

Tennyson and Eliot's Poetic Plays on Thomas Becket: A Study in Plot, Structure and Characters

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is about the English Christian martyr and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket (1118-1170), in the plays of Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). The paper is an attempt to identify such historical and religious figure in a literary framework in Tennyson's Becket (1884) and Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral (1935) in which Becket's story is the main subject. Accordingly, the aim of the present analysis is to make a comparative study between the previous mentioned plays in terms of plot, structure and characters in order to show the similarities and differences of the two dramatists' historical and literary treatments of their plays. Therefore, our concern takes an order, which proceeds gradually according to the following sequences: it begins with an introduction explaining the historical story of Thomas Becket and his relationship with King Henry II (1133-1188) in order to show how each writer reveals his subject matter in a literary content. Then, it follows the main points upon which this study is based about aspects of plot, structure and characters to reflect the similarities and differences of the two plays. Finally, the subject ends with conclusions summing up the main results and findings. The results shadow that Tennyson and Eliot write about the same story concerning the English martyr, Thomas Becket, but they have numerous differences in the way of revealing their subject especially in the points of plot, structure and characters.

One of the best-known martyrs in English history was Thomas Becket. He was a Londoner, born in 1118 and the son of a Norman merchant settled there. He was educated at Merton Priory and later in London, Paris and Bologna where he studied law. He was well educated and quickly became an agent to Theobald, the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, who sent him on several missions to Rome (Barlow, 1986: 5). Becket's talents were noticed by King Henry II (1133-1189), who made him his Chancellor and the two became close friends. When Theobald died in 1161, Henry made Becket Archbishop. Becket transformed himself from a lover of

pleasure into a serious clergyman. The King and his Archbishop's friendship was weakened when it became clear that Becket would now stand up for the Church in its disagreements with the King. Henry wanted him to serve his desires and to have both titles (Friend and Archbishop), whereas Becket refused because he felt that he could not serve two masters (God and King). The King had radical views on the separation of the Church and the state, and Becket did not agree with these views. The result was a great rift between the two (Knowles, 1971: 7). In 1164, realizing the extent of Henry's displeasure, Becket fled into exile in France, and remained in it for several years. He returned in 1170. After six years of contention, partly spent in exile, Becket returned as a good shepherd to his Church (Winston, 1986:20). On the 29th December 1170, four Knights confronted and murdered him in Canterbury Cathedral. For that he was made a saint in 1173 and his shrine in Canterbury Cathedral became an important focus for pilgrimage (Farmer, 2003: 78).

Many dramatists wrote about the story of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury. They used different titles to refer to the same subject. For instance, George Darley (1795-1846) gave Thomas a Becket (1840) to his play. Whereas, Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809- 1892) selects Becket (1884) to reveal the same content. Consequently, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) also wrote about Thomas Becket in Murder in the Cathedral (1935). While the French writer Jean Anouilh (1910-1987), made his play entitle Becket, or the Honor of God (1960). In addition, Christopher Fry (1907-2005) chose Curtmantle (1961) as a title to his piece of work (Fields, et al, 2004:10).

Similarly, both Tennyson and Eliot produced major works on the same subject matter .The general dramatic outlines of their plays are determined by familiar facts of history: the murder of the great Archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral forms the necessary catastrophe, and the former friendship between Thomas Becket and King Henry II provides an introduction to it. But each one differs in the way of presenting his matter especially in terms of plot, structure and characters.

Dealing with plot, Tennyson's Becket is a chronological play in order, and the author gives much concern to history depending on his real visits and observations to Canterbury Cathedral and to Becket's shrine (Hallam Tennyson, 1969:193). In his play, Tennyson makes full use of romantic subplot based on a legend about Fair Rosamond, which he tries to tie with the main plot as much as possible (Kyzlinkova, 1999: [http:// www.phil.muni.cz/plonedata/wkaa/BSE/BSE-1999-25-Scan/BSE-25-10.pdf](http://www.phil.muni.cz/plonedata/wkaa/BSE/BSE-1999-25-Scan/BSE-25-10.pdf)).

In history, Rosamond was the daughter of one of King Henry's knights. She was very beautiful, like an English rose. Henry was drawn to her softer form of femininity. She looked so different from his wife, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. Yet the King genuinely did fall in love with Rosamond and she too could find it in her heart to love him, though she was frightened she was sinning against God. However, their affair became public knowledge. Hence, the Queen discovered it and managed to reach to Rosamond place with her soldiers. She offered Rosamond a choice between a dagger and a cup of poisoned wine. But the latter apparently chose the poison and died, and that was the end of her, or so the story goes (Duby, 1998: 775).

