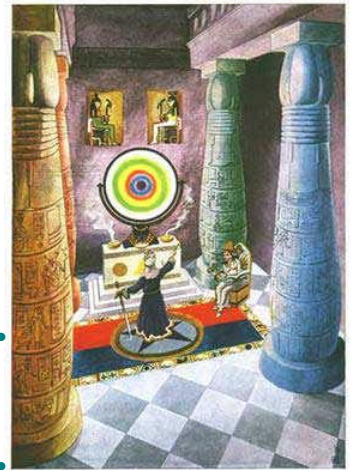
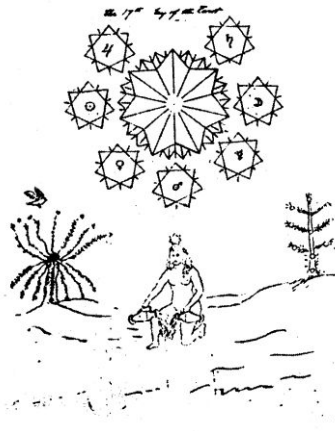


Adam McLean's Study Course on the artwork and symbolism of modern tarot



Lesson 13 : Magical tarots

In the 19th century Tarot was reborn through the French occult revival by such figures as Paul Christian and Eliphas Levi, who gave a magical spin to tarot imagery. In the closing decade of the 19th century the magical order of the Golden Dawn adopted tarot as a major component to their scheme of initiation, and those who aspired to join the higher degrees were given the exercise of creating their own tarot deck. Some examples of these Golden Dawn tarots still exist. First we see a drawing by the poet W.B. Yeats, who was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, of a design for the Temperance card, next to this is the Star card design used in the order, and finally a coloured drawing of the Temperance card by Dr Felkin a prominent member of the Order.



The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was extremely influential on the way which magic evolved during the early 20th century, though its rituals and study material remained to a great extent out of the public domain until the stream of publications about this order that were produced in the 1970's and 80's. A.E. Waite was a notable member of the Order, though he later set up his own magical or mystical group. Out of this emerged the Rider Waite deck, created by Waite and Pamela Coleman-Smith. There is so much written on the background to this deck but we will not go into all its complex history in this course - though it is a very worthwhile investigation. A whole study course could easily be devoted to this one deck! Those of you with sufficient interest should, as an exercise, undertake some research into the

origins of the Rider-Waite deck.

Waite's Order was responsible for another amazing tarot deck, but one which is almost entirely unknown as it is held within the organisation that inherited Waite's papers. These are the tarot designs by J.D. Trinick made in 1921-22. Some of these were recently published in Decker and Dummett's book *A History of the Occult Tarot 1870-1970*, 2002. Sadly it is unlikely that this beautiful tarot will ever be published, and instead will continue as one of the hidden gems of early 20th century tarot art.

Various people with interests in magic worked with tarot imagery during the first half of the 20th century, but it was not till the 1940's that a tarot entirely inspired by magical ideas emerged - the Aleister Crowley deck painted by Lady Freida Harris. These designs were originally issued in black and white illustrations in a limited edition of Crowley's *Book of Thoth* in 1944, but her paintings were, some fifteen years later, published as the Thoth deck in 1969. The wonderful flowing forms, and dense, busy textured backgrounds certainly moved tarot art forwards and inspired many of the next generation of tarot artists. Freida Harris' style is obviously influenced by 19th century symbolist art, art nouveau, and art deco. Apparently she was not particularly knowledgeable about tarot and must have relied on Crowley. She made a number of different designs for various cards, before a final version was arrived at.

Once the Thoth tarot appeared, many magicians decided to issue decks as a way of reflecting their individual magical philosophy. We can form a list of some of these. Not all were particularly 'magical' in inspiration, but held more to traditional tarot images.

