

English 211 – 2004
Mark Bayer
Take Home Examination



Milton's Satan

“ . . . Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrain'd, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire. The history of this is written in Paradise Lost, & the Governor or Reason is called Messiah.

And the original Archangel, or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is called the Devil or Satan, and his children are called Sin and Death

Note: The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of the Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it. . . .”

-William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1792)

“The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus is Satan. . . Satan [embodies] courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force. . . The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and excuse the former because the latter exceeded all measure. . .”

-Percy Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820)

Almost since the poem's publication, readers of *Paradise Lost* have noticed a strong tendency to identify with Milton's revolutionary Satan rather than his Puritanical God. This paradoxical phenomenon is probably most succinctly and notoriously advocated in the two quotations by Blake and Shelley excerpted above. Others, of course, have popularized this opinion while many have discounted it, suggesting that the character's seeming attractiveness to a fallen humanity is an integral part of the allure of Satan and our sinful world more generally.

Please write a coherent paper of six pages on the above topic. Feel free to either agree or disagree with the premise, remembering that BOTH positions could be argued to have some merit, and that the seemingly more attractive position isn't necessarily the most cogent.

Good Luck! The papers will be due on Thursday, 3 June, either by email or under my door.