Imagine St. John’s has decided to publish a journal full of students’ essays. Really, they want the freshmen and sophomores to have some junior and senior models to look up to. When deciding which courses to pull from, Brother Mike, Mr. Themistos, and Mr. Mancabelli were particularly fascinated by the works of literature read in our British Literature class. They find the monster figure that has repeated so frequently in our course to be quite intriguing.

Each of us will now be writing a paper to submit for possible publication in the “Monsters in British Literature” edition of the St. John’s Cadet Quarterly.

Consider at least two different monsters, villains, or wicked forces, and write an essay analyzing their role. One of the figures you analyze must come from 1984.

Use the questions below to guide you. If you are having trouble making an argument without a more specific prompt or question to answer, you may choose to answer one of these. However, you are also welcome to step outside of these questions as long as your essay meets the requirements and fulfills the purpose of this new edition of the St. John’s Cadet Quarterly.

1. To what extent do the characters qualify as archetypal villains and/or archetypal monsters?
2. How and why have the monsters evolved over time?
3. How does the nature of each monster contribute to the work’s moral or lesson?
4. What essential qualities does a monstrous or villainous character have?
5. How and why are two or more monsters similar? Dissimilar?

Basic Requirements:
1. Incorporate at least one secondary source (options attached)
3. 2-4 pages
4. MLA format
5. Hard copy and turnitin submission required.

Please note that there will be penalties for essays that do not meet the minimum page requirement. Essays that do not cite a secondary source or do not quote the two primary sources will receive a failing grade. Your essay will be graded using the Literary Essay Rubric posted on Homework Central.
At one point in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* (2008), the Joker and Batman are discussing the fate of Harvey Dent, a new district attorney who has been working to stamp out crime in Gotham City. After Dent’s girlfriend, Rachel, is murdered, the Joker convinces Dent to find Rachel’s killers, prompting the district attorney to go on a violent hunt. When Batman confronts the Joker about his involvement with Dent’s sudden change in behavior, the Joker (as always) toys with the hero, remarking,  

Oh, you. You just couldn’t let me go, could you? This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. You truly are incorruptible, aren’t you? You won’t kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won’t kill you because you’re just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever.

Batman, in turn, insinuates that their battles with one another will not go on forever, promising that he will put the Joker in a padded cell in Arkham Asylum. The Joker shoots back, “Maybe we can share one,” and takes pride in his influence over Dent: “I took Gotham’s white knight and I brought him down to our level. It wasn’t hard. You see, madness, as you know, is like gravity. All it takes is a little push!”

The Joker—easily one of the most well-known, maniacal, and violent villains in the comic book industry—offers some interesting insights in this scene with regards to his position as an antagonistic force in relation to Batman. A recurring theme in the Batman mythos is the parallel between the Joker and Batman, with the Joker alluding to Batman’s own insanity by offering to share a padded cell. Moreover, the Joker challenges Batman’s notions of righteousness and morality, mocking the Dark Knight’s fixation with justice—in a sense, bringing him down to the same position as any other obsessive lunatic, becoming a member of, as the Joker says, “our level.”

But let us take the Joker’s revelations about Batman and extend them to a wider thematic issue. Oftentimes in popular culture—which can involve both modern-day texts as well as forms of widely accessible literary traditions of the past, including myths and fairy tales—there appears to be some form of a binary when it comes to the hero and the villain. Orrin E. Klapp offers the typical overview of heroes and villains in his article “Heroes, Villains and Fools, as Agents of Social Control.” The heroic figure, Klapp explains, “is a supernormal deviant, his courage, self-abnegation, devotion, and prowess being regarded as amazing...heroes dominate the scene of human action, symbolizing success, perfection, and conquest of evil” (57). By contrast, villains appear “as idealized figures of evil, who tend to counter-moral actions as a result of an inherently malicious will. Despite human form, they are at heart monsters, hated and shunned as enemies of social organizations, of the good, and of the weak” (58).

