

Villainous Female Characters in Television

An analysis on the portrayal of female villains in the procedural series *The Blacklist*

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to add to the existing literature and discussion on the portrayal and representation of female characters, as stereotypes and gender-roles are still projected on female characters in today's television industry. An interesting perspective on this discussion will be shown, as this research centres around villainous characters, which also plays into societal views on when a woman is perceived as a villain. For this research, a deeper look into the police procedural genre will be taken, as the series *The Blacklist* will be used as an example for analysis. Therefore, the research question for this research is: *How are female villains portrayed in the procedural series The Blacklist?* To analyse the portrayal of female villains, three main concepts were selected to gain knowledge on different aspects of the villain, namely monstrosity, transgression and morality. Three female villains from *The Blacklist* were selected based on perceived threat, storyline and screentime: Scottie Hargrave, Kate Kaplan and Tatiana Petrova. A content analysis was used to analyse the most important episodes that featured the three villains, to establish meaning to the three main concepts and to see if similar patterns from the literature occur in the series. The results showed different villainous archetypes for each character that was analysed and each archetype contained at least one stereotypical aspect for women. Scottie Hargrave appeared to be most similar to the dangerous, powerful and beautiful woman, due to her siren-like appearance and high status that creates fear. Kate Kaplan showed characteristics of the monstrous mother and the monster-among-us, due to her need to protect Elizabeth Keen as if she was her daughter and her ability to be overlooked and blend in. Tatiana Petrova can be compared to revengeful woman and the villain that is struggling to survive, which becomes clear through analysing her past and how it has affected her. After analysing the three female villains, it became clear that each villain represented a different stereotype for woman, which could be found in all three main concepts. In conclusion, this research contributes to the discussion on gendered representation and could provide a starting point for where improvements could be made for female characters in general.

KEYWORDS: Villain, Monstrosity, Transgression, Morality, Television

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1. Introduction

Can a television series challenge the moral compass of its audience? A television series that tries to push these boundaries is *The Blacklist* (Bokenkamp, 2013-2023); a popular television series that has entered the audiences' homes in 2013 and came to an end in 2023 after ten seasons. The series centres around the most wanted criminal of the United States: Raymond Reddington (James Spader), also known as the Concierge of Crime. In the show's pilot episode, he surrenders himself to the FBI to cut a deal after years of not being captured. He proposes to help them catch other notorious criminals, but under one condition: he will only speak to Elizabeth Keen (Megan Boone), a newly hired profiler without any experience in working on high profile cases. The series revolves around the relationship between the two, as Keen is unsure as for why he entered her life in the first place and chose her for his mischievous plans. Throughout the series, Raymond Reddington operates based on a self-organised list of criminals that have been flying under the FBI's radar, the blacklist. These criminals have been ranked from 1 to 200 depending on how big of a threat they are. The FBI taskforce assigned to these operations, or the Reddington taskforce as they are often referred to, finds themselves in a difficult situation when Raymond purposely puts his competition on the blacklist to eliminate them. With the slogan 'Never trust a criminal... until you have to', the series shows its duality and morally grey character, that could possibly impact the way the audience perceives the villains in the show.

The Blacklist is an example of a procedural television series, which is characterised by a few recurring aspects in the plot of almost all episodes that can be connected to the investigations. First, a crime is introduced, then, clues and hints are given and in the end, the perpetrator is revealed (Cummins et al., 2022, p. 174). This genre is a subcategory of the detective genre (Primasita & Ahimsa-Putra, 2019, p. 33) and is also familiar with the name 'police procedurals', as it tends to represent existing procedures of police forces (Arntfield, 2011, p. 76). Most procedural television series centre around a hero figure, which could either be someone in law enforcement, like a police officer or an FBI agent, or a self-operating individual, like a private detective or even an actual superhero (Cummins et al., 2022, p. 174). *The Blacklist* differentiates itself from most television series in this genre, as it focuses on an antihero. In *The Blacklist*, Raymond Reddington, a notorious criminal, is turning in other criminals by using the resources and operators of the FBI. This series tests the limits of morality, as it continuously balances on the edge of good versus bad (Herrera, 2023). Because while 'Red' is actually helping the bureau catching abominable lawbreakers, he himself also continuously breaks the law on several occasions. As the series is characterised by its morally grey undertone, the same could be said for the criminals that take the stage in *The Blacklist*. For each individual character, a consideration has to be made whether they are good or bad; a practice that arguably requires a lot from the audience's moral judgement.

Although procedural shows try to keep their villainous characters as diverse as possible (Primasita & Ahimsa-Putra, 2019, p. 34), Poore (2017, p. 3) still indicates that most of the famous villains that people immediately think of, are male. This could be due to the fact that men have been

televised much more often throughout history (Lotz, 2014, p. 19). This dates back to the beginning of the 20th century where women in television were objectified and believed to be an accessory to their male counterpart (Conor, 2004, p. 5). Despite the fact that a lot has changed since then, elaborations on this frame of mind are still visible in today's entertainment industry. In general, female characters are still often portrayed in a stereotypical way, packed with double standards and projected expectations that do not occur when looking at male characters. This becomes even more apparent when focussing on villainous female characters and what makes them a villain through society's perspective (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 35). This adds to the ongoing discussions on gendered representation.

The research question for this thesis is: *How are female villains portrayed in the procedural series The Blacklist?* To analyse the portrayal of the villains, three main concepts will be introduced to describe the differences between the chosen female villains, namely monstrosity, transgression and morality. Each of these concepts highlights a different aspect of what it means to be a villain or to be perceived as one. Insights into how female villains are portrayed in a popular series could show whether improvements need to be made in order to enhance inclusivity amongst female (villainous) characters and could indicate which specific factors contribute to the perception of a villainous character. The television-series *The Blacklist* is chosen here, because it sets itself apart by diversity in characters, as some of the most important villains of the show are female. The findings from this research could contribute to the already extended research on female representation in film, but provide a different angle, as this research will solely focus on villainous characters. This dimension is particularly interesting, because villains are supposed to be a reflection of everything that society perceives as wrong (Wright, 2013, p. 4). Besides that, rather than comparing male and female characters, this analysis will only explore female characters, hereby also contributing to the ongoing discussion of what society believes to be acceptable for women and what line they need to cross to be marked as a villain.

1.1 Chapter overview

In the theoretical framework, the three main concepts of this thesis - monstrosity, transgression and morality - will be explained through literature and examples from the television- and entertainment industry, hereby providing an overview on the existent literature on the topic and relevant aspects of villainous characters. In the methodology, a more detailed description of the sample, data and analysis method will be given, as well as an overview of all the used material for the analysis. In the analysis chapters, the selected female villains will be analysed one by one through the main concepts to see if similar patterns from the literature occur. Lastly, the conclusion will summarize the most relevant outcomes and state limitations of the research, after which suggestions for future research will be made and implications will be given.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concepts that will be explored in relation to the portrayal of female villains are monstrosity, transgression and morality. Each concept offers an entry point into another dimension of the portrayal of a villain. Monstrosity refers to the extent to which the audience sees someone as a monster, both physically and through their personality traits (Wright, 2013, p. 4). The physical aspect of monstrosity dates back to when all villains were portrayed as ugly characters with monstrous proportions and alienated features to clearly indicate their evilness. Nowadays, this indication of monstrosity appears to be much more subtle and usually comes to life through their monstrous character traits (Carroll, 2015, p. 41). Transgression takes a villain's actions into account, as it judges them by the boundaries they cross (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 13). Three different types of transgression can be distinguished: legal transgression, social transgression and moral transgression. These types take on different forms in television and have different consequences on the villains, but also to whom their actions are directed (Manstead & Semin, 1981, p. 250; Van der Toorn et al., 2015, p. 610). The last concept, morality, refers to the underlying intentions that a villain has and if they can be judged as morally right or justifiable (Tiwari, 2022, p. 312). This concept often takes an audience approach, as morality can be characterised by bringing up mixed feelings by the viewers. In this paper, the characteristics that would normally bring up these feelings will be analysed, judging their potential for creating a morally right, wrong or grey villainous character.

As these three concepts cover all aspects that characterise a villain, including their appearance, their behaviour, their actions and their intentions, a clear picture can be drawn on the portrayal of villains in general. This paper solely focuses on the portrayal of female villains, adding another layer to the discussion about a villain's characteristics. In the past, women in the television industry have usually been portrayed as very attractive, loving and powerless and some of these stereotypes still remain intact in today's films and series. Therefore, it is interesting to look at characters where power, status and fear are the start of their existence. Through the lenses of the three main concepts of this theoretical framework, the portrayal of female villains in the procedural series *The Blacklist* will be put into frame.

2.1 Monstrosity

This section describes the concept of monstrosity. First, the establishment of the term monstrosity will be explained by giving a snippet of the history of the monster. A deeper look into the portrayal of monstrosity in the entertainment industry will be presented, after which the characteristics of a monster will be mapped out. Lastly, the specific difference between monstrosity and female monstrosity will be set out.

2.1.1 *The concept of monstrosity in television*

Ingebretsen (1998, p. 25) describes monsters as political beings, that are established through different media, that infuse stability in a community by giving it a common enemy to despise. These monsters are created to be a depiction of the failures in society, specifically the ones that cross the boundary between order and destabilization. The monster is supposed to serve as a warning for disobeying the social and/or legal norm. This implies that anyone who obeys the rules and laws, will never become a monster (Grixti, 1995, p. 87). Because a monster's nature lies both in fear and destabilisation, the monster is seen as a personification of how these failures in society can be addressed and overcome (Carroll, 2015, p. 42). According to Ingebretsen (1998, p. 25), writers create these monsters with these specific traits to visualise them being defeated, which solves as a metaphor for the restoration of social order and the overcoming of fear.

In the past, the term monstrosity referred mostly solely to the visual appearance of a monstrous character, which was often inhuman and distorted (Wright, 2013, p. 4). Examples of monstrous female villains through their appearance are Disney villains, such as The Evil Queen from *Snow White* and Ursula the Sea Witch from *The Little Mermaid*. Nowadays, the term more often also refers to a character with monstrous behaviour (Wright, 2013, p. 4). For example, a siren might look attractive, but shows monstrous behaviour and can therefore also be characterised as a monster. This shows a different perspective on the monstrous woman, which points to the hidden monster within the beautiful woman. The combination of the physical appearance and the behavioural characteristics of a villain now determine whether or not a character can be characterised as a monster.

Carroll (2015, p. 47) shows two perspectives on the recognition of a monster. The first perspective states that a monster can be spotted by looking at things that stand out, things that seem different. These characteristics could be visual, like their appearance, but also non-visual or non-verbal, like their character traits. The second perspective, on the other hand, shows that a monster rather tends to be overlooked, as its goal is to fit into society and go unnoticed for as long as possible. The second perspective refers to the 'monster-among us', which is the theory that people would be unable to spot a monster if it was standing right in front of them. Ling (2004, p. 377) finds a middle ground between these two perspectives, stating that while the monster tries to remain unseen amongst humanity, it will always remain an outsider.

2.1.2 The characteristics of a monster

The first characteristic of a monster is that the character should bring fear to the audience. This relates back to Ingebreetsen's (1998, p. 25) statement that a monster is, among other things, an incorporation of fear. This statement is also supported by Cohen (1996, p. 3-20) who wrote the 'Seven Thesis of Monster Culture' in which he identifies the aspects that define a monster. He states that the monstrous body is supposed to incorporate fear and fantasy, and should be warning. Another one of his theses refers to the fact that even when a monster dies in one story, it may very well reappear in another story to haunt a new opponent.

