

Martyrdom as a Motif in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Abdul Rahman Al- Sharqawi 's *Al- Hussein as a Martyr*

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Martyrdom is a great, sacred *motif* which has frequently captured the hearts and minds of many important writers. This *motif* has inspired them to produce, through their mortal pens, some immortal works that tackle the immortality of certain great figures who have given their lives for the sake of humanity. Thus, the idea of martyrdom and the image of the martyr are both examined by some literary works as a religious concept. But many writers have tried to adopt an effective way of describing martyrdom through using their literary talent and imagination.

Since martyrdom is a unique experience, gained by extraordinary people, so approaching it successfully needs the writers to combine two important aspects: religion and literature. James Reeves affirms this idea when he says that religion and literature are two attempts to understand martyrdom both rationally and emotionally.¹

Among those writers who have made a combination between the religious aspect of martyrdom and their literary craft is the famous poet, critic, and dramatist T. S. Eliot (1888-1965). This influential figure in the modern movement of both poetry and drama has tackled the martyrdom of St. Thomas a' Becket (1118-1170) in his memorable poetic drama *Murder in the Cathedral* which was published in 1935. Although Eliot's play is one of the important plays of the twentieth century that depicts Becket's rebellion against Henry II and his final martyrdom, many dramatists have preceded Eliot and dealt with this same *motif* such as George Darley and Tennyson.²

The Arabs, on the other hand, have greatly been influenced by the concept martyrdom because it has first been presented as a term in the Holy Quran that relates it to the doctrine of Jihad.³

One of the richest fields of Arabic literature is that which reflects the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammed(PH).⁴ In fact, poetry constitutes the major form in it from the first century of Hijra until today. But in the twentieth century, another form has started to emerge about Al-Hussein's martyrdom that is drama.

The Egyptian poet, novelist, critic, and dramatist Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi, (1920-1987) is one of the pioneers who has dramatized Al-Hussein's martyrdom. The key event in Al-Sharqawi's *Al-Hussein as a Martyr* published in 1969 is the rebellion of Al-Hussein against the Umayyad dynasty at the end of 670 A.D. and his subsequent martyrdom in the battle of Al-Taf in Kербala.

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This paper aims at discussing Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Al-Sharqawi's *Al-Hussein as a Martyr* to show how each writer portrays martyrdom and then reflects his dramatic intentions.

St. Thomas a' Becket's martyrdom is one of the important *motifs* that English literature has frequently tackled. But C.D Verma considers Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* one of the greatest works because of its poetic language and masterful treatment of this important event in English history.⁵ Reflecting upon the religious poetic drama, Eliot comments that such drama attracts people because they unconsciously seek religion. Eliot believes that poetic drama is more profound in echoing ideas with which prose drama cannot compete.⁶

The church is made the setting of the play because it is the natural institution of worshipping God. In fact, the church recurs in Eliot's plays for he tries to focus on its value especially in the thirtieth of the twentieth century because of the withdrawal of the people from believing in its utility. Eliot tries to highlight the spiritual role of the church being the chaste place of saints who refresh and quench the parched souls of the people living in the waste land.⁷ Initially written for the Canterbury festival, *Murder in the Cathedral* celebrates the martyrdom of one of the most influential figures of the church.

The action takes place during the few days leading to the martyrdom of Becket whose internal struggle is the main thrust of the play. The beauty of the play heavily lies in the fact that the "historical detail is severely subordinated to the pattern or design of martyrdom which gives the play its shape as well as its meaning".⁸

To depict the suitable atmosphere of the murder, Eliot creates four groups of characters: the Chorus, the Priests, the Tempters, and the Knights in addition to Becket, the victim and the martyr.

