



## The Gospel of the Winchesters (And Their Fans): Neoreligious Fan Practices and Narrative in *Supernatural*

Charlotte E. Howell,  
University of Texas, Austin.

### Abstract

The television show, *Supernatural* (The WB/CW 2005-present), has evolved its own subversive take on Christianity in which all of the events of the series' first five seasons created a new religious gospel. Within the show's narrative, fans of the book series, *Supernatural*, are representations—and exaggerations—of actual fans of the television series, *Supernatural*. The integration of real-world fan activity (even if based predominantly online) into the religious narrative of *Supernatural* activates discourses of neoreligiosity in fan practices similar to those studied by Matthew Hills and Ann Taves' study of "specialness" in relation to religious experience. I use neoreligiosity regarding the fandom to invoke the flexibility of religious experience beyond the ascriptive web of connotations that "religion" implies. The difference for the show and my argument is discursive: religion is recognizable, known, and ideological, but neoreligiosity is flexible, adaptive, nebulous and numinous. Within the show, *Supernatural*, fans are performing religious acts, whether they know it or not, because the show imposes this designation through its narrative by linking *Supernatural* television fans with devotees to the Winchester Gospel, gospel that is religious if apocryphal. My paper analyzes the dialogue between fan works and the show's narrative and use of hybrid objects that invoke questions of religious intention, (neo-)religious ritual, and attention to and scrutiny of fan practices and agency within the object with which they engage.

*Pour le résumé en français, voir la fin de l'article*

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The television show, *Supernatural* (The WB/CW 2005-present), has evolved its own subversive take on Christianity in which all of the events of the series' first five seasons created a new religious gospel. The main characters, demon-hunting brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, were raised by their father to hunt demons and other monsters after their mother was killed by the demon Azazel. The series follows the brothers in their twenties as they cross America in a classic car, hunting monsters and trying to figure out why their family was chosen for such horrors and how they can survive<sup>1</sup>. As part of the unfolding of

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<sup>1</sup> The classic car the Winchesters drive, a 1967 Chevrolet Impala, is only one of the myriad elements of Americana iconography woven throughout the series. Other examples include: the

their chosenness, they discover within the show that their exploits have been documented in a series of novels with their own small but passionate fan community. The *Supernatural* books are revealed as “The Gospel of the Winchesters,” written by a man who is proclaimed by an angel to be a prophet, writing his visions. While the dense explicitly religious world created on the show will play a role in my interpretation, for the purposes of this paper and its focus, I will analyze the unique way in which the show (and strains of discourse created by its fans) implies fan engagement and participation as (neo-)religious. Within the show’s narrative, fans of the book series, *Supernatural*, are representations—and exaggerations—of actual fans of the television series, *Supernatural*.

The integration of real-world fan activity (even if based predominantly online) into the religious narrative of *Supernatural* activates discourses of neoreligiosity in fan practices similar to those studied by Matthew Hills. In his article, “Media Fandom, Neoreligiosity, and Cult(ural) Studies,” Hills argues that “Organized (institutional) religion may have declined in the West, but a privatized and individualized space remains open to the voluntaristic adoption of sacred themes and ideas, and it is here that discourses of “cult” media and fandom find a specific social and historical context” (2000, p.76). In moving away from religion toward neoreligiosity, Hills is foregrounding the process and experience more than the ascriptive religious demarcation. This aligns with religious scholar Ann Taves’ argument in *Religious Experience Reconsidered* in which she writes, “I do not think we need to worry so much about defining ‘religion,’ I think we can simply consider it as an abstraction that many use to allude to webs of overlapping concepts that vary from language to language and culture to culture” (2009, p. 165). Thus, I use neoreligiosity regarding the fandom to invoke the flexibility of religious experience beyond the ascriptive web of connotations that “religion” implies. The difference for the show and my argument is discursive: religion is recognizable, known, and ideological, but neoreligiosity is flexible, adaptive, nebulous and numinous.

