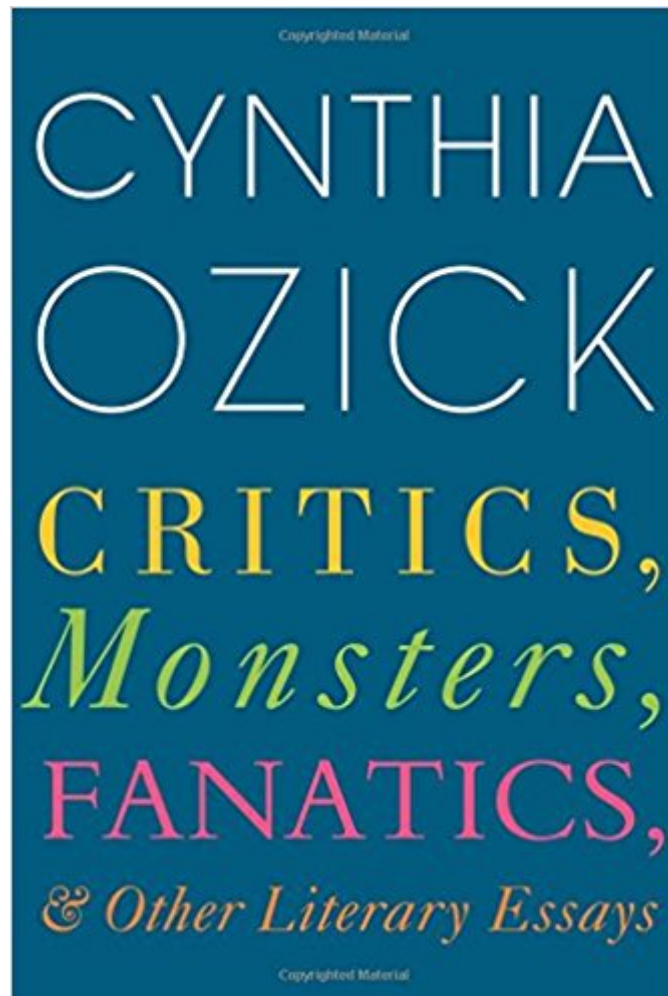




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Critics, Monsters, Fanatics, And Other Literary Essays



Synopsis

In a collection that includes new essays written explicitly for this volume, one of our sharpest and most influential critics confronts the past, present, and future of literary culture. If every outlet for book criticism suddenly disappeared — if all we had were reviews that treated books like any other commodity — could the novel survive? In a gauntlet-throwing essay at the start of this brilliant assemblage, Cynthia Ozick stakes the claim that, just as surely as critics require a steady supply of new fiction, novelists need great critics to build a vibrant community on the foundation of literary history. For decades, Ozick herself has been one of our great critics, as these essays so clearly display. She offers models of critical analysis of writers from the mid-twentieth century to today, from Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and Kafka, to William Gass and Martin Amis, all assembled in provocatively named groups: Fanatics, Monsters, Figures, and others. Uncompromising and brimming with insight, these essays are essential reading for anyone facing the future of literature in the digital age.

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Customer Reviews

Cynthia Ozick has written a collection of essays centered on criticism. Criticizing criticism is a thankless job. One gets oneself into all sorts of quagmire. She posits "nothing is worth doing unless it has never been done before...", as one mode, then the other as "...the sweet value of ripeness." Her dilemma is at least as nearly as true as those in other of areas humanity, such as engineering, where the turntable or the horse carriage outperformed nascent innovations for

considerable periods; they were perfected upon the occasions of their doom. But few will quit writing novels so long as they can be sold. Others will persist anyway. Few make money, even fewer are destined prized as literature and treasures of culture. Every step Ms. Ozick takes is fraught with complexity. If the realist or realistic or tragic realist form is or may be about to be dead because it has been done, then all pressures, artistic, commercial and academic are exerted to produce the new, the "experimental", to use an empty adjective. Yet Ms. Ozick (whom I have been reading for three decades) draws herself into such forlorn defenses of her not quite-dead-yet craft by writing that Mozart and jazz manage to coexist in our world. There is a sense, good or bad, that both of these art forms are now museum pieces, genius and beautiful, but none-the-less...no longer developing. Jazz is in another world now, never to go back in time to Parker and Armstrong, just as we no longer compose minuets. Experimentalism, short of the horrible isms, is proper to science, not to humanities. Oh, grumble not, as any author or artist has the potential to experiment. Ms. Ozick lays the onus on the absence of serious critics.

It is surprising that this book was offered for our consideration. Ozick does not regard reviewers very highly, certainly not as a group and seemingly begrudgingly in rare instances. Add to this the fact that I am also an academic and I fear that anything I write will not even merit a parentheses in consideration. That said, I write not as a literary critic but as a simple book reviewer. Book reviewers here on aren't critics at all. We're more like co-consumers, suggesting whether an item is worth buying based on our experiences. The better reviews add some useful insights, building on the product description in a--hopefully--honest way. A literary critic isn't in the business of consumer counselor. Rather, a literary critic seeks to understand a written work, putting it into its cultural and historical context, adding insights into ideas and patterns and contributions of the work to broader conversations. reviews abound. The work of literary criticism has fallen on rough times. Ozick is an amazing writer. I got this book mostly so that I could learn from her style and approach. I had friends who raved about her work. This skill is quickly apparent not only in style but also in content. Though English lit was one of my least favorite subjects, since I was very young I have loved reading all kinds of books, articles, you name it. I didn't like how critics pulled apart and took the joy out of a text. But it seems I was not given the best examples. Ozick offers a call towards the place and purpose and need for intelligent literary criticism and then, in later essays, describes particular examples, adding a mostly cohesive call towards a dying art in our age of click bait and celebrity distractions.

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