

The Meaning of Conscience IN ROBERT BOLT'S A Man For All Seasons

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ملخص

يمكن لمسرحية روبرت بولت *رجل لكل المواسم* ان تقرا او تمثل على انها قصة قتال بين الخير و الشر توماس مور الذي هو بطل القصة هو رجل ضمير و مبادئ يسعى لان يوفق بين طاعة الله تعالى وواجبه و حبه تجاه عائلته و بين ولاءه و طاعته لملكه الملك هنري الثامن والذي بدوره يأخذ جانب الشر هو و رجاله. حيث ان سلوك الملك الشهواني الذي لا يشبع و رغبة و تصميم رجاله على أذى و تشويه سمعة توماس مور تسبب بالقضاء عليه و تدميره.

وبالتالي ان الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة معنى ان يمتلك الشخص ضمير بالنسبة الى توماس مور ومعنى ان يتقبل اشخاص ابطال كتوماس مور الشهاده ليس بدافع يأس من الحياة بل من اجل فكرة يؤمنون بها و هذه الفكرة تنال اخيرا قبول واسع و شرعيه من الناس. الدراسة تنتهي بخاتمه تلخص نتائج البحث.

ABSTRACT

Robert Bolt's famous play *A Man for All Seasons* can easily be read(or seen) as a story of the struggle between Good and Evil. The man of conscience Sir Thomas More, represents the good side, valiantly seeks to reconcile obedience of God, his love for his family, his profession, and his loyalty to king Henry VIII, but is brought low by the king's insatiable lust and his followers', the evil side, determination to destroy him if cannot corrupt him.

Hence, the study attempts to figure out the meaning of conscience according to Thomas More and other characters. However, the heroic figures,such as Sir Thomas More, who embrace martyrdom, not out of despair with life, but as a way of affirming their allegiance to an idea that eventually acquires widespread acceptance and legitimacy.

The study ends with the conclusion that aims at summing up the study findings.

INTRODUCTION

The Theatrical Context

In the 1950s the Berliner Ensemble theatre company led by the German Bertolt Brecht had visited London with several productions. Their style of presentation, which became known as "Brechtian", was strongly influential in the English theatre of late 1950s and early 1960s. Its impact was immediate and stunning.¹

Generally, English theatre at this time was naturalistic; the action of the plays and the setting were made as realistic and naturalistic as possible. In short, the aim of theatrical productions was to create and present as accurate an illusion of reality as possible to the audience. The Brechtian approach to theatre was the reverse of this: through the use of various "alienation approaches", the audience were reminded throughout that they were sitting in a theatre, watching an artificial creation. This, in return, was intended to encourage them to judge the actions of the characters and the contents of the play. The audience was not merely being entertained: it was taking part in the theatrical event and was encouraged to create dramatic meaning for itself.²

Bolt borrows various Brechtian alienation in the play: direct address to the audience, to set the scene and introduce characters, is given to the Common Man, who also assumes a variety of roles throughout the play.³ At one point, the Common Man reads from a history book, telling the audience of the fates of the characters in the play whom they are at that moment watching. The setting is intended to remain the same throughout, with various screens and flats flown on and off the stage merely to suggest new settings as appropriate, all executed in full view of the audience. These and other lesser effects all reinforce to the audience that they are watching a theatrical version of events that took place over a number of years. They also allow the story to be told flexibly and economically, enabling the audience to remain engaged in the events of the play as they develop and as More's dilemma resolves itself. Finally, they allow the Common Man to deliver what appears to be the "moral" of the play.⁴

The historical context

: wrote Robert Whittinton in 1520 "More" is a man of angel's wit and singular learning. I know not his fellow. For where is the man of this gentleness, lowliness and affability? And, as time requireth, a man of marvelous mirth and pastime, and sometimes of as sad gravity. A man

for all

season .

