

HEROISM IN THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT 'S 'MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL'

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Abstract

This paper describes dramatic elements which show heroism of Thomas Becket as depicted in 'Murder in the cathedral'. Murder in the cathedral, a play written by T.

*S. ELIOT is about Becket, the British, who is killed because of his determination of not violating catholic regulations and not practicing what King Henry II asks him to do. When Becket excommunicates and expels friends and supporters of the king from the church that causes a serious conflict. The conflict is between the king and Thomas Becket. In this article, dramatic elements such as temptations the martyr undergoes, compromises, altruism, are depicted and some passages portray Becket's heroism. Consequently, the conflict ends up with the murder of Archbishop Becket in the cathedral. After Becket's death, the heroism is shown during **temptation episode, temptation to compromise and Becket enlightenment attains.***

Keywords: *Heroism, martyrdom, altruism, play, dramatic significance, temptation, compromise.*

Résumé

Cet article décrit les éléments dramatiques qui montrent l'héroïsme de Thomas Becket, comme le montre le théâtre ' *Le Meurtre dans la Cathédrale.*' Le meurtre dans la cathédrale, un théâtre écrit par Thomas Stearns Eliot à propos de Becket le Britannique qui est assassiné à cause de sa détermination de ne pas violer les règlements de l'église catholique et ne pas avoir mis en pratique ce que le roi Henry II lui avait demandé de faire. C'est en excommuniant les amis et les alliés du roi que le conflit a commencé entre le roi et Thomas Becket. Cet article montre les éléments dramatiques comme les tentations que prouve

le martyr, les compromis, l'altruisme sont décrits et analysés sur l'héroïsme de Becket. Par conséquent, le conflit va se terminer par la manière dont l'archevêque a été assassiné dans la cathédrale.

Mots clés : Héroïsme, Martyr, altruisme, pièce théâtrale, signification dramatique, tentation, compromettre.

I. INTRODUCTION

We have chosen this topic because the performance of this play invites today's audience to struggle with the current psychological and ethical discussion around the complexities of the altruism, including the most basic question of whether every human act necessarily is motivated by self-interest.

This article is about heroism expressed in the play 'Murder in The Cathedral'. Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury is killed in the cathedral because of conflicts raised between him and King Henry II (Spender, 1985).

Thomas Becket and King Henry II have been good friends at the beginning, but each felt that his interests should be of primary concern to the nation and that the other should acquiesce to his demands (Gardiner, 1949).

Our objective deals with attitudes which Becket adopts to martyrdom. In describing his understanding of the martyrdom within the drama, Eliot blends his Anglo-Catholicism with mystical, philosophical, and poetic works as well as elements such as faith and ambition to expose Becket's struggle for martyrdom (Kantra, 1968).

Dramatic elements appeared in the novel 'Murder in the Cathedral'. The first element which can be said is linked to politics. Becket is appointed as a Chancellor in the reign of Henry II. The blend of church and state responsibilities bring him conflicts with the king. Becket's deeds contrary to the will of king, made the king very angry and then Becket is going to be in trials which will bring him to be assassinated (Jones, 1985). The study is focused on heroism of Thomas before his death in the cathedral. We are going to depict also the impact of that murder in the society at that time. In order to describe this dramatic significance of Becket's heroism, some questions are asked:

What was the conflict between the archbishop Becket and the king Henry II? Why do we consider Becket as a hero? How and why Becket was killed? What impact does his death have in society?

The most controversial articles stated that members of the clergy were now accountable to state courts. Previously, criminal's clerks, members of the clergy who were accused of a crime, could be tried in the much more lenient church or ecclesiastical courts. Now they would have to answer to the king if they committed a crime. Furthermore, clergymen used to be able to appeal directly to Rome for justice; the constitution of Clarendon prohibited such appeals without royal permission. Finally, if there were a conflict between a layman and church member, the king's court was to have clear jurisdiction.

1. BECKET AS CHANCELLOR

Thomas Becket was made Archdeacon of Canterbury, an important and lucrative post, and less than three months later he recommended him to Henry II as Lord Chancellor. In this post Becket had the opportunity to distinguish himself in initiatives no longer associated with chancellor; he razed castles, repaired the Tower of London, conducting embassies, mustered, and led troops in battle, and was trusted completely by the King Henry (Becket T, 2021).

