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Self- sacrifice, sufferance and courage through murder in the cathedral by T.S. Eliot

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ABSTRACT

Suffering and sacrifice and courage cannot be dissociated. It is hard to live without facing difficulties that may lead to sufferance. Being responsible means self-sacrifice and determination. This has been well illustrated through Becket's life in *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot. Courage means being determined to do something without fear sometimes up to death. When you are fully convinced about your actions you just move ahead no matter what would happen. Suffering in accordance with LDCE, signifies serious physical or mental pain. This may ultimately lead to death. This research work aims at drawing the attention of young people on these two significant concepts. Besides, I would like to show the close link between self-sacrifice, courage and suffering and let readers be aware of the fact that courage and determination, no matter may be the situations we are confronted with, implies suffering and sacrifices.

Keywords: Self-sacrifice; determination; sufferance; *Murder in the Cathedral*; TS Eliot.

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1. Introduction

Murder in the Cathedral is a fictional work by the famous English writer T.S. Eliot. The drama has first been first performed in 1935. When considering the period of publication one can easily notice that it coincide with the rise of fascism and authoritarianism. This literary work belongs to the modern period which applies to British literature written since the beginning of World War I in 1914. Poets of the period include not only T.S. Eliot but also Yeats, Dylan Thomas, and Seamus Heaney. Novelists include James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf. Dramatists include Noel Coward and Samuel Beckett.

Courage and Sufferance as seen in *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot rises the issue of responsibility and its implications. In fact, what can we do in this life without a minimum of self-sacrifice and courage, hard to find. Taking about courage, Stephen King, best-selling author, who is a master when it comes to playing with fear writes: "The scariest moment is always just before you start. After that, things can only get better" that is to say that only courage and determination allow us to decide

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and quickly take action. As for suffering, I think that it is part of our daily lives. If it were no suffering, we wouldn't know the importance of enjoyment. Michel de Montaigne talking about suffering wrote "A man who fears suffering is already suffering from what he fears." Meaning that the moment one refuses to suffer our sufferance start from that day. Suffering doesn't have any meaning until you put it into the greater context of your life experience. One can decide to give in or get up in the face of suffering. Without tests of strength and resolve, we would never get the chance to grow. So you could say suffering facilitates growth, but really it's just a part of life. This analysis is also the point of Miguel de Unamuno when he declared that Suffering is the substance of life and the root of personality, for it is only suffering that makes us persons. In the same vain the Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations* wrote "Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but - I hope - into a better shape". That is to simply that sufferance teaches us more than any other things. My research finds it importance from what has been said above.

This research work aims at stressing on the correlation between Self-sacrifice, sufferance and courage in life with a focus on *Murder of the Cathedral* by Thomas Stearns Eliot. The research tries to put s stress on the importance and courage and determination life success. It shows the fruits and necessity to be courageous in life to get freedom and be useful for the community.

The work itself is composed of an abstract giving a short summary of the whole paper, the abstract is followed by the introduction, the methodology, the literature review the finding of the paper and the conclusion. The paper ends by the list of the bibliography.

2. Research methodology

This research work is basically a documentary research. I also conducted some In order to answer the above questions, I conducted a survey of about 200 citizens in Parakou. The survey was designed to check people perception of the real meaning and the importance of self-sacrifice, responsibilities and sufferance are concerned. Prior to analysis, the data were used to accurately reflect their point of view. The research work does not cover all the aspects of the selected topic. It is mainly a closer analysis of a documentary research of *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot and some citizen's perceptions of the related topic.

3. Literature review

Many writers dealt with the topic of courage and self-determination. In *Romeo and Juliette* by William Shakespeare, Juliette proved be courageous and self-determined by accepting to defend her boy-friend up to death. Actually, Romeo and Juliet have fallen in love with at a party. But they come from two conflicting families. Despite the opposition and the hatred coming from their respective families, they show have tried to love each other and have accepted to sacrifice their lives for love sake. This is and good illustration of courage and self-determination. Courage is defined as the ability to confront a challenge despite the overwhelming presence of fear or disapproval (Oxford English Dictionary online), the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty, and the moral strength to speak out against injustice when no one else will (Merriam-Webster Dictionary online). The etymology of courage is linked to *coeur*, the French word for heart. Courage is another prototypical characteristic of heroism (see Franco et al., 2011; Kinsella et al., 2015a). The essence of courage is the unyielding choice to fight and resist, but not necessarily in a physical sense, and to be proactive regardless of the possible consequences. Courage refers to one's own commitment to pro activity in relation to a cause or causes: motivation, love, devotion, compassion, or passion, regardless of the possible consequences (Ritchie, 2017) another illustration and self- sacrifice and courage can see in the famous *Titanic* by James Cameron. *Titanic* is a 1997 epic, romance movie with famous actors such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet and Billie Zane. In the movie, Jack finds Rose in the water and leads her to a wall panel. He then helps Rose onto the wall panel that can only support one person's weight. As he hangs onto the panel, he assures her that she will not die there and will instead die an old woman, warm in her bed. Jack eventually dies from hypothermia. Many other literature works are worth mentioning but I decided to mention but the above