Mr. Robert Bolt found in these lines a title for his remarkable play, for the title of the play presents Sir Thomas More as the ultimate man of conscience. He is never ready to compromise with his principals and beliefs.⁵

Bolt begins his preface to **A Man for All Seasons** by announcing that the story on which he bases his play is well known. Henry VIII, succeeded to the throne of England in 1509, had originally needed a papal dispensation to marry Catherine, because she had previously been married to Henry's brother. At the request of Christian Spain and Christian England, the Pope dispensed with the Christian law forbidding a man to marry his brother's sister, and Catherine became his queen. Unfortunately for Henry and everyone involved, the couple had no success producing a male offspring, and in any case, the king had become enamored of Ann Boleyn. Henry therefore sought to overturn the Pope's previous dispensation in order to annul his marriage to Catherine and enable him to marry Ann. When the Pope refused to dispense with his previous dispensation and allow the divorce. Henry dismissed his adviser, cardinal Wolsey, who then died of heart complications. Henry then appointed Thomas More as lord Chancellor of England in 1529. Meanwhile, Henry and his associate Thomas Cromwell enacted legislation to undermine the authority of the Catholic Church in England. Consequently, the king appointed Thomas Crammer as Archbishop of Canterbury, Crammer quickly authorized Henry's divorce and remarriage. As a result, Henry was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. In 1543, Parliament enacted the Act of Supremacy, which established Henry as the head of the Church in England and eliminated the authority of the Pope.⁶

Sir Thomas More who born in London on February 7,1477, was beheaded on July 6,1535, for failing to swear to Henry's oath of supremacy. For his courage and commitment, More was sainted on May 19, 1935. A humanist and the author of Utopia(1516), a novel that pictured an ideal society founded solely on reason, he was a true
. ⁷ "a man for all seasons" Renaissance man,

A Man for All Seasons was written in the context of the late 1950s, during the Cold War, when the influence of the Church was steadily declining but international tensions were high and there were many instances of a person's individual conscience or selfhood coming into conflict with the wishes of the State. Bolt himself was prominent in the

movement for nuclear disarmament in the early 1960s and was arrested and imprisoned following a protest when he refused to sign a declaration that he would not engage in similar activities in the future.⁸ In this sense, Bolt writes in his preface:

It may be that a clear sense of the self can only crystallise round something transcendental in which case, our prospects look poor, for we are rightly committed to the rational, I think the paramount gift our thinkers, artists, and for all I know, our men of science, should labour to get for us is a sense of selfhood without resort to magic. Albert Camus is a writer I admire in this connection. (M.S.P.xiv)

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in his preface to the play, Bolt states that he is largely motivated by opposition to what he sees as "vaunted absence" of individuality in modern society.⁹ He believes that we define ourselves in terms of social socially, we fly from the idea of an individual to the professional "class, describers, to the classifiers, the men with categories and a quick ear for the latest sub-division...".(M.S.P.XI)

He adds that;
we no longer have, as past societies, have had, any
Picture of individual man,(stoic philosopher,christian
religious,rational gentleman), by which to recognize
Ourselves; we are anything. But if anything, then
nothing, and it is not everyone who can live with that,
though it is our true position. (M.S:P.XI)

He mentions that the hero of his play is Thomas More, a man with;
an adamant sense of his own self. He knew

where he began and left off, what area of himself
he could yield to the encroachments of his
enemies and what to the encroachments of those
he loved .(M.S:P.XII)

man who cannot claim a special morality for " In another sense

¹⁰ Bolt "professional and public life because he cannot cut himself in two.

admits that the present society does not, like before, provide us with a coherent, socially relevant ideal, but it;

“ can only have as much idea as we have what we are about, for it has only our brains to think with. And the individual who tries to plot his position by reference to our society finds no fixed points,...”.(M.S:P.Ibd.)

The self to which Thomas More withdraws is clearly not his body. When his friend Norfolk argues for More's refusal to support the king, More answers that, "I will not given in because I suppose it-Ido-not my pride, not my spleen, nor any other of my appetites but I do,..."(M.S:p.72). He insists to distinct his self from his appetites, pride and spleen, which are all connected with the physical side of human body. The distinction between self and physical, emotional existence is evident from the fact that More can suffer insult, loss of office, imprisonment, being deprived from family and close friends and death, but not losing his self, telling Norfolk that, "I can't relieve you of your obedience to the king. Howard, you must relieve yourself of our friendship,..."(M.S:p.71).

