BRILL

Numen 60 (2013) 528–558

NVMEN
brill.com/nu

The Devil is Red: Socialist Satanism in the Nineteenth Century

Per Faxneld
Department of the History of Religions
Stockholm University
10691 Stockholm, Sweden
per.faxneld@rel.su.se

Abstract
During the nineteenth century, socialists all over the Western world employed Satan as a symbol of the workers' emancipation from capitalist tyranny and the toppling of the Christian Church, which they perceived as a protector of this oppressive system. Starting with the English Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century, European radicals developed a discourse of symbolic Satanism, which was put to use by major names in socialism like Godwin, Proudhon, and Bakunin. This shock tactic became especially widespread in turn-of-the-century Sweden, and accordingly the article focuses on the many examples of explicit socialist Satanism in that country. They are contextualized by showing the parallels to, among other things, use of Lucifer as a positive symbol in the realm of alternative spirituality, specifically the Theosophical Society. A number of reasons for why Satan gained such popularity among socialists are suggested, and the sometimes blurry line separating the rhetoric of symbolic Satanism from actual religious writing is scrutinized.

Keywords
Satanism, Satan, socialism, anarchism, Romanticism, Sweden

Beginnings: Milton's Revolutionary Re-interpreters in England

This article treats the motif of the heroic socialist Satan, or "socialist Satanism," primarily during the late nineteenth century.[1] Special attention is given to this phenomenon as it manifested in Sweden, where

[1] I here use the term Satanism in a rather more loose sense than I usually do (see Faxneld 2006:xiii–xvi, for a discussion of how I would suggest the term is best utilized

DOI: 10.1163/15685276-12341294

social democrats and anarchists were peculiarly fond of the motif in question. As a conclusion, some thoughts regarding the reasons for the popularity of the figure among socialists are presented.

The point of departure for most political use of Satan as a symbol of goodness is John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) and the ambivalent portrait of the Devil in it. Milton was an active republican pamphleteer during the English civil war, and also worked as Oliver Cromwell's private secretary. This soon lead to speculation whether Satan's rebellion against God in *Paradise Lost* was perhaps an allegory for the republican uprising against the king (Schock 2003:27).

The earliest interpretations of Milton's Satan as a hero came about through writers avoiding the question of good and evil, instead focusing on the figure's "sublime" character (Abrams 1974 [1953]:251). In his tremendously influential *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Edmund Burke held up a description of Satan in *Paradise Lost* as one of the prime examples of the sublime. With regard to this sublime passage in Milton's epic, he asks: "In what does this poetical picture consist?" His answer is, among other things, "the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms" (1889:92). It is interesting to note that Burke, who was prominent when it came to whipping up panic among his countrymen concerning the French revolution, would later, in his bestselling *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, consistently tie the French insurgents to Satan (1969 [1790]). The intention here was to denigrate the rebels against the crown, but if these polemics are read together with his verbose and enthusiastic words elsewhere describing Satan as sublime, the combined image becomes a bit odd. It is perhaps no wonder that others chose to view revolution as both Satanic and sublime at once, in a solely positive sense that Burke had not intended. Contemporaries of his, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Novalis, even read *Reflections* like William Blake read Milton, feeling that the author was of the Devil's (here the revolutionaries') party without knowing it. Novalis opined that Burke had written "a revolutionary book against the revolution" (2008:386).[2]

---

in *most* contexts). In this article, "Satanism" simply denotes praising the Devil as a good force or symbol of goodness.

[2)] Original: "ein revolutionäres Buch gegen die Revolution." All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Religious belief in Satan as a spiritual entity had not died out during the late eighteenth century, but it was certainly waning, especially among the educated classes. Now partly cut loose from his original Christian context, Satan could symbolize both good and evil things. The latter use of him, as a tool for the demonization of one's enemies, was naturally nothing new. Such tarring with the demonological brush could be meant quite literally, as during the reformation when Catholics described Martin Luther and his followers as the disciples of Satan while the Lutherans proclaimed that the Pope was Satan's messenger on Earth.[3] The innovation that took place towards the end of the eighteenth century was that radicals demonized themselves so to speak, in order to demonstrate their complete rejection of the Christian establishment. Their aim was obviously to provoke, perhaps also to frighten. Occasionally, they further seem to have wanted to ridicule the conservatives and their view of everything radical, subversive, and dissolving as de facto demonic.

As mentioned, some early readers had thought of *Paradise Lost* as a symbolic retelling of the English civil war, but that view did not really gain a foothold in the long run. However, Milton's Lucifer as a political symbol made a grand return towards the end of the eighteenth century, starting in the writings of one of the period's most well-known radical political thinkers: the author of novels, journalist, and anarchist philosopher William Godwin (1756–1836). In one of his main works, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin observes: "[P]oetical readers have commonly remarked Milton's devil to be a being of considerable virtue" (1993:146). He then goes on to present his own view of this figure, which is also positive, to say the least, and is only moderated somewhat by the reservation that he begins his pondering on Satan's nature with: "It must be admitted that his energies centered too much in personal regards" (ibid.). But why, Godwin goes on to ask,

> [D]id he rebel against his maker? It was, as he himself informs us, because he saw no sufficient reason, for that extreme inequality of rank and power which the creator assumed. It was because prescription and precedent form no adequate ground for implicit faith. (Ibid.)

3) For a sampling of visual manifestations of such rhetoric, see the propaganda woodcuts in Lehner and Lehner 1971:156–160.

Godwin has here turned Satan into an embodiment of precisely the anarchist values he himself propagated. The rebellion against God becomes a mirror of his own hatred of illegitimate authority and inherited power. The reign of God becomes analogous to that of the despotic and arbitrary authority he felt was ruling late eighteenth-century England in accordance with prescription and precedent. As Peter Schock points out, Godwin's reading of Milton is highly selective and ignores all the traits of Lucifer that he reasonably would not have appreciated at all, most noteworthy of which is perhaps the fallen angel's authoritarian side. Schock further highlights the striking fact that Godwin does not seem to consider his opinions about the Devil to be something strongly aberrant (Schock 2003:2, 34). In other words, he wrote in a time when the valorization of Lucifer was probably part of the common discourse of at least his own clique of radicals.

That radicals like Godwin, albeit admittedly merely *en passant* in a very long text focusing on other matters (it should be noted, though, that he also came to Satan's defense elsewhere), elevated Satan to heroic status would seem to have played into the hands of their conservative enemies.[4] It appears doubtful if it was really an effective strategy to try to counter the conservatives' demonization by whitewashing the demonic power radicals were often connected with in political caricatures. The examples of such vilification are numerous. For instance, the British government had spread, in newspapers and pamphlets, the image of revolutionary France as the Great Beast of the Book of Revelations (Schock 2003:19). Even more telling is James Gilray's 1798 etching *The Tree of Liberty*, where the progressive politician Charles James Fox, who sympathized with the revolution in France, is depicted as the serpent in the garden of Eden, offering an apple inscribed with the word "Reform."[5]

English radicals, revolutionaries, and reformers in general did not take the side of Satan in any large-scale or consistent manner. They

4) In his essay "Of Choice in Reading" he discusses how a "tendency" in a text can influence readers more than the author's intended moral of the story. As an example, he mentions *Paradise Lost*, where God, contrary to Milton's intentions, will appear to most readers as a tyrant, according to Godwin. Hence, Satan implicitly becomes the wronged and righteous party (Godwin 1797:135).

5) Reproduced in Paulson 1983:192.

would just as often — more frequently, in fact — utilize a more easily handled negative Devil symbolism, where for instance the royal dynasties of Europe were portrayed as Satanic. Later, Napoleon was frequently rendered as an explicitly demonic figure by his detractors, a type of smearing campaign that was time honored and hardly original (Schock 2003:18–19, 23). The opposite goes for William Hazlitt's slightly bizarre 1818 lecture, titled "On Shakespeare and Milton," where he attempts to rehabilitate the slandered Napoleon. His method for doing so is to first relate the parallels having been drawn between Napoleon and the Devil in hateful propaganda, after which he embarks on a panegyric over Satan's noble character, thus implicitly praising the French emperor (Hazzlitt 1930–1934:63–64). Hazlitt may have been innovative when he turned the tables in this manner, but he was not unique.