- 1977 A Thelemic Tarot - Augustus Donnelly
- 1978 Golden Dawn tarot - Robert Wang
- 1980 Hermetic Tarot - Godfrey Dowson
- 1980 Le Tarot Magique (Magical Tarot) - Frederic Lionel
- 1983 Tree-of-Life Tarot - Rufus Campausen and Apolonia van Leeuwen
- 1984 Gareth Knight Tarot - Sander Little
- 1985 Tarot des Mages
- 1986 Magickal Tarot - Anthony Clark
- 1991 Servants of the Light - Jo Gill and Anthony Clark
- 1994 Tarot of Ceremonial Magick - Lon and Constance Duquette
- 1999 Tarot of the Sephiroth - Dan Staroff
- 2000 Enochian Tarot - Gerald and Betty Schueler and Sallie Ann Glassman
- 2001 Golden Dawn Magical Tarot - Sandra Tabatha Cicero
- 2002 Dion Fortune Tarot - David Williams
- 2004 Libet T - Andrea Serio
- 2004 The Book of Kaos Tarot - Orryelle Defenestrade-Bascule
- 2004 Magical Tarot of the Golden Dawn - Richard Dudschus and David Sledzinski

Let us first look at those magical tarots which drew upon the Crowley Thoth deck.

1977 A Thelemic Tarot - Augustus Donnelly

1999 Tarot of the Sephiroth - Dan Staroff

2004 Libet T - Andrea Serio

These three decks rework the imagery of the Freida Harris paintings. Let us compare the Fool cards from the Thoth and these later derivatives.



The Thelemic tarot, produced by Augustus Donnelly as a signed limited edition of 499, was printed as black and white line drawings, but I have a copy in which the Fool card has been handcoloured. We notice, in all these versions, one of the characteristic features of Freida Harris' Fool design, the spiral which circles around the main figure. None of these decks are slavish copies of the original Harris paintings but rather use her images as the starting point for their own interpretation of the design.

The original designs for the tarot used in the teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were similarly taken up by later tarot artists.

1978 Golden Dawn tarot - Robert Wang

2001 Golden Dawn Magical Tarot - Sandra Tabatha Cicero

2004 Magical Tarot of the Golden Dawn - Richard Dudschus and David Sledzinski

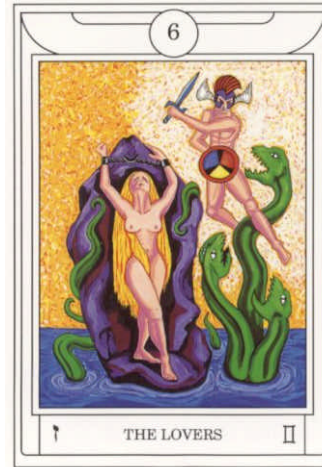
For some reason I don't entirely understand, the creators of the original Golden Dawn tarot designs, Mathers and Westcott, adopted a number of variations in the symbolism. We see this particularly in the Lovers card, where the usual conventional meeting of the man and woman, is replaced by the classical myth of Perseus and Andromeda. Here the hero Perseus, he who cut off the head of the gorgon Medusa, rescues Andromeda who has been chained to a rock in the sea by the monster Cetus. Perseus is, of course, captivated by the beauty of Andromeda and they marry. This Perseus-Andromeda idea is carried in all the tarots based on the Golden Dawn and is not found in many other decks (except Godfrey Dowson's Hermetic Tarot, which though reflecting some Golden Dawn elements is really his own creative envisaging).



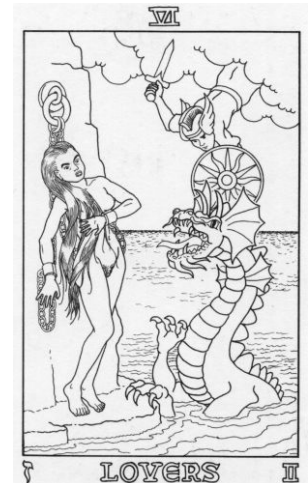
Golden Dawn Felkin



Wang



Cicero

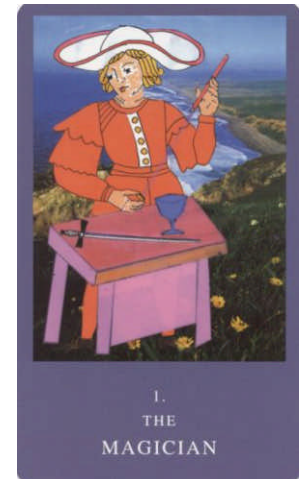


Golden Dawn Magical

A number of the 1960-80's period British magicians have had tarot card designs issued in their names or those of their organizations.