The Chorus is a group of the Canterbury women observing and commenting on the events of the play. The Chorus initiates, analyzes, stimulates emotions, concludes, and knits various actions into one composite fiber. From the very beginning, the Chorus creates an element of suspense when it foretells the coming danger:

What danger can be

For us, the poor, the poor women of Canterbury? What tribulation

With which we are not already familiar? There is no danger

For us, and there is no safety in the cathedral. Some presage of an act

Which our eyes are compelled to witness . . .⁹

After awhile, the Chorus plays the role of a chronicler stating that the archbishop has lived seven years abroad "But it would not be well if he should return"(12). The word "martyr" is early mentioned by the Chorus as it states

that some malady is coming upon them so they should wait "for those who shall be martyrs and saints / Destiny waits in the hand of God . . ." (13)

After the messenger has announced the coming of the archbishop, the Chorus again anticipates the tribulation which is to happen mentioning that they have been living quietly but meekly:

O Thomas, return, Archbishop; return, return to France
Return. Quickly. Quietly. Leave us to perish in quiet.

.....

Seven years we have lived quietly,
Succeeded in avoiding notice
Living and partly living. (18-19)

After the confrontation between the Tempters and Becket, the Chorus again portrays to the audience a gloomy atmosphere preceding Becket's martyrdom; "the air is heavy and thick / Thick and heavy the sky . . ." (43).

Then, the Chorus starts the second part of the play with the same apprehensive feelings, " The starved crow sits in the field, attentive; and in the wood / The owl rehearses the hollow note of death" (57). After the first hostile meeting between the Knights and Becket, the Chorus stimulates the audience's emotions and prepares them for the martyrdom because it describes the Knights as "death-bringers" (72).

But interestingly, there is a sort of development in the Chorus' attitude towards Becket's martyrdom because in Part One, the Chorus rather opposes even the coming of the archbishop but in Part Two, the Chorus feels quite contrite to "Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God" (94). At the end, as Raghukul Tilak comments, the Chorus' reaction lives up to the level of Becket's martyrdom for the Chorus thanks God for creating such martyrs who sanctify their life¹⁰:

We thank Thee for Thy mercies of blood, for Thy redemption
by blood. For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints
Shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places. (93)

For the first time, the Chorus becomes resonantly affirmative sounding their praises to God so they are now singing triumphantly of what they have so dreaded before.

As for the Priests, they play almost the same role of the Chorus in Part One. They suspect that no peace can subsist between Becket and the king so they fear for Becket and the church, "What peace can be found / To grow between the hammer and the anvil". (15) But they wait to have their orders from their archbishop " The archbishop shall be at our head, dispelling dismay and doubt / He will tell us what we are to do, he will give us our orders, instruct us". (17)

But in Part Two, the Priests play an active role in preventing Becket's murder by the Knights. They try to bar the door and to hold Becket back into the altar to be safe because the Knights "dare not break in / They cannot break in. They

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have not the force".(78)The argument continues between the Priests and Becket who orders them to unbar the door because the church should be open even for the enemies. But the Priests address Becket that these Knights "come not like men, who / Respect the sanctuary, who kneel to the Body of Christ".(79)

Ultimately and upon the insistence of Becket to unbar the door, the Priests submit to their archbishop. In fact, the Priests' satisfied attitude of Becket's martyrdom develops like the Chorus from bemoaning, suspicion to thoroughly perfect belief that Becket slumbers peacefully in heaven; the first Priest mentions such an idea: " Do you look down on us? You now in Heaven, / Who shall now guide us, protect us, direct us?".(90)The second priest stresses the same point when saying that Becket is now in the sight of God and he conjoins with all the saints and martyrs who have gone before so this priest asks him to remember them.

As far as the Tempters are concerned , Eliot is clearly influenced by the medieval morality plays. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the four Tempters are the personifications of the inner self of Thomas Becket. The first and second Tempters are voices from the past while the third and fourth speak of what may happen in the future. It is noteworthy that the dialogue of Becket with the four Tempters is a keen device used by the playwright to dramatize the inner conflicts, doubts, and emotions of the archbishop before he can be a martyr in the true sense of the word. In this way, the grandeur and the nobility of the archbishop are vividly brought out to the audience. Moreover, from the words of the Tempters, the audience also knows all that is necessary about Becket's early life and his former conflict with the evils outside and inside him.¹¹

In fact, immediately before the appearance of the Tempters, Becket's words prepare the audience for his strife with them, " Meanwhile the substance of our first act / Will be shadows, and the strife with shadows".(23)It is clear that the Tempters are not real creatures of flesh and blood but are just objectifications of different temptations which beset Becket.

