

Temple of Set Reading List
Category 10: The Golden Dawn
Der Golden Dawn
as of February 26, 2003

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was a turn of the century British Rosicrucian/ceremonial magic society. Drawing from the legacy of Eliphas Levi, the Theosophical Society of Helena Blavatsky, and the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (S.R.I.A.), the Golden Dawn nevertheless succeeded in achieving a sophistication and an artistic elegance all its own. While it may be going too far to say that it became the prototype for all initiatory orders of this century, it certainly was the forerunner of Aleister Crowley's A.'.A.'. and its initiatory grade-structure would later influence those of the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set.

10A. *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism* by Francis King. NY/UK/Australia: Macmillan, 1989 [Updated edition of *The Rites of Modern Occult Magic* (British title: *Ritual Magic in England*) 1970]. (TOS-3) (COS-3) AL: "A comprehensive survey of the Golden Dawn and other magical orders. Contains more actual, no-nonsense information than can be gleaned from the ponderous writings of the orders covered." MA: "A compact history of late 19th-century Rosicrucianism in England, the rise & fall of the Golden Dawn, the impact & influence of Crowley's A.'.A.'. & O.T.O. organizations, and comments on various pre-1966 offshoots, primarily in England. Readable, informative, and objective. A good introduction to the social context of the G.'.D.'. [If #13C is representative of King's research methods, however, his selection and emphasis of facts may not be as rigorous as could be desired.]"

10B. *The Golden Dawn* by F. Israel Regardie. River Falls: Hazel Hills, 1970 (2 volumes, reprinted as 1 volume in 1974 by Llewellyn). (TOS-4) MA: "This is the third edition of the famous and still definitive study of the G.'.D.'. It is perhaps the only published work in which the artistry and atmosphere intended for the G.'.D.'. are clearly evident, untarnished by bitter accounts of petty personality conflicts. Looking through this work, one can see the authenticity and sophistication that the G.'.D.'. projected, which accounted for its attractiveness to the intelligentsia of a cynical and restless Victorian England. In spite of this, the G.'.D.'. was crippled by a lack of scientific and historical precision in its doctrines; this too will be apparent to the reader. Compare, for example, the Enochian Keys with the original Dee manuscript [included in "*The Book of Coming Forth by Night: Analysis & Commentary*"]. Nevertheless *The Golden Dawn* remains a classic - and Regardie's *magnum opus*. [Not recommended is Regardie's 1984 work *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*, which is a confusingly-organized product of a variety of authors, some apparently original/ authentic and others modern/pretenders - most identified by initials/mottos only, so that the reader cannot easily distinguish between them.]"

10C. *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and "The Golden Dawn"* by Ithell Colquhoun. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975. [Deutschland: *Schwert der Weisheit*, Verlag Johanna Bohmeier & Co., Clenze, 1985] (TOS-3) MA: "An account of the G.'.D.'. and its principal figure, Mathers, by a devoted Mathers admirer. This bias, together with scant documentation of arguments in the text, makes it necessary to take this book with a grain of salt. Its primary value is as an update and supplement to #10A. The Enochian section is best ignored as unsubstantiated. An interesting feature of the book is the inclusion of G.'.D.'. membership and 'spinoff' lists, which offer clues to the legacy of the G.'.D.'. in some later initiatory contexts."

10D. *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin, the Mage* by S.L. MacGregor Mathers (Trans.). NY: Dover Books #23211-5, 1977 (reprinted from the 1932 de Lawrence hardcover edition). [Deutschland: *Das Buch der Praktik in der göttlichen Magie*, Diederichs Verlag, München] (TOS-4) MA: "In the pristine Golden Dawn this grimoire was thought to be particularly 'dangerous', but by Setian standards it is merely quaint. Yet it was the text that inspired Aleister Crowley to begin serious Workings as a magician. Now of historical/collector value only, it is a translation of a 15th-century manuscript in the Bibliotheque de l' Arsenal in Paris. Included is an extensive introduction by Mathers." DW: "This book shows two things very well: (1) The laws of consciousness cannot be codified. What works for the Sufi master, the Zen archer, or the magician of the late Middle Ages will not work straight off the shelf for you. (2) If you're about to begin a large, lifetime project - such as starting law school - a period of intense outer workings beforehand can strengthen the mind/will or, as non-magicians would say, make you lucky."

