
UNIT 1 T.S. ELIOT'S ESSAYS AND OTHER WORKS RELATED TO THE PLAY

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: Life and Works of T.S. Eliot
- 1.2 Dramatic Experiments : *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Rock*
- 1.3 Eliot's essays relevant to his plays
- 1.4 Eliot's Poetic dramas
- 1.5 Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will familiarise you with T.S. Eliot's:

- a. Life and works
- b. Dramatic experiments : *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Rock*
- c. Essays relevant to his plays; and his
- d. Poetic dramas

1.1 INTRODUCTION : LIFE AND WORKS OF T.S. ELIOT

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on 26th September, 1888. William GreenLeaf Eliot (Eliot's grandfather from his father's side) was one of the earliest Eliot settlers in St. Louis. He was a Unitarian minister. Unitarianism arose in America in the mid eighteenth century as a wave against Puritanism and its beliefs in man's innate goodness and the doctrine of damnation. Unitarianism perceived God as kind. In 1834 William GreenLeaf Eliot established a Unitarian church in St. Louis. He was also instrumental in setting up Washington University there.

Of the fourteen children born to William GreenLeaf Eliot and his wife, only four survived. Henry Ware Eliot, Eliot's father, was the second of the surviving children. He graduated from Washington University and worked for a grocery business for a short while. Later, he joined a brick making firm of which he eventually became the chairperson.

In 1869 T.S. Eliot's father, Henry Ware Eliot, married Charlotte Champe Stearns who was a school teacher in St. Louis. She was involved in social work and advocated women's rights. T.S. Eliot was the youngest of the six children born to Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Stearns. The first four were girls and nine years separated Thomas and his brother, Henry. T.S. Eliot's mother was profoundly influenced by her father-in-law, William GreenLeaf Eliot. She raised her children

according to his values. He was a strong believer in self denial and public service. When T.S. Eliot was sixteen his mother published a biography of William Greenleaf Eliot and dedicated it to her children, "Lest They Forget."

T.S. Eliot started school late – at the age of seven or eight – because he was a sickly child suffering from "congenital hernia." Eliot went to a school in St. Louis until 1905. Later, he went to Miller Academy at Massachusetts for a year. He joined Harvard at the age of eighteen. By the time Eliot was in Harvard he had broken away from the strong Unitarian influence at home and had become indifferent to the church. While at Harvard from 1906-1910 Eliot began writing. In 1908 Eliot read Arthur Symon's book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* which introduced him to the poetry of La Forge. From La Forge Eliot learnt to confess through voices and to dramatise irrational thoughts. He was struck by Symon's call for a spiritual vision to eclipse the realistic tradition,

It was in a student magazine, *The Harvard Advocate* that Eliot published his first poems at the age of twenty. Later, Eliot said that the form he adopted in 1908 and 1909 was directly derived from his study of La Forge as well as from Elizabethan drama in its later phase. Between 1909-1912 Eliot wrote a group of poems, later published in the collection, *Prufrock and Other Observations*. These poems dealt with the "New Boston" of Eliot's youth. Unlike the "old Boston" of Puritan values with which Henry James was associated, Eliot's Boston was decadent and corrupt. It was very unhealthy, highly commercialised with an influx of immigrants. Failing to find life among equals Eliot went into slum areas. He deliberately moved in squalid places. His poems pick up the images of "cigarettes butts," "broken glass" "dirty windows" etc. "Preludes" written about 1910 picks up several sordid images. St. Louis had been a peaceful phase in Eliot's life. In a certain way, the move from St. Louis to Boston had changed Eliot.

In his last year at Harvard Eliot wanted to get away from his life there, and his family's persistent questions about his career. He went to Paris. Through Symons, Eliot had already developed an interest in French poetry. While at Paris, Eliot attended several lectures by the French philosopher Henri Bergson at the College de France. By February 1911, Eliot was disillusioned with Paris. He felt the city was drab like London. Many of his poems pick up the drab appearance of modern cities.

In 1911, Eliot returned to Harvard and entered graduate school in Philosophy. In 1913 he had become the President of the Philosophy Club. A year later, in 1914, while Eliot's doctoral thesis was still incomplete he went to Oxford on a travelling fellowship to study Aristotle for a year under Harold Joachim, at Merton College. The first world war broke out in 1914. Eliot took up a school teacher's job at High Wycombe Grammar School at Oxford to supplement his income.

Eliot met several important literary personalities in England. An introduction from Conrad Aiken had led him to meet Ezra Pound. In 1916, Eliot met Clive Bell and through him the Bloomsbury group. Eliot's stay in London was important in his life for another reason too. It was here that he met Vivienne Haigh-Wood whom he later married. They were both twenty six when they met.

In 1917 Eliot gave up teaching and entered the foreign department of Lloyd's Bank where he worked until 1925. In 1921, Eliot wrote the draft of his most famous poem *The Waste Land*. The poem was edited by Pound and published in *The Criterion* in 1922.

The year 1927 was a turning point in Eliot's life, in that, it was in this year that he became a British citizen and also joined the Anglican Church of England. He was drawn to the Church of England because Anglicanism acknowledges that the truth of the scriptures is only dimly traced and must be verified by individual judgement. Of course, Eliot's growing attachment to the English past was yet another reason for

joining the Church. At the time of Eliot's conversion he was 39 years of age. In his preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* Eliot stated that he was "a Classicist in literature, Royalist in Politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion."

After 1927 Eliot's poetry was different. Although the first phase of his poetry also talked of the spiritual world implicitly, in the second phase – after his conversion – his poetry became more religious. Poems like "Journey of the Magi," "A Song for Simeon" and "Ash Wednesday" express this. In this same group of religious writings also fall *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Rock*. Much Later, in 1939, Eliot published his essay on the idea of a Christian Society to communicate his views on the subject of religion.

Eliot returned to America in 1932 for the first time (since a brief visit in 1915) to lecture at Harvard and Virginia. These lectures were later published in *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* and *After Strange Gods*. Around this time Eliot was also developing an interest in drama. Of course, he had earlier helped in publishing his mother's long dramatic poem, *Savonarola* and in 1920 was persuaded by Pound to translate the *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus.

The year 1933 was a difficult year for Eliot. He left his wife Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Her neurotic, sickly condition which started a few months after their marriage made it impossible for Eliot to continue with the marriage. Vivienne died in 1947 in an asylum. Several years later in 1957, Eliot met Valerie Fletcher and married her. Eliot was happy in this marriage.

In 1936, three years after Eliot left Vivienne, his second collected poems appeared containing the first of the Four Quartets "Burnt Norton." With *The Four Quartets* (1935-1942) Eliot reached the peak of his historical, spiritual works. Since then, he seems to have devoted himself above all to dramatic poems and to essays in Social and Christian philosophy.

Five plays followed Four *Quartets*: *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1957)

In 1948 Eliot was awarded the order of merit and the Nobel Prize for literature. He died in London in 1965 and as desired by him, his ashes were buried in the village of East Coker in England from where his ancestor Andrew Eliot had emigrated to America. On his grave is a plaque saying, "In my End is my Beginning."

1.2 ELIOT'S EARLY DRAMATIC EXPERIMENTS : *SWEENEY AGONISTES AND THE ROCK*

Sweeney Agonistes : Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama

Sweeney Agonistes is a long poem in dramatic form. It was first published as two fragments. The first, "Fragments of a Prologue" was published in the *New Criterion* of October 1926 and the "Fragment of an Agon" in January, 1927 under the general title of *Wanna Go Home Baby?*. The title picks up the language of the English pubs in the 1920s. *Sweeney Agonistes* contained two epigraphs from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and St. John of the *Cross* pointing to the Greek and Christian focus of the work. The first one dramatises the hero's haunting by the furies. The second refers to the soul's need to divest itself of the love of created beings. Both these themes appear in *Murder in the Cathedral*. When the fragments were published in 1932 in a book form, the two epigraphs were retained but the title had changed into, *Sweeney Agonistes : Fragments of an Aristophanic Drama*,

By combining Sweeney with *Agonistes* Eliot was trying to interface Milton's *Samson Agonistes* with Sweeney's situation in modern times. Samson Agonistes is in exile in an alien world, who brings that world down around his own head to destroy evil. Sweeney is also a spiritual exile in an alien world and he too destroys part of himself in attacking the world. Eliot's readers are familiar with Sweeney who has been used in several contexts to suggest man at his most elemental level.

In a sense the play is a commentary on the postponement of religious awakening in modern times. The world to which the audience of Samson Agonistes would return to was world war shocked London but seen through the eyes of the "sensational press." The view of humanity is like reading **News of the World**, a Sunday weekly, which catered to popular taste. In the early twenties, **News of the World** specialised in graphic accounts of crimes in Britain at that time.

Sweeney Agonistes has been called "*Aristophanic*" in the sense that it combines comic surface satire with the ritualistic celebration of birth and death. It is melodramatic in the sense that it uses music hall tradition and flat characters, inflated emotions and overdramatised situations,

Interestingly, although the Sweeney fragments had a title of their own, Eliot felt that they could not really stand alone. When he gathered his poems together for the Collected Poems volume 1936, he placed Samson Agonistes in a section called "Unfinished Poems" and it still remains in that state today.

Sweeney Agonistes is based on life in modern times. Doris and Dusty are two lower middle class London prostitutes. When the dramatic poem begins Doris and Dusty are debating about whether they should invite Pereira – the one who pays the rent for the apartment – to the card party that they are giving that night. They decide not to invite him, because he can't be trusted. When the phone rings Doris and Dusty panic because they know who the caller is. Dusty informs the caller Pereira, that Doris is sick and can't attend to the phone. Pereira insists, I-is insistence in meeting Doris and Dusty suggests his identity as a spiritual pursuer. These people are viewed negatively in Eliot's works because they can't accept the agony of purgation.

At the party two other characters show up "Cap" Horsfall and "Loot," Sam Wauchope with their former war friends Klipstein and Krumpacker – American business men visiting London. The party is fraught with doubt and distrust as the card game continues. We get a foreboding of death and violence. The party guests decide to go to a nearby pub. Sweeney Agonistes is the pub keeper. Unlike the other characters, Sweeney is not a flat character. He introduces the dimension of tragic horror into the world of Dusty and Doris and others. He heightens their feelings of distrust by narrating a story about the murder of a girl. Slowly all leave the pub with the exception of Doris and Sweeney asks her "Wanna Go Home Baby?" She goes back home with him and is later found murdered in a bath fulfilling the forebodings of the card game. Later, Sweeney too is discovered murdered.

Sweeney Agonistes may have been the first dramatic venture by Eliot but it is an important experiment:

- a. It is the first dramatic version of the theme of spiritual pilgrimage, a recurrent theme in his plays,
- b. It introduces contemporary rhythms and diction into poetic drama. Jazz and telephonic conversations are used. This is in keeping with Eliot's beliefs that the new drama should combine poetry with entertainment. In the 1920s in England, a popular mode of entertainment was the vaudeville. It was here that Jazz was heard. He also felt that Jazz was an important art because it still kept a social unity in the relationship between the performers and the audience that had disappeared in other forms of dramatic art.

Jazz had a special appeal to Eliot because it not only symbolised the superficial elements of a modern materialistic society but it also touched the primitive side of man's nature in its throbbing rhythms,,

- c. It stresses the agony of saints.
- d. It introduces a chorus to voice communal feeling and deals with one of his central themes – that of spiritual conflict; and growth in an exceptional human being and its relations and repercussions in the lives of ordinary people. Relationships are worked out in terms of spiritual awareness.

The Rock

This was a pageant play which opened on May 28th, 1934 at Saddler's Wells Theatre, London. It was written to raise funds to build new Anglican churches for the growing suburbs. The theme of the pageant is the building of the church. Eliot was writing under the direction of E. Martin Browne whom he had already met in 1930 when he was staying with Bishop George Bell at Chichester. The play's versification is modelled on the medieval English play *Everyman*. For form he was indebted to Greek tragedy.

The scenario for the pageant was outlined for Eliot by Browne and Webb-Odell. In his essay, *The Three Voices of Poetry* Eliot states that he merely filled in the words. When Eliot published his poetic collections, he included only the choral passages of *The Rock*.

