

## THE PARADOX OF DIABOLISM

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SAMUEL BUTLER remarks in his "Note Books" that we have never heard the Devil's side of the case, because God has written all the books. If this is so, modern literature has certainly tried to adjust the balance by giving the Devil his due. Much has been written about diabolism in its various phases,—Devil worship, literary Satanism, etc. Our countrymen have contributed their fair share to this work: a naturalized American, the late Dr. Paul Carus, composed some years ago a perspicuous *History of the Devil*, and another American by adoption, Professor Maximilian Rudwin, has written many studies in comparative diabolism, which are excellent in that they are both scholarly and readable. But in all this investigation, the essential paradox of the situation, namely the interchange of rôles between God and Satan, has been rather curiously overlooked.

There is singularly little in the Old Testament about Satan, and what there is seems vague and sometimes contradictory. Even with the added material of the New Testament, his figure does not emerge in bold relief. Only the sketchiest outline is visible: almost all that may be said of him is that he is endowed with the fearful power of the unfamiliar, a Spirit of Evil whose malign sway is exerted in the affairs of the world and over the souls of men. He is the father of lies and a sinner from the beginning. But this very indefiniteness gave popular imagination its opportunity. In the Christian apocrypha and in the Church fathers, Satan rapidly takes on form and content, and soon the satyromorphic fiend is complete before us—the noisome and repulsive Devil of tradition, with horns, bat-wings, cloven feet and forked tail, whom the Middle Ages detected so unerringly and feared so mortally. To doubt him was to deny the Christian faith; so blaspheme him or even to invoke him

vainly was perilous in the extreme, for this Prince of the Powers of the Air was also the Prince of this World, as Luther so confidently knew. Satan was in truth a most necessary figure in the Christian epic, "the great Second-Best," as Carlyle was to call him. Almost always he was unqualified Evil. There was little to be said in mitigation of his horror and nothing at all in extenuation of his guilt.

But the fascination that lurks in the terrible began presently to assert itself. From the very outset there was a certain ambiguity about the Devil personified as Lucifer. The Prince of Darkness was also a bearer of light. Comparatively early arose the saying that this Prince of Darkness was a gentleman (one finds the statement in "King Lear" and in a poem by Sir John Suckling), and would-be audacious writers in the nineteenth century like George Du Maurier added that that was more than could be said for his celestial adversary. Furthermore, in the minds of many Christians there has often been a confusion as to the respective functions of God and Satan. Cataclysms of nature have been called indifferently acts of Providence or machinations of the Devil. Even in theology their rôles have sometimes seemed interchangeable. Calvinism, for example, has been denounced as devil-worship by many people, not all of whom are to be counted among the impious. "I perceive that your God is my Devil," said John Wesley to Whitefield after an argument about predestination. But it has been reserved for the last century or so to put an end to this equivocality and to apotheosize Satan as a beneficent, humanity-loving being, a Prometheus of Christian mythology.

It was really Milton who took the first great epoch-making step in the rehabilitation of Satan. Out of the exceedingly malleable material furnished by the Scriptures, Milton was able, through his shaping power of imagination, to forge a figure so imposing as to dominate men's conceptions for some two hundred years. But it was his undoing for purposes of edification that he also unwittingly enlisted our sympathies for Satan. The fallen archangel is the great rebel, and men always delight in other people's rebels. He is also a good fighter, contending against impossible odds. His temperamental "guilt," which is simply the preference for action over contemplation and worship, is scant sin in the eyes of most men in our Western world. Above all, his grandiose rhetoric,

stately in its very vehemence, as he hurls defiance and asserts his invincible will, subdues us entirely to his mood. We are all, to use Blake's phrase, "of the Devil's party."

"To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell;  
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

"What though the field be lost,  
All is not lost—th' unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate  
And courage never to submit or yield;  
And what is else, not to be overcome."

Here, then, is an ironic situation of the highest order. Instead of justifying the ways of God to man, Milton infects Byron, Shelley, Swinburne and James Thomson with the poetry of God—defying revolt. It is small wonder that *Paradise Lost* aroused uneasiness in watchful quarters. Daniel De Foe in his "History of the Devil" observes that "Mr. Milton has indeed made a fine poem, but it is a devil of a history."

The figure of Lucifer in Byron's "Cain" plainly owes much to Milton's Satan and is only slightly less important in the development of the paradox. But while Milton's Devil rebels from pride against eternal justice, Byron's Devil revolts against what he believes to be eternal injustice. He is, he says, one of those souls

"That dare look the omnipotent tyrant in his everlasting  
face

And tell him that his evil is not good!"

Lucifer is only Byron himself in one of his moods, as Cain is Byron himself in another and kindred phase. Leconte de Lisle readily fused the two figures and, dropping the mask of Satan entirely, made Cain the eternal enemy of Jehovah and the avenger of mankind.

