

## TWO NOTORIOUS VILLAINS IN TWO FAMOUS LITERARY WORKS: SATAN IN *PARADISE LOST* AND MACBETH IN *MACBETH*

Serdar ÖZTÜRK\*

### Abstract

There are thematic and structural parallels between William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The sub-plot of *Paradise Lost* focuses on Satan's ambition to defeat Christ in order to regain his former position in Paradise, and the theme of *Macbeth* focuses on Macbeth's ambition to be king of Scotland. William Shakespeare encapsulates the whole idea of this study through the opening line of *Macbeth*: (Fair is foul, and foul is fair). This essential line can be applied to both Satan and Macbeth.

**Key Words:** Shakespeare, Milton, Macbeth, Satan, Paradise Lost

### Özet

William Shakespeare'in *Macbeth* adlı eseri ile John Milton'ın *Kayıp Cennet* adlı eseri arasında hem tematik hemde yapısal paralellikler vardır. *Kayıp Cennet* 'in olay örgüsü Şeytan'ın Hazreti İsa'yı mağlubiyete uğratarak cennetteki eski yerini tekrar elde etme hırsına yoğunlaşırken, *Macbeth*'de Macbeth'in İskoçya kralı olma çabasına yoğunlaşır. William Shakespeare tüm bu düşünceleri *Macbeth* 'in ilk satırlarında özlü bir şekilde ifade eder: (Hayır şerdir; şer hayırdır). Bu temel cümle Şeytan için de Macbeth için de geçerlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Shakespeare, Milton, Macbeth, Şeytan, Kayıp Cennet

As many Milton scholars, Christopher Hill has maintained Shakespeare as a source for some of the elements and allusions in *Paradise Lost*<sup>1</sup>. Critics have become increasingly aware of broader thematic and structural parallels between several of Shakespeare's and Milton's works, too. The parallel between the Satan of *Paradise Lost* and Macbeth of *Macbeth* has been extensively recognised. Meritt Y. Hughes asserts that "Milton's Satan is like Macbeth, Dr. Faustus, and Beatrice-Joanna in Middleton's 'the Changeling'"<sup>2</sup>. In his short essay 'Echoes of the Bible Story in *Macbeth*', Paul N. Siegel rightly observes that some similarities could be drawn between Satan and Macbeth: "Macbeth repeats the action of Adam, Judas and Lucifer"<sup>3</sup>. It might be worth mentioning here that Shakespeare explicitly had the theme of 'fallen Lucifer' in mind as he was writing the play. He says in *Macbeth*:

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.

(IV iii).

It seems that the topic has by no means been finally exhausted though critics have laboured to develop the parallels between Satan and Macbeth thoroughly.

The differences and similarities between Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* and Macbeth in *Macbeth* are almost explicit. The sub-plot of *Paradise Lost* focuses on Satan's ambition to defeat Christ, human being in general and to regain his former position in Paradise as the supreme living soul next to God, and the theme of *Macbeth* focuses on Macbeth's ambition to be king of Scotland. Both Macbeth and Satan are obliged to suffer the consequences of their respective follies. Yet, Macbeth's fall is a result of his submission to the dangerous prophesies of the three witches, and his submission to the persuasion of his wife who encourages him to fulfil his deadly scheme whereas Satan's fall is a result of his own free will.

The differences and similarities are perceptible through the responses of the reader and the audience to the two characters. The fall of Macbeth is not agonising because of the audience's or readers' awareness that the hero does not experience any undeserved suffering. Satan, in like manner, finds his

\* Erciyes Üniversitesi Kayseri

<sup>1</sup> Hill, Christopher. *Milton and the English Revolution*. London: faber and faber, 1988, P. iv.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, Meritt. Y. *John Milton Complete Poem and Major Prose*. Indianapolis: The Bobbsmerill Inc., 1975, p.176.

