

Article

# Theology of *Supernatural*

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**Abstract:** The main research issues of the article are the determination of the genesis of theology created in *Supernatural* and the understanding of ways in which this show transforms a traditional Christian theological narrative. The methodological framework of the article, on the one hand, is the theory of the occulture (C. Partridge), and on the other, the narrative theory proposed in U. Eco's semiotic model. C. Partridge successfully described modern religious popular culture as a coexistence of abstract Eastern good (the idea of the transcendent Absolute, self-spirituality) and Western personified evil. The ideal confirmation of this thesis is *Supernatural*, since it was the bricolage game with images of Christian evil that became the cornerstone of its popularity. In the 15 seasons of its existence, *Supernatural*, conceived as a story of two evil-hunting brothers wrapped in a collection of urban legends, has turned into a global panorama of world demonology while touching on the nature of evil, the world order, theodicy, the image of God, etc. In fact, this show creates a new demonology, angelology, and eschatology. The article states that the narrative topics of *Supernatural* are based on two themes, i.e., the theology of the spiritual war of the third wave of charismatic Protestantism and the occult outlooks derived from Emmanuel Swedenborg's system. The main topic of this article is the role of monotheistic mythology in *Supernatural*. The author concludes that the case of *Supernatural* shows how the classical monotheistic narrative, in its orthodox and heterodox formats, is hugely attractive for the modern audience. A wide distribution of the occulture that has become a basis of modern mass culture and easily combines, by virtue of historical specifics of its genesis, with monotheism makes the classical monotheistic mythology more flexible and capable of meeting the audience's different demands.

**Keywords:** religion; theology; Western esotericism; occult; monotheism; spiritualism; God; possession; exorcism; screen culture; TV series; narrative

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## 1. Introduction

The series *Supernatural* is one of the longest-running shows in the modern media industry. Released on 13 September 2005, it ran for 15 years, during which time 327 episodes have been filmed. On 19 November 2020, the final episode of the series was released, and the show officially finished. Such a long run of a series not focusing on detective or melodramatic issues can rightly be considered a record. During this time, the project invariably had a high rating and, according to IMDb, was among the top series through all the years of its running. During this time, the series, its makers, and its actors had been nominated 121 times for different awards and won 37 times. Throughout its existence, the series acquired a lot of fans, fanfics, and spin-offs, and became an object of a scientific study. Several collections of articles and books have been published on the subject of this series (Lavery and Abbott 2011; Brown 2011; Engstrom and Valenzano 2016). They analyzed its mythological essentials and considered the social, philosophical, and ethical problems it dealt with. All these factors make *Supernatural* one of the most typical examples of modern story-telling.

Without a doubt (and all the critics write about this), the core of the series is the subject of family values. Its essence was aptly defined by Eric Kripke, the project's author: "It's always been a show

about family, much more than it is about anything else. The mythology is only an engine to raise issues about family. A big brother watching out for a little brother, wondering if you have to kill the person you love most, family loyalty versus the greater good, family obligation versus personal happiness....” (Eric Kripke *Fields Your Questions about Supernatural* [TV Guide 2007]). Indeed, the issue of family values permeates all aspects of the show. It is manifest not only in the relationship and personal history of two brothers, Sam and Dean, the chief characters of the series, but also in the mythology that surrounds them. Lucifer, the chief villain, rises up against God because God starts to love people more than him. The conflict between Lucifer and angels is described as a conflict between brothers. Lucifer has fatherly feelings about his son Jack, so the Cain and Abel drama is constantly projected onto the history of the Winchester brothers both metaphorically and factually. Even God’s conflict with his sister Darkness is settled as a family disagreement.

However, in studying this socio-ethical issue, the investigators often missed another aspect. The very title of the series, *Supernatural*, inevitably refers to the religious and para-religious sphere, and the fact that, from the very start, the entire plot is built on unexplained phenomena (ghosts, werewolves, vampires, angels, demons, magicians, etc.) makes it one of the most interesting examples of on-screen mythology that creatively rethinks classical religious narratives. Further, while analyzing the series’ mythology, I would like to answer a number of questions that *Supernatural* sets before the researcher; to wit: How are Christianity, polytheism, and esoterism combined in a single narrative? What elements of the religious mythology make the modern series successful? How does the structure of the modern narrative impact the transformation of traditional theology?

To answer these questions, we should turn to two concepts: Christopher Partridge’s theory of the occulture and Umberto Eco’s closed text model.

In the year of the first season of *Supernatural*, the British religious scholar Christopher Partridge published a monograph *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (Partridge 2005, 2006), in which he introduced the term “occulture.” According to Partridge, the dying of interest in Christianity in the late 19th through the early 20th century did not result in abandonment of religiousness, but gave birth to a spiritual subculture in esoteric communities. It was when the ideas of those communities became popular and started being used by the mass culture that the occulture emerged. For Partridge, the occulture includes different deviant ideas and practices (Partridge 2006, p. 70): from magic, numerology, Tarot, Kabbalah, shamanism, and channeling to deep ecology, alternative science, and UFOs. It is safe to say that everything not embraced by traditional religions and traditional science makes up the occulture’s subject matter. Referring to the screen culture, Partridge separately dwelt on the case of *The X-Files*. For him, *The X-Files* is a “as a very powerful metatext” (Partridge 2006, p. 262) that concentrates different occulture narratives. In many ways, *Supernatural* is a successor to *The X-Files*, which its makers never concealed. In the first episodes, the two brothers are presented as replicas of the agents Scully and Mulder. This is made use of as early as the first episode. As the brothers encounter their FBI counterparts, the elder brother Dean deliberately chaffs them, calling them Mulder and Scully.