The first Tempter represents the sensuous joys of Becket's early days. He reminds the archbishop of the old carnal pleasures he has once enjoyed, "Your Lordship won't forget that evening on the river / When the King and you and I were all friends together".(24)Since the king and Becket have reconciled their differences, the latter is allowed to relax both clergy and laity in "mirth and sportfulness".(24) Becket replies that he will not put back the clock. When the Tempter implicitly threatens Becket to "Leave well alone, / Or your goose may be cooked and eaten to the bone"(26)Becket reflects that "Leave well alone" is a delusion which is meant to divert his mind's attention from the problems of the present.

The second Tempter represents the lure of the secular power so he reminds Becket of the time when he has been the archbishop and the chancellor. Becket firmly replies that he has the country's supreme spiritual power so he should not stoop to pettier considerations which are no more than "Temporal powers".(31)

With the elapse of time, the audience is gradually shown the spiritual suffering and anguish which Becket has to undergo just before his martyrdom. Now, the third Tempter suggests treachery since no genuine reconciliation can be made between Becket and King Henry. Thus, if the king is deposed, the church's power would strengthen, the Pope's influence would extend, and Henry's tyranny would end. To this suggestion, Becket retorts that he should not be a traitor, "Pursue your treacheries as you have done before / No one shall say that I betrayed a king".(36)

The fourth Tempter is the most subtle of all because he cannily tempts Becket with his own dream – the desire for martyrdom:

What earthly glory, of king or emperor,
 What earthly pride, that is not poverty
 Compared with richness of heavenly grandeur?
 Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
 On earth, to be high in heave. (41-42)

Becket is aware that seeking martyrdom only for gaining immortality and fame is a great sin. Thus, he declares that he does not want to do the right deed for a wrong reason.¹² Becket is now fully conscious that martyrdom is a bliss that God alone can endow to His faithful people to be near Him. It cannot be obtained by man's longing alone, but through God's grace. Thus, the true martyr is the one who seeks martyrdom to please God and not to gain glory.

After the Tempters have been defeated by Becket, the four Knights arrive at the Cathedral to be the means by which Becket is to be murdered. Thus, they are the agents of the king but at the same time they are , though unawarely, the agents of God's will. Their role in the play can be conceived on two different levels. First, they are evil agents coming to get rid of the archbishop who has been "Denying the legality of [the king's] coronation".(68)Second, in their address to the audience after Becket's murder, they represent a "technique" employed by Eliot to emphasize the contemporary significance of Becket's martyrdom and to liberate the play from the historical events.¹³

On the first level, the Knights' evil is symbolically shown by the immediate withdrawal of the Priests' banner as soon as the Knights arrive. This is because the saints' emblem and evil cannot co-exist in the same place. Then, the tense situation is intensified when the Knights rudely refuse the Priests' hospitality and ask to see the archbishop , at once and alone. Their argument with Becket is harsh accusing him of being a rebel "to the king and the law of the land".(63)The meeting ends with a line of biting irony, "We come for the king's justice, we come with swords".(72)

After the Chorus' lamentation and the Priests' failure to persuade Becket to seek safety by turning the sanctuary into a fortress, the Knights make a second appearance ordering Becket to submit to the king's will. Upon his refusal, they kill him with the name of God on his lips.

The second level is conceived after the murder when the Knights advance to the front of the stage and address the audience.¹⁴ The first Knight is the chairman so he presents the other Knights. Thus, the third Knight stresses that they "have been perfectly disinterested".(85)It is their duty to put the archbishop out of the way although they have great admiration to him.

The second Knight asks the audience to view the whole business soberly, not emotionally. He affirms that the king has made Becket the chancellor and the archbishop but Becket rejects and becomes "more priestly than the priests".(87)Therefore, in murdering him, they have served the interests of all citizens including the audience. Ultimately, the second Knight declares that if there is any guilt, the audience must share it with them.

