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## DARLEY'S AND TENNYSON'S VERSE TRAGEDIES ON THOMAS BECKET

### Plot, Structure, Proportion and Character

The general dramatic outlines of George Darley's *Thomas á Becket* (1840) and Alfred Tennyson's *Becket* (1884) are determined by the familiar facts of history, which are treated chronologically. The murder of the great Archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral forms the necessary catastrophe, and the former friendship between Thomas Becket and King Henry provides an introduction to it. Both playwrights make full use of a romantic subplot based on a legend about Fair Rosamond, which they try to tie with the main plot as much as possible. Both dramatists use a five-act structure, to which Tennyson adds a prologue, and spectacular scenes with numerous characters alternate with lyrical soliloquies or more ordinary scenes with fewer people.

#### George Darley's *Thomas á Becket*<sup>1</sup>

George Darley (1795-1846) presents a traditional dramatic structure and makes use of the most important elements popular at the time. On the one hand he is faithful to history as his subtitle to the play, "Dramatic Chronicle", suggests, on the other hand there are strong romantic features, such as beautiful settings in nature which have a sentimental appeal (the woods and gardens in the Labyrinth), or stock figures of the romantic subplot (the innocent nymph-like beauty in distress and the wicked Queen). The medieval and religious theme also allows the typical Gothic drama settings, e.g. castles, palaces, churches or bowers. In Darley these are surprisingly rarely shown, the action takes place frequently outside the buildings, in streets or courtyards. Even Rosamond's secluded Bower is never shown from the inside. One small reference may be of interest here and it appears in Rosamond's father's speech, in which he warns his daughter to go back to Godstowe Convent. His reasons correspond

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<sup>1</sup> All the page references to Darley's *Thomas á Becket* are to the edition listed in the Sources.

to a Gothic portrayal of a convent, which was often seen as a place of intrigue and sexual lust. A number of minor stock figures, e.g. monks, a conjurer, a physician preparing a phial of poison, and a disfigured female dwarf (Dwerga), who provide a certain medieval authenticity are, however, rather comic than sinister. The disguise and disclosure of identity is used only very occasionally, so are natural disasters in connection with grave situations (all the three main females appear in disguise once; De Broke fearing excommunication is seen kneeling in a snow storm). In the final episode there is the representation of the supernatural, the Shade of Rosamond, which has a moral impact on the villainess. In this way Darley punishes the wicked Queen, who has probably gone mad (nobody else can see the Shade), faints in the end and is carried away. It may be claimed that Darley also follows the tradition of wartime patriotism (prominent at the turn of the 18th century, however, surviving long after the Napoleonic Wars), due to which English themes were promoted. Darley incorporates distinct national feelings into his play (this is to be found especially in the first part of the play, Acts I and II), where Anglo-Saxon ancestors are defended, the mythical figure of King Arthur mentioned, and the beauty of English countryside highlighted.

Faithful to Shakespearian and Renaissance prevailing tradition, Darley ignores the limitations of the unities and works freely especially with time. Yet he focuses on the English territory and his historical tragedy presents a closely-knit whole. Plot is prime for him and Darley can be regarded as a very good craftsman in this area, a master of action on the stage. Even the reported events are never long-winded descriptions but they form an integral part of the action. Darley is never over-instructive and does not think every vital incident should be shown on the stage, e.g. the King's crucial words which, however, sign his former friend Thomas Becket's death warrant are reported by Fitz-Urse. Darley's individual scenes display such a variety that it is hard to come across a similar episode: Soliloquies and dialogues alternate with spectacular scenes with huge crowds of people. One type is especially effective in Darley's presentation and it is a kind of commentary on a serious situation delivered by a gradually increasing number of characters who bring the latest news concerning the particular event. Another impressive method of scenic constructions is Darley's repetitions, e.g. after King Henry reveals his plans concerning Rosamond, her father explains the same in greater detail to his daughter in the following scene. There are also magnificent scenes designed for spectacular effect. These show processions or ceremonies during which hardly any words are uttered, such as a large crowd "of different ages, sexes, and conditions" (Darley, 308)<sup>2</sup> passing De Broke on the steps to a church. Subsidiary episodes often featuring humorous lower class characters are always closely connected with one of the plots, while the love triangle of the subplot has almost no connection with the main historical theme.

