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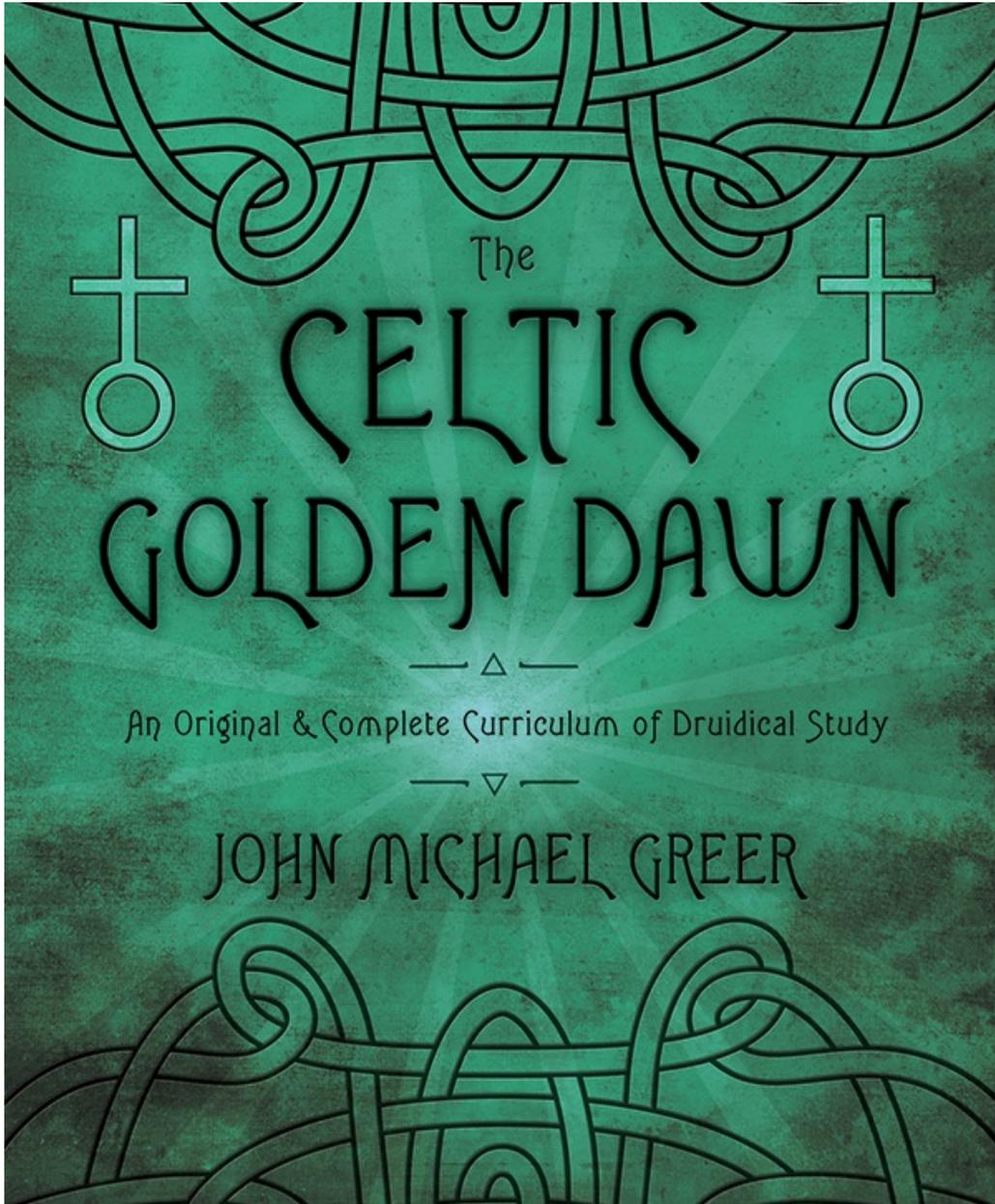
GOLDEN DAWN

