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From Olympian to Christ-figure: *Lucifer* (2016–2021)

Abstract On the surface the television series *Lucifer* (2016–21) is a simple police procedural but, in actuality, the criminal cases in the show serve merely as window-dressing and structure for the deeper consideration of issues, such as guilt, shame, love, and even the meaning of life on both an individual and universal level. These topics are explored through the ever-developing character of Lucifer himself, who, like other recent anti-hero depictions, is initially presented in a manner that is very different from traditional portrayals of the Devil, and is, in fact, far closer to that of the Greek Olympian gods. Over the course of six seasons, the depiction of Lucifer alters, however, as he becomes a figure that is in many ways Christ-like, but with a 21st century twist that places the individual in an exalted position that is superior to that of divinity.

Keywords Lucifer, Devil, Olympians, God, Christ

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INTRODUCTION

At least since the dawn of Christianity, the relative perceptions of God and the Devil have been clearly delineated; God is the ultimate and absolute good, whereas the Devil presents his opposite, the personification of evil, the tempter to sin and a consummate liar who cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Such depictions have been challenged in recent products of popular culture, and the television series *Lucifer* continues this trend in a portrayal that puts a post-modern spin on the Judeo-Christian tradition with more than a nod to the Greek Olympians gods.

The TV series *Lucifer* is based upon a character created by Neil Gaiman, Sam Kieth, and Mike Dringenberg for the DC comic book series *The Sandman*. The latter was followed by a later spin-off comic book series called *Lucifer* written by Mike Carey, which was then adapted for television by Tom Kapinos in the form of an American procedural/urban fantasy series. The programme premiered on Fox on January 25, 2016, and ran for three seasons before being dropped. After a successful fan campaign tagged #SaveLucifer, the show was picked up again by Netflix for further, initially two, and then confirmed three, seasons. In format, the show is a police procedural, in which Lucifer works with Detective Chloe Decker to solve murders, but in practice these cases merely provide a framework and backdrop to the main narrative. In *Lucifer* the criminal cases serve merely as window-dressing and structure for the deeper consideration of issues, such as guilt, shame, love, and even the meaning of life on both an individual and universal level. Such topics are explored through the ever-developing character of Lucifer himself, whose circumstances present him as an extreme example of the questions faced on some level by all mortals.

Lucifer is suave and cynical, possessing an ironic sense of humour that lends a lightness to the programme that masks the deeper issues being raised. Although his British accent stands in contrast to the American accents of the rest of the cast and perhaps points him up as a villainous character in the tradition of Hollywood,[1] this is a far from traditional portrayal of the Devil, as the production traces Lucifer's struggle to understand the world and his consequent journey of self-growth in a manner that reveals a great deal about contemporary thought.

1 See e.g. Bleichenbacher (2008); Szentgyörgyi (2015); h2g2 (2003/2011). 'Why villains in movies have English accents'. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: Earth Edition. (12 September 2011). Retrieved from http://h2g2.com/edited_entry/A891155 (3 October 2023). The casting of the Devil as British may also in this case draw on the idea of the British 'stiff up-

This celestial being is supremely anthropomorphic, and, above all, depicted as a hero with qualities more godly than demonic. In fact, he is at the outset more typical of the Olympian gods than of any Biblical figure. Like the Greek gods, he is not only enormously handsome in the divine model, but he is, of course, also immortal, the significance of which affects him in a manner similar to that of the depictions of the Classical deities. In addition, his family dynamics echo those of the Olympians. Over the course of six seasons, he changes, however, into a character that is more in keeping with Christianity. Yet, he does that in the form of a Jesus figure, rather than a Satanic one.

METHODOLOGY

Before examining the series itself, it should be stressed that this paper falls within the purview of Classical Reception Studies, examining the series as an indirect reception of some elements of interpretation of the Greco-Roman past as filtered through the lens of Judeo-Christian Western society. While recognizing the difficulties with these terms, this approach does not intend to elevate the West over other cultural traditions, but merely to acknowledge the impact that such thinking has had over the past two millennia, particularly with regard to religion, of which the depiction of the Devil is an intrinsic part.

In recent years, classical reception theory has become increasingly sophisticated, moving away from positivistic ideas of models of classical influence or the classical tradition towards theories of intertextuality.[2] Classical Recep-

per lip', i.e. the repression of emotion, a characteristic that defines Lucifer, and a move away from which marks his development and journey of self-growth. In fact, the part was not originally intended to be played with such an accent; it was Ellis himself who made the alteration, since he 'realized that the character was coming off as rude, arrogant, and idiotic when he spoke with an American accent', and, as he explained on twitter, 'With a British accent, you can say pretty much anything and get away with it' (Guha, 2020). By these statements, Ellis was perhaps subconsciously channeling the stereotype prevalent in the United States of the British as having a sarcastic sense of humour (frequently incomprehensible to those from other cultural backgrounds), but also that of being classy and aristocratic – or more colloquially, 'posh' – perhaps as a result of the existence of the traditional British upper class as epitomized in the American mind by the royal family.

2 See e.g. Hardwick (2003); Hardwick and Stray (2008); Goldhill (2004, 2011); Hall; Hopkins (2010) 1–14.

tion Studies argue that the study of the reception of the ancient world provides another tool for understanding the receiving culture, in which the instances of reception are viewed as equally valid interpretations. As Martindale puts it in his ground-breaking article that in many ways was a trigger for the entire field of classical reception, 'Meaning is always realized at the point of reception.'[3] From such ideas arose further theoretical approaches that emphasise the contexts in which texts were produced. Such ideas have been explored in research by multiple scholars into the ancient world on screen, a subfield that has long been at the forefront of Classical Reception Studies.[4] This paper considers the series *Lucifer* within such a framework, arguing that, at the outset, the presentation of the Devil in the production strongly resembles ancient ideas about the Olympian gods, but that this alters over the course of the programme to present a reception of a Christ-like figure.[5] Finally, it analyses the two interpretations, demonstrating that both are representative of the contemporary culture in the 21st century of which they are a product.

THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF THE DEVIL IN POPULAR CULTURE

In order to analyse the figure of Lucifer in the TV series, it is first necessary to outline the traditional physical characteristics of the Devil, as well as how *Lucifer* deviates from these. The Devil in Christianity is most commonly pictured with cloven hoofs, horns and a tail. Those are elements that were derived from the Greek god Pan. He is sometimes depicted with wings; he is sometimes also depicted with characteristics of the Celtic god Cerunnos, namely a goatee beard,

3 Martindale (1993) 3.

4 A full bibliography lies beyond the scope of this paper but see in particular Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011), Cyrino (2005, 2008, 2013, 2015), Cyrino and Augoustakis (2017, 2022), Cyrino and Safran (2015), Michelakis (2013, 2020), Michelakis and Wyke (2013), Nikoloutsos (2013), Paul (2013), Solomon (2001, 2016), Winkler (1991, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2015, 2017, 2020), Wyke (1997), Wyke and Wozniak (2020), as well as the *Screening Antiquity* series edited by Monica Cyrino and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and published by Edinburgh University Press (https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/series-screening-antiquity).

5 This paper therefore builds on my earlier work explored at length in Maurice (2019).

large phallus, big nose and wrinkled skin. In some depictions, he even has female breasts, probably derived from the Roman goddess Diana.[6] The Devil is also associated with the colours red and black, the former with its linkage to the fires of hell, blood and sexual lust, while the latter is the colour of evil, contrasted with the white, a colour that is often identified with purity.[7]

Over time the large number of disparate composite elements in his appearance have led to a similarly wide range of depictions. An exhibition entitled *Sympathy for the Devil: Satan, Sin and the Underworld* that was held at Stanford's Cantor Arts Center in the summer of 2014 reflected this by displaying representations ranging from a 'fanged, horned demon to a tailor of Nazi uniforms.'[8] There is, however, another tradition of satanic depiction which developed from the seventeenth century onwards. At that time there was a trend to move away from the horrifying demonic characterisation, in favour of a more attractive, suave and elegant figure, a portrayal that is connected to the idea of the Devil being a tempter and deceitful character, whose outward appearance is in opposition to his true nature. A contributory factor to such interpretations was Milton's *Paradise Lost,* which portrayed Satan as an almost tragic hero, struggling to overcome his own doubts and weaknesses. From this root, and also under the influence of works, such as Goethe's *Faust* and Mark Twain's *Mysterious Stranger,* this new depiction of Satan emerged. No longer a bestial creature, he became a stylishly smooth, cunning character, whose outstanding characteristics are deviousness and dishonesty, and who entices men to sin through temptation and persuasion, trapping them through attraction, rather than terror. The phrase 'devilishly handsome', evokes this characterisation, and, in the words of Bernard Barryte, curator of the Stanford exhibition,

> By the 18th century, he's ennobled, almost looking like an Apollo. […]. People interpreted the figure less as demonic creature and more as heroic rebel against the oppression of the paternal god.[9]

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6 Russell (1986) 68; Levack (2013) 33.

7 Ogechukwu (2012) 54.

8 Dunne (2014.

9 Ibid. Quote is by Bernard Barryte, curator of the exhibition, explained, referring to Thomas Stothard's *Satan Summoning His Legions* from 1790.

This comment on Apollo strikes at an essential similarity between the Greek gods and this version of the Devil. Just as the Olympians are anthropomorphised, idealised beings, so too, this incarnation of Satan is one that is the epitome of beauty, and sublimely attractive, with an appeal that is irresistible to mortals and as overwhelming as divine theophany to the ancient Greeks. Although Lucifer is depicted as rather older than Apollo, in modern terms he is still young, and very much a man in the prime of his life. The fact that the name used for this Devil figure is Lucifer, the bringer of light, connects it further to the sun imagery of Apollo, who also is a giver of light in his role as sun god. However, Apollo is not the only Greek deity that can be seen in the portrayal of Lucifer. Often depicted with a glass in his hand, partially or totally nude, and involved in scenes of louche debauchery, Lucifer also contains elements of Apollo's opposite, Dionysus, who was frequently depicted in a similar manner in ancient statues and artwork.[10]

THE CHARACTER OF THE DEVIL

So much for the physical depiction of the Devil; but what about his nature? In the Old Testament, the Devil does not really feature significantly and is not distinguished from the noun 'Satan', meaning an obstructor, as in the case of Bilaam's ass, and that of King David addressing the sons of Zeruiah. It is only in the Book of Job that he seems to assume a definite personality. Later still, under the influence of Apocalyptic Judaism and Hellenism, the figure of the Devil was developed much more definitely by Christianity.

Satan in Christian theology is the personification of absolute evil. He is a fallen angel whose first sin was to rebel against God in a bid to overthrow him and seize power for himself. In this manner, he is the epitome of pride and arrogance and as a result of this insurrection, he was expelled from Heaven and has since remained in constant opposition to God.

The Devil is also the ultimate tempter of humans to evil. He is often identified with the snake in the Garden of Eden, whose tempting led to the situation that Christian doctrine calls original sin and for which it sees Redemption by Jesus Christ as the cure. In particular, in this role, it is the Devil who tempts Jesus, seen

10 See e.g. 1861,0725.2 in the British museum collection, viewable at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1861-0725-2 (accessed 27 March 2023).

as a second Adam, in his attempts to induce him to abandon his redemptive mission.[11] Temptation is the Devil's primary weapon against humanity, encouraging people to sin, and enticing them to commit evil.