<sup>3</sup> Siegel, Paul. N. 'Echoes of the Bible Story in *Macbeth*' in *N. S. 2 N and Q*. 1955,p.142.

doom because he sought it. Sometimes, the audience may be more sympathetic towards Macbeth because he is basically good, noble and admirable; it is his single-minded and deadly ambition that causes his fall. On the other hand, Satan treacherously conspires to devastate innocent men to avenge God's wrath upon him when he attempts to usurp the throne in Heaven. Satan causes the destruction of innocent man who had no responsibility in his downfall, but Macbeth only attempts to conspire against his opponent and potential opponents.

In both works, the similarities may also be seen in the manner in which both are motivated to aspire for power. Macbeth is driven to compete to the throne because of the prediction of the witches. In *Paradise Lost*, God's proclamation in Heaven that He will create a new creature called man is what intensifies Satan's envy and ambition, which leads him to avenge himself through his own scheme to destroy such a creature. In Book III of *Paradise Lost*, God tells Christ that Satan will stop at nothing to achieve his scheme, to destroy man, or rather, to destroy who will follow him eagerly:

Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems  
On desparate revenge, that shall redound  
Upon his own rebellious head. And now  
Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way  
Not farr off Heav'n, in the Precincts of light,  
Directly towards the new created World,  
And Man there plac't, with purpose to assay  
If him by force he can destroy, or worse,  
By som false guile pervert; and shall pervert;  
For man will heark'n to his glozing lyes,  
And easily transgress the sole Command,  
Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall  
Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?  
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee  
All he could have; I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers  
And Spirits, both them who stood & them who faild;  
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.

(Book III, 84-102).

Satan and Macbeth present common characteristics in their heroic qualities. Yet, both are subsequently diminished because of their depravity. Macbeth is courageous, strong, and he exhibits great powers as a general and co-leader of Duncan's army. He wins the first engagement of the battle. Satan is also presented heroically in the first two books of *Paradise Lost*; however, Milton using his ingenious scheme degrades him gradually, and ultimately Satan falls just as Macbeth does. Satan keeps fighting in the battle between Hell and Heaven in spite of his wounds; he declares that to be weak is to be miserable. However, by the end of Book V, Satan is presented as a coward who is the first to run away from agony. He shows great skill in warfare by providing a cannon of his own invention. Satan's cowardice appears when he escapes before the Archangel Michael threatens him out of Eden. His cowardice is also obvious after he is defeated by Christ in the great battle that took place in Heaven.

Satan and Macbeth are elevated to the heights of power and then levelled in a similar manner. Though neither is qualified for a throne, both Macbeth and Satan ascend to the throne, establish tyrannical monarchies, and finally lose them. By being inwardly tortured by their own despair, they become susceptible to destruction are cast into Hell. They decide not to live under God in a rule of love, and therefore are undoubtedly compelled to live under His chastisement forever. Macbeth and Satan live in exile; Satan is separated from God's glorious presence, and Macbeth is psychologically isolated from his old friends, though most of them pretend to befriend him. They feign friendship only because they fear him. Macbeth reveals:

Seyton!—I am sick at heart,  
When I behold—Seyton, I say!—This push  
Will cheer me ever, or disseat me now.  
I have liv'd long enough: my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have; but, in their stead,  
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.  
Seyton!

(V ii).

Macbeth and Satan are plunged into fear and pain, and 'utter darkness'. They live in 'chaos', and they are accursed to the point that they even become frauds, bringing disaster upon their followers. They are two talented instruments of evil, and are very active and strong instruments of mischief and destruction. Consequently, Satan deserves to be called 'lost-Arch-Angel' the 'traitor Angel', and the 'False Fugitive'. Throughout the play it is possible to focus on Macbeth the traitor, the lost Thane of Cawdor, and the false king of Scotland. As a matter of fact, Macbeth is not called any of these things though they are all true of him. He is called "hell-kite" (IV iii), "hell-hound" (V viii) and is twice compared to a devil "this fiend of Scotland" (IV iii) and

. . . . Not in the legions  
Of horrid hell can come a devil more damned  
In evils, to top Macbeth

(IV iii).