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<sup>2</sup> When quoting, the name of the playwright instead of the name of the play is given to avoid confusion.

Both plots have a progressive development and cover a large scope. The historical plot comprises the protagonists' earlier friendship, which is followed by the first clash, then the more serious conflict, their reconciliation, the murder, and the final tribute to the dead Archbishop, the future saint. The romantic subplot seems to be starting at the very beginning, from the budding relationship between the King and Rosamond, through their love to Rosamond's tragic death. The plots alternate almost regularly, and each of them reaches its climax and catastrophe at about the same time. There is an immense cast of characters, but only a few of them help tie the main plot with the subplot. These are: The King, Becket's former friend and later opposer, who is in love with Rosamond; John of Salisbury, Becket's supporter and Rosamond's tutor; and finally Earl of Cornwall, the King's friend and councillor, who is Rosamond's uncle. Thus the plots seem to be dealt with almost separately in places and the well-known facts of the historical conflict are not damaged by sentimental conclusions. Becket's connection with the subplot is only reported, apart from Act I where he, as the King's Chancellor, arranges a rendezvous for the King and Rosamond in his Palace: He is referred to as the architect of the Labyrinth, the Queen receives his letter, Rosamond pleads for him, etc. This is one of the main differences from Tennyson's conception of his title hero, which will be seen later.

Thomas Becket is clearly indicated as the moral winner and tragic hero; his death is not presented as a personal downfall but rather as "the tragic error". Apart from the beggar, no one has any presentiment of the Archbishop's fate. Darley neglects the frequently quoted Becket's premonition of death before he returns to Canterbury and had the knights not heard the King's regrettable exclamation, the conflict might not have resulted in Becket's murder. At the same time it must be admitted that Becket shows great pride and superiority when dealing with Fitz-Urse and the knights, planting thus seeds of their hatred towards him. At the beginning Becket is in the subordinate position to the King, being a modest scholar on the one hand (the holy Archdeacon of Canterbury and Chancellor of the Realm) but also an excellent warrior and a rich lord displaying his wealth ostentatiously on the other hand (enjoying hawks, hunts, jousts, drinks, and games). Throughout the play Becket becomes more independent, but his two characteristic features do not disappear: as a respectable scholar he defends himself and the Church rights admirably and is described as "meek as a nun", as a proud and brave man who is aware of his power Becket is compared to a tiger (e.g. during the violent quarrel in Act III). King Henry, in rage of course, calls Becket a howling wolf and suggests that he should "wipe that surge of foam from his blest mouth" (Darley, 280). Although Becket is frequently characterised through other people, occasionally he also contributes to his own characterisation, e.g. he tries to explain his views, reveals how insulted he is after the young king's refusal to accept his honest homage, or how he feels all alone in his struggle for the Church. Becket fears the conflict will not be resolved without blood, however, he is never passive and bravely fights the conspirators. In spite of his transformation into a pious churchman he remains an honest and courageous Renaissance-like gentleman until the very end.

King Henry is then the loser although no blame is ever put on him. His importance is gradually diminished. In Act I the King is shown as the real master and organiser, in long Act V he himself never appears and there are only several short references to him. In the beginning he is seen as a model of the true chivalrous spirit, "stern with the stubborn, tender with the mild/ Fiercest in battle-field, gentlest in bower" (Darley, 291). Later on King Henry is depicted as much more emotional than Becket, unable to keep his fury under control when unsuccessful, which is somehow extremely human: "Henry spurs to London breathing pure flame" (Darley, 281). The Archbishop also attacks the King when criticising the knights' inappropriate behaviour: "the King's body-guard/ The master's conduct shows it in the men/ Most coarsely mimick'd" (Darley, 285). The King may be considered a tragic figure too because he never accomplishes his aims and the consequences will make him suffer. His love for his mistress Rosamond seems genuine and so does the love for his sons. In the final scene Darley does not make it clear whether the King knows about his true love's murder and when the Shade of Rosamond foresees the disastrous future concerning the Princes to punish the Queen, one feels sorry for the King instead and our empathy is echoed in John of Salisbury's conclusion.

