

Doreen Valiente and the Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn

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Doreen Valiente is a name that I am sure every reader will have heard of. This inquisitive, intelligent, writer and Witch was born in 1922, in Mitcham, Surrey, but lived for most of her life on the south coast of Britain. She had a keen interest in folklore, the Occult and Witchcraft and wrote several books on the latter subject. Always keen to expand her knowledge, she was involved with various different Witchcraft groups throughout her life, and worked solo magic too.

In 1952, *The Illustrated*¹ printed an article about Witchcraft, based on an interview with Cecil Williamson, then-owner of the Witchcraft Museum on the Isle of Man. Upon reading it, Doreen wrote to Cecil who then referred her to Gerald Gardner who was at that time, the ‘resident Witch’ of the museum. Her subsequent initiation and involvement in the re-working and writing of pieces for the ‘Gardnerian’ Book of Shadows is well-known and something she talks about in her book *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft*.

In the same book, we also find Doreen stating ‘I had been a student of the Golden Dawn system of magic for years, long before I ever met Gerald Gardner.’² Intrigued by this statement, I enlisted the help of Golden Dawn Magician and writer, Nick Farrell, and set out to try and find out more about Doreen Valiente and her connection to that premier Magical Order, The Golden Dawn.

The Golden Dawn

The Golden Dawn has arguably been the most influential Magical Order ever to have existed. It was formed in 1887 by three Freemasons, Dr. William Wynn Westcott, Dr. William Robert Woodman and, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (who was the more magically-inclined of the three). Other well-known members included, ‘the Great Beast’ Aleister Crowley, the mystical A.E. Waite, the creative W.B. Yeats, the magical Israel Regardie and the gifted Dion Fortune.

The Golden Dawn’s grade system is based on Qabalistic structure and consists of an Outer Order composed of five grades; it is this part of the Order that was originally referred to as the ‘Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn’. There is then an intermediary portal grade you have to pass through before moving on to the second, or Inner Order, called the Ordo Roseae Rubeae et Aurae Crucis (R.R. et A.C.) which translates to ‘Order of the Red Rose and Golden Cross.’ It is in this Second Order where the real magical work of the Golden Dawn system starts. The First Order, Portal Grade and Second Order could loosely be likened to the three degrees found in Witchcraft with each being analogous to purification, consecration and amalgamation into the whole; although the hermetic nature of the Golden Dawn, tends to make it more cerebral than the Craft. There is a final, theoretical, Third Order that corresponds with the supernal triangle on the Tree of Life and it is said that no *living* person can enter this Order.

After making some enquiries, I have been unable to find anything to suggest that Doreen was a member of any Golden Dawn temple, or any of the related offshoot groups, that existed in England in the 1940s and 1950s. However, in a letter Doreen wrote to Rev. T. Allen Greenfield³ in 1986, she mentions that she owned some Golden Dawn notebooks that belonged to Frater Nisi Dominus Frustra. Evidence would seem to suggest that it was these original notebooks, (along with Regardie’s published Golden Dawn works), that she considered herself ‘a student of’. But how did Doreen obtain them?

Doreen’s Acquisition

It was the Craft Historian, Philip Heselton, who drew my attention to a story in Gerald Gardner's biography, *Gerald Gardner Witch* (Octagon Press 1960), attributed to Jack Bracelin but actually written by Sufi writer Idries Shah. This book was written whilst Gardner was still alive and so in a way, could be considered almost autobiographical.

Within its pages, we find a strange account⁴ of how some Golden Dawn notebooks were acquired by a lady who was a Witch. Reportedly, this Witch was talking to her bank manager and he happened to mention that he was currently valuing for probate some magical belongings that were owned by a recently deceased doctor. The man's widow was frightened of the items and was thinking of burning them. From some snippets of information that the bank manager gave her, the Witch manages to deduce where the doctor lived, and gets on a bus in order to investigate things further. After taking a pebble from the deceased doctor's garden, the Witch uses it to 'create a link' and works some magic to ensure the safety of the notebooks. Her desire becomes manifest and the doctor's widow duly contacts the bank manager and, surprisingly, tells him that she knows he has a lady friend who is interested in the books and the other magical equipment, and that she can have them. The passage continues; *'There were twenty-eight magical books, two magical swords, two pentacles, and some other things. The manuscripts were those given to initiates into the Golden Dawn - a society started by the magicians MacGregor Mathers and Wynn-Westcott. They should have been learnt by heart and returned to the organisation.'*⁵ *One bore the name of Count MacGregor de Glenstrae, a name used by Mathers. She [the Witch] kept the swords, but gave the MSS. to Gardner, who placed them in his Museum.'*

