No City for Fatal Women: Gender, Power, and Noir Convention in Marvel's Jessica Jones

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Abstract
This paper aims to analyze both the employment and subversion of traditional noir convention in the web television series *Jessica Jones*, based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name. While the series is more a crime drama than a superhero story and features numerous elements that mark it as a work of neo-noir, it simultaneously subverts and reworks noir's traditional portrayals of gender and power. Centered around a female, superpowered private investigator who suffers from PTSD due to a history of rape, violence, and manipulation, *Jessica Jones* presents a version of urban femininity that embodies traits previously associated with the masculine, tough-as-nails heroes of hard-boiled fiction, but also gives voice to the anxieties of contemporary womanhood. This paper will further examine how the creators of *Jessica Jones* successfully incorporate elements of noir fiction into the series while opening new possibilities for the genre's representation of gender and power dynamics; it will conclude that, much as classic noir reflects the social issues and collective anxieties of mid-century America, *Jessica Jones*—and potentially, neo-noir—brings forth the social issues that continue to weigh on our contemporary psyche, ushering in a new form of noir fiction that embodies new complexities.

Keywords: Noir, Neo-Noir, Gender, Women, Power, Trauma, PTSD, Superhero

Introduction

The titular heroine of Marvel's Netflix series *Jessica Jones* kicks us into her narrative by informing us of her job as a private investigator as we see her lurking in New York's seedy back alleys, capturing the trysts of unfaithful spouses and resorting to her superhuman strength to bag criminals and intimidate difficult clients. After she dryly introduces herself by claiming that she excels at her line of work because of her aptitude for seeing the worst in people, Season 1 unfolds with a cryptic missing person case that compels Jessica to confront her traumatic past of rape and psychological manipulation at the hands of telepathic sadist Kilgrave; the ensuing investigation sees the P.I. take increasingly active steps in her search for the predator she formerly sought to avoid at all costs. The series' narrative style and visuals mark it indelibly as a work of neo-noir; however, its characterization of heroism and evil, as well as the first season's depictions of sexual dynamics and themes of trauma survival and female autonomy, radically subvert and rework numerous conventions of film noir. While classic noir was a murky mirror of the social anxieties that gnawed at mid-century America, the multidimensional meshing of noir tradition, superhero fiction, and urban psychological thriller that is *Jessica Jones* engagingly tackles contemporary discussions of gender, power, and consent (sexual and otherwise). This paper will examine the noir conventions present in Marvel's *Jessica Jones*, focusing mainly on Season 1, and argue that the series' creators utilize certain elements of classic noir and subvert others to craft a series that is both a tribute to a time-honored cinematic inheritance and an embodiment of timely gender discourse; namely, that *Jessica Jones* is an artistically and ideologically rewarding noir text for the age of #MeToo.

"Camera Friendly": Noir Visual Narrative

Named for its distinctive visual characteristic, film noir's most recognizable convention is its use of lighting and color to enhance narratives. In the most literal sense, *Jessica Jones* is noir all over but with a strategically colorful twist—a phenomenon that is both a creative spin on an iconic visual tradition and a nod toward the series' origins in the comic book art form. This staining of Jessica Jones' noir with calculated dashes of color imbues both the narrative's urban landscape and the characters' complex psychological dimension with striking immediacy. Like traditional noir works, the show typically features wide-angle shots that "[have] the effect of drawing the viewer into the picture…and thus rendering emotional or dramatic events more immediate" (Place and Peterson, 1996, p. 67), with the show's cinematographer Manuel Billeter using wide lenses that incorporate New York's cityscape into *Jessica Jones'* narrative (Heuring, 2018, para. 12). The aesthetic of the show also vigorously embraces noir's penchant for "the constant opposition of areas of light and dark" (Place and Peterson, 1996, p. 67); the overarching atmosphere of suspense and gritty urban realism, as well as the psychological isolation and gloom experienced by the protagonist, is rendered by a willingness to "[allow faces] to fall into complete darkness" in several scenes, but not without "one white point in the frame to emphasize the inky blacks" (Heuring, 2018, para. 13). But color is also a crucial element employed in the visual fabric of *Jessica Jones*, effectively conveying mood and subtext. Billeter opted for cool tones in the daylight scenes to create a sense of "harsh reality," while "[embracing] the warm, dirty-orange sodium vapor light" of New York after nightfall to render the night "warmer and more forgiving" (Heuring, 2018, paras. 7-8); in fact, true to noir cinematic convention, "[t]he majority of scenes are lit for night" (Schrader, 1996, p. 57) as the alleys, bars, offices, and ramshackle apartments of New York by night sees a greater percentage of plot development than daylight. Moreover, Season 1 skillfully incorporates the comics' use of color and characterization in its portrayal of the perverse villain Kilgrave, known in the original texts as "Purple Man." Rather than the literally purple-skinned nemesis of comic book

