CHAPTER 10

The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism
The Temple of Set and the Evolution of Satanism

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Introduction

In all human communication, 'names' have many different connotations, the number of which often depends on their relative popularity and familiarity. The thought that scholars can remain entirely unaffected by lay connotations of a term or can present value-laded terms neutrally to a general readership is naïve. It is not uncommon for scholarly terms to be adopted by nonscholars and given different connotations. The word 'cult' is a good example. From having been a sociological term for a distinct type of religiosity and its social organization, it was adopted by opponents of unorthodox, alternative religions to mean, more or less, 'bad religion'. This connotation is difficult to escape and is an important reason why sociologists of religion have all but abandoned use of the term. 'Satanism' is a word which, similar to the word 'cult', evokes various, mostly negative, and often emotive, associations in listeners and readers (cf. Petersen 2011).

Early on in my academic career, I expressed doubt about the analytical usefulness of the term 'Satanism' (Granholm 2001). With time, my position on the issue has not changed, but it has become more nuanced. In this article I present some problems I see with the scholarly use of the term, as well as some possible solutions to these problems. In particular, I will present the categories and approaches of the Left-Hand Path and post-Satanism and discuss how we, by using these approaches, can enrich the study of Satanism (and other similar phenomena) with increased theoretical and methodological

depth. I will demonstrate the usefulness of the latter term in particular by applying it to the Temple of Set, a group which, although it has the Egyptian deity Set as its main focus, is often labelled a satanic organization.

The disadvantages with the term Satanism

As noted, Satanism is a value-laded term which often invokes very negative connotations among scholars and nonscholars alike. When the term is brought up, it is expected that people will have some kind of presumptions of what is meant, but these presumptions seldom have much to do with the reality of Satanism. Satanism is usually seen as having to do with child and animal sacrifices, evil, deviance, and fascism, among others, even though research shows that this is not the case.[1] A situation where the term Satanism could be divorced from any pejorative connotations is difficult to imagine.

The discursive approach to the study of Satanism presented by Jesper Aagaard Petersen is interesting. As a complementary perspective to substantive definitions, Petersen proposes that the utterance 'I am a Satanist' can be regarded as a speech-act declaring and practicing an adversarial stance (Petersen 2009: 3). Further, he offers a definition of modern Satanism as a 'fuzzy' satanic milieu of key terms, practices, and ideas, as well as individuals and groups shading out into the cultic milieu. Within this polythetic entity, satanic discourse is defined through four main traits: self-religion, antinomianism, the use of *S* words, and a ideological genealogy (ibid.: 5–8). While very useful, this approach does not provide solutions to the problems the use of the term 'Satanism' evokes. I agree that the focus should be on discourse rather than on belief in Satan, and that this discourse is indeed concerned with practicing an adversarial stance—something I return to when I discuss both the Left-Hand Path and post-Satanism. There are, however, speech-acts which do not refer to Satan or Satanism but, nonetheless, can be regarded as part of the same adversarial discourse. Conversely, I would argue that the speech-act of claiming to be a Satanist does not necessarily need to be part of an adversarial discourse. Thus, with a focus on Satan and related mythological beings—something which by necessity is inherent in the term Satanism—several structurally and functionally similar movements and discourses would need to be left out.

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[1] See e.g., Granholm 2008 for the ecological and animal rights developments in the Temple of Set and Dragon Rouge; as well as Petersen 2011 and his contribution in the present volume on various discourses of evil and transgression.

I am also unconvinced that the approach of broadening our perspectives on what mythological figures should be considered to represent the satanic is a good one. Petersen (2009: 8) describes the word Set as related to the words Satan, Satanism, Satanic, and Satanist (when used as 'emic self-designation' within 'antinomian self-religions'). While Petersen does not propose a structural equation of Satan and other mythological beings, it still subsumes them under the general heading of 'Satan'. Where do we draw the line regarding which words should be considered related to the words Satan, Satanism, Satanic, and Satanist? Is the word Odin, from Old Norse mythology, also related to Satan? Should references to entities such as Set and Odin be regarded as essentially satanic in some way or only when combined with other aspects of 'satanic discourse'? Are utterances such as 'I am a Setian' or 'I am an Odinist' considered speech-acts that declare and practice an adversarial stance and *therefore* label a person a Satanist? While I can agree that considerable structural and functional similarities can be found in the uses of figures such as Satan in the Church of Satan, Set in the Temple of Set, and Odin in the Rune-Gild, labelling all these groups as Satanism is imprecise.