The second characteristic is that a monster is almost always alienated and differentiated from others. Cohen (1996, p. 6) phrases this as: 'The monster is the harbinger of category crisis'. This means that a monster is impossible to place in a box or any sort of category, as it transcends them. Besides that, he also founded another thesis that refers to the othering of monsters as it says: 'The monster dwells at the gates of difference'. This thesis refers to the fact that a monster is seen as different and as a distortion, although this is not the only meaning that can be extracted from the thesis. This aspect of monstrosity is also supported by the earlier mentioned first perspective presented by Carroll (2015, p. 47), as this perspective explains that a monster can be spotted by looking for something that stands out. Besides it indicating that a monster is different from others, it also states that monsters are close to the 'normal humans', as they are near the gates of difference.

The last clearly identifiable characteristic goes even beyond the earlier presented theory by Ingebreetsen (1998, p. 25) and Grixti (1995, p. 87), stating that a monster is not only a depiction of the failures in society and an example of what happens when one oversteps boundaries, but also a representation of mankind's desire for freedom. Cohen (1996, p. 7) explains that monsters try to explore the unknown by stepping outside boundaries and as this is often punished in the story, it functions as a warning for the audience to stay within your own boundaries, instead of being too curious. This theory was already mentioned by the other authors, but Cohen (1996, p. 16) adds another layer to this as he states: 'The fear of the monster is really a kind of desire'. The desire that is mentioned here is the desire of freedom and autonomy that a monster has (Cohen, 1996, p. 17). The last aspect that Cohen (1996, p. 20) relates to this characteristic is that these monster make us question the world around us and shape our views on societal issues by addressing them from a different perspective.

2.1.3 Female monstrosity

Female monstrosity is quite literally what it appears to be: the personification of a monstrous woman. The fact that women have their own term when it comes to the definition of monstrosity, already reveals that female monstrosity can be set apart from monstrosity, as it comprises more than just general monstrous characteristics, but also specific stereotypical female traits that contribute to the monstrous character (Deleyto, 1997, p. 21). But even more than that, female monsters are also socio-

cultural 'tools' to control the borders of what it means to be a woman in society, of what is acceptable and what is dangerous (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 35). The first example of this, is the stereotypical motherly instinct that women are said to have. Kenkel (2001, p. 545-561) expressed critique on the French drama play *Merope* (written by Voltaire) to explain the monstrous woman from this motherly perspective. In the play, Merope's motherly instinct is 'perverted' as she specifically calculates to kill the man who is responsible for the murder of her son, thereby tuning her motherly feelings into something horrific and ugly, while her character is getting more cold with the minute (Kenkel, 2001, p. 553).

Another element that is specifically related to female monstrosity is the dual feelings a monstrous woman causes on the audience. While the (male) audience naturally feels repulsion towards the unpleasant feelings a monstrous character creates, they also tend to be fascinated by the threatening experience of watching an attractive female (Deleyto, 1997, p. 33). The monstrous female is equally pleasant, as she is unpleasant. Deleyto (1997, p. 34) argues that the sexual attraction that female characters have been meant to arouse since the history of television, play a part in these mixed feelings that exist regarding female monstrosity. Joan (2000, p. 20) names this phenomenon the 'feminine-as-monstrous'. She describes this monstrous character as the most ruthless type of monster, due to its siren-like form. The feminine-as-monstrous is erotically desirable and therefore excites compassion and sympathy, while being undeniably threatening and violent. She balances between life and death, beauty and disgust and attraction and malice (Joan, 2000, p. 20). The female-as-monstrous differentiates itself from the monstrous female as this character is always attractive and desirable, in contrary to the monstrous female.

2.2 Transgression

Moving from monstrosity to transgression, this section solely focuses on a villain's actions, instead of mentioning their appearance as well. Although monstrosity takes a behavioural approach as well, this mostly relates back to monstrous characteristics that can be distinguished in a villain. Transgression on the other hand, indicates what a villain's actions are and to what category they belong, instead of connecting this to the overarching discussion of judgement. This section will look into the three different types of transgression, legal transgression, social transgression and moral transgression, and what can be categorized underneath each type (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 13).

2.2.1 *The concept of transgression in television*

Hermes and Hill (2021, p. 13) describe transgression as surpassing legal, social or moral boundaries, which tests written and unwritten rules. Transgression often involves challenging established norms and conventions, pushing the limits of what is considered acceptable or appropriate. As mentioned in Cohen's (1996, p. 3-20) *Seven Theses of Monster Culture*, a monster can be characterised by overstepping boundaries and exploring the unknown, which is often followed by punishment to send a warning to the audience. Although most monster theories refer to transgression as breaking the rules, Merkelbach (2019, p. 32) mentions that transgression could also refer to breaking the laws of nature, such as escaping the death. This creates a dimension to transgression that is only possible through television, as monstrous characters such as zombies or hybrids are created through fantasy (Merkelbach, 2019, p. 32).

Television producers have different ways to incorporate transgression into a production, such as using transgressive characters, themes or narratives (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 12). An example of a transgressive theme, that was already used in the Greek mythology, is rape (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 187). Writers use these transgressive elements to push boundaries and attract audiences, as people are often drawn to dark characters or morally grey subjects (Black et al., 2019, p. 11). The reason that dark characters and transgressive subjects are often connected in television, is that it is generally found more acceptable in media to introduce a risky topic through an already morally grey character (Black et al. 2019, p. 11). Transgressive elements in television usually result in strong emotional responses, that might spark debates between the audience (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 12).

2.2.2 *Types of transgression*

As earlier mentioned, there are three types of transgression: legal, social and moral (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 13). Legal transgression refers to overstepping laws and regulations that are upheld by a legal system and governmental institutions, which is why Bauwel (2012, p. 159) defines this type of transgression as 'transgression of the rule'. This type of transgression can be especially harmful when it is directed towards another person (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). Common examples in procedural television series are illegal activities like kidnapping, money laundering or murder. This type of

transgression is the most noticeable, as laws and regulations are a fixed factor, meaning that this does not differ for each individual. Besides that, crime and breaking rules are the key elements of the police procedural genre, especially when analysing the villains of the television series (Primasita & Ahimsa-Putra, 2019, p. 33).

Social transgression indicates the disobedience of social norms or expectation, which are established through social communities, cultures or groups (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). This type of transgression is the least harmful to the observer, as it can sometimes even be accidental (Manstead & Semin, 1981, p. 250). An accidental example might be not living up to a group's social agreements, because the transgressing person might not have been aware of these social agreements. Nevertheless, social transgression might very well be on purpose, to indicate that a character refuses to take on a role that is expected from them or does not wishes to follow the rules that are established by a specific group. Therefore, breaking these social rules can be perceived as a crime against a certain community (Bauwel, 2012, p. 159). A non-accidental example of this might be inappropriate behaviour or actions that are considered to be taboo, such as public nudity or swearing (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4).

Moral transgression means the violation of ethical and moral principles, that are established through universal or fundamental understanding (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). Examples that can describe this type of transgression are physically harming someone by punching them or mentally harming someone by lying or cheating. The difference between deceiving someone, which is a moral transgression and betraying someone's trust, which is a social transgression, is that by betraying someone's trust, a deal between two people is broken, which makes it a social understanding, whereas for deceiving, there does not need to be a pre-arranged understanding (Bilandzic et al., 2017, p. 99). Moral transgression factually does not break any laws, but can be transgressive in terms of crossing someone's boundaries. Violating this type of transgression may create a feeling of internal threat to the observer, as it can be associated with the dehumanization of a person (Van der Toorn et al., 2015, p. 610; Tileagă, 2012, p. 206). According to Bilandzic et al. (2017, p. 99), besides swearing, which is a form of social transgression, aggression and lying/deception are the most commonly used transgressions in television series.

2.2.3 Transgressive female characters

According to Chappell and Young (2017, p. 1-5), the definition of the transgressive woman in television has changed over the years, although the earlier versions of this 'Bad Girl' behaviour can still be recognised in today's television industry. The transgressive woman used to refer to female characters that disobeyed the demands of male authority. Chappell and Young (2017, p. 2) mention examples like Eve in the Bible and Pandora in the Greek mythology as the first women who refused to heed the rules that were established by the men around them. Tierney-Tello (1996, p. 34) adds another viewpoint on the transgressive woman, namely the daughter that starts a rebellion against the paternal

law. In all these cases, the female character opposes the rules that were set for her, indicating that she cannot live freely, but is rather oppressed by the people around her.

Over the years, the powerless and voiceless woman that was reliant on her male counterpart was praised, while the independent, disruptive woman was characterised as revengeful and violent and therefore needed to be restrained (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 2). In order to be called a 'transgressive woman', the female characters simply had to do something that was against the social norm that has been projected on women for ages. This is largely due to the expectations of gender roles and the appropriate behaviour attached to these roles (Sirin et al., 2004, p. 120). Failing to live up to these expectations or resistance of any kind, might lead to being perceived and evaluated negatively and being punished accordingly. Sirin et al. (2004, p. 126) mention that a double standard between male and female transgressors occurs when observing behavioural transgression, as for example dominance is seen as a transgressive trait for women, whereas for men it is not.

2.3 Morality

The last of the three concepts is morality. This concept is undeniably connected to the other two concepts, monstrosity and transgression by adding a different dimension: a villain's motives and intentions to act a certain way. The difference here between moral transgression and morality is that moral transgression focuses on the actions that cause a moral dilemma, whereas morality focuses more on the underlying motives or causes that have led the character to that moment. Adding this concept to the others will give a full picture on, not only the background of the villain, but also their motives.

2.3.1 The concept of morality in television

The concept of morality is almost always embedded into characters in television shows, but specifically for villainous characters, morality takes a different perspective. Poore (2017, p. 16) explains morality through children's shows, stating that the tendency in those shows is to depict the villain as the misunderstood outsider. In children's shows, there is no real evil, just misunderstood intentions, which sparks sympathy for the villain. The example that Poore (2017, p. 16) uses is from the movie *Frozen*, where the trolls sing: "People make bad choices if they are mad or scared or stressed", hereby partially justifying a villain's actions by attaching it to a strong emotion. In television shows that are meant for adults, the writers have the inclination to play with the audience's moral compass. This becomes apparent in *The Blacklist*, but also in the procedural series *Dexter*, which centres around a man who murders other villains (Green, 2011, p. 26). Here, the audience is put into the difficult position where they are invited to share the same twisted view on the situation as the main character himself.

Whether the audience sees a fictional character morally wrong or right depends on our judgement between good and bad. When judging ethical characters like heroes, the audience can embed their moral codes in the most effective way (Tiwari, 2022, p. 312). Nonetheless, not every character that people tend to root for or like, can be seen as an ethical character. Television shows might make the distinction between good and bad more difficult for the audience, as some shows centre around a villain or antihero. According to Keen et al. (2012, p. 134), the fact that the audience still likes these characters might be because of the Mere Exposure Effect. This indicates that when the audience sees a character more often, they tend to like them more. For example, if the villain is the main character and the audience follows them along their path, they are more drawn to them than to the 'opposite side', even if this is a hero. When being exposed to their background, motives and true intentions behind an action, this makes it more difficult to see the villain as truly evil (Keen et al., 2012, p. 134). When judging a villain or antihero that is likeable, our moral codes are being questioned, which often makes us feel uncomfortable (Tiwari, 2022, p. 313).