The play opens with the Chorus lamenting the temporal order gaining ascendancy over the spiritual. In modern times, the church is seen as having a limited value. A group of workers enter and point out that building a church is a different experience from building a bank. There is a certain commitment that is emotional which goes with the former. The Saxons enter at this point and explain the history of Christianity and its introduction into England. The Chorus reminds the congregation of contemporary times to keep the flag of Christianity up by building churches,

Soon we come to know of the various challenges facing the church. For one, the land given for church building is not good. For another, a Marxist comes and creates an uproar by stating that the funds given for Church building should go into building homes for the needy. We are also reminded about the Danish invasion of England and the persecution of early Christians. Hearing about all this the Chorus almost falls into despair but the character, Rock, brings them out of it by pointing to the power of the eternal over the temporal.

In the final scene, the construction of the church is shown as completed, throwing light upon darkness.

Eliot was involved with some aspects of this play's production as he was with all his later plays.

Importance of *The Rock* as a Dramatic Experiment

Although, in his *Three Voices of Poetry*, Eliot stated that the Chorus in *The Rock* did not have any voice of its own, the Chorus in this work is important,

- a. The Chorus consists of seven men and ten women wearing half masks to emphasize their "impersonality," "The "Rock" is a character. The Chorus was trained and coordinated by Elsie Fogerty, principal of the Central School of Speech and Drama, and her colleague, Gwynneth Thurburn.

- b. The Chorus is both a vehicle of social commentary and a dramatic instrument for piercing through the level of philosophic and theological implications of the actions.
- c. The idea of suffering of the person who acts, the need to perfect one's will, and the conflict between eternal and temporal orders, are things seen in *Murder in the Cathedral* which was written a year later in 1935.

1.3 ELIOT'S ESSAYS RELEVANT TO HIS PLAYS

T.S. Eliot's essays on drama can be divided into three parts: First, the Elizabethan essays which discuss the criteria for drama. Second, his assessment of the situation in contemporary theatre and third, Eliot's statements about his ideal of poetic drama. It is important to remember that most of Eliot's essays were written before the first performance of his first play. Only a few were written after he had established a reputation as a dramatist.

Shakespeare is a central focus in Eliot's essays on the Elizabethans. He recognised Shakespeare's genius and he found his use of the blank verse particularly innovative. Shakespeare's verse rhythms picked up the colloquial speech of his age. In *The Music of Poetry* (Glasgow: Jackson, 1942), Eliot states that "Shakespeare did more for English language than any other poet adapting drama to colloquial speech." Shakespeare's verse rhythms, he argues, reflected a world in which reality was not fragmented. But, Eliot remarks, that in the formless nature of modern age, Shakespeare's verse rhythms do not apply. In *The Waste Land* Eliot had stated that writers after Shakespeare should evolve their own verse styles instead of imitating Shakespeare. The failure of verse drama in the nineteenth century, Eliot argues, was because their verse rhythms were not tied to colloquial speech of the time. His views on this subject are expressed in his book *Poetry and Drama* (Cambridge, MA : HUP, 1951). About Eliot's own struggles to get away from Shakespeare he discusses in his essay, "The Need for Poetic Drama." (Listener 16-411, 25 Nov. 1936 : 994-995).

Apart from his comments about the Elizabethans, Eliot also wrote several essays assessing the state of contemporary theatre. One of the major problems in contemporary theatre Eliot states in "A Dialogue on Poetic Drama," (Eliot Selected Essays 31-45) was the fact that unlike the Elizabethan and Restoration periods (or even earlier), where there was a moral code that the dramatist shared with the audience, in the modern age there was no such moral code. This distanced the modern dramatists from their audience's sensibilities. Moreover, the fact that the standard modern plays were made for the actors, Eliot felt, made it difficult for poetic drama to be effective. In his essay on "The Duchess of Malfi : and Poetic Drama," (*Art and Letters* 3.1 Winter 1919/20 : 36-39), he says, "the successful presentation of a poetic play like Webster's or Shakespeare's demands that the actor not try to improve or interpret the script – rather, that he efface his personal vanity.

While advocating the need for a poetic drama in modern times, Eliot stated that "A new dramatic literature cannot come about until audiences and producers can help poets write for the theatre ("Audiences, Producers, Plays, Poets" *New Verse* 18 Dec. 1935 : 3-4). The actor, Eliot said, should be selected and trained early for the purpose of speaking verse drama. Similarly, "Poets who write for the stage cannot simply learn about the theatre and fill scripts with poetry: they must learn to write a different kind of poetry, in which the implicit speaker is not the poet himself – as is the case with ordinary poetry – but someone else" ("The Future of Poetic Drama." [Journal of British Drama League, London] 17, Oct. 1938 : 3-5). Eliot was at pains to point out that poetry should not be merely ornamental in drama and that style and matter should be suited to each other in poetic drama. He says : "Good poetic drama is not

simply a play translated into verse but rather a play wholly conceived and coinposed in terms of poetry, embodying a pattern like that of music" (*Poetry and Drama* Cambridge, MA : HUP, 1951). For Eliot the highest aim of poetic drama is to bring us to the border of those feelings which can be expressed only in music without leaving the everyday world of dramatic action.

The reason why Eliot found poetic drama important was because he believed that "Poetry is the natural medium for drama, providing the intense excitement that the abstractions of a prose play cannot offer" ("The Need for Poetic Drama," *Listener* 16-411, 25 Nov. 1936 : 994-995). Eliot credits Yeats and the Abbey Theatre for the revival of the genre. In Eliot's view, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekov were good poets who were constrained by the limits of prose. He also believed that if modern dramatists used verse for their works the mundane world would be transformed, giving meaning and order to its chaos.

Eliot's Other Essays Relevant to his Plays

a. "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

This essay has raised great debate and controversy. In it, Eliot says, that the contemporary reader praises "a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles any one else." Eliot protests against such an approach to literature. He argues that it arises from a misunderstanding of the concept of originality. For Eliot, the best part of a poet are those parts where his predecessors "assert their immortality most vigorously." What Eliot means here is that when a poet goes by a past tradition, his individuality is shown more through the unique manner in which he incorporates something which is of the past tradition to his work which is of contemporary value. Hence his statement, "[a new work of art is not] merely valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value.

b. "The Three Voices of Poetry"

Eliot describes the three voices of poetry as follows:

1. "The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody."
2. "The second voice is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small."
3. "The third voice is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character."

Eliot adds that "The distinction between the first and the second voices ... points to the problem of poetic communication; the distinction between the poet addressing other people in either his own voice or an assumed voice ... points to the problem of the difference between dramatic, quasi-dramatic and non-dramatic verse."

1.4 ELIOT'S POETIC DRAMAS

- a. **The Family Reunion** was published in 1939. This play is based on the Greek myth of **Orestes**, but transformed into a contemporary setting. Orestes was pursued by the furies for the murder of his mother. Here there is no real

murder, only the suggestion that for the Christian to contemplate a curse was to commit it.

- b. **The Cocktail Party** published in 1949 was written for the Edinburgh festival. The play may appear to be a comedy but beneath its humour lies the decadence of any large city in a disillusioned age, like the modern age.
- c. **The Confidential Clerk** written in 1954 was inspired by Euripides' *ION*. The story has a complicated plot and is set in modern times.
- d. **The Elder Statesman** (1958). In this some of the themes of Sophocles' **Oedipus at Colonus** are transformed into a modern setting. The play was performed at the 1958 Edinburgh festival.

1.5 EXERCISES

- a. What were the important influences on Eliot's life that had an impact on his works?
- b. Give an account of Eliot's views on Poetic Drama.
- c. Understanding key concepts:
 - What is Eliot's notion of Tradition and the Individual talent.
 - What are the three voices of poetry that Eliot talks about in his essay by the same name?
- d. What are the titles of the plays written by Eliot? What strikes you as significant in these titles?
- e. Write a note on the significance of Eliot's early dramatic experiments: *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Rock*.

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- e. Write a note on the significance of Eliot's early dramatic experiments: ***Sweeney Agonistes and The Rock***.

UNIT 2 BACKGROUND, PRODUCTION AND PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Historical background to the play
- 2.2 General summary of the play
- 2.3 Production History of *Murder in the Cathedral*
- 2.4 Explanation and Critical comments of the lines from the 1st Choric entrance upto Becket's arrival in Part I of the play.
- 2.5 Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to acquaint you with the

- a) Historical background to the play,
- b) Production History of the play : and to provide
- c) Explanatory comments of the lines from the 1st Choric entrance upto Becket's arrival in Part I of the play.

2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

George Bell, Bishop of Chichester saw *The Rock* and admired it. He asked Eliot to write a play for the Canterbury festival of 1935. *Murder in the Cathedral* was a product thereof. The play premiered in 1935 and was directed by E. Martin Browne. Interestingly, it was the wife of Martin Browne who gave the play its present title. Eliot had considered calling the play *Fear in the Way*.

The play deals with the martyrdom of Thomas Becket-one of the greatest of English saints-who was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162-1170. He was murdered in his own Cathedral by knights who claimed to be loyal to the king.

For his historical source, Eliot used the eye witness accounts of eleven monks who wrote down their versions of the murder at Canterbury. Since *Murder in the Cathedral* is not a chronicle play, Eliot offers little about the constitutions of Clarendon or the coronation ceremony which created the rift between Henry II and Becket.

The year of the composition of the play (1935) is also important because in Europe there was a lot of tension building up which finally erupted in World War II.

2.2 GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

CHARACTERS : A Chorus of Women of Canterbury
Three Priests of the Cathedral
A messenger
Archbishop Thomas Becket
Four Tempters
Four Knights
Attendants

SETTING: The first scene is the Archbishop's Hall ,on December 2, 1170. The second scene is in the Cathedral, on Dec. 29, 1170.

GENERAL SUMMARY : The play begins in early December, 1170 with the Chorus, which comprises of the poor women of Canterbury. They fear something terrible is going to happen with the return of Thomas Becket - Archbishop of Canterbury - from exile. The Archbishop was returning after seven years of exile in France (1164-1171). Disagreements with his friend and King, Henry II over the authority of the church vis-à-vis the state had led Becket to his exile. Earlier, as Chancellor, Becket was on the King's side. However, when he was also made into an Archbishop by King Henry II (in the hope that the church and state could function together under the king's control), Becket made it known to the king that his loyalties were first to God and only then to the King.

The priests are confused about the way the state is run without the guidance of the Archbishop's authority. A messenger arrives and states that Becket is returning from France. The priests get curious about the terms of his return. They feel that even if Becket's return is a "patched up affair" with the king it is better for the people than his absence for the past seven years.

Becket enters in a peaceful way yet aware of the dangers involved in his return to Canterbury. Soon four tempters come to tempt him. The first tempter, tempts Becket with the time in his past when he was friends with the king. He tells him to go back to those days and forget about his spiritual intensity. Becket overcomes this temptation, which he considers as no temptation because it comes " twenty years too late." The second tempter comes and tempts Becket with the time when he was the Chancellor to the king and enjoyed secular and political powers. He tells Becket that real power is in this world and not in the next. Becket turns away from him too. The third tempter is a little different. He tells Becket to team up with the Church and the Barons against monarchy. Becket overcomes this temptation saying, "no one shall say that I betrayed a King." Becket finds the temptation of the fourth tempter most difficult to overcome. He is an unexpected visitor. He tempts Becket with his own pride the pride of achieving martyrdom. Thomas tells him "who are you tempting with my own desires?" It is after this last temptation that Becket almost sinks into despair: "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness, / Does not lead to damnation in pride?"

The Chorus in part I reflects the sick nature of the state. The tempters talk about the unreality of human kind and even the priests begin to fear Becket's strong position. Part I ends with Becket rising above it all. He places himself in God's hands and becomes more clear about the nature of his struggle and what he should do.

The Christmas sermon, is a prose interlude. In it Archbishop Becket talks of Christian paradoxes relating to birth and death and sets the stage for his own martyrdom.

Part II begins with the Chorus in a more optimistic mood. The priests are still waiting for the eternal pattern to emerge. The four knights come from France claiming that they have urgent business with the King. They accuse Becket of ingratitude to King Henry II who made him the Archbishop. This ingratitude is expressed in Becket insisting on the power of the church over the state. Becket politely defends himself against these accusations arguing that loyalty to God does not imply disloyalty to the King. The knights ask Becket to leave England but he refuses saying that he has the sanction of the Pope in Rome.

Becket leaves and the Chorus talks about the church / state conflict and the tragedy that will ensue. The priests request Becket to hide in the Cathedral in case the knights return again. Becket refuses but the priests drag him in. The Chorus prays for him. The knights return in a drunken state and accuse Becket of treason, disobedience and embezzlement of funds among other issues. The priests try to block their entrance but Becket states that God will protect him. The knights murder Becket and the Chorus laments along with the priests. But they feel that the church is strengthened by Becket's martyrdom. The knights address the audience arguing that their loyalty to the king made them implement their act. The priests dismiss the knights as "lost souls" and the Chorus praises God for making them understand the divine pattern of action through Becket's martyrdom. They ask for forgiveness for not submitting their will to God earlier, They ask for the mercy of God and Christ and for the prayers of Becket who is now Saint Thomas.