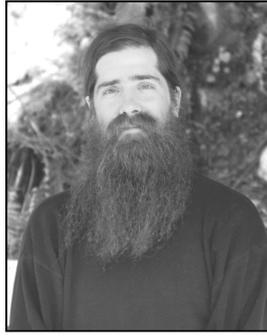


An Original & Complete Curriculum of Druidical Study



JOHN MICHAEL GREER





## About the Author

JOHN MICHAEL GREER (western Maryland) has been a student of occult traditions and the unexplained for more than thirty years. A Freemason, a student of geomancy and sacred geometry, and a widely read blogger, he is also the author of numerous books—including *Monsters*, *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult*, and *Secrets of the Lost Symbol*—and currently serves as the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a contemporary school of Druid nature spirituality. Greer has contributed articles to *Renaissance Magazine*, *Golden Dawn Journal*, *Mezlim*, *New Moon Rising*, *Gnosis*, and *Alexandria*.



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JOHN MICHAEL GREER

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# Introduction

## The Golden Dawn and the Celtic Twilight

THE FOUNDATION OF THE Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1888 marked the zenith of one of the most creative periods in the long history of occultism and the convergence of trends that had been building in British and European occult circles for many decades. Too many students of occultism these days, whether they believe that the Golden Dawn system was handed down from the immemorial past or think that it was patched together more or less at random out of scraps of forgotten lore from the collections of the British Library, see it as a unique phenomenon. The truth of the matter is far more interesting.

The beginning of the flood tide of magical innovation that brought the Golden Dawn into being can be dated to 1854, when the French occultist Alphonse Constant—writing under his pen name Éliphas Lévi—published the first volume of *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie (Doctrine and Ritual of High Magic)*.<sup>1</sup> Lévi, as he may as well be called here, was an extraordinary and too-often underrated thinker who studied for the priesthood in a series of Catholic seminaries, left before ordination, and was active in radical politics for several years before finding his life's work as the first great modern writer on magic. At a time when popular opinion dismissed occultism as superstitious nonsense, Lévi was able to restate the basic principles of magic in a form that the reading public of the nineteenth century found understandable and appealing. In the process, he kickstarted a revival of magic that is still ongoing.

Lévi's genius was that his theory of magic combined a first-rate knowledge of traditional occultism with an equally keen understanding of those intellectual currents of his time so that a contemporary audience could make sense of magic. He reworked the old philosophy of magic, which was heavily tinged with the scholasticism of the Middle Ages and opaque to most people by his time, in terms drawn from the cutting edge of nineteenth-century philosophy and science. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, then hugely popular, wrote about the world as the product of will and representation; Lévi borrowed this by positing that magic is the product of will and imagination. Nineteenth-century physics accepted the idea of a subtle substance pervading the universe, providing the basis for light, heat, electricity, and magnetism; Lévi borrowed the idea, renamed it “the Astral Light,” and postulated that it was the

medium that transmits magical influences from mind to mind—or from mind to matter.

Another key to Lévi's success was the way he redefined the image of the practitioner of magic. During the Renaissance, when magic had last been popular and respected in Western culture, magicians had envisioned their art as a way to the fulfillment of the highest reaches of human possibility. Since that time, reduced to a hole-and-corner existence as members of a despised subculture, magicians had done as socially marginal groups so often do, accepted the wider culture's negative opinion of them without ever quite noticing that this was what they were doing. Lévi restored magic to its old dignity, but in updated terms: in an age that was intoxicated with the dream of conquering nature, he offered the promise of nearly limitless power and wisdom to those who were willing to rise to the greater challenge of conquering themselves.

This act of redefinition relaunched occultism back into the popular culture of Lévi's time, giving it a foothold in the collective imagination for the first time since the onset of the Scientific Revolution two centuries earlier. In the wake of *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* and a string of sequels from Lévi's busy pen, an occult subculture emerged, first in France, then in other European countries and overseas as well. As the new subculture expanded, it found an unexpected audience among Freemasons.