2.3.2 Moral Disengagement

In the uncomfortable situations that someone can start to justify the actions of an unethical character, they tend to hold on to a mechanism called Moral Disengagement (Tiwari, 2022, p. 313). This means that people tell themselves that under certain circumstances, other ethics than their usual ethics are allowed, therefore justifying the character's behaviour. This is also the reason that one can feel sympathy for a villain, even though they might have done terrible things. The eight cognitive mechanisms that are connected to moral disengagement were first introduced by Bandura (1999, p. 193-209). These describe the different ways in which our own ethics can be bended in order to justify an antihero's behaviour. If these mechanisms are activated when watching a show that features a villain, this could contribute to how the audience judges the character's morality. The most important mechanisms will be explained below.

Tiwari (2022, p. 313) explains moral justification as justifying someone's actions by attaching a purpose to it. If a character has reasonable underlying motives or intentions, it is easier to justify their behaviour and excuse them for their harmful actions. The mechanism euphemistic labelling relates to this, as it twists the definition of an event. For example, labelling the crime of stealing as 'looking out for themselves' is a way of justifying the crime (Tiwari, 2022, p. 314). Both of these mechanisms justify a villain's behaviour by shifting the cause of their actions. It is easier to like a character when their motives or reasons for committing a crime are somehow justifiable.

The next two mechanisms as described by Bandura (1999) put the blame on someone else, instead of holding the one committing the crime responsible for their actions. These mechanisms are advantageous comparison (p. 195) and attribution of blame (p. 203). Attribution of blame simply shifts the blame onto someone else, as if the villain was handling on behalf of someone else. Advantageous comparison compares the crime of the villain to an even worse crime that someone else has committed, therefore downplaying the villain's actions. The last important mechanism is dehumanization (Bandura, 1999, p. 200). This mechanism differs itself from the others by looking at the victim, instead of the villain to justify the villain's crimes. If the victim is dehumanized, therefore stripped of favourable qualities, it is easier to justify a crime committed towards them. If people don't like the villain's victim, or even think they might deserve it, the audience might even root for the villain and start to like them more.

2.3.3 Morality of female characters

A woman's motives to commit a crime or behave in a monstrous way might differ from other characters that act in the same way. While male villains motives mostly find their origin in power, status or violence, the motives of female villains still tend to hold on to a stereotypical image that is created by the entrainment industry (Deleyto, 1997, p. 33). A motive that was mentioned before as present in *Merope*, is the motherly instinct motive, where the female character feels the need to protect her child and therefore commits crimes (Kenkel, 2001, p. 553). This motive relates to the motive of

love (for another person, e.g. a partner, family or child) that plays into the projected gender-specific traits that women are supposed to have (Sirin et al., 2004, p. 120). Chappell and Young (2017, p. 184) find another recurring motive for a villainous women in the role of *Medusa*: revenge for what a man did to them. This motive relates back women being perceived as transgressive when they defy male authorities.

On the other hand, when judging a villainous character, the focus will mostly depend on their motives and intentions. Since female characters often have a motive that isn't born out of evil, but rather out of feelings, this makes it less difficult to judge them as a morally wrong character and rather sparks sympathy for the character (Poore, 2017, p. 16). These intentions and motives, combined with the fascination that a villainous female character might arouse, due to their appearance and sexuality, ensures that it is harder for the audience to judge the character as evil and instead will more easily receive the benefit of the doubt (Deleyto, 1997, p. 33).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research will take the approach of a qualitative content analysis of the television series *The Blacklist*. A qualitative method is more suitable here, because this research will deal with subjective concepts and meaning making, instead of numbers and statistics. This particular design is chosen, because of the ability to establish meanings to larger amounts of textual or visual data (Berelson, 1952, p. 515). In this case, the data will be both visible and textual, as the research will cover data from episodes based on narrative and visuals. By performing a content analysis, patterns and relationships between concepts can be discovered that may contribute to the overall research question and topic. The main concepts that the findings of this analysis will be linked to are monstrosity, transgression and morality.

3.2 Sample

3.2.1 Procedural television series – *The Blacklist*

For this research, (police) procedurals will be the genre that is explored. This genre was chosen, as this genre normally showcases a wide variety of villains. Most procedural shows feature a new villain every single episode, that gets captured within the same timespan (Cummins et al., 2022, p. 174). This results in a large database of villains to choose from and therefore a lot of diversity. Producers keep the villain-cast as inclusive as possible to attract audiences and keep them interested (Primasita & Ahimsa-Putra, 2019, p. 33). With a larger database, it is easier to select female villains, as female characters are still often underrepresented (Lotz, 2014, p. 19). By focussing solely on female villains, this research aims to not only add to the existing literature on villains, but also to the portrayal of powerful women. Besides that, some research has been conducted on the impact of female villains in Disney films, but these women are often portrayed in a physically monstrous way as well, by making them purple or hideous to look at (Wellman, 2020, p. 5). This research centres around realistically portrayed women that are monstrous mostly through their behaviour, although they differ significantly in appearance (Wright, 2013, p. 4).

The Blacklist is a very diverse show, which is visible through the cast, as people from all different ethnicities are shown in both hero and villain roles. Not only the cast can be seen as diverse, also the roles that they play show a large variety of villain-types. The characters vary from mass-murderers and drug dealers to cult leaders and evil surgeons, making each villain unique in their behaviour, ways and crimes. Besides that, all villains in *The Blacklist* are very detailed in terms of their characteristics. As each villain is introduced into the series, they are presented to the audience with an entire background, in order for the audience to understand the context of the villain's life and where their motives originate from. Another reason that this show is suitable for this research is the fact that they also include many female villains in their show. The biggest storylines actually belong to female villains, instead of male villains, making this a suitable television series for this research.

3.2.2 Sample selection

Out of approximately 40 female villains that are introduced in *The Blacklist*, three female villains have been selected: Scottie Hargrave (Famke Janssen), Kate Kaplan (Susan Blommaert) and Tatiana Petrova (Laila Robins). The selection criteria that all three villains met that have led to their choosing is that they have the most screen time out of all the other female villains. They have the most visual content that can be analysed and are therefore the most interesting to draw conclusions upon. Kate Kaplan (storyline in season 4, 28 episodes throughout the series) and Tatiana Petrova (storyline in season 7, 16 episodes throughout the series) are by far the most detailed female villains of the show, as they have an entire season dedicated to them. Scottie Hargrave (storyline in season 3, 12 episodes throughout *The Blacklist* franchise) on the other hand, became one of the main characters of the spin-off series *The Blacklist: Redemption* (Bokenkamp et al., 2017) after her appearance on *The Blacklist*.

The second reason that these female villains have been chosen, is because they are provided with a large background, motives and character traits that can be analysed. Additionally, as mentioned before, each villain on the show receives a ranking on the blacklist that was created by Raymond Reddington. The higher the villain is ranked, the more dangerous and threatening they are perceived to be to the main characters of the show. The three chosen female villains all have a high rank. Tatiana Petrova is the second highest ranked female villain of the show, as she is ranked number three. Kate Kaplan follows Tatiana Petrova on this list, as she comes in at number four. Scottie Hargrave takes the sixteenth spot on the list. Each one of these villains also portrays a different perspective on the three main concepts (monstrosity, transgression and morality), as they all have various character developments, commit different crimes and have a different way of handling situations.

3.2.3 Data

The data that will be analysed for this thesis are specific episodes featuring the three chosen female villains. These episodes are all available on Netflix. For Scottie Hargrave, three full episodes were analysed, as well as parts from two other episodes from season 3. For Kate Kaplan, multiple episodes throughout season 4 were analysed, a total of six full episodes. For Tatiana Petrova, the most relevant episodes from her storyline were analysed. These episodes were almost all from season 7, but two episodes were from season 8. All episodes were approximately 42 minutes long. The specific episodes can be found in Table 1.

Character	Season and Episode	Writer, Director and Year
Scottie Hargrave	Season 3, Episode 17	Studler & Egilsson, 2016
	Season 3, Episode 18	Cerone & Terlesky, 2016
	Season 3, Episode 20	DeNoon & Thorin, 2016
	Season 3, Episode 21	Cerone & McCarthy, 2016
	Season 3, Episode 22	Eisendrath & Dinner, 2016
Kate Kaplan	Season 4, Episode 17	Cerone & O'Hara, 2017

	Season 4, Episode 18	Noah & Watkins, 2017
	Season 4, Episode 19	Studler & Thorin, 2017
	Season 4, Episode 20	Reiter & Roe, 2017
	Season 4, Episode 21	Reiter & Thorin, 2017
	Season 4, Episode 22	Reiter & Watkins, 2017
Tatiana Petrova	Season 7, Episode 1	Eisendrath & Roe, 2019
	Season 7, Episode 2	Reiter & Hessler, 2019
	Season 7, Episode 3	Johnson & Robinson, 2019
	Season 7, Episode 8	Reiter & Holohan, 2019
	Season 7, Episode 9	Hennen & Marquardt, 2019
	Season 7, Episode 10	Cerone & McCarthy, 2020
	Season 8, Episode 1	Cerone & McCarthy, 2020
	Season 8, Episode 2	Reiter & Marquardt, 2020

Table 1. The Blacklist episodes per villain.

3.3 Operationalization of Concepts

The three main concepts that will be analysed in this research paper are monstrosity, transgression and morality. These concepts will help define why the audience perceives certain villains as evil and some as good or better. The fact that characters can also be portrayed as morally grey, makes it interesting to see which factors contribute to our judgement of villainous characters.

For the concept of monstrosity, a distinction can be made between two different aspects, namely a character's appearance and their personality traits. These things are the most visible when it comes to analysing a character, because these are the first things that are noticeable. For a character's appearance, attention will be paid to their looks, but also the way they dress and how this might contribute to the development of a specific archetype. The other aspect, personality traits, covers their characteristics and character traits like aggressiveness or charisma. It also covers their display of emotions and how they handle certain situations.

As mentioned before, transgression can be divided into three sub-sections, namely legal transgression, social transgression and moral transgression. This concept focusses solely on a character's actions that overstep boundaries. These actions will be analysed by the nature of the crime, the context of the situation and the damage it does to the receiver. By doing this, the actions can be categorised into dangerous and less-dangerous transgressions, which can say a lot about a character. Besides that, it will be indicated which of these actions find their nature in the stereotypical female transgressive actions as established by the entertainment industry.

The last concept, and also the most difficult recognisable concept, is morality, which covers a character's motives and underlying intentions. This will, for example, be analysed by taking a look at the character's background story to see where they are coming from and what has lead them to this moment and to their decision-making. Other aspects that might tell something about a character's morality are the relationships they have with others. Besides that, this section also focusses on the moral dilemmas that a character causes throughout the show. As this is a difficult underlying aspect

that is mostly established through the eyes of the audience, it will simply list what factors could contribute to a character being perceived as morally grey or which actions could be seen as justifiable.

3.4 Analysis

As mentioned before in the sample section, the three specific villains were chosen based on, among other things, screentime and ranking. Due to the fact that these female villains had very large storylines that could be analysed, a selection had to be made out of the episodes that they were featured in. The most relevant episodes for the storyline and the understanding of the villain were chosen to sketch a complete image of the portrayal of the villain. As the researcher had previously watched the entire series of *The Blacklist* twice already, the selection process was notably easier. For every villain, the introduction and conclusion episode of their storyline was analysed in full, as well as the episodes that featured key elements and highlights of the villain's development and general character.

