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Monster Theory: Reading Culture



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Monster Theory" is a collection of essays which provide useful ideas and concepts if you are interested in making sense of this time of monsters we live in. Of course, monsters have been with us for some time, and the book contains essays dealing with vampires, Frankenstein's monster and Beowulf. There is also an essay on Jurassic Park and the fascination of dinosaurs. For me, the most useful text by far was the one by editor Jeffery Jerome Cohen, in which he described seven theses on the role of monsters in culture. I found the concepts in this book useful when writing papers about such diverse topics as children's literature (monsters and the monstrous in children's lit) and popular culture (the role of the vampire). Monsters embody borderline concepts, things we worry about. Monsters are the things that trouble us at night. Whenever society is insecure and needs to find a new balance, monsters stalk the perimeter of the fence we have put up around "normality" and challenge us to alter the demarcations. I feel that anyone interested in monsters and their role in culture would profit from reading this book - and not just the student or scholar of popular culture.

Critical theory, in my view, often walks a line between providing real insight into art and society, and getting caught up in it's own self-referential obfuscation, substituting wordiness and word play for true insight. I think that's what has happened here. At least for me, I had to work too hard to find too little. I've read a lot of critical theory, and this type doesn't do it for me. But if you like theory to be art

in itself, more about itself than the purported topic--in this case monsters and monstrosities--then you may, like the other reviewer, enjoy this work. But I prefer the work of Anijar, Barone, MacLaren, work that turns outward as well as inward. I suggest using the "look inside" feature to examine this book before buying. See if it's the flavor of critical theory that moves you.

This is one of my favorite theoretical books! I find Cohen's book offers great insight into monsters and why we both love and fear them. It's very relevant to border studies, the abject, third spaces and liminality. I return to it in my own work on a regular basis because not only is it innovative but very clear for critical theory. I highly recommend it.

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