

Murder in the Cathedral – Historical Background

One of the most notorious episodes in medieval English history took place at Canterbury Cathedral on 29 December 1170. During evening vespers, Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury and erstwhile friend of King Henry II, was murdered by four of the king's knights, William de Tracy, Reginald Fitzurse, Hugh de Morville and Richard Brito. They are said to have been incited to action by Henry's exasperated words, 'What miserable drones and traitors have I nurtured and promoted in my household who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk!'

Becket's martyrdom was the subject of T. S. Eliot's verse drama *Murder in the Cathedral*, first performed on 15 June 1935 in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral before it moved to a run at the Mercury Theatre in London. Eliot's play drew on the work of an eyewitness to the event, a clerk named Edward Grim who had attempted to defend Becket from William de Tracy's blow. Henry had actually hoped that the appointment of his chancellor, Thomas Becket, as Archbishop of Canterbury, would help him to reassert royal authority over the Church. But the king had not anticipated that Becket would resign as chancellor shortly after he was elevated to the see of Canterbury. The conflict between Henry II and Becket centred on the perennial issue of the balance between royal and papal authority and the rights of the church in England.

Becket's murder sent shockwaves across Western Christendom. The four knights were excommunicated by Pope Alexander III, who ordered them to serve in the Holy Land for 14 years while they sought his forgiveness. Becket himself was canonised in February 1173, less than 3 years after his death, and Canterbury Cathedral became a major site of pilgrimage – Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, from the late 14th century, are testament to the continued popularity of pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas. Henry II, meanwhile, undertook a public act of penance on 12 July 1174. Confessing to indirect responsibility for the murder, he entered Canterbury in sackcloth, both barefoot and mute, and made a pilgrimage to the crypt of St Thomas where he was whipped by the monks while he lay prostrate and naked by the tomb.

"Medieval Manuscripts Blog." *Medieval Manuscripts Blog*. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.
<<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2015/04/murder-in-the-cathedral.html>>.

Murder in the Cathedral – Background of the Play by T.S. Eliot

'The theatre as well as the church is enriched by this poetic play of grave beauty and momentous decision'
— *New York Times*

When the Bishop of Chichester commissioned the poet and dramatist T.S. Eliot to write a play for the Canterbury Festival of 1935, Eliot decided to link his subject matter with the location and chose to write about the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 until his brutal murder within his own Cathedral church on 29 December 1170.

The story is well-known: the conflict between Thomas Becket and his royal master Henry II, which was sparked by the King's secular interference in spiritual matters, culminating in a deadlock between these two strong personalities and the subsequent murder of Thomas by knights loyal to their king, who, legend has it, called out beseechingly in an angry moment, 'Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?'

These are the events which provide the basis of *Murder in the Cathedral*, but it is not told in chronicle format; Eliot structures the story in the manner of a Shakespeare play in which the events matter less than the situations. It examines the conflict between the material and the spiritual worlds, and Becket's journey from spiritual doubt to certainty as he prepares for martyrdom, as well as the effect his actions have on the people of Canterbury.

Interestingly, Eliot had been on his own spiritual journey in the 1930s. There had been a gradual burgeoning of his Christian awareness throughout his poems in this period as his agnosticism faded and his attraction to Catholicism developed. Eliot's growing conversion to the Anglo-Catholic faith contributed greatly to the style of *Murder in the Cathedral*. It is a ritualistic poetic drama, giving the writer an opportunity to consider the inner thoughts and doubts of the central character, Thomas Becket. These thoughts centre on the *nature* of martyrdom; it is not seen as an act of personal glorification, but the acceptance of man's will being subdued to the will of God—the path shown to man by Christ himself.

For the poetic style of his play, Eliot went back to the roots of the drama, Greek tragedy, which was an act of religion, ritual, purgation and renewal. Later, the medieval morality play sought to achieve the same response from its audience by imaginative example, the anonymously written *Everyman* being the masterpiece of this genre. *Murder in the Cathedral's* verse structure is based on the rhythms of *Everyman*, as is the ritual element and the symbolism of the characters. From Greek tragedy, Eliot borrows the Chorus, which comments on and responds to the developing drama.

The Chorus of the women of Canterbury is not however entirely symbolic; it is rooted in humanity and acts as a mirror for the audience to see and hear its own responses expressed. The tempting of Becket in the first part of the play reflects *Everyman's* struggle to overcome his earthly strengths (Knowledge, Strength, Discretion etc) and let his Christian spirit alone prevail over all-conquering death. Eliot was keen to re-invent verse drama, which had largely become moribund in its imitation of Shakespeare, developing its ancient forms to suit a modern play. For instance, he uses the power of modern prose to shock when the knights try to justify their actions.

Murder in the Cathedral is constructed with medieval simplicity:

Part I – Shows Becket's spiritual struggle.

Interlude – His doubts resolved, Becket affirms his beliefs in a sermon preached on Christmas Day.

Part II – Becket's murder, and its meaning and effect on the people.

