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Scripps College

Looking At Damon Lindelof And The Television Auteur

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As show creator Damon Lindelof and “his writers were finishing... the first season [of *The Leftovers*], he ... was full of doubt. He was wondering: ‘why did I ever take this on?’” It was

not lost on him that after major scrutiny over the final season of his last hit TV venture, *Lost*, “he was not only back on TV, but back working on a show that revolved around a prolonged mystery — one that would eventually have to be wrapped up in a satisfying fashion.” He realized that “more than anything else... taking this show said: ‘Yeah, I’ve made my persona into the guy who is clearly emotionally affected by [audiences’] dislike of *Lost*, but here we go again. I’m getting back on the roller coaster because I can’t help myself” (Brodesser-akner).

Discussion of *Lost*, which ran on ABC from 2004-2010, comes up often when evaluating Lindelof’s newer show, *The Leftovers*, which ran on HBO from 2014-2017. Articles commenting on *The Leftovers*, particularly its final season, include titles like: “You Hated *Lost*’s Ending, it’s Time to Watch *The Leftovers*,” “18 Similarities Between *Lost* and *The Leftovers*,” and “As *The Leftovers* Ends, Damon Lindelof Explains his Biggest Regret About the Divisive *Lost* Ending.” In this paper I investigate why people define Lindelof’s shows so much by their creator and why they are so linked to one another. I ask if Lindelof’s case is an example of auteurism in television, and if so, what the implications of this are for television as a whole.

Authorship in Film

Auteur theory came into film criticism from the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which was written in the 1950s by French New Wave cinema directors and critics. One director and contributor to this journal was Francois Truffaut, who wrote about auteur theory in his “A Certain Tendency of French Cinema” in 1954. Truffaut wrote this piece to express his concern with filmmakers who were focusing at the time on recreating literary works on screen. He referred to this practice as the “Tradition of Quality” and argued against the growing trend, in favor of film authorship and a shift in praise towards directors who demonstrated a distinct,

personal voice. Truffaut stated that he did not “believe in the peaceful co-existence of the ‘Tradition of Quality’ and an ‘auteur’s cinema.’” He made the claim that “the then dominant critical view that the writer was the central creative force behind a film and the director merely a translator who realized the writer’s creative vision” was incorrect, and “Truffaut insisted that the real creative force in a film was the director”(Vande Berg 233). From here, auteur theory was born. The theory was later taken up and commented on by other film critics and “like most other critical methods, it evolved slowly through the film criticism and film theory articles published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and later the British journal *Movie*” (Vande Berg 233).

Andrew Sarris, an American, added his ideas to Truffaut’s auteur theory in “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” which was published in the American journal *Film Culture and Film Quarterly*. He wrote that “there [was] a misunderstanding... about what the auteur theory actually claim[ed], particularly since the theory itself [was] so vague at the... time”(Sarris 561). In an effort to try and make auteur theory clearer, Sarris developed three premises of auteur theory, which he presented as concentric circles. The outermost circle was a director’s technique, the most basic component necessary for him/her to be considered an auteur. The second circle was personal style, which Sarris considered necessary but not emblematic of authorship. The innermost circle was defined as interior meaning. This premise sparked the most contention by other critics, as it is vague and difficult to define. But, Sarris believed it was a vital component of being considered an auteur. Sarris explained interior meaning as “the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art” and stated that this was close to *mise-en-scène*, because it dealt with the arrangement of actors, costumes, lighting, and overall look of a piece, but not quite the same thing (Sarris 562). He believed that it was more than this, writing, “Dare I come out and say what I think it to be is an *élan* of the soul? Lest I seem unduly mystical, let me hasten to add that all I

mean by soul: is that intangible difference between one personality and another, all other things being equal”(Sarris 563). Interior meaning could be that element of filmmaking that cannot easily be defined, but can clearly be understood when looking at a director’s work, and it shows a potential auteur’s own history, opinions, and influences.

Although Andrew Sarris’ terms for authorship do lay out a clear framework for auteur theory, they have been written about as a “rather romantic view [that] sees artists as creatively obsessed individuals who manage, despite the collective nature of film production... to put their own unique signature or stamp on their films.” Because of this, auteur theory has faced major controversy. Thomas Schatz, for example, wrote that “The socio-economic imperatives of Hollywood [production]... indicate that there are a number of deep structures- industrial, political, technical, stylistic, narrative, and so on- which inform the production process” and therefore a single director cannot assume credit as the sole artistic voice on a piece (Vande Berg 231). Schatz believed that “the quality and artistry of all these films were the product not simply of individual human expression, but a melding of institutional forces” (Schatz, 460). There were some examples early on during the silent film era when directors supervised every aspect of their films’ productions. “Charlie Chaplin, for example, wrote the screenplays and musical scores, financed production, cast the performers, acted, performed the music, and directed the production...[but] with the coming of sound and the evolution of cinematic technology, filmmaking [did become] increasingly complex and expensive”(Van Berg 231). As time has gone on film production is only more involved, and the need for a multitude of voices and talents is now even more necessary.