Moving outside the specificities of Petersen's approach, the focus on 'words related to the words Satan, Satanism, Satanic, and Satanist' in discussing modern religiosity has scholarly implications. For example, in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Esotericism in Scandinavia*, edited by Olav Hammer and Henrik Bogdan, the Temple of Set is included in the category 'Satanism' whereas the Rune-Gild and Dragon Rouge are included in the category 'Occultist Groups'. What are the essential differences between, for example, the Temple of Set and Dragon Rouge that firmly positions the former as Satanism but not the latter? Neither group defines itself as a satanic organization, and it is actually the latter that makes more frequent use of certain words such as Satan and Lucifer. Other than the Temple of Set being a direct descendent of the Church of Satan, whereas Dragon Rouge is not, I see no reason to include these two groups in different categories. Perhaps one could argue that it is the Temple's predominant focus on the figure of Set—contrasted to the extremely eclectic approach of Dragon Rouge—which makes it accurate to designate it as satanic. However, due to its eclectic approach, Michael W. Ford's Luciferian witchcraft (see Ford 2005) would then be disqualified from being included under the banner. This would also disregard the fact that the Temple of Set does indeed include other deities than Set on its menu, albeit generally in less prominent positions. The categorization of an organization such as the Rune-Gild (see Granholm 2010) is another thorny issue when using definitions of Satanism similar to the above one. The founder of Rune-Gild, Edred

Thorsson (Stephen E. Flowers), is a longtime member of the Temple of Set. The Gild also operates on much the same basic premises as the Temple. For example, both organizations have the same basic notions of natural and non-natural evolution, of the objective and subjective universes, and of the role attributed to the main deity in respective organization. By this logic then, particularly as the vocabulary used in reference to the Gild's central deity—the Old Norse Odin—is very similar to the vocabulary used regarding Set in the Temple, the Gild should be defined as a satanic organization. However, most scholars would probably agree that using this label on a heathen group focused on Germanic/Old Norse mythology and religion, which does not engage in discussion on Christianity to any noteworthy extent, is problematic.

The Left-Hand Path as an alternative

I use the term Left-Hand Path to denote the milieu of 'dark spirituality' that includes many forms of modern Satanism. The term has the benefit of being fairly unknown to the general population (other than in occultist circles of course), and therefore it lacks many of the negative connotations and presumptions that are actuated by the term Satanism. However, and more important from a theoretical and methodological standpoint, the terms have different foci. As I see it, the term 'Satanism' by necessity highlights the figure of Satan and an increasingly dubious collection of other mythological figures that are meant to be, in some way, analogous to the Christian devil. The term 'Left-Hand Path' has less baggage, and, thus, it is easier to shift the focus to specific discursive strategies and practices. It could be argued that the choice of the figure of Satan in the original Church of Satan is in itself based on an antinomian ethos. It could also be argued that the figure of Satan, at least for certain actors in the wider occult milieu, has become too familiar and overused to be of sufficient value in antinomian practices.

To summarize, I do find Jesper Aagaard Petersen's discursive approach very compelling. However, we need to escape the connection to the figure of Satan that the use of the term Satanism unequivocally brings with it. What should be under investigation are the structures and functions of discursive practices, and nothing should distract from this. Thus, saying 'I am a Satanist' can function as an adversarial stance in some contexts, whereas in others it can represent something else. Similarly, the claim to being a Setian, an Odinist, or a black magician can have the same basic function. The notion of Satan is simply not the most relevant here, but

rather the overall discursive constructs which may or may not be Satanist in a strict sense. Consequently, this focus on discursive practice is where Petersen and I converge (Petersen, 2009: 2–3, 7–8).[2]

The Left-Hand Path can be considered a distinct esoteric current, informed by the specific combination of the following three discourses:[3]

- The ideology of individualism; where the individual is positioned at the absolute centre of that person's existential universe.

- The goal of self-deification; interpreted in a wide variety of ways, but always involves the individual becoming in as total as possible control of his/her own existence.

- An antinomian stance; in which the individual questions and breaks societal, cultural, and religious taboos in the quest for personal liberation.

The above description presents the Left-Hand Path-current in its 'pure' form, something rarely seen in real life. Instead, esoteric currents—or discursive complexes—are commonly influenced by other discursive complexes and freestanding discourses. Dragon Rouge, for example, is, while being a Left-Hand Path movement, strongly influenced by several neopagan discourses as well (some of which I earlier erroneously placed within the Left-Hand Path discursive complex, see Granholm 2009). It should also be noted that this construct is not to be regarded as a checklist that can be used to determine whether a specific movement, philosophy, or phenomenon is Left-Hand Path or not. Rather, it represents a number of discursive traits that are in a central position in a number of philosophies that I have chosen to group together due both to their historical relation to each other and their structural and functional similarities. These traits are based on emic self-understandings, as well as an ongoing analysis of various movements. That this construct is posited on the level of discursive traits rather

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[2] The word 'discourse' is much used in the social sciences, but this has unfortunately led to its meaning often being obscured. I employ the term in a social constructionist, discourse analytical context. Here, the term refers to 'a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events' (Burr 1995: 48); or, put more simply, to 'a fixed way of talking about and understanding the world (or a section of it)' (Jørgensen and Phillips 2000: 7 [my translation]).

