

2017

# "She's Not a Real Monster": Orphan Black's Helena and the Monstrous-Feminine

Natalie Eisen  
*Scripps College*

---

## Recommended Citation

Eisen, Natalie, "'She's Not a Real Monster': Orphan Black's Helena and the Monstrous-Feminine" (2017). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 929.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps\\_theses/929](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/929)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scripps Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scripps Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**“SHE’S NOT A REAL MONSTER”: *ORPHAN BLACK*’S HELENA  
AND THE MONSTROUS-FEMININE**

by

**NATALIE EISEN**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR ANDREJEVIC**

**PROFESSOR CHENG**

**DECEMBER 9, 2016**

The scene opens on a pool of blood in a sink. As the camera skitters madly through a series of fractured images – bloodstained bandages on the countertop, bloodstained gloves holding rubbing alcohol, bloodstained boots and bloodstained skin – the scene echoes with the soundtrack’s mechanical screeches and a woman’s labored gasps of pain. The woman in question is invisible to the audience, at least as a whole body; she is fractured – inhuman – *monstrous*. The scene blurs and shifts, irrationally, and at last the camera focuses on the woman’s mouth. All she says: “I’m not Beth.” So that is the entirety of her identity: what it is that she is not.

Female monsters are defined by their unpredictability, their inability to suit a clear definition. They are the narrative equivalent of this scene’s camerawork, broken into small pieces and difficult to define. There *is*, after all, no clear definition of the female monster. Thus, this paper seeks to define the female monster and her difference from the male monster. Specifically, the focus of this paper is Helena – our aforementioned fractured woman, and a character from the television show *Orphan Black*. Helena is a curious case: although she is initially presented on the show as a female monster who is not explicitly feminine – a rare case indeed – over the course of the show she moves through several different stages of monstrous femininity. Helena is the focus of this paper for two reasons. First: she represents the potential of a world where female monsters are not linked to their femininity. Most female monsters are specifically feminine monsters, which reveals plenty about the anxieties about women that spawn these characters. Through the behavior of the female monster, it is possible to see exactly what sort of femininity is prized – and what aspects are best warped to become monstrous. Femininity is prized when it is innocent, idle, and passive; when

female monsters spew bodily fluids or have sex or behave in ways outside of the specific box of the “ideal woman,” they act in a way that can be easily labeled as monstrous. However, Helena opens up the possibility of a world where this is not necessarily true – where female monsters can present however femininely they’d like, and act for whatever reasons they wish. If female monsters represent a warped sort of mirror of the “ideal woman,” and monsters can behave in any way imaginable, then the ideal woman suddenly gains the potential to do anything. It is an admirable goal for film and television.

The second reason that Helena is the focus of this paper is that she goes through a monstrous-feminine journey over the course of *Orphan Black* that succinctly summarizes each facet of the monstrous-feminine. Thus, she provides a clear and concrete example of what precisely the monstrous-feminine *is*, and how it can be expressed in many different ways by one single character over the course of one single show. Although the potential of Helena is the origin of this paper, her role in the paper will mainly be to provide a more concrete illustration of the monstrous-feminine.

The structure of this paper will be as follows. First, define the female monster. Second, define the various facets of female monstrosity. Third, elaborate on each of these facets – what common traits are shared between specific kinds of female monsters, and what their monstrous femininity says about their creators and what fears the audience presumably possesses. After all of these various permutations of the female monster have been laid out, the paper’s focus will turn to Helena – to see how much she fits into each of these various roles, and what exactly her journey is as a female monster. To conclude,

the lens will expand outwards from Helena once more to question the role of the female monster within the current – and perhaps future – film and television industry.

There is no standard definition for a female monster – although several scholars talk about violent women, or monstrous women, or inhuman women, few take the time to lay out what it is exactly that they mean by their choice of female characters. Thus, it becomes necessary to create a definition from scratch. After reading many theorists' discussions of women who are killers and supernatural creatures and supervillains and assassins and otherwise on the fringes, the definition this paper will be working with is as follows: a woman who uses violence in a way that warps the boundaries of femininity and her own humanity. Not any particular occupation or even species, but *any* sort of woman who fits within this broad definition.

Take, for example, *Carrie* – the lead character of the film of the same name. *Carrie* unexpectedly gains telekinetic powers upon the onset of her menstruation, and the two are irreversibly linked. Says Shelley Stamp Lindsey, an expert on women and film culture: “Not only is *Carrie* a female monster, but sexual difference is integral to the horror she generates; monstrosity is explicitly associated with menstruation and female sexuality” (1991: 36). Consider also the female characters on the show *Law and Order* – two-thirds of all female killers convicted on the show killed within the context of their familial and domestic life, and 62% of female killings on the show were linked to their sexuality in a way that placed them on the “whore” end of the whore-Madonna spectrum (Humphries, 2009: 69, 70).

There are an exhausting amount of examples. Juliet and Pauline, of *Heavenly Creatures*, naturally transition from their girlhood games to murder; Ginger's transition into a werewolf, in the film *Ginger Snaps*, is explicitly linked to her menstruation; Bo from *Lost Girl* is a succubus who kills all the people she has sex with; Jamie Moriarty of the television show *Elementary* breaks out of prison and murders several people specifically to protect her daughter. Says Hilary Neroni, a professor of film theory with a particular interest in the link between gender and violence: "The public discussion surrounding so many cases of violent women, both past and present, seems to be less about justice or the act in question than about what it is to be a woman—motherly, feminine, wifely, ladylike, and so forth. Nothing can bring up the discussion of proper womanly traits like a violent woman" (2005: 60). Monstrous women exist as a fascinating mirror – through the portrayal of the monstrous woman, it is possible to see the warped reflection of what precisely the *ideal* woman is. Neroni may be describing real violent women, but this conversation carries on to the fictional monstrous woman as well: the particular aspects of femininity that are highlighted and made monstrous show what writers think it is to be a woman.

