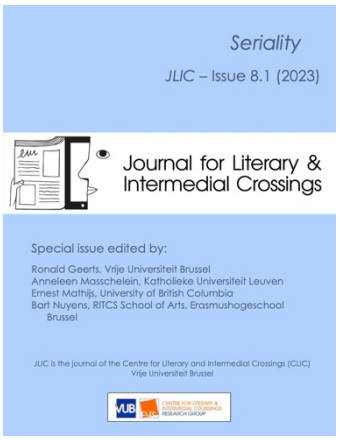

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How to End Complex Serial Drama?
Mystery and Monologues in *The Leftovers*

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> *Art in its endless search for perfection knows only one thing – not how to end, but how to see.* (Viktor Shklovsky)[1]

> *By the same token, narrative is a resource for closure. Any particular telling of a narrative has to end, even if the narrative being told is presented as unfinished or unfinishable.* (David Herman)[2]

How do creators end a complex serial drama series in a satisfying manner, offering a fitting finale that says goodbye to the characters, addressing central questions without closing the story completely, keeping dedicated viewers engaged until the end, and making them believe the creators are knowing what they're doing? In other words, how do they stick to landing, how do they create closure? This question troubles writers all over the world, and it certainly troubled Damon Lindelof while creating the final season of the HBO series *The Leftovers* (2014-2017). According to the critics Lindelof and co-writer-showrunner Tom Perrotta, on whose book the series is based, and the rest of the team, formulated an adequate answer to this convoluted question. Unlike the finale of Lindelof' first series *Lost* (2004-2010), the final season of *The Leftovers* was unanimously praised by professional reviewers, and the entire show ended up on top of many best-of-the-decade lists, before *Fleabag*, *Game of Trones* and *Breaking Bad*. (Dietz)

[1] Shklovsky 109
[2] Herman 173

Closure isn't a synonym for ending or dénouement, rather it "refers to the satisfaction of expectations and answers of questions raised over the course of any narrative." (Abbott 65–66) Narratives that sustain closure offer a kind of completeness, as first expressed in Aristotle's paradigm of the story as an imitation of a whole and complete action with a beginning-middle-end structure. This paradigm is so much about closure that you could say that the end gets the lion's share of the attention: "For what Aristotle actually has in mind as the imitation of a complete action is a representation of an action where the representation itself excites the apprehension of closure." (Carroll 3) In other words, the story is designed in such a manner that the end is weaved into it. In literary and screenwriting practices, creating closure is often dubbed as 'landing' (Wintersgill), and Lindelof in particular expresses the difficulty to "stick to landing" in numerous interviews.

The promise of closure, however, is particularly hard to fulfil in complex serial drama because the "redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration" (Mittell, 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television' 32) accumulates so much story information and plot twists throughout many seasons. Bruun Vaage sketches the reasons why it's difficult for creators of complex serial drama to design a satisfying ending, given the formal features of serial television drama. (Vaage 131–40) Firstly, the ensemble cast and multiple plotlines makes it challenging to present a coherent and unified resolution that does justice to every character and its arc. (132-133) Secondly, the complex morality of the often disturbed or villainous characters and their fascinating immoral behaviour can't be sustained until the end without compromising the author's own moral opinion. (134) Thirdly, the mixing of genres complicates the viewer's expectations about the resolution because the inherent logic of one genre demands a different ending than another. (135) Fourthly, complex serial drama's intermediate position between art and commerce demands the creators to cater diverse audiences,

with most viewers demanding answers, and a substantial minority appreciating an (artistic) open or ambiguous ending. (137) And lastly, the viewer's long-standing relationship with the characters makes it much harder to part with than shorter fiction formats like movies. (140)

In the following paragraphs, I will explore the extent to which the finale *The Leftovers* successfully addressed these design challenges and problems without alienating a vociferous part of the viewers, as happened with the ABC-series *Lost*. In her review of the final season of *The Leftovers* Maureen Ryan asserted that the "new season of *The Leftovers* is spectacular, in every sense of that word."[3] (Ryan, 'TV Review') I want to unravel some aspects of this spectacular storytelling and the way the narrative and audio-visual plotting in the final episode offers closure and ambiguity, evoking that distinct kind of viewer sensation Jason Mittell calls "the narrative special effect", that moment of amazement, "calling attention to the narration's construction and asking us to marvel at how the writers pulled it off". (43–44) To this end, I will analyse the audiovisual text on the one hand and the creative process and the production on the other.