[3] I construe esoteric currents as discursive complexes, i.e., collections of specific discourses which in combination produce specific practices, 'beliefs', worldviews, etc. (see Granholm, forthcoming d). Particular discursive complexes focus general esoteric discourse, i.e., claims of higher knowledge and ways of accessing this knowledge (von Stuckrad 2005) in specifying *what* the higher knowledge is sought, and *how* it can be accessed.

than as aspects of doctrine and philosophy is of significance. We are here then looking at practices rather than thoughts, expressed on the levels of text, speech, and other symbolic systems. That this construct represents historical developments, particularly in the realm of the esoteric and the occult, helps us position the phenomena in a greater continuum of discursive practice and helps us examine their birth and development, as well as context and relation to and within other esoteric discourses (see von Stuckrad 2005 for the discursive take on the esoteric that my formulations are based on).

In particular, the discursive components of individualism and antinomianism play a significant part if we are to examine the phenomenon of modern religious Satanism (cf. Petersen 2009: 8). Here the speech-act of saying 'I am a Satanist' can be put in a context that helps to compare it with other speech-acts occurring within the same discursive complex and helps us understand how and why such speech-acts change through time while still remaining firmly within the same discursive tradition. In short, by examining contemporary Satanism through the idea of the Left-Hand Path we can include broader historical perspectives, as well as be able to grasp the larger societal phenomenon that it is a part of. As an added bonus, we will, at the same time, escape the problematic notion that figures such as Set, Odin, Ahriman, and Shiva, among others, would be in some way related to the Christian Devil outside emic discourse. This brings me to my earlier question of whether references to mythological entities such as Set and Odin should be considered satanic in some way. I say no. However, in looking at the discursive complexes in which these references are made, we may find that they are, in fact, expressions of the same general discourse that the speech-act of claiming to be a Satanist is. Clearly, then, this discourse should not be labelled satanic or Satanism but rather adversarial or antinomian.

Introducing a new concept: post-Satanism

In addition to the term 'Left-Hand Path', the concept of 'post-Satanism' provides some interesting analytical benefits. From having been somewhat dismissive of these benefits in my essay in the anthology *Contemporary Religious Satanism* (Granholm 2009), I have come to regard them more positively. When dealing with the methodological and terminological problems that the scholarly use of the term 'Satanism' brings up, the concept of 'post-Satanism' is very useful indeed. It highlights both continuity and change in the realm of 'dark spirituality', while providing a way to avoid the

inescapable connection to the figure of Satan that I argue goes hand in hand with the use of the term Satanism.

The term 'post-Satanism' can be used in two complementary ways. One way is to use it to refer to groups and individuals that relate to the idea of Satanism in some manner but reject the term as a self-designation. Commonly, it would then be about seeing Satanism more as a 'thing of the past'. This would include a group such as Dragon Rouge, where certain members have expressed views on Satanism as something which might initially spark the interest in the Left-Hand Path, but that one will eventually leave behind to go to 'more mature' alternatives (Granholm 2005, 165). Looking at the use of transgressive symbols in Dragon Rouge, particularly the absence of such a 'traditional' satanic symbol as the inverted pentagram in any official capacity, the desire not to be defined as a satanic organization is evident (see Granholm, forthcoming a; forthcoming b). The second way to use the term post-Satanism is to relate it to movements, groups, and philosophies that have a self-defined satanic background but abandoned the self-definition, for one reason or another, along with the attribution of specific importance to Satan or related words. This would include a group such as the Temple of Set. Although the Temple is an outgrowth of LaVey's original Church of Satan, the deity Set is given prominence, and the words Satan and Satanism are as good as absent in internal material and discussion (but still used in publically available material, which is interesting in itself). An author such as Michael W. Ford and his 'Luciferian witchcraft' could possibly also be included here; self-identification with Satanism is present but deities such as the Zoroastrian Ahriman are given prominence. One could also discuss the Rune-Gild and the rune magical publications of Edred Thorsson as postsatanic, because they represent developments of discourses contained within the Temple of Set.

