

Feminist Action in and through Tarot and Modern Occult Society: The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, UK and The Builders of the Adytum, USA

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Overview and Theoretical Framework

This article uses a feminist theoretical framework to explore links between foundational elements of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn¹ (hereinafter called the Golden Dawn), the American offshoot group the Builders of the Adytum² and the widespread dissemination of the Tarot in light of the history of feminism. It makes a case that the work of the Golden Dawn and three of the teachers associated with it had a significant impact on the history of feminism, not only in the initiatic setting. The workings of these occult groups could also be seen as forming a magical bridge, leading to inspired feminist activity in the wider Western culture in the early twentieth century. While gender equality at the formation of the Golden Dawn has already been acknowledged, this study seeks to further locate the impact that both the general inclusion of women, and the actions of some of the specific women themselves had on the history of feminism. The work of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn therefore holds a unique and important place in the chronological narrative history of feminism. Furthermore, because a number of scholars working within the history of feminism³ suggest that any group which has worked towards women's equality can be considered a feminist movement (even if the group itself would not consider itself as such), we can view the Golden Dawn and the Builders of the Adytum themselves as feminist movements.⁴

¹ The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was founded in London, in 1888.

² The Builders of the Adytum was founded in 1922 by Paul Foster Case.

³ The discipline of the history of feminism explores the chronology and narrative of movements that worked towards women's equality. This differs from feminist history – which views history solely from the perspective of females in that particular chronology.

⁴ Please see: Margaret Walters, Joan Kinnaird, Charlotte Witt, Ann Taylor Allen, etc. Margaret Walters. *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 2005. Joan Kinnaird. "Mary Astell: Inspired by Ideas (1668–1731)," In Spender, Dale. *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*, (Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 29. Charlotte Witt. "Feminist History of Philosophy". In Zalta, Edward N. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Fall 2012).

Ann Taylor Allen. "Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity: The Debate on

We will limit this discussion to elements that had an impact on issues relative to the history of feminism: initially exploring the friendship between Dr. Anna Kingsford and S. L. MacGregor Mathers - one of the founding members of the Golden Dawn, and the work of two women involved with the Order: Moina Mathers and Pamela Colman Smith. Their efforts in particular rebalanced and redressed issues of the dominance and exclusivity of male leadership, magically, and subsequently culturally. We will then note how – perhaps inadvertently – another Golden Dawn member - A. E. Waite also helped with the work of promoting the action of women's equality. Finally we will cite how the recognition of occult equality for women came to its complete fruition in America, in Paul Foster Case's ritual and teaching Order: the Builders of the Adytum. These individuals and magical Orders will be explored as historical operatives within the history of feminism.

Historian of feminism Nancy Cott has identified the time prior to women obtaining the vote as “the issue of women as a ‘universal entity’.”⁵ It is specifically this issue of the equality of women as a ‘universal entity’ that this study addresses. In order to understand the magnitude of this feminist activity, it is first necessary to historically define the position of women in Victorian Britain.

Proto-feminism and the culture of fin de siècle England

Historian of feminism Ellen Jordan has explored the way that gender was understood in the context of household and community in Victorian Britain. Jordan posits three major assumptions regarding Victorian notions of gender and femininity: (1) that women occupied a different sphere, separated by their biology; (2) that women were what Sarah Stickney Ellis⁶ describes as ‘relative creatures’ – meaning that they were defined by the nature of their relationship to men; and (3) that women were simply inferior to men.⁷ Jordan notes that this third category was so widely accepted that it was an “undiscussed and undisputed part of everyone's knowledge of how the world operated.”⁸

In the 1860s Elizabeth Sewell famously wrote about raising young women, stating that “...any strain on a girl's intellect is to be dreaded, and any attempt to bring women into competition with man can scarcely escape failure.”⁹ However,

the Origin of the Family in Europe and the United States, 1860–1914,” *The American Historical Review*. 1999. 104 (4): 1085–1113.

⁵ Cott, Nancy F. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1987.

⁶ Sarah Stickney-Ellis was a prolific Victorian author of conduct literature, including advice books that addressed middle-class women.

⁷ Ellen Jordan. *Routledge Research in Gender and History: The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 41.

⁸ Jordan, *Routledge Research in Gender and History: The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 44.

