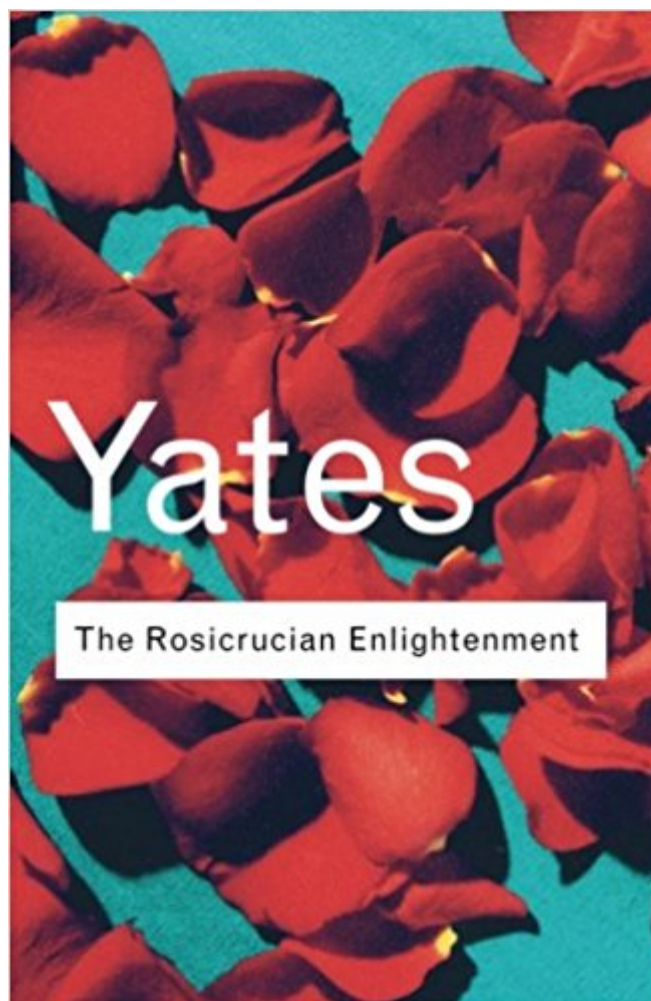


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The Rosicrucian Enlightenment (Routledge Classics)



Synopsis

A history of the role that the occult has played in the formation of modern science and medicine, The Rosicrucian Enlightenment has had a tremendous impact on our understanding of the western esoteric tradition. Beautifully illustrated, it remains one of those rare works of scholarship which the general reader simply cannot afford to ignore.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Routledge; 2nd edition (November 11, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0415267692

ISBN-13: 978-0415267694

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #100,091 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > Occult & Paranormal > Hermetism & Rosicrucianism #33 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Reference #195 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > History & Surveys

Customer Reviews

This book began a revolution in encouraging scholars and laypersons to take the role of Esoteric movements as a legitimate element in the study of Western history. Though there have been recent disputes with some conclusions drawn by Dame Yates in this work, it still remains a pioneering document of historical research. The recent collection of essays by Christopher Bamford, "The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited" goes toward validation of much of this work. A seminal book in esoteric studies, highly recommended.

This is one of the books featured in the annotated bibliography that I am writing. It is not some occult handbook; rather, it is a concise history of this movement during the 17th century, written by an eminent Renaissance scholar. If you really want to know what was happening in Great Britain and Europe during this period, what brought about the Rosicrucian Manifesto and Confessio - and why - this is the book to read. Dame Frances Yates' clarity in setting down this underground movement, how these men communicated and disseminated their thoughts and beliefs (which were considered

heretical to the church and treasonous to the politics of their day) is an enlightening revelation. It is to these men, who fought for the freedom from Church strictures to study mathematics, philosophy and science openly, that we should give our thanks today. These are the great minds who held a utopian vision: Johann Valentine Andreae, Giordano Bruno, Elias Ashmole, John Dee, Sir Phillip Sidney, Thomas Vaughan, Francis Bacon, Robert Fludd, Michael Maier, Tommaso Campanella, and others (the only person missing is Sendivogius). These are the alchemists who were responsible for the later advancement into rational science.

Wonderful book. Highly recommended. The book is a history of a very overlooked portion of the role that the so called "occult" has played in the formation of modern science and medicine. It traces with wonderful skill, the foundations of the Royal Society. It shows Bacon was FIRMLY entrenched in the lore of alchemy and hermeticism. Those early scientists were indeed the last of the great alchemists. She goes on to show the link between the "invisible college" and the rise of objective thought that culminated with the Renaissance. In the process she charts the greater part of Pre-Renaissance history! If you have an interest in the esoteric foundations of science, then this is a worthy expenditure of your time.