Today, because so many voices are necessary in filmmaking, there is discussion of certain instances in which people other than directors have been seen as auteurs. In some cases,

scholars have claimed that an executive producer is actually the main creative force behind a film. Some examples of executive producers that have a heavy influence on the style of their movies are Kevin Feige and Kathleen Kennedy, the producers of the Marvel and Star Wars franchises respectively. Marvel and Star Wars movies have a distinct style, independent of the style of these movies' specific directors. These producers have "elevated [their role] into an artistic one, mapping out overarching and inter-connected storylines not just for one film but for entire extended universes. They have often come to supplant the director as the dominant force in the filmmaking process, telling the stories while the directors execute them" (Breznican). Another example of this is the Harry Potter series, which had different directors throughout the movies. Directors, in this case, worked within the restrictions and trademarks of the overall franchise. For example, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban can be more easily classified as a Harry Potter film than a film by Alfonso Cuarón, the film's director. In cases like this, critics have argued that certain executive producers can be considered auteurs.

Authorship in Television

In many ways calling an executive producer of a film an auteur relates to the way authorship has been thought about in terms of television. In TV, "the person who typically is regarded as the most influential creative force- that is the person who is typically regarded as the auteur" is the executive producer (Vande Berg 235). In films "the director is the individual with the greatest legal, financial, and creative responsibility for the final artistic product" while in television, many different directors work on a show, and often a different person directs episode to episode. The person, then, who oversees the overall production of the show and the story as a whole, is often the executive producer or showrunner. "In television, the executive producer has

the primary responsibility for the above-the-line and below-the-line production decisions and budgets, and also for the overall continuity and quality of the final program” (Vande Berg 235).

“The rise of the term ‘showrunner’ tracks with the rise of writers in television. Before TV became a ‘writer’s medium,’ it was a studio’s medium. Throughout the ’50s and ’60s, studios controlled all facets of production, from conception onward” (Hong). This all changed around the time of *The Mary Tyler Moore* show in the late 1970s. “*Mary Tyler Moore* was one of the first shows to give writers real creative freedom... At the same time, audiences began to expect richer characters and plotlines” (Hong).

The term showrunner today applies to the “person who oversees the writing and production of each episode of a television series and has ultimate managerial and creative control over the series” (Merriam-Webster). The showrunner is usually the head writer on a television show. While there are often executive producers on a show that do not act as a showrunner, many showrunners are also executive producers. Additionally, a showrunner is usually the person in charge of a show’s overall story arc. In a panel of showrunners put on by the Producers Guild of America, *Dexter* showrunner Clyde Phillips said the role of a showrunner is to “sit and listen to everybody else and then to make a decision... Whether you’re right or wrong you’ve got to make these decisions.” Robert Kind, showrunner on *The Good Wife*, *BrainDead*, and *In Justice*, added: “When the studio or network calls” the showrunner is the person that “they blame or credit... When they call and they want to complain about something... they don’t call the other executive producers, they call the executive producer that in theory is the showrunner.” Therefore it makes sense that the person up for debate for having authorship in terms of television would be the showrunner or executive producer, rather than the directors of specific episodes.

Making a television show, even more than making a film is a group effort. Television shows have so many episodes, and therefore need a lot of people to work on them. Additionally, television shows are often on air and receiving audience's responses while still filming and writing. This can have an influence on the way a show turns out. To emphasize the number of voices that contribute to a television show, On *Lost*, for example, there were two showrunners: Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, nine executive producers, three show creators, 26 directors, and 33 writers. Although Lindelof has credit for being a showrunner, creator, executive producer, writer, and was, along with Carlton Cuse, the person in charge on *Lost*, it would not be right to give him sole credit for everyone else's work and influence on the show.

If one does attempt to see Damon Lindelof as an auteur, though, it opens up the possibility of classifying his work into a category. Sarris writes: "the auteur theory itself is a pattern theory in constant flux... The task of validating the auteur theory is an enormous one, and the end will never be in sight. Meanwhile, the auteur habit of collecting random films in directorial bundles will serve posterity with at least a tentative classification" (Sarris 563). Although the auteur theory is confusing and can be subjective, there is merit in grouping filmmakers' or showrunners' work together and looking at each piece's relationship to another, whether this is a group of films or television shows made by a certain director, studio, or executive producer. Looking at multiple works in a bundle leads to a better understanding of each individual piece. "Andre Bazin once described auteur criticism as a critical approach that involves 'choosing in the artistic creation the personal factor as a criterion of reference, and then postulating its permanence and even its progress from one work to the next.' Another way of saying this is that the critic really regards the whole body of work by a particular artist (i.e. director or executive producer) as a sort of genre in itself" (Vande Berg 231). By looking at

Lindelof's work as a genre, and by (maybe without giving him full credit for the work) accepting Lindelof's vision as a commonality between his shows, it opens up opportunities to put each show in context with another, and draw conclusions from how they relate to each other. There is merit in looking at two pieces of work and discovering how one could have influenced the other, and in attributing that influence to a person's background and style.

