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Stock, The Holy and the Daemonic from Sir Thomas Browne to William Blake

Kent Ljungquist

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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R. D. STOCK. *THE HOLY AND THE DAEMONIC FROM SIR THOMAS BROWNE TO WILLIAM BLAKE*. PRINCETON: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1982. 395 pp. \$27.50.

Although a simplistic view would distinguish between demons and angels as malevolent and beneficent agents respectively, the daemon carries a less determinate moral value because of its mysterious intimacy with supernatural power. Morally ambivalent outside an orthodox Christian context, the daemonic suggests force, uncanniness, a paradoxical melding of awe and fear. An occult source of energy, the daemonic can provoke fascination or vehemence; in its ancient setting the daemon served a positive or active, rather than a diabolical function. The classical concept of the daemon has been revived in almost every literary epoch, as such diverse scholarly studies as Robert H. West's *The Invisible World* and Charles I. Patterson's *The Daemonic Experience of John Keats* abundantly demonstrate. Tracing further the literary progeny of the ancient daemon, R. D. Stock's study provides a lively, informative, and engaging survey of the non-rational side of the Enlightenment.

Brief in his treatment of the classical daemon, Stock assays a full-scale examination of religious experience in eighteenth-century literature. Besides the primary texts he explicates with care and skill, Stock draws heavily from Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). Richly describing spiritual horror, Otto distinguishes two manifestations of numinous experience: the daemonic suggests divine energy lapsing into terror; the holy signifies the *numen* as it acquires moral attributes. The numinous inevitably carries an emotional intensity alternating between anguish and reverence; man, confronting God as the wholly other, undergoes a ravishment or captivation of the soul. Stock's analysis of religious experience thus challenges both complacent fideism and uncritical adherence to theological dogma. Within the twin poles of the holy and daemonic, his chosen texts meaningfully oscillate.

His individual analyses will hardly win unanimous approval. Donne's "The First Anniversary," according to Stock, is no distressed lament over the onset of the new philosophy, but an orthodox expression of man's degeneracy resulting from original sin. Neither emotionally false nor a meretricious portrait of a sick soul, Edward Young's

Night Thoughts emerges as an intensely personal, highly rhetorical expression of the aesthetics of terror. Likewise, the "glooms" of James Thomson's *The Seasons* carry the agreeable excitement of numinous experience. Turning to fiction, Stock finds equal measures of religious wonder and horrifying dread. With its terrifying storms and assorted misfortunes, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* proffers a daemonic quest for God's providence. Possessing no such orientation toward divine will, Richardson's *Lovelace* becomes impelled by daemonic energies beyond rational ken. Although such spiritual onslaughts may not comport with modern skepticism about religion, the holy and daemonic pervade the literature of the Age of Reason. Even as lurid a yarn as Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* wins kudos from Stock, who suggests that its powerful sense of evil would do justice to any religious education.

Singled out for Stock's special scorn, the Whig critics see the Enlightenment as a climax in man's inevitable passage from superstition and ignorance to reason and logic. Puncturing such a stereotyped view, Stock offers Johnson and Hume as the century's most authentic thinkers, the latter exposing in his blistering attacks on prejudice and fanaticism man's unquenchable craving for wonder. A rare book for a university press to have published in light of its avowed religious sentiments, Stock's study stands as a bracing exception to W. B. Yeats's claim that "all's Whiggery now."

Kent Ljungquist

Worcester Polytechnic Institute