

LUCIFER IN ITALIAN WITCHCRAFT

By Raven Grimassi

The figure of Lucifer in Italian witchcraft is perhaps best known to the public through the writings of folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland. In Leland's book *Aradia*, Lucifer is identified with the Judeo-Christian myth of Satan being expelled from heaven due to the "sin" of pride. In Italian mainstream culture, the ideas about Lucifer were strongly influenced by the fictional tale of Dante, which describes Lucifer in vivid detail. But these are all ideas about Lucifer from the perspective of the Church and its agents.

In order to obtain a non-Christian view of Lucifer we need to examine tales of Lucifer that have no attachment to stereotypical imagery. One example is the witch lore that was passed to me many years ago. In one story Lucifer is known as *Lucifero*, and is seen as the brightest star in the night sky. The "star" is known today as the planet Venus. In the old tale, Lucifer moves to join with the crescent moon, which is the goddess *Diana Lucifera*. This is represented by Venus positioned near the crescent moon at night. Diana is impregnated by Lucifer, and she later births stars to replace those that have fallen to earth. The stars are the offspring of Lucifer and *Diana Lucifera*.

The idea of a "fallen" Lucifer may originate from an old tale in which Lucifer descends from the heavens (as opposed to being cast out) and lands with such force that he penetrates into the earth. His presence in the Underworld produces volcanic activity, and for this reason pumice stones are sometimes called Devil's Rock in some forms of Catholic-based folk magic.

In the witch lore passed to me, the symbol of a five-pointed star enclosed in a circle, with one point downward, symbolizes Lucifer within the earth. With one point upward, the enclosed star symbolizes the union of Lucifer and *Diana Lucifera*. It also represents the "star child" who is the "seed of enlightenment and liberation" within Diana's womb or within the womb of the earth.

In the peasant witchcraft tradition, Lucifer is tied to the firefire, which in Italy is known as the *luciola*. These are the "stars" of the harvest field where the wheat spikes are ready for harvesting. However, in this theme Lucifer is known as *Lucibello*, the beautiful light. The *luciola* are the stars that have descended from the sky (the falling stars) who are under the guidance of *Lucibello*. This, of course, connects back to the impregnation of *Diana Lucifera* by *Lucifero* in the night sky. A type of "as above, so below" theme.

In some Italian witchcraft traditions, Diana is known as the Queen of the Fairies. The *luciola* appear in folklore as fairies who gather on the night of the summer solstice. In the mystical tradition, wheat spikes hold the mysteries of the Underworld, which were drawn up by the roots of the plants. The *luciola*, as a fairy spirit, lands on the tips of the wheat spike and imparts the mysteries of the star realm. Later the wheat will be used to make ritual bread that is used in a type of communion meal through which the inner mysteries are taken into the body, mind and spirit of the ritualists. The words of communion illustrate the mystical process:

"Blessings upon this meal, which is as our own body. For without this, we ourselves would perish from this world. Blessings upon the grain, which as seed went into the earth where deep secrets hide. And there did dance with the elements, and spring forth as flowered plant, concealing secrets strange. When you were in the ear of grain, spirits of the field came to cast their light upon you, and aid you in your growth. Thus through you we shall be touched by that same Race, and the mysteries hidden within you, we shall obtain even unto the last of these grains."

The Gain Mysteries are associated with Lucifero who, beneath the earth, is known as Noctifer or Nottambulo (the Night Walker). The light of the stars in the Underworld, emanating from Lucifer, give illumination in every sense of the word. It is the mystery teaching that light is at home in the darkness – literally, enlightenment in the places of darkness.

Lucifero is the star seeder, the light of renewal, just as Lucibello is the renewer of light at the mating of fireflies in the wheat fields on the summer solstice. He offers light and enlightenment wherever it is absent, and he is revealer of the hidden mysteries. It is through his descent to earth, and his penetration into the dark realm below, that Lucifero impregnates the earth with revealing light. The falling stars that connect with his mythos are sometimes regarded as his allies or fellow star beings that join him on the earth.

Fragmented elements of what can be called the Lucifero Mysteries peer out from several popular pieces of Italian literature. One interesting account is found in the writings of a man named Matteo Palmieri. On August eve, in 1451, he dreamed that his dead friend Cipriano Rucellai appeared to him with an invitation to join him on a trip to the yearly festival celebrated on the first of August. The festival was known as Il Paradiso, held near Florence. In his dream, Matteo accompanied the ghost of Cipriano to the festival, and along the way they speak about the state of spirits after death. The conversation includes where they dwell, and how they are permitted to revisit the living.

During the discussion, Cipriano revealed various matters to Palmieri concerning the nature of the human soul. He told him how God first created hosts of angels separated into three companies. One group followed Lucifer, when he rebelled. The second group held fast to the angel Michael and affirmed their allegiance. The third group did not side with God or with Lucifer. After Lucifer's departure, the angels of the third group were then relegated to the Elysian Fields. In the matter of the third class of angels, God desired to give them a final chance to choose sides, which he designated as good and evil. God ordained that each angel in the group is to be sent, one by one, to dwell in human bodies. The angels are allowed to choose their lives on the earth, and are accompanied by a good and a bad spirit. After the death of the inhabited body, each angel is then drafted into the company of Lucifer or Michael according to their conduct during the material life. Palmieri composed a poem titled *tersa rima*, which details the conversation in his dream.

Palmieri's dream ties in with the teachings regarding a class of beings in Italian witchcraft known as the Grigori. The name is rooted in the Italian word grigio, which means gray, and in this light the Grigori are the Grey Ones (neither black or white). In the Italic mythos of these Grigori, they first appear to humans from a gray mist. In Hebrew angelic lore there is a class of angels called the Grigori who are also known as the Watchers. These beings feature prominently in several modern systems of witchcraft and Wicca.

Lucifero is not directly connected to the Grigori in Italian witchcraft, but does share the stellar associations. In other words he is not named as their leader, and he is not identified as one of the Grigori. As a figure in Italian witchcraft, Lucifer has evolved over the centuries, during which time Christian elements were added to the non-Christian origins of his mythos. By the time of the writings of Charles Leland, Lucifer appears to be identified (in some circles) with the Judeo-Christian devil mythos. It may be that certain groups of witches venerated this depiction of Lucifer, but others did not.

As Christian influences found their way into Italian witchcraft, such elements as Saint veneration helped create a detour from the non-Christian Lucifer over to the Christian one. Some groups embraced the Christian elements and integrated them into a new form of the Old Craft, which came to be called Stregoneria. The Old Ways maintained the non-Christian understanding and continued on as Stregheria (the Old Religion). However, by Leland's era the waters were well muddied, and this resulted in much of the confusion we have today about Italian witchcraft traditions. Likewise it leaves things ripe for a misunderstanding of Lucifer as an entity as well as a figure in Italian witchcraft.

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