

SATAN AS THE MACHIAVELLIAN HERO IN PARADISE LOST

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates common points between Milton's and Machiavelli's attempts to understand interpret the limits absolute power whether it belongs to God or the Prince. Milton characterizes satan as an epic hero with virtù, which is a characteristic lauded by Machiavelli as well. Despite this, when satan is in action, he loses these positive traits and turns to a Prince-like character who can justify the employment of vicious means to reach his aim. In the light of Machiavelli's and Milton's republican views, I can say that both satan and the prince are ironic characters which imply a criticism of monarchical power.

Key words: Milton, Machiavelli, Paradise Lost, Prince, Machiavellian Hero

ÖZET

Bu yazıda John Milton ve Niccholo Machiavelli'nin, hükümdarın—ister tanrı ister prens olsun—mutlak gücünün sınırlarını anlama ve yorumlama çabalarındaki ortak yönleri araştırıyorum. Milton, "Paradise Lost" adlı şiirinde tanrıya karşı çıkan şeytanı Machiavelli'nin politik görüşlerinde de olumlu yankısını bulan cesaret (virtù) ve özgür irade sahibi epik bir kahraman olarak betimler. Buna karşın bu kahraman eyleme geçtiğinde ise amaca ulaşmak için her yolu mübah sayan Machiavelli'nin prens'ine dönüşür. Hem Machiavelli'nin hem de Milton'un cumhuriyetçi görüşleri ışığında yarattıkları prens ve şeytan kişiliklerinin ironik olduğunu ve monarşik güce karşı örtük eleştiri öğeleri taşıdığı söylenebilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Milton, Machiavelli, Paradise Lost, Prens, Makyavel kahramanı.

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*In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
Fixt Fate, Free Will, Knowledge and absolute,
And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.*

In *Paradise Lost* Milton renders the power struggle between Satan and God in Machiavellian terms. As Beelzebub boasts in the midst of Hell, their party of "Cherubims" "put to proof his high supremacy, whether upheld by strength, or Chance or Fate" (I, 132-33). These three determinants of godly power correspond to the three Machiavellian principles which regulate the acquisition and maintenance of power: "Virtù, Fortune and Fate". By refusing to give in to desperation despite absolute defeat, Satan and Beelzebub display Machiavellian virtù as opposed to Adam who is brought to obedience easily through the fear of death. The Satanic principle "Chance" or "Fortune" is closely related to free will both for Milton and for Machiavelli. Fate can be interchangeable with Fortune for Machiavelli and with Chaos for Milton.

In *Paradise Lost* Satan thinks, despite the fact that they lost the battlefield against God, "all is not lost" because his "unconquerable will" will never submit or yield (I, 105-8). Satan's ground for resistance agrees with Machiavelli's explanation of the function of man's will against Fortune. In *The Prince*, in chapter XXV, titled "How far human affairs are governed by fortune, and how fortune can be opposed", Machiavelli argues against the mainstream view of his time that everything in the world is controlled by God and by Fortune and man cannot have any influence on the actual course of events. "Not to rule out our free will," Machiavelli contends that "fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves" (I, 130). This reflects Milton's God who claims to have given man free will to account for his submission to evil and to free himself from the presupposed charges of responsibility for man's wrongdoing. Free Will acts in opposite ways for Satan

and For Adam. It gives Adam the possibility to lose his heavenly state, whereas it gives Satan the hope to get it back.

Like Beelzebub, Machiavelli associates God with Fortune in his description of the latter as the power that must be held in check. In *The Prince* he compares Fortune to "one of those rivers that when they become enraged, flood the plains, destroy trees and buildings, move earth from one place and deposit it in another" (130). While Machiavelli sees Free Will as a dam to check the power of the river of Fortune, Satan counts on the idea of the strength of his will to resist God's power.

In the *Discourses* (I, 26), the ruler "should build new Cities and destroy those that already exist. He should move populations from one place to another. In short, he should leave nothing as it was in the whole territory". Milton's demons and Machiavelli's narrator in the *Discourses* both oppose the means of the supreme ruler; at the same time they are for the utilization of the same destructive techniques God uses to suppress antagonism. As Empson puts forward, the position of Milton's demons is identical with Milton's because "he dared to deny that Charles I had divine right" (4, 46).

In Milton's parliament of the demons there are two separate views as regards Chance and its affect on the power struggle with God. This is comparable to the Machiavellian idea of the heroic ideal before and after Christianity. The group represented by Mammon thinks that to dethrone God "we then/ may hope, when everlasting Fate shall yield/ To fickle Chance" (II, 231-33) and Belial counsels "ignoble ease and peaceful sloth," in the narrator's words, which resemble those of Satan when he denounces the heavenly souls who prefer to serve "Minist'ring Spirits, train'd up in feast and song." Similarly, the archangel Michael admonishes Adam after the fall that man's woe does not begin from woman, but from "Man's effeminate slackness" (XI, 634). Both Michael and Satan have Machiavelli's attitude towards manly demeanor for completely opposite reasons. This similarity provides Satan with a right motive, and Michael with a wrong one.