origin, viewers of *Jessica Jones* are presented with the elegantly attired (in shades of tastefully varied purple) David Tennant, whose presence is accentuated with vividly purple-tinged lighting—both his physical presence and the traumatic remnants of his manipulation of Jessica's mind. The significance of the color purple is manifold: while ostensibly symbolic of royalty, "associated with power, wealth and luxury… [that is] ambitious and confident" (Rolufs, 2016, paras. 3-4) and connoting the respect and prestige that Kilgrave is so eager to command from his victims (particularly women), the color is also strongly associated with sorcery and is thus a fitting symbol of Kilgrave's invasive manipulation of Jessica (Rolufs, 2016). The neon harshness of the purple lighting that indicates Kilgrave's presence in Jessica's mind, always unsettling and disruptive compared to the relative warmth of the city lights, highlights the perversity of the control he aims to enmesh her in.

Further along the vein of noir visual storytelling employed by the designers of *Jessica Jones* is the presentation of a *mise-en-scène* that conveys the relationships of the characters pictured or the narrative impact of a particular incident. Despite its unmistakably 21st century setting, the show's cinematography celebrates and incorporates classic noir's use of unconventional shots and strategic compositions to visually imply crucial narrative points. The production design of *Jessica Jones* appropriately features spatial arrangements designed to unsettle, jar, and disorient the viewer in correlation with the disorientation felt by the *noir* heroes. … Claustrophobic framing devices such as doors, windows, stairways, metal bed frames, or simply shadows separate the character from other characters, from his world, or from his own emotions. And objects seem to push their way into the foreground of the frame to assume more power than the people. (Place and Peterson, 1996, p. 68)

Jessica's urban surroundings are delineated throughout the show with steely surfaces and glass barriers, from subway poles and rickety doorways to lit windows and the camera lens from which she views the sleazier sides of humanity. The distance and separation created by these elements indicate Jessica's propensity for isolation and alienation from others, a character trait that serves as both a coping mechanism for her PTSD and a vantage point from which to objectively perceive human interaction—a crucial element of her detective work. The constant presence of recording devices, from cameras and phones to physical files of documents and photographs, reinforces the sense of vigilant paranoia Jessica experiences in the wake of Kilgrave's manipulation; her discovery of Kilgrave's designated "shrine" to her, covered wall to wall in photographs and collages of her face and complete with a copy machine that endlessly reproduces more images (Rosenberg, 2015-2019) is a concrete manifestation of a predator's obsessive, objectifying gaze and desire for the power to dictate and manipulate her existence. On a compositional level, frames often feature atypical camera angles that are a visual hallmark of noir convention but are also fittingly reminiscent of comic book panels. "[O]blique and vertical lines are preferred to horizontal. Obliquity adheres to the choreography of the city, … [and] tend[s] to splinter a screen, making it restless and unstable" (Schrader, 1996, p. 57); dramatically slanted shots locate Jessica within the morally disorienting cesspool that New York City is presented to be, and in certain scenes highlight the disturbing disbalance of power and morality, e.g., when Kilgrave's supposedly-liberated victim Hope Shlottman carries out his final command to murder her parents in the elevator and chillingly tells Jessica to "smile"— an oft-repeated demand that Kilgrave makes of women (Rosenberg, 2015-2019). And Kilgrave's pervasive presence in Jessica's mind is jarringly depicted in flashbacks with purple-tinged closeup shots of him behind her shoulder, speaking menacingly into her ear; in one particularly triggering flashback, Jessica's forced participation in an "anniversary" dinner at a restaurant shows only Kilgrave's darkly purple silhouette foregrounding an elegantly attired Jessica bathed in lurid purple light—a shot that embodies Kilgrave's exploitative gaze and his