In actual fact, *Supernatural* becomes a new metatext that has accumulated nearly the entire bulk of the esoteric mythology accrued over the centuries of existence of deviant religiousness, operating not only large mythological narratives, such as the actualization of the Medieval notions of witchery, theosophical and spiritualistic systems, or a myth about Satanism, but also playing with some less-known subjects. For example, Aleister Crowley, the creator of Thelema, splits into two personages in the series—the demon-inquisitor Aleister, and subsequently the demon of the king of hellish deals Crowley, the king of hell. A number of episodes are named with a direct reference to the works of the underground experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger, a famous advocate of Crowley’s teaching, such as *Hollywood Babylon* (2–18) and *Lucifer Rising* (4–22). In this context, the means of structuring a narrative and building an integrated mythology of the series richly permeated with controversial occulture plots become extremely interesting.

The researchers of modern computer games or series often speak about the alien nature of these cultural products in relation to the classical methods of working on texts. Suffice it to recall the

well-known ludology-versus-narratology debate in game studies. Sometimes, a thought emerges that the specifics of a modern cultural product change the very notion of narrative, rendering the old methods based on textual studies irrelevant. However, I am inclined to believe that, for this article, it would be apt to use the classical narrative method proposed by the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco.

In his works (Eco 1979; Eco and Eco 1989), Eco came up with an idea of the existence of two types of texts, closed and open. Open and closed texts feature different plots. In closed texts, the reader is initially offered to choose some or other line of the plot development, but as the plot moves on, the point of bifurcation becomes less evident and the reader's road looks increasingly like an opening cut in a narrative forest.

Conversely, an open text invites a reader to co-author it, confirming the widest possible range of interpretations of readers' suppositions. According to Eco, if a closed text is not restricted by a small format, such as one book or film, then its creators face the challenge of how they can enrich the plot structure in order to constantly maintain the reader's or the viewer's attention. Eco illustrates this problem using an example of Superman. In his opinion, this type of hero can always be "expended," i.e., the audience will just lose interest in him. When the main plot is all used up and becomes boring, the creators start introducing flashbacks and flash-forwards to when the hero meets his parents, dead comrades-in-arms, etc. Thus, the structure of a multiverse comes into being, a sequence of imaginary worlds in which parallel events happen to the same heroes. The main problem of the closed text is its inevitable predictability, i.e., a villain must be defeated at any cost and the hero will unfailingly find an answer to an unanswerable question. In such conditions, given that the hero himself must not experience a radical transformation in order to support the basic plot, it is necessary to constantly replace his opponents and the surrounding setting. In such a context, the completely imaginary fantastic universes become a plastic material succumbing to transformations, and the viewer/reader is prepared to believe this. Eco repeatedly accentuated this narrative advantage of fantasy as he dwelt on the merits of Superman compared to classical Greek mythologies. What will happen if a model of a closed text is supplemented with a classical religious mythology with a restricted number of plots, roles, and behavioral patterns known to the consumer? An answer to this question is the narrative of *Supernatural*.

It is obvious that an analysis of a 15-year-old series consisting of several hundred episodes is not an easy matter. There is always a risk of going into details in narration of particular plot developments or, conversely, describing the problems in excessively general terms. In order to avoid this, it is imperative to make several significant reservations. The main topic of the article is a proof of the existence of monotheistic teaching in the narrative of a modern series. However, before considering this, it is necessary to outline its context. In my opinion, the plot of all episodes in *Supernatural* rests on two mythological foundations: (1) an occult worldview and (2) the practice of exorcism supported by the theology of a spiritual war. Whereas occultism accounts for the variety of mythological characters of the series and formulates the aesthetics of the other world with which the Winchester brothers communicate, the theology of the spiritual war shows, on the one hand, the specifics of this communication (opposition to evil forces to oust them from the world), and, on the other, bolsters the Christian image of evil as the principal antagonist in the series. In turn, the dominance of Christian evil results in the formation of a monotheistic theology that becomes the core of *Supernatural*.

Further, I do not plan to plunge into an analysis of individual episodes of the series or to review its seasons stage by stage. I will only revert to the series' contents for characteristic examples showing the general trend. In doing so, I will turn to all the episodes without restricting myself to any particular period. It should be noted that the narrative of *Supernatural* is rather consolidated, and none of the characteristics that I pointed out are of secondary importance in any of the episodes they were derived from or in the entire series.

## 2. A Few Words about the Plot

Any text devoted to the study of narrative should be started with a presentation of the plot, which is why I will subsequently describe in a few words the general plot line of *Supernatural*. Obviously, a series that ran for 15 years cannot be described briefly. So, I will do with just the essentials. The chief characters of the series, the brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, grew up without a mother who had died under mysterious circumstances. Their father, who raised them, was a hunter and a fighter against supernatural monsters that secretly existed in the human world. Following the disappearance and death of their father, the brothers continued his business. The first four seasons of the series gradually introduce the viewer to the world of supernatural creatures: The brothers fight with ghosts, werewolves, vampires, wendigos, rugarus, shapeshifters, zombies, pagan gods, and demons, meet angels, etc. Starting with the fifth season, the hunting takes on a truly cosmic scope. The brothers not only prevented Apocalypses, incarcerating the Lucifer and archangel Michael in a hellish cage, but also fought Leviathans, Nephilims, and Eve, the mother of all monsters, and even opposed God. They have to travel in time, go into other dimensions, and descend into hell, paradise, and purgatory.

