

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

by

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## INTRODUCTION

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 – which means that the construction of the female monster is one of the many things this paper will seek to study in greater detail. This will be done specifically through focusing on the character of Helena from the television show *Orphan Black* – the aforementioned fractured woman, and one who relates to monstrosity and femininity in ways worthy of study.

The structure of this paper will be as follows. First, lay down working definitions of the monster, the female, femininity, and the monstrous-feminine. Although monsters are frequently lumped in with villains and generally undesirable characters, monsters serve a purpose – they exist to be more than a jump scare, and rather exist to reflect unique cultural anxieties and uphold existing norms through their difference. Female

monsters, through this, uphold femininity by distorting or subverting it and demonstrating – through their monstrous reflection – what the ideal feminine woman looks and acts like. This is why the monstrous-feminine – a term created by scholar Barbara Creed – is useful: it shows the ways that female monsters are bound to, and simultaneously subvert, traditional femininity.

The second part of the paper focuses on the monstrous-feminine and breaks it down into separate life stages, encompassing the life of both the ideal feminine woman and her monstrous opposition. Each stage is examined through the lens of media and film scholars, and each stage is linked to a specific female monster to provide concrete examples of the way the monstrous-feminine operates onscreen. Black Widow, from the Marvel Cinematic Universe; Esther, from the film *Orphan*; the female killers of the television show *Law and Order* – these are all examples of monstrous-feminine characters. It is important to note that the majority of female monsters discussed within this paper are played by white actresses; the ideal femininity is linked to docility, submissiveness, and *whiteness*, and thus the divergence from it can only be conveyed through a white body – women of color cannot suddenly deviate from a white submissive feminine norm if they are not white, after all. Thus: the examples in this paper are primary white monstrous women.

The third section of this paper focuses on one female monster in particular: the character of Helena. Although *Orphan Black* encompasses only a few months of Helena's adult life, over the course of its four seasons Helena goes through all of the life stages of the monstrous-feminine in order – she displays behaviors that echo each stage, even though she is an adult. Using the previous section's established monstrous-feminine

facets as a sort of road map, this section will go through Helena's time on *Orphan Black* and show how she is the monstrous-feminine epitomized.

This road map ends with Helena pregnant and ready to fulfill her role as monstrous mother – at which point the paper transitions to its fourth section, which focuses more heavily on the relationship between Helena and her birth mother, Amelia. Amelia is a woman of color, and through her relationship with Helena the purity of Helena's whiteness is called into question; thus, *Orphan Black* presents its audience with the potential for Helena to deviate from the white feminine ideal. Helena's relationship with whiteness – and how that is called into question during Amelia's time on the show – is explored in greater depth within this section, studying the intersection of race and gender (in contrast to the more media studies-based work of the previous section). This leads to the conclusion, in which the female monster is considered in more depth: the cultural potential of a female monster whose monstrosity is not necessarily chained to her femininity, and what the importance of that monster might be.

### **THE MONSTER, THE FEMININE, AND THE MONSTROUS-FEMININE**

First consider the idea of the monster. Monsters, by their very essence, have no singular definition – a monster is something that exists on the margins, an oppositional or contradictory force. Says Georges Canguilhem, philosopher, “the monster would simply be that which was different from the ordinary, of an order other than the most probable order” (1962: 28). The monster is a foil; whether it exists as a force within the narrative or – in the case of this paper – a specific character in a story, it exists to oppose and reflect. The word *monstrous* can be defined as frightening, ugly, or huge. The deviation is

the importance of the monster: what is frightening shows what is *not* frightening, what is ugly shows what is beautiful, what is huge shows what is a comfortable size. This deviation is linked to horror, a lack of comfort; the monster must be unsettling, perhaps violent or villainous, or else it isn't a monster. The existence of the monster as deviation from the norm means that it becomes impossible to point at one singular being and define it as "the monster." Monsters can be supernatural beings; they can also be people, as long as those people are somehow other, as long as that otherness reaffirms some existing norm.