Hence, the ubiquitous character of the Common Man in Bolt's play is illustrating the lack of identity that comes from equivocating or from defining humanity solely by physical externals. He is nothing but a symbol, an abstraction. Accordingly, he has the ability to play any role in society: steward, innkeeper, jailer, foreman of the jury, executioner. This unhistorical personality serves as a common denominator for a range of characters whose behaviour is self-defeating in being self-serving.¹¹

Tomas More believes in his ideals to such extent that he is prepared to scarifies his life for them, but not his self. He is a firm believer in separation of the Church and State, but when the king tries to start the reformation of England and the Church by a simple act of Parliament called the Act of Supremacy, Thomas refuses to sign it. When the king asks him, "Why do you hold against me in the desire of my heart- the "askes him; (M.S:p.31) More answers, declaring his "very wick of my heart? obedience and love for the king but away from any compromise to his self," there is my right take your dagger and saw it from my shoulder, and I will laugh and be thankful, if by that means I can come with your Grace with a clear conscience"(M.S:P.Ibid.). He refuses to sign it because he believes that the offence of the king is

“ ...grounded in an Act of Parliament which is directly repugnant to the Law of God. The king in Parliament cannot bestow himself Supremacy of the Church because

it is a spiritual Supremacy! And more to this the immunity of the Church is promised both in Magna Carta and the kings own coronation oath!''.(M.S:P.96)

The marriage is yet another reason why More refuses to sign the Act.¹²

The fixity of selfhood is shown in More's refusal to take the oath, for the oath to him is an invitation to God to act as a witness as well as a judge and the consequences of a perjury is damnation. When his daughter God more "Margaret utters that More should take the oath because; (M.S:P.83) "regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth as he always told her. More, however, claims that oaths are by definition spoken to God, to whom the oath-taker gives his own self as a collateral¹³. He tells her that when someone takes an oath means that;

He's holding his own self in his own hands. Like water and if he opens his fingers then he needn't hope to find himself again. Some men aren't capable of this, but I would be loathe to think your father one of them.(M.S:P.Ibid)

More likens the taking of an oath to holding one's self like water in cupped hands. To break one's oath is to let one's self fall through one's hands never to be recovered. The implication is that one must be something definite to be able to offer one self as a guarantee for one's word; if one cannot back up one's word with one's self, then one's word is worthless, and one has no essential value.

But it is important to repeat that More's refusal to take the oath does not mean that he regards himself as a pure individualist in opposition to society. He resists the attempt by others to impose authority on his spiritual life, but he continues to be committed to use the institutions of the state, particularly the law to protect his sovereign self. In praising the law, More compares it to a forest, which is sturdy and provides protection.¹⁴ He told Roper, his daughter's husband, in one of his meetings that England;

Is planted thick with laws from coast to coast- Man's laws
Not God's- and if you cut them down- and you are just
The man to do it-d'you really think you could stand
Upright in the winds that would blow then?(M.S:p.39)

More wishes to rely upon what he knows to be certain and what he can perceive here on earth. He believes in God manifested in human laws and justice.

Bolt recognizes all this explicitly in the preface, but he does not refer to in the play. Instead, he offers what he takes to be a modern analogue

for More's position, where by the unrestricted Church becomes the terrifying cosmos from which the sensible man retreats into the more human and restricted society. However, Bolt presents us with a genuinely modern hero.¹⁵

Anyway, More is not defending some absolutely private sphere-but what he takes to be an indestructible community bound by an original connection with Christ. More's conscience means his self as belonging to that community in some infinite sense. It seems to him that the alternative is not another community but the destruction of the community. As a socialist, Bolt thinks of this destruction in terms of commercialized world every man " he sees around him, where there is no conscience and where (M.S.:p), as Rich thinks. Where there is only the undefined, "has his price consumer self, there can be no genuine community because there can be no shared intrinsic values and no common good, there cannot be genuine character.¹⁶

