

## A Monument to Satan: Menz's *Teufel*

by Kate Hutchens

In 1892, the Trinity Episcopal Church of Detroit inhabited a grand new building. Designed by architectural firm Morgan and Rice in the English Gothic style, the exterior featured gargoyles on both its east and west façades. In his account of it, commissioned by Trinity Church's Ladies' Aid Society, James E. Scripps warily rationalizes the presence of these "grotesque" creatures:

*The question is often asked, what [is] the significance of these monsters in a Christian church[?] The writer is unable to answer authoritatively, but presumes that they symbolize evil spirits fleeing from the holy precincts, for it will be observed they all point in a direction away from the center of the church, and are found, I believe, in old churches, mainly on the exterior of the edifice.<sup>1</sup>*

Thirteen years later and less than two miles away, the German-born stonecutter and ex-Episcopalian Herman Menz donned the top of his small workshop at 308 Stanton Avenue with his own statue of the Devil. On his 71st birthday, 5 November 1905, Menz hosted a small gathering at his home, to which the workshop was adjoined, to unveil and celebrate his Luciferian chimera.<sup>2</sup> The inscription at the base of the statue read (in what one contemporary reporter called "dog-Latin"), *Homo non est creatio, sed evolutio. Deus non fecit hominem, sed homo fecit deos* ("Man was not created, he evolved. God did not make man, man made the gods").

This incident, and Herr Menz's subsequent notoriety, might have been lost to us but for the self-archiving impulse of Menz and his friend, physician and fellow free-thinker Dr. Tobias Sigel. Over the following three years, Menz relented in his need to display the statue on his property, sold Satan to a State Fair exhibition, campaigned for City Alderman on a platform of "raising hell" in city hall, recovered his devil when it was discarded as a cursed object, and unveiled the Devil anew on his 74th birthday. All the while, he received letters and newspaper coverage ranging in tone from enthusiastic support to seething condemnation, from Detroit to Paris. In 1931, Sigel donated a collection of documents—

newspaper clippings, letters, and even a script of a play devoted to Menz's endeavour—to the University of Michigan's Labadie Collection. A scrapbook was compiled and titled, in embossed gold leaf, *Menz's Teufel* [sic.] (*Teufel* being German for "devil"). This scrapbook chronicles the *Teufel's* scandalizing career and offers a peculiar window into religious and political life in America during the peak of Progressivism.

This period, particularly from the mid-1880s to the mid-1910s, has also been called the "golden age of free-thought" in America.<sup>2</sup> Religious authority (and its symbols) was slowly unravelling, while Robert Ingersoll—the so-called "Great Infidel"—rallied crowds at lectures across the country, as he commended and was condemned by various newspapers. Rachel Scharfman posits that the "escalating labor strife and class conflict influenced many freethinkers' increasing attention to religion's imprecation with capitalism. But advances in scientific theory were what most dramatically revolutionized post-bellum free thought."<sup>3</sup> As Darwinism and social science gained credence, the churches' portraits of Satan as the terrible source of damnation were losing their hold on the popular imagination. Atheist leftists found small spaces in the rhetorical environment in which they could audaciously and publicly revere the image of the great

rebel angel. However, no sooner had these radicals employed this potent Lucifer myth than the power of the icon began to become diluted. If Satan, like God, was not to be feared, then he, too, could be mocked and dismissed, along with those who heralded his likeness.

At the time Menz's monument was un-



Photo Reads: HERMAN MENZ; Eccentric Stanton avenue resident who declares he will make things hot for anybody who molests his monument to the devil.

veiled, the struggle over the meaning of this icon gave rise to complex and varied invocations towards diverse and divergent aims. The Devil still appeared in religious campaigns, dolling out the fire and brimstone. Conservatives and reactionaries used labels like "devil" and "Satan" to denigrate leftist agents, and it could be argued that the embracing of this character was primarily an attempt to spin these insults positively.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the social leftists of the time were not universally anti-religious, as is evidenced, for example, by the large and vocal Catholic presence within the Knights of Labor organization. However, examples drawn from both the scrapbook and its contemporary context show that Satan was touted often and freely, and with strong philosophical backing, as a champion of outspoken freethinkers, anarchists, and other social leftists.