Thus, the narrative purpose of the monster is frequently to uphold an idea of the "correct" belief, action, or standard through its deviation. Sometimes this is literal – consider *Harry Potter's* Voldemort, and how his inhuman villainy serves as a mirror to Harry's heroism. Part of Voldemort lives in Harry; the two are connected, and reflect one another. However, sometimes monsters don't have a clear onscreen reflection. Frequently the only way to see the non-monstrous ideal is to examine what the onscreen monster is *not*. After all, the monster "is a being that is valuable only as a foil" (Canguilhem, 1962: 29). If a monster exists, there must be a space where the monster *isn't* – and this space is the correct, the ideal, the non-monstrous. By studying the monster, one can see what the monster isn't – and, through this, discover what the ideal behavior should be.

This ideal behavior is often linked to the white male heterosexual body. This body has been labeled as the "default" throughout history, and media history, which means that when the monster is shown onscreen it is frequently meant to represent an other to the default male. Judith Halberstam, gender studies scholar, says: "Monsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, these novels make

way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (1995: 22). So not only do monsters construct themselves, but through looking at their presence onscreen it is possible to see – through the spaces where the monster *isn't* – the ideal human; since the monstrous body so frequently condenses identities seen as “threats” into its one monstrous body (racial, sexual, or gender identities may all be seen as threats to the white masculine ideal), the identities that it is not become the ideal identities by default.

Which leads to the next point: monsters are quite frequently reflections of the particular cultural moment they come from. Says Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, scholar of monsters:

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy [...] The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read... (1996: 4)

Particular cultural anxieties birth particular monsters. In this way monsters serve as archaeological sites, in their own way, for the particular “time, feeling, and place” that birthed them. The film *Carrie*, for example, was made in 1976 – and then brought back again in 2013. As Judith Halberstam says in regards to film and television monsters, “the monster become a kind of screen onto which the spectator’s fears are projected” (1995: 39). So while all monsters, Cohen argues, exist specifically to be read, the filmed monster exists to be *viewed*. Through looking at monsters onscreen, and the screen of monsters, it

becomes possible to see the anxieties that birthed them. When looking at *Carrie*, one can ask numerous questions. What particular fears and desires necessitated the return of this specific monster? Why was she needed? What is it that the creators and viewers of this movie were so afraid of?

This is the question one asks when studying monsters: what are you afraid of? Or, rather: what are you *supposed* to be afraid of? Monsters are created on the assumption of some shared cultural fear; without this fear, this innate knowledge that what they are doing is terrifying and wrong, they serve no narrative purpose. A mirror that doesn't reflect anything back is purposeless. A monster that doesn't reflect anything – about its audience, about its creator, about its culture – is likewise.

This paper revolves around female monsters, but the concept of the “female” is a difficult one to define. As Monique Wittig, feminist theorist and writer, says: women are not a “natural group,” but instead the concept of woman is one that is constructed (1993: 103). Specifically, “woman” is created and is reliant upon “man” to exist – just as the monster requires some sort of norm to deviate from, so too does the woman need a man in order to deviate from him. Says Wittig: “For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation” (1993: 108). Because womanhood is linked to servitude and obligation, it becomes an inherently submissive concept; the woman exists to serve the man, to be passive and servile. These traits are idealized and coded into a specific version of the female: femininity.

Like the female, femininity is a constructed concept: a manufactured ideal of the performance of female gender, meticulously crafted by years of advertisements and media in general to sell – not only products that can be linked to femininity – but the body that can be sold as feminine. This body is frequently a white body – throughout history the white female body has been marketed and sold to all members of society as the ideal of submissiveness, passiveness, and femininity. Donnalyn Pompper, who did a study where a wide variety of women were asked to define femininity, noted that there are “emphasized femininity norms which use Caucasian/White body attributes as reflected across popular culture as invitations for African-American/Black young women to emulate. However, striving for those *proper femininity* ideals can take its toll on African-American/Black females’ self-esteem” (2016: 162). This toll exists on the level of the individual, in that it is damaging to individual women of color to uphold standards of femininity that are tied to a separate body. This damage also exists on the societal level: any deviation from this docile, submissive white femininity is labeled as monstrous.