Aside from Godwin, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), one of the (later to be) most famous Romantic poets, had employed Satan as a symbol of political goodness already six years before Hazlitt's daring polemics. Shelley, eventually Godwin's son-in-law, made Satan a positive political role model during the short-lived campaign for Irish political reform he engaged in during 1812, when he wrote a broadsheet titled "A Declaration of Rights." It ends with a quote from Satan's speech to the fallen angels in book two of *Paradise Lost*: "Awake! — arise! — or be for ever fallen" (1993:60). As Peter A. Schock has called attention to, the parallel becomes historically specific: in 1798 and 1803 the Irish had tried to rise up against the English, but the rebellions had been brutally quenched — just like the revolt of the rebel angels was, whereafter Satan holds the speech Shelley quotes from (Schock 2003:115–116). While at Oxford, Shelley had published a small tract titled *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), leading to his expulsion. His praise of Satan the rebel in a political context can be viewed as the next step in his iconoclastic project. Later fruits of this endeavor would be some of the most influential works of Romantic Satanism, such as the play *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). The convergence of revolutionary sympathies and Satanism among Romantics has lead scholars to conclusions like that reached by Maximilian Rudwin: "Romanticism was the logical reflex of the political revolution which preceded it" (1931:286). This statement may be a bit simplistic, as there were plenty of non-revolutionary and fairly conservative Romantics, but it does no doubt contain a kernel of truth at one level.

Schock suggests motives for the appropriation of Satan by radicals analogous to those giving rise to the so-called "blasphemous chapels" which existed in London during the end of the 1810s, where coarse agitators attacked the authority of Christianity with burlesque parody and vitriolic diatribes. They would accuse God of being indifferent to the suffering of the poor, and such anti-sermons can be viewed as a means to erase the religious fear keeping the populace from rising up against its masters (Schock 2003:172–173).[6] One London blasphemer felt, as Iain McCalman puts it, "that the timidity, superstition and deference of the common people — learned from priests and patriarchs — had to be jolted out of them." In order to achieve this, he called Moses a whoremonger, David a murderer, and so on (1988:146). A government spy attending these meetings meant that such blasphemy made the ultraradicals more inclined to drastic acts (ibid.:147). A view of God as the protector of the strong and rich can logically lead to the conclusion that Satan must be the god of the oppressed and poor, as we will see in the discussion concerning Jules Michelet further on in the article.

The counter-readings of Biblical tradition and Milton performed by the Romantics were, naturally, made possible by the gradual breaking down of Christianity's hegemony, especially from the 1750s onwards, precisely the period when Romanticism began to bud as a movement. The disrespectful handling of Christian mythology on the part of many Romantics helped further hasten this process of dethroning Christianity as ultimate truth.

None of the English Romantics who are well-known for celebrating Lucifer — Blake, Byron, Shelley — kept unequivocally praising the fallen angel throughout their careers. They all continued writing about him, occasionally idealizing him but more often letting him be a more stereotypical symbol of evil. Many of the texts that have been considered examples of Romantic Satanism also display a great deal of ambiguity in their portraits of Satan. For instance, the Lucifer we meet in

6) On the "blasphemous chapels," see McCalman 1988:146–148. The judge who sentenced one of the blasphemers took precisely such a view of events, and therefore considered words of that nature delivered before an audience of the lower orders as being particularly dangerous. It should be noted that these English revolutionaries gave much prominence to the "ancient symbol of the levelling Christ," and were often more anti-clerical than anti-Christian. See ibid.:139, 142.

Byron's play *Cain* (1821) has benevolent features, but is also a cold and aloof personage whose ultimate aim is hardly to help humankind.

From Sentimental Satanism to the Dark Angel of Anarchism: France

In France, Romantic poets — starting with Alfred de Vigny's *Eloa* (1823) — developed a tradition of sentimental sympathy for Satan, that was expressed in poems about how this outcast is finally pardoned by God and reconciled with his Creator (Vigny 1986:10–31).[7] The point was, for the most part, not so much to celebrate the Devil as virtuous or as a freedom fighter, and thus the French Romantics differ markedly from their English counterparts. George Sand, in her novel *Consuelo* (first published as a serial in a journal in 1842–1843), takes a slightly more "English" approach. The heroine of the tale, Consuelo, has a vision of Satan where he tells her: "I am not the demon, I am the archangel of legitimate rebellion and the patron of the grand struggles. Like Christ, I am the god of the poor, of the weak, and of the oppressed" (Sand 1979:285).[8] The vision (or hallucination) ends with her falling to her knees in front of Lucifer. Sand was a socialist sympathizer, but she does not explicitly connect the Devil with this ideology, even if the idea of him as an "archangel of legitimate rebellion" and the refuge of the poor and oppressed implies this. Sand's Satan has been pardoned by God and promises to bring freedom side by side with Christ, and hence does not break completely with the "traditional" approach of French Romantics.

Celebrations of Satan in the role of God's *adversary* did not really reach prominence in France until Charles Baudelaire wrote his *Les Fleurs du mal* ("The Flowers of Evil," 1857). Satan haunts several of the poems in this book, but the most explicitly Satanic is "Les Litanies de Satan" ("Litany to Satan"), where the Devil is portrayed — in a partly ironic manner — as a savior, especially for the downtrodden and despised. There is still no explicit connection to socialism, and the poet's commitment to social justice was fleeting and fickle at best. During the 1848 revolution, he was swept along and even briefly mounted the barricades

7) On the tradition of sentimental sympathy, see Rudwin 1931:285–299.

8) Original: "Je ne suis pas le démon, je suis l'archange de la révolte légitime et le patron des grandes luttes. Comme le Christ, je suis le Dieu du pauvre, du faible et de l'opprimé."

brandishing a revolver, but he was not politically active in any lasting way.[9] The Satanism in his poems is not actually as close to that of his English counterparts as is often assumed. Where they occasionally whitewashed Lucifer and made him entirely a righteous rebel, Baudelaire's portrayal is at all times more complex, representing a transitional stage between Romantic Satanism and a later Decadent variety. The Decadents could (often half-jokingly) revere Satan as evil, the patron of cruelty and unspeakable carnal sins, instead of elevating him to the lofty heights of noble cosmic liberator.[10] In Baudelaire's poems he is both. I shall shortly return to the question of possible political authorial intent with *Les Fleurs du mal*.

In the same tradition as George Sand, where Satanism is a symbol of revolt against oppression, we can also place the celebrated French historian, republican, and social agitator Jules Michelet (1798–1874) and his book *La Sorcière* ("The Witch," 1862). In it, Michelet theorizes that those who were accused of witchcraft in medieval times truly did practice Satanism, and that it was an expression of righteous class hatred on the part of feudal society's oppressed. The nobility had God and the Church on their side and the medieval peasantry in their desperation then had to turn to God's great adversary, Satan. This Satan is no evil figure to Michelet, but rather an embodiment of science, reason, and all that is natural (1987). Michelet was more of a Romantic than a scholar. Hence, *La Sorcière* contains a greater amount of colorful Gothic vignettes and passages approximating prose poems, than historical research grounded in archival sources.

La Sorcière was based on academic lectures held by the author. One of the young students attending Michelet's lectures in the late 1830s and early 1840s was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who would become one of anarchism's most important thinkers (Vincent 1984:53).[11] Since Michelet was a teacher who expressly sought to imprint his own ideas on the minds

9) During the short period when he was engaged in left-wing struggle he was, however, very active. See Hyslop 1976:273–274.

10) This is of course something of a caricature of Romantic and Decadent Satanism, which are both multi-layered and self-contradictory, but I believe it holds some truth as a general description all the same.