4. Research findings

Suffering, courage and self-sacrifice are not dissociable. Any decision we want to take needs courage and each level of decision goes with its suffering. In *Sous l'Orage* (1957) by Seydou Badian for example, Kany knowing what could happen to her took courageously her decision by choosing her future husband and accepted to suffer for that. Actually in her mind getting married with the man she chooses by herself is a life choice and she decided whatever the situation she could go through to face it. In fact Kany has fallen in love with her westernized classmate, Samou. Kany's father, however, has promised her in marriage to an old and wealthy man, Famagan who already has two wives. Kany does not agree with her father and has been sent to the village of her uncle Djigui. It has been an opportunity for father Benfa to make the young girl be aware of some ancestral traditions. It has been also an occasion for Kany to plead her cause to Djigui who has finally decided to intervene in her favour. Considering the authority of his elder brother Djigui, father Benfa bow to that and the two young's men can finally get married. Kany was ready for any sacrifice to be with her boyfriend and get married with him even against the will of his parents and the principles of her customs and traditions. They finally succeeded in getting married after days and months of tribulations and internal conflicts. Thanks to multiples family conversations the issue has been happily.

A closer analysis the raised issues can also be seen in the famous play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. The Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is one of William Shakespeare's most famous works. The play follows the lives and deaths of Romeo and Juliet, two young star-crossed lovers from feuding families in Verona. Romeo and Juliet's love is one of the most beloved, and tragic, in all of classic literature. For Juliet, getting married has nothing to do with wealth. It is a matter of true love coming from heart and dealing with the sense of responsibility, no matter how its implications may be. Actually, Romeo and Juliet have fallen in love with at a party. But they come from two conflicting families. Based on the deadly opposition between the two families, the two lovers were sure they won't be allowed to get married. Nevertheless, helped by Friar Laurence, (a brother of the Franciscan order and Romeo's confessor, who advises both Romeo and Juliet. The Friar agrees to marry the couple in secret in the hope that marriage will restore peace between their families,) they have got married in secret instead. Unfortunately, before their wedding night Romeo has killed Juliet's cousin in a dual and in the morning he has been forced to leave her. If he ever returns to the city, he will be death sentenced. Juliet's parents have told her she must marry Paris. Her parents did not know she is already married. She has refused at the beginning but later agreed because she has planned to fake her death and escape to be with Romeo forever, again with the help of Friar Laurence who has designed the plan.

He has given Juliet a sleeping potion. She has appeared to be dead and has been put in a tomb. However, Romeo doesn't know about the plan. He has visited her grave, thought she is dead and has killed himself. When Juliet finally woke up, she had discovered that Romeo is dead and then has killed herself.

Juliet through her behaviour has shown the strength of true love. She has come up with reason after reason that drinking the sleeping potion might harm her, physical and psychological but has chosen to drink it anyway. In this action she has not only attempt to circumvent the forces that have obstructed her relationship with Romeo, but has taken full responsibility for herself. She's recognized that drinking the potion might lead her to madness or to death. Drinking the potion therefore has constituted an action in which she has taken her life into her own hands and has determined its worth to her. Romeo and Juliet once in contact seems to have decided to live for love or for death in total responsibility and mutual sacrifices. In death, Romeo and Juliet have created the world that will have allowed their love to live. In fact Romeo and Juliet deaths are tragic, but this tragedy is fated: by the stars, by the violent world in which they live, by the play and by their natures. Romeo and Juliet have been immortalized as the archetypes of true love not only because their tragic deaths bury their parents 'strife, but also because they are willing to sacrifice everything including themselves for their love. Sacrifice might end suffering but, causes more pain to the others who cared and loved you. Once a child dies he/she might forget they existed in this world but, the parents of the children will be devastated by the pain that caused them for the rest of their lives and will remember them forever If

the death of the two young men has been a great lost for their family, it has the merit of reconciling the two families.

Courage, self-sacrifice and sufferance through Murder in the Cathedral. Thomas Becket was a close personal friend and chancellor of Henry II, though he had decided to devote his life to the (Catholic) Church from a relatively young age. During this time Becket enjoyed the earthly pleasure of wealth and influence in the state and even led contingents of knights to fight alongside the king. It was ultimately Henri who suggested that the vacant Archbishopric of Canterbury Cathedral (the highest Church office in England) go to Becket, even though he initially refused. Becket was conscious that were he to become Archbishop the two would likely no-longer be friends, and Henry may even come to hate Becket because the king had been infringing on the rights of the Church, which Becket would not allow. Eventually, despite his protestations Becket was elected to the seat, and as predicted his relationship with the king became strained. After his appointment Becket lived piously, his influence and friends at court ceased to be of importance to him, and he and the king often clashed over the relative powers of the Church and the State. After several other conflicts between the two, the final straw occurred in 1170 wherein Becket excommunicated the Archbishop of York and two other bishops for presiding over the coronation of Henry II's son, which was the traditional right of Canterbury. Angered by this latest assertion of power Henry condemned Becket. Regardless of the king's intent, it appeared to those in attendance to be an order for Becket' death. Becket had been seeking refuge in France and the counsel of the Pope, but decided to return to England even though it appears from historical accounts that he was both aware of the danger and had predicted his own imminent death.

