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**The Machiavellian Stencil of a Prince**

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Grammaticus’ *History of the Danes*, although may be perceived by many as a stereotypical tale of sadness depicting an unstable revenge-driven protagonist, in reality are an intricate web of political maneuvers comparable to Niccolo Machiavelli’s ideas in the *Prince*. In his book, Machiavelli doesn’t merely state his ideologies to urge readers into inclining towards the good or the bad but instead, shares a carefully curated series of moves, techniques and the mindset required for a leader to be successful which he had learnt throughout his life. And upon keen study, it appears that the characters of Hamlet/ Amleth and Claudius/ Fengi although occasionally give into hastiness or short-sightedness, in many ways tend to walk along the lines of an ideal Machiavellian leader’s mindset, the details of which will be analyzed in the proceeding paragraphs.

Discussing Hamlet/ Amleth, Machiavelli’s ideas on political philosophy state that a prince shouldn’t always be virtuous and should heed the signal of times to take sides with the evil; The leader/ prince must master “how not to be good” (Machiavelli, 1992, pg. 42). Often stated as the pinnacle of literary characters, both Hamlet and Amleth appear to be sharp, cautious and intellectual with an unparalleled sense of observation, just like the fox personality Machiavelli encourages his princes to possess. Both characters expertly deceive the masses, including Claudius/ Fengi into believing they’ve gone mad under the crushing circumstances, hence using their “antic disposition” (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 172) to divert the attention away from their plot of revenge. Be it heeding the negligible signs by his foster brother (Grammaticus, 2015, pg. 185) to get cautious about spies, analyzing the presence of eyes on him (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 242) or actually manipulating the people around into being pawns in his master plan, both characters demonstrate remarkable cunning and hence, comply closely with the Machiavellian trait to get what they want even if they have to go down the evil path to get it. This show of madness put on by them not only hides their interests, but also allows them to remain wary of the public’s hatred as a vengeful plotter, an important trait that according to Machiavelli (1992, pg. 50), all princes must possess to avoid the ruled hating their ruler. For Hamlet, this attention to intricacy goes a step further where instead of blindly following the whims of thoughts or the Ghost’s ideas, he plots a “Mouse trap” to “catch the conscience of the King.” (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 250) Hence by exercising prudence, Hamlet complies with another one of Machiavelli’s postulates that “He ought to proceed cautiously, moderating his conduct with prudence, allowing neither overconfidence to make him careless, nor excess suspicion to make him intolerable.” (Machiavelli, 1992, pg. 46)

Although Amleth has been downright focused on getting his revenge, Hamlet is an embodiment of struggle within himself to either avenge his father and deviate from the path of righteousness or get steered by his moral senses and often has his conscience weighing down on him as presented in his soliloquys (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 234) where he is emotional about extracting cold-hearted revenge, something that his conscience is opposed to. In such moments, Hamlet, by allowing his soft side to take over his cunning, slightly deviates from the Machiavellian stencil of a prince. But soon after, the smart *Prince* sees through Claudius’ feigned dispositions and realizes that he is but a “Remorseless, treacherous and lecherous villain” (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 239) and decides to go ahead with his plan of revenge. Hence, although he does deviate slightly, he goes on to follow another one of Machiavellian traits stating that a prince “ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty” (Machiavelli, 1992, pg. 47) because according to Machiavelli, a true prince shouldn’t hesitate in utilizing strict measures to preserve his interests and against his enemies as it the only way to ensure continuation of the regime against all forces. Hence both the characters, Hamlet and Amleth, alongside possessing the ability to act like a fox, manifest themselves as the lions who know when to crush other foxes and employ political shrewdness as Machiavelli asks *Princes* to. Hence, just like manipulating the King of England into killing the double-faced friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (or the accompanying spies with Amleth) (Grammaticus, 2015), by killing Polonius/ the spy ruthlessly without any remorse, Hamlet/ Amleth complies with the Machiavellian (1992, pg. 48) definition of a ruthless lion and a true prince who goes to all lengths to fulfill his motives and eliminate the foxes.

Yet as mentioned earlier, for Hamlet his conscience presents itself as a major resistance to his Machiavellian traits. Even after extracting the truth from Claudius during the play and having verified the ghost’s claims, he fails to deliver his ruthless revenge to the perpetrator. When presented the opportunity to kill Claudius while he prays (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 275) and getting done with his plan, he hesitates, making excuses to convince him against his inability to act sternly on his motives. This missed opportunity not only indirectly resulted in pointless delays in Hamlet’s revenge, but also put him on the path the tragic ending which involved every major character, including himself, dying in the end. Hence, when analyzed against Amleth from *History of the Danes*,Hamlet’s rather naïve conscience shadows his Machiavellian traits.

Amleth, on the other hand, accepts the situation and the need of his ruthless revenge. Hence, when it comes to killing Fengi and all of his guests along, a murderer and threat to the regime, there exist no barriers like Hamlets conscience for him which ultimately sets him as a better prince and an absolute Machiavellian leader. Amleth’s careful plotting against Fengi, stepping back to analyze (Grammaticus, 2015, pg. 203) the situation and then intelligent timing at addressing the public after having analyzed their position demonstrate his ability to utilize the situation to his benefit and prove that he understands the importance of public opinion. As Machiavelli (1992, pg. 60) states, a prince should “undertake great enterprises and set splendid examples” to earn the respect of the ruled, Amleth goes out to the crowds and presents his revenge as a collective “responsibility of everyone” (Grammaticus, 2015, pg. 207), presenting himself as the avenger of the regime and the savior of the time. This manipulation further demonstrates his Machiavellian mindset.

