



Stages of Evil: Occultism in Western Theater and Drama (Studies in Romance Languages)

Robert Lima

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"The evil that men do" has been chronicled for thousands of years on the European stage, and perhaps nowhere else is human fear of our own evil more detailed than in its personifications in theater. Early writers used theater to communicate human experiences and to display reverence for the gods governing daily life. Playwrights from Euripides onward sought inspiration from this interplay between the worldly and the occult, using human belief in the divine to govern characters' actions within a dramatic arena. The constant adherence to the supernatural, despite changing religious ideologies over the centuries, testifies to a deep and continuing belief in the ability of a higher power to interfere in human life. *Stages of Evil* is the first book to examine the representation and relationship of evil and the occult from the prehistoric origins of drama through to the present day. Drawing on examples of magic, astronomy, demonology, possession, exorcism, fairies, vampires, witchcraft, hauntings, and voodoo, author Robert Lima explores how theater shaped American and European perceptions of the occult and how the dramatic works studied here reflect society back upon itself at different points in history. From representations of Dionysian rites in ancient Greece, to the Mouth of Hell in the Middle Ages, to the mystical cabalistic life of the Hasidic Jews, to the witchcraft and magic of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, Lima traces the recurrence of supernatural motifs in pivotal plays and performance works of the Western tradition. Considering numerous myths and cultural artifacts, such as the "wild man," he describes the evolution and continual representation of supernatural archetypes on the modern stage. He also discusses the sociohistorical implications of Christian and pagan representations of evil and the theatrical creativity that occultism has engendered. Delving into his own theatrical, literary, folkloric, and travel experiences to enhance his observations, Lima assays the complex world of occultism and examines diverse works of Western theater and drama. A unique and comprehensive bibliography of European and American plays concludes the study and facilitates further research into the realm of the social and literary impact of the occult.

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