⁹ Elizabeth Sewell, *Principles of Education drawn from Nature and Revelation and applied to*

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in the second half of the nineteenth century, over one third of adult women were not married, and by 1900 almost three fourths of all unmarried women over the age of fifteen were employed. Clearly, the normative values of the late Victorian era were in conflict not only with the notions of gender equality and issues of women's empowerment, but also with the reality of these very apparent sociocultural demographics.

Women who engaged in either intellectual or philanthropic activities were referred to, in the language of the mid to late 1800s, as "strong-minded women."¹⁰ Jordan's exploration of strong-minded women notes that it was only within this severely limited public sphere of activity that women could be considered as external to the binary opposition of masculine and feminine principles, and were accepted. However, the occult world should *also* be considered as a sphere in which these strong-minded women operated. The Golden Dawn welcomed many women whose dynamic social activities made them culturally normative outsiders, or strong-minded women.

Dr. Anna Kingsford and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

One of the most impactful mentors and friends that S.L. MacGregor Mathers had was the charismatic social pioneer and strong-minded woman, Dr. Anna Kingsford (1846 – 1888). Indeed so important was she to him that Mathers dedicated his text the *Kabbalah Unveiled* to her and her associate, Edward Maitland. Kingsford was a visionary social reformer, anti-vivisectionist, campaigner for vegetarianism and importantly, a trailblazing advocate for women's rights. A key player in the history of feminism, as the owner and editor of *The Lady's Own Paper (a Journal of Taste, Progress and Thought)*, Dr. Kingsford sought to prove that women were capable of rational thought. She actively encouraged women to be involved in the public sphere, seeking to ground her vision of an intellectual enlightenment among middle class women. This, she hoped would in turn lead to a wider change for women of all classes. As one of the first female doctors in England, Kingsford was also active in both the British Theosophical Society¹¹

female education in the upper classes, (https://archive.org/stream/principlesofeduc01seweuoft/principlesofeduc01seweuoft_djvu.txt), 1865.

¹⁰ Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 87. The stereotype for this woman was transferred to the term "bluestocking" roughly around the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹¹ The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by Madame Helena Petrova Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge. According to the UK website, "The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, is a worldwide body whose primary object is Universal Brotherhood without distinction based on the realization that life, and all its diverse forms, human and non-human, is indivisibly One." <https://theosophicalsociety.org.uk>. Further information on the Theosophical Society and its work can be found on the American Theosophical Society's webpage: <http://www.theosophy.org>. Kingsford served a term as President of the London body of the Theosophical Society.

and the Hermetic Society.¹² Mathers assisted her in both her anti-vivisection campaign¹³ and, significantly, in her campaign for women's rights. Although an endorsement by Aleister Crowley could hardly be considered meritorious, even he saluted Kingsford for challenging the cultural zeitgeist of the time, noting that as a "magnificent intellect ... [she] proved conclusively that [her] ... course of action was correct and ... was amazed that humanity remained unconvinced."¹⁴

At the formation of the Golden Dawn, Mathers insisted that the feminist principles espoused by Kingsford should be incorporated as foundational tenets of the Order. This new ritual group would break with centuries of Western occult initiatic tradition, as well as with strict societal norms, and allow women into the Order on an equal basis with men. This is explicitly stated in the founding documents of the Order, whose purpose was: "... to hold meetings thereof for Study and to initiate any approved person *Male or Female*, who will enter into an Undertaking and maintain strict secrecy regarding all that concerns it. Belief in One God necessary. No other restrictions."¹⁵ Mathers successfully convinced the two other co-founders of the Golden Dawn – William Wynn Westcott and William Robert Woodman – of the value of Kingsford's suggestion regarding the equality of women. This inclusion made history that changed the occult world forever.

A key component of Western esotericism states that personal spiritual transformation can lead to the wider transformation of society.¹⁶ This notion was also a foundational tenet for the members of the Golden Dawn: initiates believed that the evolutionary work on themselves, as conducted within the Order, could lead to a wider social evolution and transformation. As magical historian Henrik Bogdan states: "The adepts of the Golden Dawn considered themselves as forerunners of a new spiritual elite. Since the microcosm – the adepts themselves – were considered to be in direct correspondence with the macrocosm – the society – personal transformation would, as a natural consequence, result in societal change."¹⁷ A key principle of the Golden Dawn's manifesto recognizes the

¹² In 1884 Kingsford founded the Hermetic Society, which sought to recover an esoteric and spiritual significance to religion. Although the society was active for a relatively short time (it finished meetings in 1887, when Kingsford's health declined), the work of the Hermetic Society has had a profound effect on Western mysticism and occultism. For further information, please see Samuel Hopgood Hart's *Biography of Anna Bonus Kingsford and Her Founding of the Hermetic Society*. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2010.