After the selection of the episodes, the researcher watched each episode once and replayed specific moments that needed further analysis. The notes that were made by the researcher during each episode were mostly descriptive, by for example describing the current situation or the context that could be withdrawn from multiple scenes. Besides that, the notes also consisted of dialogues from the script that might contribute to the realization of one of the main concepts. Lastly, the researcher took pictures of certain outfits to make it easier to describe them afterwards through the lens of monstrosity. After all notes were written down, they were divided into the three main categories: monstrosity, transgression and morality. To finalise the notes, the most relevant ones were selected to be elaborated on further in the results section to provide evidence for the specific archetypes that each villain represents.

4. Analysis Chapter 1: Scottie Hargrave

4.1 Introduction

The first female villain that will be analysed is Scottie Hargrave (Famke Janssen). As she is villain number 18 on the blacklist, the indication is given that she is perceived as a large threat to the main characters of the show. Her character not only appears in the show *The Blacklist* as a side character, but is also one of the main characters in the spin-off show *The Blacklist: Redemption* where more of her background and personal life is being disclosed. This analysis will solely focus on her time on *The Blacklist*, but will take into account certain developments that were made in the spin-off. The character made her first appearance in season 3 episode 20 'The Artax Network' (DeNoon & Thorin, 2016) and her last appearance in season 5 episode 9 'Ruin' (Hennen & Caracciolo, 2018). It is important to note that out of the three villains that will be analysed, she is the only one who is still alive after opposing Raymond Reddington.

The archetype of female villain that Scottie resembles with most, is the dangerous, powerful and beautiful woman. As she is both threatening and beautiful, this could create dual feelings for the audience (Deleyto, 1997, p. 20). Her manipulative social skills and cold emotions add to the threat that this female villain poses throughout the show. These villainous characteristics occur more often in *The Blacklist*, as this pattern can be recognised, among others, in the characters Laurel Hitchin (Christine Lahti) - whose name did not make it onto the blacklist, but was part of a larger criminal organisation within the government - and Anna McMahon (Jennifer Ferrin) - who is number 60 on the list. To clarify the origins of Scottie Hargrave's character, her background story will be elaborated on briefly. In this chapter, it will be argued how Scottie Hargrave's characteristics contribute to this villainous archetype by looking at her appearance and character traits (monstrosity), her actions (transgression) and her intentions and possible justification for her actions (morality).

4.2 Background Story

Susan 'Scottie' Hargrave is a powerful woman, a great strategist and co-founder of her own company, Halcyon Aegis; a private and independent military organisation with teams of corporate operatives. The organisation occasionally cooperates with the American government to handle international military operations that require an independent party due to their complex and politically-incorrect nature. When the American government hires Halcyon Aegis, it is usually for an operation that requires discretion to keep other countries uninvolved. As the organisation is still a private company, anyone with any intentions can hire Halcyon Aegis for military precision and assistance. Because of her ties to the government, Scottie Hargrave appears to be untouchable.

The character first starts out as the villain in her storyline at the end of season three. She is part of the organisation that is hired to fulfil three tasks: to oppose the FBI team, to abduct Elizabeth Keen and to kill Raymond Reddington. Only the last one of these three tasks is left aside by Scottie, because of their shared history, which unravels throughout the following episodes due to the subtle mentions of

their past. Even though there seems to be mutual respect between Hargrave and Reddington, it becomes clear early on that her loyalty certainly does not lie with Reddington. After the FBI team has been left in the dark for multiple episodes trying to find the person behind multiple attacks on their team, they find a lead directing towards Scottie. After she has been illegally captured by Raymond Reddington, he proposes to cut a deal with her to go after the person that contracted her, hereby suddenly shifting into her role of an ally. After some of her secrets are revealed, she turns from a threatening villain, into a powerful ally. One of the most important secrets that has led to her becoming an ally, is the fact that Tom, Elizabeth's husband appears to be her son that disappeared decades ago. The unravelling of this secret causes a shift in Scottie's emotions; where little emotion could be spotted early on, she is suddenly capable of showcasing these emotions regarding her son's re-appearance. In season 5, she even becomes the person that takes care of Elizabeth and Tom's child when Elizabeth has to work late or has an emergency.

4.3 Monstrosity

When looking at the monstrosity that can be seen from one's physique, through Scottie Hargrave's appearance, it can be noticed very quickly that this villain is not a stereotypical depiction of a monstrous character as described by Wright (2013, p. 4). Scottie Hargrave is introduced in the series when the FBI taskforce finds a surveillance photo of their prime suspect talking to Scottie. As the suspect claimed to never have heard of Scottie, one of the FBI agents replies: "This doesn't look like a woman anyone would forget" (Season 3, Episode 20 — DeNoon & Thorin, 2016), verbalising the beautiful appearance of the woman. Even though Scottie is in her forties, she looks a lot younger than her age. Scottie is an example of what Joan (2000, p. 20) characterises as a feminine-as-monstrous, due to her siren-like appearance and personality. Besides that, the outfits she is wearing also add to her admirable appearance, because she always embodies a rather classy and lady-like style using bold colours to accentuate her bodily features. These outfits not only add to her beauty, but can also be a depiction of her power as a (business)woman. Her beautiful physical appearance, combined with the layers underneath it that showcase monstrous behaviour, make this character a very dangerous villain as she is often wrongly underestimated.

Besides her physical looks, her facial expressions and body language also add to the characteristics of a powerful and dangerous woman (Figure 1). This could, for example, be seen in the look she has in her eyes, which adds to her siren-like appearance, as it could be perceived as a confident and manipulative look. For example, even after she is captured (Season 3, Episode 21 — Cerone & McCarthy, 2016), she is still very arrogant and full of herself. It almost seems as if she enjoys everything she does, even if things do not go to plan. She feels that she is untouchable, which in the end she is. She always comes across as self-fulfilled and independent, which can be seen in the way she talks, sits and walks. The use of camera angles that clearly show the powerful poses she adopts, add to this untouchable image. Scottie is a charismatic character that can run a business like no

other, because of her power and skills. She is the exact opposite of the voiceless and helpless woman as described by Chappell and Young (2017, p. 2).

Figure 1

Scottie deceives Raymond in Season 3, Episode 21 (Cerone & McCarthy, 2016)



As Wright (2013, p. 4) mentioned that monstrosity is not only about appearance, but rather about certain traits that a character might have, there are several character traits that add to Scottie's monstrosity. In season 3, episode 21 (Cerone & McCarthy, 2016), it becomes apparent that Scottie is a master in the art of manipulating and seducing. When trying to convince an investor to hire her organisation for an operation, she puts his hand on her breast, hereby shocking the man and leaving him in disbelief. She does this to reassure him that he can trust her, by using her female charms. This works and the man agrees to hire her organisation. The use of her beauty to manipulate male characters adds to the siren-like characteristics that Scottie demonstrates (Joan, 2000, p. 20).

Even though Scottie Hargrave looks attractive and desirable, her personality is rather cold and ruthless most of the time. She generally does not show a lot of emotions throughout the show. Even when she is worried about something, it is barely visible to the other characters and the audience. The only time when her true feelings shine through, is when she talks about her son. This plays into the existing expectation that women should feel a certain way when talking about their children that differs from showing their general emotions (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 35). Scottie's personal life remains secretive for the first few episodes, although it is made clear that she is holding on to a lot of secrets. Later on, it is revealed that her son Christopher had disappeared from their beach house on vacation when he was very young. This harmed her and her relationship with her husband as they spend years looking for him. The fact that she suddenly is capable of showing her feelings when it comes to parenthood, is an example of a stereotypical female trait that is added to the monstrous

character of the villain. This characteristic actually opposes the female villainous archetype that Scottie portrays, but does align with other stereotypical female expectations.

Another characteristic that supports the idea of Scottie being a monstrous character, relates back to Ingebreetsen's (1998, p. 25) theory that a monster is most likely a depiction of fear. It becomes clear that Scottie uses fear to pressure people in season 3, episode 21 (Cerone & McCarthy, 2016). In that episode, the leader of the FBI taskforce wants to present the evidence against Scottie Hargrave, but everyone, including the lawyer tells them to stay away from the matter. This scene also indicates the power Scottie has and the friends she has in high places. This gets supported by the next moments in the scene; After being told to back down, the leader of the taskforce returns to the office and his colleagues asks: "Why was the warrant denied?" on which he replies: "I don't know. Power, influence, fear". Even though Scottie is never visibly intimidating others or threatening them verbally, she has an intimidating air around her caused by the influence she has due to her ties to the government and the leverage she has over people.

4.4 Transgression

4.4.1 Legal transgression

When analysing the legal crimes Scottie has committed, one thing that immediately stands out is that all crimes appear to be a business transaction for her, as she always operates on behalf of someone else. Hermes and Hill (2021, p. 4) describe legal transgression as breaking the law, disturbing the reigning order and disobeying authorities, which makes Scottie's case a little different than the other villains that are analysed. Although she can be seen as obedient to authorities, as she sometimes operates on behalf of the American government, these operations are still purposely disobedient to other parties, for example authorities from targeted countries. Besides that, she still leads an independent company that could take on assignments from anyone, which includes people that would like to use her services for harmful purposes. Specifically these assignments are the reason she could be seen as a transgressive character. The first and most prominent example, as it was directed towards the main characters and hereby introducing her to the audience, is that she leads the team that attempts to kidnap an FBI agent, killing many bystanders and injuring even more (Season 3, Episode 17 — Studler & Egilsson, 2016; Season 3, Episode 18 — Cerone & Terlesky, 2016). The FBI agent in question, Elizabeth Keen, was pregnant and gets shot, causing an emergency birth that almost killed both her and the baby. This example also proves Hermes and Hill's (2021, p. 4) statement that this type of transgression is the most harmful, especially when it is targeted towards another person. However, this is not the only time that Scottie and her team have surpassed legal boundaries. For example, in season 3 episode 21 (Cerone & McCarthy, 2016), she leads an operation in the harbour of Amsterdam to increase a company's profit by eliminating the competition. She intends on destroying their product, so the other company can fill this gap in the market.

4.4.2 Social transgression

Since Scottie can be seen as a powerful character, this is also implemented in the socially transgressive situations that can be spotted in her storylines, as these situations indicate that she feels more powerful than her opponent. Social transgression differs from legal transgression as no legal boundaries are surpassed in social transgression, but instead crosses social boundaries that are established by groups or communities (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). The first example that can be derived from *The Blacklist*, is when Scottie showed up to the nursery room of Elizabeth Keen's baby, whom she almost killed (Season 3, Episode 22 — Eisendrath & Dinner, 2016). This was after she made an alignment with Reddington to keep each other safe. Even though Elizabeth and Tom Keen wanted nothing to do with Scottie, she still held their child without their consent. A reason for this could be that she wanted to express that peace between the two parties was possible for her. It also could be a sign of dominance, which relates back to her villainous archetype. Although this situation is not illegal, it is still threatening for the father to see the woman that just attacked his wife and child, holding his child in her arms. This is an example of a non-accidental social transgressive situation, as Scottie was fully aware that this would cause the father to be furious (Manstead & Semin, 1981, p. 250). This situation also adds to her villainous archetype, as caring for a baby could be seen as something beautiful and harmless, just like Scottie's appearance also suggests in the first place, but when taking a closer look at the context of the situation, it could be perceived as a very dangerous move, since she was responsible for emotional damage and the need for medical procedures.