Although Queen Eleanor may be considered one of the protagonists, she never meets her husband, King Henry, nor Becket, nor the knights. She represents the wicked character of the subplot, the powerful villainess, and other demerits of hers are mentioned from time to time, e.g. her old age, infidelity, ugliness, jealousy and cruelty. She judges people according to herself, therefore she cannot understand why in his letter Becket rejects to let her know about the secret Bower if he quarrels with the King. She would certainly do it, simply out of spite. She does not believe in sincere love, therefore she demands to learn from Rosamond all the "sorceries" she used to bewitch the King. Later she seems in a deep trouble because of her horrible deed, however, she tries to put the blame on Dwerga, the morbid servant, who only carried out the Queen's orders. The other prominent female figure, who is the example of a white character, is Rosamond de Clifford. A young beauty of noble origin, the only child without a proper guardian (her father is dying) is to become King Henry's ward: "...he (Henry) can then enjoy/ His will of all thou hast, in thy despite,/ Thy lands, thy tenements, thy gold, thy jewels,/ The virgin treasure of thy beauty,—All!/  
Such is the royal licence of these times" (Darley, 257). This presents a typical fatal situation as Rosamond is trapped: She cannot do anything else but follow her beloved father's advice, which leads to the inevitable end. She becomes the King's mistress but despite the King's regarding her as the future Queen she feels guilty and unhappy in the secluded Bower hidden in the Labyrinth. As an innocent victim she changes into a Shade to haunt the Queen until promised a decent burial. Rosamond, although not impossibly virtuous, is a highly idealised character, and can be seen as the combination of beauty and exquisite knowledge (she is capable of translating a passage of Virgil into English beautifully), to say nothing of her excellent psychological qualities, of which modesty and concern for other people seem to be the main ones. It may be claimed that Dar-

ley defends Rosamond considerably by putting a strong emphasis on the fact that there was no other choice for her but to yield to the King's wishes. Despite all the limitations, both the female protagonists, Eleanor and Rosamond, sustain a certain credibility, both of them represent basic human qualities, both of them are conscience-stricken and contemplate a change. The third main female, Dwerga, the mixture of a fool, servant and confidante, is a completely limited abominable character or monster-like figure. She evidently enjoys putting the Queen's merciless orders into effect and then laughs at her. Her appearance reflects the inhuman defects of hers, she is depicted as an ugly, disfigured dwarf.

The historical figures, such as the King's or Becket's supporters, are not particularly individualised. They are given their proper names and duly appear when needed. Occasionally the more prominent ones get further distinguished. Earl of Cornwall, the King's friend, is depicted as a good listener, John of Salisbury as a bookworm. After the first clash between the protagonists John of Salisbury is deeply depressed while Walter Mapes enjoys the fun. The leader of the knights, Fitz-Urse, is shown as a very important and trustful "King's man" in the beginning, but he is a much flatter character than his colleagues on the whole. Apart from the fact that he criticises the King's "foolery", meaning the affair with Rosamond, and reveals his negative opinion of women in general, we do not learn much about him. The other knights, Brito, De Traci, and De Morville are portrayed as individual human beings, and their ages, origins, likes and dislikes are commented on. The young ones (Brito and De Traci) tend to bicker and fight, but both admire and respect Becket, while older De Morville, a clear enemy of Becket from the very beginning, may be considered a supervisor of the former two as he frequently admonishes them. He also shows some objectivity when commenting on Becket's behaviour: "Well, the Archbishop stood/ toughly up to 't: I almost honour him" (Darley, 282). Darley manages to show the knights in various situations, e.g. waiting for a horse outside a smithy, so they are not confined to their historical roles only. In this way they seem similar to other excellently drawn minor figures who give the play its special flavour. It is in the area of distinctive minor characters' presentation that Darley succeeds in particularly. Darley includes a great number of brilliantly depicted ordinary people who rarely reappear. They are endowed with basic human qualities which do not change with history and so we come across e.g. gossipy maids, a corrupted physician, a worried innkeeper, a babbling park-keeper, or a rude stableman. Darley's strength lies in these low and ordinary people shown in everyday situations and in his illustration of basic human relationships.