I believe that the 'Witch' is none other than Doreen Valiente and that this story, typical of Gardner's 'conceal-reveal' fashion, does actually bear some truth about how these Golden Dawn notebooks ended up firstly in Doreen's possession and secondly, in Gardner's Museum of Witchcraft. Further evidence to support this can be found in the words that Doreen wrote in a letter to Gerald Yorke⁶, a collector of magical items and Crowley's archivist. She writes: *'My friend Gerald Gardner tells me that you would like to hear from me, and has passed on to me a couple of letters he received from you, about some G. D. manuscripts in my possession. ... The story which Gerald tells - rather indiscreetly - of how the manuscripts were obtained is in the main true, though he does not know some of the details.'* It seems to me, that the 'story' Doreen is referring to, is quite probably the same one mentioned above and written about in *Gerald Gardner Witch*.

As suggested by the story, the notebooks were indeed loaned to Gardner by Doreen and placed in his Museum of Witchcraft on the Isle of Man, in the 'Golden Dawn Room'. As an interesting aside, this room was largely designed in 1951, by Steffi and Kenneth Grant with assistance from Gerald Yorke. This was about three years before Gardner had purchased the museum from Cecil Williamson.

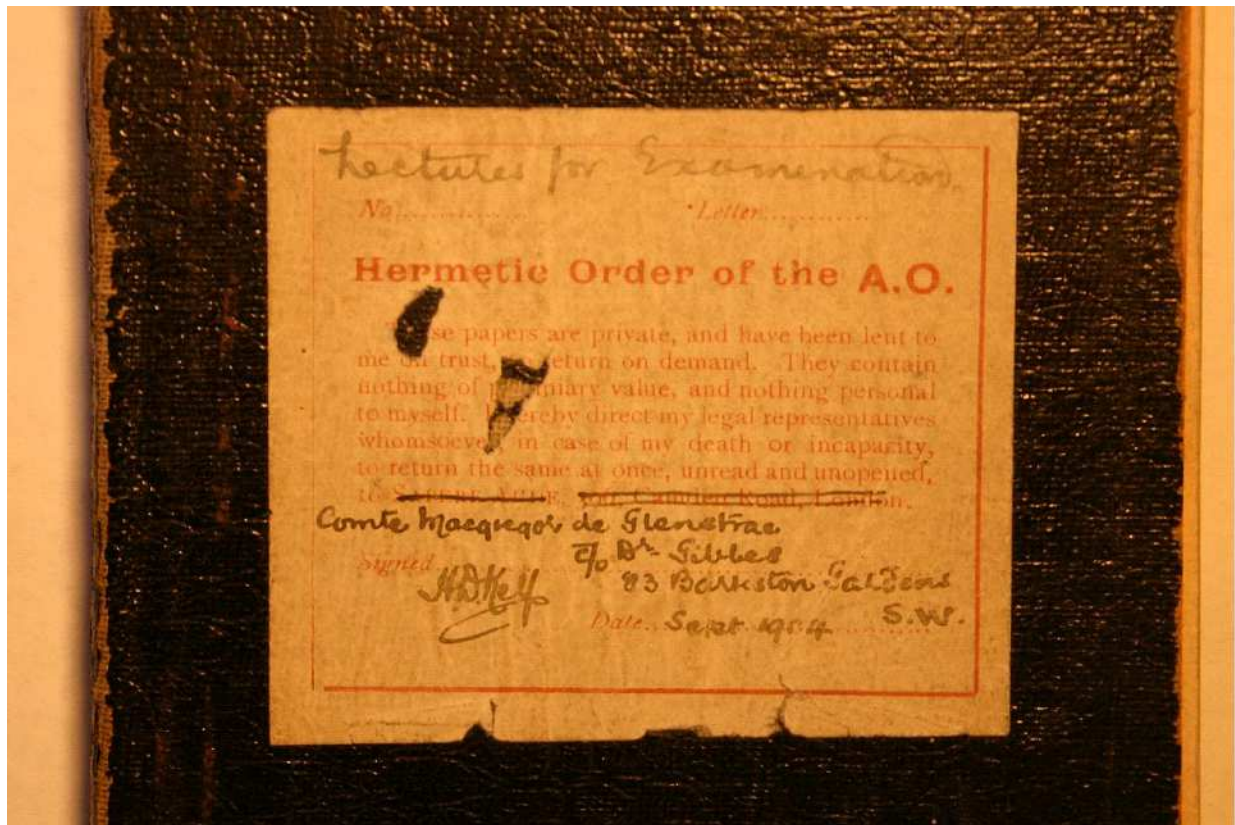
In the Museum's original pamphlet and guide we can find a small description of the books: *'Case No. 7. A complete collection of the secret manuscripts of the Order of the Golden Dawn, a famous magical fraternity to which Aleister Crowley, W. B. Yeats, and many other well-known people at one time belonged. It was founded by the late Dr Wynn Westcott and S. L. MacGregor Mathers, and claimed descent from the original Rosicrucians. Aleister Crowley quarrelled with the Order and broke away to found his own fraternity. The magical working of the Order of the Golden Dawn is founded upon the Hebrew Cabala, and its Cabalistic knowledge was kept very secret, though some of it has now found its way into print; but most of the contents of this case have never before been available to the public.'*