By the middle ages, the Devil had been widely accepted as the antagonist of Christ, attempting to thwart God's plan of salvation of mankind. Attended by a legion of demons, he is the antithesis of all things good. As Jeffrey Burton Russell stresses, 'the very definition of the Devil is that he is evil. To call the Devil 'good' is like calling a buzzing insect a horse.'[12] In this period he is also often associated with all the seven deadly sins (pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth), that are represented by demons doing his bidding.[13]

The idea that the Devil governs hell gained prominence partly as a result of Dante's *The Divine Comedy,* in which God created hell when he threw the Devil and his demons out of Heaven with such power that they created an enormous hole in the centre of the earth. Dante portrays the Devil himself as a grotesque, winged creature with three faces – each chewing on a devious sinner – whose wings blow freezing cold winds throughout Hell's domain.

It is also a matter of great importance that the Devil is a liar. This is so much so that the idea even gave rise to a recent book on the Devil by Dallas George Denery, which is subtitled, 'A history of lying from the Garden of Eden to the Enlightenment'. In this book he stresses:

> What the Devil had first done to Eve, he continues to do to each and every one of us, and what he continues to do is lie. The Gospels made it clear that lying was, for all intents and purposes, the Devil's unique contribution to God's Creation. The Gospel of John records a confrontation 'in the treasury of the temple' between Jesus and the Pharisees, in which Jesus accuses them of having strayed from the faith of Abraham, from faith in God. 'Why do you not understand what I say?, Jesus asks them. "It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the Devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies'.[14]

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11 Matt 4,1–11; Mark 1,13; Luke 4,1–13.

12 Russell (1992) 5.

13 See e.g. Taşdelen (2019).

14 Denery (2015) 25, quoting John 8,20–44.

THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF LUCIFER

The whole gamut of depictions of Satan has, of course, been seen in representations of him on screen: the red horned creature with hooves, a forked tail and a pitchfork; a human but marked by some elements such as horns or blood-red eyes; and the elegant, urbane and handsome man.[15] Lucifer's appearance in the television series combines all three of these common tropes. Although in the graphic novel he was drawn to resemble David Bowie, in the television series he is played by Tom Ellis, whose dark good looks, charismatic charm and imposing height of 6'3" (1.91 m) make him a strikingly attractive figure.

In keeping with the tradition of elegance and sophistication, this Lucifer also places great emphasis on his own style. He is normally costumed in an expensive three-piece suit, usually in dark blue or black, complete with silk tie and handkerchief in his breast pocket, the epitome of chic sophistication according to Western beauty standards.[16] Even here there are some hints to his satanic side; the suits are occasionally purple or dark red in colour, but his demonic nature is also seen through his enthusiasm for more risqué garments, such as his 'orgy pants', made of black leather, and without back covering. It is also reflected in his fondness for nudity, an aspect obviously included for the audience's delight, but also strongly connected with Judeo-Christian ideas of shame, as evidenced by Adam and Eve's awareness of their nakedness in the garden of Eden after the sin; Lucifer's lack of such shame points him up as the opposite of moral goodness, and thereby Satanic.

Lucifer therefore seems to be thoroughly mortal in appearance, and even metatheatrically mocks the traditional Satanic elements of the depictions of the Devil when trying to convince Chloe, his detective partner and love interest, of his true nature:

> Lucifer: I'm afraid I can't offer anything obvious like a tail as proof.
> Chloe: And so no horns.

15 See Maurice (2019) 58.

16 The website *Hollywood Jackets* explains that 'You will always see Lucifer Morningstar in a well-dressed suit' and offers a 'Lucifer Morningstar costume' of a black suit, which is 'made up of a high-quality wool blend and has a soft inner viscose lining, […] a lapel collar with a front double buttoned closure […] full-length sleeves with buttoned cuffs and flap waist pockets […] and pants made up of the same high-quality material.' https://www.hjackets.com/blog/lucifer-morningstar-costume-guide/ (accessed 14 December 2022)

Lucifer: No, afraid not. That's the stuff of movies and TV.
Chloe: Mm-hmm.
Lucifer: They always get it wrong.[17]

Yet, despite the apparent lack of traditional Satanic elements, it emerges that Lucifer's true form is that of his 'Devil face'. An effect achieved by CGI, this visage features red glowing eyes and, as it was developed and improved over the series after the move to Netflix with its more generous budget, a dark red, scarred, gouged out face that has a leathery quality.[18] As the transformation of the face occurs, flames could be seen licking under the skin and spreading into the altered visage. The finale of season four extended the look to a full 'Devil body', similarly marked and with the flesh hardened and compressed to show the bones, in a bestial depiction. Such a portrayal draws upon traditional associations of the Devil with fire, the colour red and monstrosity.

Perhaps the most striking element of the physical depiction of Lucifer is, however, his wings, which draw on the tradition of his being a fallen angel, an aspect that is taken as fundamental in this characterization. The appearance of the wings themselves is unexpected; they are made of white feathers and glow with a divine light, and, in fact, contrast with those of the other celestials whose wings are grey or brown. In the first season, Lucifer has cut off his wings, which are then stolen, causing him to hunt for them but on recovering them, he burns them in front of Amenadiel, who had arranged for them to be stolen in an attempt to encourage him to go back to Hell. Then, in the final episode of the second season, Lucifer wakes up in the desert with his wings restored, and although he repeatedly cuts them off, they return on each occasion.

