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## MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL: A DRAMA OF SELF CONFLICT



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### INTRODUCTION

The subject of the play is taken from twelfth century. Theobald, the old archbishop of Canterbury was the most powerful man; Henry II (1130-1189) was the king who ruled in England from 1154 to his death in 1189. He was anxious to replace him, after his death, by Thomas Becket proved his ability to be an efficient and glamorous character. Henry II wanted to exploit the Church for his own political ends through Thomas Becket, but the latter opposed all those illegal matters and became the victim of king's anger which made him run away to France to avoid the risk to his life.

Thomas Becket was firm on the question of power of the Church. This insulted the king. The reconciliation of two friends at once became apparent. King warned him of severe actions against his obstinate behaviour.

*Murder in the Cathedral* is a drama of self-conflict but Becket being the great Archbishop proves superior to this Tempter who helps us by contrast to understand the grandeur, greatness

### Abstract

*"Death will come only when I am worthy  
And if I am worthy, there is no danger  
I have therefore only to make perfect my will"*  
- Thomas Becket

*Murder in the Cathedral is T. S. Eliot's full-length play. It was written for the Canterbury festival of June, 1935. It is a religious drama dealing with the story of Thomas Becket; the Archbishop of Canterbury ended his life for the safety of churches in England.*

**Keywords:** *Murder In The Cathedral , political ends , illegal matters .*

### Short Profile

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and nobility of his character. He is haunted by these Tempters who "gather their forces for a united attack on him"<sup>1</sup>

The first Tempter reminds him of all good time which they had spent together in the past. He knew him as old Tom, gay Tom, Becket of London and the true friend of Henry II. There was also much wit, wine and wisdom. Now the first tempter persuades him to become the friend of Henry II once again. Priests

and Laymen may again enjoy themselves in peace. Thomas Becket, without being affected by his words, says that what he has talked of belongs to the past. He advises him that men do not care to learn from the experiences of others, but in the life of the individual the past never returns, so one should try to free oneself from the shackles of the past. Thus one gets alienated from one's past self:

*But in the life of one man, never  
The same time returns. Sever*

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*The cord shed the scale. Only  
The fool, fixed in his folly, may think  
He can turn the wheel on which he turns.<sup>2</sup>*

The endless effort of convincing him goes in vain. Thomas Becket replies to him that he has come twenty years too late and rejects the pleasures of his youth as well as him. Thomas does not allow his past to interfere with the present. What he was is a history; the present being is a fact. There is wide gap between his two selves – past and present. It becomes difficult for Thomas Becket to accept the earlier self, being the Archbishop. It is a conflict between the self of his youth and the self of higher vice, pride.

Thomas Becket escapes from one and is joined by the Second Tempter reminding him of their earlier visit to Claredon, Northampton and Montmirail in Maine. According to him, it is his mistake to be the Archbishop rather than having the opportunity as the Chancellor. But the mistake can be corrected if he accepts it now. The Tempter thinks that it is the power that brings glory, which lasts all the life and is permanent possession; it is the power that can disarm the wicked and dispense justice. The power is to be enjoyed in the present. On the other hand, Thomas warns him that the spiritual power means ruin or a voluntary servant of powerless Pope. He rejects loftiness of power:

*Power with the King-  
I was the king, his arm, his better reason.  
But what was once exaltation  
Would now be only mean descent?<sup>3</sup>*

The Tempter leaves him alone to his own fate. In the course of time his choice is changed. Here it is a conflict between a self of the Chancellor and that of the Archbishop. What he did in the past is worldly, what he does now is spiritual.

The Third Tempter advises Thomas Becket on particular politics telling him that they are the backbone of the nation and not intriguing Barons

who dance around the king and live upon him. The continuation of friendship does not depend upon oneself but upon circumstance which are the backbone of the nation and not intriguing Barons who dance around the king and live upon him. The continuation of friendship does not depend upon oneself but upon circumstances which are determined by a man's own actions. He explains the present situation- King in France, in Anjou and is surrounded by his sons hungry for the throne. The Tempter says that they are the Normans and England is a land over which the Normans should rule. He leads "To a happy coalition of intelligent interest" for removing the cruel rule of the king over the Bishop's court as also over the Barons. Thomas Becket disclaims the Tempter saying that if, being an Archbishop, he cannot trust the King, and how can he trust those who plot against the King. He condemns him:

*Shall I who ruled like an eagle over doves  
Now take the shape of the wolf among  
wolves?  
Pursue your treacheries as you have done  
before:  
No one shall say that I betrayed a King.<sup>4</sup>*

His denial to a happy coalition with the Normans describes his loyalty towards the King. He does not want to be a 'wolf'. Perplexity of his mind is due to a 'Norman' and a 'loyal friend' in him. His ideals and loyalty do not allow the Norman to plot against the King.

The Forth Tempter who is an unexpected visitor now stands before Thomas to lead him to the right path. He requests him to pay no attention to the previous visitors because temporal power is an ephemeral thing. Spiritual power is different from kingly commands, pleasures, intrigues and tricks. According to him, Thomas Becket has power to bind both King and Bishop under his heel. The worldly power has a short life, the spiritual power is eternal. When the king dies he can be replaced

by another king but Saints and Martyrs rule even after their deaths. Thus he appeals to him to make the lowest on the earth to be the highest in heaven. Thomas Becket realizes that it is the temptation of his own desires and has often dreams. The Forth Tempter echoes Becket's own thought that the action and suffering are the same.

7.Ibid, P-258.

Thus, all the Tempers are imaginations or diversions of his own mind. "Becket's suffering comes after the temptation, and it really constitutes also the reconciliation."<sup>5</sup> It is the conflict of his four selves which settles at the last which is his real or present self. He leaves his parents self, goes into that particular trance, recollects the reminiscences which he experienced before and then again comes towards the original self. David Ward rightly comments on Thomas's self conflict:

*"In Murder in the Cathedral the antagonist is split into four tempters, but as is made clear in many ways, the four are merely different manifestation of one antagonist."*<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the four Tempters are his four alienated selves which make it difficult for him to choose the right path. He escapes from all the temptation for making his way clear. His last temptation was the greatest deception, 'to do the right deed for the wrong season.'<sup>7</sup>

#### REFERENCES:

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- 3.Ibid, P-250.
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