

Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa. Petersen, eds. *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*. Oxford and New York City: Oxford University Press, 2013. 289 pp. ISBN: 9780199779246. £60.00 (hardcover), £22.50 (paperback).

Few new religious movements evoke such sensationalism and fear as Satanism, a term used collectively in reference to a variety of magico-religious spiritual paths that venerate, in one way or another, the traditional bogeyman of Christendom. Following on from where Petersen's previous edited volume, *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology* (Ashgate, 2009), left off, *The Devil's Party* contains twelve papers from academics currently involved in the expanding field of Satanism Studies. In doing so, it draws from historical, sociological, and religious studies perspectives, providing a welcome interdisciplinary addition to a rapidly expanding corpus.

*The Devil's Party* opens with a handy little introduction in which the editors outline – and, briefly, critically evaluate – prior research into this controversial subject. This is invaluable for readers not already well acquainted with the field. The rest of the book is divided into four quarters, each containing three papers. The first is titled “The Question of History: Precursors and Currents,” and begins with Mikael Häll's discussion of those unusual individuals who claimed a relationship with the Devil in the court accounts of Early Modern Sweden. Noting that at the time some considered “the Devil as a kind of god of the outlawed and enemy of the established order” (37), he presents a convincing argument that these individuals could – from a scholar of Satanism's viewpoint – be considered Satanists. Although a fascinating account of Swedish folk religion and popular belief in the time of the witch trials, the paper lacks reference or integration with wider studies into Early Modern witchcraft beliefs across Europe; in particular the paper would have benefited from reference to the works of Emma Wilby, which deal with similar beliefs in Britain. Ruben van Luijk follows this with his paper on the “Romantic Satanists,” members of the nineteenth-century literati whom he considers to have been sorely neglected in prior studies of religious Satanism. He aims to reclaim these figures as forefathers of modern Satanic thought, arguing that their reappraisal of Satan as a heroic, anti-establishment figure made later Satanism possible. It's an interesting hypothesis, though he fails to illustrate any explicit links between these “Romantic Satanists” and more recent practitioners. Faxneld then presents his chapter on the Satanic ideas of Stanislaw Przybyszewski (1868–1927), a Polish decadent author and anarchist who made his name in Berlin's *fin de siècle* avant-garde. Exploring Przybyszewski's views

on Satan, human evolution, and the innate satanic nature of women, Faxneld considers him a figure of particular significance for being “probably the first person ever to attempt formulating an actual *system* of satanic thought,” (54) going so far as to suggest that he be considered “the first Satanist.” (74)

Part Two, “The Black Pope and the Church of Satan,” is devoted to the activities of Anton Szandor LaVey (1930–1997), the American founder of the Church of Satan and primary theorist behind the occult current of LaVeyan Satanism. In her paper, Amina Olander Lap analyses LaVey’s early written work, and employs Paul Heelas’ understandings of “self spirituality” in order to draw comparisons with the contemporary New Age and Human Potential Movements. Although identifying some of LaVey’s sources, it is sadly not explained how he developed these concepts, or how they changed in his later work. Eugene V. Gallagher proceeds with a textual analysis of “The Book of Satan,” the shortest part of LaVey’s *The Satanic Bible* (1969), exploring how and why he selectively used text appropriated from the pseudonymous Ragnar Redbeard’s far right tract, *Might is Right*, presenting the interesting argument that LaVey was more innovative than has previously been assumed. In his chapter, Asbjørn Dyrendal examines the relationship between LaVey and conspiracy culture, highlighting that while “The Black Pope” was contemptuous of conspiracy theorists, there was also a conspiracist element to LaVey’s own thought, particularly regarding his beliefs in societal threats to human individuality. Papers such as these do scholarship a great service in fleshing out the life and thought of one of the United States’ most important religious figures of the twentieth century.