11) Proudhon attended Michelet's class on French fourteenth and fifteenth-century history, where his teacher would have been likely to present his theories concerning witches as fighters against class oppression.

of his students, it could perhaps be that it was this charismatic professor who made Proudhon incorporate a sprinkling of Satanism when he started to write his anarchist works. The two also associated privately later, even if the teacher was skeptical of some of his former student's ideas, like the famous (and often misunderstood) maxim "property is theft."[12] He was perhaps less hesitant regarding exclamations in the book *De la justice dans la révolution et dans l'église* ("Concerning Justice in the Revolution and in the Church," 1858) like the following, where Proudhon addresses a hater of freedom:

> Liberty, symbolized by the story of the temptation, is your Antichrist; liberty, for you, is the Devil. Come, Satan, come, the one slandered by priests and kings, so that I may embrace you, so that I may hold you to my chest! Long have I known you, and you know me too. Your works, oh beloved of my heart, are not always beautiful nor good; but only they bestow meaning upon the universe and prevent it from being absurd . . . Hope yet, outcast! I have at your service but a pen: but it equals millions of ballots. (Proudhon 1932:433–434)[13]

From other things Proudhon writes in this chapter it becomes clear that he is first and foremost praising Satan in order to attack the conservative forces that regard freedom as Satanic. This, however, was not the first time Proudhon had sung Satan's praise. In the first volume of *Système des contradictions économiques* ("The System of Economic Contradictions," 1846) he wrote of "[t]he spirit of analysis, the indefatigable Satan who questions and contradicts without cease" (idem. n.d.:7).[14] In *Idée générale de la révolution au XIX^e^ siècle* ("The General Idea of Revolution During the Nineteenth Century," 1851) he exclaims: "Stand by me, Lucifer,

12) I have proposed this influence earlier, in Faxneld 2006:91.

13) Original: "La liberté, symbolisée dans l'histoire de la tentation, est votre anté-christ; la liberté, pour vous, c'est le diable. Viens, Satan, viens, le calomnié des prêtres et des rois, que je t'embrasse, que je te serre sur ma poitrine! Il y a longtemps que je te connais, et tu me connais aussi. Tes œuvres, ô le béni de mon cœur, ne sont pas toujours belles ni bonnes; mais elles seules donnent un sens à l'univers et l'empêchent d'être absurde . . . Espère encore, proscrit! Je n'ai à ton service qu'une plume: mais elle vaut des millions de bulletins." I here take "bulletins" to refer to the ballots used in voting, but there are other possible translations of the word in this context: it could among other things also mean bulletin in the sense of a paper publication.

14) Original: "L'esprit d'analyse, Satan infatigable qui interroge et contredit sans cesse."

Satan, whoever you are, demon who in the faith of my fathers opposed God and the Church! I will carry your word, and I ask for nothing . . ." (idem. 1923:307).[15] All the same, we must not misconstrue Proudhon's occasional outbursts of sympathy for the Devil. As a whole, his writings are more anti-clerical than anti-Christian, and he never ceased to praise the virtues of early Christianity (Vincent 1984:65). In fact, the idea of property being theft arose from his attempts to correct existing translations of the Bible. Even if he was always critical towards the Church, he was during periods of his life a practicing Catholic and an avid reader of the Bible, who even studied Hebrew in order to better understand the Holy Writ. His view of it was that the gospels proscribed inequality, but that the Church had strayed from this original position (Hyams 1979:12, 28; Vincent 1984:72–73).

It is possible that Proudhon may have influenced Baudelaire's Satanism, as the poet was enthusiastic about the anarchist's works and also met with him several times from 1848 onwards. A political subtext to poems like "Les Litanies de Satan" is therefore conceivable.[16] Proudhon met not only with struggling poets, but also with several important socialists. Among them was the Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), who to some extent let himself be inspired by the French anarchist. Ultimately, however, he rejected Proudhon's peaceful and theoretical teaching in favor of a more violent anarchism of his own devising. For a while, Bakunin was a leading name in international revolutionary socialism, but unlike Marx he was never a great system builder. Instead, his fame rested primarily on his celebrated deeds as a practical revolutionary.

According to Bakunin, revolt is an inherited instinct in all men rather than something that needs to be reached through complicated reasoning. This view of rebellion as a prime human instinct was presented in a Satanist framework in his most famous work, *Dieu et l'état* ("God and State," written in 1871 as part of a planned larger work and published in 1882, six years after the author's death; since the book was written in French, I here discuss it in the section on French socialism, even if

15) Original: "A moi, Lucifer, Satan, qui que tu sois, démon que la foi de mes pères opposa à Dieu et à l'Eglise! Je porterai ta parole, et je ne te demande rien . . ."

16) On this, see Faxneld 2006:96; Clark 1973:164; Rubin 1980:51–53, 148–149; Hyslop 1976; and Burton 1991:198–199, 259.

Bakunin was Russian by birth). In *Dieu et l'état*, he designates the Bible as "a very interesting and here and there very profound book," but holds God up as "the most jealous, the most vain, the most ferocious, the most unjust, the most bloodthirsty, the most despotic, and the most hostile to human dignity and liberty" (1970:10).[17] That God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the fruit on the tree of knowledge was according to Bakunin caused by him wanting that "man, destitute of all understanding of himself, should remain an eternal beast, ever on all-fours before the eternal God" (ibid.). In the anarchist's Satanist counter-reading, Lucifer now hurries to our rescue:

> But here steps in Satan, the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and the emancipator of worlds. He makes man ashamed of his bestial ignorance and obedience; he emancipates him, stamps upon his brow the seal of liberty and humanity, in urging him to disobey and eat of the fruit of knowledge. (Ibid.)

Bakunin asserts that "God admitted that Satan was right; he recognized that the devil did not deceive Adam and Eve in promising them knowledge and liberty as a reward for the act of disobedience which he had induced them to commit" (ibid.:12). Hence, mankind's development starts through rebellion, which leads to free thinking. The inspirer of this is Satan, who to Bakunin symbolizes revolt and reason. That Bakunin chooses to utilize a mythological figure in such a manner is slightly strange, considering his uncompromising atheism. In the same text, he himself later warns the reader that we are always at risk of "sooner or later" relapsing back "into the abyss of religious absurdity" (ibid.:23). Belief in God is according to Bakunin one of the most threatening obstacles in the way of humanity's liberation, for the simple reason that when we are "[s]laves of God, men must also be slaves of Church and State, in so far as the State is consecrated by the Church" (ibid.:24). Hereby Bakunin even claims he can disprove the existence of God: "If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist" (ibid.:25).

Even so, the figure of Satan is apparently tempting to use. The reasons for this are difficult to be sure of. Bakunin may have been so deeply rooted in a Christian cultural tradition that (a purely symbolical) Satan

17) I quote from the 1970 English translation.

simply seemed the logical antipole of God and the Church. Perhaps he wanted to provoke his readers, or he may have considered a Satanist counter-reading of the Bible an effective method to destabilize the truth claims and status of the Holy Writ. Satan could also perhaps be nothing more than a rhetorically effective tool that gives some color to the exposition of abstract political ideas.

Satanist Social Democracy: Sweden

Slightly later, the red Devil reared his head in the periphery of Europe as well. In late nineteenth-century Sweden, use of Satan as a heroic political figure became remarkably widespread, probably due to the popularity of English Romanticism with some of the more intellectually inclined socialists in Sweden. I have found no direct references to Proudhon or Bakunin in the Swedish political celebrations of Satan, but that does not of course rule out that such an influence could also have been at work in some instances. As for locally produced esoteric or literary Satanism, there was very little of either in Sweden or Scandinavia at the time, so the motif did not have an indigenous background of that type.[18]

Lucifer as a specific aspect of Satan that is primarily a symbol of liberation seems to have been a well-established idea in Sweden around the turn of the century. It is not Lucifer as a figure completely *separated* from the Devil that gained this signification.[19] They remain part of the same conglomerate mythical cluster, aspects of one and the same figure. An example of this view is when the influential social reformer and feminist Ellen Key (1849–1926) writes in 1905 about superficial love

18) For a rare example of Scandinavian esoteric Satanism from roughly the same time period, see the discussion in Faxneld 2011 concerning Dane Ben Kadosh's (Carl William Hansen, 1872–1936) Luciferian pamphlet, published in 1906. An author that has sometimes been labeled a literary Satanist (even by himself) is August Strindberg (1849–1912), but this is a complicated case and it is doubtful if he really presents a positive image of the Devil in the texts in question. On this, see Faxneld 2006:134–140.