Following Gerald's death, Doreen's notebooks seem to have been inadvertently bequeathed along with the rest of the museum's contents, to Monique Marie Mauricette Wilson (nee Arnoux). Monique and her husband, Campbell, ran the museum for several years but fell on hard times and in

1973 decided to sell much of it to Ripley's in the USA. A lot of the collection was subsequently purchased in 1987, by Richard and Tamarra James of the Wiccan Church of Canada, and this is where Doreen's notebooks can be found today. There are not twenty-eight books in the James' collection, as stated in Gardner's biography, although I suspect that the number 'twenty-eight' may be an example of Gardner's tendency to exaggerate matters or perhaps the collection was divided up. However, as suggested by Gardner's story, one of them does bear the name 'Comte MacGregor de Glenstrae' and Doreen did indeed own some Golden Dawn magical tools, now owned by her magical beneficiary, John Belham-Payne.

The Magical MSS of the Hermetic Order of the Alpha et Omega

The notebooks consist of a series of small pocket-sized jotters with dates on them that range from 1902 to 1908. Several of them have 'official' printed stickers on the front and are labelled as belonging to the 'Hermetic Order of the A.O.' (Alpha Et Omega). The earliest one, from 1902, is labelled slightly differently, with an earlier 'official' sticker which reads 'Hermetic Order of the G.D.' with the 'G.D.' crossed out and 'A.O.' handwritten over the top. This would make sense as in 1900 the original Golden Dawn group started to splinter and the people loyal to Mathers carried on under the slightly revised name of the Hermetic Order of the Alpha Et Omega.



Cover of one of the books. Dated Sept. 1904

The books contain the initiations for the five outer order grades; 0=0 (Neophyte), 1=10 (Zelator), 2=9 (Theoricus), 3=8 (Practicus), 4=7 (Philosophus), as well as the Portal and Second Order rituals. There are also several 'Flying Rolls', lecture notes, and examination answers.

Most of them appear to have belonged to Henry David Kelf, a pharmaceutical chemist dispenser, who at that time, lived in Camberwell, London. His magical motto was 'Nisi Dominus Frustra' which is also the motto of the city of Edinburgh, and which means 'Except the Lord in Vain'. This is a heraldic contraction of a verse from the 127th Psalm: 'Except the Lord build the house, They

labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, The watchman waketh but in vain'. As a small aside to this, R.A. Gilbert in his book *The Golden Dawn Companion*, mentions that there was a Lucy Margaret Bruce with the magical motto 'Nisi Dominus Frustra'. However, she was initiated in 1907, into the Stella Matutina, a Golden Dawn offshoot group created by Dr. Robert William Felkin and John William Brodie Innes, following one of the schisms that troubled the Order in the first few years of the twentieth century. As the name on the front of the notebooks is 'H. D. Kelf' and as these notebooks go back to a time before Lucy's initiation in 1907, I am working on the assumption that these two individuals just happened to have the same magical motto. This is not as unlikely as it may at first sound, in the early days of the Golden Dawn, peoples magical mottos were often derived from their families heraldic motto, or those of a city with which they had strong ties.

