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Religious Ideology and Motivation of Action: A Study of Nature of Action in T. S. Eliot's "*Murder in the Cathedral*"

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to re-establish the status of Archbishop Becket as a standard tragic hero of a religious play written by T. S. Eliot. Various critics have denounced the characterization of Archbishop Becket as a proper tragic hero, claiming that the entire process of the plot is devoid of 'dramatic action', which is considered the backbone of any drama. In this paper the author has tried to illuminate on a renewed definition of 'dramatic action' and consequently prove that the performance and actions of Archbishop Becket are, in fact, a process of mental action which nevertheless arrive the character to the definitive destination of all other dramatic heroes, i.e. a tragic death.

Keywords: Tragic hero, Dramatic Action, Murder in the Cathedral, Mental Action and T. S. Eliot

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What do we expect of a play? What is it that creates our sense of enjoyment of a play? What is it that conjures up the main part of our literal and logical satisfaction of it? Is it the plot of the play, the characterization or the conclusion? Who is a real hero of a drama? What are his characteristics? The answer to each of these questions has been long debated. It has also varied through ages. In twentieth century, for instance, the focal axis of a drama has shifted from plot to characterization. Plots are becoming simpler or even bare; on the other hand, the characters started to have more obscurity and have become a challenge to the mind of the reader. These abstract concepts find their meaning when we talk of them in the context of a particular play.

"*Murder in the Cathedral*" is a play by T. S. Eliot which, similar to a host of his other writings, has as its subject matter a Christian topic. Quoting Ranji Singh writing in his book "Tennyson and T. S. Eliot", "the basic plot structure appears to be derived from the ritual form of ancient tragedy" (2005, 114). Among the play's themes are conflict of spiritual and secular power and relation of Church and the State. But these themes are subordinated to another underlying theme; that of martyrdom. As Gardner points out in her book "The Art of T. S. Eliot", "The central theme of the play is martyrdom and martyrdom in its strict, ancient sense." (1968, 133)

Since its publication in 1935, the play has been the subject of controversy among critics. Hugh some of criticism has been devoted to illuminate its merits and demerits. Some have called it "the finest dramatic verse that has been written" (Gardner, 1968, 127). Still the same author has accused it of failing in affecting the audience and also of incorporating uninteresting and unconvincing characterization. John Peter, in his essay titled "Murder in the Cathedral", objects to "Eliot's handling of his psychological and his religious content" (1962, 155). The most underlying defect that critics ascribe to it is the play's void of action. They argue that the protagonist of the play is not a man of common errors; rather he is a superman in that no earthly subject can affect him and that he is above temptation.

A review of Aristotle's concept of character reminds us that there are two views concerning this definition. The first one, which is also the most prevalent one, is the definition of character as the "dramatic personage". But the second and the more important definition is, as Tilak mentions in

his book "History and Principle of Literary Criticism", "the bent or tendency or habit of mind which can be revealed only in what a dramatic personage *says* [Italic is mine] or does" (1992, 67). What we must not ignore here is that according to Aristotle, what a character says is equally as important as what s/he does. A good example of this kind can be found in the character of Archbishop Becket who has been said to have departed from the prevailing qualities of a 'dramatic hero'. We should bear this point in mind that, as Pearce mentions in his book "T. S. Eliot" , "Becket is one of those persons whom Eliot sees as possessing special spiritual insight" (1967, 143). Therefore, it is only his "spiritual insight" and not his super powers or extraordinary qualities that enable Becket to go through the process of evolution as we find in the play.

Thus, by so recognizing Becket as the appropriate protagonist of a religious play, we can further justify his dramatic *actions*. In his book "Secondary Worlds", Auden notes "He [Archbishop Becket] is pre-eminently one of those cases of martyrdom over which the question of motive- did he die for the truth or out of spiritual pride and ambition?- must rise. This is, from the religious point of view, the most crucial point." (1967, 23). This paper tries to focus on the miscellaneous aspects of action in both its physical or psychological sense, and to demonstrate how these mental actions have their roots in an ideology which is the backbone of all that is observed in the play. To do so requires us to go slightly beyond the established and acknowledged definition of action and also to keep this pivotal fact in mind that "it is the end which a character desires" and that "characters become actual only when the agent has a definite 'end' in view and initiates a movement [and not an action] to achieve his end" (Tilak, 68). Thus while reading the play, we should keep ourselves in accordance and harmony with Becket's ideology and his 'end'; otherwise we would lose a great share of our enjoyment of it.