2.3 PRODUCTION HISTORY OF ELIOT'S MURDER IN *THE CATHEDRAL*

The play premiered on 15 June, 1935 at Canterbury's fourteenth century Chapter House. This was about fifty yards from the spot where Thomas Becket was killed in 1170. There were seven performances. The Canterbury productions were community affairs, with local businesses, schools, and Cathedral personnel all taking part.

Robert Speaight, who starred as Becket, describes the Chapter House : "The building has a certain Gothic bleakness, which was suitable enough to the play but which somehow forbade enjoyment" (Speaight, Robert. "Interpreting Becket and Other Parts. " In *T.S. Eliot : A Symposium for His Seventeenth Birthday*. Ed. Neville Braybrooke. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries P, 1958: 70-80. This book recounts experiences of acting in Eliot's plays).

The play was directed by E. Martin Browne, who also played the fourth tempter and one of the knights, Browne revised Eliot's text slightly to enable the four tempters to double up as the four knights, for production reasons. George Bell, who had seen and admired *The Rock* commissioned the play for the Canterbury Festival of Music and Drama. This festival also produces other versions of Becket's martyrdom: Laurence Binyon's *The Young King* which depicts the reign of Henry II after Becket's death and Tennyson's *Becket*.

Kenneth W. Pickering in *Drama in the Cathedral* examines the twenty year old tradition of Canterbury plays. The chapter on *Murder in the Cathedral* presents a basic overview of the play and details about its original performance. Other chapters examine the history and context of the play's sponsor, the Canterbury Festival and explores the background of Modern Christian drama.

Browne recalls decades later that to the theatre as it then was, the play was a non-event. It was religious and so no scout or manager came. "The only English theatre man interested was Ashley Dukes, owner of the tiny Mercury in Notting Hillgate."

Stella Mary Pearce, who had also worked on *The Rock* designed the costumes. Since the walls of the Canterbury Chapter House were painted in cold colours, strong designs for the costumes were used. They were not always historically accurate. The Chorus in sight for the whole play, was "given garments which provided for as much variety of appearance as possible. They had unshaped robes divided vertically into two shades of green and decorated with strong patterns in deep red and blue, giving the effect of figures of early stained glass." (E.Martin Browne *The Making of T.S.Eliot's Plays* Cambridge : CUP,1969).

The knights wore traditional medieval dress based on a reconstruction of the heraldry on the Black Prince's tomb of the actual murderers. Priests wore Benedictine habits and Becket wore a habit and a travelling cloak. The tempters' costumes were dominated "by bright yellow colours and included a suggestion of a modern-day type of each temptation, combined with the necessary medieval flavours." (Browne,1969).

The Canterbury production was an abridged version of the text Faber & Faber first published in 1935. This was so because the original performance had to be limited to ninety minutes. The only stage property was a simple throne. The tempters entered from screens on both sides of the stage and all other entrances were through the audience from the large oak doors at the back of the Chapter House. After the murder Becket's body was carried out in a procession through the audience.

During World War II the play was quite popular in England and was presented in makeshift venues-- cathedrals and churches, schools and an air raid shelter. In 1959 Eliot stated that he wrote the play as "anti-nazi propaganda" expressive of "the desire to save the Christian world from the attacks of rival secular ideologies."

In 1970 Browne produced the play within the actual cathedral at Canterbury to mark the 800 year anniversary of Becket's martyrdom. Modern sound equipments made this possible.

Eliot wrote the screenplay for George Hoellering's 1952 film version of *Murder in the Cathedral* and spoke the role of the fourth tempter(as an off-screen presence).

The play's performance reviews were good. Conrad Aiken wrote about the Canterbury premiere under the pseudonym Samuel Jeake, Jr. in *The New Yorker* : [It is possibly] "a turning point in English drama-one felt that one was witnessing a play which had the quality of greatness... one's feeling was that here at last was the English language literally being used, itself becoming the stuff of drama, turning alive with its own natural poetry."

2.4 EXPLANATION AND CRITICAL COMMENTARY OF THE LINES FROM THE 1ST CHORIC ENTRANCE UPTO BECKET'S ARRIVAL IN PART I OF THE PLAY

PART I CHARACTERS

A Chorus of Women of Canterbury
Three Priests of the Cathedral
A Messenger
Archbishop Thomas Becket
Four Tempters
Attendants

SCENE

The Archbishop's Hall. December 2, 1170.

Chorus: The play begins with the Chorus standing near the Cathedral. They are very apprehensive about Becket's return from France. As poor women of Canterbury, they have already gone through a lot of suffering yet they don't feel safe. They feel that something ominous is about to happen and they have been forced against their will to bear witness.

With the passage of time from autumn to winter and the collecting and storing of apples, the New Year waits, whispering about the destiny awaiting Becket. It is almost seven years since Becket left them. He was very kind to the people and yet they feel that his return is not going to be a good sign. Whether the king rules, or the Barons rule, these women have gone through a lot of oppression. But in general they are left alone and they prefer it. They are content doing their domestic chores. Life goes on with the merchant making his money, the labourer toiling on earth. All prefer to be unobserved. With the arrival of Becket they rear disaster. Everything is going to be upset. They wait just as martyrs have also waited. God alone knows their destiny. They claim to have seen all what they know about the future in a "shaft of sunlight." All that they can do is to wait.

Critical Commentary on the First Choric Speech

The play opens at a critical moment with the unexpected arrival of Becket after seven years of exile in France. The Chorus which comprises a group of "poor women" of Canterbury and who also represent humanity in general, expresses "fear." One of the choric functions is to create the atmosphere of doom -akin to Greek tragedy. The original title of the play was *Fear in the Way*. The "fear" that the Chorus expresses in a sense also relates to the political moment of the play. Eliot wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935 when the tensions leading to World War II and Nazism was already strongly felt.

The Chorus who has gathered together like the congregation attending a Christian mass use the term "wait" in its opening speech in various ways. For example, the New Year waits, Martyrs wait and the Poor Women of Canterbury wait. "Waiting" is an important concept in Christianity. The "Holy Spirit"-- which is part of the Holy Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-- appears often in the form of a breeze. If you are prepared and ready and waiting, this breeze will have an impact on you. In a sense, these Women of Canterbury are waiting without preparation like the five foolish virgins in the Bible (Refer to the parable of the ten virgins in the Gospel of St. Matthew in the New Testament of the Bible). What draws these "poor women" to the Cathedral is physical safety rather than any spiritual ties.

Ironically, although these "poor women" of Canterbury keep saying that no one bothers about them, Thomas, does bother. The reason why the Chorus is forced to bear witness against its will is because it takes both parties to complete a sacrifice. The saint and those he saves. Those whom the martyrdom benefits must accept the fact. This is what the Chorus has to learn. They must not "deny their master." The second verse of the Chorus speech picks this up. Christ died for the sins of humanity, in order to save it. Unless human beings realize this, we are not saved and Christ's sacrifice has no meaning.

The reference to the seasons in verse 2 of the Chorus refers to the temporal dimension in which human beings live a meaningless existence without any relation to the "still point" that is God. The first draft of *Murder in the Cathedral* started with this line which paralleled the opening lines of *The Waste Land* ("April is the cruellest month...")

When the Chorus talks about remembering the martyrs and saints who wait and question as to who will acknowledge them, they are talking about the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (All Hallows). When these feasts were celebrated did the

people of Canterbury really remember them?. Peter (One of Christ's twelve disciples) too denied his master, Christ. In the Gospel of St. Mark-- in the New Testament of the Bible-- we are told that Peter stretched out his hand on fire and denied Christ.

We are next given the historical background. The Archbishop is returning after seven years of exile in France (1164-1170). The Chorus' statements about being left alone to do its own things parallels *The Waste Land* where the characters do not want to be disturbed from their inertia by spring. Later, the attitude of the Chorus changes. It learns that spiritual regeneration involves sacrifice. It learns that the monotonous kind of life that they are living at the temporal level is going to be changed by Becket's martyrdom which will give their life a new meaning. Through out this choric speech we get the feeling that the "poor women" are living at the temporal level only. They follow the linear concept of time. Statements like "What shall we do in the heat of summer" refer to their emptiness. Yet the Chorus knows that "Destiny waits in the hand of God." It is God who controls everything and not the statesmen at the temporal level. The Chorus is also very prophetic. They state that death will come from the sea. The knights who killed Becket did come from the sea across France. Compare the intuition of the chorus of having seen things in a "shaft of sunlight" with Becket's statement that they speak better than they know.

Towards the end of their speech when they mention Christ and the notion of regeneration, they are comparing Becket with Christ. A Christ like figure has to perish in every age to save humanity.

By the end of the play the Chorus progresses from fear in the opening passage to glorifying God at the end. *The fluctuations of the Chorus are the true measure of Thomas' spiritual conquest.*

Conversation among the **Three Priests** and the Messenger following the Chorus' first **speech**.

The first Priest says that it is seven years since the Archbishop left England. The second Priest asks what the Archbishop and the Pope can do about the conflict and intrigues between King Henry II and the French King which have been discussed in endless meetings and deferred conferences? The third Priest comments on the state of temporal government which is full of duplicity and thrives on appropriation of wealth. The first Priest wonders why people cannot remember their God in heaven and forget such violence and duplicity. Soon a messenger enters and states that the Archbishop has arrived on the shores of England and that he had been sent to prepare the Priests to welcome him. The first priest asks the messenger if the feud between the King and Archbishop--two proud men, has ended. The third Priest wonders what peace can be expected between "the hammer and the anvil." The second Priest wants to know from the messenger if "old disputes" are at an end and whether it is "peace or war?" The first Priest is still not clear whether the Archbishop is coming with the consent of King Henry II or because of his spiritual support from the Pope in Rome and the love of the people in England. The messenger states that the Priests are right in asking these questions and that the Archbishop comes not with any consent from the king of England but with support from both the Pope in Rome and the king of France and most importantly, due to the "devotion of the people." Again, the first Priest inquires "Is it war or Peace?" and the messenger says that it is not peace but a "patched up affair." He also states that he has heard that when the Archbishop left France he told the French King "I leave you as a man / whom in this life I shall not see again." This does not augur well. The messenger exits after stating this.

The first Priest fears for the Archbishop and the Church. He says that he has seen the Archbishop as Chancellor working closely with the king. People loved him but he was "always isolated." His "pride" was "always feeding upon his own virtues." He had contempt for earthly power and wanted to be subject to God alone. He ends his

speech by saying that if King Henry II had been weaker or greater, perhaps things would have been different between him and Becket.

The second Priest states that whatever it is, the Archbishop has returned to his people who have been waiting for a long time for him. The Priest then goes on to say that the Archbishop who is at one with the Pope and the King of France would give them orders as to what should be done. He would give them all directions. Therefore, they should welcome and rejoice his coming. The third Priest says whether the outcome is good or bad it is better that the Archbishop is coming. At least the wheel is now turning.

Critical Commentary on the Passage Summarised **Above**.

The Priests are numbered and not named. This is significant in that they become representatives of a class. Ironically, even though the Priests stand for the Church, they lack the vision of the Chorus and discuss mundane state / church issues. Is Eliot trying to associate them with institutionalized religion? The speeches of the Priests (especially the second Priest) expose us to the historical situation in the play which is necessary for our understanding of the conflict between Henry II and Becket. However, since Eliot's play--unlike Anouilh's--focuses on Becket's martyrdom, the King does not appear in the play at all. Becket's "pride" is discussed by the Priests. This is important. One of the things that Becket has to shed in his move towards martyrdom is "pride." Thomas was not born a saint. He has to get rid of his pride. The last temptation is the most difficult one. When the first Priest talks about Becket's "isolation," we have to keep in mind Kierkegaard's category of the individual as the communicator of truth. The communicator of truth can only be an individual and it can be addressed only to the individual. For truth consists precisely in that conception of life which is expressed by the individual. The crown is "untruth." Truth is subjective. This could be one reason why Becket does not even listen to institutionalized religion as symbolized by the Priests. Even when the Priests shut the door against the Knights, Becket opens them. He must bear witness. He must validate his own truth even if it personally destroys him.

