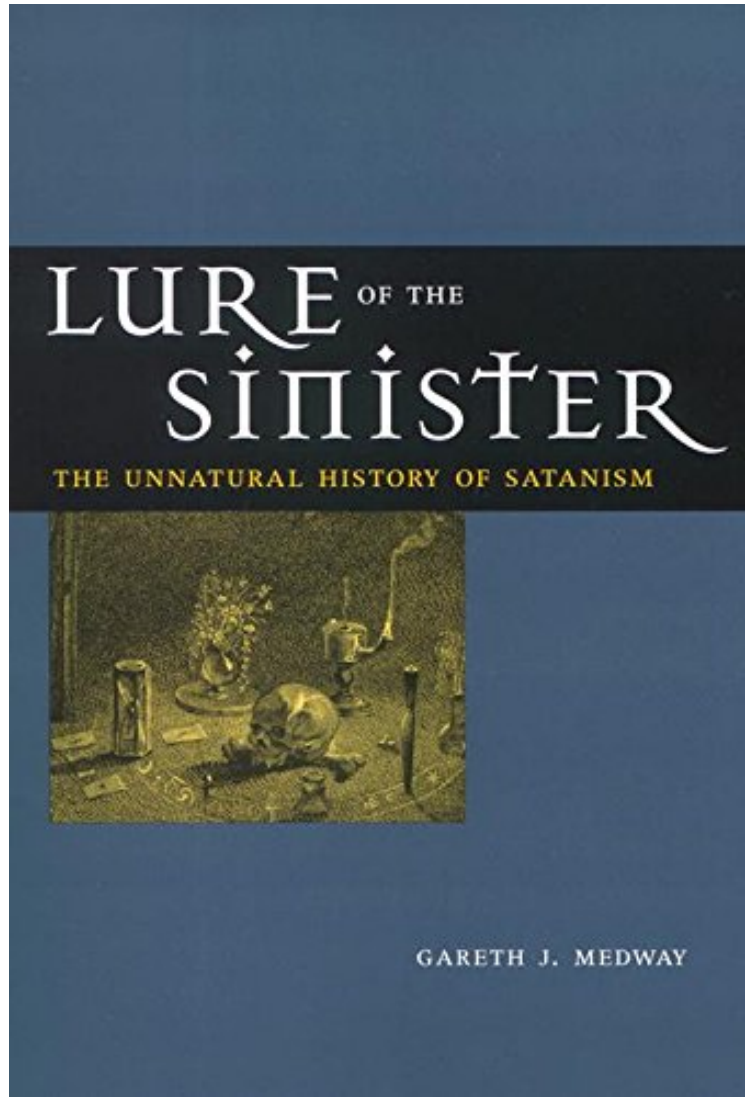


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## Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism

*Gareth Medway*

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**Gareth Medway : Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism:

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Well-Researched and Informed Investigation of Satanism By Matthew S. Schweitzer Gareth J. Medway's "Lure of the Sinister" is a well written investigation of historical and modern Satanism, focusing on the myths of Satanic Ritual Abuse and the wide-spread Satanic Panic of the 80s, when many people, deluded by sensationalist books and TV talk shows were lead to believe that an international Satanic conspiracy was working to undermine church and state. The book first addresses the origins of Satanism and the idea behind the existence of the mythical entity known to Christians as Satan and Lucifer. It analyzes the cases most often

cited as reliable instances of historical Satanism and devil worship such as Gilles de Rais, the Affaire des Poisons, The Hell Fire Club, as well as modern cases of supposed Satanic crime like the Black Circle Boys and Richard Ramirez. In all cases, paranoia and media sensationalism were shown to have warped the facts of these crimes and have mythologized them to the point where fact and fiction are indistinguishable and that, in truth, Satanism was either not a factor or was only a side issue to the real motivation. It also shows that the Church of Satan, far from being a truly evil threat to mankind, is not much more than a red herring meant to antagonize mainstream Christians and indulge themselves on ego rather than the Dark Lord. The book goes on to take task with the myth of SRA and the panics of the 80s and 90s that were fueled by delusional paranoid religious factions and psychotherapists eager to cash in on a nation's fears by endorsing nothing less than a real modern witch hunt. While there are very real problems with adolescent crime and drug abuse today, the fears that they are related to a world-wide conspiracy of black magic and devil worship are unfounded and have no supporting evidence. The book debunks the many myths that have grown up around this subject and gives a balanced and interesting accounting of them.<sup>3</sup> of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great read, but misleading title. By Abraham DeLeon Gareth Medway's book is an illuminating look at the Satanism, and Witchcraft scare that has plagued England, and the United States. Medway retells stories of supposed possessions, satanic activity, and other "evil" occurrences, and discounts the authenticity of these accounts. Even though he is biased in his presentation of some of the facts, his wit, and sense-of-humor emerges throughout the book. The title is misleading though because Medway does not really deal with the history of Satanism, instead with the hysteria surrounding it. His bibliography is also extensive for anyone interested in the occult. This book is ideal for those looking to examine if those stories we heard during the 80's of Satanic rituals in our backyards were true.<sup>2</sup> of 4 people found the following review helpful. Footnotes don't mean you did your homework By Scott C. Locklin Yet another history of Satanism. While this one was recommended highly by people who should know better, the prose is journalistic, windy and overwrought. Some small parts of it cover interesting history not covered elsewhere but the yellow press who originally covered it. The problem is, some of it was excruciatingly poorly researched nonsense (probably based on some other yellow journalism). Medway desperately needs a fact checker. Footnotes do not mean you checked your facts. Its main purpose seems to be something with footnotes to wave at witch-hunters when they show up at your door bearing pitchforks and torches, assuming you are a friendly neighborhood Satanist. Mostly it made me sleepy. Doubtless the soporific effect would also be efficacious on pitchfork-wielding witch hunters. Seriously; the world doesn't need another book about this sort of thing. I wish Mr. Medway well in getting his assistant professorship or whatever this book was supposed to accomplish, but the rehash of well-known nonsense involving Led Zeppelin records, Al Crowley and Charles Manson for the umpteenth time is completely unnecessary. The repeating of Huysmans and Dashwood mythology, yet again, is actively harmful to scholarship in this "field." If you want to dig up something new in the Satan game; dig up some reports of Satanism from other cultures and other histories. And please, check some of your footnotes.

