



DIVERGING THE POPULAR, GENDER AND TRAUMA AKA THE JESSICA JONES ANTHOLOGY

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ISBN 978-1-77385-575-2

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Defining “Rebel Femme Noir” through Genre Hybridization in Cinematic and Comics Narratives of *Jessica Jones*

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The hybridization of the superhero genre in print, film, and comics has allowed for the creation and expansion of superhero sub-genres that shift the attention toward the femme experience and the spaces of difference that non-heteronormative protagonists can occupy. Within these multi-modal comics and cinematic spaces of difference, new heroines are helping rebuild and even heal fictional universes that have been oriented toward portrayals of predominantly male superheroes. This is especially applicable to genre hybridization in film and comics as types of media that have over time developed a symbiotic relationship with audiences of mass and popular culture phenomena. New comics aligned with critical feminist frameworks, graphic novels written as well as drawn by women, and television series with narratives that break with traditional genre staples—all of these contribute to the emergence of exciting literary and media hybridization. In fact, the growing demand for non-heteronormative superheroines has helped to diversify comics and film, while directing superhero sub-genres toward the exploration of the empowered *rebel femme* as a superhero in her own right.

The definition of the rebel femme superhero cannot be obtained through limiting conventional methods that have been used as cornerstones in traditional superhero narratives. Peter Coogan, who has written extensively on the nature of the superhero genre, suggests that these key defining characteristics are bound by embodied conventions in the form of the superhero's mission as the champion for the oppressed, explicit power, and superhero identity through specific costumes and code names or aliases (Coogan 2009,

77–82). Although all of these have become essential signifiers of the superhero genre, they have received criticism for generating a dynamic driven by the regurgitation of abstract traits that come dangerously close to homogenizing the genre. The new approaches to genre hybridization can act as a welcome narrative destabilizer and a way of making cinematic and multi-modal superhero narratives a source of storytelling rebellion.

One such empowered narrative comes in the form of the *rebel femme noir* sub-genre, which merges the crime thriller aesthetic with the psychological intensity of a superhero gone rogue. This chapter looks at *Jessica Jones* as a manifestation of this sub-genre, tracing the variety of implicit as well as explicit ways in which Jones's characterization generates liberating tensions and new types of social agency. Jones is an unusual, and in some ways uncanny, superhero with a distinct sense of unease verging on suspicion about the superhero scene, institutional justice, and intimacy. Jones's identity and life decisions complicate her femme superhero identification and status because they shatter the linear conception of what a woman superhero is capable of and is expected to embody. This narrow spectrum of characteristics tends to insist on binaries between heroes and villains by locating characters like Wonder Woman, Storm, and Batwoman toward one end, and Catwoman, Harlequin, and *Red Lantern's* Bleez toward the other. The subtle aim of *Jessica Jones's* narrative is precisely to question such binaries by exposing them as part of the homogenizing agenda that caters to a phallogocentric superhero universe.

She made her first appearance in Marvel's "Max" adult reader titles as the protagonist of a twenty-eight-issue series titled *Jessica Jones: Alias* (2001–4), written by Brian Bendis and illustrated by visual artist Michael Gaydos. Jones's narrative gained a much wider popular audience through the cinematic reimagining of her story in the Netflix original television series *Jessica Jones* (2015–19). Rather than function as versions of the same story, the television series and *Alias* comics occupy a complementary narrative space where *Jessica Jones* sets a precedent for a highly engaging rebel femme superhero. In the introduction to the first volume of *Alias*, producer and comics writer Jeph Loeb affectionately calls *Jessica Jones* "a blessing and a curse" (Loeb 2015, 4). He goes on to suggest that this dichotomy is attributed to her being a not-so-hard-boiled detective living and working in the gritty underbelly of the Marvel Universe. However, there is much more to this separation. Although she shares the fictional New York realm with the militarized Avengers and

the heteronormative Marvel “superstars” such as Spider-Man, Ant-Man, and Daredevil, Jones exhibits an unconscious desire to distance herself from organized superhero communities. In fact, both the comics and the television series ensure that Jones’s character remains relatable precisely because of her non-superhero qualities and her capacity to experience and learn from failures, flaws, and weaknesses.