The messenger's description of the welcome that the Archbishop gets on arrival in England echoes Christ's triumphal entry in Jerusalem when people hailed him saying "alleluia, King of the Jews," and "strewed his path with palm leaves."

The messenger's remark that Becket told the French King that he would not meet him in this life again is close to the historical statement. *Eliot, like Shaw in St. Joan is careful to use words actually spoken by the historical character wherever possible.* Becket's other remark, "not if I were to be torn asunder, limb by limb would I relinquish this journey . . ." makes us realize that the third temptation is really no temptation because Becket is already willing to die for the cause of martyrdom and he knows what he is doing.

The second Priest's remark that we should rejoice in the Archbishop's arrival since "I am the Archbishop's man" echoes the four Knights, who murder Becket and claim to be the King's men. The second Priest is a little too optimistic. He has to learn that peace and security come through suffering. The third Priest is not so hopeful. Neither attitude is correct. Reconciliation involves conflict between good and evil,

The third Priest is important because he is the one who states the epitaph on the Knights, "Go, weak sad men, lost erring souls, homeless in earth or heaven." In the third Priest's speech the image of the wheel is also used. Unless man's will is in harmony with God's will, can the wheel turn smoothly around the still point. If this is not the case then the wheel is at a standstill. Eliot's theory of depersonalization in poetry explained in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" fits in with the process of martyrdom in which one surrenders one's will to God.

The last few lines of the third Priest before the second choric entrance is a quotation from the Ecclesiastes, (Chapter 12, verses 3-4, Bible) which talks about the end of things.

Summary of the second Choric Speech

In this Choric speech, the Chorus tells Becket to return to France and leave it "to perish in quiet." It fears cataclysmic changes if Becket continues to stay in England. The time is not right as yet for Becket's return. The Chorus wants to continue to live the way it has in the past seven years. It has gone through ups and downs when crops have failed and droughts have occurred. However, it carried on with life observing the religious feasts and has seen "births, deaths and marriages." Even in these seven years these women of Canterbury have had fears of various kinds but nothing like the fear they now sense and can't face. It is a "final fear which none understands." They tell Becket that he is not aware of the implications of his return to England and its impact on their lives: "do you/realise what it means/To the small folk drawn into the pattern of fate,/the small/folk who live among small things."

They plead with the Archbishop to leave and say that he will be their Archbishop even in France.

Critical Commentary on the Chorus's second Speech

The Chorus begins its' speech quoting from St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament: Chapter 13, Verse 14. Their speech is full of morbid images and colours "evil the wind," "grey the sky," "rotten the year" etc. In this speech the Chorus emerges as very selfish. It fears for itself. Later on it grows and learns to express concern for Thomas. The phrases "we do not wish anything to happen" and "Living and Partly living" echo Eliot's *The Waste Land*. These poor women-- who are so poor both economically and spiritually-- do not wish anything to happen. They never come to grips with their lives which makes for greatness. They are also not in communion with the still point which gives one identity. They live at the linear, temporal level of time. Christ had said that "man can't live by bread alone." This is precisely what these women are doing. The empty routine of their lives is recaptured as in "East Coker" of *The Four Quartets*. There is an inner emptiness, a death march: "Silent funeral nobody's funeral for there is no one to bury." As in "East Coker" here too the poor women of the Chorus have not lived at all. They have existed only on a superficial temporal level.

To the women of Canterbury "death" is frightening. This can only be so if death is not seen as part of a larger pattern. The Chorus has to learn the fact that Becket's death through martyrdom is necessary for their birth. What the Chorus fears is beyond their comprehension. In this second speech of the Chorus we see a change in it. It recognises its own guilt "tarnished frame of existence." When the Chorus states: "Archbishop, secure and assured of your fate," they have fear and no understanding of what is to befall them. It is important to note that the Chorus refers to itself as small folk who live among small things at the temporal plain and do not want to be drawn into the eternal pattern of fate.

The Chorus here is like the Chorus in Greek drama. Like the Chorus in Sophocles' Antigone which fears the conflict between state and the individual, act, inspired by divinity, here too the Chorus fear the church/state conflict.

Summary of Second Priest's Speech

The second priest chides the "poor women" of Canterbury for babbling foolishly. He tells them that the Archbishop is about to arrive at any moment and the crowds in the streets will be cheering. He tells the chorus not to "croak" like frogs and to put up

pleasant faces whatever their "craven apprehension" may be and to give a hearty welcome to the Archbishop.

Critical Commentary on Second Priest's Speech

The second Priest uses a lot of animal imagery when he scolds the "poor women" of Canterbury represented by the Chorus. This is significant. These women are leading an animal like existence away from the "still point" that is God. In the Christian hierarchy animals are lower down in the scale. Human beings are at the top of God's creation. Lower down are animals and still lower, is vegetation. The Chorus has to spiritually evolve into higher levels of existence to be one with the "Still Point."

2.5 EXERCISES

1. Outline the historical background of the play.
2. Critically comment on the importance of the first two choric speeches.
3. Discuss the significance of the conversation among the Priests between the first two choric speeches.
4. Is there any development in the first two speeches of the Chorus?

UNIT 3 : CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE PLAY PART -I

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Explanatory and Critical Notes on Part I of the play from Becket's first appearance upto the temptation scene in Part I
- 3.2 The Significance of Becket's silence after the temptations.
- 3.3 Explanatory and Critical Notes on Part I of the play from the Choric passage following the exit of the fourth Tempter upto the end of Part I
- 3.4 Important aspects of Part I
- 3.5 Exercises.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to provide you with

- a) Explanatory comments on Becket's first appearance in the play upto the end of the temptations in Part I.
- b) It also highlights the significance of Becket's silence after the temptations, and provides
- c) Explanatory comments from the Choric passage following the exit of the fourth Tempter upto the end of Part I.

3.1 EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL NOTES ON BECKET'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN THE PLAY UPTO THE END OF THE TEMPTATION SCENE IN PART I

Thomas' Dialogues with the Priests before his Temptations

Thomas **enters** with the word "peace" and tells the Priest to let the Chorus alone because it "speaks better than it knows," and what it says is beyond the understanding of the Priests. He then goes on to say that the women of Canterbury do not know about action and suffering except the fact that "neither does the agent suffer /nor the patient act" **The women** are fixed in the wheel of eternal action in which all must consent to the will of God for the wheel to move in harmony.

The second Priest apologises to Becket saying that he did not see him coming because he was **involved** with the chatter of the "poor women." He says **that** he would have been better prepared otherwise. However, seven years of Becket's absence has already prepared him for his arrival which seven days in Canterbury would not have done. He then tells Becket that he will light the fires in Becket's room to ward off the December cold **and** that Becket will **find** his rooms as he left them.

Thomas thanks the second Priest and says that he will leave the rooms the way he got them. But these are all "small matters," he says. He informs the Priests that there are enemies all around. Even his arrival in England could have been prevented by "Rebellious bishops, York, London, Salisbury." All of them had helped in the coronation of Henry II's successor without the permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Warenne, and the Sheriff of Kent tried to oppose Becket's return and Broc was the one in whose house the Knights stayed before and after the murder. Becket says that it was the Dean of Salisbury who helped him cross the sea "unmolested."

To the first Priest's question whether the enemies are still following, Becket replies that this peace is temporary and that they will attack at the first opportunity. The "end will be simple, sudden, God-given," he observes. Meanwhile, he says that one has to overcome other problems in preparing for the event.

Critical Commentary on the above passages

Becket's first word "Peace" as he enters is very significant. In the play all the characters strive for "Peace" in different ways. The knights think that by killing Becket they can obtain "peace", the Priests think that they can obtain it by escaping. The Chorus feels that it can obtain "peace" by avoiding witnessing Becket's martyrdom. Becket is the only character who achieves true "peace" by conscious submission to the "Still Point."

Becket's speech about acting and suffering is very important in understanding the Christian process of martyrdom:

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer
They know and do not know, that action is suffering
And suffering is action. Neither does the agent 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 will it,
That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.

What Becket means by this is that in the long run there is no question of deciding to either act or to suffer passively. There is no distinction between making a decision and passivity. Becket's very passivity is action and even that does not belong to him but is one with God's will. *It is the divine pattern that is important not individual acting and suffering since God is ultimately in control. This control is not to be confused with predestination. Man has the free will to accept or to reject God's plan.* Becket is tempted to do the latter but he overcomes the temptation. Human beings must submit to God's plans for them. Becket's role in this pattern is to accept martyrdom while the role of lesser mortals as well as the Chorus is to humbly recognise the need for that sacrifice. Only when man's will is in complete harmony with the divine will can the wheel turn smoothly around the "Still Point." Suffering is not simply undergoing misery and pain. It is also permitting, consenting and submitting. He who consents to an action must suffer for it and accept responsibility. The Chorus, like the common man, understands no such responsibility. At the point in the play the Chorus says, "for us the poor, there is no action." But during the course of the play it learns to participate in the action, "I have consented Lord Archbishop."

When Becket says, "Neither does the agent suffer/nor the patient act," he is the agent in one sense. He sets the wheel rolling. In another sense he also suffers to be killed. But yet at another level, he is neither the agent nor the patient since action and

suffering proceed from God's will and not his own. This is again the reason why Becket, referring to his enemies says, "For a little time the hungry hawk/Will only soar and hover, circling lower,/Waiting excuse, pretence, opportunity./End will be simple, sudden, God-given." He refers to his murderers as "hawks" highlighting the animal nature of this being. Becket is aware that no plotting can succeed until God wills his death. Becket's awareness parallels Christ's response, "My hour is not yet come." Like Christ, Becket too must first face temptation. He says this is more difficult than death. Meanwhile, "All things prepare the event. Watch."

Explanation of the Temptation Scene

The first Tempter calls Becket, "Old Tom, Gay Tom, Becket of London," and reminds him of his past when he was friends with the King. Now that Becket has again patched up with the King, he asks him whether the "Clergy and laity may return to gaiety" of flirting in the meadows and enjoying life with all its pleasures. Becket responds by saying that the Tempter speaks of past seasons and that "in the life of one man, never / The same time returns." The first Tempter insists that the good times have come again with Becket's peace with the King. Becket chides him saying, "look to your behaviour." The first Tempter says that earlier Becket was kinder on sinners and that he should take friendly advice from him and choose a comfortable life and forget martyrdom. Becket tells him that he comes twenty years too late. To this the first Tempter says that he will leave Thomas to his "higher vices" and leaves. After the Tempter leaves, Becket comments that if one hoped that the past will return then one gets distracted from one's duties in the present.

The second Tempter enters suggesting a compromise with Henry and reminds Becket of their amity. He refers to the historical context when the constitutions were presented to Becket at Clarendon and he faced the full force of the temptation of compromise with the King. In Northampton the King summoned him to account for money spent during Becket's Chancellorship. Here too Becket could have done the easier thing and submitted to the King. At Montmirail, another attempt was made to coax Becket to surrender to the King's point of view. The second Tempter states that if one weighs the balance between the "not too pleasant memories," and the "good memories" in his position as the Chancellor the "late one's rise!" He states that Becket, whom all acknowledged should "guide the state again." Becket is intrigued by his meaning and asks the Tempter to clarify. The second Tempter continues to stress the point that Becket should regain his "Chancellorship" and that it was a big mistake to have given it up. As a Chancellor, Becket will gain power and glory over men. To this Becket states "To the man of God what gladness?" The Tempter states that it is "sad" that the man who had real power on earth should fight for spiritual power in the next world by "giving love to God alone." To this Becket enquires "Who then?" and the second Tempter states if he take back his chancellorship he and the King can work together. They can help the poor, strengthen the laws of the country, dispense justice. What more can man do on earth for God? Becket asks "What Means?" The Tempter states that this could be achieved by compromise. This is because "Real power/ is purchased at the price of a certain submission." Becket rejects it and the Tempter tells him that by choosing the position of Archbishop and serving God, Becket is a "realmless ruler" bound to a "powerless Pope." He carries on by saying that men have to manipulate and manoeuvre. Even Kings need loyal friends to work with at home.