Helpful to this definition is Barbara Creed's idea of the "monstrous-feminine." The monstrous-feminine, argues Creed, is a separate concept from the idea of the female monster – the hyphenation of the monstrous and the feminine binds them together, ensuring that one is incapable of existing without the other. Says Creed:

The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience. A new term is needed to specify these differences. As with all other

stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase ‘monstrous-feminine’ emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity (1993: 3).

The female monster requires her own description of her monstrosity in a way the male monster does not. There is no “monstrous-masculine,” because the male monster’s monstrosity is generally not defined by his masculinity. Male monsters are allowed to exist in a variety of spaces, shapes, and forms in a way that female monsters are not – likely due to the patriarchal structures that both types of monsters exist in. The same way that male characters on television are allowed variety that female characters do not possess (one particular example: during any number of apocalyptic television shows the men are visibly worn-down, while the only evidence of the apocalypse is artful smears of dirt on the female characters’ faces; their body hair is still shaved, their makeup is still applied, and they continue to present in a feminine way), male monsters can be monstrous for any number of reasons – while the female monster is chained to her femininity by creators who cannot imagine a woman not motivated entirely by something feminine.

Consider the example of Frankenstein’s monster: while the monster itself is not explicitly male (and is not referred to with male pronouns) the Bride is specifically and intentionally created to be the monster’s female equivalent. She is the *Bride*; such is the entirety of her. This is what makes female monsters distinct from their male counterparts: although it is possible to create a list of male monsters who are not steered by their masculinity, finding a female monster whose monstrosity is not stemming from or affected by her femininity is difficult – if not impossible to do.

Creed discusses a number of presentations of femininity typically linked to monstrosity – chief among her examples are the monstrous mother, the monstrous womb, and the woman possessed by otherworldly power. Although these examples are helpful, they are limited when it comes to facets of femininity. Nearly every stage of a woman's life can be linked to monstrosity and seen within the example of the monstrous-feminine. For the purposes of this paper these examples will be limited to the girl-child; puberty and menstruation; sexuality and sexual awakening; and motherhood. To return to the earlier examples: Juliet and Pauline are monstrous girl-children; Ginger goes through monstrous puberty; Bo is a sexual monster; Jamie is a monstrous mother. Most – if not all – female monsters display one of these aspects of the monstrous-feminine. It is their primary motivation, what steers their characters, who they *are*. Just as the Bride is forever the Bride, so too are these women limited to whatever aspect of their femininity is seen as most monstrous.

And now to elaborate with more clarity on each of these examples. The first: the monstrous girl-child. A well-known example is Regan MacNeil from the novel and film *The Exorcist*. Regan is a well-behaved child who becomes possessed by a demon called Pazuzu; this possession becomes evident when Regan begins behaving rudely and using curse words, and escalates to truly violent and obscene heights. Regan's possession is linked to the expulsion of bodily fluids (vomit, urine) and sexual behavior (she repeatedly penetrates herself with a crucifix while yelling "Let Jesus fuck you"). It's also interesting to note that as Regan is possessed her voice deepens to the point of sounding nothing at all like her original girlish voice. Thus one can see the true horror of the monstrous girl-child: the ruination of her innocence.

The little girl, when shown onscreen, is often symbolic of innocence and purity. She “confronts the viewer with a story of a childhood innocence, corruptible by a dangerous world. She has to be saved and taken away from this at all costs” (Walkerdine, 1997: 1-2). The little girl is the *most* innocent, the most vulnerable. Thus when the time comes to make her terrifying or monstrous, what other aspect of her is there to twist *besides* this feminine innocence? Says Creed, “Innocence invites corruption – the more pure and irreproachable, the greater will be the child’s fall from grace. Still not fully developed or formed, the girl child is malleable, capable of representing destructive archaic impulses as well as innocence and the potential for good” (2005: 34). The girl-child exists to be corrupted – her violent behavior is monstrous and fascinating because the ideal little girl lacks it. The expulsion of Regan’s bodily fluids thrills audiences because the ideal little girl is polite and dainty; she would never urinate in public, she would never curse. These aspects of Regan’s possession can be seen as just as monstrous as her speaking backwards, the words on her stomach, or the morphing of her appearance – these elements of monstrosity spark horror in the viewer, echoing the viewer’s horror at the deviation from the ideal little girl.

