

FIRSTYEAR SEMINAR: VICTORIAN MONSTERS AND MODERN MONSTROSITY

CULTURAL DEVIANCE ASSIGNMENT

Part One: Annotated Bibliography

“Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet. . .but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood.”

—Harker on the Vampire Women, *Dracula*

In class, we've been discussing how Stoker's novel *Dracula* articulates kinds of cultural “deviance,” meaning cultural practices or ideas or behaviors or beliefs that deviate from what is considered “normal” standards of practice, idea, behavior or belief.

On the one hand, the novel is about Victorian Deviance—it contains and conveys sexual and racial deviance in the character of Count Dracula. Dracula taints England's blood, both literally and metaphorically: he literally contaminates Lucy, for example, but he metaphorically contaminates Harker (through “inappropriate” desire as well as indoctrinating Harker into an “Eastern” way of being); Dr. Seward, Van Helsing, Arthur, and Quincey (through infecting their women, namely Lucy and Mina, and by making them have to embrace “superstition” in order to fight him); English children (through Lucy as the “Bloofer Lady”); and, ultimately, English culture itself (the ship, the zoo, the insane asylum, London, mediums of mass culture such as newspapers and telegrams, British religious practices, etc., etc.). By extension, then, Dracula obviously represents concepts larger than his own character: he is the symbol of British fears about “reverse colonization” (especially at the height of the Victorian colonial project); genetic “regression” (this is a post-Darwinian world, after all); sexual “perversion” (particularly in this historical moment, during the widely publicized Oscar Wilde sodomy trial); and religious blasphemies (i.e., idolatrous Catholicism). In other words, Victorian vampirism is able to hold and contain a wide spectrum of late-Victorian hang-ups.

On the other hand, vampirism also has been adopted in modern-day culture as a vehicle for articulating all kinds of contemporary hang-ups as well, from dread over HIV-AIDS to debates over stem-cell research to homophobia. A vampire is a monster who is up-to-date with a vengeance as well as archaic and “backwards,” and the vampire—in ways even more powerful than Frankenstein's monster or Bertha Mason—is able to function as a cultural monster (and not just a “monstrous type”). As such, this novel creates a powerful metaphor for Modern Deviance.

This assignment, then, asks that you research and then write up an annotated bibliography of a modern-day issue that constitutes an example of “cultural deviance.” In other words, you need to choose a modern-day topic that acts as a kind of cultural vampirism—that “feeds” on the populace, that “infects” it, and perhaps even makes it “un-dead.” Through the metaphor of the vampire, cultural deviances rot society from the inside out.

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For example, you might think about what behaviors or practices are thought of as deviant by some groups (and, obviously, not by others) here at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Maybe transgendered identities, homelessness, evangelical Christianity, atheism, Marxism, anarchism, pornography, feminism, polygamy or "free love," terrorism, veganism, home-schoolers, right-to-lifers, pro-choicers, cannibalism, serial killers, tyranny, or genocide. While this is not an exhaustive list, what's most important is this: you want to choose a topic of modern-day cultural deviance that is of interest to you—either because you, yourself, see it as "deviant" and/or because it is a topic that compells you in some vital way.

Whatever issue you decide to research, I ask that you look up five (5) separate sources on your topic and then write up an annotated bibliography. It is my hope that as part of your five sources, you will have at least one critical newspaper or journal article, one book, and one website (not a personal one). The thing to keep in mind here is this: I'm more interested in having you peruse a number of sources to find five that you think will work well for this assignment than to have you approach this task as a check-off list, and thereby go with the first book, newspaper article, and website that you come across and call it "good." Today in class, we'll talk with librarian Rob Sloan about what constitutes legitimate vs. illegitimate sources, and next week, I'll also give you an example of what I expect to see in an annotation: but that's the basic assignment. If your annotations are detailed enough, I suspect that you'll be turning in two pages, single spaced, for this paper. You'll also be putting these sources in appropriate MLA style. **Note that I will be merciless (one might say "monstrous") about accurate MLA citations. You cannot have a second chance, so get it right the first time—every comma, every period, everything. Don't test me on this, please; I prefer to hide my devil horns, hooves, and forked tongue.**

To narrow your focus, I also want you to make sure that whatever "cultural deviance" you choose to work on is linked to the body in some way (e.g., piercings that are part of Goth culture could be your example of cultural deviance, and this practice is clearly linked to the body) and that your sources—what you choose to cite and to annotate—are sources that actually address how this issue or practice is deviant. In other words, your article or book or website should be discussing, at least in part, how piercings are a "deviant" practice (although your sources almost certainly won't use the word "deviant").