Freemasonry itself was finishing up a century of extraordinary innovations when the nineteenth-century revival of magic began. When it originally went public in 1717 with the founding of the first Grand Lodge of England, Freemasonry had only two degrees of initiation, Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft. A third, Master Mason, was added around 1720; the Royal Arch, the first of what came to be known as the higher degrees, appeared at some point before 1743, the date when it was first mentioned in Masonic records. Thereafter the floodgates opened, and literally thousands of new degrees came into being. Most of these lasted only a little while, but some of the best found their way into an assortment of rites, or systems of degrees, that took shape around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The York Rite of ten degrees and the Scottish Rite of thirty-three were the most successful of these rites, and both of them are still active today.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, partly as a result of this wave of creative innovation, Freemasonry was far and away the most influential voluntary organization in the Western world. The Craft,<sup>2</sup> as its members still call it, served many purposes—social networking and charitable work, among others—but it also very often provided an outlet for the interests of men who were intrigued by ritual, symbolism, and mystical philosophy. Lévi's updated occultism made a good fit with these interests. One of the consequences was an explosion of new organizations, some connected to Freemasonry and others simply inspired by it, that combined initiation

rituals modeled on those of the Craft with instruction in magic modeled on the writings of Lévi and the many authors who followed him into the realm of the occult.

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AS THE ORIGINAL HOME of Freemasonry, Britain saw a particularly large number of these new occult lodges. One of the earliest and most influential was the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* (Rosicrucian Society in England), or SRIA, which was founded in 1867 by English Freemason Robert Wentworth Little. Open only to Master Masons, the SRIA based its degrees on the traditions of the Rosicrucians, a mystical and alchemical society of early seventeenth-century Germany, and attracted a great many British Freemasons with occult interests. Several other orders of a similar kind came into being within Freemasonry, while outside the Craft, occult societies such as the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, the August Order of Light, and the Royal Oriental Order of the Sat B'hai competed for members.

The spread of occultism in nineteenth-century culture went into overdrive in 1875, the year of Éliphas Lévi's death, when the Russian expatriate Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and a group of American occultists founded the Theosophical Society in New York. The first public organization for occult education in modern times, the TS, as it was usually called, grew explosively over the decades that followed, helped substantially by Blavatsky's talents as a writer and publicist. Unlike Masonry and many of the other initiatory orders, the TS was open to women as well as men, and it attracted a great many women who were interested in occultism but too often found themselves on the wrong side of lodge doors.

By the late 1880s, the popularity of Lévi's new vision of magic, the proliferation of occult lodges and secret societies, and the rapid spread of Theosophy created a substantial market for a magical lodge that would admit women as well as men and teach not simply occult philosophy but also practical magic. That niche was filled in 1888 when William Wynn Westcott and Samuel Mathers—both of them Freemasons, Theosophists, members of the SRIA, and more than usually competent occultists—launched the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Westcott, the driving force behind the order in its early years, had been active in British occult lodges, Masonic and otherwise, for years; Mathers was a gifted writer of rituals. Their raw materials included the famous “cipher manuscripts,” which outlined the rituals and teachings of what became the Golden Dawn's Outer Order, but the two of them also drew on the accumulated experience of decades of magical societies and more than a century of Masonic innovations.

The story of the Golden Dawn's rise and fall has been told many times and need not be retold here in detail. Like too many other occult organizations before and since, the

Golden Dawn ended up with an inner circle composed of people who were better mages than managers and who discovered the hard way that esoteric wisdom is no substitute for the forbearance, cooperation, and common sense that any group project needs to succeed or even to survive. The first major blowup came in 1900, splitting the order into two factions; a more serious explosion followed in 1903. One round of troubles followed another until the last Golden Dawn temple with a charter from the original order finally went out of existence in the 1970s.

The years before the troubles began, though, were spent in a continuing creative ferment. Not only Westcott and Mathers but many of their inner circle of students and initiates kept busy bringing new material into the Golden Dawn synthesis; some of this new material was drawn from older occult literature, but a significant portion of it was entirely new. In the process, a number of Golden Dawn initiates ventured into other parts of the busy alternative spirituality movement of the time—and one of the things they encountered there was the revival, a century and a half old by then, of the spirituality of the ancient Druids.

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THE DRUID REVIVAL, as it is usually called these days, first took shape around the time that Freemasonry was establishing its first public presence. A tradition in modern Druid circles, in fact, dates the organization of the first Druid order of modern times to 1717, though documentary evidence is lacking. There was certainly a documented Druid Revival group meeting in suburban London in the early 1740s, however, under the chiefship of the genial Rev. William Stukeley, a noted scholar of British antiquities, and the movement expanded rapidly from there. By the 1790s, according to contemporary records, there were Druid societies in Dublin and in the Hudson River Valley of the newly independent United States, and Druid ceremonies were being openly celebrated at Primrose Hill in London.