Trauma therapy

Like *Lost* – and Lindelofs third (mini) series *Watchmen* (HBO, 2019) – *The Leftovers* is "about a society struggling with unresolved trauma." (Nussbaum) Yet from the start *The Leftovers* presented itself as an antithesis of the SF adventure series *Lost*: it is not about surviving the jungle, mythical monsters, or time-travel, but about trying to cope with and make sense of everyday life in a recognizable, real world three years after the overwhelmingly mysterious event of the so-called Sudden Departure, the disappearance

[3] In another much-discussed article, Ryan writes how much the series has touched her personally and even helped her cope with the grief and loss of her own mother. (Ryan, '"The Leftovers," Life, Death, Einstein and Time Travel')

of 2% of the world's population.[4] The show is not about the people who disappeared, but who were left behind. It's not about unravelling the mystery, but how the mystery affects the psyche and the worldview of the main characters, notably a police chief, Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux), his broken-down family, and his new girlfriend, Nora (Carrie Coon), a grieving widow who has suffered disproportionately, losing her husband and two children in the Sudden Departure. In short, *The Leftovers* is not a story about mystery solving, but about trauma treatment.

The move away from mystery was "almost in direct response to the way that *Lost* ended," Lindelof explained, referring to the negative reviews his first series had received. (Betancourt) Within the scope of this article, we cannot elaborate on the reception of *Lost*, but in short, a small and vocal section of the viewers was so dissatisfied with the sentimental ending of the series that it infuriated them.[5] Unlike co-showrunner Carlton Cuse, Lindelof took this criticism very much to heart, so much so that he was obsessed with it and returned to it in dozens of interviews. Although he stood by his artistic choices and repeatedly claimed that he would never have wanted *Lost* to end any other way, the vociferous, negative criticism continued to torment him for years. *The Leftovers*, in other words, is not only a TV show about trauma, but it's also written by a traumatised showrunner.

Mystery and romance

[4] The handling of dogs in the pilot episode also underlines the contrast with *Lost*: in both series, the protagonists meet a dog in the first scene, but in *The Leftovers*, the dog is shot by the tobacco chewing gunman Dean (Michael Gaston).
[5] For more on the critical reception of *Lost*, cf. (Sepinwall, *The Revolution Was Televised* 172–93; Mittell, *Complex TV* 323–29)

By the time Lindelof started writing the HBO series he fully realised that "[t]he problem of answering mysteries is there's always some level of dissatisfaction and unhappiness—because it's never as exciting as the mystery itself. 'The Leftovers' openly embraced that idea."(Betancourt) In this, he follows in the footsteps of J.J. Abrams, who co-created *Lost* and revealed his poetics of mystery in a TED talk in 2007, stating that it is better to leave questions unanswered and "keep the mystery box [...] closed" (Abrams).

Most of the storylines in the first season are therefore not about where the 2% went, but about how those left behind try to pick up their lives and deal with a life-changing event like the Sudden Departure. Kevin is trying to protect his hometown Mappleton from the impending outbreak of violence from or against the Guilty Remnant, the cult his wife Laurie (Amy Brenneman) joined, while his son Tom (Chris Zylka) is trying to help one of the partners of the leader of another cult, and his teenage daughter Jill (Margaret Qualley) struggles with the abandonment of her mother and with Kevin's parental authority and inability to communicate. All these broken people are struggling with pain, grief and mental problems, and the narrative turns are long confined to character revelations, time jumps and retardation of information that explains the relation between the characters before the Sudden Departure. I can't delve into it here, but the penultimate episode of the first season, for example, is almost an integral flashback to the days before the Sudden Departure and a narrative spectacle in itself.

The second season is set in the small town of Jarden, Texas, which is called Miracle because it was miraculously spared by the Sudden Departure. Kevin and Nora try to build a new life there, but their traumas continue to haunt them while the Guilty Remnant conspires to unmask the town's miracle and plunge it into chaos. In the course of the story, bizarre things happen to Kevin: he dies, ends up in a kind of purgatory world where he has to solve an espionage adventure, and comes back to life. Kevin's resurrection from the dead is not necessarily an act of magic or religious faith, since the possibility is kept

open that he was only on the verge of death, either way his resurrection follows the uncommon narrative logic of the TV show with its ambiguous twists and turns.