The Byronic Satan dazzled the French romanticists, who saw themselves reflected in him, for they too felt lonely, sad and misunderstood. "Dear Satan, the first dreamer, the oldest victim!" exclaims one of them. Alfred de Vigny in a remarkable passage speaks of the secret human hatred of God as the author of evil and of death, and adds that those who, like Satan and Don Juan,

struggle against the injustice of heaven will always command the admiration and love of mankind. "*Ce qui excuse Dieu, c'est qu'il n'existe pas,*" remarks Stendhal. "*Dieu, c'est le mal!*" vociferates Proudhon, that Goliath of paradox, as a French critic has rather ungently called him. And Swinburne intones in a chorus of "Atalanta in Calydon" the words "The supreme Evil, God," and "All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high!"

Such denigration and denial of deity of course do not in themselves constitute diabolism, but when one scale of the balance goes down the other inevitably rises. For a genuine reversal of values is here involved, which makes this paradox of diabolism far more profoundly significant than the familiar whitewashing of besmirched reputations, from Judas Iscariot and Nero down to Benedict Arnold and Marat. Satan's hey-day was in the Middle Ages. Now in certain important respects the evil of the Middle Ages has become our modern good. What more natural, therefore, than that Satan, the mediaeval embodiment of wickedness, the very fount of sin, should become, like Shelley's Prometheus, the vindicator of reason, of freedom of thought and of an unfettered humanity?

It is appropriate that Satan should now assume beauty in the estimation of men. Lammenais, in the days when he was still a faithful son of the Church, called him the very type of the beautiful mingled with the false and the bad—beauty separated from God. Certainly beauty was never a Christian value, but even that beauty which is sheer insidiousness can make its appeal to the eternal paganism in man. The lineage from Milton and Byron in this matter is very evident and the type that results is that of the *beau ténébreux*, the handsome, melancholy man of loneliness and mystery. Milton's Satan is a great romantic hero.

"Deep scars of thunder had entrenched and care sat on  
his faded cheeks, but under brows of dauntless courage."

There is no doubt that Byron strove to realize this type in himself and in the characters in his poems whom he creates in his own image, those dark-browed, crime-stained villain-heroes, sardonic in gesture and stricken in soul, who are in turn the begetters of a whole progeny of other romantic heroes from Musset's Rollo to the Rochester and the Heathcliffe of the Brontë sisters.

However, not all the romanticists were actively rebellious or wished to conduct "a bold adventure for Hell." Those who were by nature less subversive indulged in their expansive mood of senti-

mental humanitarianism and, having compassion on the Devil, were solicitous for his repentance and redemption. We begin now to hear about the Sorrows of Satan. Alfred de Vigny in one of his best-known poems tells how Eloa, an angel of pity (and a very feminine angel, not one of the neuters that are said to people the Kingdom of Heaven) sought out Satan in his desolation in order to turn him from evil and restore him to paradise. Instead of succeeding in her enterprise, she herself succumbed to his blandishments. Yet this overthrow of her virtue was a sweet satisfaction to her, since it bound her fate henceforth inseparably to his. If the projected sequel had ever been written by Vigny, it would have shown how even the devastated heart of Satan was touched by this devotion, and once touched, was moved to a contrition which was the prelude to redemption. Victor Hugo once asserted that he could not worship a Jesus who would crucify Satan. The theme of one of his last poems was the end of the Devil. But Satan dead is reborn as the celestial Lucifer. Who now reads Bailey's *Festus*, that diluted, Anglicized *Faust*, which seemed to its early-Victorian readers so majestic and so sublime? Probably not even the historians of literature. The present writer was, by a peculiar combination of circumstances, inveigled into reading it in his youthful days, and he can still recall his thrill of delighted surprise, when on the Judgment Day Lucifer is suddenly, strangely, spectacularly pardoned, and thus "redeemed to archangelic state," the highest is content to become also the humblest.

The Mephistopheles of Goethe's *Faust* is *sui generis*, without either predecessor or, strictly speaking, successor. It was the first attempt to intellectualize the character of the Devil. Much as he delights in deviltries of all sorts, he was evidently conceived in no mood of adherence to the traditional view of Satan. He is rather the spirit of negation, of cynical criticism, which delights in curbing the free spontaneity of man and in pricking the bubbles of idealism. He is the sworn foe of all grandiloquence and evangelism. Such "evil" as he represents is subsumed in the universal good:

"Ein Teil von jener Kraft,  
Die stets das Böse will  
Und stets das Gute schafft."

His most famous self-characterization, *Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint*, has been declared by moral rigorists like Paul Elmer More

and Irving Babbitt to be a complete bouleversement of rôles. It is, say they, God who denies, not the Devil. Blake, indeed, called the God of Christianity "an abstract objecting power that negatives everything;" but Blake, it should be remembered, did not give his homage to this deity, but rather to the affirming, energizing, demonic Power, which he did not hesitate to identify with Hell itself.

