

The Golden Dawn: Symbolism, ritual and self-development

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This paper will situate the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (GD), within the context of the Western esoteric tradition. It will explore how the GD uses symbolism and ritual for self-development. To assess the GD as a system of transpersonal development it will be evaluated against transpersonal theory, particularly that of Ken Wilber. It may be useful for the reader to understand the affiliations of the authors: the first author is a member of the GD, the second is a psychologist with an interest in the transpersonal but is not affiliated to any esoteric order.

The Western esoteric tradition and the Golden Dawn

THE INCREASING POPULARITY in the West of magical orders, pagan paths and magic-using Earth religions is an interesting phenomenon. It may suggest that the mainstream Western religions are failing for some. There seems to be a desire to return to the older roots of religion, emanating from a time before what is often perceived as a corruption by Churches, or councils of undemocratically elected people. Religions may be seen as a form of spiritual capitalism, alienating people from having their own personal dialogue with Divine nature. Grof is of the opinion that when a religion becomes organised it: 'completely loses the connection with its spiritual source and becomes a secular institution that exploits human spiritual needs without satisfying them' (2000, p.211). As a result, many people have sought other ways of reconnecting to that personal dialogue with Divine nature and to a spiritual source, and to do this some have turned to the East.

The East has its own esoteric traditions and religions, such as Tantra and Buddhism, that focus on individual spiritual enlightenment and a union with the Divine, and many people in the West have taken to these spiritual paths with zest. However, Eastern and Western religions and esoteric traditions, whilst sharing some similarities, such as self-work and compassion, have their roots

in different cultures. Jung (1962) has argued that the Eastern psyche has a balance that makes it more attuned to inward-looking meditative approaches such as Buddhism, whereas the Western mind is more outward looking and focused on the intellect. It is acknowledged that Jung's work in general remains without substantial support from quantitative studies, and this includes his suggestions of the differences between the Western and Eastern minds. In Jung's defence, Fontana (2003) points out that this lack of research evidence may be a consequence of many academic psychologists holding negative views of Jung's work and not being prepared to test them. However, if Jung's views do hold some truth then the Western esoteric tradition is perhaps a more suitable system for the Western mind and collective soul. Even if Jung's views are incorrect, to look to the East for the only solution is to neglect our Western spiritual heritage. To achieve transpersonal development an alternative or complementary approach to following an established Western religion or an Eastern path could be through membership of a Western Esoteric Order.

Esoteric orders are collectives that aim to raise the consciousness of their members. They have a system for self-development in order to achieve the secure balanced foundation that is believed to be necessary for the 'Great Work' of the individual and thus the Order. Some aim for their practitioners to

work magic for both the good of the individual and for all (in the case of magical orders). Alternatively, there may be the channelling of ideas through meditation (in the case of mystical orders), or a combination of both approaches. Magical orders, like Wiccan covens, are considered by their members to have *egregores*, i.e. group souls that are often understood as living creatures (Farrell, 2007a). These entities foster and protect the group as it performs its magical work. There is an emphasis on people being your 'brother' or 'sister'. For example, magical orders in the Hermetic Tradition use terms such as *Frater* (brother) and *Soror* (sister) to reinforce attachment to the spiritual family. The path of service to others and to the world is absolutely vital to esoteric orders. Whilst it may at first appear obvious what the path of service is, a person's understanding generally changes over time. A *Frater* or *Soror* might start thinking that it is simply a matter of looking out for others, helping that old lady across the road, but on a more spiritual level it is about doing 'God's' will, by helping the Universe to manifest or unravel and by recognising that we are all part of that Universal expression. This process of development may reflect a commonality in spiritual experience that transcends any one religion or esoteric order.

The *Esoteric Order of the Golden Dawn in the Outer*, later to become more commonly known as the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*, is an initiatory magical group, founded in London in 1888 by several high-ranking freemasons as a society dedicated to philosophical, spiritual, and psychic evolution. Unlike Masonry, it is open to both men and women from any background and any religion. As Cicero and Cicero state:

The Golden Dawn is not a religion, although religious imagery and spiritual concepts play an important role in the work of the Order. The GD is a school and a repository of knowledge, where students learn the various elements of Western philosophy and magic. Tolerance for all religious beliefs is stressed, and symbolism

used within the Order comes from a variety of religious sources. As is stated in one important initiation ceremony, "Remember to hold all true religions in reverence, for there is none but contains a ray from the Ineffable Light that you are seeking." Today, people from many diverse religious paths consider themselves Golden Dawn magicians – including Wiccans, Neopagans, Gnostics, Jews, and Christians' (Cicero & Cicero, nd).

Whilst there are some similarities between the structure of Masonry and that of the GD, the latter is more complex, academic and magical than most Masonic groups. Its teachings appear in many different British occult groups, especially those related to Aleister Crowley and Dion Fortune, who were both members. The GD is a detailed and complete magical system which encapsulates many of the ideas behind the Western mystery traditions and it is currently enjoying a modern renaissance.