Whereas Eliot gives us very little of history. He focuses on one situation, the murder of Thomas Becket. In fact, Eliot tries to celebrate a local religious figure in a

festival play and to reflect that specific geographical relevance and religious subject matter can produce more widely appealing drama (Weales, 1961: 189–90) .

In Tennyson's *Becket*, The action starts with Becket almost immediately appointed Archbishop who appears as the King's Chancellor and friend in the prologue only. In Act I, he is already Archbishop and in the last Act he meets his death in the Canterbury cathedral. The romantic subplot is also introduced in the prologue when Becket is asked by the King to take care of Rosamund in her English Bower and Queen Eleanor spots the chart of it, "This chart with the red line! her bower! whose bower? "(Tennyson, 2003, Prologue: 10). The King and Rosamund's love affair started before, as they have a little son, Geoffery. Finally, she is found by Eleanor and Reginald Fitzurse, one of the King's Knights and the Queen's yes-man, and from a certain death, Rosamund is rescued by Becket who persuades her to go to the Godstow nunnery , " Get thee back to thy nunnery with all chasts; Let this be thy last trespass." (Tennyson,V,ii : 101). Then she appears in Canterbury just before Becket's murder. The play closes with Rosamund kneeling by the Archbishop's corpse, bringing thus both plots to an end. Obviously, the dramatist's most historical details are found in Act V : the King's furious words, the unnoticed disappearance of four of his men: Reginald Fitzurse, William de Tracy, Hugh de Morville and Richard Brito, the four Barons' arrival at Canterbury and their rude demands for the immediate absolution of the Bishop , and the Archbishop excommunicated. It seems to be that Tennyson would not leave out one of the most touching incidents in the last act (Kyzlinkova,1995: http://www.phil.muni.cz/angl/bse/archieve/BSE_21_08.pdf).

On the contrary, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* opens with Becket's return to Canterbury in December of 1170, after seven years in exile. Part I opens with a chorus of women from Canterbury, lamenting the fact that the disagreements between King Henry II and the Archbishop Thomas Becket have led the latter to seek safety and help in France, "Seven years," they say, "and the summer is over" (Eliot,1974 , partI.p.12) . In this sense, the audience is immediately introduced to the critical period in the protagonist's life without proceeding forward from his past to his present conjuncture. This reveals an indebtedness to Aeschylus" in opening the play near the crises"(Misra, 1977:85). Then, Becket is introduced struggling against worldly temptations that could cause him to deviate from his aim (Leeming, 1989: 82).Consequently; four Tempters approach him, separately, and offer him reasons about his opposition with the King. After that, he conquers them and delivers a sermon in which he defines martyrdom and its value for his generation, and claims that the gifts of God are not the same kind of gifts, or even the result of the same kind of giving, as those given by people in the temporal world. Instead, he declares, the gifts given by heaven are real, eternal, unequivocal, and most important:

A Martyrdom is always the design of God, for his love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.(Eliot,Interlude:53)

Part II of the play begins with the Priests narrating the events of each holy day following Christmas. Then the play ends with Becket's murder at the hands of the King's Knights because of his constant to give in to the King's commands. This brief summary of the plot reveals that the central point of the play is not the murder in the Cathedral. But, as K. S. Misra comments, the title is "slightly deceptive"(Misra: 82). The play is concerned with "what happens through the man than with what happens to him"(Smith, 1966 : 182).

It seems that the two playwrights ignore young Becket's career in their plots. Though Tennyson's Becket mentions something of his youth- life in a quarrel with Roger, Archbishop of York: "Roger of York,/when I and thou were youths in Theobald's house, / Twice did thy malice and thy calumnies/ Exile me from the face of Theobald"(Tennyson, I, iii : 29). Eliot also tells us about Becket's origin in the first appearance of the Knights: "This is the man who was the tradesman's son: the backstairs brat who was born in Cheap side" (Eliot, part II: 64).

But each dramatist concentrates on a certain point to achieve his plot. For instance, Tennyson considers Henry II his second main protagonist and shows very little of Becket as Chancellor. In addition, the King's trust in Becket is expressed in a strange way: Becket is given the chart of the King's mistress Rosamund's Bower and made to promise and swear to look after her (Kyzlinkova,1995) "Henry (laying paper on table)./This chart here mark'd Her Bower,/'Take, keep it friend."(Tennyson, Prologue:6). In contrast, Eliot gives us a great deal to reflect Becket as a Chancellor through the speeches of the First Priest "I saw him as chancellor, flattered by the King,"(Eliot, PartI: 17); and Becket himself admits, "I was the King, his arms, his better reason,"(ibid., p.32).