Throughout the play, Robert Bolt uses the characters of Richard Rich, Thomas Cromwell, and Wolsey to portray how corruption comes to those who put interest above all values. Consider the first encounter in the play between Richard Rich and Thomas Cromwell. Rich is a friend of Sir. Thomas More. Rich visits More to see if More opposes the annulment in private for More never opposes it in public, but Cromwell, suspects that More opposes it in private. He turns to Rich to discover More's private conversations because Rich is corruptible. It turns out that Cromwell is wrong about More's conversations, but right about Rich. More says nothing to anybody about his views on the king's marriage, but, late in the play, Rich gives false testimony against More, and is rewarded by being made attorney general for Wales.¹⁷ When More hears the false It profits a man nothing to give his "testimony in court. He says to Rich, (M..S:P.95)"soul for the whole world...But for Wales! Earlier in the story, when Cromwell was testing Rich, he asked Rich whether he was capable of providing what the state needed, if the state needed faithlessness toward his friend and even falsehood. Rich replied that the answer depended on what he was offered. Cromwell said that he believe faithlessness "admired that answer. Many people, Cromwell said, There are "Rich objected a little," is a matter of price, but few will say it. And Cromwell said ". "some things one wouldn't do for anything surely administrative convenience...our job as " it was all a matter of he told Rich "administrators is to make convenient what power wants, that,

There are these men-you know-'upright,'
'steadfast'

Men who want themselves to be the constant
 factor
 In the situation, which, of course, they can't be.
 The
 Situation rolls forward in any case...If they've any
 they're Sense they get out of its way...[if not,] well,
 Fit only for Heaven.(M.S:P.45)

Then, Cromwell believes that heaven has one morality; the
 , "constant factor " power in the court of a king, has another.¹⁸
 Rich is a very sneaky and ambitious man, he wants to be popular. When
 who would know " he is offered the job of teacher he comments;
 (M.S:P.4), the fact that Rich has read Machiavelli puts Rich's action "it?
 in a historical and intellectual context. Nicola Machiavelli(1469-1527)
 who is most famous for his political treatise *The Prince*, which advocates
 a kind of common sense approach to government that put political
 expediency ahead of ethical and moral concerns.Machiavelli believes that
 to create and maintain a stable state, a ruler should have the public image
 of being fair to his people, but may resort to fear, cruelty, and
 manipulation to achieve his ends.¹⁹ Machiavelli's morals differ greatly
 from More's. More reveres his private conscience above things like
 personal advancements, but Machiavelli advises the opposite . It is
 but everyone has " evident that Rich is capable of bribery when he says,
 . More dismisses Rich's belief that money, status, or women " his price
 can bribe anyone. When More shows him an Italian silver cup that a
 litigant used to try to bribe him and he didn't not realize at that time that
 it was a bribe and now he wishes to get rid of it, Richard happily takes it,
 . He also points out "some descent clothes" saying he will sell it and buy
 that he wants a gown like More's.

Rich: I want a gown like yours.

More: you'll get several gowns for that I should think

It was sent to me a little while ago by some woman.

Now she is put a lawsuit into the Court of Requests

...I'm not going to keep it, and if you need it. Of

Course-if you feel it's contaminated...