Through media this deviation is frequently portrayed – not through the bodies of women of color – but instead through white, conventionally beautiful, thin female bodies. The female monsters this paper will address all fit into this category. The horror of the female monster’s deviation from white femininity is that the body is presented as one that *upholds* this standard of white femininity, and then goes on to deviate from it. Bodies of color cannot be seen as monstrous in the same way as white bodies, specifically because women of color are *already* monstrous – by their sheer existence they deviate from the norm of white femininity, and there is no shock or horror or sudden reveal. The

traditionally beautiful white female body is used, over and over again, to tell monster stories because the audience's assumption upon looking at it isn't monstrosity but is instead a tacit understanding that this body upholds standards of femininity. When it is revealed that this woman is a monster – that is terrifying. That is a distortion of something that is correct. Monstrous. Horrifying.

Here is where the female monster lives: in a place where she and her monstrosity are both defined by femininity. Female monsters' violence and viciousness exists within the box of femininity – her crimes are, more often than not, tethered to some aspect of an idealized, cisgendered feminine experience. There are numerous examples. Juliet and Pauline, of *Heavenly Creatures*, naturally transition from their girlhood games to murder; Ginger's transformation 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). If monsters exist to reflect the ideal of culture, and femininity is the ideal for the woman, then 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 might be. 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. It's true that male monsters can be tethered to different aspects of their masculinity, and there are male monsters who are defined by their masculinity just as female monsters are defined by their femininity. However: the construction of the male monster does not always *rely* on masculinity the same way that the female monster requires some aspect of the feminine. The "monstrous-masculine" does not exist because masculinity is not the defining feature of the male monster. Just as male characters on television are allowed variety in terms of their masculine presentation 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, meanwhile, 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 exists to be female, so much so that her feminine identity is the closest thing she has to a name. She is the *Bride*; such is the entirety of her, this is the source of her monstrosity and her identity. 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.

In the section below each of these separate permutations of the monstrous-feminine will be unpacked, with textual examples used to provide a framework for how each monstrous-feminine aspect is displayed onscreen.

## **THE MONSTROUS-FEMININE EXPLORED**

### **The monstrous girl-child**

A little girl who displays traits a little girl should not possess is terrifying. This is a fact deeply-rooted within media culture – so much so that it expresses itself repeatedly. The monstrous girl-child is commonly recurring, terrifying enough to return to television and film screens over and over again. As per usual, this warping of femininity is done with white bodies: *Lolita*, *The Exorcist's* Regan, etc. are all little white girls who are terrifying because of their deviance from the established ideal of white passive femininity. White little girls are – of every age and gender – the most symbolic of innocence and purity. The little girl “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). She 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.

Take for example the character of Esther from the film *Orphan*. Esther is presented to the audience as a nine-year-old orphan, fond of painting and firmly in the position of the outsider. In an exchange with a couple planning on adopting her, Esther says: “I’ve never really seen the point [of parties]. I guess I’m different” (Collet-Serra, *Orphan*). This difference, this position of outsider, marks Esther throughout the movie – Esther begins to behave in ways less and less befitting the ideal little girl, ways that include both murder and an abnormal sexuality. These two things – Esther’s vengeful attacks on those who hurt her, and her sexual knowledge and attempts at sexual maturity – are both treated by the narrative as something abnormal. Says Andrew Scahill, scholar of youth representation, when summarizing the film: “Underneath [Esther’s drawings] are large wall murals of men and women copulating—offering the film’s final determination that Ester [sic] is not a child at all. With impossible sexual knowledge, Ester [sic] is not only no longer a child; she is no longer possibly a childlike adult” (2015). It is Esther’s sexuality, abnormal and disturbing for a child, that pushes her firmly over the edge into the realm of the monstrous. (Note that Scahill calls Esther’s sexual knowledge *impossible* – little girls simply *do not know this*, and it is therefore impossible for Esther to be a little girl.)

Esther’s attempt to seduce her own adoptive father is the final straw: after this seduction, the film finally pulls back the curtain and reveals that Esther is not *really* a child at all. Esther is not a nine-year-old, as *Orphan* led its audience to believe: she is thirty-three, with a rare hormone disorder that just gives her the *appearance* of a child.