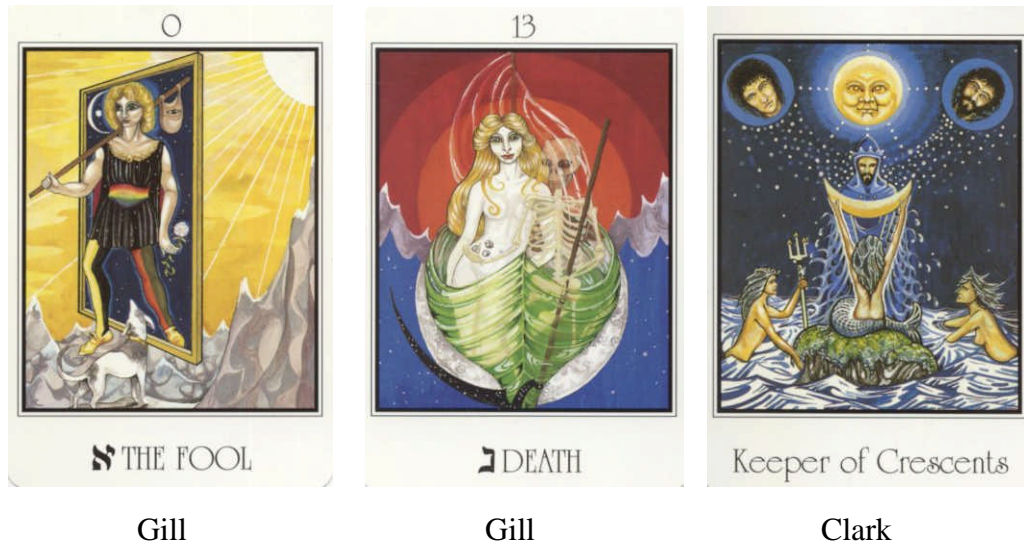
- 1984 Gareth Knight Tarot - Sander Little
- 1991 Servants of the Light - Jo Gill and Anthony Clark
- 2002 Dion Fortune Tarot - David Williams

These tarots fail to live up to the deep understanding of magic that these authors display in their books, and do not seem to incorporate their magical ideas, but instead are conventional tarots. The Gareth Knight deck is perhaps rather simplistic. The Dion Fortune designs try to marry simple child like drawings with photo-collage elements. Both these decks, it seems, let down the people in whose name they were issued, and though they are competent enough tarots no magical insight is presented to us.



This group of tarots issued in the name of the three major British magicians of the mid to late 20th century, is saved by the delightful paintings that Jo Gill with the help of Anthony Clark made for the Servants of Light deck. The S.O.L. is the magical organization run by Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki during the 1980's up to the present. It provides courses, levels of initiations, conferences and other meetings on magic. The artwork for the S.O.L. is truly remarkable, with great attention given to the Major arcana. Here we find detailed and wonderfully composed thoughtful imagery. The Major arcana were originally painted in the late 1970's by Jo Gill (who later produced a tarot under her own name). In the late 80's when it became obvious to Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki that it would be possible to have this published as a deck, she asked Anthony Clark to produce the Minor arcana. Clark has succeeded well at

completing the deck and complementing Jo Gill's images within the limitations of his own art style, and these two work well together. It is a difficult task for someone to complete another artists work but Clark has here done this extremely well and with great sensitivity. He, himself, produced a magical tarot which we will look at shortly. The SOL deck quickly went out of print and is well sought after and usually fetches a high secondhand price.



The next group of magical tarots are those which substantially incorporate magical correspondences into the designs.