Behind this phenomenon lay a complex history. The ancient Druids were the priests, wizards, and philosophers of the Celtic peoples of Ireland, Britain, and Gaul (modern France). There are a handful of scrappy references concerning them in Greek and Roman records, and accounts in Irish legends written down centuries after the last Druids went extinct, but none of these sources provide a clear view of what the Druids were and what they taught. Some accounts portrayed them as savage priests spattered with the blood of human sacrifices, while others extolled them as wise sages in forest sanctuaries contemplating the secrets of nature and passing on exalted moral teachings to their students. Whatever they might have been, the Romans suppressed them in Gaul and Britain, and Christian missionaries finished the job in Scotland and Ireland;

they last appear in history in the ninth century, when they tried and failed to prevent the Picts of eastern Scotland from converting to Christianity.

There the story might have ended, except for two factors. The first was the mystery that surrounded the standing stones and earthen mounds scattered across the countryside in Ireland, Britain, and France. Today's scholars argue on the basis of radiocarbon dating, as well as currently accepted estimates of when the Celts arrived in the far west of Europe, that those monuments could not have been built by the Druids. In the seventeenth century, however, when the cultural ferment of the Renaissance sparked the first serious historical research in France and England, nobody had access to radiocarbon dating or historical linguistics. As scholarly curiosity turned toward the tall stones and low mounds that dotted the landscape, the idea that they had been built by the ancient Druids was hard to dismiss. That possibility inspired researchers to comb old documents for references to the ancient Druids, and accounts of the little that the Greeks and Romans had said about the Druids found their way into circulation.

The second factor, which arrived with shattering force in the early eighteenth century, was the first wave of the Industrial Revolution. Modern historians like to paint this as a great leap forward, but many people who witnessed it at the time were appalled by the human and environmental cost of a transformation that forced several million rural people off lands their ancestors had farmed for centuries, offered them the hard choice between emigration and work in the vast smoky factories of the new industrial order at starvation wages, and blighted the land itself with coal smoke and sprawling industrial earthworks. The two respectable ideologies of the time—dogmatic Protestant Christianity on the one hand and an equally dogmatic scientific materialism on the other—insisted that all this was for the best. Those who disagreed ended up seeking a third option; some of them found it in what little was known about the ancient Druids.

The newly created Druid groups that emerged from the collision between these factors pursued various paths. Some took an active role in the struggle of the Welsh people for cultural survival and self-determination, an allegiance that ended up transmitting Druid Revival ideas and organizations to the Celtic peoples of Cornwall and Brittany a little later on. Some modeled themselves on Freemasonry and concentrated on social networking and charitable works. Some followed up on the original religious and environmental agenda that seems to have launched the movement, laying the foundations for a movement of nature spirituality that would blossom in a later century. By the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result, there were plenty of Druid orders of various kinds scattered around Britain.

Some of these orders had substantial overlaps with the subculture of magical lodges and Masons with occult interests mentioned earlier. The same Robert Wentworth Little who founded the SRIA in 1867, for example, went on to found a Druid Revival organization, the Ancient and Archeological Order of Druids (AAOD), in 1874. The connections that gave birth to the subject of this book, however, had a different origin: they took shape in the wake of a remarkable cultural shift that still influences the English-speaking world today.

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THE CULTURES OF THE Celtic nations that were part of the United Kingdom in 1800 were by and large despised not only by their English conquerors but by many of the Celts themselves. In Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall, those who wanted to rise in the world copied the culture and language of England and did their best to rid themselves of what a great many people at that time considered the outworn relics of a barbarous past.

During the century that followed, though, an astonishing transformation occurred: the Celtic nations rediscovered themselves. Languages, music, traditions, and lore that had been on the verge of dying out found new defenders as people in the Celtic lands redefined themselves as members of distinct cultures and nations with their own values and histories. That in itself was remarkable; what was still more remarkable was that the English themselves began to fall under the spell of the peoples they had conquered. By the late nineteenth century, Celtic arts, literature, and music had become wildly popular in England as well as other European nations.