When it come to action both Satan and Macbeth displays bravery. Yet, they both entertain a sense of fear when they ponder the consequences of their rebellion. Satan thinks that submission will be a total disgrace to him. He also thinks that if he submits to God, the other apostate angels whom he has led astray will ridicule him. At the same time, Satan is aware of the impending dangers in rebellion. If he had not been conscious of this, he would not have considered the negative effects submission would have. Macbeth too hesitates and fears the consequences when he pauses to think of his actions and rationalise them. He is driven into action by Lady Macbeth or by the false sense of safety and security attained from his contact with the three deceptive witches.

Macbeth can be linked to Satan through the manner in which he aspires to power. When King Duncan proclaims that his son Malcolm is to be his successor to the throne, Macbeth decides to take action in order to usurp the throne. Correspondingly, he kills Duncan though he vacillates six times. There is almost the same motive behind the Satan's rebellion against God. When God declares in Heaven that Christ is to be placed above all creatures and that all the angels even Lucifer must prostrate to him and obey him as they obeyed God, Satan reacts violently and decides to take some action against Heaven because he feels that he is superior to Christ. Satan feels he is created out of light while Christ is created out of mud and dust. Wagen K. Edward rightly maintains that:

Macbeth is also Lucifer, who fell because of his ambitious desire to assume the kingship of Heaven, setting the pattern for future sin, and his internal dismay when Duncan proclaims Malcolm the Prince of Cumberland is like Lucifer's dismay when God announces the begetting of His Son. In making his proclamation Duncan announces (I iv 40-1) that when the Prince is formerly invested with his new title, 'signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine on all deserves'. The foremost of the shining deserves in this distribution of honours is Macbeth, as Lucifer, the morning star, was brightest of the angels before his glory was darkened by his fall, but, as a result of his sinful ambition, he becomes 'black Macbeth' than whom 'in the legions of horrid hell' is no 'devil more damn'd n evils'(IV iii)<sup>4</sup>

From beginning to the end, Satan is his own master. Though God can dominate him or destroy him in a moment of less than a second, He withholds and decides to allow Satan the freedom to bring about his own destruction. Accordingly, being his own master, Satan launches into action without being led or encouraged by anyone. On the contrary, Macbeth is vehemently persuaded into action by his own wife. Satan is encouraged by his own satanic thoughts which are 'inflam'd of highest design' and deadly ambition. This is obvious when he addresses the sun with envy, bitterness, and some regret:

O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams  
That bring to my remembrance from what state  
I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;

<sup>4</sup> Wagen Knecht, Edward. *The Personality of Milton*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972, P. 52-7

Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down  
Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King:  
Ah wherefore! he deserv'd no such return  
From me, whom he created what I was  
In that bright eminence, and with his good  
Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.  
What could be less then to afford him praise,  
The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,  
How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,  
And wrought but malice; lifted up so high  
I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher  
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit  
The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
So burthensome, still paying, still to ow;  
Forgetful what from him I still receiv'd,  
And understood not that a grateful mind  
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once  
Indebted and discharg'd; what burden then?  
O had his powerful Destiny ordain'd  
Me some inferiour Angel, I had stood  
Then happie; no unbounded hope had rais'd  
Ambition. Yet why not? som other Power  
As great might have aspir'd, and me though mean  
Drawn to his part; but other Powers as great  
Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within  
Or from without, to all temptations arm'd.  
Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?  
Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,  
But Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all?  
Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,  
To me alike, it deals eternal woe.

(Book IV 37-70).

At least according to the first few books, Satan is brave when it comes to physical action, though he seems to lose such bravery when he encounters Michael or Christ. Before casting him out of Eden, Gabriel communicates to Satan that his superiority and strength were gone the moment he decided to set himself in glory above his creator and above man, whom God had chosen to be superior and glorious above all the angels. However Satan steadfastly holds on to his faith in himself; he is brave and seldom hesitates or fears the consequences. In his soliloquy, he declares that:

What matter where, if I be still the same,  
And what I should be, all but less then hee  
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least  
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built  
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:  
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.  
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,  
Th' associates and copartners of our loss  
Lye thus astonisht on th' oblivious Pool,  
And call them not to share with us their part  
In this unhappy Mansion, or once more  
With rallied Arms to try what may be yet  
Regain'd in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell?