Jones’s identification as a superhero is superseded by her role as an independent private investigator and a deeply traumatized woman with PTSD and a severe addiction to alcohol. What this order of identification priorities implies is a proud acceptance of complexity and psychological trauma in progress. This chapter approaches Jones’s narrative as complementary comics and television series that dissect the notion of regenerative counter-normativity and rebel femme empowerment. It further suggests that the *Jessica Jones* comics and television series try to reinvent the concepts of domesticity, agency, and consent through the figure of a femme superhero who confronts the stigmatization of mental illness, the victimization of women, and rape culture, among other issues.

To properly talk about the narratives of *Jessica Jones* it is necessary to accept her as a tumultuous and rebellious woman who is in many ways a counterintuitive embodiment of a superhero. She is further positioned outside of the habitual discourse on graphic novels and comics because of the connotations that the rebel femme noir sub-genre introduces into her storyline. Examining the domestic/suburban/chick noir genre hybridization, A. J. Waines writes that the crime thriller category featuring female protagonists has been rapidly growing through sub-genres that are concerned with the figure of the empowered femme and the uncanny dimension of her subjectivity. In Waines’s sub-genre classification, suburban noir is, to use her phrasing, “the dark side of suburban living” as it is very “close to home. It is on our doorstep, [in] the neighbourhood—and [it] breeds threat with themes of secrets, being trapped, being watched/stalked and things not being what they seem—all seen from behind those twitching net curtains” (Waines 2014). Compare that to the opening sequence for the Netflix original series, saturated with an uncanny noir quality and offering a series of city close-ups reminiscent of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954). Instead of the phallogocentric gaze of Hitchcock’s L. B. “Jeff” Jefferies tracing the deceptively intimate tranquility of the neighborhood, the series opens with sinister rows of high-rise windows, as if each one is being tracked by Jones’s contemplative stare. Behind every

window the viewer seems to recognize a micro-stage that illuminates rather than hides the darker dimensions of relationships, privacy, domesticity, and homeliness. Jason Bainbridge summarizes fictional New York as a largely archetypal city (Bainbridge 2010, 163–4), a quality that makes it in many ways an ideal setting for hybridized genre narratives.

New York as a site of the darker side of modernity and of its urbanization and industrialization is a type of space that is implicitly about survival against odds and obstacles (Bainbridge 2010, 167). The first episode of the television series reinforces its noir aesthetic by situating Jones as someone who spends her nights on dirty staircases watching, drinking, and photographing people for her hired and personal cases, while at the same time being watched and photographed herself. The honesty with which the noir city acknowledges its flaws makes it an emotional sanctuary of sorts. For instance, in *Alias* vol. 3, no. 16, the collaborative tensions introduced through Bendis's narrative rhythm and Gaydos's visual comics introduces a sequence that includes a full-page bleeding panel, situating Jessica as someone who is in many ways in sync with this noir city (Bendis and Gaydos 2015b, 54).

In particular, no. 16 narrates the middle part of a case Jones chooses to investigate as it resonates with her own experience of abuse and physical as well as emotional torture resulting from her abduction by the Purple Man, known as Kilgrave in the television series. This investigation revolves around the retrieval of the third version of Spider-Woman, Mattie Franklin, who has been abducted, drugged, and then mutilated. The particulars of Franklin's bodily harm are especially telling as she is violated sexually, and parts of her shoulder flesh are removed in a cannibalistic and abject manner to be ingested and sold as a drug. In fact, the job of locating and retrieving Franklin sets up a lot of the trauma-conscious tension and affective dynamics relevant to the final confrontation between Jones and the Purple Man at the end of *Alias* vol 4, no. 28. As a fellow superhero, Franklin's victimization and rape force Jones to recognize the problematic nature of her own relationships and accept that she will need to address some of her ongoing anxieties. It is in the middle of this case that Bendis and Gaydos insert a full-page bleeding panel of New York City in all its noir glory. When talking about New York, Bainbridge notes that the city effectively functions as a "grid for the Marvel Universe," since it makes the events and characters "legible" by offering the audience a sense of connectivity through an urban space functioning as a community and a dimension of realism (Bainbridge 2010, 168; emphasis in the original).

It is within this noir city grime, rain, pollution, and alienation that Jones is situated, her greyish, slouching body melting into the lower-right corner as if part of the landscape. This is Jones's narrative at its darkest, but also at its most infectiously regenerative in terms of counter-normative superheroism. The figure of Jones as the rebel femme persists against the odds and against a fictional universe that is so adept at replicating the reality of stigmatization faced by women suffering from mental illness, anxiety, addiction, and PTSD.