The GD draws from many religious, philosophical, scientific, and magical sources, many of which date back hundreds of years. Like many esoteric orders, the GD is also indirectly influenced by esoteric Christianity and the early Christian mystery schools that can be traced back to ancient Alexandria. This Egyptian city was a hothouse of Western religious thinking due to the confluence of Judaism, Christianity, the Egyptian religion and, later, Islam. In Alexandria religions came together, influenced each other and then went away transformed and more codified by that process. Thus, many of them share common features and there is often a significant Greek and Egyptian influence in Western religions, although this may not always be apparent. The thinking of ancient philosophers and mathematicians, such as Pythagoras, are also often incorporated into many modern esoteric orders, including the GD. When all these influences, philosophies and ideas are hung onto a Kabbalistic framework, certain fundamental truths seem to be revealed that unite them all despite their apparent initial diversity. Thus it could be considered that some magical and mystical

orders have something akin to a *grand unified spiritual theory*¹.

The GD's Hermetic nature is based upon fundamental principles derived from the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, astrology, alchemy and several other magical disciplines, woven together with the ancient myths and the old religions of Egypt and Greece. Hermeticism is the term given to the magical and religious movement believed to stem from the teachings of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth. In Hellenistic Egypt, the god Hermes was given as an epithet the Greek name of Thoth. He has also been identified with Enoch (Cicero & Cicero, 2004, p.215). Thoth and Hermes were gods of writing, teaching and magic. A thorough background to the GD can be found in *The Essential Golden Dawn* by Cicero & Cicero (2004). In the Outer Order of the GD the initiate, as a *neophyte*, seeks to balance him or herself through a series of initiations and teachings, passing through a series of elemental grades (linked to the four elements).

After the elemental grades have been passed members then enter into the *Tiphareth* grade and the Inner Order. The Inner Order of the GD is known as the *Order of the Red Rose and Golden Cross* and, like several other modern magical orders, it incorporates a significant amount of Rosicrucian thinking. Rosicrucianism is syncretistic, meaning that it borrows ideas and beliefs from several sources and religions in an attempt to unify them under a central theme. A form of Christian mysticism is quite central to Rosicrucian thinking. The story of Christian Rosenkreutz, a legendary figure who supposedly lived in the 15th century, and whose adventures form the body of the main Rosicrucian manifestoes, echoes that of Pythagoras, Jesus, Paracelus, Hippocrates and Plato. Rosenkreutz is reputed to have travelled extensively, learning magic and medicine on the way. He represents a heroic role-model for the GD member to emulate

on their journey of discovery and self-development. In the Inner Order members are called upon to place stress on their personality, with magical rites to holistically facilitate the care and development of both individuals and the world. The emphasis is on learning more and on the use of compassionate magic to help others, individually and on a global scale. The member is considered to be able to control spiritual forces effectively by directing them with Will and bringing about change in conformity with that Will.

Symbolism, ritual and self-development

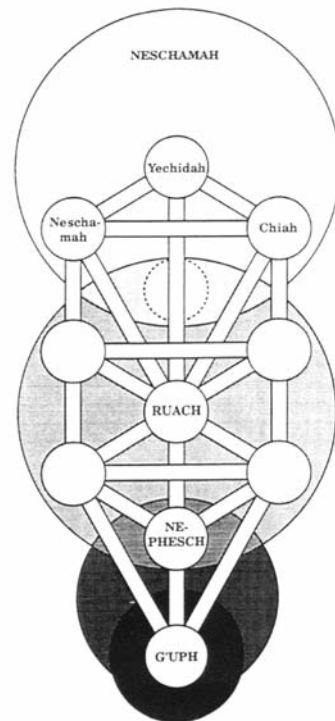
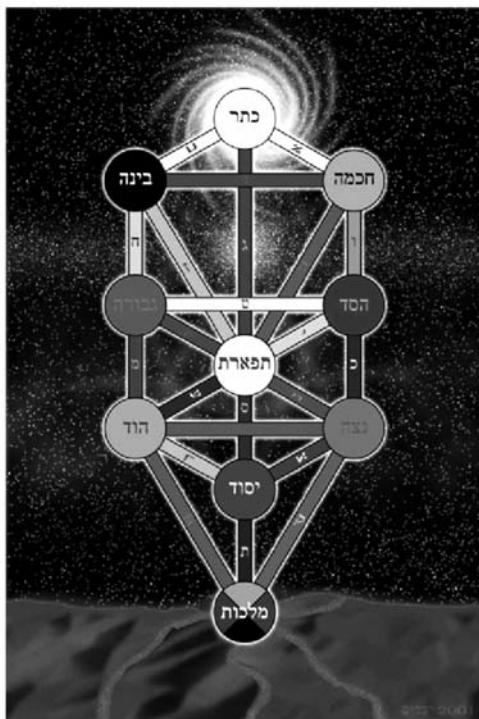
The image in Figure 1 is from a British GD Temple and depicts the twin Kabbalistic pillars flanked by the Egyptian god forms of Horus and Hathor, with the rainbow bridge beckoning the GD *neophyte* onwards in their spiritual journey. The four astrological symbols are identified with the four elements and their placement stresses the need for them to be in balance. The hexagram epitomises the ideas behind the axiom 'As above, so below', the fundamental esoteric concept that the macrocosm and microcosm are connected. Members of the GD hold the belief that the 'Great Work', which they try to do as individuals, ultimately affects everything and everyone in existence; they believe that there will be a macrocosmic universal effect to accompany their greater spiritual understanding as they climb the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

The Kabbalistic Tree of Life is depicted in Figure 2. It expresses the idea that on this earthly plane, our bodies are situated in *Malkuth*, the sphere at the bottom of the tree (Regardie, 2005, p.61). The GD member aspires to climb the tree through a process of studying and grade initiations, which introduce and deliberately invite into the person's life the lessons of each particular sphere (*sephira*) or path, with the aim of transmuting it into alchemical gold and making the person more balanced in the process. This position is reminiscent of that

¹ We suggest the acronym GUST for such Grand Unified Spiritual Theory, which is perhaps appropriate because of its association with Aleph, the breath of Spirit.