Some further background is useful here regarding popular conceptions of the Devil. In his book *Mephistopheles: The Devil in*

*the Modern World*, Jeffrey Burton Russell analyzes, among his other modern guises, Satan's characterization by the Romantic Movement. Russell posits that the Satan of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the title character from Johann Goethe's *Faust* (a devout disciple of the Devil) were both ideal Romantic heroes: "individual, alone against the world, self-assertive, ambitious, powerful, and liberator in rebellion against the society that blocks the way of progress toward liberty, beauty, and love."<sup>5</sup> Though Satan's significance was not thereby fixed or codified for all to share, Romantic literature and art was so prominent in Europe and the United States that one can assume a general awareness of this characterization.

Russell also describes the significant role played by Satan (figuratively, of course) in the French Revolution of 1798, a major milestone in Western political history:

As political reactionaries made common cause with Catholics against the Revolution, republicans and revolutionaries attacked Christianity and rallied to the standard of its opponents—the greatest of whom was Satan. Christ is King, but kings are evil, and the greatest king is the greatest evil. Revolutionaries tended to perceive Satan as a symbol of rebellion against the unjust order and tyranny of the *ancien régime* and its institutions: church, government, and family.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to a stance against tyranny (and therefore, by default, for democracy), another key aspect of the symbolic reverence for the Devil was his desire for man "to obtain knowledge by his own efforts rather than to receive it by grace."<sup>7</sup> The Romantics' merging of the characters of Prometheus—who, out of his love for mortals, bestowed upon humanity the technology of fire denied them by the gods—and Satan—who, out of his anger towards a tyrannical and fickle God, bestowed upon humanity knowledge of good and evil—was a "crucial symbolic transformation." Russell asserts that this melding allowed "the positive elements of Prometheus to be transferred to Satan, so that the Devil might also appear as a noble liberator of humanity."<sup>8</sup> It was this amalgamated Romantic Devil who was so useful to atheist leftist voices in the American political arena.

Menz crafted his *Teufel* of stone and perched him high on a pedestal, looking



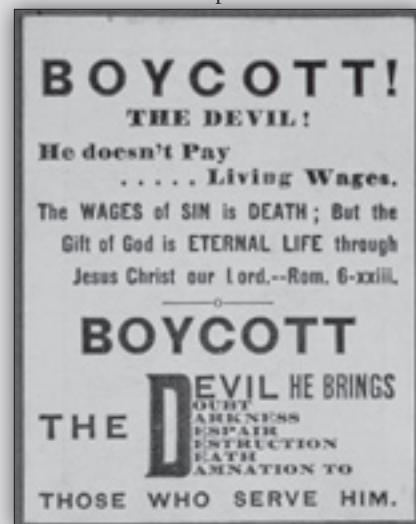
MONUMENT TO SATAN AND ITS BUILDER  
The good people of Detroit are so worked up over what they declare is sacrilege that police have been compelled to guard the statue. Herman Menz, the man who honored the Evil One, declares he will defend the fourteen-foot monument to the end.

down upon the passersby, evoking regular references in newspaper accounts and illustrations to those much more famous stone-carved creatures of Notre Dame. Thus, consideration of this *Teufel* requires a look at the cultural resonances of those chimeras that came into being while Europe was embroiled in another upheaval.<sup>9</sup> As part of his restoration of the Paris cathedral, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc began designing the gargoyles and chimeras to adorn the balustrades in the midst of France's February Revolution, part of the broader European revolutions of 1848. Time and circumstances rearranged these devils' meanings, too: these demonic figures were conceived in a time of democratic possibility, as part of Viollet-le-Duc's notion of a grand church of secular liberty. However, by the time the statues were finished, the milieu of the reactionary Second Empire had rendered them residual symbols of violence and fear.<sup>10</sup>

In the broader context of early-twentieth-century popular culture, Lucifer was also gaining face time in visages less dire than

the Christians asserted and more domestic than the freethinkers attested. In the relatively amoral world of modern commerce, the devil was popping up in various roles: a savvy consumer endorsing products, a graphic novelty, and a commercial spectacle. Posters and advertisements showed Satan enjoying wine, ink, clothing, and elixirs for his health.<sup>11</sup> Two postcards included in the *Menz's Teufel* scrapbook show mischievous images representing the word "devil," as in "We had a [drawing of a Satan-like character] of a time!" and "You saucy [devil image], you're hot stuff!" And when the controversy over Menz's *Teufel* grew to be too much for him (or, perhaps, when it grew enough to fetch the decent price of \$40), the stone carver sold the statue to a proprietor of a State Fair exhibition called "Inferno!"<sup>12</sup>

At least one bit of ephemera found in the



BOYCOTT! THE DEVIL!  
He doesn't Pay Living Wages. The WAGES of SIN is DEATH; But the Gift of God is ETERNAL LIFE through Jesus Christ our Lord --Rom. 6-xxiii.  
BOYCOTT THE DEVIL  
He Brings Doubt, Darkness, Destruction, Death and Damnation to those who serve him.