(Book I 256-70).

Although he sometimes admits to himself his weakness and his mean state in Heaven, such admission comes out of his bitterness and envy, and it only makes him more determined to pursue his goal to the end. He admits his miserable state and decides to avenge himself:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie  
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?

Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;  
And in the lowest deep a lower deep  
Still threatning to devour me opens wide,  
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.  
(Book IV 73-78).

It is a fact that Hell also exists within Macbeth.

Satan and Macbeth can also be compared on the basis of the fear they entertain when pursuing their independent goals. Macbeth fears Banquo because he sees in him a moral courage which he himself lacks. In like manner Satan fears Gabriel and Abdiel not only because he lacks any kind of morality, but also because he is aware that being a fallen angel means that he is no longer superior to the good angels who have not lost their strength as he has. Macbeth fears and hates Macduff because he feels belittled by the latter's moral superiority. Satan does not display any kind of morality, and once he carries out his deeds, he exhibits no fear against the moral consequences he may have to suffer. This is true of Macbeth only towards the end of the play; it is his feeling of guilt which presents the ghost of Banquo to him. Later he becomes hardened and can tell:

Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts  
Cannot once start me.  
(V v).

There are differences and similarities in the cruel deeds Macbeth and Satan commit. The cruelty is great, especially when Satan seduces Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge and when Macbeth plans the murder of Macduff's family. Both Macbeth and Satan sink into moral degradation and finally experience a mighty fall. Yet, Macbeth, especially at the beginning of the play, refrains from wrongdoing only from fear of being exposed. Satan has nothing to fear because his cruelty is already well known all over Heaven and Hell. He is so desperate to begin his evil deeds no matter what happens:

All good to me is lost;  
Evil be thou my Good.  
(Book IV 110-11)

At the same time Satan is aware that his scheme will go far enough:

To do aught good never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our sole delight.  
(Book I 159-60).

and, he adds:

Our labour must be to prevent the end,  
And out of Good still to find means of evil.  
(Book I 164-65).

Yet, As soon as Macbeth kills Duncan, the voice of Macbeth's conscience dies, and he does not hesitate to commit any kind of murder:

The very firstlings of my heart shall  
Be the firstling of my hand.  
(IV i)

The differences could be noticed in the basic qualities of Macbeth and Satan. Macbeth, as mentioned before, is essentially good; it is his susceptibility to the influence of the witches and to influence of his wife that caused his fall. Lady Macbeth says that Macbeth possesses "the milk of human kindness" (I v).

There is a nuance between Macbeth's oratory and Satan's oratory. The main conflict with Macbeth is that he allows his imagination to wander uncontrolled and uncurbed. In the 'air-drawn dragger' scene, he is really in a kind of a hysterical fear which seizes him before the murder of Duncan.

As he is trapped in his imaginative ideas, non-concrete ideas appear before him in concrete form. His language tends to be very intense and highly figurative, especially the language used when assassinating King Duncan. It embodies itself in a special form and becomes a clear mirror which reflects his thought and emotion:

Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.  
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.  
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible  
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but  
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,  
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?  
I see thee yet, in form as palpable  
As this which now I draw.  
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;  
And such an instrument I was to use.  
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,  
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,  
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,  
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:  
It is the bloody business which informs  
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,  
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,  
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,  
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear  
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,  
And take the present horror from the time,  
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:  
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

*A bell rings*

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.  
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell  
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

(II i).

Satan language is rarely condensed and highly figurative and he does not possess such imaginative hallucinations. Unlike Macbeth, when he decides to act he acts unhesitatingly.