Figure 1: The first step of a Golden Dawn neophyte's journey.



THE DIVISIONS OF THE SOUL

Figure 2: The Kabbalistic Tree of Life and the Divisions of the Soul.

taken by Jung (1944) when he considered that the philosopher's stone, the *lapis philosophorum*, sought by alchemists to transform base metal into gold, was actually to be found within the person, and that the transformations of physical materials that the alchemist sought were symbolic of the transformations of the psyche that were sought in therapeutic work.

The GD processes could be thought of as inviting what in the Eastern tradition would be termed 'good karma' into practitioners' lives, which in the Western tradition, following Rosicrucian thought, is termed *the law of cause and consequence* (Heindel, 2006), hopefully to accelerate spiritual enlightenment. These processes aim to make the elemental grade GD members more aware of themselves and their interaction with other people and the world, so that, by the end of the four elemental grades, through processes of guided teaching, reflection, symbolic drama, role-play, meditation, guided visualisation and dream-work, they will be more balanced individuals. This is comparable, in Ken Wilber's (2000) model of development, to the *centaur* stage of personal authenticity and individuation, attained in preparation for the higher levels of *psychic, subtle, causal* and *non-dual* consciousness.

Daniels (2005) states that Ferrer (2002) holds the view that spiritual teaching and traditions can be evaluated according to 'the degree to which they emancipate people from narcissism, self-centredness and foster the qualities of selfless awareness' (Daniels, 2005, p.36). These criteria of evaluation are exactly what the elemental grades of the GD aim to achieve; though whether this is a regular outcome of the elemental grades is a different question. However, to help the practitioner focus on this task the GD utilises a tool for meditation and reflection, the *Rosy Cross*.

The Rosy Cross, depicted in Figure 3, demonstrates the GD's attempt to have an image that encapsulates a depth of symbolic

meaning. Each symbol, colour and shape aims to provide the mind of the GD member with a language to facilitate the task of gaining greater spiritual understanding and awareness of the Universe or God. This *lamen*² is considered to be a synthesis of the masculine and feminine, the cross and the rose. The GD accepts a duality between the masculine and feminine, the merging of the anima and animus, and higher and lower selves. The four arms of the cross symbolise the four elements: red (left) is fire, blue (right) is water, yellow (top) is air and the composite arm (bottom) is made up of colours associated with Earth. The white portion belongs to 'Spirit' and the planets. The 22 petals of the rose refer to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which also correspond to the 22 connecting paths on the Tree of Life. In the middle of the *lamen* is a small rose, the centre of which is white and symbolises the reflected spiritual brightness of the topmost sephira, Kether. On the white portion of the lamens, below the rose, is the hexagram that again reminds the practitioner: 'As above, so below'. Upon each of the arms of the cross are arranged the three alchemical principles of sulphur, salt, and mercury. The white rays emanating from behind the rose and seen between the arms of the cross, are the rays of the Divine light.

Art, creativity and the spiritual impulse

There is a close relationship between the practices of ritual, magic and the creation of art. It may be suggested that good artists are sensitive to spiritual currents and are essentially natural magicians and mystics. Whilst some artists might be said to channel the darker forces of the Tree of Life, others go towards the light. Transformation and symbolism are both common denominators in art and magical orders. Magical orders tend to use alchemical and other traditional imagery, for example the phoenix as a symbol of regeneration and resurrection, drag-

² A *lamen* is a magical badge, or pendant, of varying design, that is usually worn around the neck of the officers in a Golden Dawn temple.

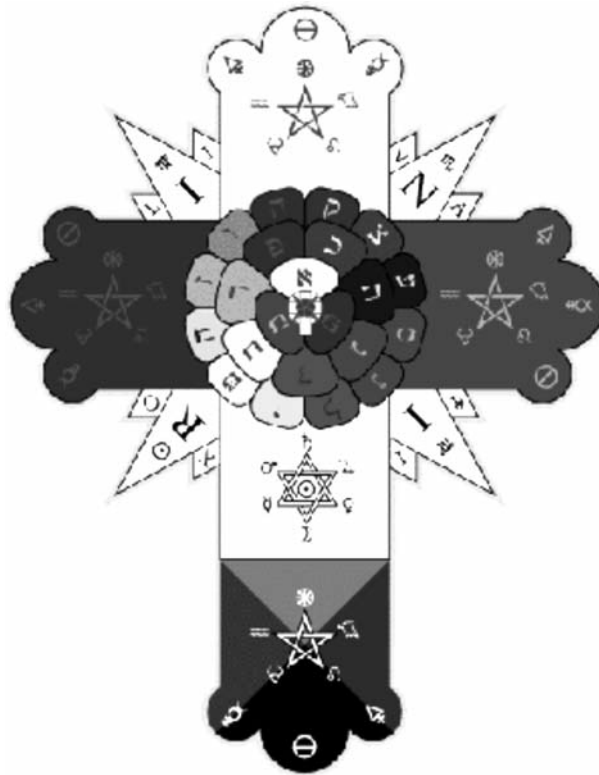


Figure 3: The Rosicrucian cross as used by the Golden Dawn.