In Jones's noir world, to be a rebel femme is to accept that personal demons can take on a variety of physical and emotional forms. Jennifer K. Stuller, writing about rebellious female comics characters like Lois Lane and their connection to second-wave feminism, insists that it is not enough to critique the pop-culture representation of women; rather, it is necessary to diversify the kinds of questions being asked about femme superheroines (Stuller 2012, 235–51). For the *Jessica Jones* comics and television series this entails asking questions about the representations of addiction, domestic violence, and the wide range of subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which gendered discrimination and violence can occur. The use of genre hybridization in both comics and television series, as well as how this hybridity is manifested through the series' rebel femme noir sub-genre, is highly effective since it creates the necessary visual and psychological climate for the dissection of alternative types of femme social agency.

One of the reasons why the *Alias* comics and the *Jessica Jones* series work so well as examples of counter-normative narratives about a rebel femme superhero is because of their meticulous commitment to allocating space for Jones's habits, weaknesses, flaws, and emotional boundaries. Complemented by carefully chosen investigative cases, these habits and boundaries become nothing short of a collection of psychological symptoms. In fact, within six minutes of the series's first episode, Krysten Ritter as Jones can be observed in the carnivalesque glory of empowerment through failure and rebellion that she embodies. After throwing her disgruntled male client through the front door, Jones heads over to her occasional lawyer/employer to beg—or as she put it, to “ask very strongly”—for a job (ep. 1.01, “AKA Ladies' Night”). Meanwhile, in the background, Jones's voiceover casually comments, “People do bad shit. I just avoid getting involved with them in the first place. That works for me. Most of the time” (ep. 1.01 “AKA Ladies' Night”). She goes on to use drinking as a personally valid reason to excuse her inability to function in a punctual and reliable manner, and yet she still manages to secure a new

work contract. The case she is offered involves serving a court summons to the owner of a gentlemen's club where an exotic dancer fell off a stage and as a result suffered permanent brain damage. Jones's first question, directed at the woman the lawyer intends to represent, reflects a deep and immediate concern for women's rights and the institutionalized victimization of women in corporate and mainstream culture. As the interests of the exotic dancer are being represented, Jones takes the assignment, and we immediately find her working the case from the comfort of her toilet seat. Nonchalant and effective, Jones proceeds to falsify her identity to obtain sensitive case information; she then reaches for the empty toilet roll: "Shit," she says, slapping it.

The inclusion of the working-on-the-toilet scene is incredibly revealing, not only in terms of counter-normative portrayals of women superheroes, but also in terms of mainstream portrayals of women's bodies and their perfect as well as imperfect boundaries. In the *Alias* comics, a similar washroom scene occurs in vol. 1, no. 7, where Jones is depicted sitting comfortably on a toilet in a contemplative manner while staring at something in front of her (Bendis and Gaydos 2015a, 150). The bleeding-style panel takes over the entire page and forces the reader to trace a total of eighteen separate speech bubbles. The scene's layout, style, and narrative pace successfully work together to compel readers to maintain their focus on Jones's body at its most vulnerable and intimate. In classic noir narratives, blood and flesh is generally affiliated with the actions and behaviours of men, while the women remain at a distance, untainted by bodily harm or bodily functions. A notable example of a classic noir woman is Goldie, who appears in "The Hard Goodbye" from the *Sin City* series by Frank Miller. On the one hand, Goldie is a distressed and haunted woman incapable of taking care of herself, while on the other, she is portrayed as possessing such incredible beauty that even her dead body does not show any signs of imperfection, broken surfaces, or decomposition. *Alias* and *Jessica Jones* can be easily distinguished from this type of noir precisely because they turn toward rather than away from imperfection, flaws, and various physical and emotional boundaries. Jones's narrative is about seeking new types of femme agency and empowerment in places that a normative or homogenizing gaze might dismiss as unnerving and even abject. Graphic novel researcher Frederik Byrn Køhlert, writing on the work of Julie Doucet, notes that comics narratives have been quite effective in raising new questions about women's bodies, their functions, and their boundaries by relying on "unconventionally drawn stories" (Køhlert 2012, 19). Specifically, Køhlert

suggests that the representation of bodily transgression and its celebratory violence can be accomplished through the introduction of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque.