The question then becomes: can Lindelof be given enough credit as a television auteur to allow his shows to be collected into a bundle? Can he, despite the nature of television as a collective process, be used as a throughline to explain his work as a genre in itself? If so, what could this mean for other television creators and the quality of television moving forward?

Damon Lindelof's Voice

While Damon Lindelof is a television producer and not a film director, his shows can further explain what Sarris was attempting to articulate when he stated that auteurs need to display consistent interior meaning in their work. The elements that link Lindelof's two shows so much together are their characters, themes, motifs, and messages. These seem to be distinct to Lindelof. "One striking similarity [between his shows] is that *The Leftovers*, like *Lost*, is filled with recognizably Lindelofian characters: people conflicted by the tension between faith and science and burdened with a desire to do good in a world that doesn't make doing good all that easy"(Brodesser-akner). This "Lindelofian" quality could point to Lindelof's personal voice and a consistent interior meaning in his work. In both of his shows, he presents similar feelings and questions that are distinct to him. Lindelof's ever-present voice in his pieces could exemplify what Sarris was pointing to when describing "the intangible difference between one personality and another"(Sarris 563).

It is helpful when investigating Damon Lindelof's personal stake in his shows, to know some of his own background and history. He was born on April 24, 1973 in Teaneck, New Jersey. He was a "writer of episodes of MTV's *Undressed*, *Nash Bridges*, *Wasteland*, *Crossing Jordan*, and *Ultimate Wolverine vs. Hulk*" before becoming a creator and joint showrunner, along with Carlton Cuse, on *Lost* (IMDb). On *Lost*, his writing was nominated for multiple Emmys. He and the rest of the *Lost* writing staff won a Writers Guild of America Award in 2006 for the show's first two seasons. The show ran on ABC from 2003-2010. It won 9 Emmys total and received widespread acclaim and commercial success attracting an average of 19 million viewers per episode in the United States during its debut season. *Lost* ended in 2010, and in 2009 Lindelof served as a co-producer and writer on *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. He later co-wrote the films *Prometheus* and *Tomorrow Land*. His next big television project after *Lost*, though, came in 2013, when he became a co-creator and showrunner, along with Tom Perrotta, on HBO's *The Leftovers* (IMDb).

Lost

Lost is about the survivors of a plane crash that originally intended to fly from Sydney, Australia to LAX. The survivors of this crash find themselves on a mysterious island. The show is in many ways a character drama, following the relationships between characters like Jack, the doctor on the plane, who quickly takes a leadership role and becomes the show's main protagonist, and Kate, the well-intentioned criminal. It also focuses on Charlie, the rock star drug addict, and John Locke, the tragic faith driven hunter. *Lost* follows numerous other characters like Sawyer, Hurley, Sayid, Claire, Sun, Jin, and Michael and his son Walt. As the show goes on many more characters become relevant, and most of them get their own backstories. One of the

trademarks of the show is its constant use of flashback. These show the lives of the characters off-island, prior to the plane crash, and work not only to further develop these characters, but also to introduce character mysteries that often drive the narrative. In later seasons these “flashbacks” themselves become mysterious as it is more and more unclear when these off-island events are happening. For example, at the end of season three, it is revealed that what had been presented for multiple episodes as flashbacks were actually now flash-forwards, and once this happens it becomes clear to the audience that some of the survivors eventually get off the island.

The show is mostly about finding out what is happening on the mystic island on which the survivors crash. Part two of the pilot ends with one character, Charlie, cryptically asking, “Guys...Where are we?” and that question is the start of many questions to follow ranging from, “Why are there polar bears on the island?” and “What is this hatch in the ground and where does it lead?” to “What is the Island?” and for the audience, “Is this island supposed to represent the afterlife?” Therefore, “part of the appeal to the audience is to see whether or not the creators are to ‘pull it off.’” Viewers wondered how the story was going to come to an end and actually make sense given the number of questions presented over the show’s six seasons. This multitude of questions “contributed to an increased media scrutiny applied to series writers and, more specifically, to the showrunners. As if in response, *Lost* showrunners Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse...starred in a series of show-themed podcasts as well as network-aired clip shows, making the writers series regulars in their own right and serving to subtly reassure a viewer that the program (with proper instruction) will indeed make sense”(Clarke). The writers spent a lot of the series convincing the show’s audience that their questions would be answered and that there had always been an overall narrative in mind for the story. In an article published on NPR, though, right before the show’s final season, Linda Holmes writes, “There are 18 hours left,

