



Villainy in Western Culture: Historical Archetypes of Danger, Disorder and Death

M. Gregory Kendrick

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Every society has its lineup of wicked, unethical characters--real or fictional--who are regarded as villainous. This book explores how Western societies have used villains to sort insiders from outsiders and establish behavioral norms to support harmony and well-being. There are three parts: nature and "barbarians" as sinister "others" bent on destroying Western civilization; tyrants, traitors and "femmes fatales" as challenges to ideals of legitimate governance, patriotism and gender roles; and gangsters, grifters and murderers as models of evil or unprincipled behavior. The author also discusses two related phenomena: the dramatic paring down of what is considered villainous in the West, and the proliferation of over-the-top villains in pop culture and mass media.

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