perceived possession of Jessica's beauty and attention (Rosenberg, 2015-2019). These and many more examples of conventional noir cinematography techniques are utilized in *Jessica Jones* to build a visual narrative that conveys the psychological effects of rape and manipulation as well as the paranoia of inhabiting an urban environment that is simultaneously alienating and inescapable; the noir lens of *Jessica Jones* thus projects the mind of its titular detective despite her efforts to keep her troubles (whiskey-) bottled up.

"Hard-Drinking, Short-Fused Mess of a Woman": The Hard-Boiled Detective and Gendered Heroism

The noir element that has been most responsible for *Jessica Jones'* popularity with audiences is the protagonist's characterization as a jaded, hard-drinking, "hard-boiled" private eye, to whom actress Krysten Ritter lends a wry charm and humanity. The conventional hard-boiled hero adopts a "cynical way of acting and thinking which separate[s] one from the world of everyday emotions—romanticism with a protective shell…[and] live[s] out a narcissistic, defeatist code" (Schrader, 1996, p. 56); sporting both a sardonic sense of humor and a bleak view of humanity, the quintessential noir hero is inevitably forced to mingle with the underbelly of society while suffering from damaged personal relationships, which leads to self-imposed isolation as a coping mechanism. This character trope marks an essential distinction between noir and mainstream detective fiction;

[w]hereas the classical detective is often at one remove from the milieu which gives rise to the socially disruptive act of murder, the "hard-boiled" investigator immerses himself in this milieu, and is tested by it in a more physical and life-threatening manner. Crucially, the private eye—the most archetypal "hard-boiled" hero—operates as a mediator between the criminal underworld and the world of respectable society. He can move freely between these two worlds, without really being part of either. (Krutnik, 1991, p. 39)

This fluidity between worlds and paradoxical entrapment in a state of alienation is effectively delineated in *Jessica Jones*, whose titular heroine is a prickly but resourceful loner with an aversion to emotional entanglement; the "physical and life-threatening" nature of her investigations plays out engagingly to prompt Jessica's displays of superhuman strength in bar fights and street chases, and criticism of her "effective" methods as being "erratic" and "volatile" (Rosenberg, 2015-2019) suggests the moral and legal ambiguity she enjoys as a freelancer outside the official police force. Coupled with the series' cinematography, which is purposely built around motifs of glass panes and lenses that create a sense of emotional alienation and distortion through multiple "layers between the camera and the actors—reflections, foreground obstruction and visual occlusions" (Heuring, 2018, para. 4), Jessica Jones—replete with her penchant for sarcasm, liquor, and black leather—makes for an ideal hard-boiled noir hero.