The setting changes even more radically in the third season when Nora travels to Australia to meet a secret scientific group that claims to have found a way for people to travel to their beloved departed. Unsuspecting, Kevin travels with her, but again his old demons resurface.

The third season is perhaps even more complex than the first two, the narrative twists are numerous, and the viewer is immersed in more outlandish worlds. The first episode, however, begins with a long prologue about a woman who is estranged from her family and community because she is the only one who stubbornly believes in the prophecy of doom of a minister. The theme of the extraordinary power and pull of belief systems is thus being infused into the final season. The rest of the episode, 'The Book of Kevin', reveals that Nora's brother, reverend Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston), is writing some sort of New Testament about Kevin, considering him a new prophet because of his resurrections. The subsequent story development and character revelation is so complex, even more than the previous ones, that I will refrain from summarising it here, but the dramatic crisis (or mid-point) of the season is Kevin and Nora's break up in a hotel room in Australia. Their relationship finally snaps after being put to the test over the course of the three seasons by their suppressed self-destructive and suicidal tendencies, and their mutual inability to choose life and each other. Kevin and Nora do not display immoral behaviour towards others, like the anti-heroes in many other complex drama series, but the regular outburst of violent behaviour towards themselves, often unexpected to the viewer, is probably just as fascinating.

After the breakup Kevin is further drawn into his father's and Matt's delusions that he might be the saviour. In the penultimate episode, on the day of the seventh anniversary of the Sudden Departure, Kevin enters the world of purgatory one last time and accepts

a weird quest. At the end of this tragicomic espionage dream-episode he gains insight in his core problem (or *need*, in scriptwriting terminology) and finally realises he messed up with Nora out of fear of commitment – like he did before with his wife Laura and his children – and didn't do enough to save their relationship.

In the final episode of this genre-mixing TV show, the romance genre begins to emerge, and the story focuses almost exclusively on Nora and Kevin. The episode is remarkable since it is largely plotted in a classical narrative structure: boy meets girls (again), boy loses girl (again), boy gets girl. The choice of the genre does not come out of the blue: despite the series' ensemble cast and multi-plot narrative, Kevin's prominent role as *the* protagonist had always been clear, as had his defining and troublesome relationship with Nora. The first two seasons ended with them coming together at the doorstep or in the living room of their home. Concluding the hybrid series as a love story in the confines of Nora's Australian home is therefore in the line of the earlier endings.

Alternate worlds

However, the spectacular story and the narrative special effect (Mittell) are not so much in this generic choice as such, but in the way the final scene simultaneously provides closure and disrupts it. The two pressing questions of the series – where has the 2% gone (the mystery) and will Kevin and Nora go on with life and each other (the romance) – are explicitly answered and subtly contradicted in the final scene of the show. In this scene Nora is sitting down over tea with Kevin and she tells him in a seven-minute monologue the story of how she was transported by an experimental scientific apparatus to an alternate, dystopian reality where 98% of the world's population disappeared instead of just 2%. After a long journey back to her (parallel) hometown Mapleton, she discovered that her husband had remarried, and her children were surprisingly cheerful because

they belonged to the happy few of that alternate world where most people had lost all their relatives and friends. Not wanting to disturb this happy new family, Nora tells Kevin imperturbably, she traced the inventor of the machine, who had been the first to be transported, and had him make a new machine to return to the 'normal' world. Once back in the ordinary world, Nora retreated to Australia and sought no further contact with Kevin, allegedly because she feared not being believed. After which Kevin sincerely claims to believe her.

The happy ending to this episode not only lives up to genre expectations, meeting Vaage's third challenge, but also ends the pending issues of behaviour, psyche, and morality. The destructive way in which Kevin and Nora dealt with themselves, which fascinated us viewers for a long time and prevented them from building a stable relationship, has now come to an end; they can finally open their hearts to each other and reconcile. The characters always relapsed into their problematic but compelling behaviour, and now the makers put an end to that once and for all, by making them choose life and each other, and thus "morality is restored" (Vaage 134).

Apart from a few reaction shots from Kevin, who only get to see Nora talking during the seven whole minutes of this monologue: her incredible, and highly questionable story is not visualised. We don't get to see the corroborating images that could confirm her story. The convention states that film and television rarely withhold these images. Peter Verstraten, using the case study of Christopher Walken's long monologue The *Comfort of Strangers* (P. Schrader, 1990), points out how uncommon it is for film characters to describe scenes from their past vividly and at length without depicting them. Another 'logic' then emerges, in the case of Schrader's film one that creates ambiguity about whether the entire film should be considered a flashback or not. (Verstraten 126, 145) Moreover, Charles Forceville, in his comparative study of the novel and the film, notes how

various objects in the mis-en-scene of that monologue thematically foreshadow the gruesome ending of *The Comfort of Strangers*. (Forceville 129).