The fascination with all things Celtic that pervaded English culture during the heyday of the Golden Dawn might have left the order untouched, except for three factors—or, more exactly, three people. The first was Samuel Mathers, one of the order's founders, an enthusiast for all things Celtic who claimed to be descended from the MacGregors, one of the most famous and romantic of the Highland clans of Scotland. The second was Mathers's wife Moina, a gifted clairvoyant and occultist who played a leading role in the order straight through its history and who was as much of a Celtophile as her husband.

The third was a figure of much greater importance: the Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats. Winner of the 1923 Nobel Prize in Literature and one of the twentieth century's most influential poets, Yeats was also a capable and passionate occultist. He founded the Dublin Hermetic Society in 1885, then was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1890 and quickly rose through the order's grades of initiation, becoming one of its leading members. At this same time, Yeats was one of the major forces in the Irish cultural renaissance, both through his own

work and through his encouragement of two generations of Irish creative talents. Yeats's collection of stories and essays entitled *The Celtic Twilight*, published in 1893, was so influential in its day that the entire Celtic literary and artistic revival of the period is commonly called "the Celtic Twilight" after it.

It was probably inevitable that Yeats's occult interests and his labors on behalf of Ireland would fuse at some point, and in 1895 that fusion began as Yeats drew up the first plans for a Celtic magical order on Golden Dawn lines: the Castle of Heroes. Samuel and Moina Mathers were among a good dozen Golden Dawn initiates who assisted in the project, which was to be headquartered in a castle on an island in Lough Key, County Roscommon. Five grades of initiation were drawn up, along with outlines of the training required of initiates. It was a workable project, and it might have gone forward if the Golden Dawn itself had survived.

Instead, the first round of political crisis in 1900 put the Matherses and Yeats on opposite sides of a bitter divide, and the struggles that followed scattered the members of the working group that Yeats had gathered around his project into a number of mutually hostile factions. The devastating impact of the First World War, Ireland's successful war of liberation against England immediately afterward, and the Irish Civil War that followed finished off any further hope of accomplishing the project in Yeats's lifetime. The extensive papers from the Castle of Heroes project are now in the National Library of Ireland, silent witnesses to one of the many might-have-beens in the history of Western magic.

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IN THE AFTERMATH OF the Golden Dawn's self-immolation, various groups of former members regrouped and organized lodges and orders of their own. Very little is known about most of them, but a curious factor appears in the few records that survive: a noticeable number of these successor groups apparently drew a great deal of their inspiration from Celtic sources, while bits of unmistakably Golden Dawn material also began to surface in Druid Revival groups in England at this same time. Robert MacGregor-Reid, an influential Druid leader of the following generation, was exaggerating considerably when he said to surrealist painter and author Ithell Colquhoun, "Doesn't it occur to you that the Druid Order is the survivor of the Golden Dawn?"<sup>3</sup> Still, there were certainly a number of Druid organizations in the early years of the twentieth century that had close formal or informal connections with the Golden Dawn tradition.

One of these was the Ancient Order of Druid Hermetists (AODH), which appeared on the London occult scene in 1926. Its head, Mrs. E. A. Ansell, was a student of Irish occultist P. G. Bowen, head of the Dublin Hermetic Society founded by Yeats. The

documents that survive—notably, copies of the AODH periodical *The Pendragon*—suggest that a fair amount of Golden Dawn teaching filtered into the AODH system by one means or another.

The Cabbalistic Order of Druids, a group of which little but the name seems to be known, also came into being sometime in the 1920s. If its name is anything to go by, it combined Druidry with the Cabalistic magic that had been central to the Golden Dawn system. There were several others, at least one of which is still quietly active in England today.