But considering that both Amleth and Hamlet were never in power during the tales, a full portrayal of all of Machiavellian characteristics cannot be expected from either. Yet there are the characters of Claudius/ Fengi that not only overthrew the previous king’s power by killing them but also managed to slide into their position without any major resistance, a sign that they may possess Machiavellian traits. To begin with, the characters of Claudius/ Fengi are presented as deceitful and manipulative since the beginning owing to their plan of killing the king and later his son while manipulating the wife of late king into marrying him. But although these actions tend to appear evil, they may well be interpreted as Machiavellian methods to attain, consolidate and maintain the authority and “bring about stability” (Machiavelli, 1992, pg. 45). And hence, their Machiavellian character is demonstrated through the way they deceive others about their virtuousness, develop schemes to overcome the regime and all sorts of resistance and finally believe that the rules don’t apply to them.

Claudius/ Fengi ruthlessly kill the king and intelligently manage the public response and their image in the scenario to keep all eyes off their hands and yet, be able to take over the position of the one they killed. The way they convince everyone of their honest façade while hiding their dark inner-self clearly complies with the Machiavellian (1992, pg. 50) idea of retaining the subject’ goodwill. As a true *Prince*, Claudius/ Fengi acknowledge the importance of the public’s support and hence keep reiterating their pure intentions (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 162) and deep grief over the loss of the king to keep the people around him convinced of his methods. Similarly, even when they decide to kill Hamlet/ Amleth, they choose for them to be sent to the King and be killed there instead of having the blood on their own hands which demonstrates their Machiavellian intellect. Furthermore, Claudius/ Fengi go on to great lengths to suppress any and all opposition while providing no respite to the rebels, a trait Machiavelli believed a true *Prince* must possess in order to keep their hand stern on the regime. Be it Claudius’ active suppression of Fortinbras’ rebellion (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 305) to Fengi/ Claudius’ efforts to understand Hamlet’s ulterior motives and ultimately sending him off to be killed (Grammaticus, 2015, pg. 193), their actions speak highly of the Machiavellian ruling tactics they possessed. For instance, when Laertes showed up grieved over the death of his father, Claudius’ swift plan to incite him against Hamlet and making him an ally furthers his mindset towards a Machiavellian one as he encourages the princes to adapt to the humors of their people to earn their support.

Finally, Claudius and Fengi closely adhere to another one of Machiavelli’s advices to the prince to maintain stability of their regime. In the *Prince*, Machiavelli (1992, pg. 58) states that it is difficult to maintains kingdoms acquired through conquests or struggle and hence, the princes should ensure not to introduce any radical innovations and deviate from the ideologies/ method of their successors drastically. This, according to Machiavelli, not only enables the public to swiftly transition to the new rule, but also reduces the chances of any major rebellion to the new ruler. Abiding by this rule, Claudius and Fengi refrain from any major changes to the kingdom’s operations and strive to make the public comfortable by avoiding extremism and presenting themselves as pure, honest beings striving to fill in the steps of the previous ruler. This ability to manipulate the public into acceptance of their treacherously-achieved rule speaks volumes of their Machiavellian traits as leaders.

But like the other characters, both Claudius/ Fengi do tend to deviate from the image of a perfect Machiavellian leader as they succumb to plots by Hamlet and fail to maintain stability against them, drastically failing at being a *Prince*. For instance, although he suspects Hamlet’s ulterior motives and strives in all his might to remove him from the path, both Claudius and Fengi fail to understand the gravity of their swift action and hence fall prey to Hamlet/ Amleth’s revenge. For instance, although after Hamlet’s acts in the play Claudius/ Fengi identifies him as a threat and orders him killed through the King, he fails to consider Hamlet’s intellect and sends him off, not sealing Hamlet’s fate but rather leaving it to chance (Grammaticus, 2015, pg. 193). Similarly, when Claudius actually plans to kill Hamlet, he doesn’t plan it through and ends up involving way too many people, ending up getting all of them including himself killed (Shakespeare, 2008, pg. 353) which goes against the approach of a true intellectual, Machiavellian hero. Hence, even the villainous leaders in the story (Claudius/ Fengi) fail to comply entirely with the Machiavellian image of a *Prince* as well.

Upon analyzing the main candidates for a Machiavellian personality, it appears that owing to their position in power, Fengi/ Claudius were better able to portray themselves closer to a Machiavellian leader whereas while considering Hamlet/ Amleth, although both characters demonstrated these qualities, Hamlet succumbed to his conscience more often. But, having established that although all characters portray a few of the required qualities, they also lack a few of the postulates to be a Machiavellian *Prince* and it may be inferred that manifestation of a few qualities by these characters isn’t reason enough to establish solid links between them and the *Prince* as many of the qualities Machiavelli presents are found in everyday human beings varying from person to person and by the situation they are in. Hence, just like the characters discussed above, people tend to use some Machiavellian principles to accomplish their goals and to protect their achievements. But what set a *Prince* apart is his adherence to all postulates and inclusion of all the traits in his personality. Using this principle, none of the characters are truly Machiavellian as they tend to loosen up on many of the ideas stated in the *Prince.*

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