The focus here is on processes of transformation, that is to say, processes through which satanic discourse has changed both in relation to the occult milieu and broader societal, cultural, and religious contexts. The key question then becomes how and why 'Satanism has evolved beyond Satanism'. What variables have changed so that the speech-act of saying 'I am a Satanist' is, for some people, no longer regarded as having the same power and appeal as an adversarial practice as it once did? In this, I feel it is beneficial to again look at the central components of the Left-Hand Path. If we examine the processes involved in the discursive trait of antinomianism, we can observe that self-identifying as a Satanist is unlikely to contain its antinomian power indefinitely. The loss of antinomian power the term has suffered is in part due to societal transformations involving increased tolerance for (certain) religious pluralism, and a situation where Christian concepts such as Satan no longer hold the same

sway. This, in turn, could be partly due to the visibility of the word due to the (over)use of it by self-proclaimed Satanists such as those of the Church of Satan.[4] Other symbols and words, such as black and/or dark magic, seem to present higher levels of antinomian power. This could be due to the lesser prominence and unfamiliarity of these words. The same applies to a symbol such as the inverse pentagram. In the Temple of Set, the more 'classically' and openly satanic elements of the pentagram (such as Hebrew letters spelling out Leviathan and a goat's head) are discarded. The pentagram then becomes more a symbol of personal liberation and esoteric mystery (see Granholm, forthcoming c).

The Temple of Set

The Temple of Set is a magic order which has been both vilified and placed under the label Satanism, two factors that regularly go hand in hand and demonstrate the negative connotations and repercussions of the term Satanism. The group came under much fire particularly during the satanic panic of the 1980s and 1990s (Best, Bromley, and Richardson 1991; Victor 1993). For example, leading members of the Temple were accused of everything from child abuse (Goldston 1988) to fascism and racism (Maroney 1990). The group was even the subject of a sensationalist book that presented a 'chilling expose' of the Temple's vile secrets (Blood 1994). The Temple sued, however, and the book was deemed libellous and was quickly withdrawn from the market.

When it comes to scholarship on the Temple of Set, much of what can be found is very short (e.g., Harvey 2008: 613–620) and/or dreadful in quality.[5] A good example of the latter is Gini Graham Scott's book-length study *The Magicians* (Scott 2007 [1986]). The book is based on ethnographic research and focuses on The Temple of Set under the pseudonym 'Church of Hu', as well as an unnamed Wiccan group. The study is certainly not short, but is made nearly unusable by the numerous errors in regard to almost every aspect of philosophy, practice, and administrational and initiatory structures of the Temple. Furthermore, Scott's understanding of magic in esoteric contexts is critically limited, and she uses outdated anthropological studies

[4] This point, however, should not be overstated. It is fairly safe to claim that various popular cultural products have played a much more important part in 'de-antinomianizing' Satan.
[5] For accounts of the Temple by members see e.g., Flowers 1997; Webb 2004; Kotkavuori 2007; Aquino 2010.

of 'primitive magic' in non-Western societies to explain magic in the context of the Temple. As Fredrik Gregorius notes, when studying magic, different historical contexts cannot be dismissed (2009: 25; see also Lehrich 2003: 3–11; and Pasi 2007). A result of Scott's use of outdated sources, neglect for the distinctiveness of different cultural contexts, and serious misunderstandings regarding both her chosen field and esotericism in general is that she regards, or at least presents, magic as ultimately based on false premises, the classic Frazerian notion of magic as 'primitive science'.[6] Thus, Scott can only reconcile the existence of magic in the communities she studies as being based on the attempt to gain social power amongst individuals who have none.[7] These factors necessitate a brief overview of the Temple of Set in this context.

Early history

The Temple of Set was founded in 1975 but is a direct descendent of the Church of Satan. Michael Aquino, a lieutenant and specialist in psychological operations in the U.S. military, joined the Church of Satan in 1969 (Aquino 2009: 41–44). Aquino was an active member and quickly rose in rank in the church. He was the editor of the church's internal newsletter *Cloven Hoof*, established one of the first local chapters (called grottos), and was initiated into the fourth- and second-highest degrees in the church's initiatory system (the fifth and final degree was reserved solely for the high priest). In 1975, LaVey instituted some changes in the church that Aquino and a number of other members were dissatisfied with, and which they felt represented a betrayal of the core principles of the church (Aquino 2009: 412–427). On June 10, 1975, Aquino therefore decided to relinquish his membership in the church, and on the summer solstice of the same year he performed a

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[6] The question of how Scott herself regards magic is difficult to answer, because her critical view of it is confounded when considering later books she wrote and published, such as *Mind Power: Picture Your Way to Success in Business* (1987) and *Shamanism for Everyone* (1989).

[7] This is an additional problem with the study, as several members of the Temple of Set do, in fact, wield significant amounts of societal and social power. They are e.g., high-ranking military officers, successful academics, and fairly affluent businessmen. This is however a whole other subject, and one beyond the scope of the present study. My attempt is not to fuel the fires of any satanic conspiracy theory. These people do not control the world, nor do they wish to. For an interesting take on these matters, see Dyrendal's contribution to the present volume. With regards to social 'deprivation' theories and Satanism, see also Moody 1974.

magical working in order to seek guidance on what to do next. He invoked Satan, but came instead into contact with an entity that identified itself as the ancient Egyptian deity, or *Neter*, Set. Similarly to Aleister Crowley and his reception of the *Book of the Law* seventy-one years earlier, Aquino wrote down the text *The Book of Coming Forth by Night* as a result of the working. In the text, which is structured as a message from Set, the Egyptian deity identifies itself as the archetype that functioned as model for the creation of the Christian mythological being Satan. The entity also informs that the Aeon of Set has now begun, with the 1966–1975 Age of Satan as a preparatory period, and that it is up to Aquino to continue the work that had started with and in the church of Satan (Aquino 2010: 170–175).