The Te Deum at the end unites the past with the present in the ever-continuing, unchanging liturgy of the Church. It is an act of ritual worship and prayer, celebrating one man's journey from doubt, through a struggle with pride, to renouncing self-will and embracing spiritual purity.

The play can also be read on another level, as an examination of individual conscience at variance with the State. This theme is most pertinent when one remembers it was written in 1935, when Europe was under the threat of Nazism and Adolf Hitler, and in the years to come, many were to find themselves and their consciences tested.

"Album Reviews." *Naxos Classical Music*. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.

<http://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=NA198412>.

As you read the following excerpts from *Murder in the Cathedral* consider the following: 1.) How does T.S. Eliot use language to paint the physical scene in minds of the audience and what do these verbal cues tell us about how he may have imagined his audience; 2.) What do these monologues/speeches/dialogues tell us about their speakers? How does WHO the speaker is relate to how we should think about WHAT they are saying; 3.) What sorts of major themes do the speakers introduce and what do they tell us about the deeper questions that may be at issue in the play; 4.) How do details such as diction, meter, rhetorical structure, and poetic techniques influence our understanding of the speeches?

The Scene is the Archbishop's Hall, on December 2nd, 1170

Chorus. Here let us stand, close by the cathedral.
Here let us wait.
Are we drawn by danger? Is it the knowledge of safety, that draws our feet
Towards the cathedral? 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, has forced our feet
Towards the cathedral. We are forced to bear witness.
Since golden October declined into somber November
And the apples were gathered and stored, and the land became brown sharp points of death in a waste of water and mud,
The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in darkness.
While the labourer kicks off a muddy boot and stretches his hand to the fire,
The New Year waits, destiny waits for the coming.
Who has stretched out his hand to the fire and remembered the Saints at All Hallows,
Remembered the martyrs and saints who wait? and who shall
Stretch out his hand to the fire, and deny his master? who shall be warm
By the fire, and deny his master?

Seven years and the summer is over
Seven years since the Archbishop left Us,
He who was always kind to his people.
But it would not be well if he should return.
King rules or barons rule;
We have suffered various oppression,
But mostly we are left to our own devices,
And we are content if we are left alone.
We try to keep our households in order;

Why did T.S. Eliot choose to make the Chorus a group of lower-class women? Why must they “wait”?

The lines speak of moving, but why might the women not move?

What do the words “compelled” and “forced” suggest is about to happen?

Note the use of vowels to change the color of the vocal tones of the women here. How does this vocal effect play on the emotions of the audience?

An allusion to Peter’s denial of Christ before the crucifixion. Note: the play reflects many of the events from the story of Christ and his life.

The people of Canterbury have been without Thomas Becket's guidance for seven years. In that time, the Chorus of the women of Canterbury say that there has been political fighting between the king and barons, but most of it is over their heads and has had little effect on their day-to-day lives. Why would the “political fighting” have little effect on them? Do we have similar situations today?

The merchant, shy and cautious, tries to
 compile a little fortune,
 And the labourer bends to his piece of earth,
 earth-colour, his own colour,
 Preferring to pass unobserved.
 Now I fear disturbance of the quiet seasons:
 Winter shall come bringing death from the sea,
 Ruinous spring shall beat at our doors,
 Root and shoot shall eat our eyes! and our ears,
 Disastrous summer burn up the beds of our streams
 And the poor shall wait for another decaying
 October.
 Why should the summer bring consolation
 For autumn fires and winter fogs?
 What shall we do in the heat of summer
 But wait in barren orchards for another October?
 Some malady is coining upon Us. We wait, we wait,
 And the saints and martyrs Wait, for those
 who shall be martyrs and Saints.
 Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping
 the still unshapen:
 I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.
 Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the
 hands of statesmen
 Who do, some well, some ill, planning and guessing,
 Having their aims which turn in their hands
 in the pattern of time.
 Come, happy December, who shall observe
 you, who shall preserve you?
 Shall the Son of Man be born again in the litter of
 scorn?
 For us, the poor, there is no action,
 But only to wait and to witness.

Eliot alludes to the Greek idea of the year. The death in winter and the return of the year in spring. Why the reference to a “ruinous spring” and a “disastrous summer”?

How does the Chorus perceive the coming actions of the play and its part in those actions?

Why has the chorus returned to the idea contained in the opening lines?

The Four Temptations.