ons, the twin serpents and the *ouroboros* as symbols of the ego, anima and animus, and yin and yang as more general representations of psychological and spiritual polarity. The *Caduceus Wand of the Keryx* in Figure 4 represents the Tree of Life. The twin serpents are polar forces, the wings are derived from the Hebrew letter *Shin* to which fire is attributed; the blue and yellow of the shaft are associated with the Hebrew letters *Aleph* and *Mem*, which themselves are associated with air and water respectively. Tarot cards are another system, rich in symbolism that can be utilised by magical orders.

Such attention to the arts and symbolism has meant that the GD has attracted creative people. For example, the poet William Butler Yeats was a member of the GD for over 30 years, having joined in 1890. Other members included writers E. Nesbit and Arthur Machen, the actress Florence Farr, and Oscar Wilde's wife, Constance. The GD

seemed to show Yeats important answers and give him the results he had sought. His experiences with the GD affected his writings, many of which contain occult meanings. As early as 1892, he wrote: 'If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would The Countess Kathleen ever have come to exist. The mystical life is the center of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write' (cited in Ellmann, 1948, p.94).

The links of the aesthetic, creativity and art to spirituality and religion have been made by great artists, for example Kandinsky (1977), and by theorists such as Coleman (1998). If spirituality is understood as being concerned with the 'spirit' of people and things, and of the linkage between their material and non-material aspects, art can be a way to explore that relationship; and through a material product (a work of art) to express an understanding of the spiritual

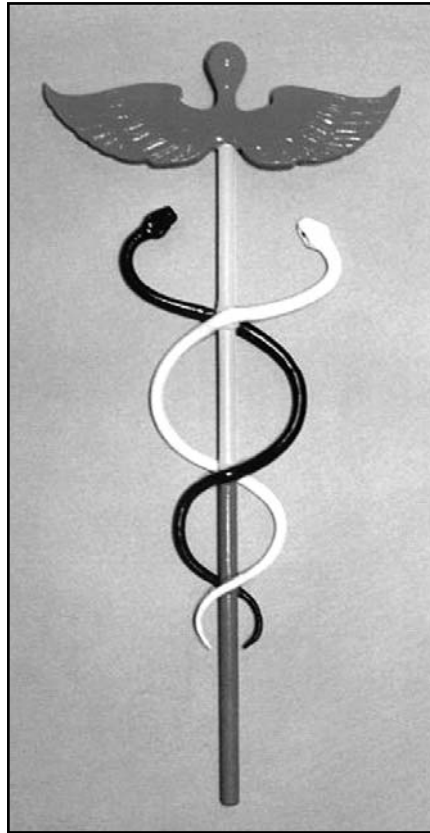


Figure 4: Caduceus Wand of the Keryx.

nature of the world. In order to do so an artist must first gain an awareness of deeper spiritual truths to be found in the world prior to them being represented artistically.

An artist who spoke eloquently about this was Matisse. In a 1948 letter to Henry Clifford, the Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Matisse stated: 'An artist must possess Nature. He must identify himself with her rhythm, by efforts that will prepare the mastery which will later enable him to express himself in his own language.' How Matisse describes his art fits the spiritual principles behind the GD, the processes of the Outer and the Inner Order, and of 'Nature', being multi-dimensional and not confined to its physical manifestation. In the Outer Order of the GD, the person achieves balance by identifying with Nature. In the

Inner Order the person is now a 'master' and able to express him or herself and to work magic in his or her own particular way. Matisse explained the key expressionist principle to the *New York Times* in 1913: 'I do not literally paint that table, but the emotion it produces upon me.' In addition, he spoke of the relation of the artist to an inner light and thereby to divinity:

'Most painters require direct contact with objects in order to feel that they exist, and they can only reproduce them under strictly physical conditions. They look for an exterior light to illuminate them internally. Whereas the artist or the poet possesses an interior light which transforms objects to make a new world of them – sensitive, organised, a living world which is in itself an infallible sign of divinity, a reflection of divinity' (cited in Flam, 1995, p.89).

This too echoes the work of the GD where the concept of spiritual 'light' is fundamental – hence the name the 'Golden Dawn'. During a person's first initiation s/he is invited to: 'Quit the night and seek the day!' Matisse was a 'light-worker' who channelled the spiritual forces of light. This can be compared to the work and views of Edvard Munch, the haunted artist who seemed more to channel the forces of 'dark'.

