

The Occult Revival

Much of the occultism that we have today was influenced by the occult revival of the 1800's. Prior to that there are many Christian Grimoires and ceremonial magic books that were published.

It was Freemasonry, religion, hermetics, alchemy and ceremonial magic that were combined to create the rituals of the Hermetic Order Golden Dawn in the 19th century. Aleister Crowley created his traditions from these sources, adding the practice of Egyptianism and eastern mysticism. There was also the advent of the racist teachings of Theosophy, *The Secret Doctrine* and H.P. Blavatsky. Both authors were influenced by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, Freemasonry and Orientalism.

One of the more influential writers on witchcraft was the textbook historian Jules Michelet, who wrote 'Satanism and Witchcraft' (1863).¹ Many quote his text as a source of historical knowledge, without realizing that he had used information from the witch trials to build his story of the black mass, and witchcraft. No serious historian would ever accept the testimony of torture victims from witch trials as historical evidence.

Occultism has always been a very obscure area of research, while at the same time it has been sensationalized by the public and the media because of the curiosity to know the unknown.

In 1891 the text known as La Bas, written by Huysmans caused a sensation.² While this tale was nothing more than literary fiction, it is also quoted by some pagans and even by some satanists, as evidence of historical satanism and witchcraft.

In the same era, storyteller Charles Leland created the Witch's Gospel (1899), a story about Aradia, the goddess queen of Witches. With this document he proclaimed that Italian witchcraft was ancient, that it was handed down to him through the works of an old storyteller from Italy. The sources and documents that he worked from are still in question to this day. This text is often used in neo-paganism and some branches of witchcraft as a historical text. Most accept that the tales he created were fictional, with a sprinkling of historical truth to them.

Practices of the occult branched out from the works of the Golden Dawn, and Crowley. The advancement of traditions like Wicca and neo-paganism became socially acceptable through the work of Margaret Murray, Alex Saunders and Gerald Gardner.

Some of these authors have asserted that the covens, sabbats and rituals of these accused witches had a pre-Christian history. There

1 Jules Michelet, *Satanism and Witchcraft*. Reprint by Kensington Publishing Corp. (1998)

2 La-Bas, J. K. Huysmans. Reprint by Dover Publications (1972)

is no proof of any of this, as the witch trials, and all of the confessions created during it, originated from false accusations. All of those terms, such as 'coven', and 'Sabbat' did not exist until they were written in witch-finding materials of the age of the inquisition.³ The accepted history of some of the beliefs in modern witchcraft are often taken from the literature of witch-finding material. Some, but not all, Wiccans believe this reconstructed history. Most will deny the obvious association with (literary) satanism, and witch-finding materials forgetting the fact that according to the Church fathers and executors, these accused witches were *in league with the Devil*, not the benevolent 'horned god' of the wood as it is portrayed today.

The dictionary of witchcraft terms states that witchcraft is a family of pagan and magico-religious traditions deriving from the myths of pre-christian Europe. It is also "...the craft used by witches, known as magic, especially that [which is utilized] for personal power with the energies of natural objects".⁴

It is related to the practice of folk magic and other simple forms of magic. This is a traditional type of definition from the religion of witchcraft, known as Wicca, created in the 1950's by leaders such as Gerald Gardner and Margaret Murray. The foundations of this type of religious magic was based on the past traditions of Hermeticism, and The Golden Dawn. Wicca is a religion, and their use of magic is a part of their religious expression. Regardless of this, there are many other methods of witchcraft that are independent of the Wiccan path.

Another legendary witch of that era who had a dubious reputation was Alex Sanders. He claimed to have been initiated into witchcraft by his grandmother. He also claimed that the source of his magic was his grandmother's grimoires to which he added materials from the Crowley and Mather's grimoire, the Key of Solomon. Sanders began his initiation into witchcraft through the Gardenerians.⁵

Because they would not accept him as one of their own, he created his own coven. This expanded to what Saunders claimed to be more than

³ cf. Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft. Rosemary Ellen Guiley. Facts on File, Inc. 2nd edition. (1999)

Coven - covine 'used by 1662 in the trials of the Aulderane, Scotland to describe the number of witches in a gathering'

Sabbat - 14thct Old French, '*Shabbath*', meaning 'to rest'. Used in witchcraft trials and literature both as a slander to the Semitic community and to prosecute both witches and Jews as heretics.