during which there is *no possibility* that all of this can be brought to a conclusion that's not going to make it pretty obvious that some threads were dropped because they didn't work, and that some things were red herrings, and that while there has always been a plan, there has never been a perfect plan”(Holmes). This is often the show’s main criticism as in the end, the writers were not able to tie up every loose end or mystery, and therefore many people were unhappy with the show’s ending and the final season. An article from the Verge reads: “For three years following the 2010 finale of *Lost* — the network drama about a plane crash on a tropical island...co-creator Damon Lindelof fielded questions from fans and critics who were unsatisfied with how the show did or didn’t explain its biggest mysteries. *The Verge* itself may have provided one the most confrontational interviews, a whopping 25-minute interrogation. It’s no surprise that Lindelof wrote in a 2013 issue of *The Hollywood Reporter* that he would no longer defend the show. ‘I’m done,’ he said. ‘I’m out’” (Plante).

Jason Mittell wrote about *Lost* as an example of quality television based on “four aesthetic norms that the show successfully achieves—unity of purpose, forensic fandom, narrative complexity, and aesthetics of surprise—suggesting that these aspects account for much of the show’s value” (Mittell). On *Lost*’s value after seeing the first three seasons of the show Mittell wrote, “*Lost* is a unified text, with every episode contributing to a larger whole. Perhaps more than any other American television series, this ‘wholeness’ is central to our understanding and appreciation of the program.” He cites this aspect of *Lost* being a “unified text” as evidence of its quality. He also comments, “Every episode, every flashback, and every character’s story can be understood as contributing to a larger understanding of the nature (or artifice) of *Lost*’s island locale” (Mittell). While in many ways this remains true of *Lost*, Mittell may have spoken too soon. In this same piece, Mittell may have predicted *Lost*’s fate writing, “American

television has a... challenge with unity, as a successful series is typically rewarded with continuation toward infinity, at least until ratings sag”(Mittell). This is what happened; as *Lost* was picked up again and again ratings did sag, and only then were the producers given the okay to end the show. In the “I Think You’re Interesting” podcast Lindelof elaborated on this experience stating:

“I did have that experience on *Lost* where it was a battle for two years to basically get them to end the show. [ABC] said to Carlton [Cuse] and I, ‘we’re not going to do it’ and we went all the way down the road of letting our contracts expire. We had a succession plan in place, and only mid-way through the third season, when finally the audience and the critical community started saying ‘good god I don’t know how much longer I can take this’ ABC did a calculation where they were like ‘how long do we think the show would survive without Cuse and Lindelof, and how long could we talk them into doing it?’ and their opening salvo was ‘we’re going to let you end the show, after ten years,’ and we were like ‘no we want to end it after the fourth season’...so six years was a huge victory for us”(VanDerWerff).

Lost’s producers made a deal with ABC that their sixth season would be their last, and only once they knew this, were they able to begin wrapping up the main story arc. Therefore, while it was unified in many ways, and certain storylines did end up complete, it did not turn out to be the totally ‘unified text’ that Mittell had originally adorned it to be.

The Leftovers

The next show on which Lindelof was a co-creator and showrunner was HBO’s *The Leftovers*. This show might have been “the finest mea culpa a creator could offer a spurned fan

base” because it was clear at this point that Lindelof knew that viewers believed he messed up with *Lost* (Plante). He stated that *The Leftovers* was not going to be a show that provided answers, and warned the audience not to expect them. The song that opens every episode of the shows’ second season is “Let the Mystery Be” by Iris Dement as if to remind the audience every episode to do just this. Additionally, *The Leftovers* was finished after just three seasons, which, while it might not have pleased Lindelof, could have ultimately been for the best. *The Leftovers* was left with fewer loose ends, questions, and red herrings. *The Leftovers* gave Lindelof another chance at creating the ‘quality television’ that Mittell predicted. Like *Lost*, it is a “sprawling spiritual mystery built around questions so big and abstract, they couldn’t possibly warrant concrete answers.” But this time, instead of promising answers, Lindelof promised that this show would not be about answers (Plante). “Co-creators and executive producers Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta promised explicitly that for [*The Leftovers*] it’s the journey, not the answers, that matter most. In other words, they [promised to] ‘let the mystery be’”(Plante). On this new show, which did not have the commercial success that *Lost* did, and on which Lindelof made it known early on that questions would not be answered, Lindelof had the opportunity to re-explore certain character types and themes and see if he could be more successful with them.