Philosophy and core practices

The post-1975 Church of Satan claims that it has always understood Satan as a symbol rather than a real being (Gilmore 2005). Aquino, on the other hand, claims that the early Church did in fact treat Satan as an actually existing entity (Aquino 2010: 10). In the Temple, Set is regarded as a real being, and, as written in *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*, the only god not created by humans (Aquino 2010: 171). In contrast to many contemporary depictions, Set is not regarded as an evil god, but instead as the origin of 'isolate intelligence', that is, the possibility of a human being to reach true individuality and spiritual perfection. The idea is that Set is the origin of a human being's self-consciousness, something which in the Temple is called 'the Black Flame' and 'the Gift of the Prince of Darkness' (Kotkavuori 2007: 22).

The most central concept in the philosophy of the Temple of Set is *Xeper*. This Egyptian term is translated as 'becoming' (Aquino 2005: 21) and refers, according to Aquino, to 'the transformation and evolution of the Will from a human to a divine state of being—by deliberate, conscious, individual force of mind' (ibid.: 114). Put simply, *Xeper* refers to processes through and in which the individual magician furthers his or her spiritual development. The term is also used as a phrase of greeting among members of the Temple.

The worldview of the Temple of Set is anchored in the concepts of 'objective' and 'subjective universe'. The former refers to the natural world and collective belief-and meaning-systems. The latter refers to the individual's personal meaning-system and experiential world, and there are as many subjective universes as there are individuals (Kotkavuori 2007: 17–21). These intertwined concepts are central to the two main forms of magic

practised in the Temple, Lesser Black Magic (LBM) and Greater Black Magic (GBM). In practicing LBM, the magician manipulates the objective universe, in Aquino's words LBM 'is the influencing of beings, processes, or objects in the objective universe by the application of obscure physical or behavioral laws' (2005: 72). One way of doing this is in real-life situations where the magician manipulates the perceptions of other people by consciously presenting a specific image of him or herself; for example, convincing a potential employer that he or she is the right person for the job. LBM can, however, also be employed in more traditional ritual contexts. Because both ritual and ceremony are, in the Temple, considered to relay conceptions of unconscious acts, the term 'working' is preferred.

GBM is, according to Aquino (2005: 88), 'the causing of change to occur in the subjective universe in accordance with the will'. The effects are, however, more extensive than in LBM as 'this change in the subjective universe may cause a similar and proportionate change in the objective universe' (ibid.). The core idea is that the magician transforms his or her own experiential universe, which in turn may affect the experiential universes of other people around him or her, and these two factors in conjunction have a concrete effect in the objective universe. A good example can be found in the work of *Arkte*, discussed in more detail later, where the participants work for animal liberation. The magicians changed their perceptions of human-animal relations, which led many of them to adopt vegetarian diets and/or do volunteer work in animal shelters, which in turn had concrete effects on both the physical world and the sentiments of people the magicians come into contact with.

Organization and structures

In the United States, the Temple of Set is registered as a nonprofit organization and is thus entitled to tax benefits (Aquino 2010, 34, 256–288, 469). The organization is officially led by a high priest/priestess who is the public face and spiritual leader of the Temple (Aquino 2010: 273–274).[8] This person is elected from among fourth or higher degree members by the chairman of a ruling council called the Council of Nine (Aquino 2010: 269–273). This ruling council consists of nine members elected from

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[8] High priests/priestesses since the beginning have been Michael Aquino (1975–1979, 1982–1996, 2002–2004), Ronald K. Barrett (1979–1982), Don Webb (1996–2002), Zeena Schreck (the daughter of Anton LaVey, 2002), and Patricia Hardy (2004–) (Aquino 2010).

among the priesthood of the Temple; that is, members of degree three and higher in the Temple's initiatory system, and the mandate is for nine years with a new member being elected each year. The council is lead by a chairman who is chosen from among the council members each year. The council has ruling power in issues regarding the Temple, and even the high priest/priestess is ultimately responsible to it. In addition to the council and the high priest, the Temple also has an executive director—nominated by the council from among members of the priesthood—who deals with administrative tasks (Aquino 2010: 274–275).