<p>Thomas: We do not know very much of the future Except that from generation to generation The same things happen again and again. Men learn little from others' experience. But in the life of one man, never The same time returns. Sever The cord, shed the scale. Only The fool, fixed in his folly, may think He can turn the wheel on which he turns.</p>	<p>What is the importance of this speech addressed to the First Tempter after his entrance and introduction?</p> <p>Do men learn "from others' experience"? Can you think of examples?</p> <p>The "wheel" is referred to several times in the play. What is it and what does it represent?</p>
<p>First Tempter: My Lord, a nod is as good as a wink. A man will often love what he spurns. For the good times past, that are come again I am your man. Thomas: Not in this train. Look to your behaviour. You were safer Think of penitence and follow your master. Tempter: Not at this gait! If you go so fast, others may go faster. Your Lordship is too proud ! The safest beast is not the one that roars most loud. This was not the way of the King our master! You were not used to be so hard upon sinners When they were your friends. Be easy, Man! The easy man lives to eat the best dinners. Take a friend's advice. Leave well alone, Or your goose may be cooked and eaten to the bone. Thomas: You come twenty years too late.</p>	<p>Why such a tone of easy familiarity? What is meant by "a man will often love what he spurns"?</p> <p>Why does Thomas use the same tone of familiarity to reject the Tempter?</p> <p>How does the Tempter alter his tone after the parry by Thomas? Note: The conversations between Thomas and his Tempters are like a fencing match with thrust and parry. Why?</p> <p>What is the temptation of the First Tempter?</p> <p>Why does Thomas so easily reject this first temptation?</p>
<p>Second Tempter: The Chancellorship that you resigned When you were made Archbishop that was a mistake On your part still may be regained. Think, my Lord, Power obtained grows to glory, Life lasting, a permanent possession, A templed tomb, monument of marble. Rule over men reckon no madness. Thomas: To the man of God what gladness? Tempter: Sadness Only" to those giving love to God alone. Fare forward, shun two files of shadows :</p>	<p>What is the temptation offered by the Second Temptor?</p> <p>How does the Second Tempter frame his argument that temporal power is greater/better than spiritual power?</p>

<p>Mirth merrymaking, melting strength in sweetness, Fiddling to feebleness, doomed to disdain ; And godlovers' longings, lost in God. Shall he who held the solid substance Wander waking with deceitful shadows? Power is present. Holiness hereafter. Thomas: Who then? Tempter: The Chancellor. King and Chancellor. King commands. Chancellor richly rules. This is a sentence not taught in the schools. To set down the great, protect the poor, Beneath the throne of God can man do more? Disarm the ruffian, strengthen the laws, Rule for the good of the better cause, Dispensing justice make all even, Is thrive on earth, and perhaps in heaven. Thomas: What means? Tempter: Real power Is purchased at price of a certain submission. Your spiritual power is earthly perdition. Power is present, for him who will wield. Thomas: Whose was it? Tempter: His who is gone. Thomas: Who shall have it? Tempter: He who will come. Thomas: What shall be the month? Tempter: The last from the first. Thomas: What shall we give for it? Tempter: Pretence of priestly power. Thomas: Why should we give it? Tempter: For the power and the glory. Thomas: No! Tempter: Yes ! Or bravery will be broken, Cabined in Canterbury, realmless ruler, Self-bound servant of a powerless Pope, The old stag, circled with hounds. Thomas: Nol Tempter: Yes! men must manoeuvre. Monarchs also, Waging war abroad, need fast friends at home. Private policy is public profit; Dignity still shall be dressed with decorum. Thomas: You forget the bishops Whom I have laid under excommunication. Tempter: Hungry hatred</p>	<p>Interesting note: T.S. Eliot was a great admirer of Conan Doyle's Holmes mysteries. This section moves like a detective story. Eliot has stated that this conversation was purposefully patterned like a conversation in Doyle's "Musgrave Ritual."* Later on the Knights will utilize courtroom jargon to cover their guilt as they answer the question "Who killed the Archbishop?"</p> <p>Note the use of alliteration in the Second Tempter's speeches and his Machiavellian approach to politics. What does that reveal about the Second Tempter?</p>
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<p>Will not strive against intelligent self-interest. Thomas: You forget the barons. Who will not forget Constant curbing of pretty privilege. Tempter: Against the barons Is King's cause, churl's cause, Chancellor's cause. Thomas: No! shall I, who keep the keys Of heaven and hell, supreme alone in England, Who bind and loose, with power from the Pope, Descend to desire a punier power? Delegate to deal the doom of damnation, To condemn kings, not serve among their servants, Is my open office. No! Go. Tempter: Then I leave you to your fate.</p>	<p>This temptation, like the first, seems fairly easy for Thomas to reject. Why?</p>
<p>Third Tempter: I am an unexpected visitor. Thomas: I expected you. Tempter: But not in this guise, or for my present purpose. Thomas: No purpose brings surprise. Tempter: Well, my Lord, I am no trifler, and no politician. To idle or intrigue at court I have no skill. I am no courtier. I know a horse, a dog, a wench; I know how to hold my estates in order, A country-keeping lord who minds his own business. It is we country lords who know the country And we who know what the country needs. It is our country. We care for the country. We are the backbone of the nation. We, not the plotting parasites About the King. Excuse my bluntness : I am a rough straightforward Englishman. Thomas: Proceed straight forward. Tempter: Purpose is plain. Endurance of friendship does not depend Upon ourselves, but upon circumstance. But circumstance is not undetermined. Unreal friendship may turn to real But real friendship, once ended, cannot be mended. Sooner shall enmity turn to alliance. The enmity that never knew friendship Can sooner know accord. Thomas: For a countryman You wrap your meaning in as dark generality</p>	<p>Why would Thomas expect this Third Tempter? How is the speech of the Third Tempter different from that of the first two Tempters? Why the change? Why such little use of rhyme?</p> <p>How does the Third Tempter set himself apart from the first two?</p> <p>What is the tempter suggesting when he states that “we country lords who know the country and ... what the country needs? Do we have modern parallels?</p> <p>What does he suggest about friendship? Can friendship be renewed once it is ended? How?</p> <p>How does Thomas “insult” the Tempter here?</p>