Innocence is also linked to passivity. Consider another example: that of Rhoda Penmark from the novel, play, and film *Bad Seed*. Rhoda is a little girl who frequently commits murder without guilt or remorse – she is the ideal image of the monstrous girl-child, skipping gleefully through her scenes in a pinafore and pigtails before going to burn a man alive. Again, this horror is placed within the context of Rhoda’s deviance: Rhoda’s mother is first alerted to the fact that her child may be monstrous by noticing that she isn’t as reliant on her mother as she should be, and that she does not express the

feelings of delight or affection that are expected from the ideal little girl. Instead, the only emotions Rhoda demonstrates are anger and a sort of sadism (if, indeed, sadism can be classified as an emotion). Says Stephani Etheridge Woodson, scholar with a specialty in children's theatre:

Rhoda's repeated expressions of avarice [...] are what remove her from the dimension of "innocence." Rhoda embodies absolute childhood desire and the will to fulfill that desire. "Innocence," then, can be understood as deeply connected to all states of desire including, of course, libidinal. In this play, innocence is the lack of desire and a corresponding absence of passion. Rhoda not only has passion, she expresses it in surprisingly violent ways. (1999: 35)

Rhoda's passions and strong feelings – the ones that fall outside of the expected realm – are what separate her from the ideal little girl and are thus what make her terrifying. As Woodson says, the non-monstrous girl-child is *innocent* – think of Walkerdine's earlier quote – and that innocence is passive. The ideal little girl exists to be acted upon. Thus, the monstrous girl-child is terrifying not only because of her deviance from the norm, her perversion of the innocent, but also because she has her own monstrous autonomy. Regan and Rhoda both demonstrate violent, vicious power over men bigger and older than they are – and thus upset the balance, becoming monsters.

But little girls must eventually grow up and move on to the next stage of their monstrosity: monstrous puberty and menstruation. Here is the transition from little girl as object – to be protected, admired, and cherished, certainly, but object nonetheless – to *woman*, and woman as terrifying unknown. Creed discusses this issue by borrowing from

Freud; what men find so terrifying about women is their difference from men (1993: 1-3). And no form of female difference is as viscerally terrifying to the male viewer as menstruation – a surge of blood emerging from parts unknown, for reasons unknown. Is it any wonder that this blood would be viewed as monstrous? That the girl, teetering on the cusp of womanhood for the first time, is seen as monstrous?

Consider once more the character of Carrie White, specifically in the film version of *Carrie* – chosen because of the deliberate choice in cinematic techniques. In the opening scene Carrie, in the showers of her gym class locker room, tentatively attempts to touch herself in an erotic way – only to be halted by the immediate beginning of her menstruation. As she is attacked by the other girls in her gym class, pelted with tampons, the camerawork faithfully echoes the scene from *Psycho* in which a woman is stabbed to death in the shower. Says Lindsey:

These intertextual references prompt us to read the sight of blood trickling down Carrie's legs as she herself does; we associate Carrie's menstruation with a bloody attack, with blood flowing from an inflicted wound.

However, whereas the violence in *Psycho* is split between victim and attacker [...] here no such diversion exists: Carrie's adolescent body becomes the site upon which monster and victim converge, and we are encouraged to postulate that a monster resides within her. (1991: 35)

As Lindsey says, it is Carrie's own body – on the cusp of sexuality and fecundity – which is the true monster. Immediately after beginning to menstruate, Carrie shatters a light bulb with only the power of her mind; her psychic powers will grow and escalate until the climax of the film, where Carrie is doused with buckets of pig's blood at her prom –

spurring her to such a frenzy that she lashes out telekinetically, injuring and killing those around her. By staining Carrie with blood, the film shows its viewers that Carrie's menstrual blood and the onset of her womanhood is the true monstrosity contained within her body. The repeated imagery of blood through the film drives home to the audience over and over that Carrie's monstrosity comes from and is intrinsically linked to her womanly bleeding. More than that: the use of pig's blood shows that Carrie's menstruation is inhuman – more akin to an animal than to a human being. The very act of female menstruation is, thus, monstrous.

Part of this monstrosity comes from the male fear of the unknown. The female body in transition is terrifying – as the woman transitions further and further from the sexless body of the ideal little girl, she becomes less masculine and more monstrous. Female fecundity in and of itself is monstrous; not only the ability to menstruate, but fertility and the ability to carry children. Thus the monstrosity of the female body is rooted in a very male sense of fear and, perhaps, jealousy. Says Jane M. Ussher, professor of women's health psychology, "The positioning of the fecund body as monstrous, and the assorted regulatory practices, have also been seen as a reflection of envy of women's reproductive power" (2006: 7). To return to *Carrie*: not only is Carrie's menstruation seen as monstrous, but the idea of the girl's locker room – a place where girls going through puberty for the first time frolic in various states of undress – is seen by the camera first as delightful, and then as terrifying. Says Lindsey, "These two views of the locker room ask us to look twice at the girls, to consider them first as nymphs, then demons. Here in the reverse angle we begin to see a monstrousness lurking beneath the cheesecake curves" (1991: 35). Note that in Lindsey's description the girls are never

asked to be seen as *human* – they are either sexual objects to be consumed, or terrifying demons. Thus, the fear of female puberty is rooted in a similar place as the fear of the little girl: that she could be something besides a series of “cheesecake curves” is terrifying. Her sexuality is simultaneously enticing and revolting – and the blame for this is placed not on the (presumably male) viewer for being enticed or revolted, but on the girl herself. The girl going through monstrous puberty is thus left in the unfortunate position of embodying the monstrosity of both her past and future self: she is monstrous because she is an object to be consumed, and because she isn’t. She is monstrous because she has the ability to carry children, to menstruate, to embody female fecundity – and yet she is still orbiting close enough to a child-role for the onset of these things to inspire horror.