The play starts with the Chorus of women of Canterbury mourning and lamenting due to an unknown reason. Rajni Singh, describes the Chorus as apprehensive and intimidated. He goes on to say "they are the wistful, leaderless women of Canterbury calling for spiritual guidance in their half-lived lives" (2005, 109). The words "danger" and "fire" are repeated respectively three and four times in the first six lines which delineate a semantic connotative relation between the two words. The "seven years" since the departure of Archbishop could be a summing up of the two

previously mentioned numbers. Therefore the arrival of the Archbishop is in a way synonymous with the sense of hazard and insecurity felt by the women. They virtually prognosticate what is going to happen to Archbishop when they sing of a "winter" that "shall bring death from the sea" (*Murder*, 2).

Gradually, the main idea of the play is being revealed in the songs of the Chorus where they say that "God shapes the still unshapen" and that "destiny waits in the hands of God, not in the hands if the statesmen" (Murder, 2). And finally they assert this fact that

> "For us, the poor, there is no action,
> But only to wait and to witness" (*Murder*, 2).

From the very beginning, there is a sense of hidden horror rooted deep in the expressions and predictions of the women. As Carol Smith points out in her book "T. S. Eliot's dramatic theory and practice", "the women of Canterbury express their desire to maintain the quiet sterility of their humble lives, undisturbed by greatness of any kind…the women are conscious of fear and desire only 'peace' as they understand it; they do not wish anything to happen" (1967, 92-3).

Throughout the play, it becomes more evident that the women of Canterbury are representation of the basic instinctual part of the Archbishop himself. They partly share the fears and agonies that lie ahead for Becket. However, in a hierarchy of consciousness, they are placed at the intuitive level. Psychologically speaking, they represent that part of the man's mind which is known as id; with Becket himself being the superego. They merely sense the danger, but they are practically unable of any higher level of interaction with that concept. Still the very essence of their role as it is, is a verification of the fact that Becket's mind is concerned with the upcoming issues even prior to his appearance in the play. Even before he enters the play, we see the tumult that his future decisions would create. In fact the songs of the Chorus enjoy such high level of effectiveness that Helen Gardner has ascribed to it "the real drama of the play": "the real drama of the play is to be found in fact where its greatest poetry lies- in the chorus" (1968, 136).

In the next line, the three priests enter the play. Early in their speech and through their conversation with the messenger, some nuances about the character of Archbishop are introduced implicitly. The image of Becket

which is thus created in these lines is that of a proud, fierce and decisive man who is returning in order to win glory, fame and victory. The adjective "proud" is repeatedly ascribed to him; a quality which, according to the first priest, is established as his tragic flaw:

> "His pride always feeding upon his own virtues" (*Murder*, 3).

Carol Smith has interpreted the reaction of the three priests to the news of arrival of Archbishop as follows:

> The reaction of the three priests to the news of Thomas's return represents the next step on an ascending scale of awareness of the event's meaning…within the group of the priests, there is also hierarchy of understanding. The first Priest, knowing his Archbishop's uncompromising nature, fears Thomas's return… The second Priest affirms his loyalty to the Archbishop… he differs from the women in wishing the return, but he does not think beyond the comfort of Thomas's presence. It is the thirst Priest who, of the three, most nearly approaches Thomas' saintly understanding of the events to come. (1967, 93)

Next, we see the women of Canterbury still mourning; but this time they have a reason: Becket's return. Here also, they function as the instinctual aspect of man that can feel the danger before it occurs. They express their fear which is "not of one but of many" (*Murder*, 4). They warn against a doom that is going to befall on Archbishop as well as on the world. Following this scene comes the appearance of Becket. He immediately embarks on the main idea of the play which he ascribes to the women, ignorant of the fact that these will be repeated back to him later:

> They know and do not know that acting is suffering
> And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer
> Nor the patient acts. But both are fixed
> In an eternal action, an eternal patience
> To which all must consent that it may be willed
> And which all must suffer that they may will it
> That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
> And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
> Be forever still. (*Murder*, 5)

As T.S. Pearce notes in his book "T.S. Eliot", "Becket speaks this from a position of superiority over the foolish and doubting women" (1967,

144). This part of the play, is particularly worthy of attention. Becket, in his ignorance, is expressing his central ideology regarding his future decisions. Primarily, the dual theme of the "action" and "suffering" is introduced for the first time to the play. He equates action with suffering and describes both the "agent" and the "patient" as passive practitioners of a Prime order. He adds that both of them are "fixed in an eternal action". It is essential here to note the equation of the two concepts of action and fixation in an ideology like that of Becket. For Becket, a person's actions and decisions are meaningful only when they are part of or imbedded in a higher order of actions and decisions. To him, action is defined as something which finds its significance in history or eternity and is not bound to space-time limitation.

In Becket's reply to the second priest, we can find out that at this stage, his mind is more or less occupied by the political issues. As Wyman mentions in her essay "Plot of Diction", "he arrives in England glorying in that he has overcome the world and failing to realize that that he must allow himself to be overcome by it, for the glory of God" (1975: 136). We can see that he is conscious of, and able to avoid danger. Thus, in the first impression, he is not a "super person" as Gardner accuses him "Mr. Eliot has conceived his hero as a superior person" (1968, 136). Before anything, he is an astute politician who is aware of the threats of danger, but his knowledge exists at a higher level than that of the women or the priests. As we would see, this knowledge does not secure him a retreat from danger; rather it will move him forward toward it.

Next we have the appearance of the first Temper. As Carol Smith points out "the first Temper offers Thomas a return to the life of sensual pleasure of his youth at court" (1967, 94). This is similar to Christ's temptation in "Paradise Regained" by Satan which is known as food Temptation which is in content similar to the worldly pleasure. In his reply to the offers of the first Temper, Thomas makes a basic statement worthy of isolation:

> "Only
> The fool, fixed in his folly, may think
> He can turn the wheel on which he turns." (*Murder*, 6)

This is a manifestation of the deep-rooted philosophy of Becket which comes to surface even in face of the trivial matters. Thus, he has prepared himself from the very beginning for his ultimate end which is martyrdom

in the will of God. But we see that throughout the process of appearance of the Tempters there is a gradual maturation in the outlook and consciousness of Becket toward his purpose. The first instance happens in the dialogues of the first Tempter where he accuses Thomas of the sin of pride

"Your Lordship is too proud!" (*Murder*, 6)

This slight reference to a particular weakness in character of Becket may be only the first step in the process of his gaining awareness and moving toward his final action.

The second Tempter, to quote Smith again, "offers earthly power with which to improve the temporal world and urges Thomas to seek power for present good and to leave holiness to the here-after" (1967, 94). This part is similar to another of Christ's Temptation in wilderness which is famous as the power temptation. In his dialogue with the second Tempter, Thomas appears to be to some extent wavering and indecisive at the beginning. He poses forth six "Wh" questions successively: *Who, What, Who, What, What, Why*. This may be a manifestation of the descending process of his internal conflict which is active at a deeper level in his unconscious mind. With a simple comparison between his dialogue with the first Tempter and the second Tempters, one can detect the changes that have taken place in the character of Becket. With the first Tempter, there was no question on the part of Thomas, only declarative sentences were used in order to reject the demands of the Tempter. But when it comes to the second Tempter, as it was mentioned, we see a series of informative questions which point to the fact that Becket is mentally or characteristically engaged with the matter at hand. It is as if he is debating the matter with himself. He wishes to convince himself of the fact that such a temptation is essentially rejected. Immediately after the questions there come the two "No's" as Thomas's reaction to suggestions of the Tempter. But psychologically speaking, these types of disjointed short negative answers are not to be that much relied upon as a definite rejection. Again it verifies that Becket's mind is engaged in the matter to the degree that it sometimes brings him to the verge of moral hesitation. Following the early short disjointed refusal of Becket come a set of reasons for his rejections. He mentions the "bishops" and "barons" who have been punished by him on the same ground which the Tempter is suggesting. But again the point with these reasons is that they are more of the nature of justification rather than reasons, they are closer to a type of excuse rather than moral obligation.