One has to admit that Darley's verse play lacks depth. It is a pleasant well-handled historical romance with a tragic ending, in which the more profound religious and national themes gradually give way to simplistic treatment of moral issues: The thought is not profound, but feeling intense, action speedy, and personality vivid.

Tennyson's *Becket*<sup>3</sup>

Similarly to Darley's approach, Tennyson uses a chronicle structure, in which the historical plot is reinforced by the same romantic subplot. Again the identical conventionalised settings of a historical play are shown: historical palaces, courts, monasteries and the Cathedral, or royal private rooms or chambers, the Bower, the gardens and woods around. Interestingly, Tennyson prefers the action to take place inside to outside. He does not focus on the English territory like Darley, the play opens in Anjou, and later the precise French historical places of the protagonists' attempts at reconciliation are used. There is distinctive romantic atmosphere but without any Gothic elements, which may be claimed to some extent with Darley. Bad weather plays an additional role only very occasionally, e.g. a "tremendous thunderstorm" breaks over the Cathedral while the murderers are leaving it. But there are no mysterious physicians, conjurers, nor morbid dwarfs and ghosts of innocent victims. Rosamund<sup>4</sup> is the only person who uses a disguise (of a monk). She can be considered a kind of stock white figure and Queen Eleanor the typical villainess and dark character again.

Tennyson follows the acknowledged traditional stages. His Prologue forms the necessary exposition in which both the plots are indicated. His acts also consist of scenes, each scene has a little climax of its own, worked into the main narrative line, and in the last scene the story is completed, and the conflict resolved in death. Although the individual scenes are neither so numerous, nor of different length, nor are they always distinguished through different structures as in Darley's play, they similarly alternate various groups of characters and keep the romantic subplot abreast of the main plot. In contrast to Darley, all the main characters (Becket, Henry, Eleanor, Rosamund, Fitzurse) remain prominent in both of the plots, so there are no separate plans here. The action progresses in chronological order and starts with Becket almost immediately appointed Archbishop. Becket appears as the King's Chancellor and friend in the Prologue only. In Act I he is already Archbishop and in the last act he meets his death in the Canterbury Cathedral. The romantic subplot is also introduced in the Prologue when Becket is asked by the King to take care of Rosamund in her English Bower and Queen Eleanor spots the chart of it. The King and Rosamund's love affair obviously started quite a time before, as they have a little son now. In the play they meet twice in the Bower, finally found by Eleanor and Fitzurse. From a certain death Rosamund is rescued by Becket, the Archbishop, and persuaded to go to the Godstow nunnery. She then appears in Canterbury just before Becket's murder. The play closes with Rosamund kneeling by the corpse, bringing thus both plots to an end.

Tennyson also tries to include all classes of society, from king to beggar, however, he does not succeed in creating much tension. The historical characters, apart from the protagonists, are almost identical with Darley's ones, and

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<sup>3</sup> All the page references to Tennyson's *Becket* are to the edition listed in the Sources.