Once the monstrous girl-child has gone through her puberty, her body becomes the source of horror: the sexual female body, another sort of monster. Teenage girls are unfortunately subject to monstrous puberty and monstrous sexuality – the sexual awakening, in and of itself, is its own sort of monster. Consider again that Regan’s masturbation is filtered through the lens of the monstrous, that Carrie’s masturbation is what spurs the onset of her blood, her mockery, and her monstrous psychic powers. Sexuality in girls is dangerous, terrifying. Now consider the character of Jennifer from *Jennifer’s Body* – a promiscuous teenage girl who kills boys and eats them. Similar to Rhoda’s avarice being the source of her monstrous nature, Jennifer’s carnal hungers are the root of her monstrosity. Her sexual appetite is terrifying; her hunger for flesh is *equally* so, on an eerily similar level. Says Karen Renner, pop culture scholar:

In making Jennifer—a teen who engages in casual sex—a monster, the film in fact promotes a rather anti-feminist idea: that girls who desire where they do not love are horrific. Once she becomes a demon, Jennifer's desire for casual sex becomes literally monstrous, associated as it always is with the slaughter of innocent men. (2012: 43)

The phrase “girls who desire *where they do not love*” is of particular interest – sex separated from the traditional narrative of marriage and children is what makes a woman's sexuality monstrous. Jennifer's control over who she has sex with and how is terrifying in a similar way to Regan's ability to kill and mock men larger than her: it demonstrates a level of autonomy, and prevents Jennifer from being a passive object. Jennifer has the cheesecake curves of Carrie's locker room, but she is not there to be consumed; in fact, she gleefully and literally consumes others. Although this consumption is exaggerated and monstrous – Jennifer, by the end of the movie, is quite literally inhuman – it stands in for any young girl's realization that her body is something she can control and use for sex in a way that allows her power. This intermingling of desire, violence, and autonomy makes Jennifer monstrous to a patriarchal society that wishes to deny her (and by extent, every teenage girl she represents) any of those things. In other words: yet again, the deviation from an ingrained ideal of the “norm” creates the female monster, whose sexual appetite – with or without any other kind of appetite – is “literally monstrous.”

Although the sexuality of teenage girls is its own sort of horror, the sexuality of the adult woman is also inherently monstrous. To return to the earlier example of *Law and Order*: over half of the female killers on the show killed in a way that not only

painted them as sexual creatures, but did that painting in a way that was heavily judgmental. Drew Humphries, professor of criminal justice, discusses the criminals of *Law and Order* in the context of the whore-Madonna spectrum – that is, that women are *either* sexless Madonnas or whores (2009: 63). There is no in-between. Thus women are shamed for having sex, and – within the context of *Law and Order* – criminalized as well. “Female killers may start out as good gals, but screenwriters rely heavily on masculine assumptions about women’s sexuality to define bad character. This entails efforts to sexualize motives” (Humphries, 2009: 71). The writers of *Law and Order* have an implicit understanding with their audience that the sexuality of women is monstrous and wrong – and because of this, a woman’s sexuality is in and of itself a motive and an accusation of guilt. Female sexuality is violent, carnivorous, and murderous; no matter the context, it’s monstrous.

But say, hypothetically, that a woman plays into the ideal narrative: she is demure, she follows the rules, she produces a child. One would think that this would rescue her from monstrosity, but this is untrue – a mother can still be a monster. In fact, monstrosity linked to motherhood is common within female monsters. Mothers kill their children, or because of their children, or for their children; other women are monsters specifically because of their *inability* to have children. Women who cannot serve their biological purpose are seen as monstrous. Women who can serve that biological purpose are rewarded by it being the source of their monstrosity.

Take, for example, the character of The Bride from *Kill Bill*. The Bride spends the length of two movies – *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Kill Bill: Volume 2* – killing first to avenge the death of her child and, after she realizes her daughter is in fact alive, killing to

protect her. She is the closest female monsters can get to being something to be approved of; since The Bride is killing to protect her daughter, her monstrosity can be classified – not as violence – but as strength. Violence is almost expected from mothers; consider the old wives’ tale of women lifting cars when their children are in danger underneath them. The blurring of the boundary between human and inhuman is alright, as long as mothers’ monstrosity is in protection of their children’s lives. Onscreen, the monstrous mother shows audiences’ “willingness to tolerate [female] violence—despite our supposed cultural outrage regarding media images of violence—as long as the family unit is preserved” (Dancey, 2009: 83-84). While other female monsters deviate from the ideal – the ideal little girl, the ideal sexless body, the ideal virginal woman – the monstrous mother is using violence in an almost acceptable way: for her child. (Note that no female monster can ever *truly* be acceptable – but the monstrous mother is the closest the female monster can get to the hypothetical dream image of the ideal woman.) *Kill Bill* demonstrates an interesting facet of female monstrosity as it distorts feminine ideals; the first scene of *Kill Bill: Volume 1* features The Bride and another assassin, Vernita Green, having a full-out brawl in the context of Vernita’s suburban home. Two mothers, each fighting to protect their daughters, using knives and guns in the midst of bright suburbia – bringing the ideal of the monstrous mother to life.