¹³ This could indeed be seen as a further window into an awareness, potentially espoused by Mathers, of the value of life in every form.

¹⁴ Aleister Crowley, *The General Principles of Astrology* (Boston: Weiser, 2002), 210.

¹⁵ Robert A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn* (Slough, Berkshire, 1997), 21. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Please see Chapter Four of Alex Owen's text: *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, "Modern Enchantment and the Consciousness of the Self," 114-147. Please also see Henrik Bogdan, "Women and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn: Nineteenth Century Occultism Initiation from a Gender Perspective," *Women's Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

¹⁷ Bogdan, "Women and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn: Nineteenth Century Occultism Initiation from a Gender Perspective," *Women's Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders*. 261.

ultimate divinity as both transcendent and immanent, acknowledging that all of creation partakes in some share of that divine nature.¹⁸ The Initiate's personal search for enlightenment therefore had wider socially transformative ramifications: one's spiritual progress was inevitably tied to the development of the society. According to this understanding of the social function of magical work, the change that members of the Golden Dawn could take credit for includes the emancipation of women through identifying changes directly relevant to women as a 'universal entity'.

As such, establishing the Golden Dawn can be seen as a proto-feminist achievement. Explored in light of the history of feminism, these actions laid the groundwork for challenging the fixed and binary nature of the social relationship between power and gender, and laid the groundwork to challenge both the nature and role of the existing dominant masculine power structure in the West.

Strong-minded women in the Golden Dawn

While we associate the three male founding members of the Golden Dawn with the formation of the Order, according to Mather's biographer Ithell Colquhoun,¹⁹ it was Mathers' wife, Moira, in her clairvoyant and clairaudient sessions who actually brought through material which became the basis for the Second Order: the Inner Order of the Red Rose and Golden Cross.²⁰ As a trance visionary, Moira's contribution to the work of the Golden Dawn was incalculable. She was the first member to enter the Second, or Inner Order, following the male founding triad. Drury notes that many of the Golden Dawn Flying Roll accounts of trance journeys "... demonstrate that some of the Golden Dawn magicians, most notably Moira Mathers, Florence Farr Emery, and Elaine Simpson, were able to convert an essentially eclectic listing of gods and goddesses into an experiential reality on the inner planes."²¹ These Flying Roll records are also of interest because the Initiates that are listed as excelling in this particular referenced work are all women. Obviously no one gender has an exclusive hold on workings at higher levels of consciousness, but the specific mention of female initiates in this list of notables validates the necessity of including women in ritual, magical and visionary work.²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ithell Colquhoun, *Sword Of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, (London: Neville Spearman Publishing, 1975). In addition to her work as a surrealist painter, Colquhoun (1906-1988) was also an occult novelist. Some of her other writings include:

- *Living Stones Cornwall*, 1957.
- *Goose of Hermogenes*, 1961.
- *Griire Of The Entangled Thicket*, 1973.

²⁰ Colquhoun, *Sword Of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, 145.

²¹ Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*, 75.

²² Indeed, several of the leading women of the Golden Dawn had a significant influence in a variety of fields, including Annie Horniman and Maude Gonne. Horniman became a leading patron of Irish theatre. Gonne was a Celtic revivalist who collaborated with Mathers in the creation of evoca-

Resuscitating the Feminine through Egyptian Isis

The Golden Dawn sought to give individual aspirants practical insights regarding their significance and function as human beings, in order that the essential divinity inherent in all humanity could unfold from within each Initiate. The Order took inspiration from the Ancient Egyptian (3100BCE – 1000BCE) magical practices that used myth to communicate with what we now, through the scholarship of Jung, understand to be archetypal realities. It encouraged Initiates to engage with this fundamental divine unity as manifested through its presentations of a variety of forms, gods and goddesses. The aim was to become, in Israel Regardie's words, "more than human."²³ Aligning oneself with these expressions of reality was a learning tool *par excellence*, ostensibly leading to the personal discovery of the unity inherent in all duality. Although the Egyptian religion was monotheistic, its pantheon contained a significant number of both masculine and feminine god-forms, equal to each other in both stature and power. Perhaps because this equality existed within the Egyptian system, the notion of an equality between the genders could more easily be implemented within the Golden Dawn.