However, she isn't one—that is, not according to orthodox noir tradition. A key quality of the hard-boiled private investigator who prowls darkened streets in search of answers is his masculinity—his status as a "hero" is intimately bound to his status as "tough" *man* who represents truth in a web of deceptive chaos and intrigue. Traditionally, the "hard-boiled" private-eye hero represents an "Americanization" and masculinization of the classical detective. The world through which he moves…[is] a world of violence and lawlessness…[and is] dominated by assertive masculine figures of self-appointed authority. The lawless context of the "mean-streets" world legitimizes the private eye's own aggressiveness in pursuit of his mission to establish a regime of truth. ...But what is principally at stake in the private-eye story is not the safeguarding of "normal" society…[but] the affirmation of the hero as an idealized…figure of masculine potency… [Classic noir] is characterized by the relatively

unproblematic validation of the detective as masculine hero. (Krutnik, 1991, p. 93)

In this sense, Marvel's bleary-eyed, sailor-mouthed PI is the gendered antithesis of the archetype she embodies, and her presence in the narrative is thus inherently subversive. Her tough-guy attitude toward work and life exudes from a petite figure which, while deliberately not adorned to stereotypical feminine charm, is undeniably female and in command of its sexuality—an aspect of Jessica's character that is central to her identity after her experience at the hands of the sexually manipulative Kilgrave. By placing a woman who is traumatized, conflicted, and psychologically vulnerable—despite her shattering physical strength— at the heart of a modern noir narrative, in the investigative slot conventionally occupied by idealized manhood, *Jessica Jones* utterly reshapes the fabric of the archetypal yet innovative story it sets out to tell.

"In My Line of Work": Voiceover Narration and the Articulation of Vulnerability

This question of the investigator's identity, perspective, and voice ties into another essential noir element present in *Jessica Jones*: the use of the protagonist's first-person voiceover. By turns narrative and confessional, this technique serves as a crucial means of highlighting the investigative plot structure as well as revealing the protagonist's character. Worth noting is the conventional difference in artistic impact of noir voiceover from the straightforward voiceover narration that frequently appeared in mainstream cinema of postwar and mid-century America; rather than simply establishing narrative authority, noir voiceovers open gateways to internal depth and complexity within characters.

In contrast to *films noirs*, other 1940's genres use voice-over primarily to accentuate the verisimilitude of and to increase audience identification with their narrators' stories. Voice-over is used in war dramas, for instance, to increase viewer identification with the films' heroic soldier protagonists. … In films adapted from literary sources, the voice-over is most often associated with a recreation of the original novel's authorial narrational voice…[and are thus] associated with authority, heroism, and power…*Films noirs*, however…contain weak, powerless narrators who tell a story of … their inability to shape the events of their lives to their own designs. (Hollinger, 1996, p. 244)

While the above generalization might seem to contradict Krutnik's description of the conventional masculinized authority the noir hero embodies, I contend that they merely describe different dimensions of the character type; the external "masculine" toughness necessarily *coexists* with the internally disorientated, dysfunctional "powerless narrator" who must don an idealized version of perceived potency to accomplish his (or, in Ms. Jones' case, her) goals.

In this light, *Jessica Jones'* use of this technique is extraordinarily appropriate to the genre's requirements, though the heroine's status as an iconoclast in the long line of male noir detectives remains untouched. Jessica's voiceover monologues do indeed establish her identity as a traumatized, isolated figure steeped in paranoia, exemplified in her tendency to throw around grim antisocial manifestos such as "People do bad [stuff]. I just avoid getting involved with them in the first place. That works for me" (Rosenberg, 2015-2019), and her confession of numbness and nihilistic disorientation:
Everything changes. And nothing changes. People die. More are born. And in between... we exist. I never wanted to do more than that. Just exist. I've gone through life... untethered, unconnected... I wasn't even aware that I'd chosen that. It took someone coming back from the

dead... to show me that I've been dead too. The problem is, I never really figured out how to live. I hate starting at the beginning. (Rosenberg, 2015-2019)