There were also a certain number of temples—that is, local working groups—of the Golden Dawn’s immediate successor orders that went in a Celtic direction. The most famous of these was the much-rumored Nuada Temple, which was apparently founded in 1916 and, according to Ithell Colquhoun, met for many years in the London suburb of Clapham<sup>4</sup>; it was affiliated to some extent with the AODH, though the exact degree of connection is anyone’s guess at present. Standard practice in the original Golden Dawn was to name each temple after a deity—for example, the main London temple was the Isis-Urania Temple, the temple in Bristol was the Hermes Temple, and so on—but Nuada Temple seems to have been the only one named after a Celtic deity, the Irish god Nuada of the Silver Hand. Another London temple, headed by William Carnegie Dickson, apparently practiced the standard Golden Dawn rituals but combined them with a series of workings drawing extensively from the legends of King Arthur and Merlin.<sup>5</sup>

The remarkable magical career of Dion Fortune also intersected with the current of the Celtic–Golden Dawn fusion in significant ways. Fortune—her real name was Violet Firth, but few people nowadays remember her by anything but her magical nom de plume—came to occultism years after the original Golden Dawn had blown itself apart. She had some of her training in two of the successor orders that emerged from the fragments of the explosion and a great deal more in the wider world of British occult societies and magical lodges; her principal teacher, Dr. Theodore Moriarty, was a Freemason and a Theosophist with connections in several corners of the occult scene.

The magical order Fortune founded, the Fraternity of the Inner Light, had three degrees of initiation and a distinctive system of teaching that included borrowings from the Golden Dawn, Theosophy, and Christian mysticism, among other sources, as well as a great deal of material that was entirely original to Fortune herself. Celtic traditions played a significant role in Fortune’s synthesis, and the teachings of the Inner Light came to include a substantial body of material on the occult dimensions of the legends surrounding King Arthur; much of this has been published by Fortune’s

student Gareth Knight as *The Secret Tradition in Arthurian Legend*, a book that has gone on to inspire a significant amount of Arthurian occultism.

The Society of the Inner Light, as it is now called, is still very much a going concern, as are several daughter orders founded by Inner Light alumni in the years since Fortune's death in 1946. The vast majority of the groups that embodied the fusion between Celtic traditions and the Golden Dawn, however, went out of existence in the Second World War and the years that followed it. Between the disruptions caused by the war years and the postwar rise of Wicca and other freshly minted Neopagan traditions that embodied a vision of magic and spirituality radically different from the one that had been central to the Golden Dawn and the Druid Revival alike, few people had any interest in the old, no-longer-fashionable magical lodges—too few, ultimately, to enable them to keep their doors open. It is an old story and an uncomfortably familiar one to those of us who have an interest in the magical traditions of the Western world.

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IT IS AT THIS point that the story this introduction tells takes an unavoidably personal turn. In 2003 I was elected to the position of Grand Archdruid in the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a Druid Revival order founded in 1912 as the American branch of the Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids, founded by Robert Wentworth Little back in 1874. I came to the job after most of a decade with the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), a large and lively contemporary Druid order with its roots in the Druid Revival traditions; I came to OBOD, in turn, after nearly two decades of intensive personal work with the traditions of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

When I joined it, AODA had fewer than a dozen members, and I was the youngest by some thirty years. The same shifts in fashion that doomed the British occult orders of the early twentieth century had an even more devastating effect on the once thriving American occult scene. In the wake of the sixties, an astonishing number of young Americans attracted to occultism seem to have convinced themselves that magic consisted solely of what had been invented in England between the founding of the Golden Dawn and the emergence of modern Wicca. To many of these newcomers, if it didn't come from the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune, or one of the first generation of British Wiccan personalities, it simply wasn't of interest. In the face of such attitudes, AODA was fortunate to survive even in its shrunken form; hundreds of American occult societies and magical lodges went out of existence in the second half of the twentieth century, in most cases taking all their accumulated knowledge and rituals with them.

The rituals and teachings of AODA (which I have discussed at some length in other books<sup>6</sup>) have very little direct connection with the Golden Dawn tradition, though they share a great deal of material with the British Druid Revival scene. Beginning in 2003 and continuing for several years thereafter, however, as word of my election to AODA's "hot seat" got into circulation, I began to be contacted by people who had had some previous connection with AODA or one of the other esoteric orders associated with it in the past. The common thread in these communications was some variation on the theme of "Since you're the Grand Archdruid now, you ought to have this." What "this" was varied from person to person, and by no means did all of it have anything to do with AODA or even with Druidry; still, among the things that came my way during those years were fragmentary documents concerning two different Golden Dawn-Druid hybrid orders, one of them probably the Ancient Order of Druid Hermetists, the other less identifiable.