Putting aside convention, within the context of the narrative style of *The Leftovers*, we would also expect to see flashback images in the final scene. In episode 6 of the first season, for example, we have some brief flashbacks of Nora's family as she stares at the empty kitchen roll (2'50"). And although we had to wait until the montage sequence at the end of the ninth episode to see the entire scene of her husband and children disappearing, it was shown to us by the cinematic narration or reliable extradiegetic narrator. In the final scene however, Nora only tells it, and her story is not confirmed by any visualization other than the images that may appear before our mind's eye. Carrie Coon's performance, the generic expectations and the viewer's investment in the romance story make it still believable for many viewers. To others, the mystery box is opened, but its content is not shown to be completely reliable (cfr. infra). The violation of "show, don't tell" hinders these viewer's expectation of a visualisation or recounting enactment[6] at a crucial moment when they desire clear answers. It draws attention to the formal structures of audiovisual storytelling, i.e., the conventional and intratextual use of flashbacks, while at the same time answering the big mystery arc of the TV show, and this creates an ambiguity that keeps the excitement for the mystery alive.

Mirroring monologues

On top of that, a crafty way of narrative and visual plotting deepens the ambiguity and narrative special effect by inviting us to compare Nora's story with two other stories told in the third episode of the third season, 'Crazy Whitefella Thinking'. That episode, five

[6] Drawing on Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, David Bordwell defines recounting enactment as the convention of a character telling about past events, and the syuzhet (or plot, discourse) subsequently presenting the events in a flashback, in direct presentation, "as if they were occuring at the moment". (Bordwell 78)

weeks earlier than the finale in the original broadcast, is dominated by two long monologues like Nora's: one by Kevin Sr. (Scott Glenn), the protagonist's father, and one by a new character called Grace (Lindsay Duncan). The comparison of these three monologues prompts the viewer to see Nora's story in a different light.[7]

The episode revolves around Senior trying to prevent the world from the Deluge that according to him will start on the seventh anniversary of the Departure. He collects ritual chants from First Nations of Australia tribal people, for which he is arrested. After being released, he goes in search of the leader Christopher Sunday, the only man who knows the last chant Kevin Sr. needs to prevent the coming apocalypse. He illegally manages to find Sunday's whereabouts and tells him how he got convinced of this impending flood in a seven-and-a-half-minute monologue. His story is an absurdist sequence of coincidental events in which the psychotic Kevin Sr. recognises deeper meanings, and which lead him across the continent to Sunday. Apart from the characterisation of Senior as a derailed mind and the subsequent foreshadowing of Junior's mental derangement in the following episodes, this monologue points to the unbridled creativity and humour that the makers brought to the show, especially in the third season, and people's tendency to seek meaning in contingency.

Yet, it is the concluding scene of this episode that resonates most intensely upon viewing the series finale. When Senior fails his mission, he ends up in the middle of the Australian desert, where he gets bitten by a snake and is found by Grace in a lamentable state. When he wakes up some weeks later, Grace confesses to Senior the heart-breaking story of how she, a true Christian and believer of the Evangelist concept of the Rapture, whole-heartedly was convinced that when she came home after an errand in town, her husband and five children had all been called to God on the day of The Sudden

[7] There are more notable monologues in the third season, but these two stand out for all the reasons that will be discussed below.

Departure. She felt utterly blessed, until sometime later she found out that her children had wandered off in the desert looking for help when only their father had 'departed'. Grace never went to look for them, being convinced they were God's chosen ones. Subsequently, she understands she's responsible for her children's death and loses her faith, only to regain it seven years later when stumbling upon the delirious Kevin Sr. lying at the foot of the memorial cross in the desert where her children died, with a handwritten page clutched in his hand. The language on the page looks like Scripture, since it is part of the holy book Matt is writing about the series' protagonist Kevin Jr. Lying with his arms open wide like a crucified Jesus, Grace believes Senior must be an angel sent by God, and she instantly regains her lost faith. The scriptural page talks about a police officer Kevin who died and travelled to the world of the departed and came back to the living. So, while Senior is recovering from his snakebite, Grace kidnaps a local cop called Kevin, convinced he is the biblical Kevin who can talk to her deceased children, only to find out he's not the One. She drowns him. By then Grace realizes that her need to belief has deflected her from reality once again, now accepting the fact that Senior is no angel, and that God doesn't care about her. "It's all just a story I told myself," she sobs, "it's just a stupid silly story." To which Senior replies that she is not wrong: she has just drowned the wrong Kevin. Of course, by then the viewer knows Senior is not the most mentally stable and reliable person, and this will be confirmed in the penultimate episode when the predictions of the Flood and of Kevin's role as saviour turn out to be false.