The Rosicrucian Enlightenment by Renaissance scholar Frances Yates is a fascinating account of the Rosicrucian movement in seventeenth century Europe and its relationship to various political intrigues of the time. Yates begins by remarking that in referring to Rosicrucians she is not referring to any of the modern day occult groups which go under this name and by referring to "enlightenment" she is not referring to the historical period known as the "Aufklärung" in which philosophers attempted to shed light on the darkness of superstition. Rather, Yates suggests that certain documents referred to as the "Rosicrucian manifestos" published in seventeenth century Germany brought about an enlightenment in which other intellectuals attempted to copy from them and incorporate elements of Rosicrucianism into their utopias. The word Rosicrucian refers at once to the semi-mythical (at least believed to be mythical by most modern scholars) hero of the manifestos Christian Rosencreutz but also to the Rosy Cross (combining "Rose + Cross" or perhaps "Ros" (dew) and "Crux" in an alchemical interpretation). Yates emphasizes two aspects of the Rosicrucian movement. First, she wants to ground this movement in the Hermetic philosophy, cabbalism, and magical traditions of the Renaissance (emphasizing her earlier studies on such Renaissance figures as Giordano Bruno and Marsilio Ficino). Second, she wants to emphasize the influence of the Elizabethan magus John Dee on Rosicrucianism. Yates begins by describing a

"royal wedding" between Princess Elizabeth and Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine. These two became known mockingly as "the Winter King and Queen of Bohemia" after Frederick's failed attempt to take the throne of Bohemia and their flight from Prague. Their union was supposed to represent a Protestant front against Hapsburg aggression and the forces of Catholic reaction. Yates shows the influence of Shakespeare and the theater on the pair as well as Spenser who wrote the *Faerie Queene*. It was at around this time that three Rosicrucian manifestos appeared. These include two pamphlets which first appeared in 1614 and 1615 with abbreviated titles of the *Fama* and the *Confessio* and a third publication appearing in 1616, an alchemical romance with the title *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*. This last romance is believed to have been written by Johann Valentin Andreae, a Lutheran pastor with socialist interests. These writings inform the reader of an invisible and hidden society of Rosicrucians founded by Christian Rosencreutz and explain his exploits and adventures as well as delving into alchemical symbolism. Yates suggests that they express political support for "the Winter King and Queen". Yates argues that one of the most important figures to play some role in the development of the Rosicrucian movement is that of John Dee. Dee, a learned magus well versed in mathematics, numerology, and science, was an important figure in Elizabethan England; however, as Yates suggests he came to influence the Rosicrucian movement when he visited Germany, Bohemia, and Prague. Indeed, the Rosicrucian manifestos, which praise science and rationality are developed along some of the same lines as Dee's writings. Other important figures involved in the Rosicrucian movement, though denying their Rosicrucianism, include Robert Fludd and Michael Maier, both of whom expressed in alchemical writings cabalistic principles as well as the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm. Rosicrucianism created a furore in Germany and also spread to France where it created a scare among the populace. Rosicrucians at first were believed to be linked to the Jesuits; however, given the antipapist sentiment expressed by the Rosicrucians in their manifestos they were soon taken to be enemies of the Jesuits by counter-reformation thinkers. Cartesian philosophy and the thought of Francis Bacon were also taken to be linked with the Rosicrucians. Rosicrucianism emphasized science and regarded the discovery of two new stars as a beacon in the sky which mirrored the coming age of enlightenment. Another figure associated with Rosicrucianism is that of Elias Ashmole, the chief representative of the alchemical movement in England who copied the manifestos. Eventually Andreae came to move away from Rosicrucianism, advocating instead Christian unions as part of his utopian "Christianopolis". However, these unions were motivated by the same basic underlying philosophy as the Rosicrucian manifestos. Others who wrote utopias based on these manifestos include Campanella in Italy and Comenius. Some have maintained that

the founding of the Royal Society, a society of scientists and mathematicians, in England serves as the instantiation of the "invisible brotherhood". Even Isaac Newton has been regarded as influenced by Rosicrucianism. In addition, Rosicrucianism came to influence freemasonry, which incorporated Rosicrucian elements into its grades. This book serves as an excellent introduction to the Rosicrucian movement in the seventeenth century. Yates is indebted to A. E. Waite whose book on the subject proved useful to her; however, she notes the problematic parts in his book. Yates also details much of the political intrigue surrounding this movement. This book includes an appendix which features the two Rosicrucian manifestos in full: the *_Fama_* and the *_Confessio_*.

I found this book to be invaluable in clearing the factual fog around the original Rosicrucians. The author was a scrupulous and brilliant historian who has not, as far as I can find, been seriously challenged on her major conclusions by another scholar of similar standing and specialty. The reviewers of this book who claim Dames Yates made "HUGE assumptions" and "misinterpretations" do not cite sources for these claims. Not to do so is, at best, a disservice and at worst, indicative that the sources are not of the same caliber as Dame Yates.

Frances Yates is well-regarded for her superb study "Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition" (1964). This book (1972) is a sequel. It places the murky origins of Rosicrucianism in the context of the religious and political rivalries of the early 17th Century. It is an extremely engaging and fascinating study which, unfortunately, was not carried through to its logical end-point--it reads like a draft of a bigger and more definitive book. But a wonderful draft it is! At this moment there is a danger that the collections of the Warburg Institute, which made all of Yates' work possible, may become unavailable to scholars or even dispersed. These collections are irreplaceable--they are the hard core of scholarship in 16th-17th century cultural evolution. If this book inspires you, please inform yourself and do whatever you can to help preserve this resource for posterity.

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