<sup>4</sup> The individual writer's variant spelling of historical names is always used.

they are not particularly distinguished. Interestingly, Tennyson's bishops and churchmen take the King's side immediately. Barons and knights freely express their hostility towards Becket. Fitzurse does this even in the Prologue, i.e. during the protagonists' friendship and strangely enough, he is rather the Queen's man than the King's man. One wonders why he should do everything for the Queen, why he has become her yes-man and confidant in a very similar way to Darley's Dwerga. Fitzurse also agrees to marry Rosamund at Eleanor's suggestion; why is he then not afraid of getting married to his own King's contemporary mistress? Becket has also a confidant, it is the Watson-like Herbert of Bosham with features of a sycophant, and again, it is hard to understand his strong attachment to his master. Tennyson's other minor characters are flat and unimportant figures, such as pestering beggars, or treacherous Margery, who lack Darley's vividness and do not help to further characterise Tennyson's typically black and white protagonists. On the one hand, Tennyson tends to simplify individual dialogues to a great extent, especially as far as human relationships are concerned, on the other hand he often includes irrelevant facts, such as some unimportant names (of another two of Henry's "paramours" before Rosamund, or of lesser clergymen), items of the Constitutions, or detailed Becket's charges.

In Tennyson's spectacle-tragedy Thomas Becket is neither a great spiritual man, nor a popular hero. His tragic death is not the result of the conflict with the King, but surprisingly, it is the Queen who is to blame. The king utters the fateful statement only after she shows him the cross and hints that Becket wants Rosamund for himself. Of course, the information may be regarded as the proverbial last straw, but Tennyson's presentation of Eleanor and the fact that Fitzurse, who orders the knights to kill the Archbishop, is Queen Eleanor's follower, seem to support the former interpretation. Becket is presented as a very headstrong man and he is frequently admonished by John of Salisbury, the scholar, clearly his superior in some respects. There is no real development of Becket's character or any change in it. In fact, he behaves rather as an intolerant churchman than the King's friend in the very beginning, e.g. when he urges Henry to stop his relationship with Rosamund and send her to a nunnery. Firstly, one would expect Becket-Chancellor to support the King in everything he was after, and secondly, it is obviously not in accordance with Becket's being the King's subject, which is constantly stressed in the Prologue. Becket, who is too wilful for a clergyman and too impetuous for a former diplomat, reminds us of his martyrdom all the time, exclaiming e.g. already in Act I "O, my dear friend, the King/ O brother!—I may come to martyrdom,/ I am martyr in myself already" (Tennyson, 38). In Act V Becket seems prepared for death, he is almost indifferent, tired in a way, aware of God's will ("What matters murder'd here, or murder'd there?/ And yet my dream foretold my martyrdom/ In mine own church. It is God's will", Tennyson, 202). Yet he resolutely orders the door be opened and fights against the knights when they come to murder him. No explanation is offered here why Becket "had thought so well" of De Morville as this particular knight rarely appears or speaks and never talks to Becket until the knights' first appearance in the Cathedral. Occasionally, Tennyson tries

hard to depict emotional areas of Becket's personality, in particular to show his concern for animals (a poor man and his dog), or his positive attitude towards women, mothers and children, which strongly contrasts with John of Salisbury's views. Tennyson also suggests Becket had been in love long ago as a youth, but the girl died of leprosy. We learn that when in exile, Becket thought of excommunicating Henry, however, hearing about the King's sudden illness he remembered the old days and "faltered into tears" instead (Tennyson, 181). In order to gear the subplot with the main plot Tennyson makes his Archbishop of Canterbury Warden of the King's mistress, no matter how platonic their relationship may be at the moment. Becket also appears out of the blue and saves Rosamund from the dagger's point and thus the villainess and the villain are foiled. In this way the playwright's attempt at a faithful illustration of history, which his didacticism suggests, is seriously damaged.