Similar to Milton who elevates the heroic ideal paradoxically in the persona of Satan, Machiavelli was an exceptional figure of his time, especially in his views that the current political conflicts could not be resolved in terms of the pacifist interpretation of Christian dogma. He thought that the men of his day were "less strong" and "less in love with liberty" than those in classical times because Christianity wanted man to show his strength "by undergoing suffering without complaint, rather than by overcoming resistance" (2, II. 2). Machiavelli complained that the Christian set of values turned men into "weaklings," "left them unable to defend themselves against the ravages of the wicked" and "we have all been made effeminate" (2, II.2). The accusation in this statement overlaps with Michael's reproach of Adam in between the two visions that man's woe arises out of his effeminate slackness. According to this, Satan as well becomes Machiavellian hero who because he aspires to overcome the passivity exemplified by some of his followers. Perhaps Milton subverts the orthodox ideas of a world in a hierarchical world order using Satan as a substitute for the revolutionary hero. Milner argues that Milton "rescues the notion of individual man as a rational agent from the clutches of Calvinistic determinism. But only at a price, the price paid by God who is reduced to the level of first cause" (3, 15).

Milton refers to Satan with a mixture of phrases involving noble, heroic and base metaphors. When he displays his will to overcome a superior power to himself, the references to Satan sound more heroic, whereas when he commits evil deeds to achieve his aims his titles gradually lose dignity. In the second book where he undertakes the mission to go to the earth and tempt man he is like a "monarch," a "comet" who has "monarchal pride," but when he is in the Garden of Eden to tempt man he starts to have animal attributes: a "prowling wolf," a "thief," a "tiger," a "lion," a "toad," a "grisly king" etc. Milton's use of these metaphors imply that despite the heroic value of Satan's aim, Milton would not bring himself to agree with Machiavelli when he holds that "as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he must learn from the fox and the lion ... must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves (1, 99).

The heroic atmosphere of the war in heavens also contradicts the temptation scene where the "powerful Monarch" is relegated to a toad by Milton. However, contrary to the Machiavelli of *The Prince* Milton does not seem to make a decisive choice between the heroic ideal of the classical times and spiritual idealism of Christianity in *Paradise Lost*, which is also enhanced by his treatment of a religious matter in epic form. Milton seems to value both, even when heroism appears as a Satanic trait unless it borders on hypocrisy and evil at the expense of innocence as in Adam's ordeal. The matter of Milton's poem contradict not only its style but also its textual strategy in some respects. God's view of himself that "Necessity and Chance/ Approach not mee and what I will is Fate" (7, 172, 173) contradicts the narrative logic which suggests that Chance, whether indirectly, plays a part in man's fall. When Satan first enters Eden, he wishes to find Eve alone but he does not have much hope. "Of what so seldom chanc'd, when to his wish,/ Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies" (IX, 422-23). In view of all the excuses Eve had to justify her eating the apple, and the chance moment—beyond all his hopes—when Satan catches Eve all by herself in the garden, we can say that Necessity and Chance does not approach God but they always go side by side his creation, which causes his original good will and decrees stray from their authentic course.

As God states, his goodness is free to act or not. What is free will on God's part and what is Chance on the part of his creation turns out to be the Fate for man. Because they do not want to accept this, Satan and his crew rebel against God and "the will/ and high permission of all-ruling Heaven/ Left him at large to his own dark designs/ That with reiterated crimes he might/ Heap on himself damnation" (I, 211-15). Thus, God's exertion of his free will on leaving Satan to his own dark designs seems to be man's Fate to be tempted by evil. As in the original sin, Satan is greatly aided by Chance in his actions, which appears to lie in a neutral area between heaven\hell, and the earth where God "chooses" to leave on its own accord.

The contradictory traits of heroism and evil capacity make Milton's Satan as a mixture of the two Machiavellis in the *Prince* and in the *Discourses*. Machiavelli of the *Discourses*, like Milton's Satan, is

against a tyrant even when this tyrant has virtù, because he would be the only beneficiary of his own achievements. His main concern is liberty and public interest; however Satan cannot totally refute Abdiel's accusation that his main motive is to be the monarch himself in place of God rather than to save himself and his friends from their fallen situation. Machiavelli of the *Prince* on the other hand sees power relations in terms of the Darwinian "survival of the fittest" rule and does not refrain from using and abusing everything on his way to achieve his aim like Milton's Satan.

The similarity between the works of Milton and Machiavelli is based on their most common point of questioning the hegemonic act of legitimating selected forms of force in the name of preventing and minimizing other kinds of illegitimate force. While Milton was against the royal authority which did not provide enough opportunity for a pluralistic government, Machiavelli was full of rage against the tyrant who caused his downfall: Cosimo de Medici. Both writers were not satisfied with the political climate they were living in, and they were both political activists to the extent that they had to undergo suffering and deprivation because of their political views.

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Satan as a machiavellian hero in Milton's Paradise Lost. In thoughts more elevated, and reasoned high Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate, Fixt Fate, Free Will, Knowledge and absolute, And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost. In Paradise Lost Milton renders the power struggle between Satan and God in Machiavellian terms. As Beelzebub boasts in the midst of Hell, their party of "Cherubims" "put to proof his high supremacy, whether upheld by strength, or Chance or Fate" (I, 132-33). These three determinants of godly power correspond to the three Machiavellian principles. This study investigates common points between Milton's and Machiavelli's attempts to understand interpret the limits absolute power whether it belongs to God or the Prince. Milton characterizes Satan as an epic hero with *virtù*, which is a characteristic lauded by Machiavelli as well. Despite this, when Satan is in action, he loses these positive traits and turns to a Prince-like character who can justify the employment of vicious means to reach his aim. In the light of Machiavelli's and Milton's republican views, I can say that both Satan and the Prince are ironic characters which imply a critique.