Rich: No no. I will risk it.(M.S:P.4)

More's gift of the silver cup has dangerous implications for More later.
 Mathew, , his servant, the Common Man, remarks that his;

...master Thomas More would give anything to anyone
 some say that's good and some say that's bad, but I say
 he can't help it-and that's...because someday someone

going to ask him for something that he wants to keep;
and he will be out of practice.(M.S:p.9)

The generosity of More in giving the cup to Richard also foreshadows More's downfall. More seems to understand the implications when he offers the cup to Rich. He tests Rich by offering him both the tainted cup, which represents Corruption, and a teaching position, which represents a way of benefiting society. When Rich accepts the tainted cup and refuses the teaching job, he reveals his immoral character.²⁰

In the play, More operates primarily as a servant to his conscience and to God. When he interacts with other people, however, More adopts the role of a teacher, as he illustrates in his conversation with Rich. More teaches not by speaking his mind, but rather by testing others. The character of Rich is tested by More. It is evident that Rich is a man who is hungry for fame to the extent that he aspires to have a gown like More's, symbolically meaning his status, position. Rich gets what he desires in such corrupted society, moreover, every step that Richard goes up, More goes a step down.²¹

Wolsey is another corrupted character who is self-serving man. Even though he is a church man he has no moral conscience. He aspires to be the Pop for materialistic reasons rather than spiritual reasons. He is supposed to be a holy man yet he speaks vulgarity, when talking about and when addressing Ann he "as barren as brick"the queen he calls her . He sacrifices his conscience for the sake of "fertile thing"refers to her as the king and says that good statesman shouldn't possess "that horrible moral squint";

...Thomas if you could see facts flat on, without
That moral squint; with just a little common sense
You could have been a statesman.(M.S:P.10)

With his great wealth and power he seems to embody the worst abuses in the Church. His motivation is political –he is prepared to take certain regrettable measures against the Church, if necessary-and he is against More's moral stand.²²

The main opposition to More in the play is Thomas Cromwell, Cromwell rejects the idea of commitment to any essential core of self; for him the self must continually adapt to survive. As More points out to his What Cromwell? "son –in-law, using somewhat anachronistic language: Pooh, he is a pragmatist- and that is the only resemblance he has to the

(M.S:P.66). For "Devil, son Roper; a pragmatist, the merest plumber Cromwell any means that will allow the individual to the thrive and prosper in the material world is justified, while More believes that the individual, to remain genuinely human, should resist mere adaptation to the power of the state by adhering to certain moral and religious values, when his daughter Margaret begs him to swear the act of succession he explains:

profitable,
greed would
animals or angles
since in fact
beyond
thought, and
perhaps
of being

...If we lived in a State where virtue was
Common sense would make us good, and
Make us saintly. And we would live like
In the happy land that *need* no heros. But
we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride,
sloth, lust and stupidity commonly profit far
humility, chastity, fortitude, justice and
have to choose to be human at all...why then
we must stand fast a little- even at the risk
heroes''(M.S:P.84).

Cromwell, in contrast ,has no principles beyond his own power and material self- interest.²³

Thomas Cromwell is a farrier's son, he is initially secretary to Cardinal Wolsey but after Wolsey's fall and More's resignation is appointed to the position of Lord Chancellor. He is a man of great ambition, intellect and energy but has no conscience. Cromwell does Henry's dirty work . What Henry wants is More's approval to his divorce and Cromwell sets himself to break More's opposition by corruption or force. He bribes Rich to tell him some information about More and in exchange he offers him the position of collector of revenues of York. so much " Rich accepts as he can be bought and Cromwell affirms that; (M.S:p43). Cromwell "wickedness purchases so much worldly prospering announces that men like More try to hold fast to their principles in situations but sometimes the situation is beyond their control. Otherwise, Cromwell predicts, men like More is only fit for heaven.

Thomas Cromwell stands out as the figure most nearly as opposite to was commanded " More himself.²⁴ More is a reluctant public servant who "coming man", Cromwell is the " him into office; it was inflicted on whose steady rise to power and prominence is uninterrupted throughout the duration of the play. Where More is very pious, Cromwell sees religious faith as a personal impediment to discarded. Where More sees the question whether Henry can divorce his barren wife Catherine as a matter of conscience, Cromwell believes it to entirely a question to be resolved by employing the most expedient means "convenience"of of eliminating the difficulties that lie in path of the sovereign's will;