⁴ Athena Gardner. Witchcraft, Dictionary of Craft Terms. 2000. Star Rising Publications

⁵ Hereditary Witchcraft: Secrets of the Old Religion, Raven Grimassi

1,623 witches who were now practicing his form of magic, known as the Alexandrian Witchcraft tradition. His coven also initiated two more popular witches, Jan and Stewart Farrar. At the height of his popularity he was called the "King of the Witches."⁶

His popularity led many to question Alex Sanders' history and claims of historical witchcraft. It was then revealed that most of the material that was copied into his book of Witchcraft came from Gardenerian writings. His popularity as a witch ended with that revelation. While he was exposed as not being genuine, Sanders is often credited for making initiation into witchcraft easier and more popular for other people.

Even more influential than Alex Sanders is Jan and Stewart Farrar, both of whom were initiated into Sanders' coven in 1970. After the breakup of the coven of Sanders, the Farrars gained fame through their own 'reformed Alexandrian' tradition of witchcraft.

The Witch hunt propaganda of the medieval era also became a source of history in Satanism. Theistic Satanist Diane Vera, asserts that there are many occult traditions that were developed from the tales of witch persecutions, and literary Satanism. "...some modern religions, including Wicca and some pre-LaVey forms of Satanism, drew inspiration from 19th century literary Satanism..."⁷

Literary Satanists were the authors that wrote about Satan in a positive light, or who wrote about Satanism in general but who were not Satanists. Some of these authors, like Michelet, Mark Twain, and William Blake, who wrote about Satan but did not have an organization or following, or did not worship Satan in the religious sense. However unhistorical their writings were, there are traditions in the occult that draw from these sources, and create a history that is based on these literary tales of witchcraft and ideas about Satan.

A version of Satanic Witchcraft for Satanism was made popular by Anton LaVey, and his book, *The Compleat Witch: or What to do When Virtue Falls* (1971).⁸ This book was written as a method of instruction to Satanic women and how they could apply their powers of seduction. It is a guide on how to think like a witch, how to dress, how to act and various other advices that LaVey felt characterized the behaviours and natures of women.

LaVey's method is a guide to enchantment by using the appearance and personality in such a way that men will fall prey to the witch. This ability to entice men is a measure of personal power. Of course, he offers little practical advice on the esoteric or magical aspects of

6 Hereditary Witchcraft: Secrets of the Old Religion, Raven Grimassi

7 Diane Vera, Reply to Chris N [explanation of literary Satanism]. December, 2002. Accessed 06/19/09, from: <http://www.theisticsatanism.com/pagan/ChrisN.html>

8, *The Compleat Witch* published in 1971. This same book was re-published in 2004 under the title of *The Satanic Witch*.¹

satanic witchcraft; his book is a treatise on how he envisioned the Satanic witch to be - as as a fantasy of seduction within the earthly realm of the physical.

In a published essay titled *Satanic Witchery*, Abby Brimstone reviews the concepts of *The Satanic Witch*, agreeing with LaVey's stereotypical views of women. Brimstone writes that women live in a "male dominated society", and "All she really needs is to understand how to maneuver her looks, curves, and intelligence to acquire success and happiness".⁹ Brimstone believes that a woman has to use her appearance and feminine wiles to survive and to dominate over men.