19) As when the Bible occasionally (e.g., Rev. 22:16) designates Christ "the Morning Star," the heavenly body also mentioned in Isaiah 14:2 and there translated as "Lucifer" in the Vulgate (this passage in Isaiah came to be seen by many theologians, among them Origen, as referring to Satan, which is the reason Lucifer became an alternative name for him).

in persons, something that according to her entails that "it is only the Devil, the world and their own flesh they love, a Devil that *does not have the features of Lucifer*, not even of Mephisto, but only of Beelzebub, the buzzing lord of nothingness" (Key 1905:232).[20] As can be seen, the atheist Key talks about Lucifer as a positive symbol in a manner implying that this is a commonly held view of him, yet still considers him an aspect of Satan. The names Lucifer and Satan are also, as will be shown, employed interchangeably by socialists at times, in accordance with traditional Christian usage.

Socialist Satanism was prevalent among early Swedish social democrats. In order to understand this, we must keep in mind that during the nineteenth century this was a threatening and radical movement — still far from the complacent hegemonic position it enjoyed during the post-World War II period. It appears highly unlikely that any of today's social democrats would use the Devil as a symbol of their own ideals, but this was precisely what their predecessors did. The choice of name for their magazine *Lucifer*, that started publication in 1891, signals this. Even if it is claimed in the first issue's editorial that the word Lucifer is here simply used in its purely etymological meaning ("light bringer"), there is no reason to doubt that the name was chosen in full awareness of the sinister connotations it has in the Christian tradition and was intended as a provocation to the Church and the conservative bourgeoisie. The magazine had also been preceded by two more simple social democratic publications with the same name, that were both only published in one issue — Christmas 1886 and April 1887 respectively — and featured very explicit Satanism.

The history of the social democratic movement in Sweden begins around 1881, when August Palm (1849–1922) published his pamphlet *Hvad hvilja socialdemokraterna* ("What Do the Social Democrats Want?"), but it was not constituted as a proper political party until 1889. During the loosely organized 1880s, the movement was home to socialists of many types. Before the end of the decade, however, the minority of revolutionary socialists, often labeled (more or less correctly) anarchists, had become so vocal and difficult to handle for the moderate reformists that

20) Original: "det är endast djäfvulen, världen och sitt eget kött de älska, en djäfvul, som ej har ett drag av Lucifer, ej ens av Mefisto utan endast av Belzebub, de surrande intigheternas härskare." Emphasis added.

they had to clearly separate themselves from such extremists. This was done at the party's constituting congress in Norrköping in 1889, even if the party program still left the door open for violent methods in the class struggle should extreme circumstances occur (Uhlén 1964:48–49, 53–55). Hinke Bergegren (1861–1936), a top representative of the radical wing at the congress, is supposed to have advocated political assassinations to scare the ruling classes, suggesting the usefulness of "dynamite and dagger and reign of terror" according to one newspaper report (ibid.:55).[21] It was mainly the adherents of measures of this type that were drawn to the Lucifer figure.

During the 1890s, this phalanx formed numerous youth clubs and other small political organizations, still using the name "social democrats." The program of the social democratic party had declared religion to be a private matter, but the radicals were determined to stamp out Christianity (or, at the very least, to completely break the influence of the conservative priesthood) (ibid.:56–57). After the 1889 purge, mainstream social democrat political writing tended to become more and more focused on naturalistic depictions of the difficult everyday circumstances for workers and less interested in bloody imagery of impending revolution or mythical allegories. There are, however, many exceptions to this tendency, and we encounter Satan as the scourge of capitalism even in the mainstream material at fairly late dates. Anti-clerical or anti-Christian sentiments are also easy to find throughout, and in the complete 1902 version of the Swedish translation of Eugène Pottier's song "L'Internationale," which was very popular with all types of Swedish socialists, the third verse proclaims: "We do not greet the savior up high, / not gods, [nor] princes stand us by" (quoted in Uhlén 1964:96).[22] It is still quite a distance between professing atheism and (symbolically) celebrating Satan. One possible reason for the attraction this tactic held for socialists could be the widespread use of the figure as an emblem of revolt against authority in less overtly political contexts during the time period, for example in Theosophy.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and her Theosophical Society published a journal in England named *Lucifer* from September 1887

21) That Bergegren actually put it exactly like this has been strongly questioned.

22) Original: "I höjden räddarn vi ej hälsa, / ej gudar, furstar stå oss bi."

onwards. They too emphasized this word was not purely Satanic, though there can be little doubt that, in this case as well, the name was chosen partly in order to provoke the Church, Theosophy being strongly anti-clerical. The strikingly positive view of Satan presented the next year by Blavatsky in her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine* also makes it obvious that a double entendre was to some extent intended.[23] The Theosophists were not only anti-clerical, they were also in league with suffragettes, social reformers, and anti-colonial forces. Lucifer as a political symbol of rebellion fits in well with these connections. Such polemics in alternative religion (Theosophy) are likely to have contributed — at the very least indirectly, by perpetuating a trope in the wider culture of Satan as liberator — to socialist appropriation of Lucifer as a symbol of righteous revolt. This trope was, as mentioned, first established in Romantic literature and is further echoed in works like Stanislaw Przybyszewski's *Satans Kinder* ("Satan's Children," 1897), where anarchism is connected with Satanism.[24] Concerning the potential Theosophical connection, we can also note that the premier issue of Blavatsky's journal featured a cover drawing of Lucifer that is extremely similar to that which adorns the Christmas 1893 issue of *Lucifer: Ljusbringaren* published by the Swedish social democrats. Either the socialists copied the Theosophists' artwork or they both have an older image as their model.

In spite of this potential visual borrowing, a more obvious source of inspiration for naming an anarchist journal *Lucifer* could have been *Lucifer the Light-bearer*, an individualist-anarchist weekly newspaper published in Kansas (later in Chicago), starting in 1883. It focused above all on the emancipation of woman and published articles discussing such highly controversial topics as marital rape and contraceptives.[25]

---

23) In the editorial for the first issue, Blavatsky dismisses the misunderstandings surrounding the name Lucifer as being purely infernal, and claims that, hence, "the title for our magazine is as much associated with divine and pious ideas as with the supposed rebellion of the hero of Milton's 'Paradise Lost' " (1887:6). But in the same editorial she also writes about Satan in "Milton's superb fiction," that if one analyzes his rebellion, "it will be found of no worse nature than an assertion of free-will and independent thought, as if Lucifer had been born in the XIXth century," thus practically presenting Satan as a freedom fighter (ibid.:2.). On Satanism in Theosophy, and its political implications (primarily feminist), see Faxneld 2012.

24) On Przybyszewski's anarcho-Satanism, see Faxneld 2013.

25) On this journal, see Sears 1977.

Swedish socialists had connections to their counterparts in the United States, and could very well have been aware of this publication.

Poetical Praise of Satan among Swedish Socialists

Let us now consider some explicit examples of Swedish socialist Satanism. In the two early *Lucifer* issues published in Sweden, the theme of Satan as a liberator is expressed in a series of poems and polemical texts by Atterdag Wermelin (1861–1904), the Lord Byron-worshipping son of a priest in the Church of Sweden. Unlike most poets of the worker's movement, Wermelin was well educated and had studied at Uppsala University. He played something of a key part in early Swedish socialism and was the one who introduced the economic theories of Marxism in Sweden. Eventually he became marginalized and from time to time even homeless. After emigrating to the United States in 1887, and finding life there just as difficult as back home, Wermelin took his own life (Uhlén 1964:28–32).[26]

In the premier issue of *Lucifer* (1886), Wermelin proclaimed the "Ten Commandments of Lucifer." The tenth commandment lays down that "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, unless she covets only you, but his ox and ass and all the capital that belongs to him thou shalt take from him and make the property of thine brothers" (Wermelin 1886:2).[27] As can be seen, Wermelin's socialist Satanist commandments to a great extent invert the Christian ones, and the first of them in his version states: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me, the Lightbringer" (ibid.).[28] This type of parody or inversion of passages from the Bible was a common feature in anti-clerical or atheist writings during this period. A typical non-Satanic Swedish example can be found in Ellen Key's *Lifslinjer II* ("Lifelines II," 1905:57), where she provocatively treats the reader to a topsy-turvy version of the Beatitudes, for instance stating "Blessed

26) Wermelin was co-editor of the 1886 and 1887 *Lucifer* publications.