Becket replies by saying that he had excommunicated the Bishops for assisting King Henry II in his son's coronation which was the prerogative of the Archbishop. To this the second Tempter says that "Hungry hatred / Will not strive against intelligent self-interest." Becket responds by asking, "What about the Barons?" The Tempter responds by saying that the King and chancellor have to work together against the barons who are their enemies. Becket dismisses the second Tempter by saying that why should he "Descend to desire a punier power" by serving the King over God. The second Tempter also leaves unsuccessfully. He recognises that Thomas is

suffering from Pride in his own spiritual position. He says to him, "Your sin soars, sunward, covering King's falcons." After he leaves, Becket ponders over what he has said and says that maintaining order at the temporal level is to arrest disorders and to descend to the temporal level "would now only be mean descent." At this point the third Teinpter enters who is a representative of the Barons. He enters saying that he is not a courtier or a politician but a "rough straightforward Englishman, "a" country lord" who knows what the country needs." He even alleges that they are "the backbone of the nation." Becket asks him to proceed with what he has to say and the Tempter continues by saying that friendship should be convenient "unreal friendship may turn to real / But real friendship, once ended, cannot be mended." Becket replies by saying that for a countryman he speaks like a courtier. The third Tempter continues by saying that since Becket's friendship with King Henry II cannot be mended, he should now form new alliances. Becket who dearly loved the King, his friend feels the loss of the friendship and exclaims : "O Henry, O my King!"

The Teinpter carries on by saying that the King in England is not at all powerful. His French link with his wife makes him susceptible to his sons stealing his kingdom, We the barons, he says are for England. Both Becket and the Tempter are Normans, unlike the King, who is from Anjou in France. "Let the Angevin I Destroy himself, fighting in Anjou." he suggests a "happy coalition/ of intelligent interest." For him, (who represent the Barons) Church favours is an advantage and Pope's blessing "Powerful protection / In the fight for Liberty." The third Teinpter says that if Becket joined their powers then they could put an end to "tyrannous jurisdiction" of the King's court over the Bishop's and the Baron's court helping both England and Rome in one stroke. Becket claims that he helped to form it. The Tempter states that it is a new coalition that is needed now. Becket states that if he cannot trust the King then why would he trust the King's undoers? The Tempter says that the King will trust only his own power and no one else's. The church and those against him have every right to come together to fight the king. In this case, Becket says that if he cannot trust the King then it is better to trust God alone. He recalls that when lie was a chancellor, these very people waited on him even in the "tilt-yard," (Becket was a great horseman in his early days). Becket argues why lie who ruled like an "eagle among doves" now rules as "wolf among wolves? He dismisses the third Tempter by saying, "no one shall say that I betrayed a King."

The third Tempter leaves saying that he hopes the King will acknowledge Becket's loyalty to him. After the third Tempter leaves, Becket says that the thought of breaking the power of the King has crossed his mind before but he has rejected it because lie dearly loves the King and he trusts God. He further says, that to break the King's power at this point he would like what Samson achieved in Gaza when he pulled down the pillars of the house in which three thousand Philistines had gathered to watch him perform feats of strength: and so pulled down the same destruction on himself. If Becket were to act against the King now it would fall short of Samson's triumph, and would only destroy himself.

The fourth Tempter enters. Becket does not expect him "Who are you? I expected / Three visitors, not four." The fourth Teinpter says that lie always "Precedes expectation" and that the King will never trust "twice" the man who was his friend and betrayed him. He warns Becket about the offer made by the third Teinpter who represents the Barons saying, "Kings have public policy / Barons private profit." He advises Becket to "fare forward to the end," because kingly power is more pleasurable than power under a king. The kind of spiritual power that Becket strives for is greater than temporal power "War, plague, and revolution, / New conspiracies, broken pacts: / To be master or servant within an hour, / This is the course of temporal power." He taunts Becket by saying that he has made a clever choice in privileging the eternal over the temporal because "When King is dead, there's another king" but "Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb." Unlike the political fears Kings may have Becket will have long lines of pilgrims waiting to see his tomb. Becket admits of these thoughts. The fourth Tempter says, that is why he is saying these things. He knows that Becket has thought about it all very carefully while praying or

early in the morning. Becket knows that nothing at the temporal level lasts and that only the spiritual world triumphs so he should go towards martyrdom. Becket exclaims, "Who are you tempting with my own desires?" He feels trapped and says, "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness, / Does not lead to damnation in pride?" The fourth Tempter leaves echoing Becket's first speech about action and suffering.

Critical Commentary on the Temptation Scene

Nevill Coghill provides a good note on this scene. He says that there is no stage direction stating the exit of the Priests and the Chorus. This is because the Chapter House where Eliot staged the play had only one exit, therefore, it was difficult for the characters to enter the exit frequently. Becket's line, "All things prepare the event. Watch" demonstrates this problem very effectively. Viewed from another perspective, the characters presence on the stage is important because the Tempters could be merely figments of Becket's imagination, an internal conflict. Eliot, in this play, has brilliantly used his theory of "de-personalization" in poetry to his advantage. He has used a character whose spiritual growth demands a surrendering of his will to God--a depersonalization of the self. The Temptation scene is also important in that it introduces the morality play pattern in *Murder in the Cathedral*. As in the Morality plays there is personification. Eliot states that he was influenced by Everyman in his use of metre for the play.

Becket's first temptation refers to his good times in the past. Becket was known for his good living. At a more significant level the first Tempter is asking Becket to move away from the still point, God. Technically, the first temptation is no temptation for Becket. Christ's temptation, which came after he had fasted for forty days and was alone in the wilderness, were genuinely difficult to overcome (See Gospel of St. Matthew Ch. 4). In a sense Becket's first three Tempters are more akin to Job's comforters in the Book of Job of the Old Testament in the Bible. Infact, Becket's remark to the Tempter proves that the first temptation is no temptation: "But in the life of one man, never / The same time returns."

One of the problems that Eliot faces in his portrayal of Becket is to make a good character attractive. Milton faced a similar problem in his creation of Christ in *Paradise Lost*. Often these characters appear as a little priggish and stilted. The essence of the first Tempter's speech is that he wants Becket to choose a comfortable life on earth and forget martyrdom and its rewards promised in the next world. The Tempter exits saying "I leave you to the pleasures of your higher vices." This is significant. Spiritual pride is a vice that Becket must fight.

The second Tempter provides a brief historical context for the central conflict between the King and Becket--representing the State and the Church, respectively. The Second Tempter appeals to Becket's love for power and cleverly tells Becket about the good that he can do on earth for God with earthly power. Becket's response "What Means?" points to the Key question in Christianity viz. that means and end are important. Later, Becket refers to the danger of doing the right thing for the wrong reason. When the second Tempter tells Becket to join hands with the King to unite against England's enemies at home and abroad, Becket says : "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?" This response of Becket shows that he is not free from spiritual pride. The second Tempter's reference to "bind and loose" refers to Christ's saying to his disciple, Peter, in the Gospel of St. Matthew Ch. 16 V. 19 "And I shall give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whosoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whosoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The first two Tempters play upon Becket's love for power and pleasure: and his love for the King. Becket overcomes both these weaknesses during the course of his

temptations. *It must be noted that although the Tempters are numbered they have very distinct personalities.*

The fourth Tempter is totally unexpected. He is the most frightening of the Tempters. In a sense, the earlier three temptations were really no challenge to Becket. *The fourth Tempter taunts him about his spiritual pride.* Becket overcomes this temptation before us in the play. Becket says of the fourth Tempter, "Who are you tempting me with my own desires?" The fourth Tempter tempts Becket with the glories of eternal sainthood as compared to the transient glories at the temporal level. He tells Becket that his choice for the eternal over the temporal, is clever. The aim of the fourth Tempter is to undermine Becket's faith. His goal is achieved if Becket surrenders to despair or aspires to pride. Infact, Becket comes close to this when he says, "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness, / Does not lead to damnation in pride."

It must be noted that the fourth Tempter appears when Becket's rejection of time is complete. He advocates perception from the vantage point of the fourth dimension of time, eternity. Becket now feels trapped. His "near despair" after the fourth Tempter leaves, is reflected in the speech of the Chorus. Becket is almost in danger of being absorbed into the abyss of despair. He has to actively overcome this temptation. It involves considerable internal conflict mirrored both in his Christmas sermon and the second part of the play.

In 1934 Eliot said, "with the disappearance of the idea of intense moral struggle, the human being presented to us both in poetry and prose fiction today... tend to become less real. It is infact during moments of moral and spiritual struggle--that men and women come nearest to being real" (*After Strange Gods*). The characters in *Murder in the Cathedral* are real from this point of view.

The fourth Tempter leaves echoing Becket's opening speech in the play about acting and suffering. "Martin Browne states that when the fourth Tempter talks of the turning of the wheel, he is refering to it as something mechanical which makes action and suffering meaningless. Becket feels trapped after the fourth Tempter tempts him and this is reflected in the ironical repetition of Becket's own speech by the Tempter. Becket, the teacher, has now become the pupil. He has to learn the true meaning of martyrdom. Respair and pride are seen only in relation to man's will not God's. Becket is forced to find a way out of his paradox. The stillness of the wheel is later contrasted with the "restlessness in the house" expressed by the chorus in their outburst following the temptations.

3.2 BECKET'S SILENCE AFTER THE FOURTH TEMPTATION

After the fourth Tempter leaves, Becket remains silent while all the other character speak. This certainly dramatises the intense conflict in Becket. *It is through this silence that Becket overcomes the fourth temptation viz. attack on his pride.* This silence is also significant because it makes us realize that Becket goes through conflict and suffering before he becomes a martyr. If this process had not taken place his death would have been misread as the "self slaughter of a lunatic."

It is important to examine the nature of the dramatic strategies used by Eliot to show how Becket overcomes his last temptation before he is ready for martyrdom. In doing this one should keep in mind the particular kind of audience the play was catering to, Eliot's use of language and metre to create dramatic effects, and the constraints both religious and theatrical within which Eliot had to operate.

As stated earlier, the play was written for the Canterbury Festival of June 1935 and it catered to a specifically Christian audience. It was performed in the Chapter House

of the Cathedral. The architectural and acoustic peculiarities of the place imposed some dramatic constraints on Eliot. For instance, the almost ponderous and heavy effect of some of the speeches in *Murder in the Cathedral* is deliberate, so that words could be enunciated and not lost in transmission. The simultaneous presence of several characters on the stage is also a direct consequence of the architectural peculiarity of the place. The Chapter House as we know had only one door for the characters to enter and exit from. Could this be one of the reasons for the simultaneous presence of the Tempters, the Chorus and the Priests on the stage after Becket's last temptation? Or, is Eliot not willing to present God, even for a religious audience? In other words, rather than showing God Eliot chose the combined effect of the Chorus, Tempters and the Priests to dramatize the whirlwind which signifies God's presence in the Book of Job.

The central problem which Eliot faced in dramatically portraying the resolution of Becket's conflict was to convincingly exteriorize Becket's interior conflict. As Helen Gardner rightly says: "...the last temptation is so subtle and interior that no audience can judge whether it is truly overcome or not." If we are to believe Becket when he says "Temptation shall not come in this kind again," what are the dramatic strategies used by Eliot to lead us to this belief?

It may be noted that Eliot was working against a dramatic tradition which was essentially naturalistic. Therefore, to put words of humility in Thomas' own mouth would make him appear the opposite of humble. Perhaps this accounts for the long silence between Becket's words after the last Tempter tempts him, and his expression of the resolution of his conflict in his speech "now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain."

Referring to the difficulty of judging whether the last temptation has been overcome Helen Gardner says: "we have to take it for granted that Thomas dies with a pure will or else, more properly, ignore the whole problem of motives as beyond our competence and accept the fact of his death" (The **Art** of T.S.Eliot P.134).

Interestingly, Eliot's essay on "Poetry and Drama" offers a possible interpretation to the dramatic strategy used by him, in dramatising Becket's resolution of the conflict. In the essay he says: "It seems to me that beyond the nameable classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action, the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which one can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action." Could Becket's silence after the fourth Tempter tempts him be that "feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action?"

3.3 EXPLANATION OF THE CHORIC PASSAGE FOLLOWING THE EXIT OF THE FOURTH TEMPTER UPTO THE END OF PART 1

The choric outburst that follows after the fourth Tempter exits conveys the restlessness of the people. There is restlessness, these "poor women" of Canterbury say, in the "house" and in the "street." The air is oppressive and clammy; the sky "thick and heavy." Images of the earth birthing "issue of hell" contribute to the general sense of horror.

Following the choric outburst, the four Tempters collectively talk about the unreality of all things. Any award or prize on earth in the ultimate analysis is not worth winning not even the hope of martyrdom. It is like "hankering for the cat in the Pantomime, which isn't a cat at all, but just another cheat"(Neville Coghill). The

Tempters want the audience to adopt their point of view in condemning Becket's martyrdom as an illusive and childish act that is "out of touch with reality." They refer to Becket as "obstinate, blind, intent / On self-destruction," someone who is "lost in the wonder of his own greatness, / The enemy of society, enemy of himself."