Three sociological chapters are then provided in “The Legacy of Dr. LaVey: The Satanic Milieu Today,” which opens with James R. Lewis’ discussion of conversion to Satanism. Based on his own on-going research, it draws heavily on comparisons with conversion to contemporary Paganism, which is of great interest but also distracts a little from the topic at hand. Petersen follows with his discussion of the articulation of transgression within Satanism, highlighting how practitioners often play up to sensationalist stereotypes by using blasphemy, violence, and political extremism, but conversely sanitize their beliefs by denouncing acts such as child sacrifice. Rafal Smoczynski then offers an examination of the web-based Satanic collective in Poland, interpreting them as proponents of Enlightenment liberalism; an interesting contrast could have been drawn with Poland’s black metal community, who also make heavy use of Satanic iconography but are neglected here.

The final quarter is devoted to “Post-Satanism, Left-Hand Paths, and Beyond:

Visiting the Margins,” and begins with Kennet Granholm’s ground-breaking discussion of terminology. Rightly criticising “Satanism” as a word carrying pejorative connotations, he suggests that scholars studying the phenomenon replace it with the more accurate “Left Hand Path.” Conversely, he argues that the term “Post-Satanism” has utility in describing those followers of “dark spirituality” who have moved away from the figure of Satan but continue with their antinomian religious stance. As for case studies to support his well thought-out arguments, he turns to the Temple of Set and the Dragon Rouge. The following chapter consists of Fredrik Gregorius’ pioneering discussion of Luciferian Witchcraft, an esoteric current that blends elements of Satanism with contemporary Paganism, and which will prove a great starting point for those, like myself, engaged in the study of the “Traditional Witchcraft” movement. The volume is rounded off with Jacob C. Senholt on the Order of Nine Angles, a British-based white supremacist group whom he has extensively studied through his doctoral research. Senholt’s excellent work will undoubtedly be of use to law enforcement alongside academia, considering the Order’s embrace of extreme violence and history of uniting with militant Islamism in their quest to overturn the “old order.”

As can be expected with any academic anthology, there is a disparity in the quality and level of research that has gone into these papers; Senholt’s for instance is based on his in-depth, investigative PhD research, whereas Gregorius’ is based largely on a reading of several key texts. That is not to say that his work is of lesser value, for it will be of clear advantage to many scholars, but this is nevertheless a caveat worth bearing in mind. Though attractively titled, I must question the choice of “modernity” within the subtitle, a term which carries with it sociological implications. The editors do not use their introduction to explain exactly what they mean by “modernity” here, which I consider unfortunate; is Satanism a product of late modernity, or should it be considered post-modern? These questions are left unanswered. Also unfortunate is the book’s lack of imagery, although Oxford University Press have published it with a striking cover design featuring a detail from Andre Jacques Victor Orsel’s *Good and Evil* (1832).

The majority of scholars featured in this volume are working from within northern parts of continental Europe; three are based in Norway, another three in Sweden, two in Denmark, and one each in Finland, Poland, the Netherlands and the United States. If this is indicative of the areas where Satanism studies are most active – and I believe it is – then this is indeed interesting, contrasting for instance with the Anglo-American domination of Pagan

studies and the fact that the majority of Satanisms described in the volume are Anglo-American in origin. Most contributors seem to place their work largely in an etic category, and the anthology therefore provides an intriguing counterbalance to another recent volume in the study of western esotericism with a focus on Paganism, *Pathways in Modern Western Magic* (Concrescent Press, 2012), edited by Nevill Drury and containing contributors from a number of practitioner-scholars. From a perfunctory examination of those active within the field of Satanism studies, it appears that the majority have adopted an etic approach to the subject; this clearly contrasts with the situation in Pagan studies, where serious questions have been raised regarding the dominant role played by active practitioner-scholars.

Overall, I would have no problem recommending this volume to anyone involved in witchcraft studies, the academic study of Western esotericism, or research into new religious movements. Certainly, it will be obligatory reading for all those active in Satanism studies. It is an excellent piece of work, and reading through it, I am comforted that the future of Satanism studies is in good hands.

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