Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen


Satan is alive and well in the contemporary media landscape. In 2014, the Satanic Temple (TST) launched a crowdfunding campaign to finance the construction of a statue in honor of the Horned One, to be presented to the Oklahoma State Capitol. The campaign could be considered an exercise in strategic blasphemy; a clever way to illuminate the breach of church-state separation caused by the previous instalment of a gifted monument to the Ten Commandments. Since, TST has promoted religious freedom and social justice through numerous highly publicized initiatives. _The Invention of Satanism_, in which three international experts in the field trace the articulation and development of contemporary Satanism as a religious movement, uses the Oklahoma incident as its departing point. While TST is not treated in detail within the book (most likely as its ascent to international fame is very recent, by academic publishing standards), its success in attracting media attention shows that Satan still packs a powerful punch as an antinomian cultural symbol. _The Invention of Satanism_ is a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand why, as well as how this provocative aspect of Satanic symbolism impacts identity construction among Satanists today.

Based on more than ten years of research on the Satanic milieu, including interviews, surveys, census data, and emic texts, the main focus of the work is the emergence of Satanism as a ‘religious and philosophical position’ (p. 2). The book comprises a brief discussion of historical interpretations of Satan, as well as the polemical construction of alleged devil worshippers from medieval witch hunts to the Satanic scare of the late twentieth century. The authors also trace the positive revaluation of Satan in modernity through the works of Romantic Satanists such as Blake, Byron, and Shelley, before summarizing the importance of Satanic symbolism in _fin-de-siècle_ occultism. Subsequently, the authors relay the formation within the 1960s cultic milieu of a self-conscious Satanic movement, epitomized by the Church of Satan (CoS) and Anton LaVey, whose most widely read work, _The Satanic Bible_, is also scrutinized. A substantial portion of the book centers on the results of three quantitative surveys conducted in the Satanic milieu over the course of a decade, dubbed the ‘Satan Surveys’.

_The Invention of Satanism_ provides an accessible and highly informative introduction to contemporary Satanism as a religious movement. Succinctly covering a number of important themes in the history of Satanism, it will be especially useful to students and scholars interested in contemporary Western
esotericism, Paganism, and New Religious Movements (NRMs). It also suggests many fruitful venues for future research. Although the book would have benefited from a more substantial reflexive discussion of the potential pitfalls and drawbacks of online surveys as research method, the presentation of the Satan Surveys is nonetheless a significant contribution to research on contemporary Satanism, that will be of great interest to anyone seeking to understand the demographic spread, worldviews, beliefs, and practices of contemporary Satanists. The overview of Satanists’ political views and affiliations as well as their sources of literary inspiration is greatly interesting, and the demonstrably liberal views discovered among a majority of respondents challenge the notion that all Satanists are ruthless Randians. The Satan Surveys also indicated a proportional increase over time in Satanists who believe in a personal Devil. This is a fascinating development, which merits further attention in future research. It is not least relevant in relation to the future of more recent organizations such as the TST, which currently presents itself as agnostic. Despite this growing metaphysical trend in the Satanic milieu, LaVey’s *Satanic Bible* remains an important work, showing that contemporary Satanists do not merely copy, but creatively reinterpret aspects of existing Satanic thought. The authors’ conceptualization of conversion to Satanism as partly a form of identity construction is also interesting, and sheds light on how the antinomian and provocative aspects of Satanic symbolism contribute to attracting interest. The notion of conversion as identity construction could also fruitfully be applied to other religious fields.

The thorough exploration of the various sub-sections of the *Satanic Bible* and their respective similarities and differences is a valuable addition to research on contemporary Satanic ideology. The authors trace intertextual connections of the *Satanic Bible* to earlier esoteric and political works, thus demonstrating both LaVey’s indebtedness to these sources as well as his creativity and innovation. Importantly, the authors highlight that LaVey did not emerge in a vacuum, but that his success as a producer of religious ideology was rooted in his ability to successfully navigate tensions and disparate views within an existing Satanic milieu.

Although *The Invention of Satanism* is a significant contribution to its field, the title of the work is perhaps overly ambitious in relation to its content. Rather than the invention of Satanism as such, the book focuses primarily on a particular brand of contemporary Satanism in the West. LaVey is the only Satanic thinker whose work is analyzed in-depth, and the thought and works of a number of other prominent Satanic and Left-Hand Path authors are mostly mentioned in passing. A reflexive discussion of the geocultural demarcations of the study would also have benefited the book. For instance, the use of Satanic