- 1980 Hermetic Tarot - Godfrey Dowson
- 1980 Le Tarot Magique (Magical Tarot) - Frederic Lionel
- 1985 Tarot des Mages
- 1986 Magickal Tarot - Anthony Clark
- 1994 Tarot of Ceremonial Magick - Lon and Constance DuQuette

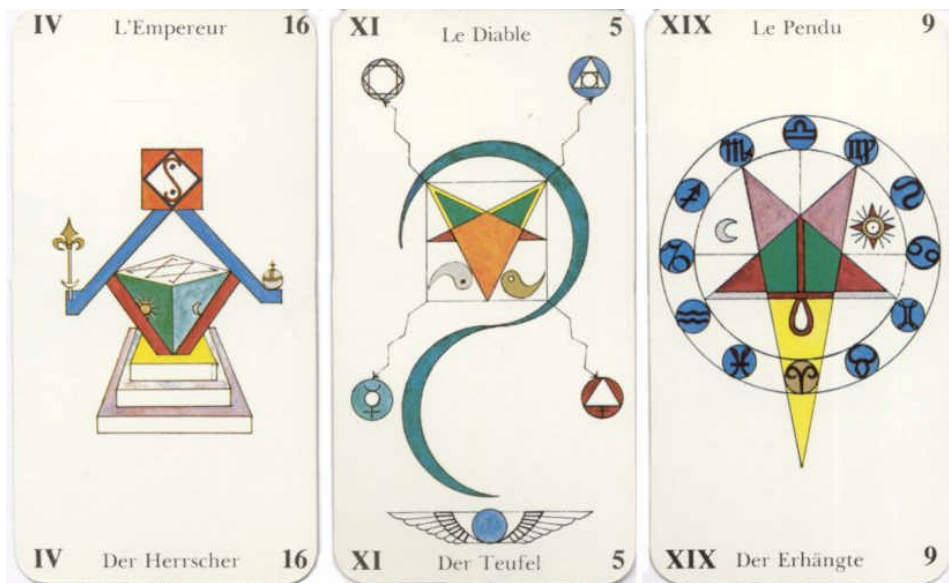
The Hermetic tarot is a relatively early magical tarot, being a series of pen and ink drawings made 1975-77 by Godfrey Dowson, a self-taught freelance illustrator. He later became involved in creating graphics for computer games. His tarot must have been among his earlier works. The title card bears the information “based on the esoteric workings of the Secret Order of the Golden Dawn”, however, this is not a deck, like the ones we looked at earlier, directly inspired by the Golden Dawn. The artwork is entirely original, though some cards reflect the Golden Dawn style - the Lovers depicts the Perseus and Andromeda myth and the Star is clearly drawn from that Golden Dawn card with its seven heptangular stars set around the central star image. Temperance draws on the Eliphas Levi image which we saw was used by W. B. Yeats in his tarot notebook drawing. The cards (even the Minor arcana) are all given subtitles following the nomenclature in the Golden Dawn *Book 'T'* which was published in 1967 (and earlier, in 1912, in a bowdlerized form by Crowley in his *Equinox* magazine, Vol I, No 8). Thus the Fool is ‘The Spirit of Ether’, the Empress ‘The Daughter of the Mighty Ones’, the Lovers ‘Children of the Voice Divine’”, and so on. The Five of Wands is ‘Lord of Strife’, Four of Cups is “Lord of Blended Pleasure, Princess of Wands is ‘Princess of the Shining

Flame'. Angelic names appear in Hebrew on the Pip cards. Unlike many of the little white books which accompany tarot decks, Dowson's detailed explanations of his cards are essential reading. This is one of the best conceived and thought out decks. The artwork is given form by the underlying magical ideas and philosophical structure of the deck. This is a deck one could study for many hours and still not entirely grasp all the details of the complex symbolism.

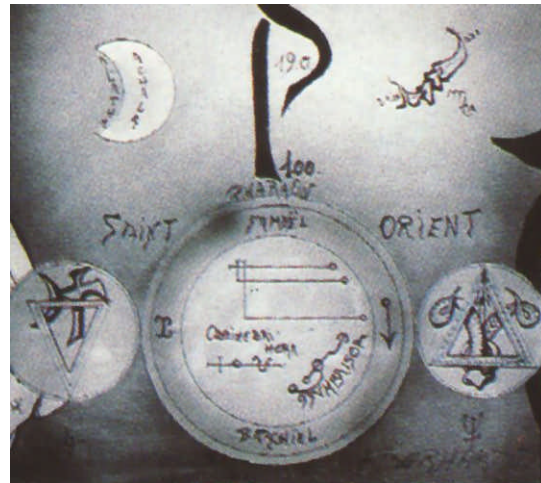
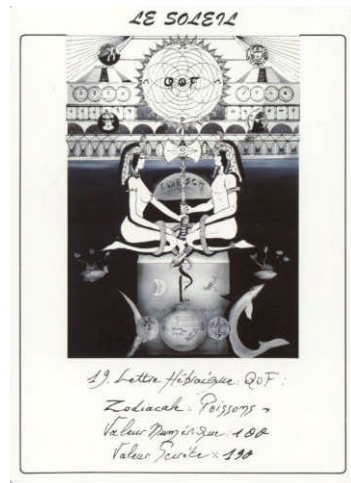