On the other side of the coin are women like the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s Black Widow, a superspy with a checkered past. Black Widow is the only prominent female character in most of the Avengers films, including *Avengers: Age of Ultron* – which she spends fitting a variety of female stereotypes. Over the course of the film Black Widow soothes a savage beast by singing it lullabies; is locked up in a prison,

serving as the film's damsel in distress; and is the female half of the movie's romantic subplot. This romantic subplot comes into play in one particular scene where Black Widow confronts her love interest – Bruce Banner, a man who transforms into an enormous, mindless monster whenever he gets angry – by telling him:

In the Red Room where I was trained – where I was raised, they have a graduation ceremony. They sterilize you. It's efficient. One less thing to worry about. The one thing that might matter more than a mission. Makes everything easier. Even killing. You still think you're the only monster on the team? (Whedon, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*)

Black Widow frames this revelation within two important contexts: that a child is the *only* thing that might matter more than a mission, and that her inability to conceive one is what makes her a monster. Not the people she's killed, or any other aspect of her training – specifically her infertility. Within the narrative Black Widow's infertility is framed as equal to Bruce's murderous alter-ego; they are *both* monsters, and both equally so. While a male monster may have to kill in order to demonstrate his monstrosity, all the female monster must do is exist in a way that deviates from an imagined norm – thus, by her very infertile existence, Black Widow has free license to call herself a monster.

Although not all of these aforementioned women may label themselves as monsters, they each portray a different facet of the monstrous-feminine. This paper argues that the character of Helena from the television show *Orphan Black* portrays *all* of these facets, and in a chronological order – and thus, she is a particularly interesting example of the female monster. Helena moves near-seamlessly through these different

monstrous stages of life: girl-child to puberty and fecund body to sexual being to mother. She is the monstrous-feminine incarnate.

Unlike Black Widow, Helena never refers to herself as a monster within the context of *Orphan Black*. Other characters label her as such – monster, psycho, crazy bitch, barely even human, killer, “bad breath, batshit crazy.” Her identity in and of itself is fairly simple. Helena is a clone on a show full of clones – and yet she exists in a position of fundamental otherness. Helena, raised by a religious cult, was taught (incorrectly) that all of her copies were inhuman; as the original source from which the clones sprung, it is her holy mission to wipe them off the face of the planet. Thus she is positioned in orbit around her copies – a placement emphasized by her deliberate choice to dye her brunette hair a stark and unsettling blonde. Helena exists, in the beginning of the show’s first season, in a position that is not only genderless but can be seen as even inhuman. She has no last name. She has no identity. For the first few episodes of the show, she is faceless and voiceless. The first time the audience hears her voice is through a voice-changer over the phone; this, combined with her natural Ukrainian accent, distorts her voice to something masculine and monstrous. She spends most of her first episode wearing an enormous, bulky parka with its hood up – obscuring her face, and rendering her nothing but a silhouette lacking in identity.

In fact, many of the characters on *Orphan Black* initially assume Helena is male. Her introduction to the show comes in the form of a bullet through the forehead of one of her doubles, sending the show’s protagonist – Sarah Manning, another clone – on her trail with the help of the local police. Through the entire chase, Helena is referred to with male pronouns – after all, as one of the detectives says, “Name me one homicide ever pinned

on a female sniper” (“Effects of External Conditions”). Characters on the show assume that since there is nothing inherently *feminine* about her killings – they aren’t sexual, maternal, or any other permutation of the feminine – she could only be a male monster. She is similar in this regard to Aileen Wuornos, widely-regarded as the first female serial killer: “Even though acknowledging that Wuornos is not the only female killer in history [...] there was something peculiarly masculine that distinguished Wuornos from other murderesses” (Foley, 2013: 89). Thus, Helena begins her stint on *Orphan Black* as an entirely unique creature: a fictional female monster who is not explicitly coded as *feminine*.

But once Helena’s hood comes off and she is revealed to be a woman after all, the show shifts to attempt to fit her into one of the monstrous-feminine boxes. Helena shows an interest in Sarah and starts pursuing her; as she does, she becomes less the frightening, genderless enigma she was at the beginning of the show. The audience learns more about her and sees more of her, and she begins to take on aspects of the monstrous girl-child. Helena consumes huge amounts of pure sugar; she speaks in childlike tones and words, helped along by the fact that English is not her first language; she sticks her tongue out, she fidgets, she makes animal noises and draws stick figures on the walls. And yet these things are unmistakably linked to her violence – Helena dumps sugar on a bowl full of Jell-O and slurps it mischievously before immediately threatening murder to her lunchtime companion. In other words, she exhibits “the dual nature of the little girl, her propensity for innocence and evil” (Creed, 2005: 34).

It is this duality that is the purpose, presumably, of choosing the monstrous little girl as the aspect of the monstrous-feminine for Helena to exhibit. Her exhibition of

childlike traits is a fast way to make her sympathetic, eerie, and comedic; it also serves to emphasize, even more, the terror and wrongness of her actions. In other words, “it is as if the girl’s innocence opens the way for the entrance of evil, one feeding off the other in a complex relationship of interdependence” (Creed, 2005: 35-6). Her childlike nature further emphasizes her monstrosity, which further highlights the fact that she is a child – consider her theme music, “We Meet Helena,” which mixes nursery-style whimsy with discordant, harsh clanging sounds.