<p>As any courtier.</p> <p>Tempter: This is the simple fact! You have no hope of reconciliation With Henry the King. You look only To blind assertion in isolation. That is a mistake.</p> <p>Thomas: Henry, O my King!</p> <p>Tempter: Other friends May be found in the present situation. King in England is not all-powerful; King is in France, squabbling in Anjou; Round him waiting hungry sons. We are for England. We are in England. You and I, my Lord, are Normans. England is a land for Norman Sovereignty. Let the Angevin Destroy himself, fighting in Anjou. He does not understand us, the English barons. We are the people.</p> <p>Thomas: To what does this lead?</p> <p>Tempter: To a happy coalition Of intelligent interests.</p> <p>Thomas: But what have you If you do speak for barons</p> <p>Tempter: For a powerful party Which has turned its eyes in your direction To gain from you, your Lordship asks. For us, Church favour would be an advantage, Blessing of Pope powerful protection In the fight for liberty. You, my Lord, In being with us, would fight a good stroke At once, for England and for Home, Ending the tyrannous jurisdiction Of king's court over bishop's court, Of king's court over baron's court.</p> <p>Thomas: Which I helped to found.</p> <p>Tempter: Which you helped to found. But time past is time forgotten. We expect the rise of a new constellation.</p> <p>Thomas: And if the Archbishop cannot trust the King, How can he trust those who work for King's undoing?</p> <p>Tempter: Kings will allow no power but their own; Church and people have good cause against the throne.</p>	<p>Who are the "other friends"?</p> <p>How is "We are the people" a genuine temptation?</p> <p>Can you think of modern examples of "powerful" parties that decide who the "leaders" should be?</p> <p>What is the implication in the reply "Which I helped to found"?</p> <p>What is Thomas saying about trust?</p>
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<p>Thomas: If the Archbishop cannot trust the <u>Throne</u>, He has good cause to trust none but God <u>alone</u>. It is not better to be <u>thrown</u> To a thousand hungry appetites than to one. At a future time this may be <u>shown</u>. I ruled once as Chancellor And men like you were glad to wait at my door. Not only in the court, but in the field And in the tilt-yard I made many yield. Shall I who ruled like an eagle over doves Now take the shape of a wolf among wolves? Pursue your treacheries as you have done before: No one shall say that I betrayed a king. Tempter: Then, my Lord, I shall not wait at your door; And I well hope, before another spring The King will show his regard for your loyalty. Thomas: To make, then break, this thought has come before, The desperate exercise of failing power. Samson in Gaza did no more, But if I break, I must break myself alone.</p>	<p>Why elaborate use of rhyme in the opening of this speech?</p> <p>What is meant by “eagle over doves” and “wolf among wolves”?</p> <p>In Gaza, Samson is surround by enemies who wish to kill him. He defeats them. Why would Eliot use this biblical allusion?</p>
<p>Fourth Tempter: Well done, Thomas, your will is hard to bend And with me beside you, you shall not lack a friend. Thomas: Who are you? I expected Three visitors, not four. Tempter: Do not be surprised to receive one more. Had I been expected, I had been here before. I always precede expectation. Thomas: Who are you? Tempter. As you do not know me, I do not need a name, And, as you know me, that is why I come. You know me, but have never seen my face. To meet before was never time or place. Thomas: Say what you come to say, Tempter: It shall be said at last. Hooks have been baited with morsels of the past.</p>	<p>Why does Thomas not expect a fourth Tempter? To whom is he comparing himself?</p> <p>The Tempter’s mysterious introduction hints at something that Thomas may have repressed in himself. What is it and why would Thomas repress it?</p> <p>The first three Tempters were from the past. Why does the Fourth Tempter now review what hast</p>

