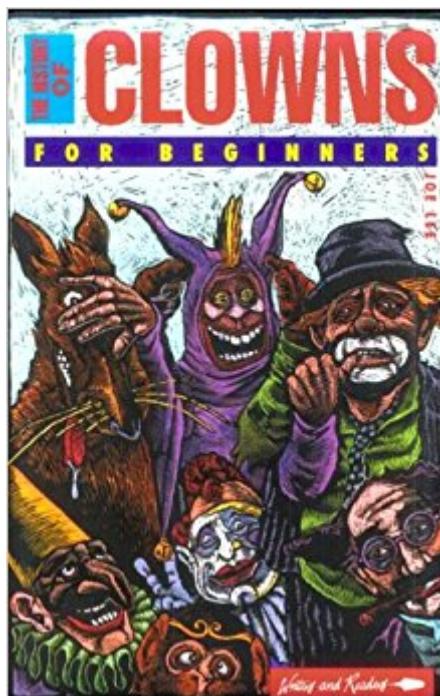


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Clowns For Beginners



Synopsis

Want to be a clown?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Want to be a clown?

Lee takes what some would see as a frivolous subject and uses it to convey deep truths about the human condition. When I bought my first copy of this from a now-defunct brick and mortar bookstore, the snarky clerk looked at the cover and sneered, "A little heavy reading, huh?" He was both unconsciously right and wrong: Joe Lee talks about big cultural anthropological issues, but does so with humor - both textual and graphic. It is not a book for children, yet it has a childlike (albeit sexual - play find the phallus on nearly every page) quality that provides the best of what clowns should be. In an age when traditional clowns get a bum rap for being scary or, at least, creepy, Lee restores their archetypal importance while expanding the definition of what it means to be a clown. He makes me wish I had run away to the circus decades ago, while giving me the opportunity to discover my inner clown now and find the sacred foolishness that permeates contemporary life.

I couldn't learn anything from this book because it was badly written and the author kept trying to be cute or funny in ways that confused what he was trying to say. Plus, the drawings were gratuitously

eroticized -- it seems like at least every few pages, there's a drawing of characters with enlarged (and/or erect) genitalia, topless women, or sexually suggestive positions. I'm by far a prude but this was so overdone and distracting, it made me feel like I was unintentionally reading something pornographic. It's too bad because he tries to cover a lot of what would have been interesting clown characters through history. Don't waste your money. Get a book by an author who's not trying so hard to be offbeat.

DO NOT ORDER FOR KIDS - LOTS OF PENIS SHOTS ON CLOWNS. JUST DON'T THINK IT's for kids!

The History of Clowns for Beginners, written and illustrated by Joe Lee, conveys the magic of clowning and the dynamics of clowning with a comic spiel and often brilliant illustrations. Joe Lee professionally trained and performed as a clown, and this personal experience brings a vivid dimension of compelling playful action to his narration. The whole spectrum is well represented here—“from rib-tickling goofy fun to delirious surreal chaotic wisdom, the many ways of the refreshing wildness of the trickster archetype. The table of contents is very helpful to readers, providing a sense of the organization of the book—“once the journey begins it proceeds at hilarious breakneck speed, and not knowing what will pop up next is part of the book’s charm. The inevitable beginning is the figure of the shaman, a universal role in archaic and primal traditions, mysteriously featured as a deer-masked dancer in a trance in cave paintings, for example. The tribal shaman cures and refreshes, and one of the medicines in his kit is hilarity. Next come the trickster stories from various cultures, with animal examples (such as snake, coyote, monkey, fox, hare, spider) and mythological and human examples from a variety of cultures, including Hermes and Loki. China’s folk novel with a Buddhist monkey hero, Journey to The West, is another great trickster figure highlighted here. Then the customs and traditions of fools from around the world including medieval European and Native American. Fool stories are dramatized, such as the Feast of Fools from Medieval Europe, and outsider figures like sadhus, and the profound foolery of Zen, too. Then the many examples from the long history of clowns parade through the pages, from the classical Sanskrit plays, and from the series of Shakespeare’s fools, such as the jester in King Lear. And then clowns of more recent styles: circus clowns, clowns from films, existential clowns, Charlie Chaplin’s little tramp, Emmett Kelly, the Marx Brothers and Laurel and Hardy, and modern entertainers like Bill Irwin and Pee Wee Herman. The black and white ink illustrations are great, with accurate costumes from diverse cultures and historical eras,

whether from the commedia del arte characters, or the Medieval Saturnalia celebrations which refreshed time cycles, energizing order with chaos. It's all here, leaping off the pages, the absurdity of the Yippies, who ran a pig for US president, and the Vidusaka of Sanskrit plays, who was a troublemaker and go-between. Clowns are as necessary to the theater as the audience and have been an integral part of it as long as it has existed, Lee writes. In all cultures, in all climes, clowns have served the function of not only laughter but also intermediary between drama and audience, just as trickster served as the link between the sacred and the mundane. Lee reveals the archetypal depths of the skits put on by circus clowns, and the universal humanity disguised in tramp clowns, and many other marvels of crazy wisdom, too. Lee shows in many ways a truth which deserves greater recognition: how from the chaos created by clowning in the human world and wild laughter a deeper clarity can be reached, just as a thunderstorm can clear the air. This book is a great overview of the basic topic of clowns fooling around absurdly for a great reason, with popularly recognizable examples and depth insights. It is a book valuable for anyone, even those familiar with some aspects of tricksters and clowns and fools"because the topic is so rich with unfamiliar examples from around the world, new insights about their performances will be fresh and informative. This book is in the series of *For Beginners* books, which includes titles such as *Zen for Beginners*, *Jazz for Beginners*, and *Sex for Beginners*. The style of this book is very much in tune with its theme. Mr. Lee uses a multitude of dramatic examples to convey what clowns, tricksters and fools are all about"and those who find this intriguing will no doubt go on to explore further other aspects of this fascinating topic. It's a tour de force on a rich topic, the spirit of clowning, well explored and wittily illustrated. Bill Jackson

Having great deal of respect for the Readers and Writers series in general, I was truly disappointed by Joe Lee's *History of Clowns for Beginners*. First of all, be forewarned: Lee's subject is not so much circus clowns per se (they get about two pages), but the various incarnations of the trickster archetype in general, from the Paleolithic era through the present. Besides the utterly groundless statements made about the disposition and mentality of preliterate civilizations, there are numerous major historical errors of an elementary nature. For example, Lee claims that no text of a Greek satyr play has survived--if, in fact, any "had ever even existed." What on Earth is he talking about? Evidently Lee isn't familiar with Euripides' *Cyclops* or the fragments we have of dozens of other satyr plays. Another of Lee's bizarre statements is that Erasmus translated the New Testament "into Latin and Greek." Apparently Lee is unaware that the original language of the New Testament is, in

fact, Greek. Neither of the silly errors should have escaped the notice of a decent editor. Nor should the countless grammatical and punctuation errors which riddle the text, sometimes rendering it unintelligible. After spotting various errors on subjects in which I am well versed, I began wondering how much I could trust Lee's representation of periods and concepts relatively unfamiliar to me. And it's hard for a reader in that kind of skeptical posture to be impressed or intrigued by anything at all. In short, this book was a disappointment—it's such a shame, since it's such a good idea for a book in the first place. I can only hope that Writers and Readers releases a new edition of *_Clowns for Beginners_* after subjecting it to a major overhaul. To Lee's credit, some of his wordplay is funny and his art is excellent.

I thought the book was exceptionally written despite the fact that it lost its meaning many times through the important sections.

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