Becket is showing to the full of his brilliant abilities, and it starts as follow:

*The Chancellorship that you resigned
When you were made Archbishop
That was a mistake on your part
Still may be regained.*

*Power obtained grows to glory,
Life lasting, a permanent possession.*

This is a representation of a temper to say that Becket is powerful chancellor. He says that Becket was a fool to resign the chancellorship, that power can bring glory and fame even after death.

This play expresses an individual opposition to authority, during fascism in the central Europe and protest individuals in affected countries to oppose the Nazi regime's subversion of the ideals of the Christian church. Becket was appointed Chancellor of England

by King Henry II where he became the most powerful man in England next to the king. *J. David (1985 :60)*

II. RAISE OF THE CONFLICT

After being ordained a priest the day before his consecration as Archbishop, the life completely changes. Living in a great austerity, he soon clashes with the king over clerical and church rights. Because of that, Saint Thomas Becket is going to be into exile in Cluny, France for six years. The conflict raises till the king Henry II is going to overheard say he wishes he were rid of this troublesome priest. In this new position, Becket finds that eventually his allegiance is going to favor more the church than his king. After six years in exile, Becket returns to Canterbury where he faces the King's wrath. What surprises people, once Becket has been consecrated Archbishop, his attitudes change entirely and becomes a devout catholic and entirely devoted to Rome. Henry II was incensed at what he saw as a betrayal by a friend, and after a series of clashes (Clayton, 2022). Becket fled to France for seven years, where he lived under the protection of King Louis VII. Henry confiscated the property of Becket and his supporters. There followed many failed attempts to reconcile the former friends before Henry finally met Becket at Freteval on July 22, 1170. A truce was negotiated, which allowed Becket to return to Canterbury on December 2. This way of behaving infuriates Henry the king. Enraging the king, Becket begins to excommunicate the king's supporters, expel them from the church, because they prioritize the king's will over what he is going to see as God's will. Because of that, Becket is killed. After Becket's death, the knights said:

*'Where's Becket, the traitor to the King?
Where's Becket, the meddling priest?
Come down Daniel to the lions' den,
Come down Daniel for the mark of the beast.
Are you washed in the blood of the Lord?'*

*Are you marked with the mark of the beast ? Come Daniel to the lion's den.
Come down Daniel and join in the feast.
Where is Becket the cheapside beat ? Where is Becket the faithless priest ?
Come down Daniel to the Lions' den.
Come down Daniel and join in the feast. p.42*

III. THOMAS BECKET THE TRAGIC HERO IN MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Thomas Becket is the tragic hero in this play for two reasons : One, his friendship with Henry II, who supposedly made the comment, this friendship did not favor violation of church regulation and because of that Becket is going to be assassinated.

'Will anyone rid me of this priest ?' p .41.

The second reason Thomas Becket is the tragic hero in this play is the fact that he is the highest ranking church official in England, and he took his duties to the church seriously. The heroic story starts with a call, or a mission. In the case of Becket, the call comes in the form of an appointment to the bishopric of Canterbury. He stood up to Henry regarding noblemen who were breaking the law of the church, and he fearlessly stood by his friends and fellow churchmen, but where Henry was concerned, Thomas did not stand up for himself. He was clever, generous, and righteous which made him popular with the common people. However, Becket believed that God's will would be done with regard to his own fate (Anciman,1996).

III.1. BECKET'S ALTRUISM

Henry II became king of an England that had been wracked by feudal wars and civil disorder. Over the course of his reign, Henry, who would prove to be one of England's ablest rulers, reorganised the nation as well as its justice system. He managed in the process to give the King's law nationwide authority through a series of reforms. It is in the context of these reforms that we must understand Henry's actions against Thomas Becket in Murder in The Cathedral. Despite the importance of the Archbishop's existence, people fear for him because they think that something bad would happen to him if he came back.

O Thomas, return, Archbishop : return, return to France.

Return. Quickly. Quietly. Leave us to perish in quiet. You come with applause, you come with rejoicing, But you come bringing death into canterbury.