It is clear that Eliot's success perhaps lies in his focus on Thomas Becket's psychological and spiritual journey towards martyrdom rather than on the historical or political circumstances that brought to his death. However, Murder in the Cathedral is a religious play, not because it is about an Archbishop who is killed, but because it is about man's relationship to god (Heaton,2007: <http://www.Newcovenantschools.org/articles/heaton/tragedyinthe cathedral.pdf>). It has a very limited plot as Eliot himself admits in his "Poetry and Drama": "Becket returns to Canterbury, foresees that he will be murdered, and is murdered" (Quoted in Tilak, 2005: 63). From the out set, Eliot made limitations of his plot into the keystone of a very tight unity of theme and expression in the play building (Leming, 83). Therefore, as a difference with Tennyson's play, Eliot's has no subplots and no extraneous characters or counter pointed themes. But the opening of the play follows the tradition of Greek tragedy rather than the multi-level development of Shakespearean tragedy and history (ibid.).

Concerning structure, Tennyson uses a chronicle structure, in which the historical plot is reinforced by the romantic subplot. He uses a five-act structure of a chronicle play in which the nineteenth century imitated the Elizabethans. The poet, in fact, tries to imitate Shakespearean tragedy in every aspect. But he adds a prologue, and secular scenes with numerous characters alternate with lyrical soliloquies or more ordinary scenes with fewer people. His prologue forms the necessary exposition in which both plots are indicated. His acts also consist of scenes, each scene has a little climax of its own, worked into the main narrative lines, and in the

last scene the story is completed, and the conflict resolved in death (Kyzlinkova,1999) . .

Structurally, the identical conventionalized settings of Tennyson's historical play are shown: historical places, courts monasteries and the Cathedral, or royal private rooms or chambers, the Bower, the gardens and woods around. It seems that the author prefers the action to take place inside to outside (ibid.). The play opens in Anjou, and later the precise French historical places of the protagonist's attempts at reconciliation are used. Bad weather also plays an additional role. For example, a "tremendous thunderstorm" breaks over the cathedral while the murderers are leaving it.

But the structure of Eliot's short play differs completely from Tennyson's. *Murder in the Cathedral* is divided into two parts. The interlude between them takes the form of the sermon preached by Becket on Christmas morning, 1170. It is actually his answer to the four temptations. Part II has two scenes, one about a month before the murder, when Becket returned to Canterbury from exile in France, and the actual murder itself. The second scene also includes an interlude in which the four Knights who killed Becket plead their case to the audience (Bareham, 1981: 44). The play is set in two locations: the Cathedral of Canterbury and the Archbishop's hall, as they existed in medieval England.

According to structure, *Murder in the Cathedral* is like a Greek tragedy in two aspects: firstly, it has a strict substitution of numbers for the Priests, Tempters, and Knights reinforcing the pattern (ibid., p.46). In this form, the play looks as a series of episodes linked by choral odes and followed by the unexpected and surprising Apology of the Knights who suddenly turn a theatre into a political meeting, "We have much more to lose than to gain. /We are four plain Englishmen who put their country first." (Eliot, Part II: 85). And secondly, it avoids presenting violent actions upon the stage and the author presents the murder on the theatre at the same time with the Chorus' speech and comment (Bareham: 45). The Chorus speaks while the Knights kill him, and Eliot implies by this stage direction that the words are chief point of interest, not the deed (ibid.):

In life there is not time to grieve long.

But this, this is out of life, this is out of time,

An instant eternity of evil and wrong. (Eliot, Part II: 83).

It is important to mention that Eliot treats the historical facts not only selectively but also faithfully. He presents a variety of standpoints. He chooses a dramatic style and structure which would allow the development of ideas, and which by its very nature would play down the struggle for power between the King and Archbishop (ibid., p.33).

Eliot, as a feature for his structure, also includes elements of pageant play into *Murder in the Cathedral*. In general, Pageants present local or popular events through tableaux, or separated dramatic scenes. They never deal with characters or the development of human relationships because they are more concerned with depicting historical events than persons (Gray, 1984:149). However, the dramatist combines elements of Greek tragedy with features of the English pageant play (Bareham: 34). This structure helps to appreciate Becket's struggle, and to build each episode towards the moment of resolution and clarity (ibid., p.36). For

example, the entrance of the three Priests at the beginning of Part II with their banners or flags which refer to the holy figures (St. Stephen, St. John and Holy Innocents) .It has been said that *Murder in the Cathedral* is 'mechanical' in its structure. It has a logical and inevitable grasp of cause and effect (ibid.).