After his return to England, four tempters arrive, each offering Becket a way to save his own life, or glorify his memory at the expense of his true beliefs. The first tempter reminds Becket of the friends that he once had at court, and suggests that if Becket were to be less severe and relax his principles, he might escape his fate; Becket refuses. The second tempter reminds Becket of the power he wielded as chancellor to the king, and that he could wield such power again and no one would oppose him. He says that holiness is only useful for the dead and power is necessary for the living; Becket refuses him as well. The third tempter recommends Becket overthrow the crown, given the church supremacy over England, and again Becket refuses. The fourth tempter is the most difficult for Becket to resist, because he suggests that Becket continue on his path, and seek the reverence and glory of martyrdom. Becket realizes that allowing himself to be killed for personal glory would be a sin against his faith, and sends the man away. Unfortunately, four knights rode to Canterbury Cathedral, hid their weapons outside and demanded that Becket leave with them by order of the king. When he refused, the knights gathered there weapons and returned to the cathedral. They killed Thomas Becket and cut off his head on December 29, 1170. A monk, Edward Grim was in attendance and sustained an injury to his arm attempting to defend Becket. His account of the murder heavily informs Eliot's version. Becket canonized just three years after his death and is revered as saint in both the Catholic and Anglican faiths.

5. Discussion

To be closed to the reality I carried out this part of the work taking into account people perception of suffering and responsibility. For this purpose I have prepared and distributed a questionnaire to two hundred people randomly in many neighborhoods of Parakou. The table below shows the details of the collected data.

Table 1

| N° | Questions | Answers | Number of people | Percent age |
|----|--|---------|------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Do you think being courageous implies some sacrifices? | Yes | 200 | 100% |
| | | No | 00 | 00% |

| | | | | |
|---|--|------------|-----|------|
| 2 | Are sacrifices suffering and courage dissociable? | Yes | 00 | 00% |
| | | No | 200 | 100% |
| 3 | Which form determination implies suffering and self-sacrifice? | Any level | 100 | 50% |
| | | High level | 60 | 30% |
| | | Low level | 40 | 20% |
| 4 | Does courage always include suffering and sacrifices? | Yes | 200 | 100% |
| | | No | 00 | 00% |
| 5 | Can suffering due to responsibility lead to death? | Yes | 180 | 90% |
| | | No | 20 | 10% |

5.1 Analysis of collecting information's

Answering to the question “Do you think being courageous implies some sacrifices?” 100% answered of the interviewees confirmed by stating that is unescapable. In their majority, people believe that being responsible also means sacrifices and I would even say that it also means giving part of his humanity “Are sacrifices suffering and courage dissociable?” the interviewees (100%) believe that it not possible. it appear that nothing is easy in life. Our success depend on how much we accept to take actions and suffer for better. When I ask them to know “Which form of determination implies suffering and self-sacrifice?” I got a 50% who said that this can be seen at any level”, 20% minimized it while the other 30% responded that this is possible at the superior level. I think that whatever the level, assuming a responsibilities always implies sacrifice. The next question “Does courage always include suffering and sacrifices?” all of the interviewees confirmed the statement. Finally, when I put the question “Can suffering due to responsibility lead to death?” 90% of my interviewees without doubt while the remaining 10% answered to my question with a “No”. Even if it is not a physical death, having and taking action consume and can lead slowly to death.

5.2 Interpretation of the above results

From the above collected data, it appears that all the interviewees think being courageous implies some sacrifices. For that reason, suffering and being courageous are not dissociable. Actually, no matter whatever the level of our determination to do something may be, it implies suffering anyhow. In a word, it is not possible to talk about courage without dealing with suffering. It is clear that almost all the time, the degree of suffering depends on the level of responsibility. The more the

responsibility is higher, the more the level of suffering increases. In some cases, it may lead to death. The visible face of courage is for sure honor. But also has it a hidden face, suffering which is most of the time barely visible by people. Accepting responsibility is being ready to make do with suffering.

6. Conclusion

Sufferance, self-sacrifice and deter through Murder in the Cathedral is a good illustration action taking and its implications. As a matter of fact, the three concepts are dissociable. The character of Thomas Becket has been a good illustration for me. He has shown example of good leadership by assuming it up to the hour of reckoning. He could have saved his own life by making do with the tempers' proposals. Nevertheless he decided to prove that suffering and responsibility stay together. They are like the day and the night. Actually Becket was aware of the fact that were he to become Archbishop of Canterbury Cathedral would ultimately lead to misfortune. It was a great honor for him of course but at the same time a responsibility to assume with its implications up to death.

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