

The “Primitive” Poet: Modernism, Revivalism, and the Occult

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Abstract

Focusing on the Occult and Revivalist movements as organic precursors to Modernism, this essay problematizes the traditional view that Modernism “belonged to 20th century pragmatism” (Surette, 1993, Preface, ix). Instead of a radical break from tradition, Modernism in fact drew from a well of mythic and anthropological referents in an attempt to reclaim and refashion culture. At a time when the science of anthropology was changing, “primitivity” itself was becoming increasingly privileged as a cultural inoculation against the workaday industrial mentality that Revivalists, Occultists, and later Modernists saw anathema to poetic production. In their privileging of “primitive” space and mythic subconsciousness, Revivalism and Occultism served as models to later Modernists in their quest for authentic sources of artistic inspiration.

Keywords

Modernism, revivalism, occultism, Synge, Yeats, Eliot, Pound

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