King Henry resembles Darley's portrayal of the same character. He is an able organiser of state affairs, not so much of his love affairs. He is an emotional, passionate personality, frequently displaying his furious temper. He is a very hard-working man and his kingdom is his priority, although he enjoys entertainment. In the Prologue Henry claims that he loves Rosamund, his true-heart wife, "as a woman should be loved" (Tennyson, 7), and strangely enough, almost immediately when Eleanor appears, he accepts her beautiful cross and it is the Queen that is assured of his love now, so that one doubts his sincerity. Later there is no suggestion of love between Eleanor and Henry any longer: "We have but one bond, her hate of Becket" (Tennyson, 93). Tennyson hints that Henry had actually been secretly married to Rosamund before he was forced to marry Eleanor, probably because of political circumstances. It is made quite clear, however, that it was a world-without-end-love-match between them that had brought them a little son, Geoffrey. At the height of the Victorian period Tennyson could not afford to favour such an adulterous relationship, he therefore presents their love, though stronger than ever, as a chaste, unconsummated love now in the view of Henry's being an officially married man. In places Henry seems lonely without Becket, which is very touching and the King (excluding his weird relationship with Rosamund) with all his faults and moods becomes the most credible character of the play.

Queen Eleanor is portrayed here in a very different way on the other hand, she is a domineering, cruel female Iago, urging Fitzurse to "devour Rosamund... and make her as hateful to herself and to the King, as she is to me" (Tennyson, 23), the lords "to stir up the King" (Tennyson, 44), or the knights to carry out the King's wishes (i.e. to murder Becket). As a stock negative character she is ugly, old, and pitiless. In the beginning she seems well informed about Henry and Rosamund, and does not believe in her husband's love for herself. At first her aim is to crush Rosamund through Fitzurse and the knights. She attempts to hurt the King and the conflict with Becket suits her purposes, so that she makes full use of it whenever she can. When Becket refuses to tell her the way to the Bower, she thinks of a revenge. Through Rosamund's courageous defence in the Bower it is revealed how adulteress Eleanor is. When Eleanor is caught red-

handed with a dagger aiming at Rosamund's heart, she swears she will make Becket suffer. She realises that Becket must not see the King any more, and hurries back to France to be able to tell her own version to Henry. She provokes him easily as the King is already upset after a discussion with the excommunicated bishops, makes sure the four knights remember that they hate Becket and after Henry's passionate cry she orders them to go to Canterbury and strike at once.

Tennyson overdid his conception of Rosamund and the result is a foolish, ignorant beauty, who is happy to be hidden in bowers and does not ask why ("...from cage to cage, and known/ Nothing but him—happy to know no more", Tennyson, 127). Occasionally, she escapes and has to ask Becket to protect her from Fitzurse who manages to follow her immediately. It seems that Fitzurse has previously attempted to rape her ("...He sued my hand. I shook at him./ He found me once alone. Nay, nay, I cannot/ Tell you...", Tennyson, 35). Rosamund has no idea that Henry is married to Eleanor. When Eleanor makes her way into the Bower and offers her the "sleeping draught" or dagger unless she instantly consents to marry Fitzurse, she refuses bravely, although her son's life is threatened as well. Rosamund claims she "never loved but one" and proudly considers herself "snow to mud" (Tennyson, 155), meaning promiscuous people, Eleanor in particular. Becket persuades Rosamund to go to the Godstow nunnery and forget the King, to which she agrees. Eleanor immediately loses interest in her, which is not sufficiently explained. In the end Rosamund changes from a helpless, sweet, submissive and ignorant creature into an adventurous and energetic sportswoman who travels all the way from Godstow in Oxfordshire to Canterbury, just to ask Becket whether he excommunicated her beloved Henry or not. She witnesses Becket's murder, vainly begs the knights for mercy (the knights are not interested in her any longer, not even Fitzurse), and finally she kneels by the body of Becket.

The sentimental conclusion may be considered a serious damage to both the historical and religious outlines and gives evidence of the subplot becoming more and more important to the detriment of the main plot. The play is a tragicomic melodrama in which the virtuous beauty must be saved. Although some situations and episodes possess dramatic interest, Tennyson's frequent absurdities of plot and character, and incoherence in places undermine the credibility. Tennyson's play has no theme either, it is just a piece of falsified history, told for the sake of its intrigue, sentimentality, violence and spectacular effects.