Within the show, *Supernatural*, fans are performing religious acts, whether they know it or not, because the show imposes this designation through its narrative by linking *Supernatural* television fans with devotees to the Winchester Gospel, gospel that is religious if apocryphal. My paper analyzes

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focus on small towns and rural communities, driving on back roads and the myth of the open road as analogous to frontier freedom, classic rock that is used throughout both diegetically and non-diegetically, and of course the particularly Christian and evangelical inflected representation of religion through angels, demons, prophets, etc.

the dialogue between fan works and the show's narrative that invokes questions of religious intention, (neo-)religious ritual, and attention to and scrutiny of fan practices and agency within the object with which they engage.

### ***The Winchester Gospel: Pulp Religion And Fanfiction***

*Supernatural* emphasizes the textual nexus of these questions by positioning a literal text at its center. "The Winchester Gospel" is introduced in the season four episode, "The Monster at the End of the Book," as a series of pulp novels, titled *Supernatural*, with a vocal but limited fan base. The writer, Chuck Shirley, is revealed in the course of the episode to be a prophet protected by an archangel and spreading divine prophecy, if unknowingly, through his nominal book series. The prophecy is the life of the Winchester brothers as they lived it (and as the television audience has seen unfold in the previous three seasons), for they are key figures in the coming apocalypse. This narrative development allows the creators within the context of the show to reflect on the nature of *Supernatural* as a text by reflecting on the ways in which people interact with the text. However, the implications of the books as religious texts are minimally acknowledged.

With "The Monster at the End of the Book," *Supernatural's* hyperconsciousness extends into the world of its own fandom. The episode begins with Sam and Dean being confused with "LARPer" (live-action role players) playing Sam and Dean from the books. The encounter with their performed selves initiates the blurring of supposed lines of reality and fiction as well as introducing offline fan practices such as live-action role playing. The episode portrays an online Supernatural (the book)<sup>2</sup> discussion board that includes a post by "simpatico," the member name of a frequent poster in the Television Without Pity online *Supernatural* discussion boards. This example of hyperconsciousness exemplifies the term as defined by media scholar Jim Collins, for it acknowledges *Supernatural's* "characters' status as popular icons whose circulation and reception are worked back into the text itself" (Collins 1992, p. 336). This is achieved while acknowledging the fan culture that has helped *Supernatural* reach its ninth (at the time of writing) season. More directly, Line Petersen argues in "Renegotiating religious imaginations through

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<sup>2</sup> To reduce confusion, I will italicize the television program *Supernatural* and underline the book series of the same name that appears within the show. This distinction is further useful because a later episode included the television show *Supernatural* as a narrative element ("The French Mistake").

transformations of ‘banal religion’ in *Supernatural*” argues, “Thus, inter- and metatextuality heighten viewers’ imaginative awareness by placing the main characters both inside and outside the diegesis of the series” (Petersen 2010, n.p.). I would expand her point by saying it also places the fans both inside and outside the diegesis of the series granting them novel power over and within the narrative. However, this novel power is constantly negotiated and not wholly positive as it is tied to a complex system of visibility and vulnerability.

“The Monster at the End of the Book” notably includes a discussion between the brothers about fanfiction, particularly incestuous slash fanfiction, dubbed “Wincest” within the *Supernatural* fan community. Slash fanfiction finds its origin in the 1970s writings about Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek* and remains as large subgroup of many fan communities for media texts. As Henry Jenkins argues in *Textual Poachers*, “Slash fiction represents a reaction against the construction of male sexuality on television and in pornography; slash invites us to imagine something akin to the liberating transgression of gender hierarchy” (Jenkins 1992, p. 194). As Jenkins points out, slash is a hotly debated aspect of media fandom, and continues to be even as it is abundant and far-reaching. In the *Supernatural* fan community, slash fanfictions most often add another, riskier taboo to their construction of sexuality: incest. The brothers discuss their discovery of the *Supernatural* fandom, moving quickly to “Sam-slash-Dean. Together” fans who don’t care that they’re related. Dean’s response to this revelation is: “That’s just sick.” Although this line is perhaps meant as a self-reflexive joke, it echoes the history of pathologizing fandom while indicting both slash and Wincest.