So, the narrative of *Supernatural* is extremely rich, organically combining the material of different religious and esoteric teachings. In my opinion, the entire variety of *Supernatural* is structured by two themes, an occult idea of the mechanical world and a theology of a spiritual war. Somehow, these themes form the axes of abscissas and ordinates that accommodate all the topics of the narrative world. Now let us turn to a consistent study of those themes.

## 3. Occult World as a Mechanism

In researchers' opinions ([Hanegraaff 1997, 2012](#); [Asprem 2014](#)), the Western esotericism of the late 18th through the early 19th centuries entered a stage of a significant transformation whose decisive factor was a new scientific outlook. In the course of this transformation, as W. Hanegraaff believes, esoterism took on two forms, romantic and occult. The romantic one presents no interest for us in this particular case, since it shows an esoteric response to scientification. Conversely, at the basis of occultism is a merger of causality and a principle of conformity. Hanegraaff occultism defines as "all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanting world or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanting secular world" ([Hanegraaff 1997](#), p. 422). The decisive role in the presentation of the un-spelled world was played by the scientific outlooks. This merger of the scientific and esoteric outlooks is presented in a bizarre fashion in an array of doctrines that cropped up in the late 18th century. One of the core doctrines of this type was spiritualism, a new notion about the world of ghosts.

In the first episode of *Supernatural*, the brothers encounter the ghost of a woman who had committed suicide because of her husband's unfaithfulness. This encounter with a ghost is not an accidental and transitory occurrence. It refers us to the basic mythological stratum of the series. The problem of unquiet ghosts of the deceased that haunt houses and hospitals, enter things, and take revenge on offenders permeates the series. Erick Kripke, the author of the series, at one point said that initially, he planned to make a show about urban legends. The bulk of them in today's America are associated with ghosts of the dead, an infatuation that dates back to English folklore<sup>1</sup>, but has reached a new level due to the emergence of spiritualism. According to S. Natale, "Spiritualism's spectacular character helps frame the Victorian supernatural within the formation of a new commodity culture that changed the way public entertainments were planned, administered, marketed, and consumed" ([Natale 2017](#), p. 3). In turn, the spiritualism that originated in America in 1848 following the well-known Fox sisters affair has a certain ideal basis, the works by the Swedish visionary scientist Emmanuel Swedenborg. At the

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<sup>1</sup> The techniques of war against ghosts (use of iron, salt, magic circles, etc.) used by the Winchesters sometimes fully coincide with those described in classical English folklore stories about ghost-laying parsons ([Brown 1979](#)).

sunset of his life, after a vision in which Christ and angels appeared before him, he described the structure of the spiritual world, paradise, hell, the after-life existence of the soul, the interaction of the world and God, and the general structure of the cosmos. In many ways, Swedenborg's ideas shaped the occult outlooks. It was those outlooks that formed one of the bases of *Supernatural's* narrative.

In terms of occult outlooks, the world is a cosmos devised as a large mechanism in which a complex system of laws controls everything. They apply equally to the spiritual and material spheres. Everyone in the series, from people to angels, follows these immutable and indisputable laws. The magic signs, hex bags, incantations, systems of symbols protecting against both demons and angels, and even the God-detecting amulet are only a tiny part of the multifarious world mechanism that we encounter. The world of *Supernatural* is permeated with an integrated system of spiritual laws observed by all its inhabitants, which is why each and every creature in it can be either neutralized or killed, something the Winchester brothers often resort to. This world is absolutely predictable. A curious illustration of these specifics of *Supernatural* is episode 15 of the first season, in which the younger brother is kidnapped by a crazy family of hunting maniacs who kill their victims just for fun. This series contains nothing out of the ordinary, though at first, the brothers want to explain the events in a way familiar to them. When the elder brother Dean finds out the truth and defeats all the maniacs, he utters the following phrase: "With our usual playmates there's rules. There's patterns. But with people, they're just crazy" (1–15). As a mechanism, the world is completely predictable, logical, and unchangeable, while the real world of people is chaotic and illogical.

The world of *Supernatural* is so mechanistic that its inhabitants resemble machines. For example, when, in the eighth season, the chief demon Crowley tortures angels, he succeeds in reaching their "operating system" (8–10). Crowley even thinks that angels can be configured "to factory settings" (8–10). The angels are, perhaps, the most robot-like creatures among all inhabitants of *Supernatural*. From almost the first sequences that show them, it is obvious that they always act in compliance with a set script. For example, in episode 18 of the fourth season, it becomes evident that if a prophet is placed in the same space with the demon, an archangel immediately comes to protect him, while in episode three of the sixth season, the angels themselves confess that they can operate only according to rules. If those are missing, they see no point in their own existence.

Like any other mechanism, the world of *Supernatural* has its schemes and instructions. At first, they are classical grimoires like *Clavicula Salomonis*, whose incantations can impact the entire environment. Later on, starting in season 7, some tablets appear with inscriptions in an unknown language. Each of them fully describes the make-up of the universe's creatures, i.e., angels, demons, and leviathans. Later on, this function is performed by the so called *Book of the Damned* (actually, a modified version of the *Necronomicon* by Lovecraft), which can be used for influencing the upper beings like Lucifer.