### **Influence or Imitation**

It would be interesting to indicate some similarities between Darley's *Thomas à Becket* and Tennyson's *Becket*. Both the plays show much of a historian's approach and they base their historical and romantic plots on the same legendary materials, so many scenes illustrate the same situations. Both the dramatists aimed at a historical chronicle and though they made a certain selection as far as the minor historical figures are concerned, there are only slight differ-

ences in this area. The historical persons, bishops and barons, are not distinguished much. The Archbishop of York is perhaps referred to more in Tennyson's *Becket*, although he is not very active as *dramatis persona* due to his brief appearance. The positive character of John of Salisbury is of some interest: firstly because it resembles Darley's identical character, secondly because he is (in Tennyson) in many ways superior to Becket. It may be added that Tennyson's characters in general remain blurred to a considerable extent, they are in places detached, indistinct, and vague and so are their deeds.

There are many minor incidents which look almost identical and these are found in both the plots, but much more so in connection with the subplot. Similar vocabulary, in particular archaisms and interjections, intensifies the effect. With some episodes it appears as if Tennyson reduced the length of some of Darley's scenes, however, his are so concise or simplified that the result is unimpressive and insufficient. This concerns e.g. the scene in which the Grand Prior of Templars, Richard Hastings, makes Becket sign the documents. Darley's account of this is much more moving and credible (Darley, 266-67; Tennyson, 54-55). It is hard to come across an incident in Darley which would not be used in a later scene somewhere. Tennyson rarely does this.

It is of course suspicious, that both dramatists use the same romantic subplot based on a late traditional legend. Darley is very faithful to this source (there is no child though), in his play the relationship between the lovers starts, Rosamond is promised to become queen after Eleanor but is murdered exactly as the legend has it. Tennyson presents Henry and Rosamund's love as platonic and absolutely innocent.

Let us list the most striking similarities, including similar incidents performed by different characters:

In Darley, Becket is the architect of the secret Bower, Henry refers to Eleanor as dangerous for Rosamond, John of Salisbury is Rosamond's tutor and visits her in her Bower, Queen Eleanor wants Becket to tell her the way to the Bower which he refuses, Rosamond is given a ring (which is then found by Eleanor), Henry sees Rosamond in the Bower and he has not much time, just one day, Henry kisses Rosamond's hand, Henry reveals to Rosamond that he banished Becket's household, Rosamond pleads for Becket and John of Salisbury, Rosamond talks to young Richard, Eleanor questions young Richard about the Bower and he suspects she is jealous of Rosamond's beauty, Eleanor and Dwerga finally discover the Bower, Walter Mapes prefers prose, Becket changes colour when angry: "Mark'd you how pale and purple Becket grew by turns? ..." (Darley, 305), Darley's Rosamond's white brow is compared to the lily of the valley, and she is called the Fairy Queen by Prince Richard, Becket announces to the crowd that on Christmas day he will excommunicate "Robert De Broke, and Ralph, besides some other odd servants" (Darley, 304), Fitz-Urse criticises the King's "foolery" and women in general, Dwerga makes fun of the Queen after Rosamond's murder: "Fair Rosamond done to death /By cruel Eleanor, that wicked Queen" (Darley, 317), Queen Eleanor kneels by the body of Becket and Rosamond appears as Shade.