What the carnivalesque entails for the *Alias* comics, and by extension the television series, is that it injects elements of grotesque "parodic excess" in the form of the visible and functioning body. Such a body is, by definition, a rebellious and empowered body, capable of shattering the gaze of visual objectification and unravelling its scopophilic pleasure potential (Køhlert 2012, 20–1). It is in moments like the toilet scene, where Jones is in a position of imaginary vulnerability, that she is at her most characteristic as a rebel femme noir.

Jones's empowerment does find its counterpart in her difficulty expressing thoughts and feelings about sexual violence, the experience of rape, the fear of domesticity, repressive behaviours, and addiction. In both the television series and *Alias* comics narratives, the process of interviewing each new client is structured in a distinctly artificial manner. In the cinematic narrative, the *Alias* Investigations office doubles as an apartment and channels Dashiell Hammett's classic noir aesthetic. In fact, during the client interviews the arrangement conveys a sense of uncanny familiarity and, at the same time, dislocation. In the comics form, the interview process is stylistically designed to take over a two-page spread in which Jones's character occupies six identical panels aligned horizontally in the upper space of the page. Below each of these smaller panels are six elongated panels devoted to the frenetic client and his or her immediate investigative emergency. In each of the six arranged upper panels, Jones is drawn as lacking in physical movement, narrative progression, and visible emotional reaction. She remains utterly still throughout the client's narration of the case monologue, leaving the reader with only one temporal progression marker in the form of smoke escaping her lit cigarette. The choice to dedicate this particular storytelling dynamic to the client interviews is both intentional and symbolic insofar as it acts as a commentary on Jones's role as investigator and on her own much more personal relationship with the cases at hand.

What this duality of visual narration suggests is not a lack of response or emotionality, but rather a habit of restraint or boundary setting when it comes to traumatic content that either overlaps with or sits at a tangent with Jones's own affective trigger areas. For instance, in *Alias* vol. 1, no. 1, Jones is approached by a potential client who wants to locate her missing younger

sister, Miranda. While the case turns out to be a hoax, the description of the missing sister divulges several critical triggers for Jones's character: "she was always kind of a lost one, kind of always drifting with the wrong crowd and getting into trouble. Uch—so stupid. She had an abortion," and "the family really didn't support her very well on that and it kind of led her to some trouble with drugs" (Bendis and Gaydos 2015a, 20). This description does satisfy some of the traditional noir narrative investigation parameters as it features a woman in distress who has been exposed to familial as well as social hostility, judgment, alienation, and stigmatization. Jones, however, is not a traditional noir detective but a complex superhero rebel seeking social justice, emotional resolution, and femme empowerment. This makes her a uniquely qualified professional capable of thinking beyond the schemes of heteronormativity and victimization.

Another instance of client interviews where Jones exhibits the same type of boundary formation and affective restraint is narrated in *Alias* vol. 1, no. 7. In this case, a heartbroken Jane Jones is desperate to find her missing husband, Rick, who eventually turns out to be a superhero impersonator, consistent philanderer, and an occasional pseudo-rock star musician (Bendis and Gaydos 2015a, 146–7). The emotional boundary that Jones sets up during the original client interview remains a constant source of support throughout the case, especially since many of the prolific lies developed and sustained by Rick facilitate dangerous misogynistic stereotypes about women and women's mental health. Instead of admitting that he is suffering from *pseudologia fantastica*, or pathological and compulsive lying syndrome, Rick chooses to evoke the mythical mad-woman-in-the-attic trope by claiming that Jane is "so wacked out of her mind sometimes" that "she concocts these theories" and then "she decides they're *true*. All of a sudden they're fact," "she's *nuts*, okay! I married a *lunatic*! So excuse *fucking* me for not wanting to come out and tell a complete *stranger* that I married a complete *lunatic*" (Bendis and Gaydos 2015a, 175–6; emphasis in original). Jones's capacity to navigate this case and her own emotions is bound by the tense negotiation between her responsibility as a superhero rebel and an empowered femme in the process of accepting her own history of trauma and PTSD.

Comics researchers, including Ruth J. Beerman, have made a connection between how women's bodies and affect experiences are narrated in comics and their connection to the development and control of superpowers (Beerman 2012, 2010). Beerman's writing on representations of heroism in

popular culture suggests that there is a delicate threshold between empowerment and disempowerment, and this threshold is defined through the heroine's ability to regain a positive understanding of her body and sexual desires. The work of Sara Ahmed on emotion and affectivity can also help elucidate Jones's process of boundary creation and distancing. For Ahmed, the contact between individuals and/or objects resembles a type of *sticky point of contact* and that allows active engagement with the spaces of trauma as defined by contact, rather than caused by an affect that always remains at a distance and outside of one's role as a conscious subject (2004, 6–11). In Ahmed's affective approach, emotions come to life and are shaped by *contact*, instead of being caused by the subjects and objects themselves. It is these sticky points of contact that make Jones stand out as a femme superhero who uses counter-normativity and vulnerability as a source of strength. This type of superheroism also makes her character feel right at home in the rebel femme noir sub-genre and its fascination with the points of contact that define the domestic, home-ly, and private as intrinsically uncanny.