10E. *Eliphas Levi: Master of Occultism* by Thomas A. Williams. University of Alabama Press, 1975. (TOS-3) MA: "Amidst all the confusion surrounding Levi, this little 174-page biography stands as an island of scholarship. Williams discusses the facts of his life, philosophy, and writings succinctly, suggesting prior influences and subsequent legacies. Today most of Levi's doctrines are thoroughly outdated, but in many ways he was the Columbus of modern occult science. Extensively footnoted, with a good bibliography and a list of Levi's own works."

10F. *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn* by Ellic Howe. NY: Samuel Weiser, 1978. (TOS-3) (LVT-4) MA: "A documentary history of the rise and fall of the G.'.D.'. by a historian, not an occultist with an axe to grind. Hence it is objective while stopping short of cynicism. This history is based upon various personal and group interactions among the membership, not upon the evolution or development of magical theory. The book is valuable as an illustration of the stresses and strains upon an occult order and of how various individuals - some well-intentioned, some not - attempted to influence the situation. The ultimate lesson is that an occult society which becomes obsessed with interpersonal intrigue to the neglect of magic and philosophy is on the path to self-extermination. Howe is also the author of #14W." J. Lewis VI°: "It gives one pause to think that one day, decades hence, someone will write a book on the Magicians of the Temple of Set. I think we will be a far more colorful group of personalities, but this is not to say the Golden Dawn members were lacking in activity! #10F gives readers a deeper insight into the Æons and Ages."

10G. *Yeats' Golden Dawn* by George Mills Harper. NY: Barnes & Noble, 1974. (TOS-3) MA: "The best account of W.B. Yeats' encounter with occultism - first via Blavatsky's Theosophical Society and then with the G.'.D.'. after 1891. A picture of the conflict between Yeats the poet and Yeats the magician. There is an extensive documentary section, including Yeats' key pamphlet 'Is the RR&AC to Remain a Magical Order?' and the 'Bye-Laws' of the 1st and 2nd Orders of the G.'.D.'. as of 1900 and 1902 [after the Mathers & Crowley schisms]. Also included is the Hermetic Library Catalogue of Wynn Westcott, now obsolete but charming for its historical quaintness."

10H. *Yeats and Magic: The Earlier Works* by M.C. Flannery. NY: Harper & Row (Barnes & Noble Import Division), 1978. (TOS-4) MA: “This is neither as lengthy nor as G.'.D.'.focused as #10G, but it is interesting because of its explanation of the influences of #19S and Blake [see #6F] in Yeats’ magical philosophy. It is also more probing than #10G, seeking to illustrate Yeats’ personal approach to a magical philosophy rather than his dealings with the G.'.D.'. organization.”

10I. *Egyptian Magic* by Florence Farr. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1982. (TOS-4) MA: “The actress Florence Farr was one of the more famous initiates of the G.'.D.'. and was a particularly close friend of Yeats and G.B. Shaw. This little paperback is a very readable summary of the Egyptian magical tradition - as abbreviated as may be expected in 85 pages - but is nonetheless notable for its section on gnostic Christian philosophy as developed in post-dynastic Egypt. Herein may be found the G.'.D.'. roots of the ‘Æonic’ system into which Aleister Crowley would propose the Æon of Horus.” DW: “This book is interesting as a historical trifle, but if you really want to know what’s going on, look for *The Books of Jey and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* by C. Schmidt (Ed.) & V. MacDemot (Trans.) (Leiden: Brill, 1978).”

10J. *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* by R.A. Gilbert. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1983. [Deutschland: WU: 37/13-352] (TOS-3) MA: “This little paperback might best be described as a ‘*Reader’s Digest* condensed-book version’ of #10A/C/F/G with some ritual samples from #10B tossed in as appendices. If you want a quick and unconfusing look at the Golden Dawn, this is as good a cook’s-tour as any.”