Such first-person accounts of the emotional vulnerability masked by Jessica's terse demeanor literally give voice to a protagonist whose heroism lies in her identity as a survivor as well as her superhuman physical abilities. Interestingly, the show's multiple comic book-style action sequences not only honor the series' origins in superhero fiction, but serve as an effective foil for her psychological vulnerability and may be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the traditionally "masculine" armor worn by the quintessential noir detective; besides her trademark caustic humor and blasé demeanor, Jessica is often obliged to protect herself from physical damage by beating up bad guys, even if her power over her mind is under constant threat from Kilgrave's manipulation and the crippling trauma left in its wake. The conflicting duality of her external power and internal vulnerability acts as a springboard that propels much of the plot and Jessica's own character arc, with her ongoing struggle for victory over Kilgrave playing out both psychologically and physically. The most significant victory in terms of narrative impact is the first episode's closing scene, which sees Jessica's character undergo a drastic shift from emotional weakness to an empowered sense of moral responsibility, culminating in her statement that "[k]nowing it's real means you've got to make a decision. One: Keep denying it. Or two: Do something about it" (Rosenberg, 2015-2019). In a character-defining flash of selfless determination, she refrains from fleeing the site of Hope's parents' murder, literally wheeling around 180 degrees and steeling herself to reenter a chapter of her life that left her deeply scarred; this transition from a passive former victim to an active, determined woman in pursuit of her predator is a pivotal moment in her role as both the damaged detective of noir convention and the empowering representation of female trauma survival.

"Smile": Female Image and Noir Free of the Femme Fatale

The task of situating Marvel's *Jessica Jones* within the film noir genre holds the most confusing difficulty—and here, I argue, ideological appeal—when faced with the gaping lack at the narrative's center: despite its litany of innovatively rendered noir elements, *Jessica Jones* seems to have forgotten to deliver one of the most iconic stock characters and genre-defining noir conventions in cinematic history—the *femme fatale*. This staple of classic noir fiction who typically seduces, manipulates, and threatens her way to either morally nihilistic success or a grisly death is a paradoxical figure because of the conflicting representations of power she embodies; while the *femme fatale* is ostensibly a force of female agency and "masculine" strengths such as ambition and intelligence, her hypersexualized image and its negative associations with danger, aggression, and manipulation—i.e., the projections of masculine anxieties and expectations she is loaded with— ultimately problematize her status as an empowering or subversive narrative device. It is therefore no coincidence that the *femme fatale* trope's uneven representation of gendered power dynamics is turned inside out by *Jessica Jones'* reconfiguration of the trope's core elements—sexuality and desire, control and manipulation—and that in its place we follow the trials of a powered woman who is most literally "fatal" to others and herself when robbed of her psychological and physical agency by a male antagonist who doesn't hesitate to weaponize her superhuman strength and demand acts of excruciating violence from her in order to accomplish his will. Certain conventional traits of the alluring yet predatory woman are instead tellingly thrust onto Kilgrave's character, namely, his potent charisma (telepathy-imposed and otherwise) and suave line delivery, his fixation on seduction and possession of romantic conquests, and the mystery surrounding his origins (which eventually gives way to disturbing revelations); he is depicted as the elusive,

menacing force that conventional *femmes fatales* perform, while the object of his obsessive penchant for manipulation is the investigative, increasingly active (and thus conventionally "masculine") Jessica. His recurring command that his female victims "smile" is the ultimate combination of *femme fatale*-esque manipulation and the male gaze's deprivation of female control over expression and appearance.