The Leftovers follows the effects of a catastrophic and unexplainable event in which two percent of the world’s population disappears. The show specifically focuses on one family, the Garvey family, and the ways in which they are still reacting to the ‘sudden departure’ even three years after the event. This show only had 28 episodes, compared to *Lost*’s whopping 118. This was partly because the show was not as popular as *Lost*. *The Leftovers*’ most popular season premiere had 1.76 million viewers (Kondolojy) while *Lost*’s most popular premiere had 23.47 million viewers (Weekly). Lindelof, along with Tom Perrotta, who wrote the book on which the

show is based (although the show deviates a lot from the book) has writer's credit on every episode of *The Leftovers*. This is a lot of episodes compared to *Lost*, on which he has writer's credit on 38 out of 121 episodes, most of which are the most significant and favorite episodes of the series.

Lindelof's Interior Meaning

Lost and *The Leftovers* do in many ways meet Sarris' requirements for proper technique and show Lindelof's personal style, especially with their consistent structures and use of music. But the elements that tie these two pieces together most significantly point to an interior meaning presented through Lindelof's themes and characters.

A constant through-line throughout both *Lost* and *The Leftovers* is the idea of science versus faith, especially in the face of catastrophic events. In *Lost*, many survivors of the crash spend a lot of time trying to get off the island, figuring out plans and carrying out missions. Others, notably John Locke, seem to accept their fate as being confined to the island and search for meaning in this. Similarly, *The Leftovers* is all about how different people react to the sudden departure. Some people react scientifically, trying to figure out how these people could have disappeared. Others turn to religion, in search of a greater meaning in the departures. Many of the main characters, though, do not wonder much about why these events took place, and instead spend their time trying to rebuild their lives and deal with their losses.

In addition to this, both shows include places in which mystical events occur. In *Lost*, the island clearly has magical elements. At first, these include mysteries like polar bears on the island. Later, more abnormalities are revealed like the island's healing properties and its ability to move in time. In *The Leftovers* second season, the Garvey family and Nora move to a town in

which no departures happened. For some reason, even though statistically this town should have had people disappear along with the two percent, it did not. Subsequently, the town is turned into a national park called Miracle. Characters in the show believe that this place is special, much like the island in *Lost*. The town keeps a controlled population so people camp outside of the town desperate for a chance to enter. The Garvey's and the rest of the show's main characters actually move there in a desperate attempt to feel safe.

In addition to these mysterious places, one of the most glaring similarities between these shows is the fact that both partly take place in Australia. In *Lost*, the survivors were flying from Australia to Los Angeles when their plane crashed. Therefore, many of their storylines include a reveal about what they were doing in Australia in the first place. *The Leftovers'* final season, almost as an overt wink to *Lost* fans, takes place in Australia.

Lindelof's Characters

One of the most significant similarities between *Lost* and *The Leftovers* is that they both have big, ensemble casts. The two shows delve into the backstories of multiple characters and have episodes that are shown from the point of view of different characters. Some of the characters and character's story arcs from each of these shows are also very similar. Some notable ones are, Jack Shephard from *Lost* and Kevin Garvey from *The Leftovers*, John Locke from *Lost* and Matt Jameson from *The Leftovers*, and Kate Austin from *Lost* and Nora Durst from *The Leftovers*.

Jack Shephard and Kevin Garvey are the main protagonists in *Lost* and *The Leftovers*. Although many characters have featured episodes in *Lost*, the first and last episodes of the show start and end with extreme close-ups on Jack's eye opening and closing. This, along with the fact

that Jack has the most point of view episodes, establishes him as the main character. Kevin Garvey also has the most POV episodes in *The Leftovers*, and all of the other characters are in the story because they are either part of his family, or become close with him in some way. The pair of characters both have conventionally heroic occupations, as Jack is a doctor, and Kevin is chief of police. Additionally, they are each part of a show-long love story, Jack with Kate and Kevin with Nora. Both characters have issues with their fathers, but long to be successful fathers themselves. In *Lost*, Jack is traveling from Sydney to LA because his father has died in Sydney and he is taking his body back to the United States. Subsequently, Jack's dad's body crashes on the island with the rest of the survivors and miraculously disappears. This haunts Jack throughout the show, as he had a difficult relationship with his father and is now facing his loss. Kevin starts the series with his father, who is also named Kevin, in a mental hospital because he had a breakdown during the 'sudden departure,' subsequently Kevin's father, in many ways, is also not present. In terms of being fathers themselves, Jack never gets to actually become a dad but manifests a son in the afterlife, purgatory-like place that the characters find themselves in during the final season of *Lost*. Kevin, though, is a father, and much of his character is built on being a good and present dad to his kids after the traumatic events of the sudden departure.