A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, A doom on the world. P.181

Apart from this fear, people seem too much to revere Becket as the messenger describes the return of him from France to England with beautiful images, as the roads are lined with people waving and throwing their hats to the Archbishop.

III.2 .THE MURDER OF BECKET IN THE CATHEDRAL

"servants of God and watches the temple, I am here to inform you without circumlocution the archbishop is in England and is closed outside the city. I was sent before in hast. To give you notice of his coming as much to was possible, that you may prepare to meet him. P 14.

The chorus made in the cathedral composes of women of Canterbury, poorer, common, and plain, these women have lived the difficult but manageable life since Thomas was sent exile seven years before they play begins.

Though they are catholic and respect the archbishop, they are one also worried that his return will bring them the new level of spiritual burden. The play examines the way they come to accept their spiritual responsibilities through the example of Thomas's martyrdom.

A nameless priest of Canterbury, characterized by pragmatism. He examines Becket's return based on its political ramification and notes how Becket's clash with Henry reflects issues of land ownership and power rather than spiritual dominion.

Though none of the four knights is particularly individualized before Becket's murder, the first knight gives his name as Reginald Fitz unseen afterward when he addresses the audience. He claims he is not a man of eloquence, and so mostly serves as another during the knights, speeches.

In Thomas's murder in cathedral the method of characterization is observed at the beginning of the novel in part 1. It is depicted as follows:

From the lines quoted above, we realized that the artist portrays the central character that is Thomas Becket, giving detail and presenting him.

IV.1. BECKET AS ARCHBISHOP

Thomas Becket was canonized a saint three years after his death, and many people view Becket as a martyr who heroically withstood the demands of a tyrannical king. Others have been less impressed with Becket. King VIII (1491-1547) destroyed his shrine, burned his bones, and had Becket's name removed from religious missals, and the historian Thomas Carlyle called Becket a noisy egotist and hypocrite (Domesticco,2012). From that point on, the Knights try to win the audience's support for their murder of Becket, and the arguments they make are eerily persuasive. Of course a

modern-day audience supports the subordination of church to state. In this case, the audience recognized that violence was necessary for maintaining the social order. During strategies brought to kill Becket, the second knight said:

‘Condemning an Archbishop by vote of Parliament and execute him formally as a traitor, and no one would have to bear the burden of being called murderer’. (Murder p.82)

Thomas has no tragic fate, but glorious and which is not in his hand, but in the will of God. Eliot T.S. brings out not the human qualities but the glorious image of Christ in the person of a Christian Saint. Thomas Becket is seen not as a man with tragic flaw, but as a Saint purifying his relations with God. He is struggling with the demon of spiritual pride and motive for martyrdom.

Christian martyrdom is not accident Saints are not made by accident Still let us see a Christian martyrdom. the effect of a man will become a saint.

Willing and contriving may become a ruler of men.

Ambition fortifies the will of man.

to become ruler over other : it operated with deception cajolery, and violence, it is action of impurity upon impurity. Not so in Heaven.

A Martyr, Saint, is made by the design of God.....A martyr 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, not lost it, but found it,

for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom. (Patrica Adair :84)

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the protagonist of the play awaits his murderers, Eliot introduces four nameless Tempers 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 Tempers who parallel the Temptation of Christ.

V. MARTYRDOM

Being the main character around which the story is built, Becket Thomas is physically seen strong and vigorous. He was brilliant in his time. The archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket was exiled from England by king Henry II due to political conflicts which occurred between the seven years before the beginning of the play. Having spent those years in France, Becket has decided to return in England and take up his old position in church (Gardner, 1988). Symbolically hinted at by the fact that he's the only character given a proper name in the play. The priests while religious, have an idea of fate that conflicts with Becket's decision to become a martyr. Murder in cathedral p. 82.

Therefore, he is in as archbishop, the narrator assents as follows:

“If the archbishop cannot trust in the throne, he has good cause to trust none but God alone. I would once as chancellor. And mean like you were plaid to wait at my door. Not only in court, but in the field. To make, then break, this fault has come before, the desperate exercise of real power, Samson in Gaza and no more but if I break. I must break myself alone.” p.82.