Identifying characters of the two plays, both dramatists present their dramatic persona in a way in which they are similar to each other in certain points and different at other ones. The two authors agree that Becket was most reluctant to become the successor of Theobald; he even warned Henry saying that as Archbishop he would have other loyalties that might bring him into opposition to the King," Me archbishop! God's favour and king's favour might so clash/ That thou and I---That were a jest indeed!"(Tennyson, Prologue: 9); and "If the Archbishop cannot trust the Throne,/ He has good cause to trust none but God alone." (Eliot, Part I: 36).

According to Tennyson's characterization, he introduces a large number of characters: all classes of society are included in his play, from the king to beggar (Kyzlinkova,1995). He alternates various groups of people and keeps the romantic subplot in connection with the main plot. All main characters (Becket, Henry, Eleanor, Rosamund and Fitzurse) remain prominent in both plots. Tennyson also includes irrelevant facts, such as some unimportant names like Fitzurse's word "paramours" (Tennyson, Prologue: 14) before Rosamund, lesser clergymen, items of the institutions, and detailed Becket's charges (Kyzlinkova,1999).

In addition, the writer of Becket makes a certain selection for the minor historical figures. The historical persons, Bishops and Barons, are not distinguished much too. For instance, the Archbishop of York is referred to more in Becket, although he is not very active as a character due to his brief appearance. The positive character of John of Salisbury (the scholar, Becket's supporter and Rosamond's tutor) is also of some interest because he is in many ways superior to Becket. It may be added that Tennyson's characters in general remain blurred to a considerable extent, they are in places detached, indistinct, and vague and so are their deeds (ibid.).

Tennyson presents Henry and Rosamund's love as platonic and absolutely innocent. But, in fact, there is a suspicious example : Rosamond is always called "wanton"(Tennyson, I, ii :26) when referring to her; and in another place she is called a "minion"(Tennyson, I, ii:26).

In Tennyson's , one can see that the writer never introduces the character of Cornwall, the King's friend and councilor, who is Rosamond's uncle, in the whole play . But when the anonymous message is left at the gate for Becket to suggest that he should flee to France, Becket assumes that he can recognize Cornwall's or Leicester's handwriting:

Cornwall's hand or Leicester's: they write marvelously alike.

Reading . 'Fly at once to France, .../Our King who would have thy blood.'
(Tennyson,I, iv:43).

In this sense, Tennyson made full use of his predecessor's work. Imitating many of the outward features of Shakespearean and Elizabethan tragedy, he imitated even the way most Elizabethans found useful: they looked for sources in the field of literature and always tried to select one of the popular works, whose adaptation would be attractive for the audience (Hallam Tennyson,1969: 193).

Unlike Eliot, Tennyson ranged over Becket's whole career from the days of his earliest friendship with the King. But the former begins with Becket's return, after his long exile in France. Accordingly, this is the situation on which Eliot made his whole play (Matthiessen, 1959: 173-174).

Tennyson tries to show Becket's entertainment only in the game of chess and even before the offer when Becket meditates, however, whether to become or not to become Archbishop, he admits: "O Lord/ I have been a lover of wines, and delicate meats,/ Am I the man?'O Lord my God, Henry the King hath been my friend, my brother, ...and chosen me... believing/ That I should go against the church with him." (Tennyson, I, i:19). In this case, the writer wants to present his hero as a spiritual man, but he does not succeed very well for his Becket is prided and wilful, far from being a martyr or saint. Moreover, he is put into a very false position: the Archbishop of Canterbury becomes warden of the King's mistress (Kyzlinkova, 1995). Becket is even permitted to save Rosamund from death at the point of Queen Eleanor's dagger, and Rosamund is seen kneeling next to the murdered Becket in the very last scene of the tragedy. This is a kind of melodrama, a piece of falsified history, even if in another places Tennyson brought to his drama much of a historian's approach, and certain scenes are skilfully dramatized historical episodes (ibid.).

In Tennyson's spectacle tragedy, Becket is neither a great spiritual man, nor a popular hero (Kyzlinkova, 1999). His tragic death is not the result of the conflict with the King, but surprisingly, it is the Queen who to blame. The King utters the factual statement, "He dared not liar! Yet, yet I remembered/ He bad me put her into a nunnery./ God's eyes! I would the church were down in hell" (Tennyson, V, i: 96), only after Eleanor shows him the cross and hints that Becket wants Rosamund for himself. Beside, there is no real development in Becket's character or any change in it. In fact, he behaves rather as intolerant church man than the King's friend at the very beginning (Kyzlinkova, 1999). For example, when he urges Henry to stop his relationship with Rosamund and send her to a nunnery, "Put her away into a nunnery!" (Tennyson, Prologue:3).