It also emerges that, along with the return of the wings, Lucifer has lost his Devil face, a situation that continues throughout season three. In the finale of this season, Lucifer uses his wings in battle, attacking and defeating Pierce's men with them, but he then fights Pierce, who is actually the Biblical Cain, without using his wings, killing him by twisting his wrist so that he stabs himself. At this point his Devil face returns, and from this juncture onwards, throughout season four, as he resumes a relationship with Eve and takes up his old, hedonis-

17 Season one, episode four.

18 The CGI team in interview explained that they 'made the eyes more prominent' and made 'gouges' and 'concavitie', in an attempt to 'take dibbets out of him… chunk him up'. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9czJKvJ7ZI (accessed 14 December 2022).

tic ways once more, his wings become more demonic and batlike in appearance, culminating in Lucifer's alteration into his more diabolical 'King of Hell' form. Eventually, in the finale to season four, after Lucifer and Chloe declare their mutual love for each other and Lucifer makes the choice to return to Hell in order to protect those he loves, Lucifer's wings recover their original angelic look. Lucifer then uses his wings to return to Hell so he can rule there once more and keep the Demons in line. Finally, in the sixth season, Lucifer attempts to use his wings to ascend to the throne in the Silver City, but they will not open, leaving him unable to do so, reflecting his internal feelings of unreadiness to take on the role of supreme deity. It is only after he purposely makes himself vulnerable, as a result of his love for his daughter, Rory, that he is able to extend his wings, at which point, choosing not to become God despite the fact that he is at last ready to assume the role, Lucifer furls his wings instead.

THE CHANGING FACE (AND BODY) OF LUCIFER

This rather detailed exposition of Lucifer's wings reflects their symbolic nature within the series. Lucifer's cutting off his wings at the beginning of the production is a rejection of his celestial, angelic side, and their repeated regrowth is figurative of his inability to escape his destiny, and to cut himself off from his divine paternity. His prolonged and desperate hunt for them when they are stolen indicates his ongoing connection and desire for this part of his being, despite his denial. As he himself later admits, burning the wings, emblematically destroyed with the essence of hell, provides him with catharsis. Their return, along with the loss of his Devil face, although he initially puts both down to the interference by God, indicates his growing self-acceptance; he finally does not feel that he is a monster, as he elaborates to Cain, in the pivotal final episode of season three:

> Lucifer: You know, when I first landed in Hell… I'd just led a rebellion against dear old Dad. I failed. Everyone hated me for it. Myself included, I've come to realize. I felt like a monster. And then, when I looked at my reflection, there was my Devil face.
> Cain: Your Father's punishment.
> Lucifer: So I thought, but… after speaking with a sleazy, murderous driver today, I realized I felt like a monster before I became one. I think I gave myself that face….
> Cain: And what about your wings?

> Lucifer: Well, I'd just saved Mum, hadn't I? And I'd decided to tell the detective the truth. I felt better about myself than I had in… well… ever. Maybe so much so that, deep down, I felt like I wasn't a monster anymore.

His act of protection, however, in saving Chloe in the finale of this season, involves his killing of Cain, an act which causes his Devil face to reappear. This is elaborated in the very first episode of season four in his conversation with Linda:

> Linda: Your Devil face has returned and you've refused to talk about it.
> Lucifer: There's not much to say, really. I killed a human for the first time, my Devil face returned.
> Linda: I don't think it's as simple as that. Killing a human is against your father's rules, not your own. And you've recently learned that angels self-actualise.
> Lucifer: So, you think… that I'm punishing myself for killing a human?
> Linda: I'm wondering if…you're punishing yourself for enjoying it.
> Lucifer: So, what if I did?
> Linda: Then perhaps that's why you see yourself as evil again.

With Chloe's inability to accept Lucifer for who he is, now that she knows he really is the Devil, this season also sees Lucifer's resumption of a relationship with Eve, and his subsequent return to his old ways as he morphs back into the Devil figure that she loves and takes pleasure in inflicting punishment on evil-doers. His older brother, Amenadiel, points this out to him, in a statement that reflects both Lucifer's original destructive nature and the change he has undergone:

> She came here for the old you, the one she remembers from the garden. The one who sowed chaos and destruction for his own amusement… I don't want her to turn you back into the Devil that you were.[19]

As he becomes more satanic, his body gradually alters until it is transformed entirely into his diabolical form. When Lucifer then makes the selfless choice of going back to Hell in order to protect those he loves, the wings return to their angelic white. Finally, when his wings refuse to unfurl in order to take him to heaven and assume the role of God, it indicates that Lucifer does not feel ready to

19 Season four, episode five.

take on the role. It is only when his conscious and subconscious minds are finally acting in tandem as a result of him finding peace of mind that he is able to control his wings, upon which he closes them, symbolically rejecting the position. Clearly then, Lucifer's physical appearance reflects his feelings about himself, a point that is stressed continually after Amenadiel's discovery that angels self-actualise, a central tenet of the programme, by which is meant that celestial beings can determine their physical appearance and gain or lose their powers as a result of how they perceive themselves, either on a conscious or subconscious level.

LUCIFER: A POST-MODERN DEVIL

The changing depictions of Lucifer's wings reflect his altering ideas and personal growth of character in a depiction of the Devil which is very different from the traditional stereotypes of that figure. First of all, Lucifer does not – indeed cannot – lie; his word is his bond, and this is a character trait that is constantly emphasised and is central to his own moral code. Secondly, Lucifer does not tempt people to sin. Although he has a special power, his 'Mojo', through which he can induce people to admit their secret desires, he does not push them to act on these or lead them on in any way, and he deeply resents the suggestion that he does so and is responsible for evil doing. As he sneers in the pilot episode: 'Oh, right, so the Devil made you do it, did he? The alcohol and the drugs, the topless selfies. The choices are on you, my dear.' In episode six of season one, he expands this further, complaining:

> As if I'd spent my days sitting on their shoulder, forcing them to commit acts they'd otherwise find repulsive. 'Oh, the Devil made me do it'. I have never made any one of them do anything. Never.

This refusal to accept responsibility for human wrongdoing is a constant theme:

> I – I can't be held responsible for what happens after I give someone a favour. I mean, if there's one thing the Devil knows, it's that people need to take responsibility for their own bad behaviour.[20]

20 Series one, episode five.

Such comments recur throughout the seasons; in the first episode of season four Lucifer declares: 'I refuse to be a scapegoat for something for which something I bear no responsibility. It's a theme in my life.' Thus, it is not the Devil who is to blame for the presence of sin, but humans themselves.