Research reveals that Henry died in October 1951, in Poole, which is not far from Bournemouth where Valiente was living at the time. So, it seems likely that it was from Henry's widow, Clara Louisa, that Doreen acquired them. This was about a year prior to her meeting Gardner.

One small handwritten book in the collection belonged to Dr Edmond Berridge whose magical name was 'Resurgam' (I shall rise again). Berridge was the Cancellarius (secretary and archivist) of the original Isis-Urania temple with Mathers being the Imperator (leader) and Wynn Westcott the Praemonstrator (teacher). Unfortunately Westcott's interest in the Golden Dawn was causing problems between him and his employers and in 1897, he ended up leaving the Golden Dawn, although unofficially, he remained behind the scenes as an advisor. Florence Farr, an actress and visionary, stepped up and took his place but in 1902, following further disagreements, she too resigned. Interestingly, the stickers on the front of many of these books, could possibly reveal another of Dr. Westcott's successors; Westcott's old address of 396 Camden Road, London, has been crossed out and replaced with 'Dr C. Gibbes, 83 Barkston Gardens, Earls Court, London'. Cuthbert C. Gibbes is listed in the 1901 census as having been a physician, and may have been a Mason. As it was usually the Praemonstrators name and address that was given on the front of books, it is possible, but not definite, that in 1902, it was Dr. Gibbes who held this position.

The Path of Light and the Wica

Many of the notebooks bear Doreen's handwriting. She appears to have gone through them and in pencil, has added her own thoughts and notes on the material. What is clear, is that the information in these notebooks influenced Doreen's thinking, and the course that her own magical path took. In her personal diaries and notebooks she often wrote things in Hebrew, the basic magical alphabet of the Golden Dawn and which you are required to learn in the very first grade. Hebrew is not really associated with Witchcraft, which tends to use Theban as its magical alphabet of choice. As Doreen had these notebooks prior to meeting Gerald Gardner, I feel sure that it was they that prompted and helped her to learn Hebrew.

Doreen also seems to have had a great respect for some of the ideas and essays that she read in these notebooks. So much so, she copied a large chunk of Flying Roll no. 5, 'Thoughts on Imagination' by Dr Edmond Berridge, into her own, personal Book of Shadows, which she wrote shortly after being initiated by Gerald Gardner in 1953. Whilst Israel Regardie (some say with the help of Gerald Yorke) had published a lot of Golden Dawn material by 1940, this particular Flying Roll, was not published until 1972, when it appeared in Francis King's book *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*, so Doreen's source was almost certainly the notebooks.

Doreen's knowledge of the Golden Dawn also came to the rescue of some important Golden Dawn artefacts which had belonged to Maiya Tranchell Hayes, the mentor of Dion Fortune. In 1966 the *Daily Telegraph* ran a story entitled 'Witch's Box Found on Beach'⁷. The box was found on the

beach between Selsey Bill and Bracklesham Bay in Sussex, and contained quarter banners, sceptres, two embroidered stoles and Egyptian style headresses. Doreen's local paper, *The Evening Argus*, picked up the story and she immediately wrote to them to put them straight saying; 'These things are not part of a witch's regalia. They are actually part of the regalia of a very famous order called the Golden Dawn.'⁸ Doreen then contacted someone she knew in London (possibly Francis King) and facilitated the return of the items to the proper persons.



'Witch's Box Found on Beach' - Photo from the Daily Telegraph, 17th October 1966.

Gardner too, would undoubtedly have pored over these manuscripts and may perhaps have noticed the small notes that some of them contained with regards to whose notebook they had been copied from. In those days, there were obviously no photocopiers and each member had to carefully copy out the Golden Dawn's rituals and notes from someone else's book. Similarly, Crowley also observed this practice and insisted on people fastidiously copying out *The Book of the Law*. Such attention to detail had probably been spurred on by his earlier involvement with the Golden Dawn. This custom of carefully copying from others' books is of course also a traditional practice seen within Witchcraft today.