The fourth Knight claims that Becket is determined to seek martyrdom by deliberately kindling their righteous anger. He adds that Becket even refuses to seek safety by going to the altar or barring the gate of the cathedral. Thereupon, Becket has committed "suicide while of unsound mind".(90)

Commenting on this apologia of the Knights, Eliot points out that their speeches create a condition of contemporariness to Becket's martyrdom i.e. the Knights' modern political mode of speaking and their sudden use of prose quickly capture attention and bridge the gap between the spiritual level of the play and the material, physical level of the audience. Consequently, the audience would seriously think of the brutality of the murder and the grandeur of the martyrdom because they are part of the experience.¹⁵

Throughout the play, it is noticeable that Eliot has not treated Becket's murder as a historical event but has tried to examine the spiritual level of Becket's martyrdom set against the background of both the 12th and 20th centuries. Thus, the dramatist has cut out the historical and political material to the minimum and confined the actions to the last days of Becket's life. He shows the importance of Becket's martyrdom to the ordinary people represented by the Canterbury women. This is why the audience is frequently warned that they are watching a sequence of events based not on human act and its result but on God's will and its significance.

The suffering of a martyr is epitomized in the agony and self-conflict of Becket from his first appearance up to the moment of his martyrdom. The climax of this conflict lies in the fourth Tempter's lure to Becket to seek martyrdom.¹⁶ But with the solid ground on which Becket's feet stand, he declares in the sermon of the Interlude that "the true martyr is he who has

become the instrument of God . . . and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr".(53)

Through martyrdom, Becket discovers the reality of the Divine Love and the ultimate force of the spirit. Becket becomes a witness, as the word "martyr" originally signifies, to the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice which is an "oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world".(51)

It is clear that martyrdom is the core of any group of characters in the play; it is the ultimate target of Thomas a' Becket, the major subject-matter of the Chorus and the Priests, the last point of the Tempters, and ultimately the consequence of what the Knights have done.

Al-Hussein's martyrdom towers over almost all the religious themes in Arabic poetry for it has affected most of the writers. But drama has also taken its part to rival with poetry in describing Al-Hussein's tragedy. During the sixties of the twentieth century, the traditional form of Arabic drama began to take a modern form. "This was due to the increase of cultural changes which resulted in the appearance of Arabic free verse".¹⁷This free verse is employed in drama for its effectiveness to transform various ideas into stage and its special qualities which traditional poetry cannot compete with.

Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi's plays represent a pioneer change in Arabic drama for they are written in free verse. Moreover, their themes cause great controversy for they are revolutionary portraying how even the ordinary man may have energies enabling him to stand against tyrants and tolerate all kinds of agonies.¹⁸

When published, Al-Sharqawi's *Al- Hussein as a Martyr* raised so much dispute from Al-Azhar scholars to the extent that they made a verdict against staging it. The verdict was justified on the ground that the prophet Mohammed's grandson and his relatives are not to be characterized on the stage.¹⁹Thus, the play in theme and style represents a revolution in theater. It dramatizes the tragic story of Imam Al-Hussein and his followers who suffer a great deal from thirst and siege by a big army, yet their faith in their just cause lets them tolerate all the hardships and are all ultimately martyred.

This verse play consists of six scenes. Its main plot which is about Al-Hussein's internal and external struggle is enriched with some sub-plots about other characters like Zainab and Al-Hur. These subplots are integrated within the main plot to serve and convey the whole message of the play.

In its first five scenes, the play describes the battle of Al-Taf and specifically Al-Hussein's martyrdom. It is a deep exploration of how and why Al-Hussein has been killed. It is noteworthy that Al-Sharqawi gives

a psychological dimension to Al-Hussein as a martyr and even to those who have participated in killing him. The sixth scene of the play is a shift in time and place. It describes how God has quickly revenged for Al-Hussein from those assassins like Yazid, the Umayyad caliph, and others.