As a Druid with a Golden Dawn background, I was fascinated by this material, and not just for the obvious reasons. Like most students of the Golden Dawn, I had thought that its methods and teachings were unique, since I had found nothing else comparable to them; it had never occurred to me that they might have been simply the only surviving examples of a much broader current of related magical traditions. Just as it only became possible to conceive of the theory of evolution once scholars considered the evidence from fossils and saw how they bridged the gaps between living forms, the excavation of these "fossil" rituals and teachings allowed me to fit the Golden Dawn into a context that had not previously been visible.

What I came to see, if I may sum up the results of a great deal of research in very few words, is that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was simply one of the more elaborate flowerings of an occult movement that had its roots in the impact of Éliphas Lévi's redefinition of magic on the Masonic and quasi-Masonic occult scene of the nineteenth century. Though they drew a great deal of raw material from ancient sources, neither the Golden Dawn nor the broader movement were ancient in any real sense; they were, rather, a creative response to the opening up of new possibilities in the field of magic, and both the Golden Dawn and the broader movement kept on displaying an impressive capacity to innovate throughout their history. In the process, they also created highly effective ways of practicing magic and of carrying out the work of personal transformation that Lévi, as well as the Golden Dawn and its successors, called initiation.

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TO SPEAK OF THE Golden Dawn as the creative and innovative product of a tradition is to risk falling afoul of some remarkably deep-seated prejudices in the

contemporary occult and Pagan communities. Both these communities, in America and elsewhere, are very largely split down the middle between partisans of tradition who bristle at the thought of innovation and partisans of innovation who see no value whatsoever in tradition. The reality is that any spiritual or magical practice worth the name necessarily includes both tradition and innovation, but this simply adds spice to the bubbling cauldron of acrimony that too often results from this split.

Thus there are plenty of people on the occult scene these days who insist that the rituals and teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn must be studied and practiced exactly as written, or that some other body of written magical teaching taken in the most pigheadedly literal manner is the only valid basis for magical training. On the other side of the scene are at least as many people who insist that all of the traditional lore of magic is stuff and nonsense that should be tipped into the dumpster in favor of notions derived from current intellectual vogues and imagery copied from today's pop culture.

This same divide runs through the midst of the contemporary Druid scene as well. There is a small but vocal faction of Druids and Celtic Pagans that devotes its time to denouncing anyone whose Druidry fails to copy whatever reconstructions of ancient Celtic spirituality might happen to be in fashion in the academic world. The fact, and of course it is a fact, that the Druid Revival has been a vibrant, creative, and meaningful movement for close to three hundred years, evolving traditions and creating lineages that can have value in their own right irrespective of any relationship to the ancient Celts, never finds a place in the resulting diatribes. On the other side of the balance are those who simply make things up out of whole cloth as they go along and call it Druidry.

It needs to be said that there is nothing wrong with following the Golden Dawn tradition exactly by the book or with choosing to practice a personal spirituality that copies every detail of currently fashionable academic interpretations of archaic Celtic spirituality. Equally, there is nothing wrong with making things up as you go along and seeing how they work. The problem emerges when these two options are treated as the only possibilities that exist, when one of them is treated as the only valid one, and when the huge middle ground—which is where magic and spirituality, by and large, have their home—is dismissed from consideration.

This sort of thinking is, among other things, a complete misunderstanding of the nature of tradition itself. A tradition—the word comes from a Latin root that means “that which is given across” or, as we would now say, handed down—is simply a collection, accumulated over time, of things that work. In magic, as in anything else, having a good idea of what has been tried in the past is an enormous asset, but it has to be combined with a willingness to adapt the lessons of the past to the needs of the

ever-changing present. A body of knowledge that remains absolutely fixed over time, incapable of absorbing new lessons and insights, is not a tradition but a corpse.