Indeed, the Egyptian pantheon and its magical methodology were widely accepted in the European fin de siècle occult culture because of the work of another woman: Madame Blavatsky. An early public announcement regarding the Golden Dawn, published in a letter to the Theosophical journal *Lucifer* in 1889, stated that, "the society studies Western traditions.. [and that] the Theosophical Society has friendly relations with them [the Golden Dawn]."²⁴ Blavatsky had already begun the revivification of Egyptian esotericism in the broader spiritual culture of the time.

Ithell Colquhoun, notes the function of Egyptian goddess Isis as the Queen of Heaven and Earth, the nourisher of mankind – citing her places as both Yesod and Malkuth on the Tree of Life, and also as Binah and Ain Soph Aur, the all pervading and all-producing energy and presence. Isis embodies the supreme archetype of mother, sister and wife, and was the "great Goddess of all pantheons, Mother Nature herself."²⁵ Both Colquhoun and Yeats' biographer Kathleen Raine²⁶ have wondered why Mathers selected Isis from the Egyptian pantheon, thereby resuscitating an Isis cult. Colquhoun suggests that it could actually have

tion ceremonies. She is also credited with influencing the course of Irish nationalism.

²³ Israel Regardie, Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabatha Cicero, *The Middle Pillar: The Balance Between Mind and Magic* (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 2002), 129.

²⁴ Kathleen Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1972), 5.

²⁵ Colquhoun, *Sword Of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, 288.

²⁶ Kathleen Raine (1908- 2003) was an internationally honoured poet and Yeats specialist. Founder of The Temenos Society, Raine is the author of many texts, including:

- *Blake and Tradition*, 1968.
- *Blake and Antiquity*, 1977.
- *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn*, 1973.
- *Yeats the Initiate*, 1987.

been the other way around: that instead the Mathers' were contacted by the energy of Isis herself. She notes that: "[w]hen Moina [Mathers] assumed the god-form of Isis, she became the universal Shakti to her husband."²⁷ Esoteric specialist Nevill Drury notes that the ceremonial cup is related with the feminine and was used in Golden Dawn rituals "related to acts of *manifestation*."²⁸ While a plethora of cups are used in the Golden Dawn rituals, Drury specifically draws together the feminine principle, the ritual implement of the cup and the act of manifestation on the physical plane.²⁹ Grounding the energy of Isis as a deity and presence through the activity of ritual in the Golden Dawn could therefore be seen as being another powerful magically-oriented Western proto-feminist precedent.

Bridging the Egyptological work into the late 19th and early 20th century, Mathers notes that previous "great exponents of the Tarot [such as] Court de Gebelin,³⁰ [Elphias] Levi³¹ and Etteilla [a pseudonym for Jean-Baptist Alliette]³² have always assigned to the Tarot a Quabalistico-Egyptian origin, and this I have found confirmed in my own researches into this subject..."³³ The Egyptian work of the Golden Dawn therefore had another tangential physical manifestation, as seen through the eyes of Mathers and other initiates in the original Order - in the form of the Tarot.

Tarot and the Kabbalistic Tree of Life in the Golden Dawn and BOTA

The Tarot was recognized as representing a "secret esoteric alphabet"³⁴ which, in addition to the Golden Dawn's respect for it as having at least a partial Egyptian affiliation, also formed a link between Medieval Kabbalah, the Hermetic tradition and alchemy. The twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana are associated with the paths on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life that link the ten Sepiroth together. Drury sees the extensive magical systemization work of the Golden Dawn as establishing a basis for a modern magical revival, extending out from Britain to the United States (as we will see through the work of Paul Foster Case), and subsequently to a number of other countries worldwide.³⁵

²⁷ Colquhoun, *Sword Of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, 288.

²⁸ Nevill Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 67. Emphasis added.

²⁹ Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*, 67.

³⁰ Court de Gebelin (1725 – 1784).

³¹ Elphias Levi (1810 – 1875).

³² Etteilla is the pseudonym for Jean-Baptist Alliette 1738 – 1791, a French Tarot specialist who is widely credited with popularizing the Tarot as a divinatory tool. Alliette also noted the links between Tarot, astrology, and the elements.