They are not sufficient per se, rather are more associated with outer references. It is as if Thomas is looking for exterior evidences to convince himself. It is only in his final words with the second Tempter that he begins to develop a self-oriented justification for his refusal of the Tempter's offers of earthly power. It is only here that we can see an instance of his real personality. Here he stops associating himself with kings and his office and instead finds the divine connections that he values most in himself as the pivotal reason for not accepting suggestions of this kind. His final "No" is totally different from his two previous "No"s and it is followed by the imperative verb commanding as

"No! Go." (*Murder,* 7)

Subsequently comes the third Tempter with his offer of "both revenge upon the King and domination for the Pope if he [Thomas] side with the English barons" (Carol Smith, 1967, 95). Presently, the Becket of the third Tempter is different from that of the second Tempter. He holds the upper hand from the beginning of their conversation by telling the Tempter that he has been expecting him. It has also been interpreted as another point of similarity between Christ and Becket in the sense that both of them had three Tempters in the similar condition. Becket's sentences are now short and commanding in nature. He asks no more questions that he did from the previous Tempter. His questions are, on the contrary, more ironical and teasing than interrogative. Thus, we can see that he is gradually moving toward a more developed self and is building upon his final determination. But it still has to be done. Notice Becket's final words with the third Tempter:

"To make, then break, this thought has come before,
The desperate exercise of failing power
Samson in Gaza did no more.
But if I break, I must break myself alone." (*Murder*, 8)

Carol Smith has noticed a sense of "willing destruction" on the part of Becket in these lines; something that would not be overcome until the appearance of the fourth Tempter. She goes on to say that

> The Archbishop thus reveals the contradiction in his thinking. He thinks that he is rejecting the temptation of willing "action" by removing himself from the act of vengeance or of seeking power, but his statement reveals that by "willing" his own destruction he is committing an

> act incompatible with making his will complaint with God's (1967, 95).

But as it was mentioned earlier, we should note that Becket is going through a process of maturation and development of his religious identity. His full grown character is not to be completed after the appearance of the fourth Tempter and of course after the speech that he makes at the Interlude. At this stage, what is important is that Becket's dialogue with both the second and the third Tempters end with a remark on his religious commitments and that he announces himself a subservient to the will of God. This is Becket's main departure from his earlier flaw of pride which was ascribed to him.

In the next step, there comes the fourth Tempter who turns out to be a surprise. Presently, Becket did not expect him

> "Who are you? I expected
> Three visitors, not four" (*Murder*, 8)

As Carol Smith notes what he has to offer is the everlasting glory of martyrdom in the presence of God. In his dialogue with the fourth Tempter, Becket comes to his final consciousness. Having heard his own words addressed to the women of Canterbury repeated back to him, Becket realizes that what he had been preaching and suggesting has been in fact a willing martyrdom; what he labels later as the "greatest treason".

The fourth Tempter in fact uses Becket's own terms in his plan to beguile him; As Becket says

> "Tempting with my own desires?" (*Murder*, 10).

He talks of "keys of heaven and hell" and "thread of eternal life and death". He propagandizes for the "glory after death" and "Saint and Martyrs who rule from the tomb". He encourages mammonism and love of worldly glories while he talks of glory "in presence of God". Quoting Helen Gardner writing in "The Art of T.S. Eliot", we would see that "the last temptation is so subtle and interior that no audience can judge whether it was truly overcome or not" (1986, 134). Following the theory of identification of characters, it is strongly possible that we interpret him as a part of as Becket's unconscious pride, that is why he evades introducing himself. Consequently he causes the strongest tumult in Becket's mind. The noteworthy point regarding this part is Becket's early

reply to the Tempter where he says "I have thought of these" (*Murder*, 9). Becket, like any other human being, is subject to desires of any kind. He has mental disturbances and his mind is constantly struggling with miscellaneous ideas. As a result, he cannot be accused of the crime of being a super hero or super human. He has thought of all these possibilities that have been mentioned by the Tempter. His mind is actively engaged throughout the play and he sees himself responsible for his actions. Even at certain points, he appears to be desperate and perplexed. He yields in anguish "Can I neither act nor suffer without perdition?"