Thirdly, and perhaps most strikingly of all, is that Lucifer is not evil. Although on occasion he sarcastically refers to himself as such, he actually believes strenuously in his own innocence and that his reputation is unjust. This is affirmed by his therapist, Linda, who often provides the 'moral' 'human' perspective in the series, as she talks with Amenadiel, Lucifer's eldest angelic brother, who is at this point pretending to be a doctor himself:

> Amenadiel: If he's positioning himself as the Devil, right? He must see himself as evil.
> Linda: Mm! No. Actually, he's struggling. I think he thinks other people see him as evil.[21]

This is articulated later in the same episode, with Lucifer again resentful of being blamed for evil ('For all eternity, my name will be invoked to represent all their depravity'). Similarly, in a later episode, he expresses his frustration again:

> Chloe: You believe that everybody's out to get you.
> Lucifer: That's because they are! But trust me, I didn't choose it. Why would anyone choose to be vilified?[22]

He bitterly resents the idea that he is either evil himself or causes others to commit evil, and expands on this at greater length later in the same episode, when talking with corrupt homicide detective, Malcolm Graham:

> Lucifer: I'm not a monster. I'm not evil. I punish evil…
> Malcolm: Yeah, but, but you're, you know…
> Lucifer: The Devil, yes. And you think you know who that is, don't you? The whole world does. A torturer, maybe. An inflictor of just desserts, sure. But a senseless murderer, I am not.

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21 Season one, episode six.

22 Season one, episode twelve.

Thus, in this version, the Devil has become an agent of justice, who punishes only those deserving of retribution, and takes no pleasure in the punitive acts. In fact, the opposite is the case; he hates and despises the enforced role of torture of the wicked, which he regards as his own punishment imposed by God for his rebellion. Lucifer continues:

> Where do I begin? With the grandest fall in the history of time? Or perhaps the far more agonizing punishment that followed? To be blamed for every morsel of evil humanity's endured, every atrocity committed in my name? As though I wanted people to suffer. All I ever wanted was to be my own man here. To be judged for my own doing. And for that? I've been shown how truly powerless I am.

In this way, Lucifer has been changed from a figure of unbridled evil, to an almost noble, and indeed tortured, character.

Such a rehabilitation in fact echoes other recent screen reinterpretations of heroes as anti-heroes, in movies like *Immortals, Alexander* and *Clash of the Titans,* where the traditional heroic elements are undercut or overturned.[23] Lucifer fits into the pattern seen in recent productions which reject supernatural elements of the ancient world and present a hero who is flawed, possessing shortcomings as well as many of the attributes of a traditional hero.[24] Anti-heroes may also be characters whose behaviour marks them as stereotypically 'villainous', or who may not hold values traditionally ascribed to heroes, but who are, nevertheless, charismatic figures.[25] These points certainly hold true of Lucifer, whose charisma, both within the programme and in a screen context of appeal to the audience, is in no doubt, but whose value system and behaviour patterns are questionable; indeed the investigation of these values is the central point of the production.

The idea of anti-heroism has been seen as a modern construct in reaction to feelings of helplessness in the face of the rise of the industrial and post-industrial society. Recent years have also seen a growth in popularity of the anti-hero in popular culture, as a result of post-modern disillusionment with politics, and the struggle to determine morally correct values. Thus, 'heroes in the traditional mold who never killed and always did the right thing were quaint relics of a by-

23 See Curley (2018).

24 See Suvin (1979) 9, along with Tomasso (2018) 207.

25 See Tomasso (2018) 209–10.

gone era.'[26] Lucifer, as a flawed individual in a society that perhaps most typified such thinking, namely contemporary Los Angeles, fits squarely int this category, and the programme is therefore an example of such elevation of antiheroes in a world that seems turbulent and uncertain. The case of *Lucifer,* in fact, presents a villain who becomes heroic over the course of the six series, while still, however, remaining far from an example of idealised perfection. This depiction is reflective of contemporary thinking in which frailty and fallibility are not to be condemned or denied, but rather accepted and even embraced as part of the human condition. Lucifer Morningstar's transformation and growth over the course of the series from callous Celestial to humanised selflessness puts a new spin on the trend seen in other productions, creating a Devil for the 21st century who is, in modern terms, ultimately heroic.

THE MILLENNIAL DEVIL AND HIS JOURNEY OF SELF DISCOVERY

Understood in this context, the story of Lucifer is rather a journey of self-discovery as he attempts to find resolution for his internal conflicts on a rather deeper level. Lucifer as a fallen and banished angel is immortal. On the one hand, immortality implies an ideal, a never-ending pleasurable existence. Yet, this also means that the serious nature of the business of existence is radically reduced. Lucifer initially regards humans as inferior because of their mortality. Yet, as becomes apparent, having a finite timespan conveys purpose and meaning to existence, spurring people on to excellence and to make the most of life in the short time available. It is not enough to be alive; there is also a need for life to have import, and for a person to feel that they contribute in some purposeful way to that life.

This question is at the heart of the Lucifer in the TV series, as he constantly searches for a meaningful existence. Although he has left hell ostensibly because he is bored and depressed as a result of ruling hell for thousands of years, and despite the fact that his life at first appears hedonistic, the show is ultimately a journey of self-discovery, and follows Lucifer on his quest to find significance in his life. In the first episode of season one he explains, 'I quit Hell because I was

26 Tomasso (2018) 210.

sick and tired of playing a part in his [God's] play', a statement that reflects his sense of helplessness and manipulation, but also his feeling that his existence has no meaningful purpose. This is an issue that has appears in other recent popular creations, notably in the fourth and final season of *The Good Place* (2016–2020), which similarly, amongst other philosophical and ethical issues, examines the issue of what constitutes a meaningful life, presenting an eternal existence in 'the good place' as ultimately unsatisfying due to its lack of purpose. The somewhat nihilistic solution proposed in this programme to the problem of the boredom of eternal bliss is endowing those who achieve entry with the ability to then reject it and to choose to leave the Good Place, and thus to cease to exist in any form.

