

The Monster Under the Bed

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Screenshot Ksenia Sobchak / YouTube

Маньяк: maniac

This week in Russia began on a note of outrage about many things, including about television personality Ksenia Sobchak's interview with a man newly released from prison. He had been incarcerated for kidnapping and repeatedly raping two teenage girls he'd held hostage for four years. The name of the town where these atrocities took place is Скопин (Skopin), for which he was called Скопинский маньяк (the Skopin homicidal maniac).

Собчак и маньяк (Sobchak and the maniac) was the topic of countless articles, reports and social media discussions. If there were any supporters of the show, I didn't find them, although it apparently had high ratings. As one person wrote: ТВ программы про насилие, домашние разборки, с копанием в невероятном дерьме — на это сейчас самый большой спрос (TV programs about violence and family feuds that poke around in the most

unbelievable crap are the most popular these days.)

I don't tend to write about this — I don't even like to think about it — but it is useful to know what levels of danger are indicated by various words for human monsters.

First of all, we have the word убийца (murderer, killer), which is a curious word. Although it is a feminine noun, it can be paired with adjectives and other parts of speech with masculine or feminine endings, depending on the gender of the killer. Молодая женщина стала хладнокровной убийцей (The young woman became a cold-blooded killer.) But the “serial” in серийный убийца (serial killer) is masculine. I guess this is because most serial killers are men, although history knows women serial killers, too.

With serial killers, the word маньяк is often used. In Russian маньяк is quite similar to the English maniac: it describes a person who is mentally ill in some way, usually having some kind of unhealthy obsession. There is a difference between убийца who might kill just once, and маньяк-убийца (homicidal maniac) who is, by definition, a serial killer. Умер самый массовый маньяк-убийца — его жертвами стали 90 человек (The most prolific serial killer has died; he had 90 victims).

Маньяк can be used alone, and it's clear from the context what kind of maniac is being described: В городе объявился убийца, и он, маньяк, убивает только по праздникам (A killer appeared in the city, and he — this homicidal maniac — only kills on holidays).

Like in English, in Russian маньяк can also be just a crazy person, usually a person with an obsession for something. In English this can be almost positive: a tennis maniac is someone who wants to watch or play tennis all the time. Not the worst obsession.

In Russian маньяк is less likely to be positive. Ты Сашу не слушай, он ездит как маньяк (Don't listen to Sasha — he drives like a maniac). Even when the result is good, the obsession is a bit unhealthy: Он был немножко маньяк — маникальность Малевича надо понимать как уверенность в чрезвычайной важности своей творческой миссии (He was a bit of a maniac — Malevich's mania should be understood as his certainty in the extraordinary importance of his artistic mission).

Only in the following example is it more or less positive, perhaps because a person is describing himself this way: Я был маньяк, как и большинство людей, любивших книги, ☒ охотился за ними через знакомых, через рынки (I was a maniac and like most booklovers, I hunted them through acquaintances and at book fairs).

Урод is another common word for a human monster: a creep, a freak, a sicko. It can mean someone with a physical deformity: Я актёр, а не цирковой урод (I'm an actor, not a circus freak). Or it can mean someone with no moral sense: Какой-то урод шумит всю ночь (Some depraved jerk makes noise all night). This kind of person is often clarified as моральный урод (moral degenerate). Today these monsters can work online: Я потеряла любимого человека из-за бреда, который написали какие-то моральные уроды (I lost the person I love because of the absolute rubbish that some moral degenerates wrote).

Russian also has дегенерат (degenerate), which was jocularly described by the writer Arkady Khait this way: Дегенерат ☒ то же самое, что дурак, только с высшим образованием (A

degenerate is the same thing as an idiot, only with university education). It can be used to talk about someone with a perverted sense of morality or beauty: Только дегенераты такие картины рисуют (Only degenerates could produce paintings like that!). Or it can be used to describe more violent forms of perversion. In a discussion about the Sobchak interview, someone wrote: Неужели вам интересен внутренний мир такого дегенерата и садиста? (I can't believe you'd be interested in the inner world of that kind of depraved monster and sadist).

Another dreadful kind of person is извращенец (pervert), which generally has connotations of sexual perversion. This is the kind of dangerous person you warn young women about: Понимаешь, детка, не стоит тебе одной выходить из дома, здесь не очень спокойный район, шляются тут сумасшедшие, какие-то извращенцы (You know, sweetheart, you shouldn't go out alone — this isn't a safe neighborhood — there are all kinds of nutcases and perverts walking around).

Or you can also just use the adjective ненормальный (abnormal), which covers any kind of unnatural or violent behavior. По меркам мирного времени многое будет выглядеть ненормальным, жестоким, изуверским (By peace-time standards a lot will look abnormal, cruel, or savage).

A lot of these words for violent and cruel people conflate mental illness with evil. You don't have to use them, but unfortunately you do need to understand them when they are used. If only to know when to change the channel.

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