From the lines quoted above, shows that instead of peace Thomas was in problem. Moreover, he betrayed this society, when he decided to be God's martyr instead of understanding their needs.

“We must see the archbishop, go tell the archbishop. We have no need of his hospitality. We will find our dinner. Go tell his lordship, most surely from the king we must speak with you alone. Leave us the alone.” murder in the cathedral p. 62.

These lines show us how the knights were against Thomas. The priests insist that he leaves and protects himself, but he refuses. The knights leave and Becket again says he is ready to die.

Thomas is taken to cathedral where the knights break in and kill him. p.72 .

VI. CONCLUSION

The topic is chosen because of the heroism of the central character expressed in the novel. The heroism expressed here, shows some psychological traits around the complexities of life in general. In the novel, the expression of heroism by martyrdom, answers questions of every human act and determine their motivations.

We have to note that the objective of this topic is to show and express attitude persons take to face a given problem or conflict. The determination of Becket which pushes him to adopt martyrdom is an example to every person to avoid cowards.

The conflict in the novel ‘Murder In The Cathedral’ is at the same time political and religious. It is political because Becket as a Chancellor of the King, is not going to accept violating catholic regulations to favor the kings' friends. The conflict is also religious for the fact that Becket is going to excommunicate the kings' friends from the church.

The article aimed heroism found in Murder in the Cathedral. The play set in Canterbury cathedral in 1170 and was

performed to show conflict which was between the king Henry II and the Archbishop Thomas Becket (T.S., 1969). Apart from the abstract which summarizes this play, is also based on the real life and historical misunderstanding between the king Henry of England and Becket the Archbishop. At that time, the king Henry II tried to consolidate England into one nation and controlled over its catholic church. The church had obligations to the pope in Rome, and these obligations could conflict with loyalty to king and the whole state. As the king controlled Catholic Church, Becket had raised from lowly origins to become king Henry's friend, loyal servant, advisor, and ambassador (Martz, 1955). Eliot invites today's audience to struggle with the current psychological and ethical discussion around the complexities of the notion of altruism, including the most basic question of whether every human act necessarily is motivated by self-interest. Writing in 1935, Eliot intends Thomas' fourth tempter to be the voice of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) whose critique of Christianity suggested that the virtues of self-denial and loving sacrifice are in reality rooted in an unreflective vicious self-aggrandizement (ELIOT, 1968). Eliot wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* for a Christian audience and thus assumes a general appreciation of the history of Christian martyrdom. One of the first issues to face the emerging Christian church in the second century was how to respond to the Roman imperial authorities who demands that Christians offer worship to the Emperor, an impossible concession for Christians. The church decided that neither course was correct, but that a Christian should follow the example of Christ in the Gospel who made reasonable efforts to avoid arrest but did not ultimately flee. The second and third centuries was the age of actual martyrdom, but when Christianity became a tolerated religion in the early fourth century the church encouraged every Christian to continue to live as a martyr who died to self and lived to God (Fergusson, 1949). In this way the age of martyrdom would never come to an end so long as Christians practiced a daily sacrifice of the self to God, or self-will to divine-will. All this history is brought together by Eliot in the words of the tempters in the first act. The first three tempters imitated the traditional three temptations of Christ to assert self-will. Thomas is tempted to the pleasure of a renewed friendship with the king, to return to his former political influence as chancellor, and finally to scheme to gain both spiritual and political power through treachery. This play is not about Becket's murder, but about the great values of martyrdom. Becket seems from the early beginning of the drama to follow a predestined way to God (Britt, 2021). The play is a study in the religious and philosophical attitudes of martyrdom. The spilling of the martyr's blood is also redemption of mankind. Even if destiny is shaped by God's will, there is still man's free will. Becket has kicked the worldly things down as he refuses to be a chancellor and an archbishop simultaneously and does not yield to all kinds of temptations. He neither wants to spend all the remainder of his life in France although it is safer to him than England, nor does he listen to the request of the chorus and priests to stay away from danger. However, three years after his murder, Becket was officially canonized as a martyr by the Roman Catholic Church (Bartlett, 2013).

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