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The play begins with the scene in the south of Iraq near Kerbala. Al-Hussein stands with his followers contemplating upon the horizon and noticing a group of soldiers approaching. The scene describes the historical conversation between Al-Hussein and Yazid's army's delegation represented by Al-Hur and Shamr. Al-Hur asks Al-Hussein's men for some water but Bishr, one of Al-Hussein's companions, grimly tells Al-Hur that they will not have a drop until they declare their support for Al-Hussein. Here, from the very beginning, Al-Hussein's grandeur and moralities are revealed when he orders his men to give Al-Hur's soldiers what they have from water; he says, "We don't get God's water prevented from any one seeking it".²⁰

Then, Al-Hussein reminds Al-Hur and his men of their letters which have carried vows to support him in confronting Yazid's unjust regime. But Al-Hussein's blame goes in vain because most of them deny those vows and others like Al-Hur do not know anything about them:

Al-Hussein: Hur, ask your men, speak out
Why are you silent? You know
It was your letters that made me come here
I was blamed for being silent on the tyranny you face
Haven't you sent your pleas from the unjust
to be freed? (15)

Al-Hur tries to convince Al-Hussein to seek safety and pay homage to Yazid but Al-Hussein firmly refuses. This is the first step of the rising actions of the play because Al-Hussein, as a character, reaches a cross-road which is either to submit to Yazid or to seek martyrdom.

Then Zainab, Al-Hussein's sister, appears and curses those who terrify the prophet's family. Realizing the critical situation of her brother, she suggests for him a way out of this miserable conflict:

Zainab: [To Al-Hussein] If men lied to you
Then no reproach nor blame to them you must show
It is their nature, as it seems to break their vow
Their penalty in doomsday they will know
Let us away to live in a distant cave
Like the Men of the Cave and never to be a slave. (17)

After apologizing to Al-Hussein and his sister, Al-Hur gives a solution and suggests that Al-Hussein must avoid fighting Yazid's army by running away to Madina in an unknown road. Here, the temptation begins because Al-Hussein reaches a critical situation in which if he remains steadfast to his duty, he will be destroyed physically and if he surrenders to evil, he will be ruined spiritually. Without hesitation, Al-Hussein decides to keep on and complete his task to defeat tyranny even if it costs his destruction; he replies "I will continue

walking in the same way of truth . . . I won't get back even if it costs my life".(18)

In fact, Al-Sharqawi has chosen this meeting between Al-Hussein and Al-Hur as a starting point for his play because it is the decision of Al-Hussein that gets him into the realm of martyrdom.

Shamr finally appears on the scene carrying a letter from Ibn Ziyad, the prince appointed by Yazid on Kufa. In it, Ibn Ziyad orders Al-Hur and Umer Ibn Sa'd, the leader of Yazid's army, to besiege Al-Hussein's camp and prevent them from taking water from Euphrates. If Al-Hussein surrenders, he and his men are to be taken prisoners. If he does not, he is to be killed.

Now the playwright keenly portrays to the audience the contrast between the moralities of the two groups fighting. Just before awhile, Al-Hussein, though in shortage of water, quenches the thirst of his own enemies whereas Yazid's soldiers now, though they are indebted to Al-Hussein for this favour, refuse to give him water.

Scene Two, the longest of all, exposes the disastrous situation of Al-Hussein and his followers. They are in a bare desert, thirsty, and surrounded by Yazid's army. Zainab gets out of the tent and reproaches Umer Ibn Sa'd for his villainy: "From now on, don't mention God's name, for you are going to stab the heart of His prophet".(34-35) As a character, Zainab sometimes plays the role of the chorus trying to make the audience visualize the brutality of the deed and its horrible effect on the whole world; now she points to the red horizon and says:

The prevailing horizon of darkness becomes red
There above, the messenger of God is looking at you
I hear the echo of his cry
Oh grandfather!! . . . I hear the pulse of his pray
O God!

I see tears falling from his pure eyes over his sacred beard.(35)

Zainab's speech makes Umer's men sympathize with her. Al-Sharqawi shows the impact of her speech on the army by an interesting conversation between a merchant and Umer:

Merchant: tell us, Ibn Sa'd . . . If we are killed in this battle,
to which religion do we belong?

Umer : [terrified] are you mad?

Merchant: answer me, Umer.

Umer: we'll become martyrs.

Merchant: Muslim martyrs?!(38-39)

Al-Hur's dilemma, which is a sub-plot, reaches the climax because he suffers from an internal conflict between staying with Yazid's army and be a murderer or joining Al-Hussein's camp and be a martyr.²¹He explicitly describes his

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suffering as "great pains but full of dignity, self-esteem, and grace".(65) At length, he decides to fight with Al-Hussein.