In Carducci's *Hymn to Satan* (1867), which scored one of the great *succès de scandale* of the nineteenth century, the paradox of diabolism is complete. It reaches such a flourishing triumph in its forthright radical way, that thereafter subtlety is the only resource left for the diabolist who would invert these values. Carducci's Satan is as progressive and philanthropic as that Pagan Satan, the Prometheus of Shelley. He is, as Carducci himself says, "the immortal foe of autocracy and the banner-bearer of the great reformers and innovators in all ages." He stands for reason, beauty, science and freedom, while the Jehovah of the priests over whom he triumphs symbolizes, like Shelley's Jupiter, ignorance, tyranny and oppression.

*"Salute, O Satana,  
O ribellione,  
O forza vindice  
Della ragione.*

*"Sacri a te salgano  
Ge' incensi e i voti,  
Ai vinto il Geova  
Dei sacerdoti."*

The sonority of these much-declaimed lines cannot be adequately reproduced in English. A stark prose version may serve in place of a deformation in verse: "Hail to thee, Satan! Hail the rebellion, the avenging force of reason! Let our incense and our prayers ascend to thee. Thou hast conquered the Jehovah of the priests." Carducci comments pertinently in one of his essays: "Prometheus is a superb representative of the struggle of human thought with theology in general. But I had to represent the vitality, the war and the victory of naturalism and rationalism within and against the Christian Church. Prometheus could not serve my purpose there, whereas Satan did suit me most excellently."

When Nietzsche came bearing his new table of anti-Christian

values, he did not assume the guise of Satan but that of Zarathustra. But in the years of feverish activity toward the close of his career, as he saw the issue narrow down to a personal rivalry and antagonism between himself and the founder of Christianity, he grew more and more to think of himself as the Antichrist, the incarnate anti-pode of the Nazarene. Antichrist is, in Pauline language, "that man of sin, the son of perdition, whose coming is after the workings of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." He is therefore to be regarded as an emissary, if not an actual emanation, of Satan. Thus the Nietzschean outlook, with all its Dionysiac and demonic elements, became in conscious intention, what it had always been in essence, unequivocally Satanic.

Anatole France, always fertile in devising paradoxical situations, has employed the myth of Satan's rebellion most entertainingly in *La Révolte des Anges*. His Satan, like Carducci's, stands for paganism or refined epicureanism, which was also Anatole France's own philosophy of life, with special emphasis on intellectual curiosity and the attitude of free inquiry resulting from it. "The Francian Fiend," as he has been called, proudly avows his love for the hell which formed his genius and made him a hater of tyrants, a friend of man and a lover of grace and learning. But in the end the great rebellion planned by him is not consummated, because in a dream he foresees himself becoming after his triumph as harsh, intolerant and greedy of adulation as his eternal enemy Jehovah. The successful rebel would only turn stand-patter.

James Branch Cabell's diabolism is similarly intellectualized and is edged with an equally fine irony. In his novel, *The High Place*, Janicot appears as "the adversary of all the gods of men." No toplofty Devil, he does not declaim ideal and eternal values. He is the Prince of this World, not worshipped in shining temples but always served in men's hearts. In many respects, this is the subtlest Satan of them all, for he represents the human instincts themselves, which have always opposed, and in the end successfully thwarted, the injunctions, prescriptions and curbings laid upon them. Is this human nature, which Janicot symbolizes, good or evil? Neither; it is simply itself, the alpha and omega, the starting point that must be taken for granted and the ultimate authority, beyond which there is no appeal. This naturalistic Satan has seen many gods come and go in the changing dynasties of Heaven. He has

known them too well not to believe in them, but unlike the devils mentioned in the Epistle of St. James, he does not tremble but shudders with distaste. None of them is less to his liking than the meddlesome Jehovah of the Jews (and, by inheritance, of the Christians). The laws of this upstart, and still comparatively youthful deity may, like those of all his predecessors, be admired as academic exercises, but they too were drawn up in heaven where there is nothing quite like the nature of man. And as for sin—that fine, impressive monosyllable—why, the wages of sin very often is life! But not even Janicot can control the insensate dreams of men, which obstinately aspire to a perfectibility that cannot exist. Not that men are bent on emulating what they worship; they only dream holiness; but so disastrously exigent is this human dreaming that in the end, perhaps, a god may be found to satisfy even its requirements. It is all very dangerous and silly and illogical; but why expect logicity in *this* universe, of all places?

Freudian psychology sees in the devil nothing but the other side of God—a negative anti-God evoked by the positive image. Everett Dean Martin says in *The Mystery of Religion*: “The Devil is then the reverse side of the father—image, and as such has value for the unconscious.” And so, to quote Samuel Butler once more: “God without the Devil is dead, being alone.” God and Satan represent the principle of specialization and the division of labor. Which may perhaps be interpreted to mean that we cannot have too much of either of them. In such wise does this paradox of diabolism, like many another of its kind, seem to lose itself in the promiscuous welter of things as they are.