Thus, the audience can feel relief: Esther is permanently separated from the ideal girl-child, because she is not a child. She is a monster masquerading as one. Says Karen Renner, pop culture scholar: “showing us that what we thought was a girl was only a monstrous simulation of a girl preserves the ideal image of innocent girlhood. Girls don’t really act this way [...] only monsters who look like girls (but aren’t)” (2012: 41). Once again comes the return to the idea of monsters: Esther is a monstrous mirror, showing through her existence everything that little girls are not – and, through that, everything that the ideal little girl should be.

The ideal little girl is pure and virginal; she exists to be acted upon. She has no knowledge besides that which adults have deemed fit to give her. She lacks any sign of adulthood – anything other than purity, chastity, and a lack of autonomy means that she must be monstrous. And yet this purity also drives her monstrosity: the purity (or potential for purity) must exist within this little girl, or there is nothing to corrupt. The horror of Esther is in the reveal; a feeling of trust and love is created in the audience for most of the movie, a need to look after Esther, and the sudden intertwining of her purity with her monstrosity is the terror in her. Consider the paintings on Esther’s walls: although they look like perfectly innocent childhood scenes, one moment of the movie reveals that underneath these scenes are scenes of intense sexual violence. The revelation is the horror – that the perfect, innocent little girl could even be considered monstrous.

### **Monstrous puberty and menstruation**

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 the character of Carrie White, specifically in the two film versions of *Carrie*. The film was released in 1976 and then rereleased in 2013, showcasing two separate viewpoints of the same character and monstrous situation. First, to focus on the 1976 version. 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 Shelley Stamp Lindsey, an expert on women and film culture:

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. (It is also Carrie's attempt to control this body that makes her monstrous; Carrie attempting to accept her own body, and her own sexuality, is something the narrative demands be punished.) 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. 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.

In the 2013 version of the film, the blood is still present – blood is linked to female fecundity from the opening scene, which shows Carrie's birth in a stream of blood. Baby Carrie stains the white bedsheets and white dress of her mother with blood, heralding her continuous links both to the monstrous fecund body and to the blood that comes with it. Carrie's bleeding in the locker room remains – but, in a modern update, the other girls in the locker room record it and upload it to Youtube. Thus the incident lingers, and – more than that – is used to consistently punish Carrie throughout the movie for the crime of beginning her womanly bleeding. (The video is even broadcasted on a screen behind the stage at prom, permanently linking Carrie's menstruation – “plug it up!” chant the girls in the locker room – to the pig's blood she's been stained with.) This is reiterated through character dialogue; Carrie's mother tells her, “God visited Eve with

a curse, and that curse was a curse of blood [...] if [you] had remained innocent, the curse of blood would not have come upon [you] as it did on Eve” (Peirce, *Carrie*). Carrie’s menstruation is a curse, a plague – not only on Carrie herself, but on everyone around her.

To reiterate: this monstrosity stems in part 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 more monstrous due to her fecundity. This is 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 the 1976 version of *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.

### **Monstrous sexuality**

Once the monstrous girl-child has gone through her puberty, her body in and of itself 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 on its own is a sort of monster. Consider again that Esther's sexuality is what marks her as inhuman; 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. 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 Renner:

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: 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. This consumption is exaggerated and monstrous: Jennifer, by the end of the movie, is quite literally inhuman, her jaw unhinging to the point that her face is entirely hunger. And yet, Jennifer’s transformation 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.

Sex is linked to death and violence, but only in women – and only when it upholds a specific narratives. “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 – and monstrous.

### **Monstrous motherhood**

But say, hypothetically, that a woman plays into the ideal narrative: she is demure, she follows the rules, she only has sex with her intended life partner and – from this sexual union – 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, and use it to uphold a narrative of traditional feminine motherhood, are rewarded by that biological purpose – their ability to carry a child – 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. However: this violence must be within acceptable parameters – upholding a narrow view of what it is to be an “acceptable” mother and monster. The Bride works within *Kill Bill* because her goal is to lovingly raise her child; this love and vulnerability that she associates with her daughter means that her violence within the film is allowed. As long as this violence serves the goal of The Bride’s eventual domestication – as long as she settles down, makes her daughter breakfast, and does other traditionally feminine tasks – the audience is allowed to root for her violence and monstrosity.