27) Original: "Du skall icke begära din nästas hustru, så framt hon ej begärer dig ensam, men hans oxe och åsna samt allt kapital honom tillhörer skall du taga ifrån honom och göra till dina bröders egendom."

28) Original: "Du skall inga andra gudar hava för mig, Ljusbringaren."

are the battling, for through them shall the meek finally be able to live on earth."[29]

In the second *Lucifer* issue, Wermelin published a distinctly Byronic poem describing how the light bringer lies bound to a rock and is being pecked by a vulture, but yet cries out "In Satan's guise, in Prometheus' guise / I remained the same — indomitable" (1887:1).[30] Such Satanism appears in the more elaborate later *Lucifer* publications as well. The 1891 issue opens with the poem "Lucifer" by the signature "Spartacus" (Carl Natanael Carleson, 1865–1929) where it is very clear the entity being hailed is no mere "light bringer" in a general sense, but indeed Satan himself: "There is a creature, who goes around / And causes only uproar and unpleasantness. / Formerly he is supposed to have floated freely in heavenly ether / And been on equal terms with divine beings" ("Spartacus" 1891:2).[31] This troublemaker is a hero for socialists, and "Spartacus" declaims:

> We do not believe the lies about him,
> Who for millennia has carried the torch
> ...
> We know that you are what you were from the beginning.
> You did not want to sign the contracts,
> You did not want to be a lackey of authority,
> You did not want to fall into the pace of the throng of thralls,
> You did not want to deafen blood and nerve.
> So you set off, away to your fair task
> To bring light to thralls and ruin to tormentors.
> And thus shine bright your proud torch. (Ibid.:3)[32]

29) Original: "Saliga äro de stridbara, ty genom dem skola de saktmodiga slutligen kunna lefva på jorden."

30) Original: "I Satans gestalt, i Prometeus' gestalt / Förblef jag densamme — okuflig."

31) Original: "Det finns en varelse, som går omkring / Och ställer till blott bråk och ledsamheter. / Förr lär han ha sväfvat fritt i himmelsk ether / Och varit du och bror med herligheter." Spartacus is identified as Carleson on p. 68 in the same issue, where we can also learn that he too, like Wermelin, had studied at Uppsala University.

32) Original: "Vi tro ej lögnerna om den, / Som i årtusenden har facklan burit / ... Vi veta, att du är, hvad först du var. / Du ville icke skrifva på kontrakten, / Du ville icke stå lakej åt makten, / Du ville icke trampa trälhopstakten, / Du ville icke döfva blod och nerv. / Så gick du bort, bort till ditt sköna värf / Att bringa trälar ljus och plågarne förderf. / Och lyse så din stolta fackla klar."

In the issue for Christmas 1893, Ernst Hellborg (1867–1927) wrote a text where he describes how he sits pondering who Lucifer *really* is, when all of a sudden the fallen angel materializes in the room: "The youthful face, his whole being, comprised a union of beauty and power, vigorous indomitable power. The deep, dark eyes gazed at me in such a friendly manner and there was an expression of contemplating earnestness in them" (1893:3).[33] He explains to Hellborg:

> It was I, who forged the weapon of your thoughts
> against the tyranny of blind gods;
> it was I, who watched and, filled with hope, patiently waited
> it was I, who foremost among you fought
> for a future bright and joyous and free. (Ibid.:4)[34]

Hellborg did not belong to the advocates of violent action, but shared their dedication to crushing Christianity and a majority of his writings focuses on this goal. Like Wermelin, he was well read in English literature (Uhlén 1964:75–77). His panegyric to Satan can thus safely be assumed to have been inspired by the classics of literary Satanism in this language.

The poem quoted above is something of an anomaly in mainstream social democracy at this late stage. When the social democrats started to seriously aim for a place in parliament, and for this reason expurgated the more extreme tendencies within their ranks, Satan was soon bundled off to the rubbish heap of unsuitable rhetoric. In fact, for the most part the figure met the same fate in other phalanxes of Swedish socialists as well. Early Swedish socialists were fond of using allegory and evoking a mysterious, visionary atmosphere, and gave center stage to mythology, gods, and abstract symbols. As previously mentioned, with time a more naturalist and social realist approach gained ground instead, albeit still with numerous exceptions challenging its hegemony.

---

33) Original: "Det ungdomliga anletet, hela hans gestalt utgjorde en förening af skönhet och kraft, spänstig, okuflig kraft. De djupa, mörka ögonen blickade så vänligt emot mig och det låg ett uttryck af tänkande allvar i dem."

34) Original: "Det var jag, som edra tankars vapen smidde / mot de blinda gudars tyranni; / det var jag, som vakade och hoppfullt bidde, / det var jag, som främst bland er stridde / för en framtid, ljus och glad och fri."

Ardent celebrations of Satan as the spirit of progress can be found in several issues of the socialist youth association's magazine *Brand* ("Fire") as late as 1907. In the seventh issue of that year, the signature "n" contributed "Hymn to Satan," a composition showing obvious similarities to the poem of the same title written by Nobel Laureate Giosuè Carducci — in fact, so overt that it is perhaps more of a free interpretation (or, less generously put, pure plagiarism) of Carducci's work, which was translated into Swedish by Aline Pipping in 1894. Once more, like Bakunin, focusing on Genesis 3, "n" blasphemously exclaims:

> Hail thee, Satan,
> who could entice
> first woman
> to pluck
> the fruit of knowledge!
> What was there before
> the light of knowledge entered the world? ("n" 1907:5)[35]

The writer "n" goes on:

> But You Great
> Holy Satan
> Lover of man
> Hater of God
> more clever was than
> old God
> who posited
> the commandments filled with thanks. (Ibid.)[36]

The theme of Satan as a god of reason and intellectual enlightenment, standing in opposition to God the enslaver, can also be found implicitly in Erik Lindorm's sarcastic poem "Paradiset" ("Paradise"), in his collection of socialist verse *Bubblor från botten* ("Bubbles from the Bottom," 1908), where the ending words are: "We should have been obedient, my missus / Thus yet in Paradise / Like before we would wander, blissful and

35) Original: "Hell dig Satan, / som kunde locka / första kvinnan /till att plocka / kunskapens frukt! / Vad fanns väl innan / vetandets ljus i världen kom?"

36) Original: Men Du Store / Helige Satan, / Mänskoälskarn, / Gudahatarn, / slugare var än / åldrige guden / som ställde upp / de tackfyllda buden."

stupid" (1908:15).[37] Another pro-satanic counter-reading of Genesis 3 is on display in *Brand* issue nine (1905) where an excerpt from a longer text by Uppsala University literature professor Henrik Schück demonstrates that the serpent spoke the truth when he told Eve that contrary to God's threats, she would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit. God is a liar and the serpent a truthful helper. According to Schück, God feared that humans would become his equal, and this was the real reason for his admonitions concerning the fruit (1905:11).