Rumors of Devil-worship, or Satanism, have circulated for centuries. Tales of Black Masses, demonic possession, mysterious nighttime ceremonies, and human sacrifices have captured the popular consciousness, prompting the Christian Church to move aggressively to root out Satanism and its practitioners through often extraordinarily brutal means of detection and interrogation. Until recently the stuff of myths and stories, allegations of occult worship have of late taken the form of police investigations concerning ritual child abuse, teens involved in Satanic cults, and serial killings. Unsubstantiated rumors have found their way into the popular and serious press and have been reported as fact, often with little or no verification. Obsessive anti-Satanists find evidence of Satanic lyrics in rock music from Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" to Live Aid's "We are the World," while the numbers "666" are found in barcodes in supermarkets. The Lure of the Sinister draws on a remarkable range of sources, from newspapers and pulp literature to early modern works on demonology to explore the entire history of Satanism from the origins of the Devil in pre-Christian theology through the Inquisition to the life and times of Aleister Crowley, "the wickedest man in the world." The book also investigates modern charges of Satanism, the psychology of the people who make the allegations, and the legal and religious contexts in which they arise, showing how rumors of Devil-worship come to take on a life of their own. Lively and wittily written, The Lure of the Sinister reveals a strange tapestry of dark and fearful beliefs which have haunted our imagination for centuries.

From Publishers Weekly Although the furor over allegations of Satanic ritual abuse appears finally to have abated, wild claims inevitably persist. This book aims to put them to rest. Although packaged as a cultural history of Satanism, it is better seen as an apologetic work that seeks to debunk the outlandish accusations leveled against Pagan practices by irresponsible journalists, overzealous evangelists and outright liars. Medway, a freelance writer and a priest of Themis in the Fellowship of Isis, reveals the mundane truths behind "satanic panics" both medieval and modern. On so-called satanic crime, he sensibly points out that it is as foolish to blame occultism for the acts of isolated criminals as it is to blame the depredations of religious maniacs on the Bible. Unfortunately, this book suffers from poor organization (not to mention a terribly clunky title) and reads as a collection of anecdotes rather than as a sustained argument.

Medway's discussion of historical incidents such as the elaborate hoax the freethinker Lo Taxil perpetrated in the 1880s and 1890s on a gullible French public are the best parts of the book. His amply documented criticism of contemporary anti-Satanists is convincing, but the accumulation of detail on so many unrelated episodes bludgeons the point. This book may serve as a useful reference tool for Pagans on the defensive, but it does not make for compelling bedside reading. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. "A solidly researched, sombre book, well-written, carefully documented and lit throughout by flashes of sardonic humour."-Jean La Fontaine,author of *Speak of the Devil: Tales of Satanic Abuse in Contemporary England*"An indispensable reference for anyone wishing to sort out fact from folklore in the Satanism Scare. In the murky world of claims and counterclaims over the danger of the occult, Medway's patient documentation of verifiable facts is welcome indeed. He makes a convincing case for seeing modern cult-busters as using the same strategies that were notorious during the witch trials of the 1600s."-Bill Ellis,author of *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*"This scholarly, provocative and wide-ranging book is the clearest and wisest yet written on Satanism."-Ronald Hutton,University of Bristol"Seeks to debunk the outlandish accusations leveled against Pagan practices by irresponsible journalists, overzealous evangelists and outright liars. . . .Convincing"Publishers Weekly"A breath of fresh air and common sense . . . should be compulsory reading for clergy, therapists, [and] tabloid journalists."-The Catholic Herald"The first truly authoritative book on the subject."-New York Press,Nov. 14-20, 2001

About the AuthorGareth Medway studied physics at Imperial College, University of London and has since been a freelance writer specializing in comparative religion and the history of occultism. His writing has been published in numerous specialist journals and magazines including *Fortean Studies*, *Magonia* (which awarded him the Roger Sandell Memorial Prize), and *Pagan News*.