In Jones's noir environment, her role as a rebel femme is contingent on remaining transparent and vocal about these sticky points of contact, especially if they elicit strong physical and affective responses. In the television series, as well as certain *Alias* issues, Jones's apartment functions as a point of such sticky connectivity, since her contact with it becomes an instant trigger of anxiety, obsessive behaviours, and an overpowering sense of dread. Unlike the processes of empowered emotional restraint and boundary formation generated during difficult case interviews, Jones's relationship with the *Alias* Investigations office-apartment amounts a narrative about the loss of legitimacy when it comes to heteronormative domesticity, homeliness, privacy, and the types of relationships that help sustain them. Both the television series and comics embrace Jones's paranoiac relationship with her domestic space. *Alias* vol. 1, no. 2 begins with an internal monologue dedicated to addressing Jones's apprehensive attitudes toward the apartment and what it signifies as a manifestation of indefinitely violated physical and psychological space. Panels with barely visible outlines of Jones's face are accompanied by a self-assessment or confession-style phrasing: "My name is Jessica Jones. This is my apartment. In a spectacularly paranoid move I have been standing here staring at it for—let's see—forty two minutes," and "I can tell you—reason or no reason—the act of staring at my own curtains for the last twenty minutes, trying to decide if they moved because of a breeze or because someone might

be in there waiting for me—is an altogether surreal experience” (Bendis and Gaydos 2015a, 32–3). This uncanny combination of urban alienation and lucid-dream awareness is at the core of Jones’s character and the rebel femme noir storyline built around her. Furthermore, both the cinematic and comics narratives are always structured in a way that makes the audience hyper-conscious of the narrative’s connotation when it comes to the systemic stigmatization of mental illness and victimization of women, especially women who identify as survivors of rape and domestic abuse.

The paranoid symptoms and self-destructive habits exhibited by Jones over the course of her storylines are carefully contextualized within the experience of psychological and physical torture inflicted by the Purple Man, or Kilgrave. During her abduction, Jones was violated and controlled in a sadistic manner that took away her sense of agency over her emotional and physical experiences. On the one hand, she was denied key boundaries that help an individual ground themselves, including but not limited to access to her familiar clothing, safe domestic space, and supportive relationships. On the other, Kilgrave’s mind control also deprived her of the basic infrastructure that legitimizes sensory and psychological reality as a lived experience. As Jones phrases it in *Alias* vol. 4, no. 25, “in your head—it doesn’t *feel* any different than when you think it *yourself*,” and “Not only does it *feel* the same, it actually feels *better* because the thought, the *command*—is pure” (Bendis and Gaydos 2015c, 88; emphasis in the original). Although both types of Kilgrave’s mind control function as instances of violation and rape, the latter is more so responsible for Jones’s prolonged state of severe depression, anxiety, and PTSD. In the television series, for instance, one of Kilgrave’s abuses entails forcing Jones to smile for painfully prolonged periods of time while simultaneously experiencing the emotions associated with such a facial expression. Not only does this perverse affect-based exercise in abusive control amount to torture, but it also undermines Jones’s capacity to distinguish between the real and the imaginary emotional states.

Such an utter lack of affective and cognitive clarity and awareness plays a critical role when it comes to forming questions about the nature of consent and its portrayal in popular mass media. In fact, Jones reflects on a similar type of abuse in *Alias* when she confides about her extreme paranoia and anxiety to friend and lover Luke Cage. Prompted by the need to address the Purple Man’s escape from prison, Jones recounts how for eight months, “He fucking made me stand there and watch him fuck other girls. Telling me to