...it's much more a matter of convenience, administrative Convenience. The normal aim of administration is to keep Steady this factor of convenience- and Sir Thomas would agree. Now normally when a man wants to change his woman , you Let him if it's convenient and prevent him if it's not normally Indeed it's of so little importance that you leave it to the priests. But the constant factor is this element of convenience.(M.S:p.43)

Where More ultimately goes to the executioner's block by refusing to compromise his loyalty to the law of God and to the English Constitution, Cromwell betrays the law he praises by using subornation of perjury to bring More down. More triumphs over tyranny by what Bolt calls his , Cromwell turns himself into "adamantine sense of his " own self" infinitely flexible tool of tyranny.²⁵

CONCLUSION

A Man for All Seasons may suggest that corruption is the only avenue to survival in a world full of bad individuals, men like More, who have no hope to survive. The play offers a desolate, pale, unhappy and cheerless world. Men like Cromwell, Richard Rich, and Wolsey are examples of persons ready to sell out their principles for advancement. They find the easy and happy life with the approval of the king and that leads them to act against their conscience. Bolt draws a clear distinction between the characters, Sir Thomas More who has principles and conscience and those who lack it.

Although he is destroyed in a bodily sense, his goodness and courageous stand have lived in the minds of many people over centuries. Death can not kill Thomas More and his likes for they are immortalized by their

glorious actions and their idealism and principles provide a ray of hope in life of honest people. Thomas More may have failed as a politician, he surely succeeds as a human being, more than that, he proves that Rich's can not be applied to everyone "every man has His price" emblem; because there are some men who are priceless.

Richard Rich and Thomas Cromwell are the villains of the play, they exploit their positions for personal gain and destroy the life of an innocent man. However, some critics believe they too are victims of a system over which they have little control, a system that depends on compliance for survival, in which rebellion leads swiftly to elimination. Cardinal Wolsey is an exemplary citizen of such a state, yet he falls victim to the king's desire. All these villains survive, yet none have any real freedom to act or to speak.

However, to examine a literary character such as Bolt's More in terms of traditional or archetypal hero. Bolt, a self-identified agnostic, (xiv), a phrase "hero of selfhood" refers to the deeply religious More as a that refers to the ideas of twentieth-century French philosopher, Albert Camus as an exemplar of this orientation. In fact, it is this type of existentialist hero, more than archetypal hero figure, that More represents in *A Man for All Seasons* .

But there are other definitions of hero that more accurately apply to More. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, defines tragic hero (and certainly More's death at the end of the play qualifies him for the tragic level) very , and Joseph "people who are better than the average " simply as Campbell, whose classic *book The Hero with a Thousand Faces* writes the composite hero of the monomyth is a personage of exceptional " that . Both of these " honored by his society" who is frequently " gifts descriptions can be applied to More's character.²⁶

END NOTES

1 ----- A Man for All Seasons: A Play of Thomas More, www.uvu.edu. p.1.

2 Ibid.p.2.

3 Ibid.p.3[

4 Ibid.P.3.

"⁵Marven O'Connel A Man for All Seasons:: an Historian's Demur"
www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/pol...

⁶Blair Mahoney, " A Man for All Seasons". veng6a.pbworks.com./f/insight notes.

⁷Steven Smith, D."Interrogating Thomas More: The Conundrums of Conscience".
[http://www. Stthomas. Edu/law/studentlife/journal/tableofcontent.asp](http://www.Stthomas.Edu/law/studentlife/journal/tableofcontent.asp).

⁸Mahoney, p.2.

⁹Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons*, London: Heinemann Educational Books.

¹⁰Thomas Shaffer L. *Faith and Professions*, New York: Sunny Press, P77.

- ¹¹ Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: University Press, P116.
- ¹² Casey Joe, "Ethics in A Man for All Seasons".www.uvu.edu.p.5.
- ¹³ Ibid.p.7.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.p.10
- ¹⁵ Ibid.p.18.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.p.20.
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- ²¹ Roper, William" the life of sir Thomas".www.historyguid.org.html.
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- ²⁴ Ibid.p.43.
- ²⁵ Ibid.p.45.
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