Although this is the first explicit discussion of Wincest on the show, many fans, at least those who write Wincest, see it as an implicit part of the text. As Catherine Tosenberger argues in her study of Wincest fanfiction, the text invites the taboo: “Sam and Dean are unable to form romantic attachments to others, and therefore their love is locked in an eternal feedback loop, referring back only to itself. They don’t have anyone but each other (and their father) to love, and since their father’s death, they love none but each other” (2008, n.p.). In her discussions with fanfic writers, a similar line of reasoning occurs, to the point that the subversive element is not the sex but is instead the happy ending for the brothers (Tosenberger 2008, n.p.). Yet, the act of taking the subtext and making it text—even in extratextual fan productions—is characterized as “sick” by both the character and the writers who decided to include it. Its pathologizing sentiment reinscribes the taboo of slash fanfic by connecting it with the cultural taboo of incest. Wincest and its writers thus are placed in a subaltern position to the producers of the show and potentially other

fans. This will further complicate the representation of Becky Rosen as a Wincest fanfic writer and disciple of the Winchester Gospel.

The visibility and vulnerability of this joke and others like it illustrates a clear power dynamic at work even as the producers of the show bring the fans into the narrative world. As Laura E. Felschow writes in her examination of the minimized distance between producers and fans on the series:

The acknowledgment of fan behavior within this episode is not an overt invitation to participate, but a demonstration that the producers/writers of the program are aware of exactly what their fandom is doing *without* an invitation. Whatever the producers' stated intentions, whether their die-hard fans view this as an inclusive or exclusive act, a compliment or an insult, the end result is the same. The cult fan is reminded that s/he cannot decide what is to be included and excluded, who can be complimented or insulted. (2010, n.p.)

Producers still hold the power in the relationship between the fans and the text. However, by inviting the fans into the text through their representation and mimetic nods to their real-world fan activity, fans can claim a degree of textual agency as they can imagine themselves on similar narrative ground to the characters and have that be an implicitly sanctioned dynamic. This is particularly significant when the characters they can stand with include angels, prophets, and the divinely chosen agents of the "Winchester gospels."

By directly engaging with the fan community for the show through fans of the book, "The Monster at the End of the Book" opens the door for connective fan agency, a possibility that a few fans picked up and utilized in their creative production relating to the "Winchester gospels" granting their diegetic avatars with the religious power of disciples. In a short fanfiction written by With-A-Kay (now longsufferingly) on livejournal shortly after the airing of the episode, posited this potential in explicitly religious terms. In the fic, Sam and Dean are discussing their posterity:

"See, someday? These books are gonna be the Gospel of Winchester."

"I know, I was there."

And then the fanfic? That's gonna be, like, the Book of Mormon." (2009, n.p.)

The implication of fanfiction for a religious text is never discussed within the show, but recurs in the fandom likely because it imbues fans with religious

power and world-shaping agency. I will discuss fan production further, but this is episode in which that first seed of neoreligious power is planted.

“The Monster at the End of the Book” is both a fan and critical favorite, but as discussed above, it also marks the first time the somewhat critical eye of the *Supernatural* producers was turned so explicitly on its own fandom. At the beginning of the fifth season, that eye would focus even more strongly on *Supernatural* fans and their practices as the character of the *Supernatural* fangirl, Becky Rosen, is introduced into the narrative. Becky is in her twenties, with atypical-for-the-CW looks, and is characterized as a leader within the book fandom. In the first image of her, Becky writes *Supernatural* slash fiction before being tasked to deliver a message to the Winchesters by the prophet Chuck. The scene begins by panning from a poster of one of the *Supernatural* book covers, across pink wallpapered walls, and to Becky sitting at her computer. She speaks as she writes, narrating the first part of a Wincest fanfic until she receives a video phone call from the prophet Chuck. Becky initially tells Chuck that she knows that the books are fiction but once the opposite is revealed, she crows, “I knew it!” This scene visually illustrates the complicated representation of Becky as both a fan avatar (and thus a narrative object) and a character who is meant to resemble real-life fans. The poster keys us to her fannishness as her primary characteristic, but her room’s girlish look and her own youthful-but-not-fashionable costuming indicate a juvenile naiveté that is confirmed by her joyous “I knew it!” Within the text, she is introduced in much the same way Wincest fanfiction was: with a grudging acknowledgement of its existence while verbally or symbolically locating it as undesirable, either illustrating psychological illness, arrested development, and/or strange femininity. Despite this, within the show’s religious narrative, Becky’s actions counteract this characterization.