Throughout the scene, Al-Hussein's chivalries are highlighted by the playwright to reveal his readiness for martyrdom. One of Al-Hussein's men wants to throw Shamr, the most villainous and the one who would kill Al-Hussein, with an arrow but Al-Hussein prevents him saying, "I would not start the fight".(48) In another time, he prevents Sa'id, one of his companions, from reviling the army and says, "Keep off, keep off Sa'id. We have come to reform, not to revile".(82) His unmatched bravery and self-sacrifice are brought home when he asks his men to leave him and seek safety, "These people don't want but my head . . . and I am dead so leave me and I'll fight them alone".(99) Al-Hussein's greatness is effectively shown when he transcends his agony and even tries to reclaim those torturing him; Umer and his men. Moreover, Al-Hussein's internal conflict is intensified in this scene through the voices of women and children repeating "thirst, thirst" and the voices of Umer and Shamr, on the other hand, calling him to surrender.

With a modern touch, Al-Sharqawi ends the scene with Al-Hussein addressing all generations including the recent audience. Al-Hussein's message is that the martyr is a star guiding the believers throughout the time to the truth harbour:²²

Across the whole time I am the martyr here,
Raise the body of the martyr there,
In the middle of the wilderness,
To be a bloody symbol of dying for the sake
Of justice, truth and freedom.(104)

Scene Three describes the battle of Al-Taf by the speeches of Umer's men specially Shamr and Assad. Although Al-Hussein's a few followers gradually fall martyrs in the battle, Umer's soldiers are terrified from their prowess. Umer is puzzled how these men, who are only seventy and are exhausted by thirst and hot weather, fight with such courage and kill so many. Umer orders the army not to fight Al-Hussein's men man to man but to throw them by stones, spears and arrows. In order to busy Al-Hussein's men, Shamr orders to burn their tents.

At last, Shamr announces that they have killed all of Al-Hussein's men and the only ones alive are Al-Hussein, his sick son, and his women. Now, a group of mourning women, just like the chorus, gets into the scene reciting lamentation on the martyrs. These women repeat the prayer, "God . . . have mercy upon us" preparing the audience dramatically to the great event of the play that is Al-Hussein's martyrdom. Although Al-Hussein is alone, he is resolute declaring that his martyrdom is for God's religion, not for a worldly reason:

Al-Hussein: Be patient when facing death . . .

Here, I am going to destruction

For the sake of defending my nation

Protecting my religion.(125)

In Scene Four, Al-Sharqawi reflects the crucial level Al-Hussein reaches before his martyrdom. He is alone and darkness prevails over Kerbala's desert. There is nothing but the shining moon, and Al-Hussein wanders solely apostrophizing his ancestors and wishing a new dawn for the humanity:

And here I am alone . . .

May all this blood spilt over this darkness

So as to make for the world a new dawn . . .

Why cannot it make a dawn?!

I wish it to be a flood burning the enemies

May it make for this life peace . . . (130)

With a universal tongue, Al-Hussein advises all generations and specially those who value and mourn for martyrdom to stand against tyranny and oppression,²³ "Don't lament ...but revenge for the sake of the oppressed / and for those who among you are wronged and killed".(131)

Although Al-Hussein is alone, Umer orders the army to be divided into three divisions: the first throws him with fire, the second with arrows, and the third with spears. At last, Al-Hussein falls wounded and his voice is heard off stage saying, "Am I to be killed unjustly and my grandfather is Mohammed?!".(135)

After Al-Hussein is killed and beheaded by Shamr, the character of Zainab plays an essential role in defending Al-Hussein's just cause. Seldom is there a woman witnessing such a horrible scene and still courageously stands firm. After seeing her brother's martyrdom, she rushes among the killers reproaching them in sharp words that wound the hearts more than swords do, "O killers of the hero of truth and pioussness / Hell to you for crushing the body of the martyr".(142)

In Scene Five, there is a shift in place because the events take place in Yazid's luxurious palace in Damascus. Yazid is seen on a couch flirting with his bondwoman. Through the trivial conversation between them, the playwright shows to the audience the great difference between Yazid's lechery and Al-Hussein's piety.

