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Monster Theory: Reading Culture



Synopsis

Monsters provide a key to understanding the culture that spawned them. So argues the essays in this wide-ranging collection that asks the question, what happens when critical theorists take the study of monsters seriously as a means of examining our culture? In viewing the monstrous body as metaphor for the cultural body, the contributors consider beasts, demons, freaks, and fiends as symbolic expressions of very real fears and desires, signs of cultural unease that pervade society and shape its collective behaviour. Through a sampling of monsters as a conceptual category, these essays argue that our fascination for the monstrous testifies to our continued desire to explore the difference, prohibition and the everchanging "borders of possibility". Topics treated include: the connection between Beowulf, Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, and Dr Jekyll's Hyde; the fascination with Chang and Eng, the "Siamese twins" in 1830s America, and what it has to say about anxieties regarding the recently "united" states; the idea of monstrosity in Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles"; the use of monstrosity in medieval anti-muslim polemics; and an exploration of the creation myth embedded in "Jurassic Park".

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Customer Reviews

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.

While I did have to buy this book for a class a few years ago, it is still a book I enjoy to read once a while to this day. It has many different helpful ways that can help expose a different way of thinking to a person and helps to open conversation in an area that most people don't seem to think about, especially talk about. I enjoyed the topic and the conversations it started very much.

This is a great foundational text for monster theory. I used several essays extensively for a graduate project and to create a unit plan for teaching my AP Lit class.

Arrived in good condition.

This book provides insightful and new ways of looking at those beings deemed as monsters forcing readers to confront stereotypes and archetypes in a new way.

"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 its 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.

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