

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

Amazon.com Is a 21st Century Deal with the Devil

Source: Amy Koss, *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 2017

Note: This is an opinion piece. You may—or may not—agree with it.

I count 11 deserted shops at the Eagle Rock mall. The ghosts of their signs appear eerily above their chained doors. With a few other lost souls, I wander past blank kiosks, witnesses to the mall's dark descent. I think I detect a slight sulfur smell.

In the past, the devil offered endless love or glamorous fame to tempt the weak. But in a world of dating sites and apps, love is only a swipe away and YouTube fame requires no more than a goofy pet. So what would Satan offer Americans today to win our souls?

How about easy consumption?

It's not ambition he needs to appeal to, but our acquisitiveness and sloth. He can show us a picture of a thing — a book, a bauble, a sweater, a vacuum cleaner — and ask three questions:

“Do you want it?” Even if we don't click yes, we can scroll past to the next item, and the next, all offered with equal enthusiasm and zero judgement, unlike the cranky, now unemployed sales clerk who used to work at the mall.

“Do you want it cheap? Less than anywhere else? (And no need to actually touch the filthy lucre or do math. I'll handle that.)”

“Do you want it *now*? (I'll leave it right at your door, so you don't have to acknowledge another soul during the entirety of this transaction.)”

To which we the people have answered, “Yes! Oh, yes!”

And the devil, manifest as Amazon.com, smiles.

So it has come comes to pass that mom & pops and department stores, boutiques and shops, grocery stores and post offices are vanishing in a trail of scorched hoof prints.

Now the retail giants are stumbling to their knees.

They're offering deals and deeper discounts, closing branches, consolidating staff, trying to fend off the inevitable. We can solemnly recite the roll of the dead, dying and struggling: Macy's, Sports Authority, Walmart, Kmart, Office Depot, JCPenney, Bebe, Payless Shoe Source, American Eagle, Chicos, Ann Taylor, Rue 21, Gap, Sears, Radio Shack, Game Stop, Staples, BCBG, Men's Wearhouse, the Limited, Crocs, Guess, Abercrombie & Fitch, Wet Seal... According to the feds, there have been 60,000 retail jobs lost in just the last two months.

Beelzebub's blood bath began with books, remember? First came the massacre of specialty and small, independent bookstores. Then he smote Borders, Crown, Brentano's and B. Dalton, followed by the crippling of Barnes & Noble.

Andrea Vuleta, executive director of the Southern California Independent Booksellers Assn., doesn't think Lucifer makes much money off books. She thinks he wants our

“information” to sell us everything else, and to get his technology into our houses so we will order laundry detergent and toilet paper with the push of a button.

The bookstores didn’t entirely disappear. Cary Lore of Michigan’s Book Beat points out that bricks and mortar establishments still offer things you just can’t do online. “We actually read and care about books,” he said. In regard to Amazon, he sighed: “There’s no defense or revenge. We just have to live with it.”

According to Maureen Palacios, owner of Once Upon a Time, a children’s bookstore in Montrose, Calif., Christmas is the worst time for “show rooming.” That’s when non-regulars come in to do their gift research, examining the books in the store, then go home and order them from Amazon.

Watching the bookstore die-off in horror back then, I wondered if it would end in writers’ losing all control over the written word. If the devil hated cats, say, would that mean the end of publication or sales of books that mention cats? It hasn’t happened yet, but the sinister possibility looms — every choice we make among newspapers, magazines, music, movies, television, fashion, furniture, gadgets, accessories, toys, cameras, dildos and groceries can be accessed by some Big Data decision maker.

A terrifying piece on NPR’s Radio Lab described the work day of “pickers,” the benighted thousands who rush around filling online orders, enabling our laziness and greed. They labor in “fulfillment centers” the size of 17 football fields. These poor souls are timed and monitored, driven to toil without rest like the damned in hell.

Back at my disappearing mall, I flee the emptiness of the corridor into one of the few remaining stores. Indicating the wasteland outside the door, I ask the sole surviving saleswoman what happened. She shrugs. “Everything in the store is 60% to 80% off,” she tells me. “Closing sale!”

Possible Response Questions:

- Identify the author’s central argument and explain why you agree or disagree with it.
- Is the death of the American mall avoidable? Explain.
- Discuss the moves and techniques employed by the writer in this argument.
- Select a passage and reflect on it.