Also in another part:

> "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness,
> Does not lead to damnation in pride?" (*Murder*, 10)

In these lines, we can see the image of a man who, in his distress, is struggling to find the truth; a man who is not at any rate certain of his ideas; not to the very last moment. The following lines by Chorus and Priests reveal the sense of tumult and confusion that is going on in Becket's mind. "The restless house and streets and feet", "the heavy and thick air and sky" are allegorical representations of his state of mind and his guilty conscious. It demonstrates a transitory period for Becket which is a turning point for his religious and personal development. The following lines are crucial to the play in that they capsulate the on-going process of Becket's development prior to his transformation from a man who serves his own will to a man serving will of God

> "A man may walk with a lamp at night, and yet be drowned in a ditch.
> A man may climb the stair in a day, and slip on a broken step.
> A man may sit at a meat, and feel the cold in his groin" (*Murder*, 11).

The transitory section ends with Becket's declaration that "Now my way is 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" (*Murder*, 11).

As Paul Gannon mentions in his book "T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* A Critical Commentary", "The crux of the problem for

Thomas is to determine once and for all the sincerity of his actions" (1965, 36). Here, Becket is transforming from a religious man of a set of principles and maxims in mind; determined to observe them, to a servant of God who is determined to actually enact those ideologies and become a part of them. As Grover Smith mentions

> Becket seems to realize that unless the sufferer refrains from willing to suffer and thus from soiling his hands with his own blood, he cannot be a true martyr. After nearly blundering, Becket recognizes that not only the Women but he himself must be passive. He must only consent to the divine will, so that he shall suffer and shall become for suffering in others the involuntary agent. Both action and suffering comes from God" (1961, 188).

Thus with Becket's soliloquy ends Part I and we are led to the Interlude where he is giving a sermon on Christmas Morning. Regarding the significance of the Interlude, it is fitting to agree with Wyman on this ground that both the events prior to and events after the Interlude, are in one way or another, based structurally and thematically upon that. In his sermon, Becket point to the underlying themes of the play as well as to the basic Christian ideologies. In the Interlude, Becket mentions once again that a true martyr does not desire the glory of his action; it is, as Pearce mentions "an act of atonement for the inadequacies of this world…he must not make this sacrifice out of a desire for self-glorification" (1967, 143). For Becket, it is an act of voluntary self-sacrifice which is carried out, as he mentions later, on pure consent on his side.

Singh comments on the altered character of Becket between the first and the second part as follows; "Becket's movement from Part I through the Interlude of the Christmas Sermon to Part II, shows him losing his will in the will of God" (2005, 118). Similar to Part I, Part II starts with a soliloquy of Chorus lamenting the barren and dried atmosphere of their lives. Just as in first Part, they have their fears of "the hollow note of death". But we do see a sense of development in their moral disposition. Now they talk of an everlasting peace which is realized in the presence of God. They seem to have come to a sort of understanding of this fact that "Lord renews death". They have apparently come to this notion that in order to avoid a "sour spring, a parched summer, an empty harvest" (*Murder*, 13), they have to give something instead, even if it be their

dearest and nearest. Next come the three priests with their representative emblems of three martyrs and each deliver a speech which serves as the introductory part, enriched with the allusions to Becket's upcoming death.

In this Part, we also see the appearance of the Four knights who introduce themselves best in their very first sentence which is the counterpart to all the notions that had appeared in the play up to this stage: "Servants of the King" (*Murder*, 14). They also evaluate Becket on the same false ground where they label him as "his [King's] servant, his tool, and his jack" and also ascribe all his "power and honour" to the King. In his first encounter with the Knights, Becket tries slightly to defend himself against the accusations charged on him by them. In his speech with them, Becket uses a witty and ironical language which shows his qualifications as a man of politics as well. In his words, his new personality reveals itself and we can see a man of action who is ready to take any (legal) measure needed for his ultimate purpose. But again, here, we should remember that Becket does not wish to do so, because he has dedicated himself to a higher order of what he calls "eternal burden" or "perpetual glory". Occasionally, he uses the "shepherd" symbol; something that verifies his further similarities with the Christ figure. Regarding the similarities of the two, Grover Smith explains that "as martyr in Part II, Becket is a type of Christ, who has suffered temptation before entering upon the drama of action through suffering" (1961, 186).

