
This tantalizingly titled publication is written for the graduate level architectural historian and scholar. The book is divided into four parts with a lengthy preamble and postscript, all well illustrated. The notes are voluminous and the index is comprehensive but there is no bibliography.

It is presumed that the reader has knowledge of the life, works, and theories of Le Corbusier (born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret). This publication attempts to edify readers on his early years, before he was known as Le Corbusier. One hopes that within book and its theory there is a hidden driver in Le Corbusier’s architecture - the influence on his life and art made by the Loge L’Amitié, the local Masonic lodge, in his childhood home, La Chaux-de-Fonds.

The first fifty pages are almost solely focused on the potential influence on Le Corbusier by the works of French architect François-Joseph Belanger. Birksted has provided numerous drawings and diagrams attempting to show a direct connection between the two; but what this has to do with Le Corbusier and Freemasonry (the aforementioned Occult in the book’s title) is never clear. The argument becomes repetitious and pedantic until the chapter finally ends. Unfortunately, this is the manner in which the entire book proceeds.

The information presented on the popularity of Rabelias’ works in the Jeanneret household is intriguing, as is the review of Le Corbusier’s thoughts on the ‘architectural prommenade’ and the act of moving through architecture. The review of books in his personal library and those of his acquaintances is informative, yet none of the esoteric facts presented by the author draw anything other than weak parallels between the tenets of Freemasonry and Le Corbusier’s architecture.

Birksted has evidently gone to great lengths to conduct and present new research on the impact of Le Corbusier’s formative years in Switzerland and his early study in Paris but the arguments are never cogent or cohesive. The citations strung end to end become a distraction. The unrelated historic photographs and images, while interesting in their own right, detract from rather than support the argument. In the end the tenuous relationship drawn by Birksted between Le Corbusier and the Masonic lodge is never really substantiated. Recommended only for architecture and/or arts collections whose scope serves graduate level and professional researchers.

Sylvia Welsh, Librarian / Archivist, David J. Rowan Library, Payette Associates, swelsh@payette.com