In the Swedenborg system, like in subsequent doctrines, the world mechanism does not eliminate the idea of God watching over it. We see the same in *Supernatural*. Initially, the series leaves the question about God unanswered. From the general setting, it looks rather like he does not exist; there is only a mechanism created by him. However, starting with season 5, where the entire plot is built on prevention of the Apocalypse, a thought crops up about the possible existence of God, defined as a writer. Further on, this idea is disclosed more fully, and when, in season 11, God appears in his own guise, he emerges precisely as a writer constantly composing the world's scenario. The metaphor of God as a writer helps to get away from the absolute determinism of a deistic image of the mechanistic universe, with God the mechanic retiring from it. This creates in it a place for free will, but leaves untouched the very structure of the mechanism within whose limits this freedom can be asserted.

The last feature demonstrating the occult nature of the universe of *Supernatural* per Swedenborg is a special teaching about spirits (Swedenborg 2020). As is known, according to Swedenborg, people's souls do not immediately end up in hell or paradise. After death, they enter the world of the spirits, where they are preached to about the single God. The souls accepting it go to paradise, while those declining it and sunk in evil are shipped to hell, where they are first tortured by demons and then,

establishing themselves as utter miscreants, they become the same torturing demons. The thought that, at one point, demons, too, were people first appears in episode 9 of the third season, in which the Winchesters, while investigating a witch case, encounter a witch who had sold her soul and became a demon. Remembering her life in hell, she notes that: “Sooner or later, hell will burn away your humanity” (3–9). Subsequently, it turns out that after Abel’s murder, Cain, too, became one of the fiercest demons. A detailed mechanism of the demons’ world is depicted in the fourth season when the older brother Dean returns from hell. As it happens, the people ending up in hell are tortured until they decide to become torturers of other victims of hell. So, Dean temporarily becomes such a torturer. In the eighth season, this theme obtains a new treatment when there appears a special ritual of exorcism capable of recovering an original human guise for the demon. I should note that the theme of the demon’s original humanity is Swedenborg’s innovation, and has no analogues in classical Christian theology. In *Supernatural*, this technique variegates the plot, making the absolute evil ethically ambivalent.

Occultism, as a system of outlooks, is on the borderline of classical monotheism, often going beyond its framework. Largely relying on the occult outlooks, the *Supernatural* does not limit itself to this, but turns to the plots of monotheistic religions; in this approach, the theology of spiritual war proves very helpful.

#### 4. Theology of Spiritual War

The second axis on which the series’ topics rest is the idea of possession and an associated system of Christian demonology. In his recent investigation on exorcism in the Anglican Church, Francis Young noted that: “Demonology is not the same as exorcism itself (it is possible to be committed to demonological beliefs without advocating the practice of exorcism), but ‘practical demonology’ may be defined as specific advice and guidance for the practice of exorcism” (Young 2018, p. 12). In *Supernatural*, in fact, we encounter “practical demonology.”

In 1981–1982, at Fuller Theological Seminary, Peter Wagner and his colleague delivered a course on the theology of a spiritual war. The ideology of the spiritual war became a new stage in the development of the third wave of neo-Pentecostalism (McCloud 2015). According to Wagner and other authors who took up his ideas, the entire modern world is literally possessed by the Devil. Satan controls people, imposes his power, and engineers the Apocalypse. In order to resist it, an uncompromising spiritual war must be waged at three levels: personal, i.e., exorcism of individual people; occult, i.e., struggle against communities of evil (masons, Satanists); and strategic, i.e., war against territorial spirits that control the regions. The chief and universal weapon in this struggle was pronounced to be exorcism (rather, a service of deliverance as an analogue of classical catholic exorcism), while the main force against which the struggle was waged were demons installing themselves in people and things, conquering huge territories (such as the Bermuda triangle).

In *Supernatural*, the main enemies all through the plot are demons. Yes, sometimes the Winchesters enter into agreements with them, and sometimes demons are their allies in struggle against powerful enemies, but in all cases, the plot returns to the opposition between the brothers and the demonic world. The main means of demons’ manifestation in the people’s world is possession. Interestingly, the process of possession, as well as deliverance from demons, is built based on the classical Christian patterns. The demon is portrayed as a cloud of black smoke, a standard iconographic technique spread in Europe as early as the Middle Ages. He enters a man on his own will and fully brings him under control. The demon cannot bear holy water and a cross, classical attributes of tests for possession in the time of the Council of Trent<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the demons can be expelled only by the ritual of exorcism (not counting the seasons in which Sam Winchester temporarily demonstrates a super-ability

<sup>2</sup> In the series, this test for possession assumes a grotesque dimension, which is clearly manifest in episode 16 of the fourth season in which Dean Winchester tortures the demon Allister, crucified on Magen David (!), with a cross and holy water.

to expel them). It is noteworthy that, in the series, this ritual is reduced to the central incantation used by exorcists to this day. Interestingly, the brothers use a prayer version composed by Pope Leo XIII<sup>3</sup>, who firmly believed in the global satanic conspiracy against Christianity, which is obvious from the prayer's wording.