The last, and possibly most significant similarity between Jack and Kevin is that each of these characters adopts god-like responsibilities and ends up sacrificing themselves for the greater good. Jack spends most of *Lost* being a 'non-believer' in the island's magical qualities and is deemed the 'man of science.' He spends the first three seasons of the show desperately trying to find a way off the island. But, in the season 3 finale, it is revealed that some of the survivors, including Jack, get off the island. The episode ends with Jack crying to Kate saying, "every Friday night I fly from LA to Tokyo, or Singapore, Sydney, and then I get off, I have a

drink, and then I fly home.” Kate replies: “why?” and Jack says, “Because I want it to crash Kate. I don’t care about anybody else on board. Every little bump we hit, or turbulence, I actually close my eyes and I pray that I can get back.... we made a mistake... we were not supposed to leave.” When Kate walks away he yells after her: “we have to go back, Kate!” Jack decides that he is “meant” to return to the island. Once he does go back and convinces his friends to go with him, he devotes his time to protecting the island. In the end, he actually ends up replacing the island’s god-like protector “Jacob” and becomes a new Jacob for a short amount of time. He kills the smoke monster that threatens the island and in the final moments of the show, he dies because of his injuries.

In *The Leftovers*, Kevin, like Jack, starts out as a ‘man of science.’ As the chief of police, his main goal in the first season of the show is to keep chaos in his town under control after the sudden departure. He is particularly concerned about a cult that forms as a response to the mysterious disappearance. Throughout the season he starts to black out and get hallucinations. After finding this out, Kevin’s father tells him that Kevin’s life has a greater meaning and that he must listen to and follow these hallucinations. Kevin does not believe this at first, but the hallucinations continue to haunt him until he takes action towards the end of season two. He deals with them by drinking poison that is supposed to kill him. He is told that this will get rid of his hallucinations, which he believes are very real at this point. Kevin then finds himself in a purgatory where he has to slay his demons in order to go home, and he succeeds. After this experience, Kevin believes more that the hallucinations were real and that he died and came back to life. It is unclear whether Kevin is supposed to have actually died and gone to this purgatory, or if all of this is happening in his head. In *The Leftovers*, the imagery of Kevin becoming a god-like figure is even more clear than it is with Jack in *Lost*. After Kevin goes through the

experience of dying and coming back to life his friends begin to think of him as a man who is holy in some way. Another character, Matt, actually ends up writing “The Book of Kevin” in the show’s final season which is supposed to be an addition to the bible. In the first episode of the final season of *The Leftovers*, entitled “The Book of Kevin” Kevin begins to grapple with his newfound image. He spends the season questioning his sanity, and his storyline culminates with him, like Jack, sacrificing himself to help his loved ones. He unlike Jack ends up surviving.

Although both *Lost* and *The Leftovers* focus on many characters that have significant story arcs, Jack’s and Kevin’s seem to be the most important. Their stories are the ones that drive each show’s main plot. The fact that the two are so similar points to Lindelof’s consistent voice. It also highlights his connected messages and themes throughout both shows. The theme of science vs. faith is especially prevalent in these characters as questions about this are the ones that each of these men struggles with the most.

While in both of these shows the main character walks the line between science and faith; both *Lost* and *The Leftovers* have a prominent character that represents faith fully. In *Lost*, this character’s name is John Locke. “What’s tragic about Locke is that he will follow,” said Terry O’Quinn who won an Emmy for the role. “He’s faithful to a fault. Once he decides, he follows to the end... I believe Locke is going to stay [the] course whether it proves to be the good or evil one, the dark or light one.”(Fernandez). In the first three episodes of *Lost*, John Locke is a mysterious, elusive character. He is kind of creepy, actually. One iconic scene features him smiling at a child survivor on the island, Walt, with an orange peel in his mouth. Before Locke’s backstory is shown in *Lost*’s fourth episode: “Walkabout,” the audience is left to question if he is a good guy or a bad guy. “Walkabout” opens with an extreme close-up on Locke’s eye, a trademark of *Lost*’s first season that is meant to signal to the viewer that this character will have