However, Becket, who is too wilful for a clergyman and too impetuous for a former diplomat, reminds us of his martyrdom all the time, exclaiming already in Act I "I am martyr in my self already," (Tennyson, I, i, :25) and "Strike, and I die the death of martyrdom;/ strike, and ye set these customs by my death/ Ringing their own death- knell thro' all the realm" (Tennyson, I, iii: 31). In Act V, Becket also seems prepared for death; he is almost indifferent, tried in a way, aware of God's will "what matters murder'd here, or murder'd there?/ And yet my dream foretold my martyrdom/ in mine own church. It is God's will" (Tennyson, V, ii: 110). Yet he resolutely orders the door be opened and fights against the Knights when they so come to murder him, "Undo the doors: the church is not a castle:/ Knock, and it shall be open'd" (Tennyson, V, iii :111).

Occasionally, Tennyson tries hard to depict emotional areas of Becket's personality, especially in the point of his concern for animals (a poor man and his dog), or his positive attitude towards women, mothers and children, which strongly contrasts with John of Salisbury's views. In addition, the poet also suggests that

Becket had been in love long ago as a young man, but the girl he loved died of leprosy:

Becket. There was a little fair-hair'd Norman maid
Lived in my mother's house: if Rosamund is
The world's rose, as her name imports her—she
Was the world's lily. John of Salisbury.

Ay, and what of her? Becket. She died of leprosy.” (Tennyson, V,ii:102)

Hence, hearing about the King's sudden illness, Becket remembered the old days and begins to shed tears instead. He also appears as a savior to Rosamund from the dagger's point and thus the villain are foiled. The struggle in Becket between his love for the King and his duty to the Church (or what he takes to be his duty) is nobly presented, and is truly dramatic.

The King is shown as a real master and organizer in Becket. At the beginning, he is seen as a model of the true chivalrous spirit. Later on, he is depicted as much more emotional than Becket, unable to keep his fury under control when he is unsuccessful. In the prologue, Henry claims that he loves Rosamund , his true- heart wife , "as a woman should be loved " (Tennyson, Prologue:4), and strangely enough, almost immediately when Eleanor appears, he accepts her beauty cross and it is the Queen that is assured of his love now, so that one doubt his sincerity. Later there is no suggestion of love between Eleanor and Henry any longer: "We have but one bond, her hate of Becket" (Tennyson, II, i: 53). Tennyson hints that Henry had actually been secretly married to Rosamund before he was forced to marry Eleanor, probably because of political circumstances.

To add, Rosamund is forced to marry one of the King's men and Eleanor's yes-man, Fitzurse. Tennyson portrays that she is happy to be hidden in Bower and does not ask why. Anyway, she escapes and has to ask Becket to protect her from Fitzurse who manages to follow her immediately. It seems that Fitzurse has previously attempted to rape her "...He sused my hand. I shook at him./ He found me once alone. Nay, nay, I cannot/ Tell you...", (Tennyson, I, i: 23). Rosamund has no idea that Henry is married to Eleanor. When Eleanor makes her way into the Bower and offers her the "sleeping draught" (Tennyson, IV,ii: 85) or dagger unless she instantly consents to marry Fitzurse , she refuses bravely, although her son's life is threatened as well, Rosamund claims she " never loved but one" (Tennyson, IV,ii: 86) and proudly considers herself " snow to mud" (Tennyson, IV,ii:86) , meaning promiscuous people , Eleanor. In fact, Becket persuades Rosamund to go to Godstow nunnery and forget the King, to which she agrees. Eleanor immediately loses interest in her. At the end, Rosamund changes from a helpless , sweet, submissive and ignorant creature into an adventurous and energetic sportswoman who travels all the way from Godstow in Oxford shire to Canterbury, just to ask Becket whether he excommunicated her beloved Henry or not. She witnesses Becket's murder, vainly begs the Knights for mercy (the Knights are not interested in her any longer, not even Fitzurse), and finally she kneels by Becket's corpse.

Eleanor, as a female character in Becket, is a typical villainess. She is portrayed in the play in a very different way. She is a domineering and cruel woman, urging Fitzurse to ' devour Rosamund... and make her as hateful to herself and to the

King, as she is to me " (Tennyson, Prologue: 15), the lords " to stir up the king "(Tennyson, I,ii:28), or the Knights to carry out the King's wishes (i.e. to murder Becket) .As a stock negative character she is ugly, old, and pitiless. Her aim is to crush Rosamund through Fitzurse and the Knights. Then she attempts to hurt the King, exploiting the conflict with Becket to suit her purposes, so that she makes full use of it whenever she can. When Eleanor is caught red- handed with a dagger aiming at Rosamund's heart, she swears she will make Becket suffer. She realizes that Becket must not see the King any more, and hurries back to France to be able to tell her own version to Henry. She provokes him easily and she is herself who orders the four Knights to go to Canterbury and strike the Archbishop at once, exploiting their hate for him. Henry's wife, Eleanor, has an important role in Tennyson's play, but Eliot leaves her completely as well as her rival, Rosamund.