The Temple of Set is an initiatory order, meaning it has a degree structure that indicates the level of spiritual development and skill in magic of the individual members. The initiatory structure is based on the Church of Satan, which in turn was based on the structure developed by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (see Howe 1972; Bogdan 2007: 121–144). Whereas the Church of Satan has five distinct degrees, the Temple has six.[9] When joining the Temple, a person needs to contact a member of the priesthood and engage in premembership negotiations with him or her. If personal contact with a member of the priesthood is impossible, one sends an application along with a letter of introduction to the executive director of the organization (Temple of Set 2010). If both the Temple representative and the applicant agree that the Temple is suitable for the applicant, and the applicant suitable for the Temple, the person is accepted as a member of the first degree. The process of scrutiny is quite rigorous, and not all who apply for membership are accepted. Furthermore, a new member has two years time in which to qualify for the second degree or have his or her affiliation with the Temple severed. In essence, this means that the member needs to demonstrate a basic knowledge of Setian philosophy and skill in magic. The new member gets a diploma, a white medallion with an inverse pentagram in silver for use in magical workings, and access to the 'Crystal Tablet of Set'—a collection of documents detailing the Temple's approach to magic, among other things. Each subsequent degree has a medallion of a different colour (II°—red, III°—black, IV°—blue, V°—purple, VI°—gold), where each colour has a distinct symbolism, and its own 'Jewelled Tablet of Set' with material relevant to that particular degree. The 'Ruby Tablet of Set', for second-degree members, is the most sizeable and contains the most diverse material.

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[9] The degrees are: I°—Setian, II°—Adept, III°—Priest/Priestess, IV°—Magister/Magistra Templi, V°—Magus/Maga, and VI°—Ipsissimus/Ipsissima (Aquino 2005: 24–25).

Initiations in the Temple regime are termed recognitions. The explanation for the choice of term lies in the Temple's philosophy, which holds that no organization can provide spiritual development, that is, initiation. Instead, it is the individual member who initiates him or herself, and the Temple simply acknowledges the member's new state of being (Aquino 2005: 20–22). Most members of the Temple never advance beyond the second degree nor are they expected to (Aquino 2005: 29–30).

On recognition into the third degree, something which can be acknowledged by a fourth or higher degree member (Aquino 2010: 265), the initiate is considered part of the priesthood of Set. This involves greater responsibilities towards the organization, such as the preparedness to act as a teacher to more junior members. While first- and second-degree members primarily use the Temple as a tool to advance their own spiritual development, priests and priestesses are official representatives of the Temple. It is also the priesthood that has the power to recognize the adepthood of a first-degree member, and sponsor second-degree members in the founding of local groups, called 'pylons' (Aquino 2005: 30–31).

The fourth degree, which is acknowledged by the high priest/priestess and reified by a majority by the Council of Nine (Aquino 2010: 266), entails that the member has advanced far enough on his or her initiatory path to found his or her own school of magic, represented in an Order. The fifth degree, which is acknowledged by the high priest/priestess and requires the unanimous consent of the Council of Nine (ibid.), entails that the member has '"stepped outside" the totality of the existing Æonic formula to alter it in an evolutionary way' (Aquino 2005: 31). In practice, this means that the member utters and defines a concept which in some way transforms and affects the philosophy of the Temple. An example of such a concept is *Xeper*, discussed previously, and uttered by Aquino himself when founding the Temple. Another example is *Arkte*, uttered by Lilith Aquino in the year 2000 and which 'calls upon the initiatory capacity of humankind to realize that animal intelligence must be measured against its own benchmark, not ours, and that as such it goes beyond mere "instinct" to various forms of metaphysical awareness pertinent to each species' (Aquino, L. 2000). Only a handful of members have reached the fifth degree and even less 'fifth-degree words' are still actively treated. This is due to a few of the fifth-degree members having left the Temple at some point, which makes them unable to elaborate on and develop the concepts they originally uttered. The sixth and final degree, defined concisely as representing 'a "successful magus": one who's Task is complete' (Aquino 2005: 32) is only held by a very select few within the Temple. Any fifth-degree member may make the assessment to assume the sixth degree on his or her own (Aquino 2010: 267).

The initiatory work of the Temple's members is conducted primarily on an individual level. In order to facilitate this work, however, the Temple has a number of pylons in different parts of the world (Aquino 2010: 282–283). A member usually joins the pylon closest to his or her location but applying for membership in a different pylon is possible. There also exist correspondence-based pylons, which, nowadays, commonly operate over the Internet. This provides support for members who do not have a local group in their immediate vicinity. Pylons are supervised by second or higher degree members who are called 'sentinels'. Although second-degree members can found pylons, a local group needs to secure the sponsorship of a member of the priesthood. Individual pylons have specific foci and the diversity is considerable. The common conduct is, however, that meetings include both theoretical and conceptual discussion and practical magical work.

