



# Evil Be My Good: An unauthorized Paradise Lost study guide

*Derek Murphy*

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## **Evil Be My Good: An unauthorized Paradise Lost study guide** Derek Murphy

A history of fallen angels, pirates, revolutionaries and other daring insurgents who liberated humanity and founded the modern world. Paradise Lost is a unique text in that responses to Milton's epic have not evolved in line with trends in literary theory, and instead rehash the three hundred year old disagreement on whether Milton's Satan is, in any sense, either by accident or deliberation, the hero of the story. This dialogue, like the biblical story of the Garden of Eden on which the epic is based, centers on the theme of temptation: in Paradise Lost Satan's deliberate and malicious destruction of Adam and Eve seems to guarantee his guilt, yet it is hard not to sympathize with the heroic passion of Satan's daring odyssey. Many modern critics read this as exactly the genius of Paradise Lost, that it is a seductive text, and that Milton's Satan must be resisted. On the other hand, it's easy to argue that this orthodox reading is medieval--a duty towards obedience to inherited wisdom and the strict containment of your own passionate tendencies; and that this reading is also completely at odds with the liberal, Faustian values of contemporary society. In this thesis, after exploring the orthodox response to Paradise Lost (and the reaction it generates), I'll demonstrate how Milton's writings are symptomatic of an ethical inversion in Western culture, which first caused Satan to be celebrated (as a symbol for revolutionary politics) and later condemned (as humanity confronted the depths of its unrestrained depravity). After tracing how responses to the character of Satan have evolved in literature and entertainment in line with political sympathies, my original contribution to knowledge will be a comparative reading of Paradise Lost through the lens of postmodern thought and existentialism as Satan's over-proximity with the Real (the abyss of freedom creates anxiety which demands action). Satan's crisis of identity can be divided into three major shifts: the development of subjectivity through a crisis of alienation; his resistance to a totalizing power discourse that defines his being; and his ultimate failure to exempt himself from the systemic order that relied on his transgression. The aim of this book will be to show how universally modern thinkers agree on the concept of evil as a negation of what is, in favor of anything else but this--a negation that is paradoxically the source of all human liberty and creativity (which nevertheless leads to death); and also to demonstrate how the silencing of so-called satanic elements allows and perpetuates social injustice and the marginalization of minority voices.

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