Another example of a situation that was non-accidental and also a clear sign of Scottie feeling untouchable, was when Scottie purposely betrayed Raymond Reddington by leading him into an ambush. This situation is socially transgressive, because trust is a social concept (Manstead & Semin, 1981, p. 250). It is common knowledge amongst almost all communities that trust is not to be broken and could be very harmful to the victim. In season 3, episode 21 (Cerone & McCarthy, 2016), Raymond sets up a meeting with Scottie to talk out their differences and to propose a deal. Scottie immediately reached out to her previous contractor, that wanted Raymond dead. He came up with a plan to kidnap him in a place that he knew Raymond would be vulnerable: the airport. Because of the heavy security, he knew Raymond would have to go through great lengths to even reach the meeting place. When he made it, instead of meeting him there alone, Scottie betrayed his trust and set him up, while he did held up his part of the deal. This also shows that Scottie only answers to the highest bidder and to the person she believes has her best interest.

4.4.3 Moral transgression

The first transgressive situation that causes a moral dilemma, is when Scottie uses her power to kidnap Elizabeth's baby (Season 3, Episode 22 — Eisendrath & Dinner, 2016). The scene started with Elizabeth's husband running into the nursery room when he saw the police standing outside of the room. He quickly realised that his child had been taken and panicked, which is a logical response.

Moments later, he receives a call from Scottie, who was an ally at that point, that she received information that his child was in danger, so she 'rescued' the baby from the hospital and brought her to a safe place. She gave him the address, so they could be reunited in a safe environment. The fact that she did this without consent or awareness of the parents, causes a moral dilemma, because she tried to help, but caused a lot of threat to the father (Van der Toorn et al., 2015, p. 610). Scottie actively uses her power and influence for what she believes is right or for what is best for her, without the consent of others, which is very typical for the archetype that Scottie portrays.

Another morally transgressive situation occurs when Scottie leads an operation that frees innocent aid workers from a hostage situation - which could be perceived as a rightful deed -, but receives a great sum of money for this. She rescues them by kidnapping one of the hostage takers and freeing the hostages that are held at that location. As she now has leverage over the hostage takers, she demands money from them instead of the other way around. This action could also be seen as legal transgression, because she overstepped the legal boundaries of the country they were held in (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). On the other hand, this assignment was for a good cause and was initiated by the American government. It could even be said that she was hereby taking orders from the authorities. The fact that she also received a lot of money from this (for her contract with the government and from the hostage takers) makes this moral dilemma even bigger. Even when Scottie is doing something for a good cause, it is still because she is working for a contractor and there is a great personal benefit to be gained.

4.5 Morality

The moral dilemma that this character creates is that on one hand, she helps leading big operations that cost the lives of people and ruin others, but on the other hand, she also leads a lot of morally good operations, freeing hostages and even helping the main characters in the end. She simply answers to the highest bidder. As she has a lot of power and influence, she could use this to do so much good, but she also chooses to lead operations for large criminal organizations and parties. Keen et al. (2012) explain that when a character's motives and intentions behind an action are revealed and these are perceived to be morally good, it is harder to judge a character as being evil or morally wrong. In Scottie's case, not much of her true intentions or motives are revealed, besides the fact that she executes depending on the contractor's needs. So in this case, based on her intentions, it might actually be easier to judge the character quite harshly, but her appearance and social abilities are the reason that this character is not seen as purely evil.

4.5.1 Intentions

The only time when her intentions shimmer through, is when she is contracted to go after Elizabeth Keen after she is hired by Alexander Kirk (Ulrich Thomson), who believes Elizabeth is his daughter, and his only way to survive is if she donates blood to him as he has a rare blood disease

(Season 3, Episode 22 — Eisendrath & Dinner, 2016). Since Scottie has a history with Raymond Reddington, she does not want to defy him out of respect. In season 3, episode 21 (Cerone & McCarthy, 2016), it is made clear that the actions against the FBI taskforce and Raymond Reddington are not something she wants to do. It is suggested that she is being blackmailed by Kirk with a secret from her past. This becomes apparent when she tells Reddington: “we all do what we have to do to survive”. In this scene, sympathy can be felt for Scottie, therefore making it harder to dislike her and hereby questioning our moral codes (Tiwari, 2022, p. 313).

4.5.2 Moral Disengagement

The first mechanism of moral disengagement that could resonate with the audience is euphemistic labelling (Tiwari, 2022, p. 314). In the case of euphemistic labelling, the nature of the crime that was committed by the villain is twisted slightly to make it seem like the crime was not too bad at all or was serving as a purpose. As mentioned before, it was suggested that Scottie was being blackmailed or framed by her contractor to perform actions she did not want to commit. Her actions could therefore be justified by saying that she was just doing what was best for herself. Euphemistic labelling shifts the cause of her actions by looking at what the intentions behind it were (Tiwari, 2022, p. 314). As her intentions were not harmful here, this could potentially activate this mechanism of moral disengagement, hereby making the audience question their judgement of the character.

A mechanism that could also be activated when looking at the same situation is attribution of blame. If this mechanism is activated, the blame is shifted from the villain onto someone else (Bandura, 1999, p. 203). This could be applied more than once throughout the series for Scottie. Scottie Hargrave always works on the instructions of someone else; that is the nature of the operations of her company. When Alexander Kirk hired her to kidnap Elizabeth Keen, because he believed she was his daughter, she took the assignment, but was never the initiator or commander. This is also why she was able to make a deal with Reddington to go after Kirk, because she was only the executor and her contract with him was strictly business to her. Since Scottie simply answers to the highest bidder without asking too much questions, she can be seen as a mediator, instead of the cause of the problem. Therefore, another mechanism, advantageous comparison, is also applicable on this situation (Bandura, 1999, p. 195). As Alexander Kirk is seen as a much bigger threat and a more evil villain, making a deal with Scottie appeared to be the better option.

The attribution of blame mechanism by Bandura (1999, p. 203) can also be connected to all the other contracted deals that Scottie has ever made with Halcyon Aegis. This, for example, applies to the deals she has made with the government. These actions could be seen as questionable, because it involved crossing other countries' physical and political boundaries by interfering and negotiating with organisations within their country. On the other hand, this is exactly why the government needs them, to be able to keep their own hands clean and still achieve their goals. In some cases, these operations

take the shape of human rights actions like freeing hostages that are being held in warzones, in other cases, this involves spying on another country to protect America from being attacked.

4.6 Conclusion

This evidence provides the link that connects the character of Scottie Hargrave to the female villainous archetype of the beautiful, powerful and dangerous woman. To begin, her appearance and style ensure that Scottie can be seen as an undeniably beautiful woman. This beauty is part of her strength, as she weaponizes her charms and female features into manipulative skills. Combined with her impeccable social abilities, Scottie Hargrave is the personification of the siren-like villain (Joan, 2000, p. 20). Her real emotions on the other hand, are almost never visible throughout the show, as she is perceived as a cold woman. Her actions make her very powerful and dangerous, given she has many friends in high places and has the resources to lead high level operations. She is a villain that uses fear to intimidate others (Ingebretsen, 1998, p. 25). Since she only answers to the highest bidder, her intentions are somewhat questionable, as her motivations are mostly money-related. The only thing that does not fit into the archetype that Scottie falls under, is the fact that her love for her son sparks sympathy and make her vulnerable.

5. Analysis Chapter 2: Kate Kaplan

5.1 Introduction

The next female villain that will be analysed is Kate Kaplan (Susan Blommaert). Kate, whose real name is revealed to be Katheryn Nemec, is number 4 on the blacklist. Although her appearance might suggest that she is a rather non-threatening opponent, her high ranking on the list proves otherwise. Her character first appeared in season 1, episode 10 (Reiter & Watkins, 2013) and jumped of a bridge in season 4, episode 22 (Reiter & Watkins, 2017), leading to her death. After that, she made several re-appearances as a memory or ghost. In the first seasons, she served as a worthy ally and trusted friend of Raymond, until she became the villain in the story halfway through season 4 in episode 8 (Cerone & Watkins, 2016).

Susan Blommaert's villain differs a lot from Famke Janssen's villain, as Kate is definitely not seen as an attractive or even powerful woman. She is often underestimated and overlooked, but eventually holds the power to destroy Reddington's empire, because she was there when he built it. Therefore, Kate Kaplan is a clear example of the monster-among-us, as she easily goes unnoticed by her opponents (Carroll, 2015, p. 42). Besides that, Kate also shows characteristics belonging to the monstrous woman from a motherly perspective, as characterised by Kenkel (2001, p. 553). Her main motive for becoming a villain is protecting the main character Elizabeth Keen, as she feels the need to protect her from Reddington, who is keeping dangerous secrets from her. She sees herself as her guardian angel, even though she is not her mother. These characteristics can also be found in another character of the show, namely Elizabeth's real mother, Katarina Rostova (Lotte Verbeek). In this chapter, the main concepts monstrosity, transgression and morality will again be used to argue that Kate's characteristics match the description of the monstrous motherly villain after a brief introduction of the character and her background.

5.2 Background story

Kate Kaplan is one of the most complex characters in the entire series. She used to be Reddington's oldest and most trusted confidants. She stood beside him for over 30 years to clean up the bodies he left behind while he built his empire. Kate has studied the dead since a very young age. After working in a mortuary, she decided to focus on the beginning of life, instead of the end of it. So, she became a nanny, specifically for the Rostova family, and cared for Elizabeth when she was a baby. After finding out that Elizabeth's mother, Katarina, was a Russian spy, she helped cover up for her and cared for Elizabeth when she had to leave her behind. After Katarina called with instructions, Kate left Elizabeth with a foster family and was told to never look back. She returned to her old life as a coroner, until she received a request from Raymond Reddington to join him and his crew in keeping Elizabeth safe as her life would come in danger when people would find out that her mother was Katarina Rostova. She accepted the request, but told him: "If you ever put me in a position where I

have to choose between you and Elizabeth, I will always choose her” (Season 4, Episode 17 — Cerone & O’Hara, 2017).

After standing by his side for decades, she did what she promised to do in the first place, which was putting Elizabeth’s safety first. At the time of Elizabeth being pregnant, she truly believed she needed to get Elizabeth out of Raymond’s life in order for her to be safe, so she helped fake her death. Raymond could not forgive her for this betrayal of his trust and shot her. Redington thought the shot was fatal and left the scene, but Kaplan managed to get back up and recover in secret. When she returned, she managed to steal his money without him suspecting she was still alive, as she was still authorized to draw money from his accounts. After that, she dug up all the bodies she had buried over the years for Reddington and handed them over to the authorities on a silver platter. By doing this, she tried to get Raymond out of Elizabeth’s life and to expose all of the secrets that he had been keeping from her. She proved to be a worthy enemy and did a lot of damage to Reddington’s empire, but committed suicide afterwards, because she couldn’t stand the thought of living together with Reddington.

5.3 Monstrosity

In contrast to Scottie Hargrave, Kate Kaplan is not meant to be desirable or attractive to the audience, but is rather a very small and stiff lady. She clearly fits Ling’s (2004) description that a monster tries to go unnoticed within societal groups, but will always remain an outsider. This not only happens when looking at her characteristics, but it can also be seen in her looks. For example, she only wears colours like black, brown and grey. It is often said in the series that she feels overlooked, which might also be because of her choice in clothing. Besides that, her age also has something to do with the fact that this character is not supposed to be attractive, as Kate is in her mid-sixties. In general, this is not the age that women are perceived as the most attractive. What also stands out, is that after Kate becomes a villain, the lighting in the scenes shift to a darker tone (Figure 2). As Kate is often overlooked or unnoticed because of her height, age and clothing style, she perfectly fits the description of the monster-among-us (Carroll, 2015, p. 42).