In addition to the individual work and the pylons, initiatory magical work is also conducted in the Temple's elements and orders. 'Elements' are loosely structured interest groups where very specific issues and themes are treated (Aquino 2010: 110, 281–282). They can be available for nonmembers and are commonly operational only for short periods, although there are exceptions. One of the most significant of these exceptions is the *Arkte* element, where the focus lies on the examination of 'the Gift of the Prince of Darkness', that is, self-consciousness, in nonhuman animals. A major part of the activity of the element involves different forms of animal rights work on a practical level (see Granholm 2008). The 'orders' of the Temple can be likened to schools focusing on specific aspects of magic and providing different paths to initiation. A member I spoke to likened the Temple as a whole to a university and the Temple's orders to different departments with specific research interests within the university.[10] The most important order, as well as the oldest, is the 'order of the trapezoid', which has a focus on runes and Grail mysticism. Another important order is the 'order of the vampyre', which deals with the vampire as a model for the magician. Orders are founded by members who have reached the fourth-initiatory degree and represent these members' distinct approach to magic and spiritual development. Orders are led by grand masters, who often are the founder of the order in question. In the longer-lived orders, however, others than the original founder normally function as the grand master. When a member of the Temple reaches the second-initiatory degree he or she is expected to apply for membership in an order of his or her choice. In actuality, it often takes

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[10] Interview with Finnish male member of the Temple of Set, by author. Turku, Finland, March 9, 2007. Stored at the folklore archive at Åbo Akademi University.

quite some time before a new second-degree member applies for membership in an order. While a person can get special exemption to join more than one order, it is normally discouraged (Aquino 2010: 280–281).

Because the Temple is a relatively small organization, with around two hundred members in 2007, spread throughout the world, the Internet is one of the most important channels for communication.[11] The Temple has its own closed Intranet with various discussion groups. They also contain membership material accessible for the different levels of membership and electronic versions of the Temple's newsletter *Scroll of Set*, published four to six times a year.

The Temple of Set and the concept of post-Satanism

In this final section, I look at how the concepts and denominators of Satanism, the Left-Hand Path, and post-Satanism can be applied to the Temple of Set, as well as their relative usefulness. The predominant focus will be on the concept of post-Satanism.

Whichever way one looks at it, Satanism is not a proper way to describe the Temple of Set (cf. Gregorius 2006: 20). The word Satan and closely related ones, such as Lucifer and the Devil, receive almost no exposition whatsoever in internal Temple material. Certainly, the figure of Satan is not in a prominent position in Temple philosophy and practice. However, the Temple's relation to the greater 'satanic milieu' (cf. Petersen 2009) is a more complex issue. Temple writings include relatively much elaboration on the Church of Satan, as well as some discussion of the Setian as an 'evolved Satanist' (see Granholm 2009: 96). Due to this engagement with Satanism, the Temple can, in a general sense, be described as an actor in the satanic milieu.

Because the Temple of Set is one of the central movements examined when determining the key discursive components of the Left-Hand Path current, it quite naturally fits into this category. The discourses of individualism, self-deification, and antinomianism—the latter both in the use of transgressive symbols, such as the inverse pentagram and sentences such as 'the Prince of Darkness', and as an expressed ideology facilitating the liberation, individuation, and deification of the practitioner—are all explicitly present in Temple philosophy and practice. No more exposition is really needed in this context.

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[11] Interview with Patricia Hardy, high priestess of the Temple of Set, by author. Amsterdam, the Netherlands, September 30, 2007.

The Temple of Set is a textbook example of post-Satanism. It has a clearly identifiable and acknowledged background in a self-identified satanic group, the Church of Satan. The Satanism of the church is readily acknowledged, as is the Temple's background in and reliance upon the church. The Temple is also, however, a group which has forgone the use of the self-identifier 'Satanism'. 'Abandoning' the satanic goes through every level of the Temple's philosophy. Instead of Satan, or other closely identified biblical devil-figures such as Lucifer, the Temple has chosen the non-Christian Egyptian deity Set as its main focus. As discussed previously, the Temple's use of the inverse pentagram is also an illuminating example. While the inverted pentagram is a key symbol in the Church of Satan and many other forms of contemporary Satanism, the Temple has stripped the symbol of the overtly satanic add-ons that can be found in the Baphomet sigil of the Church of Satan. The Temple has also gone to lengths to motivate the meaning and significance of the pentagram in nonsatanic ways, referring to Pythagorean ideas and 'mathematical perfection' rather than to demonology or the Devil. The same goes for the trapezoid-symbol, used in both the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set. In the church, the symbol has a pitchfork/trident and flames included in it, whereas the Temple's version has replaced this with a left-facing Egyptian *Tchām* sceptre. While some versions of the Temple of Set trapezoid has the number 666 included, it is in the form of stylized geometrical shapes rather than clear numbers; the latter is used in the Church of Satan version of the symbol (see Granholm, forthcoming c).