<p>Wantonness is weakness. As for the King, His hardened hatred shall have no end. You know truly, the King will never trust Twice, the man who has been his friend. Borrow use cautiously, employ Your services as long as you have to lend. You would wait for trap to snap Having served your turn, broken and crushed.</p> <p>As for barons, envy of lesser men Is still more stubborn than king's anger. Kings have public policy, barons private profit, Jealousy raging possession of the fiend. Barons are employable against each other; Greater enemies must kings destroy.</p> <p>Thomas: What is your counsel? Tempter: Fare forward to the end. All other ways are closed to you Except the way already chosen. But what is pleasure, kingly rule, Or rule of men beneath a king, With craft in corners, stealthy stratagem, To general grasp of spiritual power? Man Oppressed by sin, since Adam fell - You hold the keys of heaven and hell. Power to bind and loose: bind, Thomas, bind, King and bishop under your heel. King, emperor, bishop, baron, king: Uncertain mastery of melting armies, War, plague, and revolution, New conspiracies, broken pacts; To be master or servant within an hour, This is the course of temporal power. The 'Old King shall know it, when at last breath, No sons, no empire, he bites broken teeth. You hold the skein: wind, Thomas, wind The thread of eternal life and death. You hold this power, hold it.</p> <p>Thomas: Supreme, in this land? Tempter: Supreme, but for one. Thomas: That I do not understand, Tempter: It is not for me to tell you how this may be so; I am only here, Thomas, to tell you what you know.</p>	<p>already been said by the first three? How does this reflect Eliot's use of Greek Theatre techniques?</p> <p>Be care what you ask, Thomas. The Fourth Tempter now suggests that Thomas could even supplant the King, but with a caveat. What must Thomas do to supplant the King?</p> <p>The Fourth Tempter submits that Thomas has already thought of this. Could the Fourth Tempter be Thomas's own conscience?</p>
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<p>Thomas: How long shall this be?</p> <p>Tempter: Save what you know already, ask nothing of me.</p> <p>But think, Thomas, think of glory after death, When king is dead, there's another king, And one more king is another reign, King is forgotten, when another shall come: Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb, Think, Thomas, think of enemies dismayed, Creeping in penance, frightened of a shade; Think of pilgrims, standing in line Before the glittering jewelled shrine, From generation to generation Bending the knee in supplication. Think of the miracles, by God's grace, And think of your enemies, in another place.</p> <p>Thomas: I have thought of these things.</p> <p>Tempter: That is why I tell you.</p> <p>Your thoughts have more power than kings to compel you.</p> <p>You have also thought, sometimes at your prayers, Sometimes hesitating at the angles of stairs, And between sleep and waking, early in the morning, When the bird cries, have thought of further scorning.</p> <p>That nothing lasts, but the wheel turns, The nest is rifled, and the bird mourns; That the shrine shall be pillaged, and the gold spent, The jewels gone for light ladies' ornament, The sanctuary broken, and its stores Swept into the laps of parasites and whores. When miracles cease, and the faithful desert you, And men shall only do their best to forget you. And later is Worse, When men will not hate you Enough to defame or to execrate you, But pondering the qualities that you lacked Will only try to find the historical fact. When men shall declare that there was no mystery About this man who played a certain part in history.</p> <p>Thomas: But what is there to do? What is left to be done?</p>	<p>What is the "glory" that the Fourth Tempter now cannily suggests to Thomas?</p> <p>Does Thomas begin to realize there is a problem with a personal desire for immortality? Does Thomas begin to see and feel the burden of guilt? How is it reflected in this speech?</p> <p>Why the mention of the "wheel" again?.</p> <p>Thomas will answer this question in his Christmas sermon. (Christian martyrdom is never an accident or</p>
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<p>Is there no enduring crown to be won? Tempter: Yes, Thomas, yes; you have thought of that too. What can compare with glory of Saints Dwelling forever in presence of God? 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 Oh earth, to be high in heaven, And see far off below you, where the gulf is fixed, Your persecutors, in timeless torment, Parched passion, beyond expiation. Thomas: No! Who are you, tempting with my own desires? Others have come, temporal tempters, With pleasure and power at palpable price. What do you offer? what do you ask? Tempter: I offer what you desire. I ask What you have to give. Is it too much For such a vision of eternal grandeur? Thomas: Others offered real goods, worthless But real. You only offer Dreams to damnation. Tempter: You have often dreamt them. Thomas. Is there no way, in my soul's sickness, Does not lead to damnation in pride? I well know that these temptations Mean present vanity and future torment. Can sinful pride be driven out Only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer Without perdition? Tempter: You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer. You know and do not know, that acting is suffering, And suffering action. Neither does the actor suffer Nor the patient act. But both are fixed In an eternal action, an eternal patience To which all must consent that it may be willed And which all must suffer that they may</p>	<p>the design of man. It only happens when one has lost his will in the will of God, and who desires nothing for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.)</p> <p>Considering the above definition of a martyr, why is it logical that Thomas attempts to reject the suggestion of the Fourth Tempter?</p> <p>Why do you think that Thomas continues to struggle here?</p> <p>The Tempter now repeats almost exactly the words Thomas spoke earlier in the play. How do the words reflect that Thomas neither longs for martyrdom nor any other religious dignity, he knows that every human is dictated by God?</p>
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<p>will it, That the pattern may subsist, that the wheel may turn and still Be forever still. Chorus: There is no rest in the house. There is no rest in the street. I hear restless movement of feet. And the air is heavy and thick. Thick and heavy the sky. And the earth presses up beneath my feet. What is the sickly smell, the vapour? the dark green light from a cloud on a withered tree? The earth is heaving to parturition of issue of hell. What is the sticky dew that forms on the back of my hand? The Four Tempters: Man's life is a cheat and a disappointment; All things are unreal, Unreal or disappointing: The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat, The prizes given at the children's party, The prize awarded for the English Essay, The scholar's degree, the statesman's decoration. All things become less real, man passes From unreality to unreality. This man is obstinate, blind, intent On self-destruction, Passing from deception to deception, From grandeur to grandeur to final illusion, Lost in the wonder of his own greatness, The enemy of society, enemy of himself Thomas: Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain: Temptation shall not come in this kind again. The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason.</p>	<p>Once again "the wheel".</p> <p>The Chorus senses uneasiness, but are still unable to physically move. What does that suggest about the events soon to take place?</p> <p>Why such an anti-heroic image of the human condition? Keep in mind that Eliot is reaching back in time to Everyman in the Medieval World and even back to the Greek tragedies.</p> <p>How do we know that Thomas has finally defeated all of the Four Tempters?</p>
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* In Conan Doyle's story, the instructions read as follows:

Whose was it?

His who is gone

Who shall have it?

He who will come

What was the month?

The sixth from the first

...

What shall we give for it?

All that is ours

Why should we give it?

For the sake of the trust (Nicholas "The Murders of Doyle and Eliot").

In Conan Doyle's story, this passage forms the instructions for the "Musgrave Ritual," a mysterious Riddle that contains the directions to the hidden location of the golden crown of Charles I. And while the "month" in Conan Doyle is the month that the crown was concealed (and thus the optimum time to retrieve it, since the one must find the end of a tree's shadow to find the crown), the "month" in Eliot's Play is the month of Thomas' death (Nicholas). When asked in a letter about this clear borrowing from Conan Doyle, Eliot replied, "my use of the 'Musgrave Ritual' was deliberate and wholly conscious"

Weaver, Claire, "He Do the Police in Different Voices: the Influence of Detection Fiction in T. S. Eliot's Works" (2015). *College of William & Mary Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 169.

Reading Questions for students

Many of the following questions are level 1; however, in such a complex piece as *Murder in the Cathedral*, students may need assistance with the "on the line" reading. These questions are formulated to help the students with the basic understanding of the piece. Teachers might wish to consider assigning the questions a section at a time prior to class room discussion.

Act 1

1. In Part One, where does the action of the play take place?
2. What character(s) opens the play with the first monologue?
3. According to the information in the opening monologue, how many years have passed since the Archbishop has left the city?
4. What does the Chorus claim is their purpose in the action of the play?
5. What ruler of England does the Second Priest refer to as "the stubborn King?"
6. What doesn't the Third Priest see in "the art of temporal government?"
7. What important message does the Messenger convey to the Priests?
8. What metaphor does the Third Priest use to compare the relationship between the King and the Archbishop?
9. What are the priests eager to know once the Messenger has delivered his initial message?
10. What is the feeling of the general public in regard to the Archbishop's return?
11. What does the Messenger call the relationship between the King and the Archbishop?
12. What does the Messenger say were the last words of Thomas Becket to the King of England before the Archbishop's exile?
13. What does the First Priest believe was Becket's character flaw that ultimately brought an end to his friendship with the King?
14. After the first scene featuring the three Priests, the Chorus speaks again. What do they wish the Archbishop to do?
15. According to the Chorus, what does the Archbishop bring into Canterbury?
16. How does the chorus define its time in Canterbury since the Archbishop left seven years previous?
17. How does the Chorus describe itself?
18. What does the First Priest compare the women of Canterbury to?
19. What is the first idea that Becket relates to his audience and what does he insist that the Chorus "know and do not know?"
20. Who are the first two characters who speak of "the wheel" on separate occasions?
21. What is the first action that the Second Priest wants to take to welcome the Archbishop back to Canterbury?
22. Who does Becket say may have intercepted his letters and planned his demise?
23. Who does Becket say saved him from the wrath of his enemies?

24. What does Becket claim is the "substance of our first act?"
25. What does the First Tempter tell Becket he remembers?
26. What, according to the First Tempter, "should be more than biting Time can sever?"
27. "The wheel" is spoken of time and time again. In one instance Becket says that "Only the fool, fixed in his folly, may think he can turn the wheel on which he turns." What is the idea of a wheel supposed to symbolize?
28. How does the structure of the dialogue change during Becket's first temptation?
29. What does the First Tempter predict for Becket if he does not "leave well alone?"
30. When will the First Tempter remember Becket?
31. What does Becket call "the springtime fancy?"
32. What position did Becket resign when he was made Archbishop?
33. What is it that the Second Tempter offers Becket?
34. How does the Second Tempter claim real power is purchased?
35. What month does the Second Tempter say Beckett will have power?
36. What does the Second Tempter tell Beckett he will be like if he continues on course?
37. Why does Beckett believe that the local bishops would not support a power move like regaining his Chancellorship?
38. What does the Third Tempter believe upon his arrival?
39. How does the Third Tempter describe himself?
40. According to the Third Tempter, what does friendship depend upon?
41. Who does the Third Tempter represent?
42. What is one thing the Third Tempter and his party want from Beckett?
43. How many visitors did Beckett expect?
44. How does the Fourth Tempter claim Beckett can have ultimate glory and power over the King of England?
45. Why is the fourth visitor the most successful Tempter?
46. What does Beckett claim the Fourth Tempter offers?
47. What idea does the Fourth Tempter repeat that Beckett voiced on his first entrance?
48. According to the Four Tempters, what is man's life?
49. What does Beckett believe to be the last temptation and what he fears the most?