In other words, 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. The two

fight viciously in Vernita's perfect suburban living room, but the second Vernita's daughter jumps off the school bus and walks inside both women hide their knives and Vernita goes to make her daughter cereal. This is the job of the ideal monstrous mother: to have her knife out to protect her child, but to hide the knife the second her child appears and be a provider instead.

On the other side of the motherhood 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.

### **HELENA AND THE MONSTROUS-FEMININE**

*Orphan Black's* Helena stands apart from all these female monsters: although each woman mentioned throughout this paper expresses one aspect of the monstrous-feminine, Helena is unique in that she portrays *all* of them – and portrays these aspects in chronological order throughout her time on the show. Because of this, she is a particularly interesting example of the female monster and one worth analyzing more deeply. 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 – all of them duplicated from one original source, implanted as eggs in the wombs of surrogates around the world, and raised without awareness of their status as clones. Helena exists among her doubles in a position of fundamental otherness. She was raised by a religious cult, which fed her lies from a young age; they told her that all of her copies were inhuman, and as the original source from which the clones sprung, it was 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, the show begins to code her as a woman. Helena is referred to using she/her pronouns, which she does not disagree with; she is played by cisgendered female actress Tatiana Maslany, and thus the primary audience assumption may well be that Helena is a cisgendered woman. The show takes this assumption and runs with it by – immediately after the aforementioned hood removal – shifting its motives 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. She even play-acts at her own form of femininity: after breaking into the apartment of another one of her clones, she plays with the clone's high heels and pretends to have a date with a photograph of her double's boyfriend. Here the audience can see, for the first time (but not the last), Helena attempt to play at femininity: "How was your day, Paul?" she asks the photograph, before saying: "Yes, I also had a pleasant day. I went working and shopping" ("Parts Developed in an Unusual Matter"). Helena shows a child's idea of how grown women should behave – working, shopping – and her expression of this paints her even more as a monstrous girl-child.

As audience learns more about her and sees more of her, this girl-child presentation happens with increasing frequency. 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 platonic attachment to Sarah – who audiences will 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, Amelia, 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 Amelia are alone, Helena 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 echoes 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. This scene marks the end of Helena's monstrous puberty on the show – and does so with a clear textual reference to *Carrie* and the horrors of menstruation. As creator Graeme Manson says: "Homage to *Carrie*, all the way" (Ross).

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 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 once again play-acts at femininity by pretending to be one of her clones, 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 (echoing her own birth mother's pregnancy with Helena and Sarah). 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. The scene is the ideal of the suburban and the feminine: a perfect green backyard, a white picket fence, the women plying Helena with cupcakes and the lone man standing by the barbecue. Helena has a simplistic idea of what femininity should be, and this comes through in her dream sequence – and also links her motherhood to a two-dimensional feminine ideal.

The dream proceeds without deviating from this image, until Helena looks down at her stomach – at which point 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. This monstrosity is completely tied to Helena's simplistic ideal of what a mother should be and how one should behave; thus, her monstrous motherhood is concretely attached to this ideal as well. 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 dresses like Alison, mimicking her outfits and borrowing her clothes, and she proudly tells whoever will listen: “I am a mother now, I walk a different path” (“Insolvent Phantom of Tomorrow”). Once again Helena struggles with femininity, and mimics someone else's ideal of it instead of learning it on her own. However: even within this perfect suburban box, 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). Because Helena's kills are now motivated by an earnest desire to create a safe and nurturing life for her babies, she receives 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, SARAH, AMELIA, AND WHITE FEMININITY**

Helena can be left to her monstrous motherhood, but there is more to unpack with regards to the connection between Helena and motherhood itself. As mentioned, Helena’s relationship with her surrogate Amelia is a volatile one; their relationship is monstrous, and Helena’s connection to motherhood is monstrous. What is of particular importance to note *about* this relationship is Amelia’s position as one of the lone women of color within *Orphan Black* as a show. Helena’s mother (and Sarah’s mother, but that is a point to be addressed later) is a woman of color – thus, Helena’s whiteness is directly called into question in a way that it isn’t for the other female monsters within this paper. Because of this, Helena’s relationship with Amelia – and the relationship to race implied with that mother-daughter bond – makes her another interesting symbol of monstrosity: a female monster, played by a white actress, whose monstrosity directly stems from her deviation from whiteness.