Figure 2:

Kate Kaplan in Season 4, Episode 17 (Cerone & O'Hara, 2017)



In terms of emotions, Kate Kaplan and Scottie Hargrave are actually very similar characters, since they both show little emotion throughout the show. The only difference is that Scottie creates the illusion that she feels no emotions and in general comes across as a cold person, but with Kate it is obvious that she does feel emotions and is a warm person; her face just does not show it. This comes across as very powerful, because even when it is evident that she is desperate or feels enormous pain, she still holds her head held high and does not break down in any way. According to Chappell and Young (2017, p. 2), it can be seen as dangerous that a woman is strong and independent even in times of need. Since Kate thinks of herself as Elizabeth's protector, she finds it difficult to seek help for herself, as she wishes to do everything herself.

Kate Kaplan became the example of what happens when you defy Raymond Reddington, which adds to her monstrous characteristics, as many monsters serve as a warning to society of what happens when someone defies (male) authorities (Grixti, 1995, p. 87). She betrayed his trust and therefore got shot in the head. She survived the gunshot, because she has a metal plate implanted in her head, and came back to defy Raymond one more time. In the end, she still did not get the results she wanted. Ingebreetsen (1998, p. 25) explains that these type of monstrous characters are created to be defeated, to send a warning to others that might try the same. Kaplan's storyline fits this description, as she did everything in her power to defeat Raymond Reddington, but in the end, he used her as an example to the underworld to show that it will not end well for you if you try to defy him.

Besides that, Kate Kaplan tries to shape the view on what she believes is a societal issue: Raymond Reddington, the most wanted criminal in the United States, working together with the American government. The American government continues to persevere that the deal they closed with Reddington helps them catch criminals they did not even know existed, hereby excusing the lawfully wrong nature of the deal. Kaplan tries to change their minds by serving them almost a

hundred bodies that Raymond has killed over the years, of which many during the time he was under contract with the government. This characteristic supports Cohen's (1996, p. 17) seventh thesis that states that a monster makes the audience question authorities and might show different perspectives on societal issues.

One of the characteristics that relates the character of Kate Kaplan to monstrosity, is by the way she is referred to throughout the series. According to Cohen (1996, p. 7), monsters are often alienated from the rest by using different strategies to do so. This is not only supported by her looks, but also by her name. In the series, Kate is often referred to as Mr. Kaplan. In the flashback episode (Season 4, Episode 17 — Cerone & O'Hara, 2017) where a lot of her past is revealed, it becomes clear that she was first called Mr. Kaplan by the man who shot her girlfriend, Annie Kaplan. Referring to her as Mr. Kaplan, instead of Mrs. Kaplan, alienates her from her female features. On the other hand, this alias worked very well for her, because when the authorities are searching for a Mr. Kaplan, nobody suspects a woman in her mid-fifties. This then supports the exact opposite, namely Carroll's (2015, p. 42) monster-among-us perspective that explains that monsters want to blend in with everyone to not stand out. Besides that, this nickname could have something to do with status. In the military, for example, people refer to higher ranks with Sir, regardless of gender as a symbol of power or knowledge. As Kate is perceived to be a very intelligent and skilled lady, her name could also be a reference to this.

Another way that Kaplan is alienated, is by her hobbies and interests. Kate is a very intelligent lady; in season 4, episode 17 (Cerone & O'Hara, 2017) it is revealed that she is fluent in multiple languages and has a degree in medicine and child education. She has had a diverse career, as she has worked both as a coroner and a family nanny. Besides that, she has an obsession for death and anything that has to do with it. Normally, death is something that might freak people out, but Kate embraces it: "I find them (the corpses) fascinating" (Season 4, Episode 17 — Cerone & O'Hara, 2017). She is often made fun of for her obscure hobbies, but it is also said that she can hide behind the bodies as another way of going unnoticed. She has always been the woman behind Reddington, instead of being the centre of attention.

The last aspect, which makes her specifically attached to the monstrous mother archetype, is that all of her actions are because of the love for a child. In this case, it is not even her own child, but the child that she cared for when she was younger and who she swore to protect at all costs. In season 4, episode 20 (Reiter & Roe, 2017), her motives become clear when she says: "I would do anything to protect Elizabeth and her daughter". Kenkel (2001, p. 553) explains that this motherly instinct is often used as a weapon to create these type of monstrous mothers, hereby turning a quality that is perceived as beautiful by society, into something dangerous.

5.4 Transgression

5.4.1 *Legal transgression*

Throughout season 4, it becomes evident that Kate will stop at nothing to take down Reddington's empire, because she believes this is necessary to keep Elizabeth safe. This is also the reason that almost all of her crimes are directed towards the people close to Reddington or people that help him remain his empire. She hired a number of criminals that are best at a specific job to help reach her goals. She hired Nathalie Luca (Elizabeth Lail), a woman that turned her own disease into a contagious weapon, to dismantle Reddington's money launderer (Season 4, Episode 12 — Schechter & Watkins, 2017). She hired Isabella Stone (Melora Hardin), one of the best character assassins, to kill Reddington's associate that managed his Mediterranean shipping operations (Season 4, Episode 13 — Martin & McCarthy, 2017). She hired The Apothecary (Jamie Harrold), a man who could brew any disease in a bottle, to poison Reddington (Season 4, Episode 15 — Studler & Caracciolo, 2017). She hired Philomena (Susan Misner) to kidnap multiple associates of Reddington (Season 4, Episode 18 — Noah & Watkins, 2017). She hired Dr. Bogdan Krilov (Rade Šerbedžija), a doctor who is specialised in memory manipulation, to frame a member of the FBI taskforce, Donald Ressler (Diego Klattenhoff) (Season 4, Episode 19 — Studler & Thorin, 2017). Lastly, she hired Mario Brandon Dixon (Aldis Hodge), a master thief, to steal the document in which Raymond Reddington's deal with the government was established (Season 4, Episode 21 — Reiter & Watkins, 2017). These attacks were almost always targeted towards a single person, which makes these legal transgression so dangerous and violent (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). Even though she has hired multiple people to harm the people close to Reddington, she always made sure that there were no further casualties and that Elizabeth would not be harmed in any way. These crimes are also an example of how Kate hides behind others to stay out of the spotlight herself, as she never harmed or killed anyone directly.

5.4.2 *Social transgression*

Just like Scottie Hargrave, Kate also betrays Raymond's trust, but the difference is that Kate has been a trustworthy ally to Raymond for decades, making this betrayal weigh heavier for him. In this socially transgressive situation, the social norms were not necessarily established between groups, but rather between Kate and Raymond (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). In the middle of season 4, Raymond realises that his organisation is under attack by someone close to him, as this person must have had personal information. After a manhunt that lasts for a couple of episodes, it becomes clear that Kate is the one that has betrayed Raymond's trust, while perceived to be deceased (Season 4, Episode 16 — Margolis & de Segonzac, 2017). In the next few episodes, she tries to turn Raymond's allies against him. When they refuse out of fear for Reddington, she delivers them to the authorities along with evidence against them to keep them from helping Raymond (Season 4, Episode 18 — Noah & Watkins, 2017). Raymond responds to this by saying: "When we put down one fire, she just lights

up another one. The woman is an arsonist. She won't stop until she has burned me to the ground" (Season 4, Episode 19 — Studler & Thorin, 2017).

Another situation that can be connected to social transgression is when Kate shows up to Elizabeth's house when the entire FBI is looking for her (Season 4, Episode 18 — Noah & Watkins, 2017), which could be seen as unusual, hereby transgressing social expectations (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). Kate knows that Elizabeth finds it hard to go after her, because Kate has helped Elizabeth before and they had a meaningful relationship. What Elizabeth did not know is that Kate cared for her when she was a baby and knows many truths about her past. Kate uses this to ensure Elizabeth does not arrest her on the spot. She tells Elizabeth half of the truth to show that she wants to be an ally, but that she needs something in return to be able to tell her everything she wants to know. This situation also shows that Kate does not mean to harm Elizabeth in any way, but is rather concerned of her and wants to give her helpful information, even when she is a wanted woman.

5.4.3 Moral transgression

Although Kate might not have killed anyone herself, she is still an accomplice to the crimes that have been committed over the years, first by Raymond and then by the people she hired to help defeat Raymond. This specific transgression can also be categorised as legal transgression, but besides that it also triggers a moral dilemma as to what extent Kate can be held responsible for the casualties that were created. Kate starts off as Reddington's cleaner, which means she has 'cleaned up' hundreds of bodies over a time-span of twenty years. Whenever there was a body that needed to be disposed, 'Mr. Kaplan' came to help and got rid of the body. At this time, Kate could be seen as the passive and voiceless woman, as described by Chappell and Young (2017, p. 2), because she never had the guts to stand up for herself or to defy Reddington. When she finally became the opposite, the revengeful woman, she became villainised.

5.5 Morality

After all these years of helping Reddington and standing by his side, Kate decided it was time to clean up his mess by uncovering all his wrongdoings. After surviving a gunshot in the head, Kate returns to bring down Reddington's empire, hereby also working against the FBI. When she is asked why she didn't just leave after she survived, but came back, she simply replied: "To clean it up... I'm done cleaning Raymond's mess. I'm taking responsibility for my own" (Season 4, Episode 18 — Noah & Watkins, 2017). In the process, she worked against the taskforce of the FBI, which actually made her on the opposite side of the law, but it could be argued that she was doing the right thing here. This situation could potentially make the audience question their moral codes, because it is a morally grey area (Tiwari, 2022, p. 313). The uncomfortable feeling of judging something that is morally grey is only strengthened by the nature of the show, as the main character, Raymond Reddington, is also a villain, which makes the attacks against him seem like the acts of a hero.

5.5.1 Intentions

When looking at Kate's motives and intentions, two stereotypical motives for women can be recognised. The first one is the most obvious one and can be noticed throughout the whole show, which is the motive where the woman did it all out of love for a child (Kenkel, 2001, p. 553). This is characterised by a motherly instinct that is supposed to justify her actions. The reason behind this is revealed in episode 17 of the fourth season (Cerone & O'Hara, 2017) when multiple flashbacks to the past indicate that Kate used to be Elizabeth's nanny, hereby explaining the motherly feelings towards her. As Elizabeth has almost no memory of her real mother, Kate is the closest thing she has got that ties her to her past. Kate lives up to her words "If you ever put me in a position where I have to choose between you and Elizabeth, I will always choose her" and tries to reveal the truth about Raymond to her. She believes this will help Elizabeth to live a normal life, instead of being hunted by criminals ever since Reddington has stepped into her life.

The other stereotypical motive is explained by Chappell and Young (2017, p. 184) as revenge for a man's wrongdoings. After Kate chose to help Elizabeth over Raymond in season 3, episode 18 (Cerone & Terlesky, 2016), he shoots her in the head. Because of the metal plate that was embedded in Kate's head, she survives the shot that would have normally been fatal. After this, she returns to straighten up the things he had done over the past decades by coming after him. This could be seen as revenge for underestimating her and for wanting to kill her. As the audience was also lead to believe that Kate was killed for a moment, the fact that she appeared to be alive could overshadow her villainous actions, since Kate was a well-liked and interesting character.

5.5.2 Moral Disengagement

The first moral disengagement mechanism that could be activated when looking at Kate Kaplan is moral justification. This means that her actions can be justified by attaching them to a bigger purpose (Tiwari, 2022, p. 313). For Kate, this goal is to destroy Raymond's criminal empire to keep Elizabeth safe. All the actions she has taken, all the criminals that she has hired were meant to take down one little piece of the entire construction of his empire. This could be seen as a morally good intention, which is why it might be easier to justify her actions.