The three Priests--like the four Tempters--collectively tell Becket not to fight the forces against him. They ask him to wait until things subside.

Following the collective plea of the Priests to Becket, the Chorus, Tempters and the Priests alternately highlight "Prowling presences" like "rain that taps at the window, " "wind that pokes at the door" and the "mastiff" prowling at the gate. Images of death and violence are also picked up by them. Phrases like "a sudden shock on the skull," "drowned in a ditch" and "feel the cold in his groin" intensify and atmosphere of anxiety.

The Chorus now enter and tell Becket that they are not happy about the present situation. They state that they are not "ignorant women" and know "what to expect and not expect." In life they have known suffering, "extortion and violence," of "the old without fire in winter" the "child without milk in summer," young men "mutilated" and "the torn girl trembling by the mill-stream." Despite all these problems, the "poor women" state that they have carried on with life by "picking together the pieces."

They say that they carried on "Living and partly living" because they felt that God gave them some reason to hope. But now with the new developments they feel very frightened. They sense a terror enveloping them "which none can avert, none can / avoid, flowing under our feet and over the sky / Under doors and down chimneys, flowing in at the ear and / the mouth and the eye." These "poor women" express despair which is encapsulated in their words, "God is leaving us, God is leaving us, more pang, more pain / than birth or death." Their despair is highlighted through the animal imagery that they use: "Puss-pun. of leopard, footfall of padding bear, / Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyaena waiting." They plead with their archbishop Becket to save them by saving himself. If he destroys himself, they too will be destroyed.

After a long silence (in which he undergoes intense conflict and struggle over the temptations) Becket speaks. His internal struggle, as explained earlier, was dramatized by Eliot through the collective presence and speeches of the Chorus, Tempters and Priests on the stage.

Becket is now clear about the meaning of his life. No longer will any temptation upset the peace and understanding that he now has. He admits that "The last temptation is the greatest treason: / To do the right deed for the wrong reason." Becket recalls his life in the last thirty years and says that he has "searched all the ways / That lead to pleasure, advancement and price" at the temporal level. To become a "servant of God" was never his wish. It is difficult to serve God because one can fall into spiritual arrogance by doing the "right deed for the wrong reasons." In other words, by resisting sins you may open your heart to the pride of having resisted it and develop contempt for those who are unable to do so. Becket says that he can foresee how history will interpret his death as the "senseless self-slaughter of a lunatic, / Arrogant passion of a fanatic." The fourth Knight's words at the end of the play corroborates it, viz. that Becket committed "Suicide while of Unsound Mind." Becket, continues by saying that all those who are implicated in evil will be punished. As for himself, he says that he shall not "act or suffer" and surrender himself to God. This is reflected in the sermon that he gives soon after.

Critical Commentary on the above passage

The "restlessness" of the Chorus express the anguish of Becket after the fourth Tempter leaves. Their "restlessness" is also in contrast to the stillness of the "still point." Terrible images like that of the "withered tree" and "sickly smells" dominate

not only the tone of the passage but also the state of the country and its people.. There is a general sense of decay. Eliot's contention that human nature shares in the Evil which befell all nature after the Fall is seen in this speech. In a sense, the dismal picture that emerges from this passage clearly points to the need for Becket's martyrdom to save the world.

In the collective speech of the four Tempters there is a sudden shift from the 12th century to the 20th. The Tempter-- like the Knights later--try to persuade the audience to see things from their point of view. They deliberately use images from the 20th century to bridge the distance between them and the audience. This speech by the four Tempters clearly points to their stand regarding Becket's martyrdom. However, the irony lies in the fact that it is people like them who necessitate Becket's martyrdom to cleanse the world from sins.

The three Priests in collectively persuading Becket to give up his battle demonstrate their lack of religious strength. They too need to grow and understand the meaning of martyrdom. These lamentors fear death because they see it as sudden and unprepared. Becket's attitude is different. He sees his death as being in God's hands. It is never an accident but planned.

The speech alternately spoken by the Chorus, Priests and the Tempters resembles the Liturgy during a Christian mass service. This technique of alternation is also akin to "stichomythia," in Greek tragedy.

The choric speech that follows foregrounds the extent of the terror and disease that has set in. They speak of terrible images of rape, violence, deprivation and death. The oppression and torture that the "poor women" speak of refer specifically to the days of King Stephen (whom King Henry II succeeded) when many were tortured by "brigand barons" for information regarding hidden wealth. It is important to note that the Chorus too must learn that death is frightening only if one sees it as individual annihilation and not as part of God's plan. The Chorus claim not to be "ignorant women" yet they don't seem to realize that they are living at the temporal level of linear time. They do not have a totality of existence, "Living and partly living, / Picking together the pieces." They have to learn that "sleeping and eating and drinking" is not adequate to realize the full potential of one's being. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ had said that "man does not live by bread alone" to his tempter who tempted him with food while he was hungry (see Matthew Ch 4).

The terror depicted by the Chorus in this speech is the kind of despair the Tempters wanted Becket to fall into. The Chorus can only understand private catastrophe and personal loss. They cannot comprehend that which is out of time and yet they are not at ease with the old dispensation (like the magi in Eliot's poem, "The Journey of the Magi.") Rebirth is always painful. It may be noted that Becket's lines before he surrenders to his death in Part II of the play, strike a contrast to the function of the Chorus at the linear level of time. He says :

It is not in time that my death shall be known:
It is out of time that my decision is taken
If you call that a decision
To which my whole being gives entire consent.
I give my life
To the Law of God above the Law of Man.

Critical Commentary on Becket's Speech after his Temptations

Becket's opening words "now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain" tells us that he has indeed overcome the fourth temptation. The clarity of his belief that is revealed here is later shown in Becket's sermon preached on Christmas day. The process through which he overcomes, is seen in his long silence--discussed earlier.

Becket admits that the last temptation was the toughest "To do the right deed for the wrong reason." His recapitulating his past thirty years during which he explored all forms of pleasure at the linear level and his distance from it all now, shows that the first three temptations were no real challenge to him. He has now achieved a real sense of calm expressed in "I shall no longer act or suffer." He is ready to face death when it comes. In this speech, Becket's address to the audience "you and you" parallel the Knights address to them later in the play.

3.4 IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF PART I

The Chorus is very timid and fearful, worse still, it is content to live lives of spiritual stagnation. But there is hope for them because they know their own weaknesses. Part II shows their growth.

The Tempters although individualized could be viewed as aspects of Becket's personality.

We get the historical background of the play. Eliot never lets us lose our grip on historical facts. There are constant references to meetings and treatises.

What the Chorus perceives as a sense of doom, Becket sees as peace before death,

The idea of martyrdom is developed. Man must submit to God's will.

3.5 EXERCISES

1. Delineate the nature of the four temptations that Becket undergoes.
2. Critically comment on the significance of Becket's silence after the fourth temptation.

UNIT 4 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE PLAY - PART II

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Eliot's Christian Perspective
- 4.2 Becket's Christmas Sermon: Explanatory and Critical Notes.
- 4.3 Murder in the *Cathedral* as a Christian History Drama
- 4.4 Explanatory and Critical Notes on Part II of the play from the First Choric entrance in Part II upto the entry of the Four Knights
- 4.5 Explanatory and Critical Notes on the section from the Entrance of the Knights upto their exit
- 4.6 Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to make you aware of

- a) Eliot's Christian Perspective
- b) Explanatory comments on Thomas Becket's Christmas Sermon
- c) *Murder* in the Cathedral as a Christian History Drama
- d) Explanatory Comments on the lives from the First Choric entrance in part II upto the entry of the Four Knights Comments
- e) Explanatory Comments on the Section from the Entrance of the Knights upto their Exit

4.1 ELIOT'S CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

'As stated earlier T. S. Eliot was raised in a family which had very strong Unitarian beliefs. However, he did not find Unitarianism sufficient for his own spiritual needs. Contrary to the opinion of many critics, Eliot did not invent his own version of Christianity. He was an "Incarnational Christian," that is, he believed that the coining of Christ was the most important event in history and that "Sacramental Worship" reaffirmed this.

Eliot converted to Anglican Catholicism in 1927-but it was only a year later that he made this fact public. In his preface to *For Sir Lancelot Andrewes* (published in 1928) Eliot declared that he was "a Classicist in literature, Royalist in politics and Anglo Catholic in religion."

The year of Eliot's conversion was also the year that he published "The Journey of the Magi" (an *Ariel* Christmas poem), The poem is based on a Christmas sermon of the seventeenth century Anglican divine, Bishop Lancelot Andrews. Interestingly, although the devotional prayers of Bishop Andrews were published after he died, it

was Eliot who showed the world that Bishop Andrews was also a significant preacher. Eliot was introduced to the works of Lancelot Andrews through William Force Stead whom he had met at a party in 1923. He was an American diplomat in England but had resigned his job to get ordained in the Church of England. Both Stead and Eliot shared a common interest in the study of seventeenth century Anglican Divines particularly Sir Lancelot Andrews.

Eliot was particularly lured by Bishop Andrews' ability to temper his emotions with his intellect. He liked his "medieval temper" which was balanced as compared to the flashy brilliance of John Donne. It was through the works of Bishop Andrews that Eliot discovered not only the importance of "Orthodox Christianity" as a medium between skepticism and isolation, but also the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. In his essay, *For Sir Lancelot Andrews (1928)*, Eliot describes Andrews' appeal for him. He felt that Andrews in his sermon was "alone with the alone." He was not like Donne who was combating a strong emotional personality. Andrews became one with the subject.

Ironically, it is while Eliot was getting acquainted with the doctrines of Lancelot Andrews that he wrote the poem, "The Hollow Men." This poem exposes the spiritual aridity of the modern age. But it also marks the turning point in Eliot's life. Following this in 1930, Eliot published his next major poem "Ash Wednesday" written after his conversion in 1927. The poem is seen as the story of Eliot's conversion with all his skepticism and doubts. It is perceived as a poem which charts Eliot's spiritual ascent from the meaningless world of "The Hollow Men," "Ash Wednesday" was structurally built on a phrase about "Two Turnings" which Bishop Andrews had declared were necessary for conversion. The one looking to God and the other to the sinful past.

After his conversion, Eliot loved a life which was responsible to the doctrines of the Church. Infact, when Eliot finally decided to separate from his first wife, Vivienne, he did not have divorce in mind. Nor did he intend to remarry until she died since that was the official position of the Church of England.

What established Eliot as a "Defendant" of the Church of England was the pageant play, *The Rock*. He was commissioned to write this play. The scenario for this pageant was given to him by Brown and Webb Odell. However, the ten choric passages that Eliot wrote were what made the pageant a success. In *The Rock* Eliot was learning how to use a chorus for dramatic exposition. Bishop Bell of Chichester came to see *The Rock* and was very pleased by it. It was the success of *The Rock* that made Bishop Bell commission Eliot to write a play for the Canterbury Festival. This play was *Murder in the Cathedral*. Thus Eliot's first two plays are both religious verse dramas.

Eliot felt that preserving Christianity was important for civilization. In his essays, "The Idea of a Christian Society" Eliot described the kind of Christian society needed to be built in "England's green and pleasant land." For him the disappearance of Christianity was the end of western civilization. Eliot believed that a Christian elite would head an ideal community because for him a neutral society would not live long. He felt that the Church needed to intervene and point out what was right and wrong. But, for the Church to be effective, he felt there must be a Christian community studying and supporting these ideals. He also claimed that Christian views could not be private because it is hard to be a Christian in a non-Christian society. This is why he felt that Churches and Christian institutions were important.

In 1948, Eliot's *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* was published. This was his first book length study in which he spoke about his social and spiritual concerns for "Christendom," in a post World War world. The main aim of this book was to show the relation between religion and culture. For peace in the post World War age a common faith was needed. That faith for Eliot was Christianity.

4.2 BECKET'S CHRISTMAS SERMON : EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL NOTES

The sermon begins with the 14th verse of Ch. 2 of the Gospel of St. Luke. Becket addresses the congregation which has gathered for the sermon in a very loving way as "dear children of God." He tells them that his Christmas sermon is going to be a short one and asks them to meditate upon the mystery of the Christmas mass. He says that whenever mass is celebrated, Christ's death is celebrated. What he means by this is since Christ died to save human beings from sins, his death becomes a celebration. Becket then goes on to say that on Christmas day mass has a special meaning because that was the day Christ was born. So when one celebrates mass on Christmas one celebrates Christ's birth and death simultaneously. He then goes on to say that it was on the night before Christmas that Angels appeared before the shepherd at Bethlehem, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." The fact that the Christmas mass is both a celebration of Christ's birth and his death on the cross, Becket points out, may appear strange to the world. This, he says, is because no one mourns and rejoices in the same moment. In the Christian mystery, however, to mourn and rejoice at the same time is possible. Becket then goes on to ask the congregation whether it seems strange that the angels should have spoken of "peace" considering the fact that the world has had ceaseless wars or the fear of war. Becket presents the congregation with a rhetorical question. Could it be that the angles were mistaken or was the promise "a disappointment and a cheat?"