flashbacks featured in a certain episode. He then goes on to prove himself helpful to the other survivors on the island as a hunter, because at this point the survivors are low on food. In flashbacks, it is revealed that Locke is not actually a hunter in the outside world. He is a man who works in a box company. Locke dreams of going to Australia to hunt and live off the land. He signs up for an opportunity to go to Australia and participate in a walkabout, where he would get the chance to survive in the wilderness. Once Locke gets to Australia, though, he is told that he will not be able to participate in the excursion. In a conversation with the program supervisor, he is told that he will not be able to go because of his 'condition.' Locke responds angrily saying, "Look, I've been preparing for this for years. Just put me on the bus, I can do this." The supervisor responds: "No you can't." and begins to walk away from Locke. At this point, there is a cut to a long shot of Locke and it is revealed that he is in a wheelchair. He yells after the supervisor saying, "Hey, don't you walk away from me. You don't know who you're dealing with! Don't ever tell me what I can't do...ever! This is destiny. This is destiny. This is my destiny. I'm supposed to do this, dammit. Don't ever tell me what I can't do! Don't ever tell me what I can't do!" Then Michael Giacchino's famous *Lost* score kicks in and there is a shot of Locke lying on the beach after the plane crash. Locke wiggles his toes, moves his leg, and then slowly gets up among the wreckage. Jack yells to him, "Can I get a hand over here?" and he goes to help Jack care for the other survivors of the crash.

After this reveal, it is clear why John Locke feels such a devotion to the island. He believes that it healed him. From then on, Locke feels sure that he is on the island for a greater purpose. He spends the show trying to convince others, namely Jack, of this. After Jack, Kate, and some others get off the island, Locke leaves the island as well and tries to get them to come back. He tells Jack that he believes Jack is supposed to go back. Locke is killed during this

mission. After Jack hears that Locke has died, he decides that Locke was right, and then he rallies Kate and his other friends together to go back to the island. On the flight back, Jack holds a note in his hand from John Locke reading, “Jack, I wish you had believed me.”

Matt Jameson in *The Leftovers*, like John Locke, is not a prevalent character in the first couple episodes of the show. But the third episode entitled “Two Boats and a Helicopter” is all about him. It starts with Matt, a priest, getting the news that he is going to lose his church as a result of people dropping religion after the sudden departure. He does not have enough money to pay for the building. He goes on a long journey and ends up gambling to get the money to pay for the church. At the end of the episode, he does not get back to the bank with the money in time and the church is taken from him. Even after Matt loses his church he, like John Locke with the island, feels a devotion throughout the show to making sense of the departure and to finding meaning in it. He is a loyal friend to Kevin throughout the show and constantly acts as a reminder of faith and religion to him. Just like Locke does for Jack in *Lost*. He is the one who eventually writes the “Book of Kevin” and who vehemently believes that Kevin is the key to saving people.

Possibly the most striking similarity between these two characters, though, is that towards the beginning of each of these shows both characters are revealed to have experienced great tragedy, and both these tragedies are fixed by the powers of a specific place. John Locke is in a wheelchair and is able to walk once on the Island. Matt Jameson’s wife, Mary, is paralyzed due to a car accident during the sudden departure. When the two move to Miracle, along with the rest of the show’s cast, Mary is healed for one night, and eventually forever. After this initial night in which Mary is healed Matt becomes adamant that Miracle is a special and holy place, just like John Locke is adamant about the island on *Lost* being this way.

Kate and Nora, the female leads of *Lost* and *The Leftovers*, also possess similarities. When investigating how much writer's credit Lindelof actually had on *Lost*, I found that while Lindelof only has writers credit on 31% of *Lost*'s episodes, he has credit on 50% of Kate's backstory episodes. He also has credit on her debut backstory episode, episode 3: "Tabula Rasa." He does not have writer's credit on John Locke's "Walkabout", and he also does not have writer's credit on Sun, Charlie, Sayid, Claire, Boone, Michael, Jin, or Hurley's debut backstory episodes. When I looked into whether he wrote on the next Kate centered episode, episode 12, 'Whatever the case may be' I found that he did. Although Lindelof does not have writers credit on Kate's third episode, 'Born to Run,' he has credit on her fourth: 'What Kate Did', and also on her fifth, sixth, and eighth episodes. In an excerpt from Alan Sepinwall's book *The Revolution Was Televised*, Sepinwall writes about *Lost*, stating:

"At the center of the pilot would be two characters: Jack Shephard, a doctor who quickly falls into a leadership role among the castaways; and Kate Austen... in the vein of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*... [the writers] planned to pull the rug out from under the audience by killing Jack midway through the first episode, forcing Kate to take charge. After this sudden demise, viewers would realize no one was safe. Lindelof says Steve McPherson, then the head of the ABC studio made a convincing counter-argument that it would teach viewers not to trust the show, and the writers ultimately agreed with him."

Although this did not end up happening, originally the *Lost* writers and Lindelof wanted Jack to die in the pilot, and for Kate to end up being in charge. This may contribute to the reason Lindelof writes on so many of her episodes.