The Temple's close relation to, but rejection of, self-designated Satanism is what marks it as a postsatanic group. In using this concept then, we can focus on the processes by and through which the Temple has diverged from the Church of Satan. In particular, the changes in the discourse of antinomianism would be under scrutiny. While it is impossible to provide any conclusive answers as to why the Temple's antinomian discursive practices differ from those of the church at this point, it is possible to speculate. One part of the explanation is the Temple's need to distinguish itself from its parent organization. By choosing a different symbol than Satan, the Temple staked out its own space in the contemporary occult milieu. Furthermore, in the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey had created a carnivalesque over-the-top entity in which both the church's public portrayal and LaVey's circus-like presentations of himself as 'the black pope' to an extent positioned Satan and Satanism as something more eccentric than dangerous and transgressive. By going in another direction, both in adopting a less well-known figure than Satan as its main symbol and in consciously refraining from cultivating an actively visible public presence, the Temple could

focus on 'inner antinomianism' in the form of psychological crossing of personal, but socially constructed, taboos, instead of public performances of transgressiveness.

This relates to Petersen's distinction between 'transgression from' and 'transgression to' (Petersen 2011). The former refers to a sort of 'rebellion for the sake of rebellion', a reactive transgression which confirms the norms transgressed. The latter, where the aim is to achieve personal liberation, is expressed in the 'inner antinomianism' common in groups such as the Temple of Set. In some ways, the Church of Satan represents both these forms of transgression. The early Church of Satan's approach to antinomianism, much of which could be termed public performances, did, in fact, play a part in making the figure of Satan less threatening. By this I do not primarily mean that the Church 'devalued' the symbol of Satan, but instead that it helped secure a space where later Left-Hand Path groups did not need to act antinomian performances of this kind. Of course, other societal processes, particularly an increasingly pluralistic atmosphere where the loss of hegemonic dominance of Christian institutions creates more space for other religious alternatives (see e.g., Granholm 2013), played a major part. However, these societal processes are not the focus of this chapter. All in all, the Church of Satan's 'mainstreaming' of Satanism led to both a loss of antinomian power of the symbol of 'Satan' and a situation where the need to invoke such an overtly antinomian symbol is deemed obsolete. This, in turn, led to the 'Satanism evolving beyond Satanism', discussed earlier.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I dealt with the categories and concepts of Satanism, the Left-Hand Path, and post-Satanism and concretized the discussion in the example of the Temple of Set. My point has not been that the label Satanism should be abandoned altogether, but that it needs to be applied more carefully. Satanism is indeed a valid denominator for groups and philosophies which appropriate the figure of Satan and attribute significance to it, and that identify as Satanist. However, it is not a particularly useful analytical category. With the focus on the figure of Satan as the core of a spiritual and/or religious current, other structural and thematic components of groups that include this appropriation are relegated to a lesser role. Furthermore, movements, groups, and philosophies that share other thematic, functional, and structural similarities with satanic ones but do not give the figure of Satan a prominent position should, by the dictates of logic, be excluded.

Analogous to Petersen, I suggest that a more useful approach is to focus on *how* and *why* the figure of Satan is used (Petersen 2009: 4), and then compare these discursive elements with the elements in groups that include similar themes but that do not include the figure of Satan. The focus is then unavoidably shifted away from Satanism in a strict sense, which becomes simply one element of a broader esoteric milieu. This discourse-focused approach lets us analyse foundational aspects of a greater variety of religiosity than simply those that make use of Satan. One such function is the use of Satan in an antinomian approach and a suitable label could be the Left-Hand Path. Again, this does not conclude that the term Satanism should be abandoned, but it should be relegated to a secondary level subjugated to other, more analytically useful, labels. A further problem addressed by this shift is the widespread focus in scholarly discussion of Satanism on the satanic panic of the 1980s and 1990s, as apparent in, for example, *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook on Satanism* (Lewis and Petersen 2008) and the entry on Satanism in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Bromley 2005). This overshadows research on Satanism as a practiced religion, philosophy, and spirituality, something we cannot neglect. A new terminology might stimulate new research.

A theoretically and methodologically solid approach is to examine later developments in the Left-Hand Path milieu by reference to the concept of post-Satanism. Here, the focus is on movements with roots in modern Satanism, particularly in its LaVeyan variant, and on how shifts have occurred away from the Christian Devil and to other mythological figures. The key themes would be how and why such shifts have occurred, and, again, a useful approach is to look not simply at the 'satanic figures' in themselves, but rather how and why they were appropriated and used in the first place (cf. Petersen 2009: 10–16). Groups included would be those that do not give an exalted position to Satan but include a strong antinomian ethos, such as the Temple of Set and Dragon Rouge, as well as groups that do regard themselves as Satanist but have chosen to promote mythological figures and traditions other than the Christian one, such as the Luciferian witchcraft of Michael W. Ford.

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