scrapbook makes use of both the leftist invocations of Satan and emerging propaganda/advertising featuring the devil at the same time. A small card, about three by five inches, exclaims "BOYCOTT!" at the top. The date and origin of this card is unknown, so it is hard to speculate what the most immediate resonance might have been for its recipient, but the style echoes fliers used in the period for commercial

boycotts. The second line of the card names the boycott's target: "The Devil!" The twist that connects directly to leftist labour movements of the day is in the third line: "He doesn't Pay...Living Wages." The card then cites the Christian scripture "The wages of sin is death" and lists the ills that befall those who follow Satan. Presumably, this card is meant to speak to, and thus simultaneously implicate and evangelize, those sympathetic to leftist labour activities.

Returning to Menz's *Teufel*, the pronounced admiration for the devil in this case was very much rooted in the Promethean Satanic myth. Though the anti-religious inscription on the statue itself does not reference the Devil at all, both Menz and Sigel had put forth laudatory statements at the unveiling of the *Teufel*, accepting as given the apocryphal Miltonian understanding of the serpent in Eden as a manifestation of Satan, and generally commending the speaker of truth and rebellious agent of human empowerment. This sentiment was echoed consistently throughout the correspondence Menz received from anarchistic and atheistic supporters around the country. However, Menz and Sigel took a bizarre and literalist approach in the specifics of their analysis of the Genesis story, and in so doing furthered the malleability and utility of Lucifer's significance by rendering him as the antagonist of the Bible itself. They reasoned that it was not only the encouragement to eat of the Tree of Knowledge that made Satan the real hero of the story, but also that he was, strictly speaking, more truthful than God had been. According to their reading of the text, Lucifer told "the first truth" in creation. As Sigel explained (in greater detail than did Menz):

God allmighty lied [...] "the day thou shalt eat therefrom, though shalt die," but the devil said "God knows that the day thou eateth therefrom thou shalt have the knowledge of good and evil, and be like God and live." [...] As far as we know through the holy book, edited by God Allmighty, and every word of which we must believe or be damned, the words of God wer[e] not true; for the voracious Eve, not only got her "Belly full" of the forbidden fruit, but stuffed Adam full of it also, and both thrive well on it. Hurrah for the forbidden fruit! According to Chapter 5, verse 3 and 5, Adam lived to

be 950 years of age and was dead 20 years before he died.

By employing the Devil as the instrument undercutting the coherence of the religious text and, by extension, the legitimacy of religious authority, Menz and Sigel paint Satan not only as the liberator of Adam and Eve, but also as the rescuer of themselves and their audience from ignorance and obedience to God.

Still, the veneration of the Devil by anti-religious leftists came in varied forms. In 1907, Maxim Gorky, the well-known Russian playwright and champion of the proletariat, published a short piece in Emma Goldman's monthly magazine *Mother Earth*. In the story, Gorky himself interviews Satan amidst the dead souls of the powerful men of history and, to the narrator's delight, the Devil reveals that he is really a revolutionary Socialist at heart.<sup>13</sup> With a similar conviction, Johann Most, the leader of a large anarchist circle in late-nineteenth-century New York, named his second son Lucifer.<sup>14</sup>

At least three anti-clerical newspapers circulating in the US at the time named Lucifer as both their figure- and masthead.<sup>15</sup> Moses Harman, a freethinking anarchist very likely known to Menz and Sigel, was editor of the most prominent of these, more than twenty years before the *Teufel* appeared. Beginning in 1881, Harman edited the *Valley Falls Liberal*, from Valley Falls, Kansas. The renowned radical paper was dedicated to the denunciation of religion and government, with an uncommon focus on women's rights. After two years, Harman changed the name of the paper to *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*,<sup>16</sup> and the first issue bearing the new title carried an explanation for the amendment. Harman very practically stated that wider circulation beyond Kansas called for a less localized name, but went on to assert the good fit of this particular moniker:

Freethought, in its character of "World's Savior," proposes to redeem and glorify the name Lucifer, even as it has redeemed and made illustrious the names "Infidel," "Freethinker," "Atheist," etc. While we do not adopt the reputed character of any man, god, demigod or demon as our model, yet there is one phase of the character of *their* Lucifer that is also appropriate to our paper, viz: that of an Educator. The god of the Bible had doomed

mankind to perpetual ignorance—they would never hav[e] known good from evil if Lucifer had not told them how to become as wise as the gods themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Harman’s invocation of Satan, while subtly different from a philosophical perspective, shares the fundamental argument made by Menz and Sigel. For those opposed to a reverence for God living in a milieu that predominantly ascribed veracity to the Biblical texts, pronouncing appreciation for the Devil was a strong rhetorical act. Harman’s denial of adopting a character as a model, which of course would have been just another form of religiosity, is paralleled again by Russell’s interpretation of the Romantic Lucifer: “Their admiration for Satan was not Satanism, however—not the worship of evil—for they made the Devil the symbol of what they regarded as good.”<sup>18</sup>

Then again, Harman was writing in the early 1880s, and Menz displayed his *Teufel* more than two decades later, at a time when spiritualism and a general interest in the “occult” were also on the rise. But, even in the two years between the *Teufel*’s initial appearance and its second unveiling, and through Menz’s intervening attempt at public office, the tone shifted from outrage to amused dismissal. Most reporters covering Menz’s campaign for Alderman treated his threats—to “raise hell” and “make it hot” for the seated council—with mockery.



MENZ DEFIES CHRISTIANITY  
WHILE REVIVAL STIRS CITY  
Menz Will Erect Three More "Devils"; Forty Converts in One Church Last Week.

"Read My Letters and Be Ashamed of Christianity," Says Menz—Real Religious Awakening Spreads to Churching of all Creeds.

As one article published in 1908, after the second unveiling of the *Teufel*, remarked, “[t]here are ‘sermons in stones,’ and this particular piece of stone ought to preach a sermon of tolerance toward an old man’s foibles that can harm no one.”<sup>19</sup>

As outrage towards Menz’s public pronouncement of Satan as superior to God withered, so too wilted the political propaganda that was meant to accompany it. Indeed, when admiration for the Devil no longer carried with it the threat of persecution, the monument as a rhetorical manoeuvre seemed to lose its power. The devil, so it seems, is in the details. ×

#### Endnotes

- 1 James E. Scripps, *Descriptive Account of the New Edifice Erected for Trinity Church, Detroit* (Printed on Behalf of the Funds of the Ladies’ Aid Society of Trinity Church, 1892), 7–8.
- 2 In architectural terms, a stone figure emerging from a building is only considered a gargoyle if it contains a spout and is designed to redirect water away from the building. A purely decorative, free-standing statue is a chimera.
- 3 Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 149–185.
- 4 Rachel Scharfman, “On Common Ground: Freethought and Radical Politics in New York City, 1890–1917,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2005), 19.
- 5 For example, Emma Goldman was often associated with Satan in printed accounts. See Richard Drinnan, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), and James Edwin Miller, *T.S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888–1922* (University Park, Penn.: Penn State Press, 2005).
- 6 Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 175.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 169.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 10 Michael Camille, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19–25.
- 11 Gilles Néret, *Devils* (Paris: TASCHEN, 2003).
- 12 “Menz’s Devil Comes Back: Electric Park Decides that Freak Statue is a Sure Hoodoo.” Newspaper clipping, publication unknown, date unknown. Found in *Menz’s Teufel* scrapbook, 7.
- 13 Maxim Gorky, “The Masters of Life: An Interview with Maxim Gorky,” *Mother Earth* 1, no. 11 (January 1907): 47–54.
- 14 Tom Goyen, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 101. Interestingly, Most wrote a pamphlet in German entitled *Die Gottespest, or The God Pestilence*. In 1932, Tobias Sigel translated this pamphlet into Esperanto and published it in Detroit.
- 15 Harman’s paper was the first to use Lucifer in the name, followed by *Lucifer’s Lantern*, an anti-Mormon paper edited by Theodore Schroeder in Salt Lake City, 1898–1901, and *Lucifer*, a freethought periodical published in German by M. Biron, in Madison, Wisconsin, early 1880s(?)–1896.
- 16 In 1907, after his imprisonment for violating the Comstock Law, brought about by the publication of a story detailing and railing against marital rape, Harman changed the name again, this time to the *American Journal of Eugenics*. His views on sexual politics and the modern endeavour of human self-improvement led to a firm belief in the eugenics movement.
- 17 Moses Harman, “Change of Name,” *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1, no. 16 (August 24, 1883): 2.
- 18 Russell, *Mephistopheles*, 175.
- 19 Newspaper clipping, title unknown, publication unknown. Date assumed based on article’s mention of Menz’s 74th birthday. Found in *Menz’s Teufel* scrapbook, 6.

#### Bio

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