In Tennyson, Becket is given the chart of the Bower, Henry wants to save Rosamund's life and Eleanor's soul "from hell-fire" (Tennyson, 7), John of Salisbury is to accompany Rosamund to the Bower, Queen Eleanor wants to know how to get to the Bower and Becket rejects to tell her, Rosamund is given a cross (which is then taken by Eleanor), Henry sees Rosamund in the Bower and they can spend just one hour together, Henry kisses Rosamund's hand, Henry tells Rosamund about Becket's expelled household, Rosamund pleads for Becket, Rosamund talks to her young son, Geoffrey, Queen Eleanor tries to find out from young Geoffrey Rosamund's whereabouts, the boy does not find her pretty like his mother, Eleanor and Fitzurse manage to track down the King to the Bower, Walter Map speaks prose only, Becket turns red when signing the documents: "And when he sign'd, his face was stormy red/ Shame, wrath, I know not what. He sat down there/ And dropt it in his hands, and then a paleness..." (Tennyson, 57), Tennyson's Becket remembers a young sweet girl and calls her the world's lily, Eleanor pretends she is a good fairy to impress the child Geoffrey, Becket's enemies are enumerated in one place, e.g. one of the De Brocs, Robert, a monk who was with Randulf in Canterbury, John of Salisbury reveals his negative opinion of women in general, when Eleanor attempts to kill Rosamund, the latter cries bravely: "Murder'd by that adulterous Eleanor/ Whose doings are a horror" (Tennyson, 159), Rosamund kneels by Becket's corpse in the end.

In fact, there are another two suspicious examples: Rosamund is always called a "minion" by Darley's Eleanor, and Tennyson's Rosamund's enemies would use a more negative "wanton" when referring to her. Yet in one place, just once, nowhere else, Tennyson's Fitzurse calls Rosamund a "minion" (Tennyson, 23). The second case is even more incomprehensible. One of Darley's quite prominent lords and councillors is Earl of Cornwall, the King's friend. Tennyson has no such character, and never refers to him anywhere in the whole play. However, when the anonymous message is left at the gate for Becket to suggest that he should flee to France, Becket assumes he can recognize Cornwall's or Leicester's handwriting (Tennyson, 76).

One would therefore be inclined to claim that not only did Tennyson know Darley's dramatic piece, but he simply chose what he wanted and changed it for his purposes. Tennyson thus made full use of his predecessor's work. Imitating many of the outward features of Shakespearean and Elizabethan tragedy, he imitated even the way most Elizabethans found useful: they looked for sources in the field of literature and always tried to select one of the popular works, whose adaptation would be attractive for the audience. However, Tennyson did not succeed in his adaptation. Darley's play with its vivid characters and ingenious scenes surpasses Tennyson's *Becket* in many ways.

In conclusion, it would be perhaps a good idea to quote a sentence from Hallam Tennyson's account concerning the famous actor, Henry Irving. He was the first to adapt *Becket* for the stage (1893) and played the title role in such a way (Rosamund was most touchingly rendered by Ellen Terry), that Tennyson's tragedy became one of the three most successful plays produced by Irving at the Lyceum:

Assuredly Irving's interpretation of the many-sided, many-mooded, statesman-soldier-saint was as vivid and as subtle a piece of acting as has been seen in our day.<sup>5</sup>

The web of tragical circumstance is provided by the skilful interweaving—for which, we presume, the poet himself is responsible—of the king's love for Rosamund with the jealousy of Eleanor.<sup>6</sup>

The first quotation confirms the fact that it would be false to consider the drama merely a part of literature, for it is a multiple art and great actors and directors may completely change an individual playwright's defects. It would also be fair to add that Tennyson's graceful blank verse must have contributed to the wonderful reception at the time although Darley's blank verse is not without qualities, it is extremely dramatic with surprising animal imagery. Hallam Tennyson's remark in the second quotation concerning the poet (Tennyson) being responsible for "the skilful interweaving" may be viewed as odd and can be interpreted in the way that Tennyson's son himself was dubious about the poet's originality. We need not doubt any longer: Tennyson's *Becket* imitates Darley's *Thomas á Becket*. And as regards "the skilful interweaving", instead of "skilful", "overdone" or perhaps "strongly exaggerated" would sound even more appropriate.

## SOURCES

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Tennyson, Alfred. "Becket", in Hallam Tennyson, ed., *Becket and Other Plays*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1908.

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<sup>5</sup> Tennyson, Hallam. "Notes", in Tennyson, Alfred, *Becket and Other Plays*, ed. by Hallam Tennyson, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1908, 422.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.