Amelia is not immediately introduced as Helena’s mother; Helena’s twin sister Sarah Manning meets Amelia an episode before Helena does. (It is interesting to note that Sarah has a last name, but Amelia and Helena don’t – linking the two of them by their lack of identity.) The audience’s introduction to Amelia comes at the same time as Sarah’s, when Amelia tells her: “I’m your birth mother. Yeah, I’m...not what you expected, I’m sure. I’m sorry to arrive like this, but when word came you were looking for me I had to leave Cape Town in a hurry” (“Unconscious Selection”). Like this Amelia is immediately racialized: she is played by a black actress, and in her first line of dialogue

she reveals that she is from South Africa. Amelia is one of *Orphan Black*'s scant characters of color; one of the few others is Maggie Chen, the woman who raised Helena for most of her life before dying tragically prior to the beginning of the show. Helena's position as a child – both by the womb she grew in and the way she was raised – of two women of color calls her whiteness into question. This is when her monstrosity becomes too much for both the show and characters within the show to bear. As Halberstam says, “race becomes a master signifier of monstrosity and when invoked, it blocks out all other possibilities of monstrous identity” (1995: 5). Although Helena had been an antagonistic force throughout the entire first season of *Orphan Black*, Helena's linkage to race places her in a position of unforgivable monstrosity.

Helena and Sarah both reject the idea of Amelia being their birth mother – Helena rejects Amelia even more strongly than Sarah does, in fact, blaming Amelia for making Helena “this way” before stabbing her in the stomach. This bloody deconstruction of Amelia calls to mind Halberstam's idea of the deconstructed monster – Halberstam discusses how Frankenstein's attempt to build a female monster with a womb transforms the act of reproduction into “a bloody mess of dismemberment, a deconstruction of woman into her messiest and most slippery parts” (1995: 47). Helena's birth from the womb of a woman of color is monstrous, at least in Helena's mind, and she recalls this by remaking her mother into a monster she can understand: a bloody, dying mess. However, Helena links herself and her mother over linking herself and Sarah – Helena uses their shared mother as a reason for Sarah to meet her, saying: “We miss you, sister...come join us” (“Endless Forms Most Beautiful”). Helena joins herself and her mother into one “us,” even as her mother lays dying; she groups the two of them together in a group that

excludes Sarah. Helena, previously an outsider on the show – always orbiting away from her other clones – finds herself in an uneasy position of belonging that she cannot decide whether or not to reject. When Sarah follows Helena’s instructions and rejoins Helena and their bleeding-out mother, Helena brings her to a warehouse that she has lit up red with a flare gun – a womb-space that pulls her and Sarah back inside their mother’s black body.

An aside: Amelia’s dying words to Sarah are an entreaty for Sarah to not trust her foster mother, and to trust Amelia instead. Throughout the two episodes Amelia appears in, she and Sarah’s white foster mother, Siobhan Sadler (or Mrs. S) are pitted in opposition – Amelia is referred to as Helena and Sarah’s birth mother, never their surrogate, and Siobhan is referred to as Sarah’s foster mother. These two mothers orbit each other and openly distrust each other. This calls into question the idea of motherhood, and which of these mothers Sarah belongs to. (Helena, who has no living maternal figure outside of Amelia, does not deal with this debate.) Sarah and Siobhan have a conversation about the subject:

SIOBHAN: Sarah – mind Amelia.

SARAH: Why? It’s true, right? That she’s my birth mum?

SIOBHAN: Yeah, it seems to track, just – she didn’t *raise* you.

SARAH: Yeah, I know. You did. (“Endless Forms Most Beautiful”)

Helena and Sarah are both torn between accepting Amelia and rejecting her; but while Helena’s objections are mostly internal, Sarah deals with external pressure from another maternal figure to reject Amelia outright. Note also that in Amelia’s first introduction to

Sarah she tells Sarah that she must not be what Sarah expected – from their first meeting, the two of them are placed in opposition. Sarah thus orbits closer to whiteness than Helena, who – as a white body now linked to non-whiteness – is monstrous.