Besides moral justification, another clear example of moral disengagement can be seen: advantageous comparison. Advantageous comparison compares the villain in question to another villain to make their actions seem not so bad (Bandura, 1999, p. 195). When comparing Kate Kaplan to Raymond Reddington, Kate suddenly seems like a smaller fish. Compared to all the wrong that Raymond has done, Kate actions are more justifiable, even though they both claim to be doing everything in their power to help Elizabeth. The difference is that Raymond uses his criminal empire to do this, hereby also putting Elizabeth in danger at times, while Kate wishes for her to have a normal life without the dangers of the criminal world. The fact that she is targeting Raymond, makes justifying her actions even easier, as the dehumanization mechanism could also be activated. This

mechanism explains that it is easier to justify harmful actions if they are directed towards a morally wrong character (Bandura, 1999, p. 200).

5.6 Conclusion

Kate embodies a combination of both the monster-among-us and the monstrous mother, which become evident throughout the series. As Kate is one of the most developed villainous characters, as she is introduced into the series very early on, a very detailed analysis could be made of all characteristics that add to these two archetypes. Mainly her appearance and her actions relate back to the monster-among-us archetype (Carroll, 2015, p. 42), as she is often overlooked through her appearance and hides behind others to get the job done. Her intentions on the other hand, make her a monstrous mother (Kenkel, 2001, p. 553), since her main reason for doing everything is to protect Elizabeth from Raymond and his life that often puts her in danger. Kate is a very emotional lady, which makes it easier for the audience to sympathise with her, as well as her background story that is very elaborate.

6. Analysis Chapter 3: Tatiana Petrova

6.1 Introduction

The last female villain that will be analysed is Tatiana Petrova (Laila Robins). Tatiana Petrova is number 3 on the blacklist, which makes her the highest ranking villain of the show besides main characters Raymond Reddington (no. 0) and Elizabeth Keen (no.1), as the number 2 spot was never taken. The character was first seen in the last episode of season 6 (episode 22, Reiter & Roe, 2019) and was killed by Raymond Reddington in season 8, episode 2 (Reiter & Marquardt, 2020). Her storyline is one of the longest in the entire series, as it covers more than a season, which is due to the multiplicity of the character. Tatiana Petrova is also the only villain out of the three that was never considered an ally of Reddington and/or the FBI taskforce.

The one aspect that makes Tatiana stand out from the earlier mentioned villains, is that she is an example of woman that is struggling to survive. Her villainous actions are caused by her need to look after herself and to keep herself alive. The character has been betrayed by the men around her and when she tried to stand up to them, she became an example of what happens when someone defies male authorities. Chappell and Young (2017, p. 3) explained that these type of women were thought to be a danger to society and therefore had to be restrained. Another character that can be linked to these characteristics is the main character Elizabeth Keen in the later seasons and Laken Perillos (Laverne Cox), who is number 70 on the blacklist. In this chapter, it will be argued how Tatiana Petrova's character relates to the revengeful and surviving female villain by taking the three main concepts in mind.

6.2 Background Story

The character Tatiana Petrova was first introduced to the audience as Katarina Rostova, Elizabeth's mother. Even though Reddington kept denying that she was the real Katarina, it was only revealed after her death that the woman was in fact not Elizabeth's mother. Tatiana Petrova was a former KGB operative who worked under the orders of Katarina's father Dominic Wilkinson (actor). She had already quit the job when her former colleague and friend Ilya Koslov (Brett Cullen) asked her for one last favour. What she did not know, is that Koslov planned an ambush together with Katarina's father. The reason behind this ambush was that they wanted the world to believe that Katarina Rostova was dead, so the men that were after her would stop looking. As Tatiana resembled Katarina in many ways, such as age and posture, they thought she would be fitting to take her place. Koslov and Wilkinson lured her to a hotel where they placed a bomb in her car and alerted the men that were looking for Katarina that she would be staying in that specific hotel. When Tatiana walked out of the hotel to her car, she was indeed mistaken for Katarina, but the ambush failed and did not kill her, causing the men that were hunting Katarina to now hunt her.

After running for decades, she decided to take her faith into her own hands by tracking down the real Katarina Rostova so she could move on with her life. She believed Raymond should have this

information, but he refused to give it to her. Even the people around Raymond, like Ilya Koslov, that knew the truth kept keeping Katarina's secret, even after torturing them. Then, she began using the name she was given, Katarina Rostova, for her own use by making Elizabeth Keen believe she was her long lost mother. At this point, the audience was still lead to believe that this was actually Katarina. When Tatiana finally found out the truth about Katarina, Raymond Reddington shot her to protect her from spreading it.

6.3 Monstrosity

Just like the previous character that was analysed, Kate Kaplan, Tatiana Petrova is a woman in her mid-fifties. However, unlike Kaplan, Petrova was once a very attractive woman. She served as a spy who had to seduce powerful men to get information out of them. The younger version of Tatiana was attractive while she was monstrous and therefore extremely threatening (Deleyto, 1997, p. 34). Now, she has lost some of her beauty but replaces this with her manipulative skills to sway people, making her equally threatening, but not a feminine-as-monstrous anymore (Joan, 2000, p. 20). Her manipulative skills can be observed when she portrays herself as a sweet older lady that moves in next door, while in reality, she had the woman that was actually moving in killed and wanted to work her way into Elizabeth's life for her own benefit (Season 7, Episode 3 — Johnson & Robinson, 2019).

Something else that stands out, is that it can clearly be seen that Tatiana is tired, which is probably due to the fact that she has been running and hiding all these years. The look in her eyes, combined with her age indicates how long she has been a fugitive and that her life was taken away from her. As Carroll (2015, p. 47) states, a monster can also be spotted when paying attention to details like body language and non-verbal traits. Additionally, the despair in her eyes is very present, which also becomes apparent when even though she had her life taken away from her by the people that work with Reddington, she still cares for him. It can be seen that she is having a hard time when she tortures him, indicating that this is her last and final option; she is desperate and running out of time. In contrary to the other two villains, Tatiana's emotions are always very present and noticeable. Everything she does can be seen as a cry for help, which is why her facial expressions are extreme and unfiltered (Figure 3).

Figure 3:

Tatiana Petrova's facial expressions in Season 8, Episode 2 (Reiter & Marquardt, 2020)



Tatiana Petrova has been an illusion to authorities, criminals and police forces all over the world, ever since she was framed to make it look like she was Katarina Rostova. She has many aliases, causing even her closest allies to be unknowing of her real name or identity: “Nobody knows who she is” (Season 7, Episode 10 — Cooper & Roe, 2020). These aliases enable her to shift into anyone she would like, as she can create an identity for any situation. This adds to the monster-among-us theory (Carroll, 2015, p. 42) as Tatiana can easily blend in with the crowd and go unnoticed. That this theory is applicable on Tatiana Petrova gets confirmed multiple times during the show. To begin with, she used to be a spy that had to infiltrate herself in her target’s life by befriending them or make them fall in love with her. In the present, she does the same by infiltrating herself into Elizabeth’s life and befriending her (Season 7, Episode 3 — Johnson & Robinson, 2019). In contrast to Kate, who can also be seen as a monster-among-us, Tatiana uses her ability to blend in to survive, as people are constantly looking for her, while Kate uses this ability to go unnoticed and hide behind others.

Despite all the aliases and the fact that nobody really knows who she is, it is common knowledge amongst everyone that she is a dangerous woman, which adds to Tatiana’s monstrous character, as both Cohen (1996, p. 4) and Ingebreetsen (1998, p. 25) state that a monster brings out fear to the people around them. The fear that Tatiana produces, is partially caused by people believing she is Katarina Rostova, because Rostova has always been a feared woman by both the Russians and the Americans as she was said to have double-crossed both parties. On the other hand, Tatiana was forced to strengthen her position in the underworld in case the people that were after Katarina would come after her. So, she became a powerful woman with a reputation that proceeded her. She became a fearful villain, because the people already believed she was one.

Lastly, because of her death and just like Kate Kaplan, Tatiana Petrova became an example of what happens when defying the reigning order (Ingebreetsen, 1998, p. 25). The only evident difference

between Kate and Tatiana is that Kate knew the truth all along and was villainised when trying to bring this truth to light. Tatiana, on the contrary, was looking for the truth and was killed when she finally figured it out. The truth that she wanted to uncover was where the real Katarina Rostova was, so that she could clear her name and finally live her life. This correlates with Cohen's (1996, p. 12) fifth theses that states that monsters try to explore the things people are told not to and are often punished while trying. In Tatiana's case, this is exactly what happened, but she was not told to stand down by authorities, but by Raymond Reddington. In the end, when she did not, he killed her before she could expose the truth he had been hiding (Season 8, Episode 1 — Cerone & McCarthy, 2020).

6.4 Transgression

6.4.1 Legal transgression

Tatiana's actions throughout the series add to her villainous archetype, in view of the fact that everything she does is to survive another day. In the first scene that Tatiana appears in, at the end of season 6, episode 22 (Reiter & Roe, 2019), she meets up with Raymond in the middle of a street after he requested to see her. After giving him a kiss on his cheek, she stabs him in his stomach with a knife, after which he is dragged into a van and kidnapped. This legally transgressive situation immediately set the tone for the rest of the storyline: a new villain is in town who is strong enough to deceive Raymond Reddington. In season 7, episode 1 (Eisendrath & Roe, 2019), Raymond is lying in a hospital, unknowing of his whereabouts. It becomes apparent that Tatiana and her team have kidnapped Raymond to a fake hospital while injecting him with a toxin that makes his legs feel numb, hereby making him believe that he is paralysed from the waist down. After he figures her tricks out, he manages to escape with the help of one of Tatiana's crewmembers in season 7, episode 2 (Reiter & Hessler, 2019). This appears to be another illusion, as the crewmember is in fact not helping Raymond, but only spying for Tatiana. This leads Tatiana and her team straight to the thing she was after: learning the whereabouts of the real Katarina's father Dominic, as Raymond flees to his house to warn him, unknowing of the threat that is following him. After multiple failed attempts to get the information she needed, she kidnapped Ilya Koslov and hired a memory therapist to extract the information out of his brain by forcing him to remember it (Season 7, Episode 8 — Reiter & Holohan, 2019). Besides these actions being categorised as belonging to her surviving villain archetype, these could also be linked to the revengeful woman archetype, as she targets the men who have done her wrong in the past, namely Raymond Reddington, Ilya Koslov and Dominic Rostova.

In contrast to Kate, who is out to hurt Raymond and his closest allies and therefore directs all of her legal transgressions towards involved individuals, Tatiana only targets people when she feels like she has to in order to survive. This does not limit her targets to individuals that are close to Raymond. For example, in order to befriend Elizabeth without giving away her identity, she hired a company that could provide another identity for her (Season 7, Episode 9 — Hennen & Marquardt, 2019). This company's method is to find someone with a similar profile and then kill them so a

criminal can take their place. Hereby, an innocent bystander was murdered for Tatiana to reach her goal. This indicates how desperate she was to get the information she needed and that she would do almost anything to live a normal life.