Becky represents the complicated relationship between the show and its fans on a number of levels—gender politics among them—but I will focus on Becky’s role in the religious narrative of the show and the religiously-framed and neoreligious fanworks that draw on the idea of the diegetic “Winchester gospels.” Media scholar Matt Hills discusses fandom in terms of neoreligiosity to indicate the lack of a stable referent for the term “religion;” allowing for neoreligiosity to cover a narrative in which two brothers cross the country in a ’67 Impala hunting demons and are molested by a wincest fangirl disciple of the prophet Chuck (2000, p. 74). Within this flexible frame, I want to discuss the religious narrative as it congeals around a few hybrid objects that illustrate the neoreligious discourses and space for fan activity within these discourses and their power dynamics.

### ***The Icons: Neoreligious Objects In Supernatural***

*Supernatural* is a television show that, over its five-year apocalyptic narrative particularly, reveled in its own almost-blasphemous approach to religion. The program's diegesis is steeped in Christian religion, yet the organized institutional understanding of religiosity is rejected at almost every turn as being too rigid to be useful for the characters' experiences. Instead, the Winchesters and their ethos tend toward neoreligiosity as a much more flexible ordering of meaning and located it firmly among people and within the banal world. The neoreligious objects of *Supernatural* shape the neoreligious into a rather literal humanism: God, gods, angels, demons, the Devil, heaven, and hell are all proven to exist within the show's telefantasy genre bounds, yet none of their religious trappings matter except as they are markers of the supernatural. It is not atheism but instead a willful rejection of the idea that the tropes of religion matter beyond how they are experienced—as religious, neoreligious, or neither—by people. The characters, and by extension the show, look for and find meaning instead in relationships among humans. This is a unique formulation of humanism built by the show's particular ethos that, instead of being opposed to religion, is more a neoreligious reordering of significance: religion exists but human bonds and lived existence is paramount. It is neoreligious in its plasticity, ability to adapt to experience and individuals, and its negotiation of religious tropes. In this worldview, the love between the Winchester brothers stands as a paragon. This love is visibly located in the form of the family car, a 1967 Chevrolet Impala.

### ***The Impala: Vessel and Conveyance of Brotherly Love***

The Impala is a material object, man-made and banal, but its banality is purposeful and symbolic in the neoreligious world of *Supernatural*. The culmination of the show's apocalypse story arc brings the Impala front and center. In "Swan Song," the voice of the prophet Chuck tells the audience the origin of the Impala and how ordinary it was. He intones:

On April 21, 1967, the 100 millionth GM vehicle rolled off the line at the plant in Janesville – a blue two-door Caprice. There was a big ceremony, speeches. The lieutenant governor even showed up. Three days later, another car rolled off that same line.

No one gave two craps about her. But they should have, because this 1967 Chevrolet Impala would turn out to be the most important car – no, the most important object – in pretty much the whole universe.

The story of the Impala begins the episode and intercuts visually with the action of the main plot, forcing a shift in perspective as file footage and artificially aged cinematography is used in these scenes to contrast with the dark and bleak look of the Winchester brother's struggles to evade Lucifer in his quest to possess Sam. Although this episode is the culmination of five years of storytelling, by foregrounding the Impala, it asserts the car's place as the fulcrum on which the neoreligious story pivots. It is a banal object, but as the prophet says, it turns out to be very significant.

The Impala is the un-credited third Winchester, appearing in almost every episode and complete with a long, complex backstory of predestination. Just as the Winchesters were chosen for their roles in the apocalypse, so was the Impala. For the Winchesters, the Impala was their one constant in their nomadic existence. Their mother was killed when both were very young, and they lived a life on the road with their father who trained them to hunt and kill monsters. Dean calls it "baby" and personifies it; fans call it the Metallicar (a nickname based on the frequent use of classic rock) to do the same. The car itself has often been utilized as a visual connection and symbol of the brotherly bond: they sit together on it to talk, drink, and occasionally fight; rebuilding the car or taking care of it is seen as proxy fraternal care. But in this final episode of this story arc, the Impala's significance as a symbol of their brotherhood and thus the humanistic approach to neoreligiosity appears clearly.