Another common characteristic of Macbeth and Satan is hypocritical attitude. Satan is a hypocrite because he appears to Uriel and asks him to guide him to Heaven in order to see man whom God created in His own image, and likeness in Book III. Satan knows that in order to see man he must praise God much. Macbeth's hypocrisy is obvious in Act I, when he comes back triumphant from the battle. He hypocritically praises King Duncan though he is inflamed with satanic plots to dispose of him. It is evident, after reading the first two books of *Paradise Lost* and the first few sentences of *Macbeth*, that both Satan and Macbeth would undoubtedly employ deception to achieve their fatal intention and ambition. According to Milton, Satan deceives his own peers; he influences Beelzebub in the matter of the invasion of Earth and the corruption of man's mentality. He also provokes Beelzebub that such a strategic attack will be supported and congratulated by the apostle angels. Accordingly, as he planned, Satan willingly decides to accomplish the perilous mission: He glorifies himself as a king before the eyes of his followers. They bow down to his pseudo bravery and courage. He boastfully acknowledges that:

Him by fraud I have seduc'd  
From his creator.  
(Book X 485-6).

What both Satan and Macbeth think to employ in order to fulfil their ambition successfully is deception. Satan presumes that he can deceive God through man. Thus, he decides to enter Eden, possess a serpent, deceitfully tempt man:

True is, me also he hath judg'd or rather  
Mee, not but the brut Serpent in whose shape  
Man I dece'ed.  
(Book X 494-6).

Yet, what Satan does not know is that it is he who is deceived and not God. Accordingly, Satan and his disciples are transformed into serpents, and they crawl upon their bellies. This transformation is the God's chastisement upon them. And it also proves the point that Satan becomes a victim of his own deception and plot. Satan is last seen as a serpent chewing the apples of Sodem in Book X; such action only crushes the initial pride he showed, particularly after seducing man.

Satan disguises himself in the shape of various animals; he eventually decides to possess the serpent in order to seduce man. He reaches a decision that "the serpent is the subtlest Beast of all the field" (Book IX 86). Macbeth is also serpent-like though he preserves his human form. Yet, unlike Satan who loses his heroism, he dies as a hero and heroically defends himself to the end. There are even differences in their manner of appearance after the fall. Macbeth, as far as we know, was a handsome hero, but Satan becomes horrid and ugly after his fall (Book IV 849-50). Both Satan and Macbeth are compared to wolves, thieves, rebels, fiends, dragons and Hell. Both of them have full of destructive ambitions, and they are created to be losers despite the fact that they have free will. Both Macbeth and Satan are too proud of themselves and their accomplishments.

Both Satan and Macbeth consider consulting their advisors. Although they are deaf-like, Satan holds consultations with his followers. From time to time, Macbeth also consults the three witches. Satan has a son, Death, and a daughter, Sin; however whatever he does is merely in his own interest and not in the interest of his offspring. On the other hand, Macbeth has no offspring; but all his plans are focus on improving his own situation. He hopes that he will have children who will succeed him to the throne.

To sum up, William Shakespeare encapsulates the whole idea of this study through the opening line of *Macbeth*. The three witches articulate the main point:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.  
(I i).

This essential line can be applied to both Satan and Macbeth. Macbeth presumes that what the witches predict is fair. However, it is too late when he discovers the ambiguity of their words and realises that what they have told him is only foul. On the other hand, Satan is led and deceived by his own 'inflam'd' inner thoughts and ambitions. He assumes that what he is doing is fair, and it is again too late when he realises that the situation is foul. If it were not for the ambitious desire of kingship Satan and Macbeth would have led gallant lives, free of the tragic fall they experienced, particularly because it is known that both of them "were the brightest stars of their respective firmaments before their falls, and afterwards they were darkest"<sup>5</sup>.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berkeley, D. S. *Key to a Guide to Tragedies*: London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961.  
Hill, Christopher. *Milton and the English Revolution*. London: faber and faber, 1988.  
Hughes, Meritt. Y. *John Milton Complete Poem and Major Prose*. Indianapolis: The Bobbsmerill Inc., 1975.  
Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. London: Penguin, 1989.  
Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993.  
Siegel, Paul. N. 'Echoes of the Bible Story in *Macbeth*' in *N. S. 2 N and Q*. 1955.  
Wagen Knecht, Edward. *The Personality of Milton*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.

---

<sup>5</sup> Berkeley, D. S. *Key to a Guide to Tragedies*: London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961, P.86.