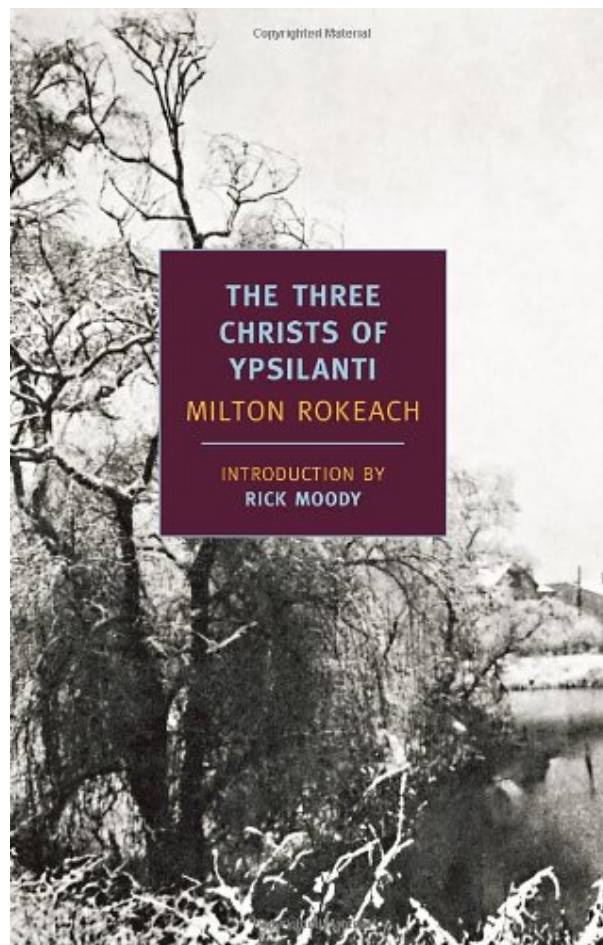
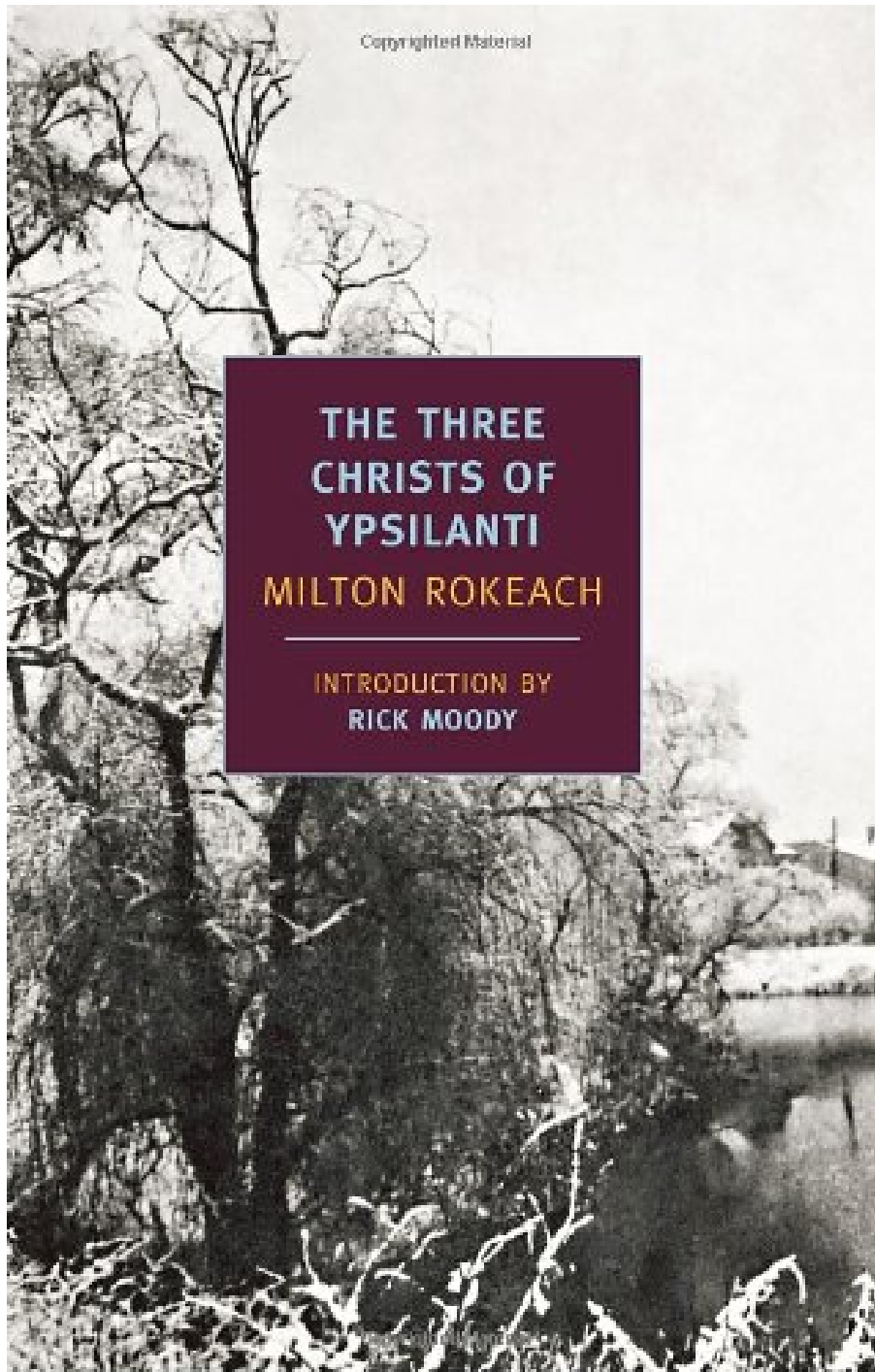