From studying some of Gardner's own Books of Shadows, it is clear that Macgregor Mathers' translation of the highly influential book, *The Key of Solomon*, was one of several works that Gardner used to help him flesh out Craft rituals. Similarly, Mathers and Westcott are also thought to have fleshed out the early rituals of the Golden Dawn that reputedly came from the mysterious Cipher Manuscripts. In a way, it seems that Gardner was repeating a pattern; just as Gardner became highly influential and a crucial key in the revival of Witchcraft, so too had Mathers been a vital cog in the revival of the Magical Order. Additionally, and on a lighter note, Gardner, like 'MacGregor' Mathers and Crowley before him, had also pretended to have Scottish ancestry!

One of Gardner's early Books of Shadows, often referred to as 'Text A' and believed to date from the 1940s, is in the main a collection of extracts and ideas from books that had been published. It

also contains a significant amount of material that was taken from the work of noted authors who were also members of, or very closely associated with, the Golden Dawn or one of its offshoot Orders. This included not only books that had been edited and translated by Mathers, but also the works of Dion Fortune, William Butler Yeats, Arthur Edward Waite, Fiona Macleod, and of course, Aleister Crowley. It is generally well-known that Aleister Crowley's writings have influenced Craft rituals, and for more information on this I refer the reader to the internet where numerous sites⁹ can be found investigating the parallels between Crowley and the 'Gardnerian' Book of Shadows.

'The Magical Revival'

Recently the media have been talking about TV presenter, Noel Edmonds and his method of 'cosmic ordering' where he asks the Universe for what he desires. The power of desire is of course, something that we as Witches and Occultists have known about for a long time. The increase in popularity of the Qabalah (partially thanks to Madonna), as well as the 'New-Age' movement, indicates that the time seems to be right for people to be more open to Magic in their lives. Now, more than ever, there are many different sorts of Magical Orders and Witchcraft groups and traditions. It is my personal belief that the same 'energies' exist behind all of them and the differences come from personal interpretation and which magical framework you choose to hang your hat on.

The Occult scene has always been close-knit, especially down in the home counties where like-minded individuals frequently bump into each other at the numerous groups, moots and conferences. In the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment of a more esoteric kind, we have always tended to influence each other, from MacGregor Mathers being influenced by Eliphas Levi and the unknown author(s) of the Key of Solomon, to Doreen Valiente and Gerald Gardner being influenced by Mathers and Crowley. There seems to be a sense of cyclicity about these things; of knowledge being passed down to be inherited and reinterpreted by younger generations. This is perhaps unsurprising for Earth is not the only one to have her Great Wheel. We live in a cyclical Universe where vast galaxies down to the tiniest sub-atomic particles are continually dancing around in their own unique orbits; defined by maths, mechanics and probabilities, embedded in a fabric of space-time, all woven together, as if by magic!

Endnotes:

- 1) *The Illustrated* September 27th 1952. Viewable at www.thewicca.co.uk/Gerald%20Gardner.htm
- 2) *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* by Doreen Valiente (Phoenix Publishing 1989: Page 200)
- 3) Letter from Doreen Valiente to Rev. T. Allen Greenfield dated 8th August 1986 and viewable online at www.geraldgardner.com/archive/valiente/index.php
- 4) *Gerald Gardner: Witch* by Jack Bracelin (IHO 1999: Page 162 -164)
- 5) Gerald gets it wrong here. Each person was given a manuscript to copy, when this was done the copy was checked by a senior official in the Order and they were allowed to keep it. This was on the condition that the copy was returned to the order on their death.
- 6) Undated letter from 'Ameth' (Doreen's magical name) to Gerald Yorke which is in the Warburg Institute.
- 7) *Daily Telegraph* October 17th 1966.
- 8) *Evening Argus* October 31st 1966.
- 9) <http://www.cyprian.org/Articles/CrowleyBAM0.html> and http://kheph777.tripod.com/art_wicca-thelema.html

I would like to thank Nick Farrell for his help, Philip Heselton who photographed Frater Nisi Dominus Frustra's Golden Dawn notebooks for me and Richard and Tamarra James of the Wiccan Church of Canada, who own them.

Biography: The author has been involved with various magical and Witchcraft groups for over 15 years. Along with Nick Farrell, she has just co-written a book about Doreen's Golden Dawn notebooks and their place in the early history of the Golden Dawn. Entitled 'King Over the Water', it will be published in 2008 by Thoth Publications. Melissa lives in Leicestershire with her partner, daughter and a growing entourage of felines.