Helena’s transition from nearly-genderless to the monstrous girl-child is helped along by her intense attachment to Sarah – who audiences later learn is Helena’s biological twin. Sarah and Helena are the only twins among the set of clones – they split in two inside the womb, leaving them twins and mirrors. (As a mirror twin, Helena’s difference from the other clones is further emphasized: her organs are flipped, her heart on the right side instead of the left.) Helena idolizes Sarah; their relationship, as said by their shared actress Tatiana Maslany, “goes from, like...sisters to...older sister, baby sister...to mother/daughter to weird lover sort of thing to, you know, monster and the keeper of the monster” (“Inside Orphan Black: To Hound Nature In Her Wanderings”). What is especially important about this multi-faceted relationship, at this point in Helena’s story, is the idea of mother and daughter. After one encounter with Sarah, Helena steals her jacket and retreats to her lair. There, she guzzles whole sugar packets and reads a letter written from Kira, Sarah’s eight-year-old daughter, to Sarah. The scene then cuts to Helena lying on the floor, wrapped in Sarah’s jacket, crooning “I miss you mummy...I miss you mummy...” (“Entangled Bank”). This firmly cements Helena’s position as the monstrous girl-child, helped along by her very next act: to lure Kira out of

Sarah's home and take her away. This ends with Kira being hit by a car – thankfully non-fatally – and Helena and Sarah are left watching each other from different sides of the road, like two women on opposite sides of the mirror. Not only that: one woman watching her mirror with a sort of desperation, wondering if Sarah can be her mother now that Sarah's daughter is gone.

Helena's relationship with her own mother is far more volatile, and is the catalyst for her transition from monstrous childhood to monstrous puberty. Helena and Sarah's birth mother meets the both of them near the end of the first season, and Helena immediately places the blame on her for making Helena this way – showing that monstrosity is “the work of mothers and daughters, a kind of maternal legacy passed from one generation to the next” (Dancey, 2009: 89). The second Helena and her mother are alone, she stabs her mother in the stomach (in the approximate location of the womb, although whether this is foresight or coincidence is uncertain) and drags her body to a warehouse to leave her to bleed out. The dark, cavernous space of the warehouse, filled with the flickering red light of Helena's flare gun, resembles nothing more than a womb – and when Sarah inevitably follows Helena to avenge their mother's death, Helena describes to her the way the two of them were intertwined in their *own* womb once upon a time. (She does this, of course, while strangling Sarah and attempting to beat her half to death; Helena's monstrosity is irremovable from her person.) This confrontation ends with Sarah shooting Helena in what she thinks is the heart. Helena lies on the floor of the womb-warehouse, bleeding out. It is a death. It is a birth. It is a rebirth: Helena's almost-death spurs her transition to the next stage of the monstrous-feminine.

Helena's monstrous puberty, like Carrie's, is heralded by the gush of blood. The premiere of *Orphan Black*'s second season ends with Helena's bloody boots trudging wearily onscreen; when the camera steps back, the viewer can see that Helena is *doused* in the blood from last season's gunshot wound. Helena will spend the next few episodes in varying stages of bloodiness – multiple times she is soaked head-to-toe in blood, both her own blood and the blood of those she's killed. As Lindsey says of *Carrie*'s climax: “Equating pig's blood with Carrie's menstrual blood [...] explicitly associates female sexuality with violence, contagion, and death. Her inner monstrosity [is] finally exposed for all to see” (1991: 39-40). It is easier to see Helena as monstrous when she is soaked in blood; this image being the audience's reintroduction to her after the break between seasons was likely intentional. Just as Helena's childlike nature was used to move the audience's viewpoint from fear to sympathy, so is the blood used here to move from child to something else entirely.

The onset of Helena's bleeding is followed quickly by another revelation: she is a fertile and fecund body, ready for impregnation. The clones on *Orphan Black* are infertile, with the exception of Sarah – or so the audience is led to believe, until Helena is abducted by a cult at the beginning of the second season and her eggs are removed. Helena and Sarah, mirrors of one another, are the only two clones who can have children. Suddenly, this fact becomes the center of Helena's story – she is removed from *Orphan Black*'s central location of Toronto and placed on a farm, where the farm-cult impregnates cows and describes her as a miracle for her ability to carry children. And yet, Helena's “miraculous” nature does not allow her to escape her roots: as one cult member

says, “She’s defective and dangerous. Any child of hers would be a monster” (“Governed by Sound Reason and True Religion”).

Here, it is Helena’s fecundity that makes her monstrous. “Central to this positioning of the female body as monstrous or beneficent is [...] woman’s fecund flesh, her seeping, leaking, bleeding womb standing as site of pollution and source of dread” (Ussher, 2006: 1). On the farm, Helena occupies *both* a monstrous and beneficent space, simply by virtue of her fecundity. She is a miracle, she is the cult’s savior – but at the same time she is monstrous, confined to a bed, heavily drugged and thus unable to speak or move the way a person would. After Helena’s eggs are removed, she escapes – wearing a wedding dress, evocative of the way she is almost forced into the “ideal” feminine narrative. Just as Helena escapes the cult and their plans for her to be the perfect bride and mother, so too does she escape the image of the bride in the wedding dress and run straight to the ideal woman’s monstrous reflection. The last time the dress is seen is when Helena flees the cult to reunite with Sarah – and the dress is immediately soaked in the blood of Helena’s newest kill, a man attempting to torture Sarah. Sarah screams at the torture and screams even more loudly when Helena approaches her; thus, the audience remembers once more that Helena is monstrous.