³³ S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *The Tarot: Its Occult Significance, Use in Fortune-Telling, and Method of Play, etc.* <http://www.hermetics.org/pdf/Mathers.pdf>, 3.

³⁴ Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*, 21.

³⁵ Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*, 41.

The use of Tarot cards in meditations and path workings transcended both personal and cultural variables, allowing the Initiate to embody within themselves the very essence of the archetype and its reality, through a process of direct encounter. Golden Dawn initiates considered the Tarot to be a symbolic cipher for universal truths, representing an entire realm of sacred inner possibilities. As a connected story, representing the transformational and evolutionary journey of a soul, it provides a systemization for the archetypal elements within the collective unconscious. As Kathleen Raine states:

Of that archetypal order the Tarot is a full and effective formulation, valid even – perhaps especially – at a time when mythologies are a dead language. The archetypes – if we encounter them at all – are likely to appear as figures mysterious and nameless, belonging to no pantheon, no theological system. The Tarot symbols gave to the members of the Golden Dawn the freedom to evoke, in their living essence, those personifying spirits which by different nations have been variously named.³⁶

The primordial images provided by the Tarot become a means for apprehending universal aspects of reality. Obviously cosmic forces are neutral - any assignation to a gendered form is solely indicative of the dynamic of that force's energy. It should also go without saying that if one cannot accept the equality of the outer form, one would be unlikely to be able to integrate the power and presence represented by an anthropomorphic representation of an inner form. This is where the value of the Golden Dawn's connection between the Tarot and the Egyptian pantheon could be seen to be of great value to the history of feminism. By recognizing the power and multiplicity of cosmic forces within the Egyptian magical system, one is also able to acknowledge the equality in the external forms of their earthly counterparts. This results in a balanced appreciation of gender equality.

Paul Foster Case teaches that the first three Tarot keys refer directly to the purest manifestations of the three levels of consciousness: the super-consciousness (represented by Tarot Key 0 – *The Fool*), the self-consciousness (represented by Tarot Key I – *The Magician*), and the sub-consciousness (represented by Tarot Key II – *The High Priestess*). The feminine power of the subconscious (represented by the female figure) can be used to develop occult powers, and heightened states of awareness. This work requires the element of the self-consciousness (represented by the masculine figure in Tarot Key I) to bring it through to manifestation.³⁷ Case teaches that Tarot Key VI, *The Lovers* represents the “perfectly harmonious relationship between the self-conscious, subconscious and super-conscious aspects of the Life Power.”³⁸ As historian of feminism Susan Gre-

³⁶ Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn*, 46.

³⁷ Paul Foster Case, *A Brief Analysis of the Tarot* (Whitefish, Montana: Literary Licensing Publishers, 2013), 43.

³⁸ Paul Foster Case, *The True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order: An Interpretation of the Rosicrucian Allegory and an Explanation of the Ten Rosicrucian Grades* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1985), 277.

enwood relates in her exploration of witchcraft and feminism, “maleness and femaleness are seen as qualities rather than static characteristics.”³⁹ The work of a high magician is to balance those forces within him/herself.

Although the left pillar on the Kabbalistic Tree is associated with the feminine principle, and the right pillar with the masculine principle, the most expedient evolutionary path of ascent moves through the middle pillar. Called the Path of the Arrow, of the three pathways in the middle pillar two are aligned with Tarot keys that represent feminine forces, as depicted by their external guise, a third path is represented by a figure in gender neutral / hermaphrodite form. The thirty-second path – from Malkuth to Yesod is signified by Tarot key XXII, *The World*. This final card in the Major Arcana represents the evolutionary culmination of the soul’s journey in the chronology of the Tarot keys. It celebrates the cosmic hermaphrodite – an equal blending of masculine and feminine forces as the celestial sky dancer. The path from Yesod to Tiphareth is assigned to Key XIV – *Temperance*. This key features a winged and robed female figure with a sun or star on her brow. The path from Tiphareth to Kether is associated with Key II - *The High Priestess*, the first female form in the chronology of the pack, representing the workings of the subconscious, and the soul memory of the collective unconscious. Here again, the workings of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots celebrate feminine forces – in an evolutionary fashion: not simply for the Initiate, but for the wider culture as well. As the Tarot began to spread more widely than before, and into the popular culture, so the idea of the importance of balancing the masculine forces with feminine ones was also simultaneously seeded into popular Western culture. The dissemination of this work therefore represents a wider opportunity to further challenge the normative social relationship between power and gender.