Munch demonstrated that artists might create an art that touches the dark side of the transpersonal where death and decay may be perceived as the dark transpersonal property woven throughout the tapestry of existence. Munch was haunted by fears for his family's health (Bischoff, 2007). His mother had died of tuberculosis when he was only 5, and his sister, whom he adored, also died of tuberculosis when she was just 15 and Munch was only 14. He himself battled both physical and mental illness throughout his life and Munch's most famous painting, *The Scream*, surely touches us from a place of distress. This motivation behind his art is expressed eloquently in a letter to his physician, Kristian Schreiner:

'My whole life has been spent walking by the side of a bottomless chasm, jumping from stone to stone. Sometimes I try to leave my narrow path and join the swirling mainstream of life, but I always find myself drawn inexorably back towards the chasm's edge, and there I shall walk until the day I finally fall into the abyss. For as long as I can remember I have suffered from a deep feeling of anxiety which I have tried to express in my art. Without anxiety and illness I should have been like a ship without a rudder' (cited in Prideaux, 2005, p.229).

The relationship between negative aspects of the human character and creativity has been explored by Diamond (1996), a clinical and forensic psychologist working in Los Angeles. In a development of the work of May (1970), Diamond adopts the concept of the *daimonic* to explain a force that humans can experience which can be put either to destructive use through anger or insanity, or

to constructive purposes through creativity. May identified the *daimonic* as a transpersonal phenomenon:

'The more I come to terms with my daimonic tendencies, the more I find myself conceiving and living by a universal structure of reality. This movement towards the logos is transpersonal. Thus we move from an impersonal through a personal to a transpersonal dimension of consciousness' (1969, p.177).

Diamond identifies two distinct creative character types who use the *daimonic*, the *dysdaimonic character* and the *eudaimonic character*. The *dysdaimonic* is both creative and destructive, and perhaps Munch was of this type. The *eudaimonic* is 'a more conscious, integrated, whole and self-possessed person' (1996, p.269), and perhaps Matisse was of this type. It is the *eudaimonic* form that the GD aims to cultivate. However, a GD neophyte must be aware of any negative life events that may have left them with unresolved issues that may predispose their practice towards darkness, a creativity that could harm rather than heal. They need to be at least aware of and hopefully able to transform their shadow-self.

In the new material that Cicero and Cicero added to Israel Regardie's *Middle Pillar* they state: 'Transpersonal psychotherapies and respectable systems of magic both work to examine and integrate the shadow' (2004, p.135). In alchemical terms, the time when one often comes face to face with one's shadow-self can be thought of as the *nigredo* (blackness) state. This is the time which Jung (1944) perceived as being a period of intense despair, when all looks lost and hopeless; the 'dark night of the soul'. Jung recognised that this was usually followed by a period of personal development and the dawning of a new level of awareness which can be compared to the subsequent alchemical stages of *albedo* (whiteness) and *citrinitas* (yellowness). With this awakening, the qualities of compassion and selflessness are often discovered and it is important for GD members to strive for this level of spiritual awareness. Ultimately the spiritual alchemical

process culminates with the stage of *rubedo* (redness) which Jung (1944) equated with individuation and the attainment of full solar (or Christ) consciousness³. A brief introduction to these spiritual alchemical processes is given symbolically to the *neophyte* during their first initiation in the GD system (Seims, 2008).

Compassion for other beings and the earth can be the antidote to negative transpersonal states such as *spiritual narcissism*. Compassion may enable the spiritual seeker to go beyond vanity and the dominance of a desire to transcend one's own death. Compassion is also important for the artist, not only in transcending vanity but also to enable something lasting and valuable to be left after the artist's death, through the continuing power of artistic works to arouse feelings of empathy with the art's message.

GD members practice magic to help others. In transpersonal terms, the aim is that the practitioner will be working their magic from the transcendent or *Higher Self* (cf. Assagioli⁴, 1976). In the GD, and in many other esoteric orders, the ultimate aim is to perfect the ego so that it might be a lamp for the flame of the Higher Self. However, to prevent narcissistic goals contaminating the work, much self-reflection is required, a process that is also common within religious traditions and can, for example, be observed in the lives of monks and nuns.

The psychological processes of creativity are vital for ritual magic. Ritual magic, and indeed religious rituals, have strong similarities to the practices of performance art such as theatre and dance, particularly where these are used to bring about therapeutic change. Moreno (1940) developed a whole approach to therapeutic change that utilised these processes, naming it, appropriately, *psychodrama*. In addition, the principles of

Jungian psychology have been used to inform the development of dance therapy (Chodorow, 1991). In the GD, performance plays a central part in the proceedings; therefore, it is useful for a member of the Order to have a tendency towards acting and performance. It is believed that the Order members are channelling the various 'god-forms' assigned to the specific officer roles and parts in a ritual. Thus an officer in the ritual will take a 'part' which is associated with an Egyptian God and will visualise themselves as acting within the consciousness of the god (Regardie, 1937). For example, in the GD, the godform of *Anubis*, the jackal-headed Egyptian god, is associated with the task of the *Keryx*, the one who serves as the 'guide' for the candidate during their lower grade initiations. This is not to suggest that members of the GD are simply acting; rather, in Jungian terms, they are enacting archetypes in order to enhance the individuation process. It is suggested that the practices of the GD bring about a more balanced individual, and one way of explaining how this occurs is to suggest that a form of psychodrama is occurring. Diamond believes that, during the creative act, the artist may experience a trance-like state which he terms *benevolent possession*, a state where:

The artist allows herself or himself to be swept up in the raging current of primordial images, ideas, intuitions, and emotions emanating from the daimonic; while, at the same time, retaining sufficient conscious control to render this raw energy or prima materia into some new creative form' (1996, p.132).