Possession becomes the central plot mechanism of the entire series. Demons enter a person to communicate with people, to commit murders and crimes, and to steal souls. The appearance of angels in the series is also directly associated with possession. For example, in the first episode of the fourth season, the angel Castiel explains that he entered the body of a man who pleaded him for this. Later on, many situations with the angels convey the idea of a person's willing consent for the angel's entry into them. A significant part of the series is based on the entry of different creatures, such as angels and demons, into the main characters. The problem of presenting spiritual entities is easily resolved by installing them in the human body. This process becomes standard practice in the series so that even when staying in naturally spiritual places—hell, paradise, and purgatory—the angels and the demons still remain in the bodies they have gripped. It is safe to say that without a notion of possession, as well as without the ritual of exorcism, the series' plot just would not exist.

What is common between *Supernatural* and the theology of spiritual war is not only the struggle against possession. The Winchester brothers are soldiers, sometimes the only ones capable of resisting the legions of evil forces. Believed to be the acme of the theology of spiritual war is the idea of the pending Apocalypse, which is also manifest in the series. The plot line of the first five seasons is based on resisting the coming end of the world. Interestingly, a true sign of the Apocalypse in the theology of spiritual war and in the series is the growing number of possessed ones. This is how this idea is expressed in the 22 episodes of the first season, when the mentor of the brothers (Bobby) says: "Normally I hear 3–4 demonic possessions, this year I heard 27 so far" (1–22).

## 5. Monotheism and the Problem of Evil

On establishing the narrative topics of the series, it makes sense to turn to its basic plot line. Despite the variety of situations, it can be defined as a confrontation between good and evil (Table 1). Whereas good is represented by the undefeatable Winchester brothers, the evil aspect is a more complicated matter. Christopher Partridge aptly observed that "occulture turns East for much of its self-spirituality and West for its demonology" (Partridge 2006, pp. 277–78). The narrative of Christian demonology proves to be the strongest and deeply rooted in the minds of both makers and consumers of modern culture. Compared to Oriental images of evil, the Christian demonology is not only colorful and sophisticated; it also offers a clear-cut, without obscure hues, picture of the opposition between good and evil. Whereas good in occulture is holistically described in abstract terms, evil has quite concrete outlines. *Supernatural* is probably the best illustration of this thesis. Despite all the specifics of the series, for more than ten seasons, we have been witnessing the world built on the basis of Abrahamic religions. It should be pointed out that the image of evil dominates in presenting their mythology. It is personified and, indisputably, painted in Christian tones. Lucifer comes up as the chief villain of the entire series, while the Christian Apocalypse, with all its attendant elements—Four Horsemen, the Whore of Babylon, the Antichrist—lays the foundation of the first five seasons. However, the closer the series gets to its finale, the more polytheistic its narrative becomes. The destruction of monotheism and the associated emergence of Darkness, God's sister, are the first steps toward it. In the final

<sup>3</sup> The version of the conjuring prayer developed by Leo XIII sounds as follows: "Exorcizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus, omnis satanica potestas, omnis incursio infernalis adversarii, omnis legio, omnis congregatio et secta diabolica, in nomine et virtute Domini Nostri Jesu Christi" (*Rituale Romanum* 1925, p. 539). In the early (prior to Leo XIII) versions of the ritual, the words "omnis congregatio et secta diabolica" are missing; the beginning of the prayer runs as follows: "exorcizo te," i.e., "I expel you" (Young 2016). At a certain time, this wording made exorcism a special tool of the cosmic battle of good against evil.

season, God becomes one of the entities vested with superpowers, and the world itself turns into a polytheistic universe.

**Table 1.** Development of the Monotheistic Narrative.

Topic	Season	Episode	Elements of the Monotheistic Narrative	
Implicit monotheism	1	4	First appearance of demons, possession, Christian exorcism	
		11	First pagan antagonist deity	
		16	Zoroastrian gods as antagonists	
		21–22	Demons as the main antagonists, possession—the way they manifest	
	2	8	For the first time, a classical Medieval image of the crossroad demon appears, and is then repeatedly reproduced	
		13	An episode with a ghost in the guise of an angel. Towards the end, Dean starts thinking that God does exist, but Sam doubts this	
		15	The appearance of Loki, the pagan demigod	
	3	4	The myth of the fall of Lucifer is told for the first time	
		8	The pagan gods of the New Year as antagonists	
		12	Appearance of the head of the demon Lilith	
	Absolute monotheism	4	1	First appearance of angels. A thought about God selecting Dean for a special mission. Conclusion of the episode: “If there are angels, then there is God”
			7	The angels are sent by God to destroy the town where demons operate. All of Dean’s actions are declared results of divine providence
10			A story about an angel that lost goodness and believes that angels accept God in faith without communicating with Him.	
16			The struggle of the angels Uriel and Castiel. Uriel sided with Lucifer and claims that God is no more	
18			The appearance of the writer—prophet of God	
21			The story that Lucifer is the highest angel who created demons	
22			Dean is tempted by the seraph Zechariah, who asserts that “God has left the building” and does not interfere anymore with the worldly matters	
5			2	The appearance of the God-detecting amulet
		4	Lucifer himself tells of his disobedience to God	
		6	Episode about the Antichrist	
		8	Loki turns out to be the Archangel Gabriel	
		10	The horsemen of the Apocalypse	
		14	The second horseman—Famine	
		16	The brothers find themselves in Paradise. The episode’s message is that God has long not interfered with anything so intensely as with the Winchester brothers’ life	
6		17	Episode about the whore of Babylon	
	19	The pagan gods try to confront “the Judeo-Christian apocalypse”		
	20	The third horseman—Plague		
	21	The fourth horseman—Death		
	22	Apocalypse, the battle of Lucifer and Michael		
	22	Castiel begins to play the role of God		
7	1	Castiel plays God, the appearance of Leviathans		
	20	For the first time, <i>tablets</i> appear, i.e., instructions according to which the creatures of the supernatural world were created		
8		The theme of the season is fighting demons		
9	3	Angels’ struggle for power		
	11	The story of Cain as the first demon knight		
	18	The appearance of Metatron, the scribe of God		



Table 1. Cont.