In the same way, the refusal to learn from the lessons of the past, far from being a sign of originality or what have you, simply guarantees that a great many mistakes made long ago will have to be made again. Those who refuse to learn from the past, as the saying goes, are condemned to repeat it—and as Karl Marx pointed out a long time ago, while the first time around may be tragedy, the second is generally farce.<sup>7</sup>

Nor is it ever possible either to follow or to reject tradition totally. No matter how rigidly traditionalist a magician thinks he is, he inevitably reinterprets the teachings and rituals he receives in the light of his own experience of life and responds to the blanks that are always left by a system of teaching by filling them in with material that, consciously or otherwise, is invented for the purpose. The older the tradition, the more comprehensive the innovations will be, since (for example) no American in the twenty-first century is even remotely capable of experiencing the world in the same way as a Celt in the fifth century BCE. No matter how cutting-edge and avant-garde a magician thinks she is, in the same way, the very concept of magic itself in contemporary society—to say nothing of the fashionable philosophies and pop culture that provide today's avant-garde magic with so much of its raw material—are freighted with so much existing magical material that it's no wonder cutting-edge magic generally ends up looking very much like the old-fashioned magic it claims to be rejecting.

The most successful magical traditions, in turn, are generally those that combine a solid awareness of tradition with a willingness to innovate freely, using tradition as a base. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was among the best examples of this. Westcott, Mathers, and the other adepts of the order came to their work with a wealth of tradition inherited from the movement set in motion by Lévi, by the documents remaining from older systems of magic, and from the occult end of Masonry and quasi-Masonic magical orders. That gave them their basis in tradition. On that foundation they built a structure of astonishing creativity—and that structure became part of the body of tradition that later orders had available for their own work.

The Celtic–Golden Dawn hybrid orders of the early twentieth century drew, in turn, on the traditions that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn enriched. It is an accident of history—or perhaps the working of those subtle factors that occultists have so often sensed moving through history—that the teachings and practices of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn have become famous while those of the Castle of Heroes, the Ancient Order of Druid Hermetists, and their peers have been ignored or lost. It could easily have gone the other way; there are many people in today's Druid and Celtic Pagan communities who find the Judeo-Christian symbolism of the Golden

Dawn teachings less than congenial and likely would have welcomed similar traditions built up on a Celtic polytheistic basis. It simply happened that while the hybrid orders were still a going concern, modern Pagans were generally practicing Wicca if they were doing anything at all, and once the Neopagan movement expanded to the point where people were interested in a wider range of alternatives, nearly all the hybrid orders had died from lack of new members.

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THE KNOWLEDGE LECTURES, PAPERS, and rituals that follow this introduction may thus be seen as an imaginative effort to stand history on its head. It probably needs to be said that they are not the materials from a Druid–Golden Dawn hybrid order that actually existed. As mentioned earlier in this essay, the materials I received were fragmentary, so much so that creating a working system out of them would have required at least as much work as creating an entire system from scratch.

I have also been told, though I have no way to verify this claim, that there is at least one Druid order in Britain still working the system sketched out in one of the sets of fragments I inherited. Publishing rituals and teachings that belong to a order that still exists is a very serious matter, magically speaking, as well as a breach of the common courtesy one Druid tradition owes to another. Nor, for that matter, would such a disclosure help communicate the point I hope to get across here, which is that the Golden Dawn system—like any magical or spiritual system—is the product of a lively dance in which tradition and innovation take the lead by turns.

For these reasons, among others, I have done the logical thing and created an original system of Druid magic—or, to introduce the old-fashioned form consistently used in the papers that follow, Druidical magic—which is based on the same template of Golden Dawn tradition used by the Celtic–Golden Dawn hybrid orders but fills in that template, as they did, with material from a variety of sources. The most important of these sources is the body of Druid Revival teaching and tradition common to most of contemporary Druidry, which derives largely from the brilliant Welsh innovator Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams)<sup>8</sup> and was developed further by generations of Druids in the various Revival orders.

There is also a great deal of straightforward Golden Dawn material, though this has been altered in a number of ways—for example, in the pentagram rituals of the system that follows, the pentagrams of the five elements are drawn in a different way, and the assignment of the elements to the Tree of Life is also different. These distinctions follow from the basic structure of the system, which works with elemental influences exclusively, rather than combining them with planetary influences. This strictly elemental focus follows the lead of most Druid Revival orders, which put a great deal