This can be equated to any magic where there is an invocation of a God or Goddess that is drawn into the person, which is the stated aim of the officers of the GD system where godforms are attributed to each role. The enactment of each godform is claimed to enable a change of consciousness that

³ These traditional alchemical terms should not be seen as carrying racial connotations.

⁴ The founder of psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli, was a close associate of the esotericist Alice Bailey (Daniels, 2005, p.20). Whilst not a member of the Golden Dawn, Bailey was contemporary with it and significantly contributed to the esoteric thinking of that period. Assagioli and Bailey mutually influenced each other and the course of both transpersonal psychology and Western Occultism.

Grof (2000) would consider to be ontologically real, not fantasy, but transcending the consensual reality of space and time.

The GD aims to create altered states of consciousness through a kind of sensory and symbolic overload. It makes use of costume to heighten the dramatic effect, as shown in Figure 5, with each item having a symbolic significance. Not all esoteric orders use formal robes and the Egyptian head-dresses (*Nemyss*) as the GD does; instead they may focus more on inner work and visualisation. The GD also makes use of principles of the visual arts. *Flashing colours* are a particular aspect of the GD system, using the artist's complementary colours such as red and green, blue and yellow. Colours are also associated with different elements in conjunction with different Archangels and Sephiroth. In addition, the GD has an extensive system of correspondences that incorporates colours, sounds, images, smells, Hebrew letters and their meanings, Tarot cards and astrological symbols.

GD rituals are full of speeches, many packed with metaphors, some beautiful, some tending towards the verbose. For their psychological impact to be delivered effectively a certain degree of acting and performance ability is required, which may also be a pre-requisite for any similar roles, including the parish priest. Perhaps the main difference between a dramatic magical ritual and a dramatic play is that, in a ritual, the person needs to choose to take part in the role on an internal as well as an external level. This may involve the conscious decision to listen to the symbols and symbolic scenarios that the person is presented with; to allow the mind to be open to suggestion, and, throughout the ritual process, actively using part of the mind whose messages are often ignored (i.e. the messages of dream consciousness and the realm of imagination).

Transformative rituals become part of everyday life for GD members who are encouraged to practice daily a simple magical technique known as the *Lesser Banishing*



Figure 5: Golden Dawn members in ceremonial robes.

*Ritual of the Pentagram*⁵. Here the person considers that s/he stands at the centre of the Universe, with his/her higher self within the heart centre, flanked by four archangels, and on all sides a symbol of the dominion of Spirit (the pentagram). This sends a powerful message to the unconscious mind that the person is a channel for the spiritual self.

Though for the unsuitably ungrounded person the experience of considering oneself the centre of the Universe could lead to *ego-inflation*, the task of a GD member is to discover the middle pillar, the place of balance as seen in the concept of the Tree of Life. To discover the middle pillar it is necessary to know where the extremes are located and to experience their principles. For example, on the Tree of Life, two opposing *sephiroth* often have opposite meanings applied to them, such as *Chesed* (mercy) and *Geburah* (severity). To achieve balance is to harmonise or integrate these two principles. This approach fits well with the ideas of Jung (1998) who believed that the way to achieve realisation of the Self, i.e. for the ego to be transformed to a higher level with problems transcended and outgrown, is through the union of opposites. In addition, Jung also acknowledges that one needs to go to the extremes before balance can be achieved: 'A man who has not passed through the inferno of his passions has never overcome them' (Jung, 1983, p.306).

The self-development and transformative work of the GD involves a combination of group ritual, individual ritual, individual group study, meditative practice and dream work. The Outer Order of the GD consists of an introductory grade (*neophyte*) followed by grades involving experience of each of the elements (earth, air, water and fire). Each grade has rituals designed to evoke in the *neophyte* an understanding of whichever element s/he is working with. This is achieved through a combination of symbols and invocations using, for example, the *Elemental*

Kings whose names are given in the 17th century grimoire *The Goetia* and who are said to rule the elemental kingdoms of Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Similarly the elementally-based *Enochian Watchtowers* are also used, which derive from the hermetic writings of John Dee, the 17th century mathematician and court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I. Whilst working in a particular elemental grade the *neophyte* is required to meditate and think about the element as it is expressed in everyday life, to recognise which qualities of that element are present in his or her psychological make-up, and hopefully to appreciate any imbalance that needs to be addressed.