Klapp also mentions in his article that the two archetypal figures are most prominent in “comics, popular fiction, folklore and the like” (56). Indeed, American popular culture has developed its own monomyth with regards to the roles of the hero and villain, as John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett identify in *The Myth of the American Superhero*. They structure the American monomyth off of Joseph Campbell’s classical monomyth as presented in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which identifies the following pattern:
A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Lawrence and Jewett 28)

Absent from this monomyth, though, is the relationship between the hero and the villain. Rather, favor is given to the hero’s struggle leading to victory, or ascension to a higher plane than that of his surroundings. Lawrence’s and Jewett’s American monomyth, however, addresses the connection between heroes and villains:

A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity. (6)

There is certainly a connection to Klapp’s definition of the evil, villainous figure, as both texts identify such a figure as a threat to the maintenance of the status quo. But Lawrence and Jewett notice a paradoxical trend in the monomyth that promotes exclusion, despite working within the context of an inclusive American culture. They ask, “Why, amid so many signs of secularization, do large audiences entertain so many fantasies of redemption by supernatural powers?” (7). Or, “why, in a country trumpeting itself as the world’s supreme democratic model, do we so often relish depictions of...[being] rescued only by extralegal superheroes?” (7).

These questions prompt me to bring up another seemingly paradoxical issue: is it necessarily true that the evil force disrupting the normal institutions is, after all, entirely evil? Or, taken a step further, can we even attribute the disruption of the institutions to the villains themselves? Certainly, when we consider what the Joker says to Batman in *The Dark Knight*, there is the implication that Batman is just as responsible for perpetuating madness in Gotham City as the Joker is. A reevaluation of the villain may help us answer these questions, moving us away from the binary Klapp acknowledges and toward a new schema of who and what the villain figure is—and how much overlap with the hero is present.

[...]

In essence, villains within popular culture offer insight into our own constructions (binaries, for the most part) of what constitutes “good” and “bad,” and that a closer examination helps us deconstruct our own rigid representations. In its simplest form, villains are seen as immoral, as bringing harm and pain and chaos to others, yet old myths tell us of heroes who have done the same. Or, we can consider villains as those who disrupt the status quo; but what of villains who wish to maintain the status quo, these leaders who are staples of dystopian texts like *The Hunger Games*? And, certainly, merely challenging the perceived paradise mentioned by Lawrence and Jewett cannot be enough to vilify somebody[...] The villain complicates much of what we hold true as we relate ourselves to our surroundings and to other people, and as we attempt to fully understand ourselves as a manifestation of the intersection between heroes and villains.
Title: “Introductory Essay to Our Exploration of Monstrosity”
A webpage from the University of Michigan

*The Oxford English Dictionary* lists five definitions for monster:

1. Something extraordinary or unnatural; a prodigy, a marvel.
2. An animal or plant deviating in one or more of its parts from the normal type; spec., an animal afflicted with some congenital malformation; a misshapen birth, an abortion.
3. An imaginary animal (such as the centaur, sphinx, minotaur, or the heraldic griffin, wyvern, etc.) having a form either partly brute and partly human, or compounded of elements from two or more animal forms.
4. A person of inhuman and horrible cruelty or wickedness; a monstrous example of (wickedness, or some particular vice).
5. An animal of huge size; hence, anything of vast and unwieldy proportions.

The word 'monster' in America today can mean all of these things, though in the common vernacular it is generally used as 3 and 5 above: 'Monsters' are creatures we become on Halloween; we drive 'monster' trucks and look for jobs on 'Monster.com.' 'Monster' implies largeness, a quality almost universally admired in American culture. But what does the existence of monsters (as 'imaginary' animals) in a culture signify?

A culture's monsters emblematically embody its most acute anxieties. Cultures create and ascribe meaning to monsters, endowing them with characteristics derived from their most deep-seated fears and taboos.