Topic	Season	Episode	Elements of the Monotheistic Narrative
Destruction of monotheism	10	23	God did not create the world from nothing; before the world, there was his sister—Darkness
	11	1	Darkness comes out of the abyss
		20	God appears as a writer
		21	God meets the Winchester brothers and saves people from Darkness
		22	God, Lucifer, demons, a witch, and the brothers fight Darkness, but they cannot defeat her
23	God and Darkness are reconciled, there is a harmony of Light and Darkness		
Imagined theology	12		The main topic of the season is a hunt for Lucifer and the emergence of his son, the Nephilim Jack
	13		The emergence of an alternative universe, alternative demons and angels
	14	23	The chief antagonist of the season—Archangel Michael God emerges as a writer, saying that the brothers' entire story is just his literary experiment
	15	19	The chief antagonist of the season—God The brothers defeat God, stripping Him of immortality. Lucifer's son, the Nephilim Jack, who had created a new world and new paradise, becomes a new God

In this aspect, *Supernatural* contrasts with another famous series on the subject of occultism, *The X-Files*. According to the apt statement made by C. Partridge: "The sacralized extraterrestrial is typically a 'technological angel'—a benevolent being, seeking only the good of humans and the survival of the planet—there are also technological demons—aliens who seek to occupy the planet and overcome humanity" (Partridge 2006, p. 260). The biblical plot from Chapter 6 of Genesis about the appearance of Nephilims to God's sons who had come down to the daughters of mankind and subsequent myths about the succubus and incubus are, as per Partridge, direct prototypes of modern UFO mythology. Thus, *The X-Files* has formalized a narrative around the myth about man-made angels. Quite the opposite happened in *Supernatural*. The series starts in a format of multiple unrelated histories, only seldom resorting to the common elements of a plot. However, the more it develops, the more episodes appear on the main subject of monotheistic and demonic mythology<sup>4</sup>.

Monotheism, as a system in which personified evil can exist, is extremely important for the entire narrative structure of the series. It is monotheism that is the basis from the first to the eleventh season. Early in the seventh season and closer to completion of the eighth, God's place is occupied by angels (Castiel and Metatron, respectively). However, it is clear from logic that they are just actors trying on the unique role of God. This is well illustrated by a dialogue between personified Death and Castiel in the first episode of the seventh season, where Death names him just "an angel putting on airs," which Castiel himself admits as he addresses people with the words: "I am the better God than my father. How can I make you understand?" (7-1).

The monotheistic tones in the series are rendered still more pronounced by the emergence of pagan gods. For the first time, one of them, the Scandinavian god of fertility, is encountered in the tenth episode of the first season, and the brothers easily cope with him as well as other supernatural

<sup>4</sup> Episode 9 in the sixth season of *Supernatural* is the most significant in the comparative study of the mythology of the two series. In it, the brothers investigate the kidnapping of people by aliens in an American town. In the course of the investigation, it becomes clear that the people are kidnapped not by the aliens, but by fairies who purposefully spread a rumor about the aliens to conceal their misdeeds. However, even up to that point, the general trend of mythology in *Supernatural* is openly directed against the idea of existence of "technological angels." So, in episode 15 of the second season, Dean states: "All hunters know that aliens are lies or jokes." Thus, *Supernatural* not only gives up the UFO mythology, but openly ridicules it.

beings. In episode 16 of the same season, Dean names Zoroastrian gods as beasts because they are beast-like. In this statement, the polytheistic gods are placed on a stage below the human one. Still later, in the eighth episode of the third season, the brothers fight with a couple of pagan gods to whom sacrifices were made on New Year's Eve. In the dialogue with the brothers, the gods explain their position in the universe as follows: "We were worshipped by millions. All of a sudden, this Jesus character's the hot, new thing in town. All of a sudden our altars were being burned down. We've been hunted down like common monsters . . . We assimilated" (3–8). Evident here is the opposition between paganism and Christianity with recognition of the latter's dominating role. However, the most interesting example of this type is episode 19 of the fifth season, *The Hammer of Gods*, in which, on the eve of the Apocalypse, the pagan gods Ganesha, Mercury, Baldr, Wotan, Kali, and others arranged a feast to which they invited the Winchester brothers as guests. The gods discussed what they would do once "the Judeo-Christian Apocalypse" sets in. Some of them proposed fighting, others negotiating. Coming out for fighting, Kali comments harshly on Christianity: "You think you're the only ones on earth? You pillage and you butcher in your God's name. But you're not the only religion and he's not the only God . . . You're wrong. There are billions of us and we were here first" (5–19). The episode ends with an appearance of Lucifer at the feast, where he easily destroys all the gods. Before that, he drops a curious phrase: "I never understood you pagans. You're such petty little things . . . You are worse than humans. You're worse than demons . . . and yet you claim to be gods" (5–19). The message of the episode is clear—even a fallen Christian angel stands much higher than all the pagan gods taken together, while the chief problem of those gods is that they usurp the place of the one true God.