Then, Yazid asks his men to bring the prisoners. When Zainab and the other women get in, she contemplates on the palace and firmly says to Yazid, "Wherever you go you'll see nothing but Al-Hussein's blood".(158) This speech will be effectively dramatized in the final scene. Trying to humiliate her, Yazid asks Zainab who is the winner; she retorts that if he goes to any mosque and hears the call to prayer, he will certainly know the victorious. She means that her grandfather, the prophet Mohammed(PH), is mentioned in every call for the prayer.

Then, Yazid's wife enters weeping and reproaching him for what he has done. She even says that she is no longer his wife for his the killer of the prophet's family. Now, Yazid denies ordering to kill Al-Hussein and claims that he has sent the army just to take his allegiance. To approve this, he does not reward Umer and Shamr.

Now, Yazid's torture begins with Zainab urging the people of Damascus to revolt against oppression and threatening Yazid, "How shall you hide from shame? No way out! / the pious blood is flooding around".(174)The scene ends with a plea by a group of women to avenge for Al-Hussein.

Scene Six with its dream-like atmosphere shows how Al-Hussein's revenge quickly happens. The events take place five years later when Yazid is lost in a blazing desert looking for a drop of water. The whole situation is symbolic for it is just a manifestation of Yazid's internal torture. In fact, the scene is an attempt by the playwright to liberate himself and the audience from the historical boundaries of the play.

Amid his thirst and loneliness, Yazid hears Zainab's voice reminding him of his crimes. Then, he begins to see Al-Hussein's apparition surrounded by light, dressed in white and with a noble venerable face. When Yazid sees Al-Hussein alive, he gets shocked because Al-Hussein is supposed to have been killed five years before. Al-Hussein replies, "O Yazid . . the one like me never dies"(181) for he is a martyr. Mansi Yusif comments on this point, "At the end of [the martyrs'] struggle, they will gain victory either by achieving what they seek or by martyrdom".²⁴

In another part of the scene, Al-Mukhtar, the avenger of Al-Hussein's murder, appears having revenge from the killers like Umer Ibn Sa'd and Shamr. Then, a group of men led by Al-Mukhtar fills the stage and Al-Hussein stands upon a height surrounded by light. Hearing these men asking for revenge, Al-Hussein declares that he wants to be remembered not by shedding blood of others but by struggle to make truth and justice prevail everywhere and anytime. Eventually, Al-Hussein addresses the audience and the humanity to remember his martyrdom because it has been done for them and it is the everlasting guide for the way of truth.

Martyrdom is a great test that is passed through successfully only by absolute faith. This faith strengthens the people and makes their feet steadfast although they undergo different sorts of suffering and agony which may be crowned by their martyrdom.

Since not everyone is capable of experiencing and comprehending martyrdom, it is the task of great writers to employ their own imagination and portray by words the sanctity of this experience.

Of all the literary works that dramatize martyrdom, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* remains the most notable. Being one of the successful religious plays, *Murder in the Cathedral* "constitutes a return to the origin of English drama, the church, as an extension of the liturgy and a means of religious instruction".²⁵ But Eliot masterfully relates the medieval atmosphere to the modern audience. This is achieved by the sudden twist in the characters' speeches. The spectator moves from one scene of high phraseology to another in which the characters use modern vocabulary. This interaction between the use of poetry and prose gives special tone and variety to the play. Throughout the play, Eliot proves that faith can only live if the faithful are ready for martyrizing for it. This may be specifically meant to the audience at the time of the play because it has been written during the rise of Fascism in Europe. Thus, it can be considered an outcry for the people to stand firm against the oppression of that system.

Al-Sharqawi's *Al-Hussein as a Martyr*, on the other hand, is not a passion play narrating the tragic story of Al-Hussein. It urges the audience to think and contemplate upon his martyrdom, its causes and aims. In this respect, it may be regarded as an intellectual play in which a historical event is produced in an artistic way that narrates, entertains, and instructs. The story is narrated in a fine verse that entertains the audience and embraces the tragedy with special flavour. At the same time, it makes the audience think of Al-Hussein's martyrdom. The play's condemnation to Yazid's followers who have killed Al-Hussein extends to even those adopting Yazid's doctrines in any time and place.