An illustration of how meditating on an element can be experienced by a GD member is provided by the following example from the magical diary of a female GD *neophyte*. She was working with the Air element after taking what is termed her 2=9 exam, relating to the Air element but prior to the 2=9 Air initiation itself:

In my dream I was with my daughter, which in itself is quite unusual as I don't often dream about her. There was a tornado coming and I ran with her, to a building that reminded me of my senior school. Once inside, there were windows everywhere, many more than you would normally expect – there was one particular wall which seemed to be made from windows. There were no cupboards in which to hide for protection from the tornado. We also seemed high up, like we were overlooking some sort of valley. I looked down and I could see a knight-like figure threatening a red dragon into submission. I watched as the red dragon retreated into a wooded area. The sky was getting darker and darker and the tornado was getting closer and closer. I remember thinking "oh no, it is going to hit us!" I proceeded to do the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram suddenly all this light flooded into the scene, dissipating the dark and stormy tornado, whose swirling then mutated

⁵ This is a small ritual utilising Hebrew and aspects of Judaic symbolism that is performed regularly by many magicians. It is designed to equilibrate their mind and thus their life.

into two dragons, one black and one white. They were chasing each other's tails and spinning round and round in the air. In my dream, I said "It's OK now, look, everything is back in balance as it should be" (cited in Seims, 2007, p.50).

The form of the dream featured the Air element in the tornado, and it resolved itself through an image of balanced opposites, which is something the GD strives for. In the middle of the dream there was a surprise for the dreamer in the alchemical images of the knight and dragon in conflict as she had never paid much attention to them before and their appearance was unexpected. According to the GD scholar, Farrell (2007b), the power of elemental symbols to balance and to heal psychological problems should not be underestimated, nor should the potential for difficult experiences to occur for the person in the transformative process:

If the candidate has views about the meaning of those elemental symbols, or have [sic] prejudices against them based on their neuroses, the initiatic symbol has the ability to override the previous programming. It will draw experiences to them that prove the positive power of that element until it is balanced. This often means that candidates in the 1=10 experience illness or financial problems until they better understand their material nature' (Farrell, 2007b, p.20).

The Golden Dawn and the theory of Wilber

The practices of GD members can be meaningfully mapped onto Wilber's (1995) Four Quadrants model. This model incorporates Wilber's belief that the development of consciousness is not solely within an individual, but occurs in both the individual and in the collective, in ways that are both interior and exterior to them; hence the four quadrants. Wilber stresses the need for progress on all

quadrants and all levels (AQAL) for transpersonal development. A mapping of the GD onto the Four Quadrants may be suggested as follows. Firstly, the *interior individual* is met by the intention and Will of the individual GD member. Secondly, the *interior collective* is the culture of the GD as an organisation, whose temples work collectively and support each other. Thirdly, the *exterior individual* is met by GD members working magic for others outside the GD. To complete the fourth quadrant, the *exterior collective* consists of the practitioner writings and rituals that guide people on their own spiritual journeys. So in Wilber's terms, the GD is an AQAL approach as the attainment of knowledge and transformation is occurring in all four quadrants. The success of this mapping exercise could be taken as positive evidence for the GD achieving Wilber's criteria, and in the process potentially validating his model as an evaluation tool. Alternatively, it may be that his model is so broad and all encompassing, that the work of most esoteric or religious organisations could be mapped onto the four quadrants.

In addition, Wilber's (2000) structural-hierarchical model of self development can be mapped onto the GD's version of Hermetic Kabbalistic teaching concerning the divisions of the soul. Wilber's *prepersonal* consciousness can be equated to *G'uph*, that is in control of psychophysical functions and the autonomic system, and to *Nephesh*, the shadow-self of the soul and animal instincts. Wilber's *personal* consciousness may be equated to *Ruach*, the conscious part of being and the ego. Wilber's *transpersonal* consciousness of the *psychic, subtle, causal* and *nondual* can be equated to *Neshamah* and its three subdivisions: *Yechidah*, the one true and immortal divine self, *Chiah*, the urge to become more human, and *Neshamah*, the intuitive power that connects humankind to the Divine⁶.

⁶ Although this mapping onto Wilber's model is suggested, a more precise correspondence may be between the Kabbalistic divisions of the soul and Assagioli's divisions between: (1) the lower unconscious; (2) the middle unconscious and personal consciousness; and (3) the higher unconscious and transpersonal self. Of course this correspondence may directly reflect the esoteric influences on Assagioli's theories.

Wilber's (1995) conceptualisation of ascending and descending paths allows for an interesting comparison of esoteric orders such as the GD to pagan paths. To locate the pagan paths or esoteric orders in one or other of these categories poses challenges, as there is overlap, but general distinctions can be made. The pagan paths are centred around bringing change to the person through an approach focussed on the Earth. Descending paths are associated with a greater connection with Nature, and this is characteristic of many modern pagan approaches, where the Earth is the Great Mother, *Gaia*. The modern pagan paths also represent a re-emergence of what could be considered pre-axial religion, which emphasises the 'interpenetration of the spiritual and natural worlds' (Daniels, 2005, p.27), since this is a good description of how many followers of pagan paths understand their own religion.

The magical esoteric orders seek the same goal, but also aim to deal with higher spheres on the Tree of Life. They aim to affect and interact with the various emanations from *Ain Soph Aur* (the limitless light and source of all above *Kether* on the Tree of Life) before they eventually manifest in *Malkuth*, the material world. As Cicero and Cicero state:

'The Qabalah, which Dion Fortune called the "Yoga of the West", reveals the nature of certain physical and psychological phenomena. Once these are rightly understood, the student can use the principles of magic to exercise control over the conditions and circumstances of his/her life. Magic provides the practical application of the theories supplied by the Qabalah' (1995, p.55).