6.4.2 Social transgression

One of the clear examples where Tatiana has overstepped social norms and boundaries is the fact that she betrays Elizabeth for almost her entire storyline (Hermes & Hill, 2021, p. 4). First, she lies about her identity, as she poses as her new neighbour to infiltrate herself in Elizabeth's life so she could secretly install microphones and cameras into her house. She even suggested to watch Elizabeth's daughter while she is at work. After this, she pretends to be Elizabeth's mother to gain even more information from her. So in fact, she uses her status as Katarina Rostova to deceive Elizabeth into thinking she is her mother, hereby forcing a bond between the two. The twisted thing about this is, that she actually tries to live up to the social norms that are expected between a mother and a daughter, which makes the situation even more complex, as this turns out to be fake. As Elizabeth has always wanted a mother figure in her life, she happily accepts that this woman could be her mother. Hereby, Tatiana is consciously playing with Elizabeth's feelings for her own benefit.

6.4.3 Moral transgression

After Tatiana is killed, it is revealed that she was not Elizabeth's real mother Katarina, but a woman who was framed to make it look like she was. Since she used this opportunity to befriend Elizabeth and get her on her side instead of Reddington's, this sparks a moral dilemma. She is constantly deceiving Elizabeth by making her believe that she is in fact her mother. According to Hermes and Hill (2021, p. 4), this is an ethical principle that could indicate moral transgression. As she knew Elizabeth was desperately looking for answers about her past, she provided some of this information, since she knew some of those parts. The debate that could be started here is whether or not it was Tatiana's right to portray as Elizabeth's mother. On the other hand, she was forced into this role a long time ago and could finally see an advantage of this situation by using her role as Katarina Rostova to get to her goal: getting the necessary information that she knew was possessed by Raymond. Since Elizabeth was unaware of the moral transgression, it is unlikely that she would have felt an internal threat, as explained by Van der Toorn et al. (2015, p. 610).

6.5 Morality

The morality aspect of Tatiana Petrova's character is somewhat of a bumpy ride. Throughout the episodes, more is revealed about her true identity and her motives to handle things in the way she does. In the beginning, when she is first introduced, she is portrayed as an evil character who would do anything to get the information she wants, including hurting the people that are close to her (Season 6, Episode 22 — Reiter & Roe, 2019; Season 7, Episode 1 — Eisendrath & Roe, 2019). At that point, not

much is known about her character and her identity, making it hard to justify her actions. As Keen et al. (2012, p. 134) mentioned, it becomes more difficult to judge a character as evil when their true intentions and motives are revealed. At that point, this information was not available, making it easier for the audience to perceive Tatiana as an evil character.

Later, it is revealed that she needs information from Raymond Reddington to keep herself from being killed by the people who are after her, because they believe she is Katarina Rostova (Season 7, Episode 2 — Reiter & Hessler, 2019; Season 7, Episode 3 — Johnson & Robinson, 2019). At that point, the audience is lead to believe that this character is in fact Katarina Rostova, Elizabeth's mother. She uses this to her advantage and sparks sympathy because of the stories that are known about Katarina and the bond that she tries to build with her daughter. As her motives are now believed to be emotional, this ensures that the character can now be perceived as morally grey (Tiwari, 2022, p. 312).

In the end, it is revealed that she is not Katarina Rostova, but Tatiana Petrova; a woman who was robbed of her life and put in the terrible position where she had to hide almost her entire life, because of a set up. It was revealed that she did all of this to find out who the real Katarina was, so she could move on with her life and be safe. This could bring up a different moral dilemma, because it is possible to feel sorry for her after hearing the full story. On the other hand, it is also possible to feel disregard towards her, because she mislead people and is not who she appeared to be. The final stage of this character's motives make it very hard to judge these actions as morally good, grey or wrong (Keen et al., 2012, p. 134). This character is a clear example of how the information that is given about someone influences the judgement of their actions. As this character goes through multiple phases with multiple aliases and identities, it is clear that her actions can be interpreted differently depending on what identity they are linked to.

6.5.1 Intentions

Just like Kaplan, Petrova has to stand up for herself because of the harm that a man (or multiple man in fact) has done to her (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 184). That is why the first one of Tatiana Petrova's motives can also be seen as a stereotypical motive for women, as women are typically not allowed to stand up for themselves, as they tend to be villainised when they do so. Throughout the season it is revealed that she was framed at a young age to make it look like she was Katarina Rostova. The attempt to take her life failed, causing her to be on the run for decades. As she wants to take her life back, she tries to gain the information that is needed to save her life, which is why her intentions are always to do whatever is necessary to get to that goal.

Besides that, the second motive for Tatiana is survival, which becomes apparent after more information is revealed about Tatiana's history. In season 6, Elizabeth starts asking questions about her past and starts digging in old files about her mother Katarina Rostova. This does not go unnoticed by the people that have been after her for all these years. When Raymond hears about this he says: "And

now they will crawl out of whatever hole they were in and they will hurt whomever they must, because of the chance or even the notion that she might still be alive” (Season 7, Episode 2 — Reiter & Hessler, 2019). This causes Tatiana to be hunted again while she is looking for answers that might help save her life. It also becomes apparent during the entire timespan of her storyline that uncovering the truth by opposing Raymond Reddington is her last option, as it is made clear that she feels remorse for hurting him.

6.5.2 Moral Disengagement

The survival instinct that was previously mentioned, can be connected to the moral disengagement mechanism moral justification, as Tatiana’s actions can be attached to a larger goal (Tiwari, 2022, p. 313). The goal for her is to gain information so she could live her life again without the restrictions of being a fugitive. If she could prove who the real Katarina Rostova was, she would not have to run anymore and people would hopefully go after the real Katarina. As she is fighting for her life and looking out for herself, the mechanism euphemistic labelling could also be applicable here (Tiwari, 2022, p. 314). It is clear that she is running out of options and needs to do something in order to get her life back. These two mechanisms are very similar as it takes a villain’s motives into account. As her intentions are not to hurt someone because she feels like it, but to gain something from it that could save her life, it is easier to justify her actions.

6.6 Conclusion

Tatiana Rostova is the embodiment of two villainous archetypes, namely the revengeful woman and the surviving villain. The revengeful woman is a stereotypical archetype that is created through the revenge that the female villain takes on the men that have treated her poorly (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 184). In Tatiana’s case, she was framed by two men that were very close to her, which made this betrayal even harder for her. The other archetype, the surviving villain, is brought to life through the mentioned betrayal. This type of villain finds its nature in one of Bandura’s (1999, p.194) moral disengagement mechanisms, that are supposed to make it easier to justify one’s actions. After Tatiana was framed, she had to live as a fugitive for the greatest part of her life, making her life unbearable. This archetype is mostly visible through her actions and intentions, as all her actions are related to a bigger cause: getting her life back.

7. Conclusion

After an in depth literary search into the three concepts of this research, knowledge on the portrayal of villains in general and on female villains in particular was gained. To put this into practice, *The Blacklist* served as an example of how this theory could come to life in the entertainment industry. Three female villains were selected to be analysed in terms of their appearance, their actions and their motives, taking their background and character development into consideration. Each female villain appeared to represent one or two different villainous archetypes, of which at least one could be recognised as a stereotypical archetype for female villains. These archetypes were established through all three main concepts and each one contributed to the portrayal of the villain.

7.1 Key Findings

The research question for this thesis was: How are female villains portrayed in the procedural series *The Blacklist*? To come to a conclusion, three villains from the series were analysed based on the three main themes of this research: monstrosity, transgression and morality. The first villain that was analysed, is Scottie Hargrave, the beautiful business woman who seemed to have a shared history with the main character Raymond Reddington. The first villainous archetype that Scottie embodies is the siren-like villain, as explained by Joan (2000, p. 20), due to her beautiful appearance and manipulative social skills. This is one of the stereotypical female archetypes, as these type of villains were introduced to generate both the feeling of threat and curiosity to the audience (Deleyto, 1997, p. 34). The other archetype is derived from Ingebreetsen's (1998, p. 25) theory that a monster is almost always an incorporation of fear. As Scottie uses her power and influence to intimidate the ones around her, she also falls into this category.

The second villain that was analysed, is Kate Kaplan, one of Reddington's most trusted confidantes who turned into a villain to protect the child she cared for when she was little. Kate also resembles two villainous archetypes, namely the monster-among-us villain (Carroll, 2015, p. 42) and the monstrous mother (Kenkel, 2001, p. 553). The monster-among-us villain is established through her appearance, as she is small and dresses in neutral colours, but also through her actions, as she almost always hires other people to take care of her jobs. The monstrous mother archetype becomes apparent through her motives, as she is doing everything she can to keep Raymond out of Elizabeth's life, because she believes that that is the only way she will ever have a normal life.

The last female villain that was analysed, is Tatiana Petrova, the woman who was framed to make it look like she was one of the most notorious and wanted criminals in the world – Katarina Rostova – and who had to run for decades to escape the men that were hunting her. The stereotypical female archetype that can be connected to Tatiana is the revengeful woman who seeks justice for the wrongs that a man has done to her (Chappell & Young, 2017, p. 184). This becomes clear by analysing her storyline and the motives behind her actions. Besides that, she also shows signs of the surviving villain motive, as she would do anything to get her life back. This type is related to one of Bandura's

(1999, p. 194) mechanisms of moral disengagement, which makes it easier to justify a character's actions.

7.2 Limitations

The first limitation that this research faces lies in the nature of the procedural television series that was chosen as an example, namely *The Blacklist*. Normally, a procedural features around a hero figure or a group of morally right individuals that fight crime. However, the main character of *The Blacklist* is the most notorious criminal of the United States, making him the exact opposite of the usual main character in such series. Nevertheless, Raymond Reddington helps the FBI to catch other notorious criminals, but benefits from this along the way. Keen et al. (2012) explain that even when the main character is a villain, the audience will be more drawn to them than to their opponents, because of the Mere Exposure Effect. Therefore, it might be more difficult to judge the villains in this show based on morality, as the show already has a morally confusing undertone and a morally grey main character.

The second limitation of this research is that only three female villains were analysed, but were worked out in detail. Analysing three specific villains from one television show ensures of a very detailed research that is hard to generalise to the television industry in its whole. Another option might have been to include more female villains of the show, but to keep the analysis more on surface level or to analyse only one concept, instead of diving deeper into three. By that means, a more general conclusion about all female villains in the show could be drawn, as the show features around 200 villains in total, of which around 80 are women. As this research is more narrowed down, it could possibly exclude some factors.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Research and Implications

To overcome the first limitation, future research might want to explore a procedural series that features around a hero figure. This makes it easier to compare the main character to its opponents and to eliminate the morally grey undertone that was present in *The Blacklist*. Another suggestion to overcome one of the limitations, specifically the second one, is to analyse more of the female villains from the show based on other criteria than their rank and screentime. This could, for example, be done based on audience interests in a specific villain or based on the type of crimes the villain commits.

To extend the knowledge on the portrayal of female villains in procedural shows, it might also be an interesting perspective to analyse a television show that centres around a woman, whether it be a villainous character or a heroic character. This might shift the dynamic between the main character and their opponent, as this relationship in *The Blacklist* is always between a man and a woman. If research were to compare these two perspectives, this could also provide insights on the general dynamics between different gender combinations and how they treat each other.

To conclude, this research will further advance the existing literature on female villains in general by adding a new dimension: the female villain in procedural television series. Although the television industry has come a long way since female characters' sole purpose was to entertain the male audience and to serve as an accessory to their male counterpart, this research still indicates the presence of stereotypical projections on the female character. The representation of female characters of all kinds is still an ongoing discussion in the television industry and this research will add to that discussion by pointing out that female characters are still generally stereotyped by projecting a gender-role on them and what behaviour should come with that. This implies that there is still knowledge to be gained on the topic and improvements to be made in today's television environment.

8. References

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9. Appendix

9.1 Episodes Scottie Hargrave

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9.3 Episodes Tatiana Petrova

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