Satan becomes not only a symbol of intellectual enlightenment, but also of the so-called sins that many socialists believed were nothing of the sort. In the short story "I helvetet" ("In Hell"), published in *Brand* 12 (1907), Hjalmar Nilsson depicts an imprisoned proletarian having a dream about Hell, where Lucifer explains "Jehovah is conservative, but Lucifer is a democrat," and Hell is not a place of torment at all:

> . . . if men were wise, they would rather come here than to Heaven. All great spirits come here, all souls who have had the ability to detest fawning. Do not believe that we have a disagreeable time. Christianity preaches asceticism and self-denial; we preach happiness and pleasure. Hence, all the things considered sinful on earth are practiced here: eroticism, dance, theatre and cheerful melodies. (1907:14)[38]

Fairy Tale, Fire, and Deeds of Terrorism

In *Loke: Flygblad till ungdomen* ("Loki: Pamphlet for Youth") — another short-lived socialist publication — the following explanation for the use of mythological figures was printed in 1897:

> Loki, Prometheus, Lucifer, these beautifully concocted figures of myth, are all symbolic expressions of one and the same thing: the spirit of liberation. They represent the human lust for rebellion, the battle between oppressor and oppressed,

37) Original: "Vi skulle varit lydiga, min gumma / så skulle ännu uti paradiset / som förr vi vandra, saliga och dumma." The poem was previously published in *Brand* 8, see Lindorm 1907:6.

38) Original: ". . . voro människorna kloka skulle de hellre vilja hit än till himmelen. Hit komma alla stora andar, alla själar som haft förmåga att hata kryperiet. Tro ej att vi ha tråkigt. Kristendomen predikar asketism och försakelse, vi predika glädjen och njutningen. Här idkas därför alla de saker, som ansågos för synd på jorden; erotiken, dansen, teater och glada melodier."

> between darkness and light. And therefore the dissatisfied, forward-looking individuals in society hold dear these personages of fairytale. (Anonymous 1897:1)[39]

Another example of "dissatisfied, forward-looking individuals" fond of such personages can be found in *Brand* issue 1 (1898) where the signature R. Å. (Robert Ågren, 1869–1917) expresses his longing for "[a]n arson, not with hideous grin / That burns churches and altar boxes," and calls out "O hear, Prometheus, listen to my song! / Steal the sacred flame once more!" (R. Å 1898:4).[40] With his exhortation to church burning, R. Å. was clearly trying his best to be provocative and probably confirmed the very worst fears the priesthood held concerning socialists.

The renowned revolutionary Leon Larsson (1883–1922) also drew on a Luciferian, promethean symbolism of internal and external hellfire and arson when he wrote the following Byron-like verses in his book *Hatets sånger* ("Songs of Hate," 1906): "But one feeling I have: a devilish hatred it is. / And in my own soul, Hell has its home, / It is a fire of the abyss, that ravages and devours" (1906:6).[41] The mentions of fire may be a biographical reference, as Larsson — when he was sixteen years old — had been sentenced to six months of hard labor for setting fire to a house in Malmö (Uhlén 1964:270). A few pages on in the same book, in the poem "Frihetsbegär" ("Desire for Freedom"), a panegyric to the longing for liberty, he writes: "That spark smoldered in Satan / when alone he fought against God / when defiantly he left the Lord / and refused to heed his command" (Larsson 1906:12).[42] Larsson's fame was not only a product of his poetical talent and penchant for purely symbolic provocation, but also of his involvement in dramatic events like the infamous police raid against the so-called "bomb factory" in Vasastan, Stockholm,

---

39) Original: "Loke, Prometeus, Lucifer, dessa myternas skönt diktade gestalter, äro alla symboliska uttryck för en och samma sak: befrielseanden. De representera den mänskliga upprorslustan, striden mellan förtryckare och förtryckte, mellan mörker och ljus. Och därför håller de missnöjda, framtidsblickande individerna i samhället dessa sagans personligheter kära."

40) Original: "En mordbrand icke med hiskeligt grin / Som bränner kyrkor och altarskrin," "O hör Prometeus, lyss min sång! / Stjäl heliga elden än en gång!"

41) Original: "En känsla har jag blott: ett djävulskt hat det är. / Och i min egen själ har helvetet sin boning, / Det är en afgrundseld, som sargar och förtär."

42) Original: "Den gnistan hon glödde hos satan, / när ensam han stred mot gud, / när trotsigt han lämnade herren / och vägrade lyda hans bud."

when dynamite and other materials were confiscated in the apartment of Larsson and his brother (Uhlén 1964:280–282).

To his contemporaries, verses like Larsson's would not have had the quaint and amusing qualities we may perceive in them today. At the time of their publication, anarchists were genuinely dreaded in Sweden, as several bloody terrorist deeds were perpetuated during these years. Not only was the "bomb factory" in the Larsson brothers' apartment discovered in 1906, but also in July 1908, a bomb attached to the hull of a ship in Malmö harbor housing English strike breakers was detonated, killing one person and injuring many. In 1909, the commander of the Swedish coastal artillery was shot dead by an anarchist (carrying an issue of *Brand* in his pocket!) in a Stockholm park, the intended target actually being Tsar Nicholas II who was visiting Sweden (ibid.:290). The anarchists wanted people to fear them, and Satanism would naturally have seemed a useful additional tool to accomplish this.

The Romantic Influence and Swedish Socialism as "Religion"

When Axel Uhlén, in his extensive study of Swedish socialist poetry, writes of "revolutionsromantik" he is referring specifically to a rosy view of primarily the French revolution of 1789 (from whence many Swedish socialists borrowed their noms de plume) (ibid.:48). This term would also be an appropriate label for the special brand of revolutionary socialism propounded by those with sympathies for the Devil: a strain of political poetics strongly colored by Romanticism, especially its English branch. A German influence also appears likely. Goethe's poem "Prometheus" (written in 1772–1774, published 1789), in which the Titan expresses his defiance of God (Zeus) and relishes his own independence, is one example of parallel motifs. Another example is Schiller's play *Die Räuber* (1781), in which the heroic robber Karl Moor, in a republican and revolutionary conversation (which was deleted from the second edition of the play), describes Milton's Satan as one who can never submit to another, and then rhetorically asks, "Was he not an extraordinary genius?" (Schiller 1953:248).[43]

43) Original: "War er nicht, ein außerordentliches Genie?"

This "revolutionsromantik" had visual dimensions as well. In her dissertation on the use of banners in early Swedish socialism, Margareta Ståhl has pointed out similarities to Masonic symbolism in the iconography used by one union group (1999:203). This does not in any way imply that the socialists were in cohorts with the Freemasons, but is an interesting illustration of how many symbols had become floating signifiers by the late nineteenth century and how iconography originally gleaned from the depositories of Western esotericism thus could find its way into some rather unexpected contexts. Ståhl further shows that the commonly seen torch symbol on the socialist banners was, often, a reference to Lucifer (ibid.:204–205). The 1886 and 1887 *Lucifer* journals also had a hand grasping a burning torch as their logotype, firmly establishing, I would say, the connection between the torch as a depiction of the purely etymological content of the word ("light bringer") and the demonic connotations explored in the aforementioned journal. Ståhl suggests that star decorations on the banners could also be tied to Lucifer, him being the morning star (ibid.:205). Whether the connection between the torch, stars, and Lucifer was something all activists were aware of is highly doubtful, and one should not be tempted to conclude that vast scores of workers were, to put it drastically, marching under the banner of Satan.

Several commentators have remarked that socialist doctrine assumed religious dimensions for its adherents in Sweden. Well-known political scientist Herbert Tingsten, for instance, writes that it became "a gospel, enough to fill their need of a philosophy of life" and took on "something of the color of religious faith" (Tingsten 1941:148).[44] Hendrik de Man, though not writing specifically about Swedish conditions, argued already in 1926 that the worker's movement displayed religious traits and that some of its practices could be related to Christian folk festivals and religious processions. The symbols and rites of socialism are, according to de Man, expressions of religious needs (1928 [1926]:127–161). Ståhl dismisses de Man's theory as a rationalization after the event and emphasizes that the socialists of the 1880s constituted a protest movement, in which many participants tried to break the hegemony

44) Original: "ett evangelium, tillräckligt för att fylla deras behov av en livsåskådning … något av den religiösa trons färg."

of Christianity since they perceived it as yet another capitalist tool for domination. That socialists would write new words to Christian hymns and appropriate religious customs, even going so far as to hold socialist weddings and baptisms, was in Ståhl's opinion a provocation rather than an adaptation to existing patterns (1999:262–263). It is possible that both Ståhl and de Man are right. To me, it appears likely that it was often a case of both attitudes being adopted simultaneously for strategic reasons, in order not to alienate adherents. Further, we need to keep in mind that the worker's movement was deeply divided in different phalanxes, and that some of them may have intended to eradicate Christianity by replacing it with new rituals and symbols (which were, it should be mentioned for the sake of clarity, not of a Satanic variety), while others may have been keen to adapt to the ingrained religious habits of many members. In other words, there is no way to determine an attitude towards religion held by the entire movement, since it was so heterogeneous.