Israel Regardie emphasises the ascending nature of the GD's magical practices as follows:

'The object of Magic, then, is the return of man to the Gods, the uniting of the individual consciousness during life with the greater being of the universal Essences, the more embracing consciousness of the Gods who are the everlasting sources of light and life and love.

Only thus, to the human being, may there come liberty and illumination, and the power to see the beauty and the majesty of life as it really is' (2005, p.65).

The esoteric orders generally have an ascending structure; for example, in the GD system of magic, the person start off as a neophyte and then gradually works their way through subsequent grades, which correspond to different *sephiroth* on the Tree of Life, attaining greater spiritual perfection as they progress. By the time all the grades in the Outer Order have been achieved the student will have ascended from studying the ideas and experiences behind *Malkuth* up to those of *Netzach*.

The distinction between the *Great Circle or Web of Being* versus the *Ladder or Chain of Being* as outlined by Daniels (2005) can also be appreciated when comparing pagan paths to esoteric orders such as the GD. Many pagan paths are referred to as 'Earth religions' since they are generally concerned with earth mysteries, the environment and the cycles of nature as experienced on Earth. Modern Wiccans experience divinity through what they call *raising power* by dancing, chanting, invocation, evocation and ritual. Circles and spirals are important to them as they represent the circle of life, death and rebirth, a womb, a receptacle and container for spiritual powers and experiences. However, many covens also have an initiatory system which could be likened to a *ladder*, but generally they have fewer rungs compared to esoteric orders like the GD, and, in addition, there are many different forms of Wicca today; some have no initiatory structure, whilst others have more than the typical three grades.

Esoteric Orders differ from the descending Pagan paths in that there is generally less emphasis on nature in the physical world around us (though physical objects may be used in rituals). Rather there is an emphasis on Divine nature and on trying to understand the workings of 'God', and the machinery of the Universe, on a more spiritual level. Esoteric orders are more

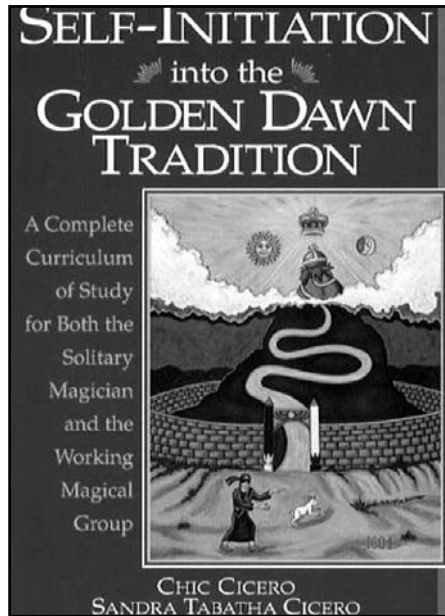


Figure 6: *The Golden Dawn as an ascending path.*

ladder-like and many use the structure of the Tree of Life as the basis of their spiritual model. However, this is not to say that they do not also see a *Great Circle or Web*; they do, but it involves many levels, not just the *Malkuthian* physical world. Daniels (2005) suggests that the *Great Circle or Web* is found in practices such as shamanism that explore the interaction between the physical and spiritual worlds and the great web of interconnectedness. In contrast, practitioners of esoteric orders, such as the GD, would suggest that they are dealing with more complexity: worlds upon worlds, *sephiroth*, kingdoms and multiple planes based around the *ladder-like* Tree of life. However, both approaches are clearly operating in the realms of the transpersonal.

In Figure 6, the GD *neophyte* is represented (with clear echoes of Masonic symbolism) blindfolded and metaphorically groping in the dark, looking for the entranceway to the path, from which point to begin the spiritual climb up the mountain, signifying the ascent of the Tree of Life. In this aspect the GD is probably closer to the ladder (ascending) concept than that of

the circle or web (descending). The *neophyte* passes between the black and white pillars, and the path takes him or her to the extremes of each, as these must be known for the middle to be located, yet ultimately the purpose is to arrive back in the middle, at the place of balance.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the main features of the GD and demonstrated how it sits within the stream of transpersonal development that is the Western esoteric tradition. The GD's use of symbolism and ritual were explored to demonstrate how it aims to bring about self-development. Its actual effectiveness in leading to the attainment of this goal is essentially an empirical question that could benefit from further research. During our study of this topic we were struck by the overlap between the practices of the ritual magician and that of the artist, both visual and performance. A comparison of the GD system to transpersonal theory indicated that, in Wilber's terms, it offers an AQAL approach and is predominantly an ascending path.

Acknowledgements

This article is a revision of a paper presented at the British Psychological Society's Transpersonal Psychology Section Annual Conference, 2007. Many thanks to the following for permitting the use of their images: Harry Wendrich (www.wendricharthouse.com) for permission to use the picture in Figure 1; Chic and Sandra Tabatha Cicero for permission to use the pictures and diagrams in Figures 2,3,4 and 6; The Mountain Temple Center for permission to use the image in Figure 5.

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