Between Becket's first and second encounter with the knights, there is another of the Chorus' soliloquies which contains a good many of what Grover Smith calls as "zoological imageries". There is also a wide range of allusions to the natural elements which, again quoting Smith is a sort of identification of Chorus with the cycle of creation, corruption and ruin. It could be an interpretive sign of their final perfection which they demonstrate at the end of the play in their final soliloquy.

In his comforting advice to the Chorus, Becket equates "eternal burden" with "perpetual glory" and asserts that once set against a background of "figure of God's purpose", what may seem suffering to them, is but "a moment". This is an instance of the thematic dualism which Grover Smith refers to as the "dualism of eternity and time, duration and flux, spirit and flesh, action by suffering and suffering by action" (1961, 187).

Becket uses this device, once again, under a similar occasion. While arguing with the priests, he attempts to convince them and make them understand that what he is doing does not simply fit into "facts" and "results"; it is only through passage of ages that the significance and meaning of his action reveals itself:

> It is not in time that my death shall be known;
> It is out of time that my decision is taken. (*Murder*, 19)

In this part and in the lines that follow are capsulated Becket's ideology, his reasons for his decisions as we see them and his justification for his inaction. Primarily, by contrasting the two notions of "in time" and "out of time", he shows the universality of his decisions. After that, he declares his total submission to the will of God by juxtaposing the two laws of God and that of Man. Becket sees victory not in fighting with the people who are opposing to him; he rather believes that by the materialization of his ideas and by putting them into action, he has truly overcome his (and alternately God's) enemies. To him, the realization of his ideas is of primary significance. And at this stage, his only way to bring about this aim is suffering; of course suffering for an exalted reason. In these lines, Becket makes bare his ideology by maintaining that fighting has never been his purpose. While the act of fighting contains physical action as its constituting part, we would find out the reason for Becket's insistence on his inaction. Furthermore, as he proceeds to say in the next line, he rejects resistance of any kind. What he put to practice was an instance of negative resistance. According to Singh, "Becket stands on a higher ethical plane. He will not have God's law lowered to the level of man's" (2005, 113).

But it is not until his second encounter with the Knights that the climax of the play is revealed. Finally, the doors are open and the Four Knights enter the Cathedral. This section reveals a good many instances of the resemblance between Becket and figure of Christ. As Carol smith mentions the very act of sacrifice (here enacted as murder) is analogous to Christ's Crucifixion. The two figures are similar in their acceptance of martyrdom as a voluntary act in order to bring about the redemption of mankind. Subsequently, as he is being slain, we hear his final words in which he, once again, maintains his ultimate reason: "that of the church".

After the murder, the four knights each directly address the audience in a modern language different from that of their original role in the play. The

most noteworthy part appears in the speeches of the Fourth Knight who accuses Becket of the crime of egotism. What he talks of as "egotism" or "[his] determination upon a death by martyrdom" is exactly the same mistake that Becket himself was about to make. The word "determined" here points to a pre-planned act. In other words, it is that "willing martyrdom" which Becket avoided and lost his life in order to escape it.

The possible reason for Eliot's inclusion of the Four Knights' direct addresses to the audience can be the deliberate juxtaposition of the two different set of ideologies. It is possible that Eliot intended subtly to draw the attention of the audience to the deeper layer of Becket's decisions by contrasting it to the motives of the four representative Knights who share the common errors of the 'common man"(as the Chorus calls themselves) in labeling Becket's deed as "a suicide of unsound mind".