The body of the monster, then, becomes the site of these cultural proscriptions, representing the taboos of the societies that spawn them: “the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy. . . . giving them life and an uncanny independence” (Cohen 4). A monster cannot be contained. A monster disobeys its master, overspills its margins, consumes its benefactors. We make scapegoats of our monsters, attributing to them our own misdeeds and faults while using them as vehicles for intergenerational transfers of taboos and morals.

The monster becomes a way of explaining the seemingly inexplicable. The humanoid form most monsters assume is our own--familiar yet unfamiliar--and transgressions performed by the monster reinforce its status as 'other': "In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond--of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant but originate Within" (Cohen 7).

A monster dwells on the fringes of what is culturally acceptable (Grendel). Banished to the physical and social hinterlands, he is also border guard (Sasquatch). Whoever crosses into the monster's realm has also transgressed, broken the taboo, courted contamination. The transgressor must then encounter the monster on its own terms.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud writes that taboo, originally a Polynesian word, means something that is simultaneously sacred and profane (821). Taboo does not solicit silence nor encourage ignorance, but demands rather an awareness and deliberate avoidance of the sacred/profane object or action. Taboo is characterized by a "dread of physical contact . . . . [and] a conviction that violation will be followed by unbearable disaster," which is not necessarily "external" or physical (828). The violator of a taboo likewise becomes taboo and must be
avoided. Freud writes that the transgressor "has the dangerous property of tempting others to follow his example . . . . He is therefore really contagious [emphasis mine], in so far as every example incites to imitation and, therefore, he himself must be avoided" (832).
With Halloween approaching, people turn their attention to the spooky and the scary, reveling in stories and images of ghosts, ghouls and witches for the holiday. While some monstrous characters only come out to play in October, however, others enjoy attention year round.

For example, in recent years, vampire media has gained popularity, from Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series of books and films to HBO’s *True Blood*, which finished its fifth season this summer. Zombies have recently seen a resurgence in popularity as well, evidenced by new takes on the genre, such as Zach Synder’s 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* and Edgar Wright’s *Shaun of the Dead*. Zombies have even shambling onto the television screen with AMC’s *The Walking Dead*.

Hollywood is quick to cash in on what’s popular, but why do themes gain popularity in the first place? Does the prevalence of a certain monster reflect what’s going on in our society today?

“I would argue that monsters in literature in general are almost always indicative of things we fear in a sort of collective sense,” says Cajsa Baldini, a senior lecturer in the English Department of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Baldini is well versed in classic monsters and their cultural significance. She teaches a course on 19th century fiction, which covers monstrous tales such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H.G. Wells. Both novels are steeped in themes of technology out of control and the ethical implications of science, ideas that remain in fiction today.

*Jurassic Park* is a great example of the “technology out of control” trope. It’s a modern-day Frankenstein story, says principal lecturer Paul Cook, who teaches and writes science fiction in the English Department.

In the original *Frankenstein*, after Victor Frankenstein creates his monster, he abandons it to be persecuted and ostracized. Once the monster understands what his creator did to him, he seeks out the doctor.

“I think that’s what it’s about, to be confronted with our creations,” says Baldini of the novel. “What responsibilities do we have to what we create? It essentially posits the question, do scientists have ethical responsibilities, or is the only responsibility towards further discovery? And I think that’s the reason we read that novel today.”

Baldini points to Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*, in which one man hunts down rogue human-looking androids, as a more modern interpretation of these ideas.

“The android turns around and says: ‘Hey, I know you built in a flaw in me, I’m going to die, I need to know when,’ a question most of us ask, as does Victor Frankenstein in Shelley’s novel,” says Baldini.

Just as 19th-century fiction reflected common fears and anxieties, science fiction in the 1950s served the same purpose. Films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* reflected Americans’ fear of communism.
“Science fiction of the ’50s not only reflected the culture, but criticized it as well,” says Cook.

Cook believes that some monsters in fiction are simply manifestations of the worst parts of us, or a trait that is out of control.