In the climax of "Swan Song," Sam is possessed by Lucifer and has begun the process of Armageddon when Dean drives up in the Impala, blasting Def Leppard. He then proceeds to try to stop Lucifer-Sam and is profoundly beaten for his attempt. Despite his swollen and broken face, Dean manages to tell his brother, "It's Okay, Sammy. I'm here, and I'm not going to leave you." This assertion of devotion verbally activates the show's neoreligious approach that finds transcendent power outside of religious ascription and instead in relationships between people. God, the Devil, the apocalypse do not matter as long as the brothers are together. Immediately following this declaration, the sunlight reflects off of the Impala, Lucifer-Sam sees himself in its window and beyond that to a toy army man he stuck in the car door as a child. Thus begins a montage of brotherly moments, mostly in or near the Impala that runs over a minute with no sound but the wind. It is a pure visual representation of the



brotherly bond, portrayed as a momentary revelation of the neoreligious. It is so purely about their relationship that it resembles nothing so much as a slash fanvid, a mode of fan production meant to heighten the emotional connection between two characters of the same sex. Visually, this montage might be read as another instance of appropriation and integration of fan work while positioning such work clearly as part of the neoreligious narrative and its relationship to neoreligious fan activity. The Impala becomes a neoreligious object because of this moment and its position at the center of fan and narrative neoreligious practices.

### ***The Books and Disciple: Becky Rosen as Negotiated Fan Avatar***

Although the Impala is the clearest representation of *Supernatural*'s conception of neoreligious objects, it is not the only one. Two neoreligious objects that take this formulation of the humanistic transcendent to the level of metafiction are the *Supernatural* book series and its fan, Becky Rosen. The books themselves are only briefly seen but can be interpreted as neoreligious objects because they enact the relationship between cult fans and their favored source text. The books are introduced and explained, at least partially by a publisher-fan who becomes emotional discussing the narrative. This aligns with Hills' assertion that "cult fandom is a project of the self which is primarily and significantly emotional; cult fans create cultural identities out of the significance which certain texts assume for them, rather than out of textual signification and hence out of rationalist or cognitive mechanisms of interpretation" (2000, p.73). The books, as neoreligious objects and the "Winchester Gospel," invite such fannish-neoreligious relationship for the fans within the diegesis as a mirror to the *Supernatural* fandom.

More interesting for this paper, and more complex as a neoreligious object is the character of Becky Rosen as an avatar and image of the *Supernatural* fandom. Although *Supernatural*'s gender politics are troubled enough without my literal objectification of this female character, Becky is not wholly a subject within the narrative because of the symbolic weight of the fandom she represents. Continuing the analysis of *Supernatural*'s neoreligiosity as occurring between humans in everyday life, Becky operates similar to the Impala, as a hybrid subject-object unto herself but also a medium connecting real life fans with the producers of *Supernatural*. She is forever tied to the Winchester gospel.

Becky may be introduced with a mocking tone, but her actions in the episode “Sympathy for the Devil” and a later fifth-season episode called “The Real Ghostbusters” indicate that she is a character of significance in the context of the religious narrative. In “Sympathy for the Devil,” she is explicitly tasked by the prophet Chuck with delivering a message to the Winchesters. Similarly, in “The Real Ghostbusters,” she is the only one who knows where a gun that the brothers believe could kill Satan is located, and she knows this because of her devotion to the Winchester gospels. The location of the gun was written in one of the novels, but the detail is so minute not even Chuck, the author, remembers it. It’s a heroic moment for Becky that shows her power in the religious narrative, at the time of delivery it is believed to be among the most important steps toward stopping the apocalypse, and her knowledge arises from her most fannish characteristics: obsessive attention to detail fanned by passion and devotion.