Kate is a compelling enough character to carry the first episode after the two-part *Lost* premiere because Kate as a character exemplifies an important storytelling aspect that Lindelof carries throughout both of these shows, a character mystery. Her mystery is all about what she did. Early on she is as outed as being a criminal on the plane, who becomes free upon the crash on the island. The marshal who was sitting with her on the plane and escorting her back to the United States and presumably jail, dies shortly after the crash. This leaves viewers questioning why Kate was going to jail in the first place, especially because she comes off as sympathetic. The audience eventually finds out what Kate's crime was in season 2 episode 9: "What Kate Did." In this episode, it is revealed that she killed her abusive father before going on to commit several other crimes while on the run. Other than this backstory, much of Kate's storylines revolve around a love triangle that she is involved in with the hero, Jack, and the sympathetic bad boy, Sawyer. The other significant element of her story is that when she gets off the island with Jack and a few other survivors, she takes one of the other survivor's, Claire's, baby with her. She does this because they cannot find Claire in time to leave. Kate then becomes the baby's adopted mother off the island. When Jack comes to Kate asking her to return to the island with him, she reluctantly does so in order to find Claire. In the end, while other prominent characters like Jack and Locke die, she survives and gets back off the island with Claire.

Nora Durst is known in the world of *The Leftovers* as the woman who lost her whole family during the sudden departure. Therefore she, like Kate, has a mysterious backstory. A lot of her storyline revolves around why her whole family disappeared, and in the final season, where her family went. She also adopts a baby and gives it up a couple years later when the baby's birth mother comes forward. Lastly, like Kate, the end of the story is hers in certain ways. Actually, Nora has the final line of dialogue in each season finale. In season one when she finds

the baby on Kevin's doorstep she says, "Look what I found", in season two she tells him, "You're home", and in season three she says, "I'm here." In addition to this, while the final season of *The Leftovers* starts with the episode "The Book of Kevin," it ends with the episode "The Book of Nora. This finale involves a significant time jump in which years later Nora is living alone in a small town in Australia. Kevin takes years to track her down and finally, he succeeds. While they reconnect over tea in her countryside cottage, she tells him that she went to the place where the people who disappeared in the sudden departure are. She reveals that in this alternate world, 98% of the population disappeared. Nora explains: "Over here, we lost some of them, but over there, they lost all of us." She recounts the whole story and explains that when she saw her family, they were happy. In this world, they were the lucky ones because "in a world full of orphans, they still had each other." So she left and found her way back to her original universe.

In Conclusion

At first, it seems as if with Nora's final story Lindelof answers the question that he said he would never answer. This question is what happened this time: what happened in *The Leftovers*? But he did not necessarily do this. While Nora tells the story there are no flashbacks, and there is no footage of her journey. The audience can choose whether or not to believe her. Unlike in *Lost*, although Lindelof gave an answer, he also did not give a confirmed answer. This way the audience gets to choose how they want the story to end. Do they want to believe that Nora figured it out and that this is what happened to the two percent that disappeared? Alternatively, do they want to believe that this is impossible and that Nora is simply making up the story to help herself move on? The fact that Lindelof leaves this story open-ended points to

the lessons that he learned on *Lost*. Presumably after witnessing viewers' reactions to the final season of *Lost* he understood that while some people want answers and find them satisfying, others like to live in the mystery, coming up with their own theories. So, he implemented this on his next show.

Overall Lindelof as a single creator cannot be given full credit for everyone's work on *Lost* and *The Leftovers*. It is impossible to believe that every element of these shows could have come solely from his creative vision. Not only did numerous other people work on these shows, but the audiences' reactions and the studio's and network's restraints contributed to the series' final products. Damon Lindelof's voice and interior meaning are apparent in these shows though. Each show is distinctly "Lindelofian" especially in terms of its themes and characters. Each show relates to the other. Once Lindelof's history on *Lost* becomes known, it is clear that his experience on this show influenced the choices he made on *The Leftovers*. Therefore his body of work, like that of auteurs, is connected.

Talking and writing about television showrunners as auteurs has an impact itself on the direction television is moving in today. As showrunners begin to be thought of more as auteurs, this indicates a shift to a more cinematic approach to creating television. The days of TV being thought of as the "low culture" alternative to film are ending. Lindelof himself believes that television is increasingly becoming the medium in which the most interesting storytelling is happening. When Lindelof was asked about his next project he stated, "I just don't think that I'm particularly good at cramming all the ideas and characters I have in my mind onto a canvas as small as a two-hour movie. I definitely want to do another television show, I don't know entirely what that is yet and what I wanna say. I feel like this space that I've been exploring in both *Lost* and *The Leftovers*, this kind of existential spiritual belief space—at this moment in

time I feel like I've said everything I have to say about the afterlife (laughs). I've looked at it through a couple of different lenses now. There are other things that I wanna say that will probably touch on the same themes"(Chitwood.) So, as Lindelof continues to strive towards making quality television, hopefully this means that other showrunners and television creators do the same.

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