never has before. The two must face multiple seasons of obstacles, but Elena ultimately chooses to spend her life with Damon instead of Stefan, who is arguably the gentler, more morally sound brother.

So, instead of facing tragedy or other consequences for his wrongdoings, Damon faces the ultimate redemption and is rewarded with everything he has always wanted. His character follows a similar pattern of other tortured anti-heroes—all it takes is enough love and trust from the female protagonist to change him into a kinder person and give him a happy ending. The writers of *The Vampire Diaries* not only humanize Damon's character, but also minimize his darkest attributes

to make him lovable and entertaining for fans. They cover up many of his atrocities with a light-hearted sense of humor and quick resolutions rather than showing just how devastating they can be. In addition, if it were not for the reveal of his feelings for Katherine driving him forward in season one and his emotional vulnerability throughout the series, he would appear as little more than an impulsive, cold-blooded villain. Instead, the creators draw people to him with his capacity for love, his quick sense of humor, his protectiveness, and his intense loyalty for the people he cares about.

Love is such a universal human emotion that fans can respond positively to Damon's feelings of love as motivation for even some of his most horrific actions, even those that might be unforgivable in real life. They can feel sympathy and understanding rather than repulsion. Such as in the case of the character Loki, Damon needs that crucial balance between his dark and light side to remain interesting and appealing for viewers. The layers of rage, playfulness, and tenderness in Damon's character add to his complexity, which in turn can elicit more empathy and sensitivity from the audience, as well as adding to his sexual and romantic appeal.

Conclusion

These four characters: Captain Jack Sparrow, Loki of Asgard, Lucifer Morningstar, and Damon Salvatore all have a few crucial aspects in common. They all represent deviance, a break from the Western social standards that define many groups of people today. Whether they have odd mannerisms, selfish and impulsive tendencies, or superhuman powers that allow them to hurt people in terrifying ways, they all manage to simultaneously mystify and endear their audiences. Deviant behavior combined with minimal consequences for that behavior, attractive actors, and human vulnerabilities all play a part in in sexualizing these characters.

Sexual desire and acts have long been associated with evil and immorality, a frame of mind that has followed society and continues to influence it today. The taboo on sexual acts and desires considered outside the norm in Western society such as prostitution, homosexuality, and transgenderism continue to create havoc for individuals within the culture and caused extensive debate.

However, the legalizing of homosexual marriage in all 50 of the United States in 2015, the sensitivity regarding representation of minorities in the media, and the rise of the #MeToo movement on social media all indicate that Western Culture is deviating from Puritan and conservative social values. The people in our culture often value individualism and the rights of people to follow their own passions and interests. Up until recent history, those rights ended at certain groups of people. Today, these are significant topics blown wide open for debate on the Internet and news media.

The stigma regarding sex in Western Society has a long history, and there was a time when lust may have been considered the work of the Devil, an inherently evil feeling that could cause more harm than good in one's life. In the media, those who are sexually aggressive are considered amoral in comparison to those who have less desire or choose not to act upon it. However, sexual desire is a significant and common part of human nature—it resonates with people and holds their interests, and naturally, the film industry capitalizes on it.

Before *Lucifer* first aired, the One Million Moms website started a petition to cancel the series, believing it was wrong and potentially harmful to glorify the concept of the Devil. Nevertheless, Fox Network moved ahead with the series, likely predicting that the character of Lucifer would become popular with viewers. As this shows, television networks and film companies today appear to have little concern for religious ideas and values, caring more about the popularity and viewership they expect to earn.

Industries do not necessarily have to work hard to make audiences fall in love with dark characters. There is more to a sexy character than just an attractive face and body—if some people did not already have a tendency to feel drawn to powerful, deviant characters, figures like Loki and Damon would not have grown such a large fanbase. Yes, many people prefer the virtuous yet masculine hero like Captain America or the self-sacrificing and lovestruck William Turner. Both of these characters exhibit traditionally heroic traits, fighting their own emotional battles but without a villainous bone in their bodies. However, the charms and cunning traits of villains and anti-heroes alone have the power to attract as well, due to the human fascination for danger and excitement. Physical appeal and mental complexity only add to this potential.

These are just a few of many characters in current Western pop culture who stand on the edge of the darkness. Ultimately, this development in popular media is simply one of many shifts

the culture has made in becoming more secular and humanistic in its views. The rise of sexy anti-heroes and villains is not an indication that people's attraction to these characters is new; instead, it is an indication that society has begun to accept this attraction. Advancements in film and television allow people to acknowledge the dark or rebellious parts of themselves using a safe outlet. The stigma on topics regarding sex still persists, but with a culture constantly changing and evolving, it will certainly manifest itself in new ways in the years to come.

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