In contrast, the solution provided by *Lucifer* is to remove the focus on the afterlife, and instead give meaning to mortal existence, as encapsulated by Lucifer's rejection of Hell and ascent to the world. Being present in the world is not enough, however; in order to find purpose, Lucifer must also overcome the emptiness of his existence, something of which he is aware without understanding its nature or cause. Such a lack, in this contemporary reception, is primarily an emotional one. As Linda suggests to him, 'all of this excessive partying may be your attempt to fill a void… A void in your emotional life.'[27]

One of the reasons for this loneliness is his inability to regard mortals as worthy of connection. Viewing humans with contempt as lesser beings, mere pawns and of no real value, the celestials assume that they have nothing in common with humans, and certainly nothing to learn from them. In this way, they resemble the Greek views of the gods, for, in the Greek mind, although the gods might intervene in the lives of heroes in order to advance particular divine agendas, there was a vast and unbridgeable distance between human and immortal. The gods could veto human action, and it was they who, as Homer repeatedly stresses, determined human success or failure,[28] but often the reasons for their support or its withdrawal were incomprehensible, and their remoteness unquestioned.[29]

Over time, however, the perspective of those Celestials who develop relationships with humans changes, and Amenadiel even eventually fathers a son with a mortal, the therapist, Linda; this child is the first human-celestial creature ever

27 Season one, episode nine.

28 E.g. Homer, *Iliad* 7.70–2, 14.110–2, 13.562, 15.472–3.

29 See Lanzillotta (2010) 82.

to be born. In so doing, he grows from a cold and calculating servant of God, to a creature who gradually becomes aware of and sensitive to emotions. In his transition to warm, caring and emotionally mature, Amenadiel changes and adopts human traits, in contrast to those of heaven, whose beings are cold, without feeling or emotion, and prepared to commit unspeakable acts in order to carry out their divine missions. Amenadiel's sensitivity is demonstrated for the first time as he cradles the dying Charlotte Richards, comforting her and calming her fear of returning to Hell. When she dies in his arms, Amenadiel at last regains his wings and uses them to fly up to Heaven, carrying Charlotte with him. Strikingly, it is becoming more human that enables Amenadiel to earn back his angelic wings. Thus, humanity is elevated not only to the equal of that of the celestials, but actually to a place of superiority; according to this philosophy, it is actually *better* to be a mortal than an angel.

Similarly, as humans are promoted as superior to celestials, so, it appears, divinity is shown to be inferior. Since the morally questionable acts of the angelic beings, as exemplified by Amenadiel in the first season, are carried out in the name of their heavenly father, this results in God being portrayed as cruel and merciless, and the angels who do his bidding as narrow-minded religious bigots. Throughout the earlier seasons, God is shown through the eyes of Lucifer in a negative manner; 'Dad' is cruel, unforgiving, unreasonable, manipulative, inconsistent and ultimately impossible to understand. Lucifer expresses this vocally towards the end of season one, when, after the murder of a priest, whom, against his initial opposition and better judgement, he has grown to admire, he attacks God, looking up to the sky, and rages:

> You…you cruel, manipulative bastard! Was this all part of Your plan? It's all just a game to You, isn't it? Eh? Well, I know punishment, and he did not deserve that. He followed Your stupid rules and it still wasn't good enough! So, 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? What's the bloody point?[30]

His personal resentment of control therefore finds voice in his rejection of what he sees as the tyranny of God's rule. Through his fight against his heavenly father's manipulations, Lucifer becomes a figure representing freedom, indepen-

30 Season one, episode nine.

dence and individual willpower. By rejecting God and his seemingly mindless plans, this Devil therefore becomes a freedom fighter; it is better to be an honest rebel who defies God, than an obedient angel who is obedient to the heavenly creator.

Such a negative attitude towards God is reflective of a recent trend in movies, where antagonistic depictions of the deity have reached a peak over the past two decades. Both physically and ideologically, there has been a radical alteration in how God is portrayed, perhaps most strikingly in the two great Biblical epics of 2014, *Noah* and *Exodus: Gods and Kings.*[31] In *Lucifer,* in contrast, over the course of the later seasons, the attitude towards God changes. Whereas the first three seasons made much of the dilemma of believing in an unknowable and unfathomable deity, with Lucifer and Amenadiel trying to interpret God's wishes from his silence, this changed with the, perhaps most surprising, twist in the final season of *Lucifer,* in which God appears on earth, but then decides to retire, leading to a war between his angelic offspring over who is to succeed him. Lucifer eventually wins this war, and the second half of the final season is about his internal dilemmas as to whether and when to take on the role. It is only in the very last episode that matters resolve themselves, and Lucifer, realizing his true calling and purpose in life, exclaims, with regard to his divine father, 'Oh, you cheeky bastard… He said I'd figure it out, and I did', thereby accepting the correctness of God's approach and affirming his ultimate status. Nevertheless, God has now retired, replaced by a new order. Somewhat ironically therefore, God is somewhat rehabilitated by this approach, in contrast to many other contemporary productions, but also side-lined as irrelevant and with no place in the new modern theology.

