Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology, edited by Jesper Aagaard Petersen. Ashgate Publishing, 2009. 277pp., hb., \$99.95. ISBN-13: 9780754652861.

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This anthology offers a variety of scholarly articles; eight of them appear for the first time in this collection while eleven others have been rewritten or have previously appeared in other sources. It compiles many different academic perspectives on the phenomena of contemporary religious Satanism on topics ranging from Satanism in post-Soviet Eastern Europe to Satanic influences in the black metal music scene to sociological analyses of statistics culled from census data. Several of these contributing authors include recognized authorities in the field of new religious movements such as James R. Lewis and Graham Harvey. The book is divided into three parts, with the first part focusing on history, tradition, and legitimacy, the second part on regional studies, and the third part featuring primary sources, all written by established Satanists such as Vexen Crabtree and Ole Wolf, and even includes an excerpt from the seminal *Lords of the Left Hand Path: A History of Spiritual Dissent* by Stephen E. Flowers.

In Chapter 1, Jesper Peterson informs the reader that the purpose of the book is not to rehash the same decades-old stories of alleged satanic ritual abuse but to academically analyze the new religious movements falling under the umbrella category of “contemporary religious Satanism.” To bring this terminology into focus, Peterson unpacks each term as follows: “contemporary” refers to the post-1960s (after the founding the Church of Satan), “religious” denotes its substantive and functional definitive realities in that it focuses on personal empowerment and development of the self, and “Satanism” as it refers to all individuals and communities that relate to Satan as a symbolic representation of “sex, pride, non-conformity, rebellion, and individualism” (2). Satan may or may not be understood to exist as a literal being. Satanists may be theistic or atheistic in their approach, but regardless of how practitioners conceive of Satan they all assume an adversarial stance toward all institutions of authority, including but not necessarily limited to those of a religious nature. Peterson acknowledges that Satanism as a tradition is a

“contested space” among those both within and outside of it, as these players constantly strive to define what constitutes “true” Satanism. Peterson offers three main subcategories that Satanic groups may fall under: reactive paradigmatically conform (inverted Christianity), rationalist (LaVeyan Satanism), and esoteric forms (such as the Temple of Set). The four main traits Peterson identifies that unite all three of the above categories are self-religion, antinomianism, use of the word “Satan,” and a formulated ideological genealogy that is usually linked to Anton LaVey (2).

The book can be compared to the works of other scholars in the field such as James R. Lewis, whose trailblazing contributions of evaluating Satanism from a sociological perspective are augmented by Chapter 14, written by Dave Evans, regarding Satanism in the UK. Jesper Peterson’s previous study of treating contemporary Satanism as an internet phenomenon is comparable to chapters 8 and 10 by Milda Alisauskiene and Rafal Smoczynski, respectively, who each analyze online Satanic communities. As all of the articles in the book assume that the reader already has an operating familiarity with Satanism, the book is not intended for the layman or the uninitiated. It would best serve those scholars and graduate students who already have a working knowledge of Satanism and are interested in analyzing it further from its sociological, historical, and cultural contexts. Satanists would also find this book useful since it not only includes excerpts from primary sources but also scholarly material that will offer them valuable insight into their own religious identities and communities.

This book is important to the academic study of new religious movements because it examines Satanism from multicultural perspectives and unique angles that, to the best of my knowledge, were previously unexplored. Several of the chapters feature studies conducted in Europe, in places such as Italy (Chapter 13), Scandinavia (Chapter 11), the Baltic (Chapters 8 and 9), and the UK (Chapter 14). On the American continent, one study analyzes Satanism as it manifests in the southern United States (Chapter 7). Chapters 8 and 10 focus on the growth of online communities oriented around Satanism. Chapter 12 is devoted to Satanism as the thematic centerpiece of the early Scandinavian black metal scene, particularly on its role in lyrics, imagery, and justification for criminal activities such as murder and church arson as carried out by musicians such as Varg Vikernes of Burzum. Chapter 5 focuses on an analysis of The Church of Satan’s future following the death of its founder Anton LaVey in 1997. Chapter 6 explores adversarial entities other than the biblical Satan, such as Set, Typhon, and Ahriman, as found in different communities and practitioners within contemporary religious Satanism.

Much of the information presented in this book is still largely up to date, as the studies were all conducted within the past decade and the book was published in 2009. The primary sources found in the back of the book, written by established authorities within the Satanic community, offer the reader a glimpse of just how diverse the beliefs and practices of Satanism within the different Satanic communities can be.

However, there are some points of contention to be addressed. In the back of Chapter 12 on black metal there is a suggested list of bands and albums to start with, and while Gry Mørk makes some necessary recommendations such as Mayhem and Burzum, she leaves out one of the most important black metal bands of all time, Emperor. They should have been included not only because of their highly influential musical contributions to the genre beginning with their classic 1994 release, *In the Nightside Eclipse*, but also because several of the band members such as Samoth and Bård Faust were at the center of the scene's notorious criminal activities. Mørk contends that black metal from a gender studies perspective is largely a traditionally masculine movement, and while I agree with her for the most part, I would like to hear how she responds to the existence of Astarte, an all-female black metal band from Greece, as well as female black metal bands now emerging from countries like Iran, such as Seeds of Iblis, that are rebelling against patriarchy and Islam. She makes the statement that black metal is anti-homosexual, but is she aware that Ghaal, the former vocalist of Gorgoroth, is openly gay? What does she make of bands like Gorgoroth and Behemoth, who both performed concerts in Poland, and were both charged with breaking anti-blasphemy laws because of their stage antics such as having nude models hanging on crosses, impaled goat heads on stage, and destroying copies of the Bible during performances?

The only other suggestion I have for improvement here is the editing for grammatical and spelling mistakes. One such example is that the band Megadeth's name misspelled as "Megadeath" (178), and another is the phrasing "a overturning" (182). Finally there is the redundancy of the phrase "in other words," used twice in the same sentence (182).

Overall, this book is a must-have for all scholars of new religious movements and those interested in the academic study of Satanism as a contemporary phenomenon. All of the chapters are well researched, the information is accurate, and the presentation of controversial subject matter remains professional throughout. One of the main values of this book is that it presents serious studies about an often understudied and overlooked subject. This book strives to shine new light on many areas within Satanism that have previously

remained untouched by academia. It provides a much-needed contribution to the academic field of new religious movements and will hopefully generate more scholarly interest to pursue further research. This book is incredibly useful for those scholars seeking to examine Satanism as a cyber and global phenomenon.