Interlude

1. What are the words Beckett quotes from the Bible?
2. From what Gospel does Beckett quote in the opening of his sermon?
3. In the opening of the Interlude, how does Beckett describe his sermon to the audience?
4. What does Beckett ask the audience to remember about Christmas mass?
5. What, according to Beckett, is reenacted during Mass?
6. What, according to Beckett, is celebrated that day?
7. Which Biblical story does Beckett mention?
8. What Biblical quote does Beckett repeat?
9. What literary tool does T.S. Eliot use throughout the Interlude?
10. Where is the Interlude set?
11. At what time of day does the sermon take place?
12. What does Beckett call his congregation?
13. Beckett asks the congregation to think about the meaning of what word?
14. Why does Beckett believe the thought of the angels bringing peace is strange?
15. Whose idea is being echoed when Beckett talks of the promise of peace being "a disappointment and a cheat?"
16. What might be the purpose of the Interlude?

17. According to Beckett, who was the Lord speaking to when he said, "My peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you?"
18. What are the ways that Beckett defines peace?
19. What is an effective speaking tool that Beckett uses in his speech?
20. According to Beckett's speech, what was the fate of the disciples?
21. What does Beckett believe about the peace that the world was promised?
22. Defined by Beckett, who was the first martyr whose sacrifice is celebrated the day after Christmas?
23. Why does Beckett believe we should celebrate martyrs?
24. Who is the only one who can bring Beckett peace?
25. According to Beckett, are the ways you cannot define a martyr?
26. What is the best way to define the style in which T.S. Eliot wrote the Interlude?
27. How does Beckett feel about martyrs?
28. To Beckett, what is martyrdom?
29. What does Beckett see himself as, in reference to his definitions of martyrdom?
30. Which specific Canterbury martyr does Beckett ask the congregation to remember?
31. What may be one of the reasons for this sermon?
32. Knowing what you know about the situation Beckett is in and his character traits, what might be the most likely way to describe Beckett's state of being after his last speech to his flock?
33. What is another observation Beckett has about his approaching murder?
34. What would Beckett have the congregation do?
35. How does Beckett close his sermon?
36. What is the best way to describe what Beckett seems to feel for his congregation?
37. Why does Beckett tell the people that he may never preach to them again?
38. What are the reasons Beckett would allow himself to be killed?
39. Looking at the clues in the Interlude, which Tempter proved to be the most successful?
40. Why was the Tempter successful?
41. How was the Tempter unsuccessful?

Act 2

1. What season does the Chorus speak of at the beginning of Part II?
2. What are the Priests doing when they enter?
3. What does each priest bring in?
4. When is Holy Innocents Day?
5. What word do the Priests continually mull over?
6. Where were the Knights before they came to Canterbury?
7. How does the First Knight respond when the First Priest offers them dinner?
8. What is the purpose of the Knights' visit?
9. What is the irony that Beckett points out to the Priests upon his entrance in Part II?
10. What is one way the Knights describe Beckett?
11. How might you define the Knights on their entrance?
12. What are the things the Knights compare Beckett to?
13. To whom are the Knights loyal?
14. Who protects Beckett from physical harm when he is first attacked?
15. Where does Beckett insist that the crimes against him should be formally stated?
16. What are the specific crimes against the King that the Knights speak of?
17. According to Beckett, who condemned the bishops?
18. What part of the Knights' claim does Beckett doubt to be true?
19. When Beckett mentions the shepherd and his fold, who or what is he referring to?
20. Who or what does Beckett say has final word over the King?

21. What does the Chorus continue to reference in the speech that begins, "I have smelt them, the death-bringers..."
22. What are the major sentiments of the Chorus' "death-bringer" speech?
23. According to Beckett, what can mankind not bear much of?
24. How do the priests finally get Beckett to go to the altar?
25. What does the scene change to when the Priests and Beckett exit?
26. What do the Priests compare the Knights to?
27. What does Beckett demand of the Priests?
28. Beckett believes he has already conquered the beasts; how will he have his final triumph?
29. When the Knights are taunting Beckett, where do they continually ask him to go?
30. Who does Beckett parallel himself with when he says "blood for blood?"
31. Which Knight does Beckett single out as a Traitor?
32. What image does the Chorus keep referring to in their speech as Thomas Beckett is killed?
33. What does the First Knight ask the audience for after they kill Beckett?
34. When the Knights speak, how does the format of the play change?
35. Who does the first Knight believe the audience is rooting for?
36. What is the major point that the Third Knights wishes to relate to the audience?
37. What, according to the Second Knight, is in the English spirit?
38. How does the Second Knight believe violence is justified?
39. What is the major question the Fourth Knight asks of the audience?
40. What did the Fourth Knight call Thomas Beckett?
41. What does the Fourth Knight believe was the cause of Beckett's death?
42. What do both the Priests and the Chorus do after Beckett is killed?
43. What is the last thing that the Chorus asks from God?
44. What is the last thing the Chorus asks Beckett to do?

