

W.B. Yeats and the Occult: A Journey into the Mystical and Supernatural



W.B. Yeats and Occultism by Elea McDonnell Feit

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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William Butler Yeats, one of the most celebrated Irish poets of the 20th century, harbored a deep fascination with the occult and the supernatural throughout his life. This fascination permeated his poetry, plays, and prose, leaving an indelible mark on his creative output and shaping his worldview.

Early Encounters with the Occult

Yeats's interest in the occult can be traced back to his childhood in Sligo, Ireland. His mother, Susan Pollexfen, was an avid reader of Irish folklore and mythology, which sparked Yeats's imagination at an early age. He was also influenced by the writings of the Irish poet and mystic George Russell, known as "AE," who introduced him to concepts such as reincarnation and spiritualism.

In 1884, Yeats joined the Hermetic Society, a Dublin-based group dedicated to studying the occult. Here, he delved into the works of the

Hermetic philosophers, including Hermes Trismegistus and Paracelsus, and explored topics such as alchemy, astrology, and the Kabbalah.

Involvement in Secret Societies

In 1890, Yeats was initiated into the Golden Dawn, a secret society dedicated to the study and practice of Western esotericism. The Golden Dawn was a melting pot of occult ideas, drawing inspiration from Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, and Theosophy.

Within the Golden Dawn, Yeats rose through the ranks, becoming an Adeptus Exemptus (seventh grade) and serving as the order's Imperator (leader) in 1900. During his time in the Golden Dawn, Yeats collaborated with other prominent occultists, such as Aleister Crowley, and developed a lifelong interest in ceremonial magic and ritual.

The Supernatural in Yeats's Work

Yeats's fascination with the occult found expression in his literary works. His early poetry, such as "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1889), is heavily influenced by Irish folklore and mythology, featuring characters like fairies, banshees, and the ancient Celtic gods.

In his later work, Yeats delved deeper into the themes of the occult and the supernatural. Plays such as "The Countess Cathleen" (1892) and "The Shadowy Waters" (1906) explore the worlds of spirits and the afterlife. Poems like "The Second Coming" (1920) and "Among School Children" (1927) contain references to astrology, mysticism, and the cyclic nature of history.

The Influence of Theosophy

In the early 20th century, Yeats became increasingly involved with Theosophy, a spiritual movement founded by Helena Blavatsky. Theosophy promoted the idea of a universal brotherhood and the existence of a hidden wisdom accessible through spiritual practices and occult knowledge.

Yeats's interest in Theosophy influenced his work in several ways. He incorporated Theosophical concepts into his poetry, such as the idea of the "oversoul" and the cyclical nature of existence. He also wrote plays, such as "At the Hawk's Well" (1917) and "The Only Jealousy of Emer" (1919), that explore Theosophical themes.

Legacy and Significance

W.B. Yeats's fascination with the occult and the supernatural played a pivotal role in shaping his life and work. His exploration of these themes enriched his poetry and plays, adding layers of mystery, symbolism, and depth to his writing.

Yeats's legacy as an occultist continues to inspire and fascinate readers today. His work provides a window into the rich and complex world of the occult, shedding light on the human fascination with the unknown and the supernatural.

Suggested Readings

- W.B. Yeats: The Occult by George Mills Harper
- Yeats and the Occult by Anthony L. Johnson
- The Hermetic Imagination: Yeats and the Occult Tradition by Timothy Materer
- The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats

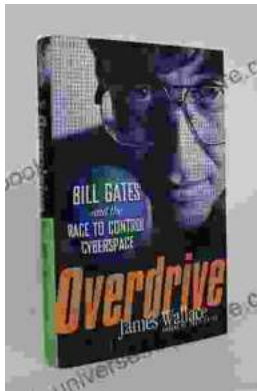
- The Plays of W.B. Yeats



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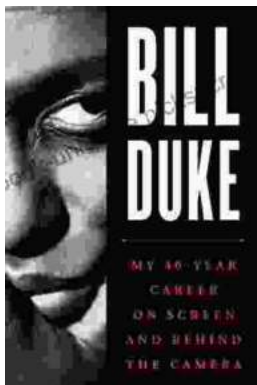
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