A.E. Waite, the ‘Rider Waite’ (Smith) Tarot deck and Pamela Colman Smith

Arthur Edward Waite⁴⁰ was perhaps one of the more influential proponents of the Tarot, and was the leading Mage for the offshoot of the Golden Dawn known as the Holy Order of The Golden Dawn. Although his new Lodge group retained the name Isis Urania, Waite debunked the Egyptian origins of the Tarot and removed the Egyptian pantheon of gods from the Order’s work. As one who preferred the study of mysticism to the occult and thought of himself as a mystic rather than a ma-

³⁹ Greenwood, Susan. “Feminist Witchcraft.” *Practicing Feminism: Identity Difference, Power*. Editors: Nickie Charles and Felicia Hughes-Freeland, (New York: Routledge), 1996. 124.

⁴⁰ A prolific writer, a selection of books by A.E. Waite include:

- The Hermetic Museum, Two Volumes, 1893.
- The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry, Two Volumes, 1911.
- The Holy Kabbalah, 1929.
- A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, 1921.
- The Book of Ceremonial Magic, 1913.

gician, Waite introduced a more Christian atmosphere into the Lodge's workings. Waite holds perhaps a more ironic and inadvertent place as an operator in the history of feminism. Undoubtedly his most popular contribution to the West was his dissemination of the Tarot, and his place in the history of feminism is bolstered by his choice in using the artistry of Pamela Colman Smith for the deck itself.

Waite's writings about the Tarot were widely disseminated, and he popularized the Tarot deck that bears his name – the Rider Waite (Smith) Deck. He promoted the Tarot deck as a means for fortune telling, while simultaneously disavowing its use for that sole purpose. In understanding that the Major Arcana of the Tarot could be used to enhance, accelerate and quantify the progress of the Soul, he was of course obliquely alluding to his training with the Golden Dawn, but was nevertheless and understandably loathe to divulge the secret teachings regarding the exact nature of its true purpose.⁴¹ Although Waite perceived that the time of guarding the Tarot's secrets was coming to an end, and although he believed it to be timely to arouse the interest of the general public in the Tarot as a spiritual tool, he nevertheless demonstrates a divided mindset about the breaking of a sacred oath of silence surrounding the teachings. He states: "As regards the sequence of symbols, their ultimate and highest meaning... will be understood by those who have received some part of the secret tradition.... It is regrettable that I must confess to certain reservations, but there is a question of honor at issue."⁴² Waite clearly sought to strike a balance between the secrecy he had sworn an oath to preserving, and a more personal understanding that the Tarot needed to be shared.

The extraordinary popularity of the Rider Waite deck could be said to have established a standard pattern for occult artists and the wealth of decks that have come onto the market in the 100+ years since its creation. The rest is history – or almost. However, one key figure in this drama got neither the recognition nor the remuneration deserved for the work: the Tarot deck's artist - Pamela Colman Smith.⁴³ Smith made a paltry sum for it, and died in 1950 with many debts to her name.

Colman Smith, or Pixie, as she had been nicknamed by the actress Ellen Terry, received a small flat sum in 1909 for her work designing the deck. A vibrant storyteller with a streak for flamboyance, Smith's artistry informs the power of the deck. In his article introducing the Tarot deck in the December 1909 issue of

⁴¹ Ronald Decker and Michael Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot: 1870 – 1970*. (London: Gerard Duckworth & Co Publishers, 2002), 136.

⁴² Arthur Edward Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1919), 6-8.

⁴³ Pamela Colman Smith drew many key pieces of artwork featuring Ellen Terry and Henry Irving, many of which has been archived by the English National Trust at the historic home of Ellen Terry, Smallhythe Place, Tenterden, Kent. Colman-Smith's work for popular texts includes:

- *Widdicombe Fair*. 1899.
- *The Golden Vanity and The Green Bed*. 1899.

Coleman Smith's work has been extensively archived by the Tarot specialist, Mary K. Greer on her website: <https://marygreer.wordpress.com>.

