

# THE **OCCULT**

COLIN WILSON



"THE OCCULT IS THE MOST  
INTERESTING, INFORMATIVE  
AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING BOOK  
ON THE SUBJECT I HAVE READ"  
SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

## The Occult

*Colin Wilson*

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# The Occult

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## **The Occult** Colin Wilson

Colin Wilson's classic work is an essential guide to the mind-expanding experiences and discoveries of the occult in the 20th century. He produces a wonderfully skillful synthesis of the available material—one that sees the occult in the light of reason and reason in the light of the mystical and paranormal. The result is a wide-ranging survey of the subject that provides a comprehensive history of magic, an insightful exploration of our latent powers, and a journey of enlightenment.

“I am very impressed by this book, not only by its erudition but...above all for the good-natured, unaffected charm of the author whose reasoning is never too far-fetched, who is never carried away by preposterous theories.”—*Sunday Times*

## **The Occult Details**

Date : Published July 28th 2006 by Watkins (first published 1971)

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Author : Colin Wilson

Format : Paperback 800 pages

Genre : Occult, Nonfiction, History, Religion, Fantasy, Paranormal, Philosophy

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## **Erik Graff says**

This is not one of Wilson's better books. Given the topic, it should be hard to miss and, indeed, the text contains many juicy anecdotes and outrageous tales. What is lacking is a thesis or a canon of judgment whereby what is to be taken seriously, in the author's opinion, is distinguished from what is merely silly or pretentious. Instead, one is fed a not very nutritious stew of this and that.

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## **Fabiano Lourenco says**

My first encounter with Colin Wilson happened some 4, 5 years ago, when I read a Portuguese translation of *The Outsider*.

By then I was thoroughly fascinated with the man's clear and engaging style, and his ability to express his thoughts in a concise manner struck me as much as his perception of so many different men (such as Nietzsche, Nijinsky, Tolstoy, William Blake) as being essentially connected in their purposes and goals (albeit through various means), all of them consciously or unconsciously isolating themselves from humankind in order to acquire a broader understanding of reality- and of their own capabilities.

The fact that Wilson linked all those fascinating men, and saw them all as peers, brought a very important perception to my mind. After *The Outsider*, I have never seen Nietzsche, Camus or Tolstoy the way I did before. That book is effectively a handbook of independent thinking, a true companion to everyone who likes to think "outside the box".

Ok, after reading a brief biographical sketch of Jung (Carl G. Jung- Lord of the Underworld) short after *The Outsider*, I haven't read anything by Wilson in a long time. Coincidentally, after reading Jung's precious *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* some months ago, I suddenly remember I had a copy of Wilson's *The Occult* and I decided to give it a try. Since Jung was admired by Wilson, I presumed the English self-taught writer might have interesting things to say about the subject roughly treated by Jung in his memoirs.

Now, after reading *The Occult* with an open mind (just as I did in the case of Jung's book) I cannot be much enthusiastic about recommending it as a great book. I don't think it's nearly as great as *The Outsider*. In fact, it's not half as good.

On the one hand, Wilson's style is as clear and straightforward as ever. The guy had a huge collection of books, he liked to read, and it shows. He also had a wonderful ability to be clear and concise while employing a hugely varied vocabulary. There are a lot of words in his book I never saw before. The chapters in the books are also not overlong, which helps the reader not to get bored. In short, the book is 100% readable, a true "page-turner".

On the other hand, even though Wilson affirms repeatedly throughout the book that so-called occult phenomena are something so common and normal as the rise and set of the sun, relating everything to his own "Faculty X" theory, he ends up being far more credulous than an informed and educated man should be.

The "Faculty X" theory is interesting. It can be understood as the sudden glimpses of infinite joy and meaning we all feel every once in awhile, when everything in the world seems to be in the right place. You know, that sensation of "orgasm" we feel when we are suddenly overwhelmed by life, by the life energy that

drove Nietzsche's Zarathustra. According to Wilson, what prevents us from achieving a permanent state of happiness and contentment is the fact that we are all prisoners of a limited perception of existence, we are all the time dominated by the material world surrounding us, and its meaningless trivialities. We live mechanical lives, where everything is predictable, and everything means the same. The small pleasures of all days are all that keep us from feeling entirely desperate. And, since no pleasure is permanent, we live in a perpetual state of boredom, always waiting for the "next" small pleasure. And this ad eternum.

As a consequence, men such as the "outsiders" studied by Wilson in his chef d'oeuvre are the ones who realize the emptiness of this mechanical existence and try to discover true reality, not the satisfied with the petty ideals and the little pleasures of the masses, but striving to gain an insight which gives meaning to everything and makes true and permanent pleasure a fact of life, as common and as real as the sun rays or the barking of your neighbor's dog.