As I pointed out previously, the narrative of the first eleven seasons can be described as monotheistic. Of course, it draws on a wide variety of heterodox doctrines: the history of the fall of Lucifer and his relations with God and angels combined with Bogomilian and Islamic mythologies<sup>5</sup>. The demons' desire to replace people on Earth is a reference to the famous myth about the fall of angels recorded in Enoch's first book (Wright 2015). Metatron, as one of the superior angels, and Azazel with Lilith are borrowed like archdemons from Kabbalah (Almond 2014, pp. 1–22); the structure of the spiritual world relies largely on Dante (Alighieri 1995), but at the same time, purgatory is inhabited by monsters and so on. At times, the authors variegated the picture by introducing elements from the pantheistic mythology into the monotheistic context. For example, Leviathans, initially understood as specific monsters or demons created by God, turn into proto-creatures created prior to angels and placed in purgatory. Here, one can perceive a classical Greek plot about Hecatoncheires thrown into Tartarus (Woodard 2008). The idea of generations of gods manifests itself in the revision of Lucifer's image, who becomes a creator of demons, essentially remaining an angel. There are many such techniques in the narration, but they do not change the generally monotheistic pattern.

This model with a dominance of the mythology of the Christian Middle Ages demonstrates that, strange as it might seem, it is the monotheistic myth that was one of the most viable in building a long-term narrative in a closed text. *Supernatural* proves that the monotheistic universe can maintain the modern viewer's attention for quite a long time. However, as I noted previously, the specifics of the closed product lie in the inevitable exhaustibility of any plot. Over eleven seasons, the series used all the possible techniques to extend the plot, such as flashbacks, flash-forwards, and imaginary worlds. In episode 15 of the sixth season, the idea of a multiverse even emerges for the first time. Towards the end of the tenth season, it becomes obvious that the strictly monotheistic universe has exhausted itself. It was then that the authors of the series changed the mythology. The ambiguous allusions to the

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<sup>5</sup> In episode 4 of the fifth season, Lucifer told Dean Winchester about his fall: "You know why God cast me down? Because I loved Him, more than anything, and then God created you, the little hairless apes; and then He asked all of us to bow down before you, to love you more than Him. And I said: 'Father, I can't.'" This story retells the legend from the *Koran* about the fall of Iblis (7: 11–18). The relationship between God and Lucifer as father and son is a direct borrowing from a Bogomilian myth in which Christ and Satanael are the first two creations of God the Father, and Satanael is the steward, second to the Father (Zlatar 2018).

possible restrictedness of monotheism were made previously. The first of them is the speech of the personified Death (the last horseman of the Apocalypse) at the end of episode 21 of the fifth season, in which Death says that it is as old as God and will eventually harvest God. Even though this assertion fails, the very statement erodes the generally monotheistic setting. The abandonment of monotheism takes place in the 11th season, which is devoted to the brothers' struggle against Darkness, God's sister, incarcerated by him in an abyss while creating the world. Darkness rises up as God's equal in all ways and nearly kills him, threatening to destroy all creations. It is here that the monotheistic borders are erased and their place is taken by a classical plot of polytheistic mythologies about the gods' first dyads. True, at the end of the season, the problem of dualism, lying at the basis of creation, loses in importance when God and Darkness together retire from this world, leaving their old enemies like Lucifer, demons, and angels to the brothers. It seems that the plot returns to the monotheistic universe, but it is obvious that its creative potential for the narrative was exhausted, which is why the following seasons would again play with the classical plot techniques of a closed text, i.e., a variety of parallel universes in which the past events can be replayed again and again. Whereas previously, the flashbacks and travels into parallel universes were restricted to single episodes, after the 11th season, the common plot started being built around them. This type of narrative must inevitably exhaust itself. Hence, there is no wonder that the authors decided to terminate the series four seasons after the destruction of the monotheistic cosmos. Curiously, the dynamism of the narrative is also similarly demonstrated by the ratings of the series' seasons. Whereas the first five seasons, fully based on the subject of Apocalypses, drew a maximum audience of 2.64 to 3.81 million viewers, those that followed demonstrated a gradual decline in viewers' interest. Only the ninth and the eleventh seasons could overcome this trend, gathering 2.81 million viewers each. However, after the 11th season, the ratings fell each year<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the 11th season is a border separating the monotheistic universe from the polytheistic. At first, the brothers did not believe that God existed at all, but later, as they met the angels, they thought that maybe there was a God after all. The classical moral dilemma of many episodes was theodicy—how the omnipotent God can allow so much evil in the world. While for a long time, the monotheistic mythology did not explicitly manifest itself, the world created as per its canons existed in the series from the outset, and any of its viewers perceived references to God in a strictly monotheistic key. It is like completing a puzzle with imaginary pieces, roughly visualizing the general picture. In the 11th season, the classical notion of God disintegrates when it becomes known that in Genesis, “something was concealed,” and this “will upset the fans of the Bible” (11–20). After the assertion of the God–Darkness couple, the viewer understands that they are dealing with an imaginary cosmology and theology, and stops to associate it with the traditional monotheism.

The development dynamics of the monotheistic narrative can be more conveniently represented in the table below. It identifies theologies that are singled out in the development of the series. The first is an implicit monotheism. Here, the brothers fight against monsters, thinking little, if at all, about God and his existence. The second, absolute monotheism starts with the appearance in the series of angels and the statement that the brothers had been chosen by God. All the subsequent seasons are arranged around a creator of the world who has distanced himself from the affairs of the world. The main ethical question is classical theodicy. The third is the destruction of monotheism and the associated emergence of Darkness, God's sister. The fourth is an imagined theology, the emergence of a world in which God is one of the entities vested with superpowers, while the world itself is a polytheistic universe.