However, Eliot's influence on Al-Sharqawi is traceable in *Al-Hussein as a Martyr*. For instance, like the Canterbury women in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Al-Sharqawi makes Zainab and a group of women comment on the actions and add an emotional echo to the audience. Moreover, Al-Sharqawi uses the image of blood that paints the world after Al-Hussein's martyrdom. Like the chorus that mourns Becket's murder, "The land is foul, the water is foul, our beasts and ourselves defiled with blood"(83) Zainab reflects the same striking image, "Earth is painted with blood, the water of Euphrates becomes blood / all the sand becomes like drops of blood".(144) Just like the Apologia Scene of the Knights in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Al-Sharqawi jumps over the historical atmosphere in his symbolic Sixth Scene. Similar to Eliot, he tries modernize the ancient story by making Al-Hussein address the recent audience.

It is noteworthy that although both plays are tragic, they end optimistically kindling a beam of hope. In Eliot's play, the chorus addresses the audience thanking God "For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints / Shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places".(93) Similarly, Zainab points to Al-Hussein's head and portrays nearly that same message, " O head of martyr . . head of hero . . be

a flag to the oppressed / To save the world out of its chaos, to rise up for it's enough to endure".(173)

Eventually, in both plays, the two playwrights succeed in depicting a glory image for martyrdom which is contrastingly an occasion to mourn and to rejoice. To mourn for the sins of the vicious world in which the martyrs have to sacrifice and to rejoice for God's grace that is martyrdom which is to baptize those sins.

Notes

1. James Reeves, *The Modern Poet's World*, (London: Heinemann, 1968), xvi.
2. Dorothy Eagle, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1986), 572-73. For thorough study of Becket's motif in the nineteenth and twentieth drama, see Salih Mahdi Hameed, *The Becket Motif: A Study in Tennyson's, Eliot's, Fry's, Anouilh's, and Webb's Treatment of the Martyr as a Hero*, Diss. University of Baghdad, 2004.
3. A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam", www.al-islam.org/al-serat. Access on 1.8.2010
4. PH means Peace be upon him. This is the prayer usually recited by Muslims whenever Prophet Mohammed is mentioned.
5. C. D. Verma, *Murder in the Cathedral*, (New Delhi: Aarti Book Centre, 1975), 12.
6. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, www. Search. Nytimes.com/books/search/bin Access on 2.8.2010
7. David E. Jones, *The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, (London: Broadway House, 1960), 50.
8. *Ibid.*, 59.
9. T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 11. All the subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition and the pages will parenthetically be referred to.
10. Raghukul Tilak, *T. S. Eliot: Murder in the Cathedral*, (New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 2010), 72-73.
11. *Ibid.*, 67.

12. D. E. S. Maxwell, *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), 189.
13. Tilak, 65.
14. Fa'iq Matti, *Eliot*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1991), 202.
15. Se'an Lucy, *T. S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*, (London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd., 1967), 189.
16. Matti, 203.
17. Muhsin Utaimish, *Al-Sha'ir Al-Arabi Al-Hadeeth Mesrahyan (The Modern Arabic Poet as a Dramatist)*, (Baghdad: Ministry of Information Publications, 1977), 100.
18. Jalal Al-Ashari, "Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi as a Revolutionary and Pioneer", *The Writer*, Vol. 15, No. 167 (1975), 48.
19. Al-Ahram Weekly on line 19-25 April 2001, Issue No. 530, www.ahram.org/weekly/ Access on 5.2.2010
20. Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi, *Al-Hussein as a Martyr*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Katib Al-Arabi lil Tiba'a wel Nashr, 1969), 10. All the subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition and the pages will parenthetically be referred to. The translation of all the references is mine.
21. Abdel Wahid Louloua, *Moon Phases: Critical Essays*, (London: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 1990), 250.
22. Keen Witengham, "The Egyptian Theater", *Al_Aqlam (Pens)*, No.6 (1980), 158.
23. Utaimish, 224.
24. Mansi Yusif, "Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi", *Al-Masrah (The Theater)*, (July, 1960), 48.
25. Verma, 218.

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