This is proven further within the show by the confrontation Sarah and Helena have after Amelia dies. Helena attacks Sarah, saying that she is doing so because of their inherent separation: “Scientists made one little baby, and then we split in two” (“Endless Forms Most Beautiful”). The two of them are fundamentally separated, now, by Helena’s removal from her own whiteness. Sarah acknowledges this by shooting her with the intent to kill. It is important to note that Sarah and Helena spend the entire season at odds: Sarah attempts to shoot Helena several times previously, but fails to do so. Now that Helena’s whiteness has been called into question, and now that she is separate from Sarah – and, presumably, the other clones – Sarah is able to kill her. (This is also the only time Helena is put in real, extreme danger during *Orphan Black*’s four seasons: this singular moment where she and Sarah oppose each other over their mother’s body. There will be no similar confrontations in the next three years.) In the final moments before the gun fires Helena makes one last entreaty to Sarah:

HELENA: Sarah...we make a family, yes?

SARAH: I’ve already got a family. (“Endless Forms Most Beautiful”)

At the last moment Helena attempts to regain the position she had prior to Amelia’s reveal – when she and Sarah were close to caring about each other – but Sarah rejects Helena – and rejects Amelia through the proxy of Helena – and instead chooses Siobhan and the white family she already possesses. Helena, with no other option *but* Amelia, is

shot – the monster defeated, or so the audience is meant to assume at the time of her wound.

It is ironic, in a way, that at time of writing Helena is pregnant with twins. Helena kills her mother and then takes her place; Amelia's entire identity revolved around her children, and now so too does Helena's. These stories come full circle. Through Helena's absorption of Amelia's identity, it can even be argued that Helena has *become* her – thus inhabiting Amelia's racialized position within the text of *Orphan Black*. Amelia has not been mentioned within the show since her death in the Season 1 finale, which means Helena is her only legacy: an unspoken, inhabited legacy, shown only through the body and not through the speech at all. Helena's racialized monstrosity is never talked about by characters within the show, leaving it to linger over *Orphan Black* without being spoken or named; and yet it persists, continuing to classify Helena as other, continuing to classify Helena as monstrous.

## CONCLUSION

Although Helena is unable to break the link between her femininity and monstrosity, she is an important character because she opens up the *possibility* of that severing. There is potential in the figure of Helena as the audience first sees her: a woman who lacks the markers of traditional femininity, and is violent despite that femininity's absence. The female monster – separated from the monstrous-feminine – is *necessary* simply because of the purpose of the monster. Recall that the monster is a mirror of what is acceptable; if the female monster is only feminine, exclusively feminine, then what does that say about what it is acceptable for a woman to be?

And, more than that: recall that the definition of monster is something that is frightening, ugly, or huge. If the frightening is still feminine, the ugly is only within acceptable and attractive parameters, and the huge is shrunk down to fit within this box – what is the monster, truly? What is the point? The female monster must break down the walls of the feminine to allow room for her smaller, prettier, less frightening counterpart to make her way through. It is the job of the monster to exist in excess, and if the female monster's excess can be *anything* then the woman onscreen can be anything too.

Helena is representative of this – because she exists on a show that revolves around a series of identical clones, she and her copies are a same-faced symbol of this very problem. Several of Helena's clones have their own struggles with femininity, but if Helena – the monster, the misfit, the exaggeration – can burst out of this box surely there must be hope for all of them to follow. And it must be Helena: she dances so close to this potential in her first scenes on this show, the female body that steps so far past the feminine paradigm that it cannot be classified as feminine at all. If Helena could take off her hood, be female, and still operate within this space – her crimes not feminine, her monstrosity not feminine – she could be revelatory.

As it is, the pattern reproduces itself. *Stranger Things'* Eleven, *The Bride* from the recent horror film of the same name, *Supernatural's* Amara – these are all examples from within the last year or so, showing that over and over again these female monsters step into the shoes that are already waiting for them. These same stories are replayed with the same beautiful bodies, on and on into infinity. Film and television tell their audiences: the only possible monster is a feminine monster. The only way a woman can be terrifying is in a bare handful of feminine ways. This story is reproduced, repackaged, and pushed out

without cease – but it could change. There is potential there. It may be a strange and violent dream, but it is a dream worth pursuing: that a trail of fictional bodies or fictional blood could be followed to a woman who is unclassifiable, free of her boxes and constraints, a true monster at last.

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