Becket asks the congregation to reflect on how the Lord (Christ) spoke of "peace." He said to his disciples "peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." He questions whether by peace Christ meant what we mean by it? That is, England at peace with its neighbours, the barons at peace with the king, the householder counting over his peaceful gains etc. He further adds that Christ's disciple did not know of these things. They gave up everything to spread God's words through land and sea. They faced torture, imprisonment and disappointment to "suffer death by martyrdom." What did Christ mean by peace? Christ had said "not as the world gives, give I unto you." So the peace he gave his disciples is not the peace the world gives.

Becket asks the congregation to note the fact that on Christmas not only is Christ's birth and death celebrated together, but on the very next day we celebrate the martyrdom of his first martyr, the blessed Stephen. Is it a coincidence that this should happen? By no means. That is, Becket says, just as we celebrate the birth and death of Christ, similarly we do the same for the martyrs. We mourn for the sins that led to their martyrdom but we also rejoice in these martyrs becoming saints in heaven "for the glory of God and for the salvation of men."

Becket once again addresses the congregation with affection as "beloved" and says that we do not view a martyr "simply as a good Christian because that would be only to mourn. Nor do we see the martyr as only saint because that would be to only rejoice." Neither our mourning nor our rejoicing is as the world sees. "A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for saints are not made by accident" nor is a Christian martyrdom the will of a man to become a saint because this would lead him to be a ruler of men. "A martyrdom is always the design of God," to lead men back to God's ways. It is the ability of man to surrender his will to God, to desire nothing for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr. Just as on earth the church mourns and rejoices at once which the world cannot understand, so in heaven the saints are honoured for having made themselves low on earth. They are seen not as we see them but in "the light of the Godhead from which they draw there being."

Becket concludes his sermon by referring to the congregation as the "children of God" saying, he has asked them to remember the martyrs of the past especially the

martyr of Canterbury, Archbishop Elphege; because on Christmas day it is important to remember “that Peace which he brought,” and also because Becket feels that he may not preach to them again and maybe in a short time they may have another martyr and perhaps not the last. He ends saying, “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.”

Critical Comments on the above Sermon

Just as Christ’s temptation is followed by the Sermon on the Mount (see Gospel according to St. Matthew), similarly Becket’s temptation is followed by this sermon. In this sermon Becket highlights the paradox and mystery of Christianity and the meaning of Christian martyrdom. When he talks about the world possibly interpreting the angles’ declaration of peace as a “disappointment and a cheat” he may be referring to his own doubts during his temptation. John the Baptist in the prison also felt this way. When Becket asks the congregation to reflect on the word “peace,” which Christ spoke of, he tries to distinguish between two notions of peace. For Christ peace did not mean “peace” as status quo at the temporal level but “peace” in terms of spiritual calm at the eternal level. The peace chorus wants is the peace as status quo. However, they grow and come to understand its true meaning through Becket’s martyrdom.

In the sermon Becket deliberately enlists the martyrs who follow Christmas day. He wants to make the people aware that martyrs re-enact Christ’s sacrifice from age to age as a reminder. As stated earlier, it is in this sermon that Becket explains the process of Christian martyrdom. He tells us that martyrdom is always the design of God. Man has to submit his will to God’s will and desire nothing for himself, “not even the glory of being a martyr.” From this remark it is clear that Becket has obviously overcome his fourth temptation. Becket’s statement that just as on Christmas mass, Christ’s birth and death are simultaneously celebrated, the person who is made a saint and honoured in heaven has to lead a humble life on earth, touches upon a basic tenet of Christianity. In the sermon on the Mount Christ tells his disciples that to follow God one has to give up everything at the materialistic level. The opening lines of the Sermon, known as the Beatitudes, encapsulate these beliefs: “whosoever is rich on earth will be poor in heaven and the meek and mild on earth will be rewarded and honoured in heaven.”

For martyrdom total submission to God is important. The wheel image expresses this in the play. Just as the different spokes of a wheel submit to the centre for coordination in order to turn smoothly, similarly, for God’s design to be carried out man must coordinate his individual will with God’s will.

Becket concludes his sermon by referring to the martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege. St. Elphege lived between ad 954 and 1012 and became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1006. When the Danes sacked Canterbury, he was murdered. It is appropriate that Becket should refer to him in the face of his own impending death.

The sermon is beautifully symbolic of the still centre of anarchy loosed around Becket. It is appropriate that the sermon (the interlude) divides parts I and II of the play.

4.3 *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL AS A CHRISTIAN HISTORY DRAMA*

The notion of Christian history is very different from traditional notions of history. While the latter, records events without any relation to a metastory, the former,

specifically refers to all happening on earth as one metastory centring around God. It starts with the creation of Human beings by God then goes onto the fall of Adam and Eve from paradise and moves in a linear progression right upto the day of judgement. This history's true meaning at the linear of temporality is manifested best in Christ's death for the sins of human beings and his resurrection (rising again from death). In Christ's death, the temporal and the eternal, time and the timeless, human and the divine intersect, giving a new meaning to temporal events in history. It is important to note that the entering of the timeless into time, finite creates the paradox of the "Still Point" which is both inside time and yet outside of it.

After Eliot's conversion in 1928, he was becoming increasingly "committed to the dogma of Incarnation" (See, "The Pensees of Pascal," Selected Essays). It is important to remember that this is indeed the basis of the Christian notion of history. Becket, in his Christmas sermon (which forms the Interlude in the play), explains the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. That Eliot should have placed the Interlude (structurally at the centre of the play) to express this central notion of Christian history speaks for itself. *The paradoxes of the human and the divine, time and the timeless etc. which are embodied in Christ are emphasized by Becket in his sermon which highlights the simultaneity of rejoicing and mourning in Christianity.* Christian history is a "providentially oriented history of salvation." All paradoxes in time resolved only in God at the end of time which is the Last Judgement in Christianity.

Significantly, the death of saints and martyrs also ennoble mundane history at the temporal level by transforming it into events willed by God. Becket, the Chorus (who represent a type of the common man), the Priests and the Knights must understand this and affirm it. This is "the dramatic action that the play presents."

The history of salvation then, offers everyman the same religious duties to fulfill towards God. The path to those duties is through temptation, sin, repentance, penance and regeneration. Becket's Christmas (Interlude) explains that he has found his place and role in this history of salvation: "A martyrdom is always the design of God." This is an insight that other characters—Chorus, Priests and Knights—have yet to acquire.

The soul becomes the "battlefield of timeless forces, where good and evil struggle perpetually for supremacy." But it is the notion of history as salvation which makes Christians believe that ultimately good will triumph over evil. Infact this is a notion to any concept of Christian history and this is again the reason why Christian history does not focus particularly on the political, social and economic events so important to traditional history. The development of T.S. Eliot's own historical thinking before and after his conversion is an example in point. In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" published in 1919, he had spoken about the notions of "pastness and presentness" in the context of cultural and literary history. However, after his conversion we notice a change. He now sees tradition and history as gaining meaning and existence only through the Christian notion of history which centres around God. This is illustrated best in Eliot's use of the image of the "wheel." The historically acquired meaning of this image ranges from the seasonal cycle's inevitability to other meaning, in a Christian frame it refers to the perfection of God.

In the above context, it is significant that the feasts of different saints and martyrs that follow Christmas are mentioned in Becket's Christian sermon. In doing this, Eliot lifts history and time from the linear and the chronological to the eternal and ahistorical. The history of salvation is privileged over traditional history. Again the scenic presentation of the assassination strikingly demonstrates that linear time has been exploded. The Knights kill Becket by encircling him. Becket becomes a version of Christ and the history of salvation is again repeated.

4.4 EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL NOTES ON PART II OF THE PLAY FROM THE FIRST CHORIC ENTRANCE IN PART II UPTO THE ENTRY OF THE FOUR KNIGHTS

PART II: CHARACTERS

Three Priests
Four Knights
Archbishop Thomas Becket
Chorus of Women of Canterbury
Attendants

SCENE The Cathedral. December 29, 1170.

The speech of the Chorus begins bleakly with a note of sorrow. It refers to "sea birds" who are driven "inland by the storm," to the "still and stifling air" and the owl that rehearses the "hollow note of death." But, it claims that "a wind is stored up in the East." It questions the fact that even near the time of Christ's birth (celebrated in Christmas) there is no peace nor good will among men. The Chorus then states that peace among men is never certain unlike peace with God. Wars in this world create evil in man, Christ's death renews life. Unless life is cleansed in winter only a bad spring will follow which will result in a "parched summer, an empty harvest."

The Chorus once again questions what work can be done between Christmas and Easter? According to it life will merely carry on with the ploughman going out in march to turn the "same earth / He has turned before," the birds too shall "sing the same song." When spring arrives and old people and children are seen outdoors, what work, the Chorus says would the people have done? "What wrong / Shall the bird's song cover, the green tree cover, what wrong Shall the fresh earth cover?" The Chorus then states that they will wait, although the time for a change is short, the waiting is long.

At this point the first Priest enters with a banner of St. Stephen and the "Introit of St. Stephen" is heard. The Introit is a sentence or a phrase that is taken from the Psalms, or elsewhere in the Bible. This is either said or sung as the Priest approaches the altar to celebrate the Eucharist (which is the Body of Christ symbolised by bread or white wafer-like biscuit, known as the host and wine which represents his blood). This is the most important part of the Mass. When the first Priest says, "since Christmas a day: and the day of St. Stephen, First martyr," he refers to the day after Christmas which was also the feast day of St. Stephen. Feast days are special days when martyrs and saints are remembered. The line spoken by the first Priest, "Princes moreover did sit, and did witness falsely against me" is a line taken from Psalm 119, V: 23 from the Bible. The feast of St. Stephen, the first Priest says was always very dear to Becket. The second Priest soon enters with a banner of St. John the Apostle and the Introit of St. John is heard. The second Priest refers to St. John the apostle whose feast day follows that of St. Stephen. He quotes from Psalm 22 V22 of the Bible: "In the midst of the congregation he opened his mouth." The line following this psalm is taken from I John, Ch. 1 V. 1.

The third Priest enters next with the banner of the Holy Innocents. The feast day of "Holy Innocents" follows the feast day of St. John. This is what his opening lines refer to. The quote from the bible is taken from Psalm 8. V.2 which says, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies." The line "They sung as it were a new song" is taken from Psalm 96 V.1. His following line refers to Psalm 79 V 2-3 and Psalm 79 V.3 where a reference is made

to the flesh of the saints being given to the beasts of the earth and their blood being shed like water in Jerusalem. There was no one there to even bury their bodies.

The third Priest's line "Avenge, O Lord, the blood of thy saints" is taken from Deuteronomy XXXVII, V. 43 from the Old Testament. This line refers to the belief that God will avenge those who shed the blood of his believers in his name. The line "In Rama, a voice was heard, there was weeping" is taken from the Gospel of St. Matthew Ch. 2 verse 18. in the New Testament. This is actually a reference to an Old Testament prophecy that was fulfilled in the New Testament.

Next the three Priests stand together with their respective banners and together quote from Psalm 42. V 4 "Rejoice we all, keeping holy day." The first Priest then refers to Christ's death on the cross for the sins of the people. "He lays down his life for the sheep" is a quotation from John X V. 14-15 and it refers to Christ's willing death on the cross to redeem human beings from their sins.

The three Priests then talk about whether "To-day" is the holy day. That is, the "day" that they "hope for or fear for." The third Priest goes on to say that every day we hope for or fear for and it is "only in retrospection, selection, / We say, that was the day." He concludes by saying that the "eternal design" may appear even now in "sordid particulars." It is at this point that the Knights enter.

Critical Commentary on the Passage Explained Above

We notice a change in the Chorus now. Although their speech begins bleakly there is no despair. Some knowledge of God's purpose has crept into their understanding. This is expressed through phrases like, "The peace of this world is always uncertain, unless men keep / the peace of God," or "the world must be cleaned in the winter, or we shall have only / A sour Spring" etc. Towards the end of their speech the maturity of the Chorus is evident from their remark that they are willing to wait voluntarily: "We wait, and the time is short / But waiting is long." This also refers to the martyrdom of Becket. They no longer seek to escape it.