So, in a certain sense, The Occult is a logical sequel of The Outsider, offering a broader perspective on the achievements of many so called paranormal men, such as Cagliostro, Paracelsus, Gurdjeff, Madame Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley.

In order to keep a certain sense of direction throughout his book, Wilson keeps referring now and then to the "Faculty X", so as to demonstrate that all paranormal and occult activities have the same underlying goal- to overcome our everyday mediocrity, by the means of magic, paranormal activity, telepathy, hypnosis and so on.

The second part of the book contains a sketch of the history of occult and paranormal activity throughout human history. All the most famous names associated with the occult are mentioned here- from Paracelsus to the "beast himself", Aleister Crowley. He also talks a lot about alchemy, the rise and fall of witchcraft and witch burnings in Europe, the arrival of spiritualism in the 19th century, and even the "UFOmania" of the last century.

My two main criticisms of this book could be thus summarised:

01) In order to find a demonstration of his main thesis ("Faculty X"), Wilson is far too eager to believe in anything, any event or anecdote related to so-called paranormal people. So, judging from his own words, and his words alone, a reader should presume that all (I mean ALL) so called occult phenomena are true, and their proponents are genuine. Alchemy, telepathy, witchcraft and magic, reincarnation, alien abduction, astral body, all such things are practically taken for granted, as definitely proven scientific fact. It's just like, in order to write his book, Wilson decided to read all the books available about these subjects (and he does mention lots of works in his books), but he also decided to trust what the proponents of such ideas had to say- instead of critically analyzing what skeptical and neutral writers had to say about the same things. Wilson's train of thought seems to be something along these lines: "Author Z has said in his book that alchemy was true, because he himself has made many successful experiments in alchemy. Nobody has ever managed to prove that such experiments didn't occur. Therefore, Author Z was true, and alchemy is indeed possible". And therefore Wilson concludes that some men have the power to leave their physical body, that some men can read other men's minds, that some men can predict the future and even that some men have real alien abduction experiences. Even though here and there admitting that there are lots of charlatans in the mystical/paranormal fields, and even though here and there admitting the absurdity of some things he cites as undisputable facts, the definitive picture one should have of Wilson by the end of this book is of an entirely credulous man, a man who will likely believe ANYTHING he's told- provided it fits his own "Faculty X" theory.

2) My second criticism is about Wilson's perspective itself. The "Faculty X" theory is quite interesting, and I presume it was further developed in his other books. However, here, I was left with the impression that Wilson himself had little to say about his own main idea. He talks very little about his own experiences (in fact, he says he's only felt his "Faculty X" working twice in his life, and he was 40 when he published this book), and he admits he's no mystic. Therefore, it's clear Wilson creates his own theory entirely based upon other people's experiences, exactly the way these people themselves described such experiences in their books. There are very few paragraphs in this book in which Wilson develops his own ideas- most of the time he's simply digressing about the words and deeds of this or that person. So, this book might serve as a good introductory guide to the study of mysticism and the paranormal- but it certainly isn't a good handbook on the "Faculty X" itself.

So, overall, I cannot say this is a BAD book. Not in the least: it's thoroughly entertaining and readable. However, it's not a masterpiece such as *The Outsider*, mainly because Wilson mentions lots of highly questionable events as undisputed fact, takes for granted the veracity of all sort of paranormal phenomena (even alien abduction stories), and does not develop his own theory to the point of making it actually credible. That is, this book leaves the impression that Wilson had an incredible idea in his mind when he decided to write this book, but hurried to show how the lives and deeds of all the people he found in his mystical/paranormal readings served as a demonstration of his own "Faculty X" theory, he failed to give a truly convincing portrait of his main theme. So, I give a low rating to this book because it failed to convince me either of the alleged paranormal phenomena Wilson describes or of his main theory itself.

Additionally, the way Wilson enthusiastically writes about men like Gurdjeff, Paracelsus, Cagliostro, Home Douglas and Rasputin shows such a high degree of naïveté, such an incredible level of credulity, that the book ends up being utterly partial and misinformed, leaving the reader with the impression that Wilson wanted such things as reincarnation and astral body to be true so badly that he was consciously willing to accept anything as proof that such events happen all the time. A person inclined to mystical thinking will love this book, but won't find anything challenging in it. On the contrary.

The overall impression is that Wilson wanted his readers to be as gullible as himself.

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### **David Jordan says**

Mostly a decent introduction to the subject, but the book suffers from Wilson's acceptance of tall tales from long ago as fact. He doesn't question that certain people were able to levitate. Also, his faculty X hypothesis is a bit naive. He doesn't need to invoke the supernatural to explain things, and despite what he claimed, the science of the day didn't support him. There were positive outcomes in some ESP studies, but they have since been refuted or found unrepeatable. There may be something to his theory, but it's not scientifically parsimonious.