To characterize the Knights in Tennyson's play, they are the dramatist's Bishops and Churchmen who take the King's side. They freely express their hostility towards Becket. But one wonders to that during the protagonists' friendship (Becket and Henry), Fitzurse is rather the Queen's man and confident than the King's and he agrees to marry Rosamund at Eleanor's suggestion(Kyzlinkova,1999) .

In comparison, Eliot's characters are basically drawn from historical sources during the later part of Twelfth century. Becket is close to King Henry II, but differences in their attitudes towards power draw them apart (Heaton, 2007).The King who is never presented on the stage, but whose invisible presence towers over the entire proceedings of the play is omnipresent. Assuming that the audience is familiar with the actual history, Eliot shifts us into the psychological and spiritual struggle in Becket himself (ibid.). All his attention is upon the inner nature of the drama in Becket rather than upon the politics and the history of his death. This is what makes the work attractive (Bareham, p.33).The modern poet exposes the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. He makes the characters behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency (Matthiessen, p.155). The contrast with Eliot's Becket is revelatory. His presentation of Archbishop is limited but coherent .He gives none of the flare up of the natural man who was reported to have met Reginald Fitzurse, the leader of the murderers, with the angry denunciation, 'you pander' (ibid.)

The Chorus, in Eliot's, is represented by the poor women of Canterbury, who seem to feel helpless at first without their kind Archbishop. Before Becket's entrance, the Chorus begs,"O Thomas return, Archbishop; return, return to France,"(Eliot, part I:18) for his coming "bringing death into Canterbury" (p.19); later it gets more involved because it knows and fears something is going to happen, and finally it suffers , so it participates in the action. The Chorus, as Eliot defines it, is to" mediate between the action and the audience, it intensifies the action by projecting its emotional consequences, so that we as audience see it doubly, by seeing its effect on other people"(Matthiessen, p. 162). In significance , it represents the voice of the common person, sums up the past, brings the situation into the present, and expresses a lurking fear of Becket's doom, which the audience shares (Leeming: 89-90). Its appearance expresses the idea that mankind, as symbolized by the poor women of Canterbury, are waiting for something to happen, has been

forced to bear witness to an act. Its questions regarding the purpose of its attendance near the Cathedral indicate its lack of understanding (Bareham :47-50).

Throughout *Murder in the Cathedral*, Thomas Becket is warned about the danger of his remaining in Canterbury and the threat of danger from his enemies, who seek to please King Henry by murdering him. When he does arrive, he tells them and the Three Priests that none should fear his possible death, for "the hungry hawk Will only soar and hover"(Eliot, PartI :23) until there is an "End" that "will be simple, sudden, God-given." (Eliot, PartI :23). The very fact of his return suggests his refusal to fear death and belief that God will decide whether he will live or die: as he tells the Priests, "All things prepare the event." (Eliot, Part I :23).

Opposite of Tennyson, Eliot's Knights are different. The playwright does not treat them individually, but he considers them as four mouths for one purpose, i.e the punishment of the Archbishop, who in their opinion has betrayed the King (Kyzlinkova,1995) .When Becket gives them his final answer that he has no longer power to stand with the King's side, they close the episode with the following line:" we come for the King's justice, we come with swords." (Eliot, Part II : 72).Then they come again, and kill the Archbishop. The Four Knights, whose names are: Reginald Fitzurse , Sir High de Morville, William de Traci and Richard Brito, play the role of killers of Becket , and Reginald Fitzurse takes the leader's role among them .

Consequently, as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the protagonist of the play awaits his murderers, Eliot introduces four nameless Tempters who try to sway him from his resolve, revealing the power of the temporal world and selfish desire. Becket's disregard for earthly pleasures and power is heightened during his conversations with the first three Tempters who parallel the Temptation of Christ. But Eliot goes further, employing a Christmas mass at the center of the play (Kermode,ed., 1975: 97-106).

Hence, to Eliot, the Tempters are considered as the most important minor characters because they shed lights on Becket's character and they fail to tempt him with any of their proposals. In addition, the climax of the whole play lies in the fourth temptation (Bareham, p.33).

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the First Tempter offers the prospect of physical safety. He is the natural sensual man who loves pleasure, athletics, music, good company, luxurious life, gaiety and romance. He reminds Becket of the past, which the latter presumably enjoyed as younger man. The Archbishop suggests that the tempter is twenty years too late, as though such temptations have been buried long ago. The Tempter replies that "I leave you to the pleasures of your higher vices, which will have to be paid for at higher prices" (Eliot, Part I: 26). However, Becket rejects this temptation that seems ultimately to focus upon those that are now afforded by his position (Bergonzi, ed., 1969:23).