The Interlude, one of the only two prose sections in the play, is a fascinating interjection into the drama for several reasons. It sums up the play's basic philosophy/theology, reveals how fully Thomas has been altered in Act I, and connects the play to the rituals of both tragedy and the mass.

...

Some of the ideas in the sermon also echo those of Greek tragedy. At its core, Greek tragedy embodies a similar contradiction as that of saint celebration. It looks mournfully and honestly on the unfortunate forces of the world that destroyed individuals, while simultaneously celebrating those individuals who stayed strong in the face in those forces. In many ways, this is the message of the sermon. We celebrate those individuals who were strong enough to die for God and vanquish their personalities for God, but we also mourn that the iniquity of the world required their death. What Eliot's play has that Greek tragedy lacks is the lynchpin of faith. Greeks did not celebrate in the promise of afterlife in their tragedies, while the Christians for whom Eliot writes celebrate someone like Becket not only for his strength, but because he reminds them that they will be rewarded for their own strength in heaven.

"MPENGLISHVICAS." : *Murder in the Cathedral- Analysis*. Web. 23 Mar. 2016.
 <<http://mpenglishvicas.blogspot.com/2014/07/murder-in-cathedral-analysis.html>>.

Carefully read the sermon. In a well-written essay, discuss how Eliot uses literary techniques to sum up the philosophy of the play, how Thomas has been altered by the events in Act I, and how the elements of Greek tragedy contribute to our understanding of the sermon and Thomas himself.

The Archbishop *preaches in the Cathedral on Christmas Morning* , 1170

'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' *The fourteenth verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Luke*. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear children of God, my sermon this morning will be a very short one. I wish only that you should ponder and meditate the deep meaning and mystery of our masses of Christmas Day. For whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord; and on this Christmas Day we do this in celebration of His Birth. So that at the same moment we rejoice in His coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. It was in this same night that has just passed, that a multitude of the heavenly host appeared before the shepherds at Bethlehem, saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men'; at this same time of all the year that we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and His Passion and Death upon the Cross. Beloved, as the World sees, this is to behave in a strange fashion. For who in the World will both mourn and rejoice at once and for the same reason? For either joy will be overborne by mourning, or mourning will be cast out by joy; so it is only in these our Christian mysteries that we can rejoice and mourn at once for the same reason. 'But think for a while on the meaning of this word 'peace.' Does it seem strange to you that the angels should have announced Peace, when ceaselessly the world has been stricken with War and the fear of War? Does it seem to you that the angelic voices were mistaken, and that the promise was a disappointment and a cheat?

Reflect now, how Our Lord Himself spoke of Peace. He said to His disciples 'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.' Did He mean peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbours, the barons at peace with the King, the householder counting over his peaceful gains, the swept hearth, his best wine for a friend at the table, his wife singing to the children? Those men His disciples knew no such things: they went forth to journey afar, to suffer by land and sea, to know torture, imprisonment, disappointment, to suffer death by martyrdom. What then did He mean? If you ask that, remember then that He said also, 'Not as the world gives, give I unto you.' So then, He gave to His disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives.

Consider also one thing of which you have probably never thought. Not only do we at the feast of Christmas celebrate at once Our Lord's Birth and His Death: but on the next day we celebrate the martyrdom of His first martyr, the blessed Stephen. Is it an accident, do you think, that the day of the first martyr follows immediately the day of the Birth of Christ? By no means. Just as we rejoice and mourn at once, in the Birth and in the Passion of Our Lord; so also, in a smaller figure, we both rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs. We mourn, for the sins of the world that has martyred them; we rejoice, that another soul is numbered among the Saints in Heaven, for the glory of God and for the salvation of men.

Beloved, we do not think of a martyr simply as a good Christian who has been killed because he is a Christian: for that would be solely to mourn. We do not think of him simply as a good Christian who has been elevated to the company of the Saints: for that would be simply to rejoice: and neither our

mourning nor our rejoicing is as the world's is. A Christian martyrdom is no accident. Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. Ambition fortifies the will of man to become ruler over other men: it operates with deception, cajolery, and violence, it is the action of impurity upon impurity. Not so in Heaven. A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. A martyrdom is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom. So thus as on earth the Church mourns and rejoices at once, in a fashion that the world cannot understand; so in Heaven the Saints are most high, having made themselves most low, seeing themselves not as we see them, but in the light of the Godhead from which they draw their being.

I have spoken to you today, dear children of God, of the martyrs of the past, asking you to remember especially our martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege; because it is fitting, on Christ's birth day, to remember what is that Peace which He brought; and because, dear children, I do not think I shall ever preach to you again; and because it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr, and that one perhaps not the last. I would have you keep in your hearts these words that I say, and think of them at another time. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.