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Occult Review,⁴⁴ Waite managed to praise her work, while misspelling her name: “Miss Coleman Smith, in addition to her obvious gifts, has some knowledge of Tarot values; she has lent a sympathetic ear to my proposal to rectify the symbolism by reference to channels of knowledge, which are not in the open day.”⁴⁵ Interestingly Colman Smith also designed posters for the women’s suffragette movement, but does not appear to have been well rewarded for any of her artistry.

Although much of what is written about Waite (and others in the Golden Dawn and its offshoots) is anecdotal, Colquhoun hints at the possibility of a still extant chauvinistic element in Waite, based on something more substantial than her subjective impressions, by exploring the changes that Waite made to the Tarot deck. Mathers’ original set up for the Court Cards mounts its Kings on steeds, its Queens are enthroned, its Princes are seated in chariots, and its Princesses, or Amazons, are standing.⁴⁶ Waite replaced the Princesses or Amazons with standing Knaves. Colquhoun notes that in so doing, Waite had therefore: “... upset... the equilibrium of the sexes purposely established by Mathers, whose arrangement is based on the four letters of the Tetragrammaton and on the Sephiroth: Yod = The Father, Abba, Chomah. He = The Mother, Aima, Binah. Vau = the Son, Adam, Tiphareth. He = *the Daughter, Malkah the Bride, Malkuth.*”⁴⁷

Colman Smith has traditionally been seen as a “relative creature”⁴⁸ – in that her work and influence have been only acknowledged and defined in reference to her relation to Waite. It is certainly fair to say that Colman Smith did not get the attention she so richly deserved, either from Waite or from the London-based Rider Publishing Company. Nevertheless, the clarity of her artistry undoubtedly accounts for its still extant popularity, regardless of the notion that the designs were conducted under Waite’s authority. In his English translation of Papus’ *Le Tarot des Bohémiens*, Waite footnoted that the Tarot Marseilles, “had been superseded in all respects: by the pack designed by Miss Smith at his instructions.”⁴⁹ In this case, the enduring influence of the feminine presence in the Tarot is spread not through Waite’s convoluted text, but through the vibrant artistic renditions of Pamela Colman Smith. Here the strong influence and vitality of the feminine is spread through the almost ubiquitous physical presence of the deck itself. While her life circumstances were undoubtedly challenging, as a creative and strong-minded woman, Colman-Smith’s work crosses interdiscipli-

⁴⁴ The *Occult Review* was an English monthly journal, established in 1905.

⁴⁵ Arthur Edward Waite, “The Tarot: A wheel of Fortune,” *December Occult Review* (December 1909), Volume X, No. 6.

⁴⁶ Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, 250-251.

⁴⁷ Colquhoun, *Sword Of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, 250 – 251. Emphasis added. Case’s BOTA deck also follows Waite’s reworking of Mather’s system, but does however rectify other deliberate blinks placed in the order of the Major Arcana cards by Waite.

⁴⁸ Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*. Victorian Women’s Writers Project. 145. Victorian Women Writers Project:

<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7198&brand=vwwp&field1=text&text1=relative+creature&submit=Search&hit.rank=1#1>.

⁴⁹ Ronald Decker and Michael Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot: 1870-1970*, 131.

nary fields: encompassing both artistry and occult practices. The clarity of her artistry significantly places the Tarot as an art form in the West, bringing its work (and her influence) to a wider sphere. The accessibility of Smith's artwork made her deck - if not her name - into one that is still celebrated to this day.

Paul Foster Case: leading American occultist and proponent of Tarot

Because the nature of Kingsford's feminist agenda profoundly influenced the formation of the Golden Dawn, its power as a vehicle for social change can therefore also be seen in the workings of the ritual order founded by American former Golden Dawn member, Paul Foster Case. American occult historian, Mitch Horowitz states that the work of Paul Foster Case "probably stands as the single highest expression of the various philosophies that emerged from the European occult revival."⁵⁰ As the founding Magus of the still extant mystery school, Builders of the Adytum (BOTA),⁵¹ Case was a major contributor to the occult field and modern Western esotericism. He was one of the Initiates in the American Rosicrucian Order of the Alpha et Omega – which was the branch that stayed loyal to Mathers, although he later left that Order and founded the BOTA. Case published extensively on the Tarot and devoted most of his life to helping students work with its potentially transformative properties. As is noted in his numerous texts on the Tarot, Case appreciated an ontological reality for both the sub-conscious and the super-conscious mind, and may well have been the first occultist to cite Jung's belief in the collective unconscious.

