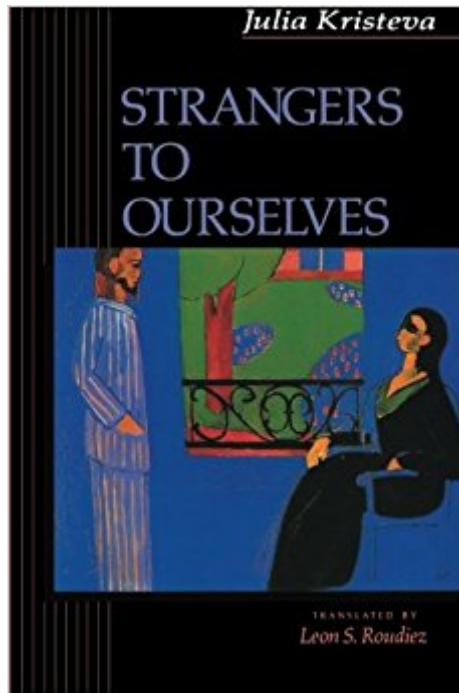




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Strangers To Ourselves



Synopsis

This book is concerned with the notion of the "stranger" -the foreigner, outsider, or alien in a country and society not their own- as well as the notion of strangeness within the self -a person's deep sense of being, as distinct from outside appearance and their conscious idea of self. Kristeva begins with the personal and moves outward by examining world literature and philosophy. She discusses the foreigner in Greek tragedy, in the Bible, and in the literature of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the twentieth century. She discusses the legal status of foreigners throughout history, gaining perspective on our own civilization. Her insights into the problems of nationality, particularly in France are more timely and relevant in an increasingly integrated and fractious world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kristeva, who teaches linguistics at the University of Paris and is also a practicing psychoanalyst, traces the concept of the "stranger" or "foreigner" in various cultures and periods from the Greeks to the present. This--albeit highly selective--excursion through intellectual/political history is influenced by Freud's notion of the alienation, or "splitting off," of the self that comes about as the result of the repression of feelings and the ideational content attached to them. It is the sense, Kristeva argues, that we are also "strangers to ourselves." This book is primarily for academic audiences and, though not an essential purchase, will delight advanced students and faculty in intellectual history, linguistics, philosophy, and psychology.-Leon M. Brody, U.S. Office of Personnel , Management

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Kristeva suggests that the antidote to xenophobia, racism and other weapons against outsiders is to recognize that "the foreigner is within us." [The book] demonstrates her amazing command of history, politics, literature, linguistics, and psychology...argues powerfully for a radical examination of self, beginning with the realization that what is most fearful to us in the stranger may be the very quality we do not want to recognize in ourselves. Only through this reconciliation with our estranged self, Kristeva asserts, can we begin to give fair treatment to others. (San Fransisco Examiner-Chronicle)

Very accessible text in comparison to Kristeva's other work. But mostly a broad overview of foreigners in European history--not the most insightful or rewarding text, by any means.

I read this in the original French back in the early 90s. It seemed an odd little book, uncomfortably poetic and "arty" from my anglo perspective. But it changed my perception of how people, and groups of people, relate with each other; to the point that I think of it or mention it quite frequently. I should probably re-read it! I don't know if she covers the same material in any other of her books, but I found that this was a simple, focused read that was interesting and very worthwhile.

The most interesting sections of this work are the earliest chapters; Kristeva seems to run out of steam and stop abruptly once she begins to discuss foreignness and strangeness in contemporary culture. The writing is also very abstract (perhaps more so because it is a translation); this particular book is probably only interesting to a student of literature who is critically concerned with the figure of the Stranger in fiction and legends. I don't recommend picking this book up simply out of curiosity.

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