Blanche Barton, Magistra of the Church of Satan, wrote about her views of women and satanic witchcraft in her essay, *Satanic Feminism*. She acknowledged that LaVey tried to promote a kind of feminism that was based on the perceived notions of Christianity, and its "blasphemous philosophical roots",¹⁰ where women, and lust were considered to be evil. In her view the real satanic witch is *compleat* because she is the dominant force in her own life, independent, willful and strong. The satanic witch, according to her, should be "...in constant, intimate spiritual and sexual contact with her strongest Demonic archetype, Satan Himself".¹¹

LaVey's agenda seemed to be more about stereotyping women and their role in society, instead of promoting equality. LaVey's definitions of witchcraft allude to his belief that only women could be witches, and they were mysterious and magical with a supernatural ability to seduce men. This is a very shallow perception on the part of LaVey that he promoted because of his desire to objectify women.

His categorization of women in *The Satanic Witch* is based on the Lavey Synthesizer clock, a systematic method of associating body types with temperament.¹² LaVey borrowed these ideas from William Sheldon's system of somatotype, a method of determining personality according to a person's body type and shape. The theories of Sheldon have been disregarded as false by modern psychologists.

Nietzsche also had a belief in three major body types which embodied certain qualities of the personality,¹³ which some have regarded as a philosophy of racial stereotyping or eugenics. LaVey had tried to effectively characterize women by their looks in the *Satanic Witch*. My speculation is that his controlling attitude about women seems to show that he was insecure and perhaps feared the power of the female

9 Abby Brimstone. 2003. *Satanic Witchery*. The Trident, Issue 10

10 Blanche Barton. 1997. *The Black Flame*, Volume 6, #1 & #2. *Satanic Feminism*. Accessed 6/19/09, from: <http://www.churchofsatan.com/Pages/Satfem.html>

11 *Ibid*.

12 Anton LaVey, fwd by Zeena LaVey. 1989. *The Satanic Witch*. Feral House Publishing.

13 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Antichrist*. 1999. See Sharp Press.

mind.

He portrayed the roles of women as the source of all evil, when he created his version of the Black Mass by having a naked woman on the Satanic Altar, an act that glorified the sexuality of women and offered nothing more. Perhaps LaVey's categorization of women as the source of 'evil' was an attempt to negate the movement of feminist [Wiccan] witchcraft in his era. It also served to shock and outrage the public and give them something that they all wanted at the same time - entertainment.

But, magic and witchcraft is not a form of *entertainment*, especially for those who study and practice it in their every day lives. Magic can be used by anyone willing to learn the craft. It's origins are from many sources and the techniques of spell making are a craft, the craft of the witch.

In the practice of LaVeyan Satanism, spell work is a psychological method. Some LaVeyan satanists choose not to burn candles in their rituals, use witchcraft, or even attempt magic, as they claim that their method of magic is not metaphysical, it is psychological, physical. They are generally wary of all things that are related to the occult.

However, LaVey included instructions on the uses of certain candle colors, rituals, and spells in the Satanic Bible. These were more than just psychological devices; LaVey labeled these practices as methods of Satanic High magic, compared to the low magic of psychological manipulation as presented in the Satanic Witch.

Modern Magic

Other areas of magic were developing during this era as well, to mutate into new forms of magic. The magicians Peter Carroll and Ray Sherwin created methods from the past works of AO Spare, to create the method of 'Chaos Magick'. This type of magic was very non traditional in approach. It used various methods to produce results, rather than being dependent on the meaning of the method used. It was magic based on method, not tradition.

Of course, these few chapters are an abbreviated history of occultism and magic, but it describes how these traditions have influenced each other throughout time. There are many sources to work from, but as you can see, not all sources are based on real historical origins. Regardless of this fact, all of these practices are a part of the occult.

We have been able to reconstruct ideas and methods of magic from past histories, for various occult uses and 'traditions' like witchcraft, wicca, chaos magic, and Satanism. These methods are creative and

useful reconstructions of the past which serve as a backdrop for many of the religious and magical practices that we have today. Even though we can not recreate the past, we have a long record of history to learn from and to use so that we may understand magic.

Magic is a life-changing process, a journey that will shape an individual's conscious being, and change their life in many ways. Magic has been used for centuries but it is not simply a re-creation of the rituals of the past. It is something that can be used to shape the future. Magic is an evolution, a means of metaphysical exploration, and it continues to evolve to this day.

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