wish it was me. Telling me to *cry* while I watched,” and “when there *weren’t* any girls around, on a rainy night with nothing to do . . . he would make me *beg* for it” (Bendis and Gaydos 2015c, 85; emphasis in the original). To complicate this abuse even further, the Purple Man introduces sinister intimacy and domesticity into these acts of torture by forcing Jones to lie at his feet, sleep on the floor, and bathe him. The confession-like nature of these traumatic recollections emphasizes Jones’s renewed capacity to voice and share memories of past suffering and her ongoing regeneration and self-empowerment. This is an essential shift in noir comics storytelling, since the majority of traditional superhero comics employ sexual and physical assault as narrative triggers for the hero to seek revenge or justice. As part of their research on the introduction of new comics content into libraries, Anna Jorgensen and Arianna Lechan indicate that there is a distinct absence of comics and graphic novels that commit to looking at what happens to the female victim of assault in the long term (2013, 281). Specifically, they call for the inclusion of more content that seeks to understand the consequences of violence against women for the victims as well as the perpetrators. Jorgensen and Lechan argue for an almost paradigmatic genre shift, where rape and domestic violence cease to be a recurrent plot device that obscures what happens to women characters and whether they overcome trauma through rehabilitation.

The rebel femme noir tropes shaping both comics and television series are very useful for narrating how Jones develops in response to the intensity of incurred trauma. The counter-hegemonic rebel femme noir sub-genre of the series benefits from a consistent commitment to concentrating on Jones and her journey toward integrating various psychological resistance mechanisms into her daily life and work. Many of these resistance mechanisms and boundary-forming techniques are manifested through Jones’s appeal to helpful transitional objects and experiences, quite similar to the method defined by psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott. Transitional objects in Winnicott’s sense act as a type of special possession that allows the subject to learn and then process the fact that they are separate from a particular object or person (Winnicott 2009). Winnicott’s concept of transitional objects can be extremely helpful to survivors of domestic abuse and rape since they might feel overwhelmed by the conscious as well as unconscious triggers surrounding them. In addition to the already mentioned triggers, such as emotionally framed client interviews and uncanny domestic spaces, Jones has to address the fact that Kilgrave’s presence as her abuser continues to haunt her. In response to

this presence, Jones integrates a number of transitional objects, some of them physically embodied and some symbolic.

To illustrate, in the television series, Jones uses variations of the street names from around her childhood neighbourhood, and we often observe her chanting, “Birch Street, Main Street, Higgins Drive, Cobalt Lane” in moments of intense and overwhelming anxiety, fear, or paranoia (ep. 1.02, “AKA Crush Syndrome”). Her friend and fellow empowered femme with some superhero abilities, Trish Walker, encourages this practice by suggesting that “reciting street names from back home” is a “proven method for managing PTSD” (ep. 1.01, “AKA Ladies’ Night”). Comments such as these help ensure that the audience can witness the importance of preventing the stigmatization of mental illness and victimization of women suffering from PTSD. In fact, as an example of an empowered femme, Walker herself functions as a type of transitional object for Jones, who has difficulties dealing with the accidental death of her parents. Jones’s use of resistance techniques and transitional objects creates the type of narrative and psychological complexity that can satisfy even the requirements of the test based on the ideas of Alison Bechdel and Liz Wallace, who argue that the film, and by extension the comics storyline, “has to have at least two women in it” who “talk to each other about” something “besides a man” (Bechdel and Wallace 2005). Not only do the television and comics series succeed in this, but they also manage to expand the rebel femme noir sub-genre to include female characters of extreme emotional and psychological intensity.

Looking at the empowered superhero noir narrative elements of Jones’s storyline, the *New Yorker’s* Emily Nussbaum awards Jessica Jones with an even more apt description: “superhero survivor” (Nussbaum 2015). There is something intrinsically counter-hegemonic about a broken woman surviving against the odds while coming face to face with the horror of violence against women. By embracing her counter-normativity and regenerative otherness, she becomes a superhero-survivor in the cinematic and graphic noir genre where women can be held captive and raped for months, and where a woman in a superhero costume becomes a fetish or a trophy. As an empowered rebel femme, Jessica Jones is not afraid to ask critical questions about agency, domesticity, consent, boundaries, and mental rehabilitation. Her narrative takes the counter-normativity discourse outside of the theoretical realm and into noir urban, domestic, and sacred spaces. Jones’s commitment to finding new types of femme agency embody the incredible difficulty of living through

violence, surviving its effects, and even thriving as an empowered rebel femme. She may say, “I was never the hero you wanted me to be” (ep. 1.01, “AKA Ladies’ Night”), but she is the rebel femme superheroine audiences, libraries, and bookstores desperately need.

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