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## Brandon says

An excellent starting point if you are curious about the paranormal, sixth senses, strange and wonderful or terrifying things that modern science doesn't explain.

He started writing the book on the assumption that he would be chronicling the hoaxes that have been perpetuated through the years. He ends up admitting there are true "miracles," things that were irrefutably witnessed and investigated at the time. Like the saint who was canonized because he could fly. He was otherwise a rather stupid person, a common laborer in the town. But in church, he would be transformed somehow and would fly around inside the huge cathedral. Bunch of Bishops witnessed it and checked for wires and such and finally concluded it was a true miracle.

When you finish the book, you will have a much better idea of what kinds of things are considered paranormal, which are most likely fakes and which have a chance of being real.

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### ♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

As a Christian, I was so afraid to even touch a book like this. But I knew who Colin Wilson was and enjoyed his intriguing style. I read the Occult and could not put it down. It is a really excellent book and it shows you what the human psyche is capable of, which brings to mind books of Tony Buzan who wrote the BBC use your mind series. You will not sin if you pick up such a book and plunge into it and see what the word "OCCULT" really means, apart from the phobia and hysteria that is attached to it in conservative Christian circles.

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### Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki says

He was a valued friend and anything he wrote is worth reading. Honest, well thought out, balanced, and open minded

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### Jeremy Garber says

Wilson's overview of the extraordinary powers of human beings is ripe with interesting, well-told stories but short on the argumentation that ties his underpinning theoretical framework together. His basic argument is that humans possess abilities beyond our normal understandings of consciousness that are undeveloped because we need to be hyper-focused in the contemporary age. The plethora of interesting and well-told stories that comprise the bulk of the volume are meant to support this thesis, all the way from the ancient Egyptians to Aleister Crowley, from Pythagoras to UFOs. That's the useful part of this volume. The problem seems to be that Mr. Wilson, who wants his arguments and his examples to be credible, can't quite make up his mind whether they are reliant on our internal psychological workings or on actual external events, and there are several pages worth of examples where he keeps changing his mind, presumably to be appropriately skeptical. Read Wilson's work as a diary of interesting and unusual stories from the human past, not as a well-constructed philosophical argument about the nature of reality and human ability, and you'll get from this work what it has to offer.

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### Armando says

Colin Wilson es más conocido en el mundo anglo sajón, pero por una extraña circunstancia, llegué a él por The Outsider, obra de tono autobiográfico el cual aún no he leído... buscándolo me topé con The Occult, editado en español por la editorial Alfaomega. Cuento todo esto por mera necesidad de empatía: el autor me fascina. He leído The Occult de principio a fin, lo he vuelto a releer por partes y lo tengo como un libro de cabecera... ¿en verdad es tan bueno?. Lo Oculto es una historia de la magia, de la brujería y de los brujos y hechiceros reales. Creo en la magia, pero por supuesto no soy un fan duro. Colin Wilson simplemente me atrapó con su acelerada prosa, su tono desenfadado y su pasión por el conocimiento, que yo digo que es

necesaria cuando se escribe ensayo; hermoso vicio el de la curiosidad. Escritor divertido, entretenido y sobre todo bien informado. ¿Merece una reseña? Sí. Vale la pena leerlo e intentar leer más obras de él. Solo espero poder encontrar ediciones en español. ¿Alguien sabe quién edita The Outsider en castellano?

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### **Steve says**

I read this before I knew better. While the writing is good and the subject matter is entertaining, I discovered later that the book contains several factual errors and what seems to be deliberate misinformation.

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### **Signor Mambrino says**

The title 'The Occult A History' is a little misleading. A more accurate name might be; "A ridiculous theory based on an unquestioning and incredibly naive consideration of the History of the Occult". The history part is pretty good even if Wilson comes across as frustratingly credulous. A typical paragraph in this book takes the form of;

"Tom was able to communicate with the leader of the great race of flying ape-dogs on the planet Zime. Tom was a patient in mental hospital who was spoon-fed mush by a nurse and needed his diaper changed twice a day but there is no reason not to believe that he had strong powers of interplanetary telepathy. In fact, most people who possess these gifts are completely untrustworthy."

The book is definitely well researched though. He used lots of interesting sources and I got loads of ideas for other books to read from this one. It's an enjoyable read for the most part too. I really liked the chapters on Cagliostro and werewolves but I couldn't bring myself to finish the final chapter in which he discusses 'faculty x' in detail. I read the book more than 40 years after it was written and all of his predictions are even more ridiculous now than they would have been when this was published.

It's dumb but mostly fun. Read it, but don't bother with the last chapter.

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