Helena strips out of the wedding dress in front of a mirror, making eye contact with her own reflection the entire time. As she strips herself of the wedding dress, she discards her monstrous puberty and moves on. The next stage of her monstrous-feminine identity is heralded by Helena’s introduction to a new clone: Rachel Duncan, the antagonist clone stepping in to be Sarah’s rival now that Helena is something akin to domesticated. Rachel is Helena’s opposite; she is incredibly feminine-presenting,

wearing lipstick and heels and tightly-fitted skirt suits. Also unlike Helena, Rachel's fascination with Sarah is not rooted in anything benevolent – she wants Sarah and Sarah's family eliminated, which is where Helena steps in. Helena returns to her previous clone-killing ways by setting up a sniper rifle in the building across from Rachel's apartment, where she watches Rachel engage in foreplay and then sex with her current male partner. Helena mimics Rachel faithfully during this process; she puts on lipstick that matches Rachel's, she cuts the hair of a Barbie doll to match Rachel's hair before loudly kissing the doll on the mouth and tying its head to her sniper rifle. She play-acts as Rachel, slipping effortlessly between a "Rachel-voice" and her own natural tones. By doing this, Helena inhabits both Rachel's identity and her own – and by watching through her sniper scope as Rachel has sex, she links her own monstrosity to Rachel's sexuality. Thus, Helena moves to the next stage of her monstrosity: sex, and the sexual awakening.

Helena doesn't manage to kill Rachel. Instead she leaves town and encounters something entirely new: romance, or at least a facsimile of it in the shape of a man named Jesse. Helena's relationship with Jesse is well-situated in the context of Jennifer, and her monstrous transformation in *Jennifer's Body* – specifically, her appetites. "When she was 'just' a teenage girl, Jennifer consumed men sexually. When she transforms, her sexual consumption becomes literally cannibalistic and thus is more clearly marked as horrifying" (Renner, 2012: 44). Jennifer's appetites are monstrous – Helena's are too. Over the course of the episode where Helena meets Jesse, Helena pursues alcoholic drinks, a plate of food, Jesse, and a bar fight with equal amounts of enthusiasm. Not only does she have an appetite for sex, but she is equally hungry for food and for violence. Helena and Jesse's courtship happens through arm wrestling, and they slow dance to

background music of “Crazy,” by Diana Salvatore – “Crazy/That’s what they tell me/’cause I’m crazy/crazy.” Even Helena’s more innocent moments are still pervaded by the constant insistence that her actions are flawed – she is crazy, and her attempt at *anything* with a boy is monstrous. Disregarding the music, Helena kisses Jesse anyways. The shot of their kiss is filmed in a similar way as Rachel’s kiss from the previous episode, and Helena kisses in an overlarge parody of Rachel’s own caresses. Helena’s hands are everywhere, and her kissing is frantic; she very obviously has no idea what she’s doing, and is equally obviously starving for it. She is a creature of appetites – and this is monstrous.

This kiss is interrupted by the aforementioned bar fight, where Helena breaks bones and almost puts out a man’s eyes while cackling delightedly. Thus her monstrosity is re-established, since “converting the improperly sexual girl into a monster allows her to be excluded from the domain of proper girlhood” (Renner, 2012: 34). Transitioning straight from her sexual attempts to violence reasserts her monstrous nature, and reminds the audience that Helena isn’t like Rachel – she isn’t sexual in an approved-upon way. Helena is put in handcuffs and sent temporarily to jail, further punishing her for her monstrous attempts at sex and romance. However, before this punishment can take, she is rescued (in a matter of speaking) by the very cult she’d escaped from. They have an offer: to impregnate her with her own fertilized eggs, allowing her to carry her babies. Helena agrees. Thus, in a way, her monstrous attempts at sex lead to her monstrous pregnancy. Although her advances on Jesse do not culminate in sex, they culminate in violence – which leads to her arrest – which leads to her re-induction into the cult –

which leads to her impregnation. It is the perfect monstrous transition to the final stage of Helena's monstrous femininity: motherhood.

Helena does take up the cult's offer, and near the end of the second season is impregnated artificially with twins. From this point on in the show, Helena's babies become her first priority. However: Helena is still a monster, and her monstrosity tangles with her pregnancy in a way that renders it inhuman. The third season of *Orphan Black* opens with a dream sequence from Helena's perspective; she is having a baby shower, and all of the other clones are there. Helena – massively pregnant, wearing a pink dress and a flower crown – is the rosy-cheeked pregnant ideal. However, when Helena looks down at her stomach, a scorpion crawls out. Paralyzed, Helena can do nothing but scream as the scorpion crawls closer and closer to her face until she wakes up. Subconsciously Helena understands that her pregnancy is just as dangerous and inhuman as a scorpion; just as the cult member warned during the previous season, any child she gives birth to would be a monster. And this continues the show's trend of opening each season with a vivid reminder of Helena's monstrosity – the second season opens with Helena's monstrous menstruation, and this (the very first scene of the third season) reminds viewers that although Helena may think her pregnancy is a wonderful thing, in reality it is still monstrous.

Helena indirectly learns how to be a monstrous girl-child from Sarah, and learns how to have a monstrous sexuality from Rachel – so too does she need a tutor for monstrous motherhood. For this she turns to another one of her clones: Alison Hendrix, a suburban housewife with two small children. Helena moves in with Alison and her husband near the end of *Orphan Black's* third season, and proceeds to – with great

determination – ape what she believes to be the ideal mother. She proudly tells whoever will listen: “I am a mother now, I walk a different path” (“Insolvent Phantom of Tomorrow”). However, Helena is incapable of escaping her monstrosity; less than half an hour after saying that line, she kills three people in defense of her babies. Helena’s body count after becoming a mother is actually higher than her body count before becoming a mother – she kills seven people onscreen (and an uncertain total offscreen) while pregnant, as compared to the six dead at other stages of her monstrosity.