It seems fairly clear from the presentation of Becky within the show that she was primarily meant to be an object of simultaneous acknowledgement and ridicule, with her two moments of religious power exertion as a devotee of the Winchester Gospel mostly overshadowed by her obsession with Sam’s appearance, and her continued “weird” fan activities such as writing fanfiction and attending conventions. She represents a caricature of female fandom that has persisted despite the growth of nerd culture and influence of fandom studies. Becky may be a textual poacher, but she’s also a character who gropes a stranger merely because she thinks she knows him through devotion to a text. By Becky’s latest appearance, in the appropriately titled “Seventh Season: Time For A Wedding” it seems clear that without the religious narrative (with the Winchesters defeating Lucifer at the end of the fifth season and the prophet Chuck disappearing into a puff of white smoke once the narrative of the Winchester Gospel was completed) she reverts to the unkind caricature of the fan. In that episode, she drugs Sam with a love potion in an effort to regain some purpose in her life. At one point in the episode, she says of the *Supernatural* fandom: “The only place people understood me was on the message boards. They were grumpy and overly literal but at least we shared a common passion.” She even ties Sam up in a bed in her remote cabin, a scene that evokes one of the strongest images of the “pathological fan”: Kathy Bates in *Misery*. Without the purpose given to her as a devotee of the Winchester Gospel when the books were explicitly activated as a religious text, Becky is diminished as does the seemingly limited amount of respect held by the producers toward the fans.

However, fan productions have followed through on Becky—and relationally all of fandom’s—potential for neoreligious power. As scholar Brigid Cherry argues, Becky’s presence “is significant for fan studies, since not only do fans become manifest in the text, but those characters develop the potential for fans to participate interactively with representations of themselves” (2011, p. 210). The first fan work I want to draw attention to is a thorough exegesis of the use and adaptation of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the *Book of Revelation* as key textual influences on the narrative arc of *Supernatural*. Though the post on thewinchesterFamilyBusiness.com is titled “The Winchester Gospel,” the post ends by saying: “So, with these two books, you can find a lot of background for *Supernatural*’s myth arc, and it’s interesting to postulate where they will go from here. The writers are not telling a religion with their story just a story about two brothers” (sablegreen 2010, n.p.). Despite spending over 1500 words describing the ways the show aligns with or differs from the religious narratives presented in *Paradise Lost* and the *Book of Revelation*, the poster ends by asserting that the authorial intent is far from religious. However, this in-depth narrative analysis focuses on the content of the television show *Supernatural* and not the significance of the book series within the show. The *Supernatural* fandom has fanfiction for that.

Although the fanfiction I found is a small sample and a very small subset of the vast and diffuse world of *Supernatural* fanfiction (with at least three large-scale livejournal communities, well over 57-thousand discrete fics on fanfiction.net and 14-thousand on archiveofourown.org), they prove interesting examples of fans taking up the potential for fan power and agency implied in the text and transforming it into their own creative power, often used to redeem, validate, and/or expand Becky’s place within the religious narrative<sup>3</sup>. One fanfic, posits Becky as God. The author of that fic, familiardevil on livejournal writes:

Becky offered him a hand up. “I wasn’t going to say anything, but ever since you started writing your new installment of Supernatural, I knew I was going to have to intervene. It’s like...I don’t know, Chuck.” She shot him a glum look. “It’s like you’re forgetting what the whole series is about! Sam and Dean! The Winchesters! You’re *losing their bond*. And as your creator,

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<sup>3</sup> *Supernatural* fanfiction favors hurt/comfort fics, but is replete with Wincest, gen, crack, slash, humor, family, het, and various other categories of fanfic. Mirroring the tone of the show, fanfic usually includes angst and an overarching tone.

and as their creator, too, I felt like it was my divine responsibility to step in and make things right. And I knew you wouldn't listen to me if I were just...normal...Chuck?" (2010, n.p.)

Not only does Becky gain omnipotence in this fic, but God (herself) is somewhat redeemed from God's acknowledged absence within the narrative of the show.