MORALITY, VIRTUE AND VICE ACCORDING TO *LUCIFER*

What, then, are the actual ideals and values promoted by the production? Clearly, taking responsibility for one's actions is held up as of prime importance. Within the programme, this is cast in the form of Lucifer's own resentment at being blamed for things he did not do, but on a wider level, it actually expresses the notion that to blame a supernatural being is ridiculous and clearly shirking ac-

31 See Maurice (2019) 54–6.

countability. Somewhat paradoxically, the notion that such blame is a form of self-delusion and weakness is rooted in the assumption that the Devil does not actually exist. By identifying with Lucifer's insistence on culpability, the viewer is expected to ridicule the idea that anyone else might be responsible for one's actions, and to glorify accountability.

Another virtue that is lauded as the highest ideal is that of self-sacrifice. Linda states this openly, in a discussion about how Lucifer has been enjoying doing good:

> Linda: You've identified quite strongly with this man.
> Lucifer: Yes. Yes, a man of honour, principle.
> Linda: Hmm. You like the way being good makes you feel.
> Lucifer: Mm.
> Linda: But true good needs to come from a place of selflessness, authenticity.
> Lucifer: Well, of course. I authentically want people to applaud the real me. The Devil gets a terrible rap.
> Linda: So you care about image, how you look to others.[32]

Lucifer at the outset is depicted as narcissistic and incredibly self-absorbed, and his response reflects his lack of comprehension of 'true good', which is equated with 'selflessness, authenticity'. Over time he changes, however, coming to feel and respond in a much more selfless manner, as the altruistic message is rammed home through repeated examples throughout the programme. Charlotte Richards dies sacrificing herself by throwing herself in front of a bullet to protect Amenadiel and is rewarded with Heaven. Chloe is willing to sacrifice herself in order to save Lucifer, throwing herself on a bomb being defused. Lucifer himself makes sacrifices to save Chloe on at least three occasions: making a deal with God and then killing his brother Uriel in order to save her, and then sacrificing his own happiness, and on some level, his entire life, by returning to Hell to keep her safe. In the final season, Lucifer and Chloe rush to save their daughter, Rory, fully aware that by so doing they are sacrificing their own chance of a life of love and happiness. All of the major characters in fact make sacrifices to varying degrees in the name of love, and these examples of selflessness are held up to be the ultimate good deeds.

32 Season one, episode eleven.

Somewhat paradoxically, along with this idealised altruism, the message of self-acceptance is also emphasised. This is reflected in the psychological journey of maturation undergone by Lucifer but also in the philosophy underlying hell in this production. According to *Lucifer,* each person's hell is different and individualised, involving repeatedly reliving, on an eternal loop, an event from one's life for which one feels guilt. As Amenadiel comments, 'It's all based on humans' subconscious, what they think they deserve'.[33] Nor is this restricted only to mortals; as mentioned before, Amenadiel comes to realise that angels also self-actualise, and this is one of the things that persuades him that mortals and celestials have much in common. In order to achieve peace both celestials and humans must learn to accept themselves, and perhaps even love themselves as they are. Neither can ever hope for perfection, but if self-acceptance is achieved, peace will follow. This is emphasised by Linda's advice to Lucifer when he is struggling with his relationships with both Chloe and Eve:

> Exploring your caring, altruistic side with Chloe…and now being in a committed relationship with Eve, who expects you to be your…– old hedonistic Devil self at all times… When you bifurcate your life this way, good and bad, crime solver and… orgy host… you're effectively denying half of yourself all of the time.[34]

The message here is that not only self-acceptance, but also that honesty and sincerity are of paramount importance. For all his inability to lie, the lesson that Lucifer has to internalise is not only to speak the truth but also, in the words of Shakespeare's Polonius, 'To thine own self be true',[35] or perhaps, in ancient Greek terms, 'Know thyself'.

FROM OLYMPIAN TO CHRISTIAN DEITY

It is clear that the modern Western world is a secular one. No longer do the traditional Christian ideals and beliefs dominate society, and particularly not those of the entertainment industry. In the wake of the rejection of this religious system,

33 Season 3, episode 23.

34 Season 4, episode 6.

35 Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* Act 1, Scene 3.

with its comforting dogma of an afterlife in which the injustices of this world are corrected, and both the virtuous and sinners receive their just desserts, there is now a vacuum, and consequent attempts to fill the ensuing void and a struggle to find meaning in life. What then, has happened to the Devil in this 21st century mindset? How has he changed, what does he represent, and how does this fit into the wider social context of our time?

Initially, the depiction of Lucifer in the TV show is far from typical, and in fact, far closer to the depictions of the Greek gods than the stereotypical portrayals of the Devil. Like Lucifer, one of the principal defining characteristics of the Olympian deities was their immortality. Unlike in some other belief systems, and indeed in some recent depictions of the Greek gods in popular culture,[36] these deities could not die, an aspect that shapes their whole being and their attitudes towards both mortals and the world with which they interact.

> Timefulness, was a critical element in the Greek conception of what differentiated mortals from immortals and the basis of all intercourse between them. The gods were not merely deathless but ageless, beyond time, beyond change.[37]

Similarly, according to Sissa and Detienne, 'The Olympians…enjoy their time that is untouched by black mortality within the dimension of an 'ephemeral' continuity that is renewed day after day.'[38] As a result of their immortality, there is a lack of gravity to the Greek gods, and a tendency, at least in classical myth, for the gods to regard mortals as insignificant beings, tiny and worthless in comparison with their own great power. Thus, the portrayal of Lucifer at the outset of the programme seems far closer in nature to that of the Olympian gods than to the traditional portrayal of the Devil.

Presented as part of an extended family, Lucifer's turbulent relationships with his siblings, also recall the internal squabbles of the Olympians, who use humans as pawns, in a manner strikingly different to anything in traditional Judeo-Christian philosophy. Even more striking is the inclusion of a female goddess, who was co-creator of the world, the mother of the angels and ex-wife of God, a presentation that recalls the Greek pantheon, and in particular the antagonistic relationship between Gaia and Uranus, Chronos and Rhea, and, most of all, Zeus

36 Maurice (2019) 193–8.

37 Davidson (2007) 217.

38 Sissa and Detienne (2000) 43.

and Hera. The depiction of this Goddess (unnamed in the series) as sexually unprincipled and wanton, also recalls ancient discomfort with the idea of coupling between goddesses and human mortals.