Following the four Knights' addresses, there come the speeches of the three Priests whom Grover Smith has compared respectively to Knights, Women and Becket himself:

> Second Priest seems close in spirit to the Knights, just as the First Priest resembles the Women and the third Becket himself. The Second Priest typifies the potential moral strength of the Knight's immoral practicality. He is not bad; he is only unsaintly… Although the Third Priest grasps the final meaning, he, in turn, does so as a spectator rather than as a participant like the Women. (1961, 195)

In the final scene of the play, both the Priests and the Women demonstrate a sign of moral improvement in their speeches. They finally come to an understanding of Becket's martyrdom. There is no more traces of the Priest's objection or of Chorus's lamentation; instead, it has been replaced by praising and acceptance. Thus, Becket, through his inaction and negative resistance succeed in proving the validity and reliability of his beliefs and ideology to others as well as to himself.

As it was observed in the discussion, Christian notions of humility and meekness are thoroughly connected with the theme of the play. Becket withdraws from his will and consequently from taking any action, only to make a higher order of motives come true. He is in fact above the glories, rewards and motives of this kind. He definitely is a man of action, but the

point is that he views action in a larger scope; he sees it in a background of non-material motives and divine Will. As Grover Smith points out, in an ideology like that of Becket, "only God's will can be the criterion of right and wrong action and suffering…those who consent with the Will of God are as God" (1961, 189). Having such manner of religious ideology in mind, we would have a clearer image of what it meant for a man like Becket to withdraw from acting and move toward inaction and suffering. It would be helpful here to quote few sentences of Joseph Chiari on the nature and necessity of his action, written in his book "T. S. Eliot Poet and Dramatist":

> The action of the play is neither carried out by the main character nor does it grow linearly in time; it is a cumulative form of action, or-should one rather say- a progressive dawning of light or illumination which reinforces upon Becket the significance and necessity of his death… .(1972, 122).

Most importantly, we should not forget that this is not an utterly passive choice resulting from his impotencies. The fact is that, a deep mental process of action is going on in the mind of the protagonist. The evidences can be found among the lines of Chorus, pleas of Priests and suggestions of Tempters. All these three factors are, in fact, a constituting part of Becket's mental interactions. If Eliot conceived his character as a super man or super hero who is independent of the external elements and who is indifferent to outer context of the society, he need not incorporate any of the elements as he did and we would not have the play as it is today. Thus, it is almost out of question that each character has his/her own particular role in the process of creation of the dramatic action as well as dramatic outcome of the play. According to Singh "the Tempters are nothing but the external concretion of the inward state of mind" (2005, 115). As for the Chorus, Chiari mentions that "The Chorus mirrors the hesitation of Becket's mind" (1972, 121). That Becket withdraws from physical action and suffers instead, is the final consequence of a series of decisions and observations which, songs of Chorus, advices of the Priests, suggestions of the Tempter and even the threats of Knights are all parts of.

Thus, we can see that Becket's refusal to act is not synonymous with the patterns of inaction as suggested by some critics; it is rather a deep pondering on one of the most serious ideological and ethical issues. As

Grover Smith puts it "Becket recognizes that…he must be passive. He must only consent to the divine will…Both action and suffering come from God.." (1961, 188). In such a case we should consider Becket's deeds in a larger context of ideology that form the background to the protagonist; both in its historical and dramatic terms.

To return to Aristotle again, it would be of great help to consider his views on the significance of choice. As Tilak puts it in his book

> Before making their respective 'choices', they [characters] will deliberate. And their deliberation may be expressed in their speeches…Such speeches are a form of action; they reveal the inward movement toward the choice which the character ultimately makes. The movement or action is there, only it is internal and will ultimately be externalized. Such internal movements can be action in the dramatic sense…(1992, 69).

Similarly, Singh, too, believes that "the play at once becomes a tragedy of inward conflicts and inward actions" (2005, 115). This could, indeed, be all we need to apply to "*Murder in the Cathedral*" and Becket as its protagonist in order to have a full understanding *and* appreciation of the play. What ultimately happens to him is a product of internal conflicts with his death being only an external manifestation of that.

Going back again to Tilak, we could borrow this helpful note from his book in which he asserts this fact that by and large modern dramatists aim at probing the more hidden recesses of human being in the sense that their plays enjoys less physical than mental engagements. This could be fully applied to a play as "Murder in the Cathedral" and more fully to an author like Eliot known for his subtle and witty language.

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