“When ideas get out of control, you get monsters,” says Cook. “Monsters as an archetype are simply a reflection of some aspect of our human nature greatly magnified to the level of destruction. That is where you get the werewolf, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or the Hulk—something that’s inside of us that comes out.”

Baldini thinks that the theme of the embattled force within us points to humanity’s desire to rise above the forces of nature.

“I think the werewolf is more of a psychological monster,” she says. “Like any monster, it has to be reflective of us to be interesting. I think it’s about the animal within, the aspects of us we think we’ve grown away from or that we don’t want to acknowledge we ever had. We’re not in control of nature, even if we like to think we are. Just look at an Ebola outbreak, or tsunamis. We think we can control nature, but we don’t. We’re subject to it like any other species on earth.”

While some monsters are reflections of humanity’s struggle with internal, natural forces, others, such as the vampire, express a fear of external influences. Baldini’s course explores the first appearance of the modern vampire, in the 1819 novella The Vampyre, by John Polidori.

“Today, it’s almost ridiculous because it’s so stereotypical—it’s about a vampire that’s aristocratic and evil, but he’s also strangely mesmerizing and attractive to people. But of course, everyone who associates with him ends badly,” says Baldini of Polidori’s story.

Even though not all modern interpretations of vampires pose them as aristocrats, Baldini sees these creatures as always being the elite.

“If you look at Polidori and Stoker’s vampires, they are aristocratic and evil,” says Baldini. “They are themselves special and set apart—not everyone can be them. And also whoever they seek out as their victim, even though it’s violent and it’s deadly, there’s a sense of being the elect—vampires don’t just go for anyone. I think this is part of the attraction, the erotic appeal of the vampire.”

Baldini cites that attraction to the elite nature of the vampire as part of their popularity in the 1980s, when Anne Rice’s novels and films like The Lost Boys portrayed vampires as evil but also glamorous and cool.

“That was the time period of glam and the early yuppies and Gordon Gekko saying ‘greed is good.’ It was okay to be selfish, to prioritize number one, to strive toward an elite status,” says Baldini.

Popular vampires today still have that elitism and admiration, but they are also tragic figures.

“It’s okay to want to be elite to the point were we start valorizing such characters, such as Edward Cullen,” says Baldini. “It’s actually a good thing to want to be like them and to be elected by them, and now there’s a humility trope in there too.”

While vampires represent the upper crust, a monster that is anything but has recently become incredibly popular: the zombie.

“The zombie is the underdog of the monsters, sort of the underachiever of monsters as well,” Baldini says of the stumbling, rotting creatures. “You don’t have to do much to become a zombie. You’re bitten by one and you become one. There’s minimal grooming involved. It’s the blue-collar monster.”
And being a zombie is cool today. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of people turn out for zombie walks, or zombie pub crawls. Hordes of people dress up as the living dead and shuffle through cities across the world, sometimes to promote a cause, give to charity or just for fun. But what does the popularity of zombies say about society today?

“We’re looking at a monster that’s a collective body that consumes everything,” says Baldini. “That’s western culture, that’s what we are. We have over-consumed throughout the 1990’s. We over-borrowed on credit, we took all the equity out of our homes and then some, we consumed indiscriminately, we didn’t think, because like zombies, we don’t think. We just followed the herd in consumption. I don’t think people sit around and think about this, but I think on some level, the zombie is relatable in this particular time in history.”

As Baldini points out, the cultural significance of monsters probably isn’t something most people consider on a conscious level. But that doesn’t make the themes embedded in monster stories any less important.

“We all recognize certain monstrosity in life itself, and so when we recognize it in a very old text like Dracula or The Vampyre, we can accept ourselves more. This is not new, it’s not just me. It’s there, and it’s worth acknowledging,” says Baldini.

“I think it’s most interesting in the way it serves to critique society in a way that seems perhaps innocuous—‘Oh, it's just horror’—but which in fact is incredibly subversive and critical,” she adds.