It should be noted that the monotheistic basis largely shapes the core of the mythology in *Supernatural*, but not its ethics or ideology. In these spheres, as mentioned previously, family values prevail. In addition, the monotheistic notions about ethics are constantly ridiculed. The best illustration

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<sup>6</sup> See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supernatural\\_\(American\\_TV\\_series\)#cite\\_note-s1ratings-214](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supernatural_(American_TV_series)#cite_note-s1ratings-214); [https://supernatural.fandom.com/wiki/Supernatural\\_TV\\_Ratings](https://supernatural.fandom.com/wiki/Supernatural_TV_Ratings).

of this is the history of Dean Winchester. When he learns that, due to a bargain with a demon, he will end up in hell, he decides to do his best to somehow alleviate his future. Later on, it so happens that he is the chosen container of archangel Michael; the angels try to make him let Michael enter him by offering jam, hamburgers, a girl with her girlfriend, and promising a future paradise with “seventy sluts and two virgins” (4–22). In these situations, the Christian notions about chastity are deliberately held up to ridicule. The angels, freely speculating about carnal relationships, on the one hand, enhance the irony of the situation, but on the other, they put the series’ problem outside the traditional notions about Christian ethics.

From the ethical point of view, in the world of *Supernatural*, there is only this life, and it is the best possible one. Hell, paradise, and purgatory are forms of a failed being undesirable for man. So, the self-same Dean, who temporarily finds himself in paradise, calls it not nirvana, but the Matrix (5–16). Incidentally, this characteristic brings us back to the issue of Easternized good and Westernized evil.

Once the series started introducing the monotheistic issue through Christian images of evil, it withdrew this by introducing the Easternized good. The opposition between God and the Winchesters in the final two seasons of the series canceled the inalienable attribute of God, divine goodness presupposed by the monotheistic context. Here, God emerges as a failed author torturing people for his own whimsical pleasure. When, in the concluding episodes, the Winchesters defeat God with the help of the Nephilim Jack, the latter becomes a new and better God. However, before this happens, he absorbs Darkness and becomes a real coincidentia oppositorum. Here is what Jack says about himself and his new role: “I’m around. I’ll be in every drop of falling rain, every speck of dust that the wind blows, and in the sand, in the rocks, and the sea. (...) And those answers will be in each of them. Maybe not today but... someday. People don’t need to pray to me or to sacrifice to me. They just need to know that I’m already a part of them and to trust in that. I won’t be hands on. . . . I learned from you and my mother and Castiel that... when people have to be their best... they can be. And that’s what to believe in” (15–19). This monologue is an ideal expression of the classical New Age maxim: I = GOD. Here, the idea of a personified creator disappears and is replaced by a notion of God inside a man, implicitly present in the entire universe. The center of the new theology is man himself, who understands, better than the personified God in the exterior, both himself and his problems. In addition, Jack creates a new paradise in which people live as they please. This paradise is just a continued worldly life, i.e., the best form of existence, according to the series’ ethics. Thus, the destruction of the monotheistic narrative in the 11th season resulted first in the polytheistic cosmos in which the images of evil became plastic. Actually, all the supernatural creatures, except those that fell under particularly strong human influence, turned into potentially evil creatures. As a consequence, God himself, as a chief supernatural being, becomes evil. The narrative ends with the re-creation of the world as an absolute good, but on a pantheistic Easternized basis where there is no longer an ontological chasm between God and man, and, hence, there is no conflict and the series is bound to end.

## 6. Conclusions

So, it is possible to conclude that the narrative of *Supernatural* is determined by domination of the monotheistic mythology. However, the monotheistic picture of the world is valuable just because it is required for substantiating the existence of a really threatening evil. Once the monotheistic basis is removed, evil stops being so absolute; thus, the narrative loses its attractiveness. The real life of the characters of the series always concentrates on the idea of a mutiny against the established world order and the idea of asserting a personal freedom contrary to a scenario established by the single God in the world.

The case with *Supernatural* shows that the classical monotheistic narrative, in its orthodox and heterodox formats, is attractive for the modern audience. The problem of possession and the practice of exorcism become not only widely spread forms of modern religious practices, but also assume an important role in the media, becoming a unique metaphor that helps create imaginary universes and raise sophisticated ethical questions. Despite the assertion that Christianity has lost its attraction and

that the spiritual culture has become Easternized, it turns out that a plot deeply rooted in the Christian mythology and relying on a strictly monotheistic context can maintain an audience's attention for over a decade. In addition, it is necessary to agree with C. Partridge's thesis that expressly the Christian context can support the colorful image of evil. The wide distribution of the occult, which became a basis of modern mass culture and easily blends, by virtue of the historical specifics of its genesis, with monotheism, makes the classical monotheistic mythology more flexible and capable of meeting different demands of the audience. At the same time, only mythology is interesting for modern culture. Ethical and philosophical aspects of monotheism are perceived as something that must be discarded or ridiculed. If we pursue the logic of the *Supernatural* narrative, we can say that for modern man, the Easternized good that permeates the entire universe is of greater ethical value than that of monotheism, but only because it places mankind at the center of the world and is one with it.

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