In other fanfics, Becky is positioned as a disciple of the prophet Chuck or as the as a kind of priest of the humanism underlying *Supernatural's* neoreligiosity if not *Supernatural's*. "SuperCon" written by livejournal user immortal\_jedi actually attaches the designation of "disciple of the prophet Chuck" to Becky (2010, n.p.). This example activates Becky within the sanctioned religious framework of the show by granting her a label within the Christian-inflected hierarchy. In other fics, Becky realizes that the Winchester Gospels were not about the Winchesters being new messiahs but instead about their ability to touch other people's lives and awaken purpose within them (fanishliss 2011, n.p. and girl\_wonder 2011, n.p.). Fanfics like these siphon some power from the diegetic religious narrative by shifting agency away from those Christian-inflected hierarchies of angels and prophets to the people who use the "Winchester gospels" or the Winchesters themselves as the site for community building. The construction of a faith community is often a tenet of organized religion, but one that in these fics can be independent of the religious institutional structure and thus resembles more the neoreligiosity of fan communities. As Camille Bacon-Smith described in her early study of media fan communities, "The community is open to anyone willing to participate but closed to anyone who might jeer, or worse, blow the whistle" (1992, p. 3). The transformation of jeers from the producers to power within fanfiction through the hybridity of Becky Rosen indicates the continued negotiation of neoreligious narratives and fan practices.

### ***Conclusion***

Although the fan practices that explicitly position Becky—and thus fans—as (neo)religiously powerful are not prolific within the fandom, their existence illustrates the activated potential that some fans made explicit. They made the fan-avatar on the show, Becky, into a disciple or God or a priestess. This transformation fulfills the potential implied within the show. Moreover, because *Supernatural* had performed the work necessary to link the diegetic fans of

Supernatural the book series with fans of *Supernatural* the television series, there is a sense that these fanfiction writers are exercising their own power over a narrative that had conscripted them as figures with potential neoreligious power that can then change the web of connotations associated with religion, particularly patriarchal American Christianity. Recalling Hills, the supernatural fans who wrote these fics voluntarily chose to continue in and expand the religious narrative the show had provided, thus perhaps practicing their own mode of neoreligious agency. They are choosing to exercise their role as disciples of the Winchester gospels by writing their own parables and psalms, building and protecting their neoreligious community, and adapting the sanctioned text (*Supernatural*) to do so. In expanding their experiences and *communitas* as a bridge between neoreligious fan cultures and more rigid, religious (Christian) ideology, *Supernatural* and its fans may be working subtly to subvert the latter by co-opting it in the former.

**Keywords** : fandom, Supernatural, neoreligiosity, narrative, metatextuality

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### ***Biographical notice***

Charlotte Howell is a doctoral student in department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin, where she also received her M.A. She recently published "[Value in Brokenness: Fractured Subjectivities in Contemporary American Telefantasy](#)" in *Networking Knowledge*. Charlotte has worked for FlowTV.org, was a co-coordinator of the Flow Conference 2010, and worked as an associate editor for In Media Res.

### **Résumé**

La série télévisée *Supernatural* (WB/CW), diffusée depuis 2005, a conduit à une reprise originale et subversive du christianisme dans laquelle les événements des cinq premières saisons de la série ont mené à la production d'un nouvel évangile. Dans cette fiction télévisuelle, des fans d'une collection de romans nommée *Supernatural* sont des représentations – et des exagérations – des fans réels de la série télévisée *Supernatural* elle-même. L'intégration d'activités faniques du monde concret (même si elles ne se retrouvent essentiellement qu'en ligne) dans le récit religieux de *Supernatural* entraînent des discours néoreligieux dans les pratiques des fans d'une façon similaire à ceux étudiés par Matthew Hills ou Ann Taves dans son étude du caractère spécial (*specialness*) lié à l'expérience religieuse. La notion de néoreligiosité en ce qui a trait à la culture des fans est ici employée afin d'évoquer la flexibilité de l'expérience religieuse au-delà de la toile attributive de connotations que la « religion » implique. La différence entre la série télévisée et l'argumentaire présenté est essentiellement discursive : la religion est reconnaissable, connue et idéologique, mais la néoreligiosité est flexible, adaptative, nébuleuse et transcendante. Dans la fiction télévisuelle *Supernatural*, les fans accomplissent des actes religieux, qu'ils le sachent ou non, parce qu'elle impose cette désignation par l'entremise de son récit en associant les fans de la série télévisée *Supernatural* avec les fidèles de l'Évangile des Winchester : un évangile religieux, voire apocryphe. Cet article analyse les dialogues entre l'ouvrage des fans et le récit de la série, puis l'utilisation d'objets hybrides qui entraînent des questions d'intention religieuse, de rituels (néo-)religieux ainsi que l'examen des pratiques de fans et de leur agentivité au sein de l'objet avec lequel ils s'engagent.