Grace tells her amazing story over a cup of tea at the end of the episode in a monologue of six full minutes to a man called Kevin, Kevin Sr. They are sitting at a table in a bay window and the entire scene is filmed with almost the exact same framing, lighting, camera angles, performance style, amount of reaction shots and editing pace as the final

scene of Nora talking to Kevin.[8] When watching *The Leftovers* finale, we are struck by the reiteration of the confession theme, the setting, the mis-en-scene, the identical visual style and editing of Grace's monologue early in the season, thus realizing that her character is a kind of doppelgänger of Nora. By then Grace's beliefs (together with Kevin Senior's predictions) are definitively refuted, and this provides the context or interpretive grid through which we can or should comprehend Nora's final story. The title of the final episode, 'The Book of Nora', not only indicates that the last instalment will focus on Nora – just like the two former seasons ended with her last words – but that her story needs to be evaluated in relation to the central theme of religion and belief systems, as announced in the prologue of 'The Book of Kevin'. On top of the emotional gratification of Kevin and Nora reconciling, the viewer gets a cognitive form of resolution, a subtle hint from the creators to observant viewers about how this ending might be understood differently: Nora is just telling a stupid silly story, to make sense of the world and to cope with her loss and grieve, like Grace did.

Visual storytelling

Despite Lindelof's deeply rooted artistic notion of keeping the excitement and the mystery alive, during the writing and production he could not help but formulate for himself and his crew an answer to *The Leftovers*' mystery and its pending question of where to the departed went. For example, he suggested filming the first scene of the pilot from the perspective of the disappearing baby, just in case they might need it later in the show, but there was no time left to film it. (Kachka, 'How to End a TV Show') In other words,

[8] The similarities are apparent at a glance in a supercut by Jonas Fontaine on Youtube (Fontaine). Fontaine adjusted the playback speed of some shots to make the sequences more similar, but even without these manipulations, the similarities are striking.

the nuclei of Nora's final story germinated very early in the production process, but it would emerge in a different way than Lindelof had initially imagined.

Lindelof was still struggling with the question of whether to reveal the mystery when he started plotting the third and final season. During the collaborative writing process, however, Lindelof was protected from himself and his compulsion to give more than a glimpse of the answer to the Sudden Departure. While he suggested to show where the 2% disappeared to, to avoid the same criticism as the *Lost* finale, Tom Perrotta vetoed against the idea. Then, writer-producer Patrick Somerville came up with a subtle compromise: what if Nora only tells the story of her visit to the Other Place to someone in the finale, sometime in the future, over a cup of tea? "But", Lindelof countered, "if she tells it, then we won't know if it's true!" And in the middle of that sentence, he realized that it was "the perfect way" to end the series: giving an answer, but not telling whether it's true. As soon as this was agreed on, they wrote "Nora makes tea" on the writers' room whiteboard and started plotting the entire final season towards that scene. (Kachka, 'How to End a TV Show')

The similarity between the monologues and the characters is striking and that's not only due to the script writing. Executive producer and director Mimi Leder directed the third and last episode of the final season of *The Leftovers*. She was Lindelof's partner in crime throughout the series and shifted the tone from the end of the first season, (Travers) and she knowingly created this thematic and visual echoing, as she asserted on different locations. (Gennis; Lindelof et al.; Whitney) Leder wanted to replicate these scenes: "What I really tried to do was mirror those images of all those monologues. It was very important to me that they felt similar, that there was a, you know, a visual theme to them, so that when you saw them it felt familiar." (Lindelof et al.) The editing pace even more reinforces this parallelism, and since Lindelof did the final editing of the series, he is responsible for this. (Kachka, 'How to End a TV Show') Additionally, it is significant that Lindelof named

Nora's doppelganger Grace, since he used that word repeatedly at the time to describe successful endings (D'Addario; Ausiello; New York Magazine): he wants his characters to "achieve some level of grace" after all their suffering, he declared, like in the ending of his all-time favourite M*A*S*H*. (New York Magazine).

