



Book Reflections
for **Good Morning, Monster**
by Catherine Gildiner

May 11, 2022

A few weeks ago, I sent a friend a small collection of baby books for her newborn. In return, she sent me a book she had recently finished. The book, ‘Good Morning, Monster’ by Catherine Gildiner, told the stories of five individuals Gildiner encountered over the course of her career as a therapist – and somewhat outside of it. The author considered these individuals heroes because they were able to make a degree of peace with their harrowing pasts and painful presents. Through commitment, introspection, trust, and time, they were eventually able to stand on their own and resolutely step into worlds where they weren’t as plagued by their traumas and weren’t as hampered by their lack of confidence in themselves and others.

At this point, some readers may wonder why my friend decided to give me such a heady book in response to the baby books. I think the answer is three-fold.

- A.) She had already read this book, felt it was good, and knew I enjoyed books as well.
- B.) She is naturally kind-hearted.
- C.) I had given her a few books from the Baby University series, which included books on quantum entanglement, quantum computing, neural networks, and more. So, I think she was trying to give me a book with enough emotional heft to match the technical heft – relative to her newborn – of the books I sent.

(I’m not completely sold on C., but I can’t count it out either.)

Regardless of the deeper reasons for the gift though, I definitely appreciated the book. It only took me four days to finish because I couldn’t put it down. It was that engaging! And, as an additional point of reference, I’ve had books half the size of ‘Good Morning, Monster’ take me months to complete.



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Part of what makes Gildiner's book so gripping is its ability to subtly push readers to think about their own backgrounds and sense of normalcy. By exploring the different lives of a woman who had to play the role of her family's mother at a strikingly young age, a skilled pianist attempting to overcome their disturbed past, a man whose identity complex inhibited his ability to feel, a brilliant woman who must move beyond the influence of her sadistic and narcissistic father, and a successful businessperson undoing the psychological damage caused by their mother – which routinely consisted of the morning greeting 'Good morning, monster' – Gildiner highlights issues that almost everyone has encountered on some gradation.

However, I'm certain that the author's intent was not to have readers relate completely to the people whose lives were shared but to have readers relate to certain moments along the way. It was even stated early in the book that the characters were mostly themselves, but for the sake of adding layers of anonymity, Gildiner told the stories in such a way that the people were – at times – amalgamations of several patients she had worked with. But whatever the case may be, the stories are undoubtedly inspiring.

As I read the book, I thought more and more about the social interactions I've had throughout my life – especially if I didn't have the pleasure of knowing the life stories of those around me and directly involved. I reflected on how they acted and how I responded in the moment. I reran scenarios and wondered if I could have noticed more, been more understanding, or set clearer expectations and boundaries. 'Good Morning, Monster' just has the power to make a person pensive and aware of the wide range of lives that can be lived on this crazy planet. A friend could be outwardly chipper but internally devastated or a colleague could seem unduly cold, but that chilling manner might be the greatest warmth they've known and can express. The world is filled



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with unknowns, but we just have to try our best to navigate through it all – highs, lows, lefts, rights, corridors, and corners.

Thus, Gildiner's book simply acts as a reminder to everyone of the emotional and cognitive chasms many people must navigate daily. We should be supportive when able and quick to seek understanding amid periods of confusion. Of course, the five stories Gildiner shares may not directly change the average reader's life in a substantial way, but I adamantly believe in the ability to affect the lives of those around oneself through clarity, compassion, self-advocacy, and a willingness to occasionally step out of one's comfort zone and into the realm of another's. So while maybe not directly but rather indirectly, 'Good Morning, Monster' does a fabulous job at pushing society's needle in a positive direction as it's replete with little life lessons for facing difficult – and potentially rather dark – realities. It's the kind of book that should be on almost any shelf. If not for you, then surely for someone you'll meet further down the road.

End Note: And Katherine (with a K), if you ever read this reflection, thank you so much for this book! It was a great gift!