The Death of the Devil and the American Antichrist

After World War I, very few authors would praise the Devil, and Lucifer-friendly artistic movements like Symbolism and Decadence disappeared, their fanciful reveries largely extirpated by the war's harsh realities of nerve gas, machine guns, and corpse-filled trenches. Socialist Satanism more or less vanished after the war as well, at least in Western Europe.[45] But there were isolated later instances where left-wingers still loved Lucifer. In his 1975 book *Wie alles anfing* ("How Everything Began") the West German anarchist terrorist Michael "Bommi" Baumann (1948–), of *Bewegung 2. Juni* fame, claims Satanist tendencies were widespread in his political circles. "'Hail Satan' was actually the internal greeting," he writes, and explains that a common salute was the so-called sign of the horns (a fist with raised index and little finger). He further mentions Proudhon and Bakunin as sources of inspiration for such infernal antics (Baumann 1976:81).[46]

45) The situation was somewhat different in the Soviet Union. On this, see Boss 1991:135–137, 140–152, 235.

46) Original: "'Heil Satan' war eigentlich der interne Gruß."

What of the country that would later appoint itself the worldwide scourge of socialism, the United States? Aside from the anarchist newspaper *Lucifer* mentioned earlier, a slightly later American left-wing figure also made use of Satan as a positive role model. In 1917, the socialist writer and magazine publisher Henry M. Tichenor (1858–1924) unleashed *The Sorceries and Scandals of Satan*, a book-length head-on attack on Christianity portraying Satan as a hero and friend of the proletarians. Chapter one ends with Tichenor ascertaining that "it seems unfair to judge the conquered by the testimony of his victorious foe," speculating that "perhaps a candid investigation by a neutral will place Satan in different light" (1917:25–26). The rest of the book consists of precisely such an investigation. It soon becomes clear where Tichenor's sympathies lie, as he writes only a few pages later: "[T]he divinely ordained warlords and landlords and joblords, the exploiters and extortioners, might be in Hell, if Satan had won the war he fought with Jehovah" (ibid.:30).[47] Like many other socialists, he holds Satan up as a patron of liberty and science, claiming, "it is Satan that inspired the world's scholars and thinkers, and its rebels against oppression." His adversary God, on the other hand, "does not believe in science, nor in human liberty" (ibid.:31). Similarly to Michelet and Swedish socialists, Tichenor states outright that "Jehovah is the god of the master class," and hence Satan is logically the god of the oppressed (ibid.:38). This, he states, is not an unorthodox view: "That Jehovah is on the side of tyranny, and Satan on the side of freedom, has never been disputed by the Church" (ibid.:87).

It is not only economic tyranny that Jehovah personifies, he is also an enemy of all the worldly pleasures embodied by Satan: "All the joys and love and laughter of life we owe to Satan's sinners" (ibid.:89). The similarity to Hjalmar Nilsson's 1907 short story "I helvetet," discussed above, is obvious. A certain distinct set of ideas about the figure of the Devil were in other words widespread and reading socialist texts from different countries often causes a feeling of being in a chamber of echoes. Rounding off the book, Tichenor underscores that when "plutocracy and priestcraft" are gone, Satan and Jehovah will both be redundant. Then

47) Variations on this proclamation are interspersed through the book, for example on p. 88: "Jehovah is the proclaimed god of the ruling and robbing classes. He is the god of the landlords, the job-lords and warlords. Satan and his heretics are the rebels of earth."

"[t]he soul of Humanity shall ride victorious above the raging storm of the ages, over all the thrones and altars, over all gods and devils of earth" (ibid.:178). This is, of course, the same atheistic anthropocentric view held by practically all of the socialist Satanists discussed thus far, but also illustrates Tichenor's conviction that until this utopia has been accomplished, Satan remains very useful as a symbol to socialists.

Conclusion: Why Satan?

Out of the four persons usually considered the most influential and famous anarchist thinkers — Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin — three explicitly celebrated Satan as a symbol of freedom and rebellion against unjust authority.[48] In early Swedish socialism, including the non-anarchist variety, Lucifer was a prominent symbol. He appeared in the US as well, and later in Germany, thus being a figure spread more or less all over the Western world.

When it comes to those socialists willing to accept staying within the symbolic framework of Christianity to some extent, perhaps in order to use a language familiar to the audience, it is not so strange that they chose Satan as their symbol for toppling worldly power, given what the Bible, in certain passages, has to say about such issues. Especially in Paul, God quite unequivocally appears as the ultimate protector of the existent world order and its rulers. In Romans 13.1–2 (King James edition), for instance, it is famously stated: "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." And who would logically be the great adversary of God's ordinance? Satan, of course.

Perhaps another possible explanation is provided by the editorial for the first issue of the Theosophical Society's *Lucifer*, where it is stated that no better symbol could be found than Lucifer for the journal's objective: "throwing a ray of truth on everything hidden by the darkness of prejudice, by *social* or religious misconceptions." An endeavor "to force the weak-hearted to look truth straight in the face" is best served by "a title

48) For example George Crowder identifies these four as the leading representatives of nineteenth-century anarchism in his book *Classical Anarchism* (1991:3).

belonging to the category of branded names" (Blavatsky 1887:2).[49] In other words, startling people by using a symbol they instinctively consider evil could be a way to make them think more carefully about all manners of preconceived notions.

It sometimes seems that the socialist Satanists are treading a slippery rhetorical slope where they risk ending up in the "abyss of religious absurdity" that Bakunin warns them of. Their fiery invocations of Satan as the genius of freedom, with much emotional fervor and borrowings from Biblical phrasings, often come dangerously close to sounding like actual religious writings. This is a problem they share with Anton LaVey (1930–1997), the nominally atheist founder of the Church of Satan, who often writes as if he is praising the Devil as an existing and conscious entity. Indeed, some of his acolytes, most importantly his former right-hand man Michael Aquino, claim he did at one point hold a theistic belief in Satan (Aquino 2009:40).[50] Be that as it may, there is no reason to think something similar applies to the socialist writers. When it comes to Bakunin, Wermelin, and others — with for example the on-and-off Christian Proudhon being a more complicated example — their view of the Devil is probably best understood as part of the broad tendency from the early nineteenth century onwards to view figures from religious myth as simply representations of human traits. In Sweden, Ellen Key wrote about humanity becoming aware that it itself is "God and Lucifer, Christ and Prometheus" (1905:39). That some readers may have interpreted the left-wing ideologues like Aquino does with LaVey is still clear, one example being "Bommi" Baumann's assertion about Bakunin's *Dieu et l'état*, claiming that it is "really somewhere a Gnostic story, that has *a religious content* when he says: when we take the Bible seriously we can in the end only say 'Hail Satan' " (1976:82).[51]

Throughout this article, I have suggested several possible reasons for the socialist use of Satan. To summarize: 1) Revolutionaries' partly ironic appropriation of Satan ridiculed the conservative view of the radical and subversive as de facto demonic. 2) Satanist counter-readings of

49) Emphasis added.

50) Some passages that do not sound very atheistic can be found in LaVey 1969:23, 52.