The Second offers power, riches and fame in serving the King. He blames Becket for having resigned the Chancellorship on becoming Archbishop. He also seeks the exercise of political power, and Becket is noted for his strict chastity too (ibid.):

To set down the great, protect the poor,
Beneath the throne of God can man do more? (Eliot, Part I: 28)

The Third Tempter, who is political, seeks to seduce Thomas Becket to have a political unity with the Barons and a chance to oppose the King, “a happy coalition of intelligent interests.” (Eliot, Part I: 35) Becket quickly discharges this temptation too (Bareham, p.52):

For us, Church favour would be an advantage,
Blessing of Pope powerful protection
In the fight for liberty. You, my Lord,
In being with us, would fight a good stroke (Eliot, Part I: 35)

In resisting the three temptations in Murder in the Cathedral, we are drawn towards the goodness of Becket's character. The temptations of pleasure, power, and political advantage seem to have little to do with the nobility of martyrdom, but Eliot would have us see that even the noblest of actions are far from unmixed motivations. It would be the highest perversity to give one's life for God as an act of pleasure, to secure power, or make a political statement (Misera: 96). Finally, a Tempter who may be the devil himself, urges him to seek the glory of martyrdom (Gascoigne, p.158) :

You hold the keys of heaven and hell.
Power to bind and loose : bind, Thomas, bind,
King and bishop under your heel.
King, emperor, bishop, baron, king: (Eliot, Part I: 39)

Becket responds to all Tempters and specifically addresses the immoral suggestions of the Fourth Tempter at the end of the first act:

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:
Temptation shall not come in this kind again.
The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason(Eliot, Part I:47)

In Becket's case the final temptation is identified at the end of the first section: “Ambition comes when early force is spent and when we find no longer all things possible. Ambition comes behind and unobservable. Sin grows with doing good” (Eliot, Part I:47), and Becket is keenly aware of this.

The Three Priests, as characters in Eliot's play, enter bearing flags: the first is of St. Stephen; the second is of St. John the Apostle; and the third is of the Holy Innocents. In the play, the Priests are worried about Becket, and they hold him in great respect and fear for his life. To Eliot, they do not have an individual identity or names, and they stand at a higher level of awareness and intellect than the woman of Canterbury. They also represent the deplane and decorum of the Church (Bareham, p.51).

The Messenger is also a character in *Murder* who informs the Priests before Becket's return to Canterbury, " He comes in pride and sorrow, affirming all his claims,/Assured, beyond doubt, of devotion of the people,/Who receive him with sense of frenzied enthusiasm," (Eliot, Part I:15)

To conclude, Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is a famous English Martyr .He seems to fascinate writers as a stage figure up to date. However, our present concern presents this slaying Archbishop in Tennyson's *Becket* and Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* according to plot, structure and characters of those two authors' plays. The results of this paper reflect that most voices contain a dualism illuminates Becket's desire to express himself, but Tennyson's *Becket* wonders too far and too long to take his decision in comparison with Eliot's. It also seems that this character is appeared reluctant in the two plays of our target.

T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* mimics the form of ancient Greek drama, but is intended completely for contemporary audiences of the twentieth century. He is specifically avoiding easy play upon the collective experience. For that, it is an extremely intellectual work, lacking external action while maintaining an intense conflict within the protagonist himself. Therefore, Eliot's method of developing sympathy for Thomas Becket relies upon the well-known story, which was legendary from the twelfth century. It is clear that he assumes that most of his audience is familiar with Becket's story. Hence, he never wants to waste time establishing the identity of his characters or describing theatrical decoration of the play's setting. This suggests that he does not write a direct historical play, repeating the events which lead up to Becket's death.

To differentiate, Tennyson shows a serious damage to both historical and religious outlines and gives evidences to the romantic subplot to become more and more important than the main plot. He concentrates upon a point that the virtuous beauty must be saved, a subject which was familiar in Victorian age. His play seems to have no theme either, it is just a piece of falsified history told for the sake of its intrigue, sentimentality, violence and spectacular effects. For example, Becket's martyrdom comes under the effect of the Queen's desire to get rid of the Archbishop and her role to create the big rift with the King. Accordingly, this is opposite of the historical story of Thomas Becket's martyrdom.

Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, specifically, focuses on a Christmas Mass as the center of the play that helps ground the spiritual problems that arise during the course of the action. The author combines dramatic qualities with the murder of St. Thomas Becket approaches. Thus he integrates religion with literature.