Besides being artistically innovative (an effect much enhanced by Krysten Ritter's and David Tennant's mesmerizing performances and the series' sophisticated cinematography), this reversal of the conventional gender dynamics typically featured in noir texts situates female voice and experience within a more substantial role and enables the audience to engage with a well-dimensioned female character while witnessing a fictionalized—but uncannily accurate—portrayal of how manipulation and violation of consent affects even the strongest of women. Feminist analyses of film noir have noted how noir representations of gender dynamics are essentially masculine attempts (and often, failures) to "probe femaleness in order to capture a hidden 'truth,'" that "femaleness is always judged as excess or lack from the perspective of male normalcy," and how the use of voiceover narrative technique "implicates the spectator completely in the perspective of the film's male narrator and leads this implicated spectator to join with the narrator in his condemnation of the…major female character, the dangerous and often deadly *femme fatale*" (Hollinger, 1996, p. 245). Christine Gledhill (1998) has stated that [t]he material for the film noir heroine is drawn from the stereotypes of the femme fatale or evil woman and the good-bad girl… [T]he hero [is] frequently not sure whether the woman is honest or a deceiver, but the heroine's characterization is itself fractured so that it is not evident to the audience whether she fills the stereotype or not. … Such a mode of characterization…is in marked contrast to the consistent moral trajectory of the male, who, although he may be confused or uncertain as to the relation of appearances to reality, at least maintains a consistency of values. (p. 31)

The inherent instability at the heart of the noir female character, as well as her reliance on masculine subjectivity to function as a narrative force, is replaced in *Jessica Jones* by the authoritative (albeit at times vulnerable and questioning) weight of Jessica as both investigative hero and narrator; it is she who grapples with the dark, murky task of probing Kilgrave's deeds and intentions, and she who must expose the manipulative predator who appears in the image of a suave, chivalrous lover that initially appeals to women. Furthermore, while Jessica is not stereotypically "womanly," it is made clear that she is sexually attractive and that her unique brand of femininity and sexuality are substantial qualities that enable her to regain control over her life as she attempts to recover from Kilgrave's rape; while her use of spontaneous sexual encounters to "self-medicate" against emotional isolation is arguably a parallel to her damaging reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism, the active subjectivity with which she wields her sexuality (rather than flirting, she claims to only "say what [she] want[s]") contrasts starkly with the sexuality of the traditional *femme fatale*, who, though potently "active" compared to the virtuous, passive heroines of other traditional genres, are underlyingly still projections of masculine fears and lusts. The series' treatment of female power, in terms of both narration and characterization, thus dramatically subverts noir convention and reworks the genre's most iconic power dynamic into an instrument that amplifies the female voice over the male gaze.

With the above factors in mind, the striking physical differences between conventional noir female characters and the image of femininity presented in *Jessica Jones* acquires clearer significance. The former type of female image is ostensibly such a prominent figure in popular visual culture that it hardly needs elaboration, but it is worth pointing out that the sensuously over-the-top bombshells of noir convention are iconic precisely because they function as visual

icons—or images—that can be intuitively located within specific visual settings. To further quote Gledhill, [t]he visual style of *film noir* is commonly seen as its defining characteristic through which its formal excesses carry and submerge the incomprehensibility of plot and contradictoriness of characterization… Within this context the female image is frequently part of this visual environment, just as she is part of the hostile world of the plot in which the hero is enmeshed. The noir heroine frequently emerges from shadows, her harsh white face photographed without softening filters, part of the abstract lighting schemes. More crucially, of course she is filmed for her sexuality. Introductory shots, which catch the hero's gaze, frequently place her at an angle above the onlooker, and sexuality is often signaled by a long, elegant leg (*The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity*, *Deadlier Than the Male*). Dress either emphasizes sexuality—long besequined sheath dresses—or masculine independence and aggression—square, padded shoulders, bold, striped suits. (p. 32)