51) Original: "eigentlich irgendwo eine gnostiche Geschichte, das hat religiösen Inhalt, wenn er sagt, wenn wir mal die Bibel ernst nehmen, können wir zum Schluß nur noch sagen 'Heil Satan.' " Emphasis added.

the Bible — where the Devil becomes a noble rebel and, in Genesis 3 a chronicle of humankind's liberation from slavery to God — served to undermine the authority of Christianity. 3) Lucifer as a symbol of liberty was a well-established symbol in Romantic literature as well as some forms of alternative spirituality (such as Theosophy) during the time period, and the tactic of radical counter-readings of Scripture was also present in these contexts. 4) Satan is a colorful figure that helps make the exposition of abstract political ideas easier to grasp and digest. 5) Satanism provoked the bourgeoisie and the Church, and probably instilled fear in some opponents (even those who did not believe in God would have been likely to find the figure of Satan discomforting). 6) Satanic shock tactics could work as a way to startle the reader into paying attention. 7) The Church had used Satan as a symbol of things they deemed sinful, and thus he became a logical choice of patron for those who would celebrate these things as innocent pleasures. 8) Socialists grew up in a Christian culture and may have used religious symbols like Satan out of habit or because of a longing for the power of religious myth, which was lacking in atheist socialism. 9) The language of Christian myth was familiar to the socialist audience and therefore rhetorically convenient to use.

In my opinion, all of the above are fairly plausible explanations, but not all will apply to each individual socialist writer and current. Hence, though some general suggestions can indeed be made, it is difficult to distill an all-encompassing explanation for why Satan became such a popular symbol.

A final question I would like to bring up is how a historian of religions best understands this usage of Satan. One way of approaching it is to view the socialist Lucifer as a myth in a wider sense, inspired by theoreticians like Roland Barthes.[52] However, that myths understood in such a broad fashion are obviously relevant to study within our discipline is not a given. But the fact that the myth in question, even if it is secular in character, is built around a figure from more classically religious myth is in my opinion quite sufficient to motivate interest from a historian of religions, who should then ask: what happens to religious material at

52) See Barthes' influential *Mythologies* (1957) for an introduction to such an approach to myth.

the dawn of a more secularized (or at least less religiously orthodox and heterogeneous) era? That this is an interesting question for us should be obvious. Following a figure like Satan from his rather more fixed position in a (admittedly non-monolithic) Christian framework to being a (more or less) floating signifier, can tell us interesting things about the wider cultural context, that are beyond the scope of this article to explore.[53] This development could also be described as one from myth to allegory, but, as has been shown, with a lingering grain of religious tendencies among the nominally atheist socialists, exemplified not least by their propensity — similar to what we find in LaVey's writings — to use a language easily misunderstood as celebrating Satan in a religious sense, as an external and conscious spiritual entity.

References

Abrams, M. H. 1974 [1953]. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press.

Anonymous. 1897. "Loke." In *Loke: Flygblad till Ungdomen*.

Aquino, Michael. 2009. *The Church of Satan*, 7th online ed. http://www.xeper.org/maquino/nm/COS.pdf (accessed 31 May 2013).

Bakunin, Michael. 1970. *God and the State*. New York: Dover.

Barthes, Roland. 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Les lettres nouvelles.

Baumann, "Bommi" [Michael]. 1976. *Wie alles anfing*, reprint ed. Frankfurt: Sozialistische Verlagslieferung.

Blavatsky, H. P. 1887. "What's in a Name? Why the Magazine is Called Lucifer." *Lucifer* 1(1):1–7.

Boss, Valentin. 1991. *Milton and the Rise of Russian Satanism*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press.

Burke, Edmund. 1889. *Works*, vol. I. London: George Bell & Sons.

———. 1969 [1790]. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Harmondsworth and Baltimore: Penguin.

Burton, Richard E. 1991. *Baudelaire and the Second Republic: Writing and Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Clark, T. J. 1973. *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848–1851*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Crowder, George. 1991. *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

de Man, Hendrik. 1928 [1926]. *Socialismens psykologi*. Stockholm: Tidens förlag.

53) On Satan as a floating signifier, see Petersen 2009:10–13.

de Vigny, Alfred. 1986. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I. s.l.: Gallimard.
Faxneld, Per. 2006. *Mörkrets apostlar: satanism i äldre tid*. Sundbyberg: Ouroboros.
———. 2011. "The Strange Case of Ben Kadosh: A Luciferian Pamphlet from 1906 and its Current Renaissance." *Aries* 1(11):1–22.
———. 2012. "Blavatsky the Satanist: Luciferianism in Theosophy, and its Feminist Implications." *Temenos* 2(48):203–230.
———. 2013. "Witches, Anarchism, and Evolutionism: Stanislaw Przybyszewski's fin-de-siècle Satanism and the Demonic Feminine." In Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa. Petersen (eds.), *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 53–77.
Godwin, William. 1797. *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*. London: G. G. & J. Robinson.
———. 1993. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. London: William Pickering.
Hazlitt, William. 1930–1934. *Complete Works*, vol. V. London: J. M. Dent.
Hellborg, Ernst. 1893. "Hvem är du Lucifer?" *Lucifer: Ljusbringaren* (Christmas issue):3–4.
Hyams, Edward. 1979. *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works*. London: Murray.
Hyslop, Lois Boe. 1976. "Baudelaire, Proudhon, and 'Le Reniement de saint Pierre.' " *French Studies* 30(3):273–286.
Key, Ellen. 1905. *Lifslinjer*, 2: I. Stockholm: Bonniers.
Larsson, Leon. 1906. *Hatets sånger*. Stockholm: Wilhemssons.
LaVey, Anton Szandor. 1969. *The Satanic Bible*. New York: Avon Books.
Lehner, Ernst and Johanna Lehner. 1971. *Picture Book of Devils, Demons and Witchcraft*. New York: Dover.
Lindorm, Erik. 1908. *Bublor från botten*. Stockholm: Carl Thorséns förlag.
———. 1907. "Paradiset." *Brand* 8:6.
McCalman, Iain. 1988. *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840*. Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, etc.: Cambridge University Press.
Michelet, Jules. 1987. *La Sorcière*. Paris: Jean de Bonnot.
"n." 1907. "Hymn till Satan." *Brand* 7:5.
Nilsson, Hjalmar. 1907. "I helvetet." *Brand* 12.:14–15.
Novalis. 2008. *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
Paulson, Ronald. 1983. *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
Petersen, Jesper Aagaard. 2009. "Introduction: Embracing Satan." In Jesper Aagaard Petersen (ed.), *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 1–24.
Proudhon, P. J. n. d. *Système des contradictions économiques ou philosophie de la misère*. Paris: Ernest Flammarion.
———. 1923. *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e^ siècle*. Paris: Marcel Rivière.
———. 1932. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III. Paris: Marcel Rivière.
R. Å. [Robert Ågren]. 1898. "Brand!" *Brand* 1:2.

Rubin, James Henry. 1980. *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet & Proudhon*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Rudwin, Maximilian. 1931. *The Devil in Legend and Literature*. Chicago and London: Open Court.

Sand, George. 1979. *Consuelo*. Paris: Editions de la Sphère.

Sears, Hal D. 1977. *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in Victorian America*. Lawrence: Regent Press of Kansas.

Schiller, Friedrich. 1953. *Die Räuber*. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus.

Schock, Peter A. 2003. *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schück, Henrik. 1905. "Paradis-Sagan: Ur den israeliska litteraturen." *Brand* 9.:11–12.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. 1993. *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

"Spartacus." 1891. "Lucifer." In *Lucifer: Arbetarkalender* 1(1):2–3.

Ståhl, Margareta. 1999. *Vår fana röd till färgen: fanor som medium för visuell kommunikation under arbetarrörelsens genombrottstid i Sverige fram till 1890*, Ph.D. diss. Linköping: Linköpings universitet.

Tichenor, Henry M. 1917. *The Sorceries and Scandals of Satan*. St. Louis: Phil Wagner.

Tingsten, Herbert. 1941. *Den svenska socialdemokratins idéutveckling*, vol. I. Stockholm: Tidens förlag.

Uhlén, Axel. 1964. *Arbetardiktningens pionjärperiod: 1885–1909*. Johanneshov: Bokförlaget Vanadis.

Vincent, K. Steven. 1984. *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wermelin, Atterdag. 1886. "Lucifers tio bud." *Lucifer: Socialdemokratiskt flygblad* 1(1 [Christmas issue]):2.

———. 1887. "Ljusbringaren." *Lucifer: Flygblad för bespottelse och galghumor* 2(1):1.