This deck has been out of print for many years and consequently has a high secondhand value. Recently, there has been some indication that it will be reprinted. It will be found well worth collecting for those interested in complex symbolism.

In 1980 the writer Frédéric Lionel, issued his book *Le Tarot Magique* with a series of tarot cards. Lionel was a prolific writer on philosophical and esoteric subjects. His magical tarot is idiosyncratic, and departs in the order of the cards from the normal arrangement. Indeed, he provides two separate numbering systems on the cards (in Roman and Arabic numerals). These systems are explained at length in his book, however, the cards bear the conventional titles. The artwork is abstract and geometrical, being line drawings with some regions coloured (probably with watercolour). At first glance they appear almost like the magical sigils found in western magical manuscripts and notebooks, however on closer inspection we can see them as being constructed from various elements. There are a number of Egyptian images, the eye of Ra, winged disc, Ankh, etc., also the Chinese Ying-Yang appears on various cards, sometimes deconstructed. There are many astrological signs, constellations and planets, as well as the magical sigils. These individual elements are all subsumed into abstract geometrical designs, which geometrically imply associations and links between these symbols. The design of each card is an abstraction of the idea of each arcana, and with only a little contemplation, in most cases, easily recognized. Thus the Emperor card shows us a sort of dais on which stands a figure holding orb and sceptre, the design for Justice obviously incorporates the balancing of forms, and the Wheel of Fortune indeed has a wheel. The Devil shows the inverted pentangle, as used in the famous image from late 19th century magical writings. Some cards designs are more obscure - the Hanged Man presents an inverted ankh, and if we recall our Egyptian symbolism the ankh symbol means 'eternal life', thus inverting this is perhaps a good, though subtle, image for the Hanged Man. This deck repays detailed study as it is likely that there are no 'rogue' or merely decorative elements, and that every component of the designs is put there for a purpose. It is a difficult work to read but worth the effort to make sense of these highly abstract forms.

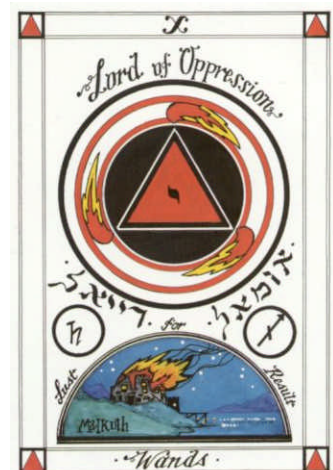


The Tarot des Mages is a wonderful Majors only art deck of large format cards, about 7 by 5 inches in size (175x125mm). These were finely drawn in pen with some pencil, then sensitively coloured and textured with watercolour. Regrettably it seems one can find out almost nothing about the artist Philippe Eberhardt. His artwork, however, speaks well for him. It is obvious that he is totally acquainted with the sigils and circles found in European magical manuscripts, as he has copied or adapted some of these and incorporated them as elements within his designs. There is a strong focus on Hebrew names and letters.



The detail on the images is so dense that illustrating a card in the standard size adopted in this study course does not do it justice, and one can appreciate very little from the scan. This illustrates why it is essential to collect actual tarot decks and not rely on scans found on the internet. We can zoom into a small area at the base of the cube shown on the Sun card and see a magical circle with various angelic names. In the top half of the circle is a magical sigil formed of three interwoven lines. Here we have, as with the Dowson a truly magical tarot, not one of the rather disappointing tarots to which some famous magicians have given their names.