Lucifer's physical appearance is also reminiscent of the Greek gods, who possessed exceptional physical beauty (Hephaestus and Pan being notable exceptions). Tom Ellis' Lucifer is, in fact, notable for its depiction as being one of almost divine physical perfection. His height recalls ancient ideas about the Olympian deities, who were invariably imagined as tall and imposing (the most obvious examples being the statues of Zeus at Olympia and Athena in the Parthenon). It should be stressed that there are intermittent layers of reception at work here, in that Lucifer responds not only to ancient Greco-Roman ideas about Olympians but also to the 21st century screen incarnations of these divinities. For the muscled and attractive body, frequently half (or more than half) naked fits in with recent modern portrayals of Greek gods on screen, as epitomized by movies such as Tarsem Singh's *Immortals,* where these deities are no longer bearded elderly men in white robes, but young, virile and definite 'eye-candy'. This depiction stems from Singh's belief, expressed in an interview at the time of *Immortals'* release, that 'if you're a god and you have all the power in the world, why would you want to be old? Why wouldn't you just keep yourself young, in great physical shape, being able to fight if you needed to?'.[39] Such a philosophy naturally reflects contemporary idealization of youth rather than age, and beauty, as opposed to wisdom, attitudes exemplified by the idolization of celebrities in modern Western societies, of which Lucifer is a product.

Lucifer, the beautiful, amoral, immortal being, who at the outset regards mortals as insignificant creatures, is strongly reminiscent of the Olympian gods. Nevertheless, he changes radically over the course of the six series of the programme. His journey of self-discovery, demonstrated through his altering appearance, introduces two main components. Firstly, it is clear that a major element of Christianity is predominant in this portrayal, namely the promotion of self-sacrifice as the ultimate virtue. This is by no means a universally accepted idea, but is a central tenet of Christianity as epitomized by the belief that Jesus sacrificed himself in order to save mankind from sin. Lucifer, epitomised at the outset by his self-absorbed attitudes, he transforms into the antithesis of his previous self, to a character who rejects these ideas and sacrifices himself for the woman he loves.

39 http://www.moviefone.com/2011/11/09/immortals-luke-evans-interview/ (accessed 10 May 2018, but page is no longer active), and also cited in Maurice (2019) 47.

He therefore changes, in fact, from a traditional concept of Satan into a figure that is actually Christ-like.

The transformation into a Christian deity goes further still in the final season, in which Rory comes back in time through a time loop caused by her own anger and grief at her father having, as she thought, abandoned her. It emerges by the end of the series, however, that Lucifer did so at Rory's behest, giving up staying with his beloved daughter and seeing her grow in order to heal the souls in Hell. In other words, Lucifer, sacrificing his own happiness for his daughter's sake and that of humanity, gives up his daughter, against all his desires. Moreover he does this in order to give the souls in hell a chance at healing, thereby closely echoing the words of the Gospel of John that, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.'[40] Thus, in the final episode of the programme Lucifer finally finds his vocation, namely to return to hell, not as a torturer but a healer. This comes about as a result of his understanding that his acts have helped others to leave Hell or find peace. In particular he persuades Rory to choose a different path from the one he had chosen, by not killing someone deserving of punishment.

In addition, in true millennial fashion, the series also preaches the doctrine of the supreme value of the individual. The fact that humans can, and do, sin and err, is a result of their having the freedom to act and choose their own destiny, and it is this that makes mankind superior, and their lives better than that of the immortals' existence. By exercising their free will for good, and taking personal responsibility for their actions, mortals are elevated into superior and even supreme beings, creatures with the potential for great power. But neither is perfection to be expected nor is failure a reason for shame in this post-modern worldview, which focuses, in a manner reflective of the 'I'-generation's emphasis upon the individual, on the need for people to love themselves, and even in some way to regard themselves as divine.

Alongside this stress on the individual stands a rejection of hierarchical structures; if celestials are reduced to the level of mortals, and human weakness lauded, the hierarchy immediately weakens, but *Lucifer* goes further than this in removing even God himself. Most tellingly, after Lucifer rejects the role of God, Amenadiel ascends the throne of heaven in a scene that vividly echoes Harryhausen's Olympus with Zeus on his throne. In both cases, the god sits majes-

40 *John* 3:16.

tically on his raised throne, dressed in white robes, looking down at the other gods in a pose of strength, legs spread dominantly, and with light rays above his head. Yet when the angels bow submissively to him, he descends and gestures to them to rise, implicitly rejecting Olympus in favour of a religion of equality, as he includes his brothers in the mission of ruling the world, or rather, helping mortals to make themselves and the world a better place.

Thus, over the course of the series, Lucifer transforms from an Olympian-style Celestial, aloof from humanity, to a Jesus figure whose purpose in existence is to save mortals from their natural tendency to sin, and its resultant path to Hell. Such a transformation takes place with a 21st century world view, however, in which humanity is supreme, and through recognition of this, anyone, even the Devil himself, can escape from Hell. As Lucifer himself states during the final scene of the series, 'If the Devil can be redeemed, then anyone can.' In keeping with 21st century sensibilities, the path to this redemption is through therapy. As the final scene of the series opens, My Chemical Romance's song, *The Black Parade,* with its beautifully apt chorus lyrics, is playing:

> He said, 'Son, when you grow up,
> Would you be the savior
> Of the broken
> The beaten and the damned',

before showing Lucifer finally having found his destiny, not as the ultimate evil, or the Antichrist or Prince of Lies, but as the Saviour of souls, in the form of the ultimate therapist.

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