Case believed that the archetypal images in the Tarot could help to transform the Initiate or seeker. He also believed that through meditating upon the images in the Tarot, it was possible to "embody its [i.e. the card and/or the archetype's] virtues."⁵² These virtues could then be integrated into the self, initially through the actions of the self-conscious mind, which in turn would be accepted by the sub-conscious mind. When these two modes of consciousness were working in harmony, heightened states of awareness could be accessed at will. As with the work of the Golden Dawn, the caveat is that both masculine and feminine forms must be equally valued for their use as anthropomorphic representatives of cosmic forces. When the inner aspects of these outer forms have been truly integrated within the practitioner, then the Initiate has a natural sense of respect for feminine power at work in the outer world, recognizing the true nature of equality that exists between men and women.

⁵⁰ Mitch Horowitz, *Occult America: The Secret History of How Mysticism Shaped Our Nation* (New York: Bantam Dell Publishing Group, 2009), 214.

⁵¹ The Builders of the Adytum was founded by Paul Foster Case as an international correspondence school dedicated to sharing the teachings of the Western Mystery Tradition. The BOTA Headquarters and main Lodge are located in Los Angeles, California. The Order still disseminates the teachings of Paul Foster Case and his successor Ann Davies.

⁵² Horowitz, *Occult America: The Secret History of How Mysticism Shaped Our Nation*, 119.

Case's choice for his successor to run the Lodge and the BOTA school was Ann Davies. In choosing a female successor, Case was recognizing that the line of transmission had little to do with (external) form, and everything to do with (internal) function. The BOTA are reticent to discuss the details of Case's life, stating that it is the teachings that are important, and not the channel through which they came. Davies has, however, said this about her first meeting with Case, in 1943:

While this young woman and older man had not previously met in this life, there occurred what can only be termed an explosion of recognition between them. Immediately she knew that at last she had found her way home and what her life work would be. With humble devotion she performed all the tasks... while absorbing and digesting into her spiritual being the luminous and transcendent teachings, which he revealed to her.⁵³

The feminist understanding regarding the equality of women within magical circles, which Kingsford and MacGregor Mathers had initiated in Western magical groups, was, in this new century and on a different continent, at last fully realized. As such, the BOTA also deserves to be credited within the history of feminism as well as in occult history.

Conclusion

The work of the Golden Dawn and the promulgation of Tarot cards demonstrates the initial Order's "unobtrusive yet persistent encouragement to feminism."⁵⁴ Whether we consider the Golden Dawn itself as a feminist movement or a proto-feminist movement, the actions of the Golden Dawn with regard to women can be seen to have had a significant impact on world history. Initial choices inspired by Dr. Anna Kingsford and instigated by Mathers helped to break ground for women's equality – first within the Order, and then, as an assumed extension, in the wider community. Acknowledgement of this element of gender equality within the Lodge and in ritual work should be seen as a key historical precedent for modern feminist movements in the West, challenging both the nature and role of the dominant power structure by introducing a different trajectory of thought regarding the rights of women into the magical and occult sub-culture.

The Rider Waite Smith Tarot deck brought these images into many households in the West, and perhaps inadvertently bridged the occult work regarding women's emancipation into the wider Western culture, thereby challenging the culturally politicized identity of women as subordinates. While gender-associated

⁵³ David St Clair, *The Psychic World of California* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), 244. This account is taken from a BOTA brochure.

⁵⁴ Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom - MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, 231.

anthropomorphic assignations and their meanings have a historical precedent in some French occult circles, it is through the wider cultural dissemination and understanding of the features of the Tarot - that these elements have been brought into the wider social sphere. Acceptance of the equality of feminine god-forms and the related archetypal inner states of awareness could be said to have aided in the work of acknowledging equal rights for women, as a universal entity. The Tarot was brought into the twentieth century as a transformative and evolutionary tool that celebrated the equality of humankind, irrespective of gender. Paul Foster Case's teachings regarding the Tarot, as well as his choice of a woman as his successor to both his school and Lodge demonstrate that he had internalized these teachings regarding gender equality – both in magical workings as well as in the outer world's workings. The sum total of the actions studied herein have had a wider effect on society at large, and should be awarded a key place within the history of feminism.

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