Anthony Clark, who we met before, finishing the Minor arcana for Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, had already produced his own Magickal Tarot. The imagery on the Majors is rather simple, being in most cases based around a central mask-like figure. These are usually set within a geometrical form or between some stylised abstract columns. One needs to know the tarot imagery well in order to see how Clark has worked this into the masks. The cards are, like with Dowson, all given subtitles following the nomenclature in the Golden Dawn *Book 'T'* but with a few variations (or simplifications) in places. The Minor



arcana are characterized by their use of the elemental colours as a key. Thus Wands, the fire suit, is keyed to the use of red, Cups or water is primarily keyed to blue, and so on, which gives the deck a strong coherence. Each Minor arcana pip has a circular form, and below that a little emblematic scene which reflects its *Book 'T'* description. Thus the Ten of Wands the 'Lord of Oppression' is shown with the scene of a house set on fire, the Three of Cups 'Lord of Abundance' has fruits shown growing on bushes, while the Eight of Cups 'Lord of Indolence' has some flowers in a vase drooping from lack of water. The pips also bear the Hebrew names of the Kabbalistic Sephiroth. This deck is obviously well thought out and based on a Kabbalistic and elemental magical system.

Lon and Constance DuQuette's *Tarot of Ceremonial Magick* sets out to provide the reader with the detailed magical correspondences associated with the tarot imagery. Each of the cards has a strip of three panels at the bottom within which complex and esoteric magical correspondences are shown. Thus with the Major arcana, the left panel holds the magical seals of the Geniis, while the rightmost panel has the seals of the Carcerorum Qliphoth. The central panel holds more familiarly, the Hebrew letter and the astrological sign. The Court cards have the watchtowers from the Enochian Magic, and Tattwa symbols, while the pips 2-10 each have two sigils of the Spirits of the Goetia. In the Minor arcana there is also a space in the upper left which has either an Enochian square, I-Ching Hexagram, or Elemental Cross from the Enochian system. We are certainly in deep magical areas here. The DuQuette's have here truly created a book of the correspondences used in twentieth century ritual magic in the form of a tarot deck. They have also used the various colouring schemas used in the magical system of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Unfortunately, their magical abilities are to some extent let down by their art work, a particular problem being their difficulties in achieving smooth washes in the larger areas of the images, and one sees all the brush loading and attempts to push paint around the edges of forms. One wishes they could have taken the advice of some graphics artist when creating their deck, then we would have seen the conjunction of complementary colours, the 'Flashing colours' of the Golden Dawn magical system, truly come to life.



This deck must be the practicing ritual magician's tarot deck par excellence. It will be of use to anyone wanting to glimpse into the complexities of a well worked out esoteric system of

magical correspondences. We can contrast this with the Tarot des Mages, which is obviously by a creative artist weaving similar material into an artistic construct, while here we have a series of correspondences accurately and systematically outlined but without any creative artistic power. These are two valid though opposite ways of working with this magical material in a tarot context.

Under this group of magical tarots we should perhaps include the large illustrations made by Marcello Peola's for *Genege des Tarotas*, 1995. You can see one of these complex images, which perhaps occupy the middle ground between Eberhardt and the DuQuette's, in lesson 10 which dealt with tarots printed in books.

There remain some magical tarots which are worth investigating further. Among these, we should mention, is the Enochian Tarot of Gerald and Betty Schueler issued in 2000. This is not a true tarot, being based on the magical system of Enochian devised originally by Edward Kelly and John Dee in the late 16th century, but essentially structured and given abstract form by the magicians of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley. Sallie Anne Glassman produced a series of 86 paintings, which though evocative are in a rather clunky style, with solid rather than ethereal forms. The idea is perhaps that of 'pathworking', a practice popularized in Western magic in the 1970's and 80's, partly through the inspiration of the British occultist Gareth Knight. Here one is encouraged to meditate on some image that will lead one to some inner experience of one of the paths on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. This has already been done in conventional tarot, but here the Schuelers have extended this to the Enochian system. They link their system to the traditional tarot structure, in that they have 30 Major arcana and 56 Minor, however there are few overlaps or parallels that can easily be recognized.