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YORK REVIEW BOOKS CLASSICS) BY  
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## Review

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“The Three Christs is part meticulous log-book, part intriguing commentary and part high-voltage play as Rokeach recreates the men's interactions over 25 months. Rokeach's aim was to force them to confront ‘the ultimate contradiction’ of believing they were the same being....Reissued for the first time in over 25 years, it comes with a pithy and sensitive preface by Rick Moody, foregrounding both changing attitudes to institutional care and the problems and possibilities of Rokeach's experiment.” – *The Guardian*

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On July 1, 1959, at Ypsilanti State Hospital in Michigan, the social psychologist Milton Rokeach brought together three paranoid schizophrenics: Clyde Benson, an elderly farmer and alcoholic; Joseph Cassel, a failed writer who was institutionalized after increasingly violent behavior toward his family; and Leon Gabor, a college dropout and veteran of World War II.

The men had one thing in common: each believed himself to be Jesus Christ. Their extraordinary meeting and the two years they spent in one another's company serves as the basis for an investigation into the nature of human identity, belief, and delusion that is poignant, amusing, and at times disturbing. Displaying the sympathy and subtlety of a gifted novelist, Rokeach draws us into the lives of three troubled and profoundly different men who find themselves "confronted with the ultimate contradiction conceivable for human beings: more than one person claiming the same identity."

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A landmark study of personality

By M. Bromberg

The premise of Rokeach's study (bringing people together who share the same delusion) has broad implications: in a culture with so many shared ideas and values, what sets us apart as individuals? In this 1960s experiment, of course, these three patients have been diagnosed with a proven pathology. In society at large most of us seek out friends and associates with whom we share a great deal; yet our sense of personality is still a matter of individual choices. At end, this was the same discovery Rokeach made with his three Christs; when confronted with the truth, these three men made personal choices allowing for the existence of the others -- a society of Christs. I first read this in the early 1970s as part of an anthropology course, and although I am not a health care professional I found it a fascinating study, one that carries the reader with an almost novel-like flow. For those who read it with care, it will provoke a lot of questions about what makes us who we are, both as individuals and as members of society. A fictional parallel to many of the ideas in this book, though by no means exact, can be found in Nigel Dennis's 1955 novel "Cards of Identity."

23 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

A psychological study that reads like a good novel

By Patrick W. Crabtree

Take three mentally ill institutionalized men, each of whom firmly believes that he is Jesus Christ. Put them

all in one place and let them talk to one another. What happens? Find out! This is a true story and a fluid read, (no major technical jargon -- edited like a novel).

This study was carried out over a lengthy period of time by state psychiatrist Milton Rokeach (the book author) in Ypsilanti, Michigan in 1964. One might question Rokeach's ethics in carrying out such an experiment with three such delusional men but, had it led to a cure for any of their respective mental difficulties, one could say that the end justified the means. And it was, of course, Rokeach's objective to help these men.

This book is often difficult to find and is usually rather expensive when it is located, typically around \$30 for a hardcover edition. Still, it's a great read and anyone who has an interest in social science will find it especially riveting.

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

schizopoetry

By Eric V. Jung

Others better qualified than I have commented on the psychological aspects, and the novel-like flow of the book. What I don't see mentioned, and what struck me, is the overlap between the language of the three Christs and the language of the poetry of the same period - Dylan, John Lennon, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac. The Christs, coming from delusion, paranoia, and dysfunctional mental processes, speak or write throwing off jarring, powerful metaphors that make no sense lying on the page but make hypersense when allowed to rattle around in your head. There are stretches that remind me, especially, of Dylan's "Tarantula" or Lennon's "In His Own Write"; or Captain Beefheart at his wordplaying best. There's plenty there for the psychologists to chew on - why does a Kerouac or a Ginsberg sound like an institutionalized delusional Christ, and vice versa. Anyway - in this very entertaining and disturbing book, there's material for a thousand New Wave or Punk band names. And there's more reality in the three Christs than in a hundred tv "reality" shows or a thousand Hollywood movies.

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