Unlike her previous kills, however, these deaths are acceptable by the standards of Helena’s family. Helena’s pregnancy allows her to be welcomed by her other sisters – she is let into Alison’s home in the first place specifically because she is a mother. When Helena kills to protect her unborn children, she is referred to by characters on the show as a “guardian angel,” and Sarah even tells Helena: “You keep those babies safe” (“The Mitigation of Competition”). This goes to prove the earlier point: that “mothers are often praised if they do harm in order to protect their children” (Neroni, 2005: 73). Helena receives this approval not only on the level of the characters, but on that of the writers; the fact that she has spent half of her time on the show pregnant, with her storylines revolving around motherhood, shows that the writers are content to have her exist in this facet of the monstrous-feminine for the foreseeable future. (And with a mere ten episodes of *Orphan Black* remaining, it seems unlikely that Helena will go through any great shifts of character – except, perhaps, giving birth to her babies. This of course will not do much to shift her out of the monstrous mother role she is currently inhabiting.) When Helena is the monstrous girl-child she is shot; when she goes through monstrous puberty she is drugged and incapacitated; when she experiments with monstrous sexuality she is put

into handcuffs and arrested; when she at last reaches monstrous motherhood, she is finally welcomed to her family's dinner table. The transition is best summarized with one particular moment from the third season's finale: Helena asks Sarah to pass the sugar and Sarah does, at which point Helena dumps it on her food and sets about peaceably eating it. This represents a sort of warped mirror to Helena's past self: whereas in the show's first season Helena would fill her mouth with both sugar and threats, she is now the "acceptable" female monster and thus can receive all the sugar she likes.

Helena is unable to escape the link between her monstrosity and her femininity, but she is important as a character because she opens up the *possibility* of that escape. Helena is the first step towards a future where female monsters might be monsters for any reason at all – not just their sexuality, or their need to protect their children, or any other reason that confine them to the realm of the female. And if the female monster is allowed to be separate from her femininity, that holds out hope for other portrayals of women as well. As mentioned, the aspects of femininity that are made monstrous show what creators (writers, directors, showrunners) think women are made of – what traits are most obvious, and most easily emphasized. Monsters are mirrors, and the monstrous-feminine woman is the reflection of the feminine woman who isn't monstrous at all. If, in the future of the film and television industries, monstrous women are allowed to be *anything* – to kill and hurt and transform for any reason at all – then it stands to reason that these monsters will reflect upon a screen full of diverse and exciting female characters of all kinds. Helena may be wearing her pink maternity dress now, cooing to her baby, but once upon a time she was a killer so outside the box of her own femininity that the characters around her had no other label for her but a man. Perhaps someday there will be another

female monster that moves outside of the box of the traditional feminine – and this time, she'll still be recognized as a woman even on the other side.

## Works Cited

- Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Dir. Joss Whedon. Perf. Scarlett Johansson, Mark Ruffalo. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2015. Transcript.
- Cochrane, Russ. "Insolvent Phantom of Tomorrow." *Orphan Black*. BBC America. 13 June 2015. Television.
- Creed, Barbara. "Baby Bitches From Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film." *Mixed-Up Childhood*. Ed. Janita Crow and Robert Leonard. Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tāmaki, 2005. 33-38. Print.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Dancey, Angela. "Killer Instincts: Motherhood and Violence in The Long Kiss Goodnight and Kill Bill." *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture*. Ed. Ann C. Hall and Mardia J. Bishop. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009. 81-92. Print.
- Foley, Megan. "The Monster in the Mirror: Reflecting and Deflecting the Mobility of Gendered Violence Onscreen." *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader*. Ed. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 87-98. Print.
- Humphries, Drew. "Constructing Murderers: Female Killers of Law and Order." *Women, Violence, and the Media: Readings in Feminist Criminology*. Ed. Drew Humphries. Lebanon: Northeastern UP, 2009. 57-74. Print.
- "Inside Orphan Black: To Hound Nature In Her Wanderings." Perf. Tatiana Maslany. *iTunes*. Apple Inc., 25 May 2014. Web. 18 Nov. 2016.

- Levine, Alex. "The Mitigation of Competition." *Orphan Black*. BBC America. 9 June 2016. Television.
- Lindsey, Shelley Stamp. "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty." *Journal of Film and Video*, 43.4 (1991): 33-44. JSTOR. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.
- Neroni, Hilary. "Female Murderers: America's Recurring Nightmare." *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*. Albany: State U of New York, 2005. 59-80. Print.
- Renner, Karen. "Monstrous Schoolgirls: Casual Sex in the Twenty-First-Century Horror Film." *Red Feather Journal* 3.2 (2012): 34-50. Red Feather Journal. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.
- Ussher, Jane M. *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Walkerdine, Valerie. *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.
- Walton, Karen. "Effects of External Conditions." *Orphan Black*. BBC America. 20 Apr. 2013. Television.
- Walton, Karen. "Entangled Bank." *Orphan Black*. BBC America. 18 May 2013. Television.
- Walton, Karen, and Graeme Manson. "Governed by Sound Reason and True Religion." *Orphan Black*. BBC America. 26 Apr. 2014. Television.
- Woodson, Stephani E. "Mapping the Cultural Geography of Childhood Or, Performing Monstrous Children." *Journal of American Culture* 22.4 (1999): 31-43. Wiley Online Library. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.