Set against this visual tradition that diminishes female subjectivity and highlights the static quality of physical appeal, Jessica's appearance in the series is a distinct aesthetic and symbolic subversion. Her tattered, distressed jeans and minimalistic tank tops and T-shirts are typically paired with her trademark black leather jacket, an article of clothing that at once evokes rebellion against the mainstream, solidarity with the outsider, and a wry tongue-in-cheek attitude toward this very notion of an archetypal charismatically rebellious hero (Green, 2016)—an attitude that Jessica herself displays throughout her journey as a superhero; large black boots are the obviously functional choice considering the damp, unsavory environments that Jessica's job takes her to. Despite the somewhat prominent theme of sexuality in the series, there is a minimum of female nudity; our glimpses of Jessica's plain underwear mainly occur in non-sexual contexts that highlight her exhaustion and restless activity as a protagonist, such as when she tumbles into bed after a frustrating night of detective work—in her shabby New York apartment, in the absence of a male audience that expects to be seduced. Another image-related detail of particular interest is how Jessica—and on a metanarrative level, the creators of this television series—explicitly rejects one of her comic-canonical superhero uniforms, a form-hugging, "sexy" spandex piece of creamy white and blue that aligns with the typically oversexualized image of female superheroes. This scene, though brief and lighthearted, is important because it marks the series as an intersection of subversive noir and subversive superhero fiction. Much like the sexually exaggerated *femmes fatales* of noir cinema, superpowered women have overwhelmingly been presented as "large-breasted and small-waisted, long-haired and long-legged" sex objects "to be looked at rather than subjects to view the story through" (Cocca, 2016, p. 12); both configurations of power and gender are pointedly undone in this production. Besides offering comic relief, Jessica's contemptuous dismissal of the stereotypical "Bad Girl" superhero aesthetic mirrors the series' liberation of the noir heroine from the *femme fatale* trope, creating a deliberate divorce from the hypersexualization of female power traditionally present in media.

Conclusion: Innovation of Gendered Genre and Meaningful Narrative in the Era of #MeToo

The social and cultural significance of Marvel's *Jessica Jones* series lies in both its refreshing place in the respective genres it falls under, and its timely arrival in the decade that saw the rise of the #MeToo movement, i.e., heightened awareness of the need for public discourse on consent and gender-based violence. My above discussions on the stylistic elements of the production aim to argue that its success in generating discussion on its themes is largely due to the creative finesse employed in evolving a cinematic tradition whose depiction of power and gender dynamics has proven ambiguously provocative. Classic noir works are "structured…as

scenes of battle conflicting aspects of their social milieux" (Hollinger 258), marked by a general sense of confusion regarding mid-century America's helpless attempts to make sense of the seemingly irreconcilable rift between the sexes and their roles in society; the genre's potential for ideological subversion was both born from and hindered by the puzzling and fragmentary narrative styles they adopted, with aberrant portrayals of powerful women and unreliable male narration intertwined with "the perennial myth of woman as threat to male control of the world and destroyer of male aspiration" (Gledhill, 1998, p. 32). Moreover, the genre has typically been remarkable for technical style rather than meaningful narrative substance or commentary, with an overwhelming "anti-realist" focus on "conventionalism, stylization, theatricality, [and] stereotypicality" (p. 32) and a fixation on "loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, insecurity…[submerged] in mannerism and style" (Schrader, 1996, p. 58).

Jessica Jones forcefully disposes of this sense of moral nihilism and emptiness, instead weaving noir's technical and aesthetic conventions into its narrative while pushing the genre's weaknesses aside and injecting an electrifying sense of authentic purpose into the heroine's pursuit of truth. The show uses the aesthetics and visual language of noir convention to depict the disorientating effects of violence against a woman, allowing the audience to inhabit the heroine's subjectivity rather than making a fetishistic spectacle of that violence, and also features well-rounded portrayals of solidarity among women (Jessica's sisterly bond with Trish Walker) and positively-functioning romantic relationships (the mutual support between Jessica and Luke Cage. The first season's narrative thereby expands the capacity of noir to encompass more meaningful narratives that resonate with contemporary issues, filling the moral lacunae of past noir pieces with Jessica Jones' heroic endeavors. At the same time, viewers are invited not only to take a walk through a stylistically striking urban noir enigma, but to witness the struggles and triumphs of a hard-boiled heroine who defies the rigid categorization of trope labels as she drinks, jumps, and punches her way through a city—and a narrative—she memorably makes her own.

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