



Precipitations: Contemporary American Poetry as Occult Practice

Devin Johnston

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Precipitations traces the influence of the occult on contemporary American poetry and positions it within the larger tradition of Romanticism. Devin Johnston focuses on the works of H.D., Robert Duncan and James Merrill, as well as Susan Howe and Nathaniel Mackey, to show how the occult, in its resistance to dialectical thinking, proved attractive to these poets and offered a means by which traditional notions of authorship could be challenged. Johnston argues that for these writers, "the poem is not produced by the individual mind, but precipitates out of a complex network of shared circumstances."

Yeats and Blake have central roles in this study, but whereas Yeats has long been associated with occultism as a literary phenomenon, Johnston argues that Blake's Romantic organicism has offered a more compelling model for American poets in the latter half of the twentieth century. With close attention to the ways in which recent American poetry has been written and read, Precipitations examines the composition of particular poems within the context of broad debates concerning form, indeterminacy and authorship.

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