Part Two: Victorian Novels and...Vampires!

“For, let me tell you, [the vampire] is known everywhere that men have been.”

—Van Helsing, *Dracula*

Okay—once you’ve done a bit of research on modern-day cultural deviance, what do you do with it? Do you formulate a “thesis statement” about this particular aspect of American deviance and write a five-paragraph essay on that thesis, employing evidence from your five outside sources? Banish the thought! No—you do not.

For just as every assignment in this course has asked you to engage both critical and creative thinking—original thinking—this assignment is no different. We are not zombies, mindlessly churning out lifeless research papers in state-approved containers (aka coffins)! No; we are active brains, vital brains, brains that are very much...alive.

So here is your mission (should you choose to accept it): you must write a carefully crafted scene that features a vampire your own invention: a very modern vampire—one that is created out of your own research on modern-day deviance. This scene will not be arbitrary; rather, you will be re-creating a precise moment of initial infection, when your vampire begins her or his process of taking over a house, town, city, country, and/or the globe. Crucially, you need to fashion a vampire that appropriately fits your research and then have him or her stalk part of this world of the 21st-century, up-to-date with a vengeance!

Say what? Let me be more specific. This final paper has three distinct components:

COMPONENT ONE

In no more than two or three double-spaced pages, detail the sum and substance of your modern-day cultural deviance vampire. What does s/he look like, and why? How does s/he behave, and why? *And, crucially, how is your un-dead vampire a parasitic creature who infects his or her victims?* You may want to consult pages 210–212 in *Dracula*, where Van Helsing gives a run-down on what makes Count Dracula a “vampire” for the nineteenth century as well as, earlier in the novel, our initial introduction to Dracula and how he looks on pages 23–24. In this section of your paper, make sure to quote directly from your research to explain the particular kind of vampire that you’ve come up with and to cite those quotations accurately in terms of MLA in-text citation style. Also, make sure you consider how the embodied-ness of your particular aspect of American cultural deviance makes its way into the embodiment of your vampire. In other words, your vampire must be described both physically and psychologically—how s/he looks and how s/he acts. Finally, you must also give me a visual representation of your vampire, **which constitutes an extra page (i.e., either page three or four, depending)**. How you visually represent your vampire is up to you: you may draw it; you may collage it. But make sure to link the written description to the visual representation.

COMPONENT TWO

In no less than four double-spaced pages, have your modern-day vampire “infest” a modern-day scene of initial infection. Both the scene and the means of initial infection should be considered carefully. How is this scene an articulation of our “scientific, matter-of-fact [twenty-first] century”? In other words, work hard to choose a setting and a circumstance that is patently modern—that bespeaks our own contemporary world and worldview. In *Dracula*, you may want to return to how the vampire arrives at England’s shores and starts to feed on Lucy. For it is with Lucy that *Dracula* initiates his project of reverse colonization. In addition, populate this scene with at least one victim who is appropriate as the first casualty of your vampire’s infectious zeal. Lucy is, as we discussed in class, a paragon of the contradictions inherent in Victorian womanhood: she is both an angel of the house as well as a sexually excited “whore” (“Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?”). It makes sense that *Dracula* would prey upon a vulnerable female—one who is already primed to “turn” from domestic goddess into a wanton woman (with no maternal instinct). Finally, show me “the bite” (although it may well not be a bite at all). Make sure this scene includes how the vampire infects her or his victim and what happens to the victim as a result. Of course, your rendition of “the bite” should be apt to the kind of vampire you’ve created; the means of infection is as important as the moment of infection.

If you draw on your cultural deviance research in the creation of this scene, make sure, again, to cite such appropriately in MLA in-text citation style.

COMPONENT THREE

At the end of your paper, provide an accurate Works Cited page.