The visual storytelling amplifies the analogy of the monologues in the script, and the viewer can find the common ground to make interpretative connections between them, or not. By the eighth and final episode, so much genre and plot twists have accumulated that the visible connections between the finale and the other monologues may have faded for the viewer. Nora tries to track down the swindlers, while Kevin is once again taunted by hallucinations and Matt, in a desperate attempt to get Kevin back, gets stuck on an orgiastic party boat, and Laurie does get as far as Kevin to say goodbye to him, after which he drowns and, in his subconscious, must solve an off-the-wall spy plot. Viewers who due to this overload of information hadn't noticed the resemblances on first viewing, were shocked when confronted with the possibility Nora was only telling a story.[9] In the end, *The Leftovers* is tying in with one of the key technique of ending many serial narratives: "the inward turn toward metafiction."(Mittell, *Complex TV* 324). The narrative plotting and visual storytelling combining these monologues suggest that the characters are telling (silly, stupid) stories and that the TV show is about belief system as storytelling machines. In short, *The Leftovers* is a story about storytelling.

Conclusion

Nora's explanation to the core mystery of the series, her answer to the question where her husband, two children and the rest of the 2% departed went to, addresses the problem of the mystery box: it gives a satisfying answer for anyone who wants or needs

[9] See the reactions on Youtube below the supercut made by Fontaine. Viewers find it "mind-blowing", "awesome", "amazing", "incredible", etc. One viewer expresses his embarrassment for not noticing the analogy before.

to believe it. The emotional gratification is immense – thanks to Coon and Theroux's performance – and the generic expectations are completely satisfied: the story ends with closure. But for those who spot the analogy of the two monologues, the mystery isn't resolved and Nora most likely is not telling what really happened.

In an interview in *New York Magazine* Lindelof said that the writers had "a unanimous feeling" as to which one of the realities was real, but that they would never say. (Kachka, 'Goodbyes Are Hard') Still, Tom Perrotta, Mimi Leder, Justin Theroux and others have suggested that Kevin is a pragmatic who needs to believe Nora in order to reconcile.[10] And even Lindelof hinted at the unlikeliness of Nora's story, expressing his surprise that some viewers took the "fishy" story for granted. (Sepinwall, 'Damon Lindelof Explains'). Elsewhere he accepts that his artistic ambitions may not be matched and that most viewers will not notice the ambiguity and will simply believe Nora. (Kachka, 'How to End a TV Show')

Even though not all viewers were happy with the finale of *The Leftovers*,[11] the critics were unanimously positive and there was little or no dissonance on social media. Part of the answer to this unanimity lies in the way the series' creators solved the convoluted problem of ending serial television drama. The five challenges Vaage observed, are being addressed in *The Leftovers* finale. (1) The ensemble plot is fittingly dismantled by focusing on Kevin and Nora at the same time as (2) the romance genre is moved forward and satisfactorily concluded, together with the overarching mystery. (3) The makers disentangle complex serial drama's intermediate position between art and industry and the corresponding audiences by overtly presenting a closed ending (Nora's truth) that's

[10] Elsewhere Lindelof did exclaim his surprise about viewers taking Nora's story for granted: "At the very least, I thought her story would smell fishy and then people would decide whether or not to believe it. The fact that they just take it completely and totally at face value that it's the truth has been surprising to me." (Sepinwall, 'Damon Lindelof Explains')

[11] Though, the majority liked it according to *TVLine*'s poll: 46,31% of the respondees thought it wast 'awesome', 21,58% called it 'very good', 17,06% said it was 'OK', 9,27% coined it a 'fail' and 5,78% judged it 'subpar'. (Mason)

opened by adding an authorial comment, using mirrored scenes, suggesting the closure is not what it seems. The mystery box is open and closed at the same time, the viewer can have it both ways. (4) And so, all the audiences can bid a satisfying farewell to the main characters they have spent so much time with, as well as to the makers who have invested in creating an intriguing, underlying layer of meaning. (5) Although Kevin and Nora are not as morally reprehensible as Walter White and the like, their fascinating but self-destructive behaviour comes to an end when Kevin chooses to believe Nora and she, in turn, chooses life.

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