Eliot's female characters that are represented by the Chorus are characterized to watch and suffer and their feelings are nearly all in the most sombre key. Their gamut is from nameless dread of foreboding to horror at the fact of Becket's murder. They are nameless and drawn to give significance to the plot in developing its action and to the structure in the point of imitating Greek Drama. But Tennyson's female characters are individuals. They dominate the whole play more than the protagonist himself, Thomas Becket, and most of the action is happened because of their power.

In order to gear the subplot with the main plot, Tennyson makes his Archbishop of Canterbury warden of the King's mistress, no matter how platonic

their relationship may be at the moment. It comes to the mind that one expects Becket Chancellor to support the King in everything he wants.

Eliot, through the temptations and Apology of the Knights, offers most historical facts can be found in the play, so there are no separate plans. But Tennyson gives most of his historical stories in Act V. In this respect, the latter does not succeed in creating much tension. Hence, the historical characters are apart from the protagonists, and other minor characters are flat and unimportant figures, such as pestering beggars. There are fine scenes, powerful and masterly drawing of character in Henry, Eleanor, and Becket, but there is a want of concentration to the long period of time covered by the action.

Tennyson's characters are typically black and white. The King, Henry, is also the main protagonist beside Becket in Becket, whereas in Eliot's there is no such character but his role can be understood through other characters like Tempters and Priests.

Tennyson's Becket shows much of historical and romantic plots on the same legendary materials; so many scenes illustrate the same situations. While Eliot's Becket reveals himself in one situation concerning his martyrdom.

In dramatizing the life of St. Thomas Becket, T.S. Eliot follows the lead of Alfred Tennyson. But unlike him, he pares away anecdotal and decorative material, and focuses instead on the final catastrophe—Becket's martyrdom. Like Greek tragedy, *Murder in the Cathedral* is made up of episodes separated by choral odes, and the dramatist makes full use of the Chorus. The play also contains Biblical echoes in that it is a drama of victory over temptation and Becket's temptations are compared to those of Christ. On the contrary, Tennyson's play is like Elizabethan drama, especially Shakespearean in the point of dividing the play into five acts with many scenes.

It is, perhaps, the difference in the way of presenting each play goes back for the period in which each writer lives. Tennyson lived in the Victorian period and this phase was still characterized by the influences of chivalry love (a theme was widely known in the Romantic period) like the love story of King Henry and Rosamond which dominated the whole action of Becket more than the story of Thomas Becket, the main subject. Whereas, Eliot lived in the Twentieth Century in which courtly or chivalry love was neglected. In addition Eliot himself tended to be serious and realistic writer for his concerning in classicism and religion. Beside, he wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* for the ceremony of Christmas Mass, therefore, he concentrated on the situation of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, The Archbishop of Canterbury.

الملخص

يدور موضوع البحث الحالي حول الشهيد النصراني الإنكليزي ورئيس أساقفة كانتربري ، توماس بكت (١١٧٠-١١١٨) في مسرحيات ألفريد لورد تينيسن (١٨٠٩-١٨٩٢) و تي . أس. اليوت (١٨٨٨-١٩٦٥). ويحاول هذا البحث ان يعرض مثل هكذا شخصية تاريخية دينية ضمن اطار ادبي في مسرحية بكت (١٨٨٤) لتينيسن ومسرحية مقتل في الكاتدرائية (١٩٣٥) لاليوت والتي يكون موضوعيهما الرئيسي هو قصة توماس بكت. وعلى وفق ذلك، فإن الهدف من هذا البحث هو عمل دراسة مقارنة للمسرحيتين المذكورتين من ناحية المحتوى والتركيب والشخصيات لغرض رؤية التشابه والاختلاف للمعالجات التاريخية والأدبية للكاتبين المسرحيين في مسرحياتهما التي هي هدف الدراسة. لذلك فان البحث يأخذ ترتيبا متدرجا وفق المتسلسلات التالية: حيث يبدأ بمقدمة توضيحية للقصة التاريخية لتوماس بكت وعلاقته مع الملك هنري الثاني (١١٣٣-١١٨٨) للنظر في الطريقة التي عكس كل كاتب موضوعه ضمن إطار أدبي. ثم يتناول هذا البحث النقاط الرئيسية التي تستند عليها الدراسة وهي المحتوى والتركيب والشخصيات لكل مسرحية لعكس التشابه والاختلاف بينهما. ينتهي البحث باستنتاجات تجمع النتائج الرئيسية والتي توصلت الى ان تينيسن و اليوت كتبوا عن نفس الموضوع والذي يدور حول الشهيد الانكليزي المسيحي توماس بكت لكنهم اختلفوا في الطريقة التي عرضوا فيها الموضوع وهو ما تحاول الدراسة توضيحه.

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