Interestingly, part II opened originally with the lines spoken by the Priests. In the second edition (1936) these lines were substituted by the lines of the Chorus which now opens Part II. It is important to note that the three Priests mark the passage of three days after Christmas. These three days precede Becket's murder. The three days that follow Christmas were important because they were the feast days of St. Stephen, St. John and the Holy Innocents. The scene is deliberately made ritualistic by Eliot. He makes the Priests quote in a formula-like fashion from the Psalms and other books of the Old and the New Testaments. Eliot believed that such ritual and religious like elements lay at the root of drama. When the third Priest says, "only in retrospection, selection, / We say, that was the day" he is referring to the fact that it is in "time" that we "conquer" time. This is a very crucial concept both in this play and in Christianity.

4.5 EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL NOTES ON THE SECTION FROM THE ENTRANCE OF THE KNIGHTS UPTO THEIR EXIT

The first Knight enters saying "Servants of the King" to the Priests. The first Priest tells the first Knight that he is known to them and enquires if he has travelled far to get to them. The first Knight says that they (the four knights) arrived from France the previous day by ship because they have "business with the Archbishop." The first Priest tells the first knight that he and his men must dine with the Archbishop. He also adds that they will be looked after well and asks them "Dinner before business.

Do you like roast Pork?" To this the first Knight says that they would like business before dinner and that they will "roast" their pork "first, and dine upon it after." By this they mean that they will first murder the Archbishop and then celebrate. The third Knight rudely tells the priest that they do not need the Archbishop's hospitality and will find their own dinner. The Priest sends for Becket who arrives. He tells the Priests that no matter how well prepared one is when the actual moment comes one is "engrossed with matters of other urgency." He tells the Priests that all his papers on the table are in order and that the documents are all signed. Becket then welcomes the Knights and asks them what their business with him is. The first Knight says that the business is from the king and that he would like to talk to Becket alone. Becket asks the Priests to leave him and asks the Knights to tell him about the business. The Knights together accuse Becket of revolting against the King and the law of the land; of showing ingratitude to a king who made him the Archbishop and insensitivity to the person who raised Becket "the tradesman's son: the backstairs / brat who was born in Cheap side: . . . / Creeping out of London dirt, "by endowing him with position and power.

Becket retorts by saying that none of it is true and that he has always been a loyal subject to the king except when he has asked him to overrule God's law for the state law. The Knights--who are bigoted to the King's cause--volunteer to pray to God so that he can help Becket. Becket then asks the Knights if their "urgent business" was merely to scold him? The knights argue back by telling Becket that they are expressing their "indignation, as loyal subjects.." Becket asks them "Loyal to whom?" and the third Knight says, "The King." Becket then tells them that if they have anything to tell him as a command from the King, then it should be done in public. If charges are made against him, in public he will refute them. The first Knight tries to attack Becket but the Priests and the Attendants intervene. Becket then says that he will face the charges "now and here." The first Knight says that he does not want to repeat the misdeeds that Becket has committed in the past because they are too well known. Becket, the Knight says, instead of being grateful for being made an Archbishop by the King, fled to France in the hope "of stirring up trouble in the French dominions." Moreover, Becket also played the French King against the English King. The Pope was also made to believe "false opinions" of him.

The second Knight goes on to say that the King was charitable enough to show kindness and make a peace pact with him and sent Becket back to Canterbury as he demanded. The third Knight adds that the King even restored all honours and possessions despite Becket's transgressions. But Becket showed no gratitude. The first Knight says that this ingratitude was expressed in Becket's suspending "those who had crowned the King's son, the young Prince" by claiming it an illegal act. Becket responds by saying that it was never his wish to "uncrown the king's son, or to diminish / His honours and power." On the contrary, he would have wished "him three crowns rather than one." The Bishops who were excommunicated (thrown out of the Church) were done so by the Pope. The first Knight insists that it was done through Becket and he must amend the act by "absolving them." The first Knight says that the King's command is that Becket and his servants depart from the land. Becket replies that if this is the King's command then, it is seven years since he left his flock and he has lost those years. But, he says, this will never happen again. The first Knight tells Becket that in speaking like this he is insulting the King and Becket responds by saying that it is not him who insults the King "But the Law of Christ's Church, the judgment of Rome." The three Knights accuse Becket of treachery and treason and Becket says that he submits his cause to the judgement of Rome and if they kill him he will rise again to submit his cause to God. Becket exits. The four Knights feel that they should restore order in the king's land. They say that they have come with swords to implement the "King's justice."

Critical Comments on the Above Passage

The important thing to note about these passages is that the charges the Knights make against Becket are all false and baseless. Becket's integrity and calm contrasts with

the Knights lack of integrity and their agitated condition. The accusations made by the Knights give a historical context to Becket's conflict with the King. When Becket says :

It is not I who insult the King,
And there is higher than I for the King
It is not I, Becket from Cheapside. . .

he is demonstrating how he has surrendered his will to that of God. "Not I" is repeated to highlight this. The egocentric "I" is given up. This passage clearly shows that Becket has overcome the fourth temptation--the sin arising from pride.

The above passages are also important because they show the church and State conflict clearly. The Knights view themselves as the King's men and Becket views himself as God's instrument.

4.6 EXERCISES

1. Outline Eliot's understanding of Christianity.
2. Critically comment on the significance of the Interlude (Becket's Christmas Sermon) to the play.
3. What is the notion of martyrdom that emerges in Becket's Christmas sermon?
4. Highlight the Christian paradoxes that Becket discusses in the Christmas Sermon.
5. Compare and contrast the two opening speeches of the Chorus in Parts I and II.

UNIT 5 GENERAL COMMENTS AND OTHER READINGS

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Critical Explanation of the Choric Outburst after Becket Exits upto his Murder.
- 5.2 Critical Explanation of the Knights, Prose Passages upto the end of the Play.
- 5.3 The Chorus in Development in Eliot's Play's.
- 5.4 Plays by Other Dramatists on Thomas Becket.
- 5.5 Greek / Medieval Models for Eliot's Play, *Murder in the Cathedral*.
- 5.6 Different Readings of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.
- 5.7 Select Bibliography with Critical Comments
- 5.8 Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will:

- a. Complete the critical explanation of the play from the choric outburst upto Becket's murder.
- b. Critically explain the section starting with the Knight's prose passages upto the end of the play.
- c. Trace the development of the Chorus
- d. Discuss other dramatist's plays on Becket
- e. Point out the Greek / Medieval model'
- f. Give an account of other Readings of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*
- g. Give a select bibliography with critical comments.

5.1 CRITICAL EXPLANATION OF THE CHORIC OUTBURST AFTER BECKET EXITS UPTO HIS MURDER

In this speech the Chorus perceives evil in the world through images like the "putrid flesh" of lobsters and oysters living and spawning in the "bowels," of death in the rose and the hollyhock. Animal images abound in their speech: rat, jackal, jackaw, jackdaw and ape. They see chaos in the universe. This is expressed through the fact that the order of time and creatures are abolished. The animal, food bird and sea imagery in their speech point to the widespread corruption in the world. In short, evil is contained not only in the knights. This is important because it points to the fact that Becket's martyrdom has cosmic dimensions. This is reinforced by their statement: "It

was here, in the Kitchen, in the passages, / In the news in the barn in the lyre in the market-place / In our veins our bowels our Skulls as well." The "Poor Women" of Canterbury say that they have tasted death and now it is too late to repent and act. Finally, these women state that they have consented to their "animal powers" and have been "dominated by the lust of self-demolition." They plead with Becket to forgive them so that they can pray for him out of sense of their shame. They now acknowledge their collective guilt. This shows that they have grown. Before they had blamed Becket for the chaos but now they blame themselves.

Critical Explanation of Becket's Speech

Becket's first word, "Peace" parallels his use of the word in his first entrance in the play. But the word has a new dimension to it now. Peace now, no longer means silence, but a calm that emanates from being in touch with the "still point" which is God. Becket's lines:

These things had to come to you and you accept them,
This is your share of the eternal burden,
The perpetual glory.

Touches upon the basic Christian paradox. That is, it is through accepting suffering and pain in this life that you get power and glory in the next. Becket further tells the Chorus that all the suffering and pain that they go through will fall into a pattern "When the figure of God's purpose is made complete." Once this happens, he tells the "poor women" of Canterbury, that all the "toiling in the household" will appear "unreal." He ends his speech by saying that "humankind cannot bear too much reality." This is a line from "Burnt Norton" which is part of *The Four Quartets*. What Becket means here is that human beings can only have a glimpse of the eternal truth. "Reality" stands for truth. We are not able to sustain our vision of reality because it is too overwhelming to us.

When the Priests tell Becket to hide near the altar because the Knights will be returning armed to attack him, he tells them that he has been waiting all his life for this moment. He tells the Priests that "Death will come" not when he wills it but when God thinks that he is "worthy." Since this is the case, Becket says, "there is no danger. / I have therefore only to make perfect my will." The Priests in a panic tell Becket that the Knights are coming and tell him to "make haste." They fear for themselves saying, "if you are killed what shall become of us?" The lines spoken by the Priests demonstrate that they have not understood the meaning of Becket's martyrdom. Spiritual rebirth is individual. Becket has reached a stage of individuality. The Priests still function collectively as is expressed in their line to Becket: "What shall become of us?" In this context, the crowd represents "untruth" and the individual represents "truth."

The Priests who represent institutionalized religion tell Becket to go Vespers which is a Church Service in the evening. They are still very ritualistic. Unlike Becket they have not understood God. Becket tells the Priests to go to Vespers and pray for him. He tells them that the Knights will find: the shepherd (that is him) and will spare the flock (that is the priests, Chorus etc) Becket says: "I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven a whisper, / And I would no longer be denied; all things / Proceed to a joyful consummation." It is important to like Becket's phrase "I would no longer be denied" to the line in the first speech of the Chorus when they say, "Remember the martyrs and saints who wait and who shall / stretch out his hand to the fire, and deny his master?" Becket is saying that he will no longer be "denied" the role that he has to play. He says "all things? Proceed to a joyful consummation" which is his death by martyrdom. The Priests who are operating at a very different level, drag Becket away. They see Becket's approaching death as murder, Becket however, views it differently. At this point the Chorus speaks and a Dies Irae (the day of wrath) a hymn

is sung in the background. This hymn is one of the greatest masterpieces of Medieval lyric poetry.

The Choric speech at this point expresses the horror of the "poor women" which results from their sin of living in the void in a state of "emptiness, absence, separation from God." In the cathedral, the Priests tell each other to bar the door and that they will be "safe." The Priests here are like the Chorus in their opening speech in the play when they hide in the Cathedral for physical safety. What they have to learn is that physical safety has no meaning unless they are protected by God. This is the reason why Becket insists on the doors of the Church being left open. He tells the Priests that he does not want the Church to be turned into a "fortress." Becket, who has understood the true meaning of God says that "The Church shall protect her own, in her own way." The first Priest responds by saying that the Knights are not coming like people who will "kneel to the body of Christ / but like beasts." The beast image is important. It shows that the Knights are far removed from the still point, that is God. They have a long way to go to reach Becket's state of understanding. In fact, the beastly nature of the Knights make us aware of the greater need of Becket's sacrifice through martyrdom to redeem people. Becket tells the Priests to unbar the door. He chides them saying that they may think that he's "reckless, desperate and mad" this is because they apply earthly standards and argue by "results" as this world does. He tells them:

It is not in time that my death shall be known;
It is out of time that my decision is taken
.....
To which my whole being; gives consent.
I give my life
To the law of God above the law of Man.

It requires a very special person to face a vision of nothingness on earth, Becket has achieved this. He privileges God's order over man's. His entire body, and soul have surrendered to God. Eliot believed that the values for which Becket gives his life are in essence permanent and therefore relevant to all times. Nevill Coghill gives a good commentary on these lines. He says "Thomas's argument is that when an act is looked at time, it can be assessed relatively to its motives and consequences, that is, it is a human action that partakes of both good and evil, as the world judges. To murder a man, not to say an Archbishop, is judged evil by the world, and therefore it would seem wrong for Becket to make such a murder possible by opening the doors. But if a martyrdom is "made by the design of God," it is an act made beyond Time, and bears an eternal witness. It is absolute and cannot be judged relatively. Becket's will is only involved in that he has identified it with or surrendered it to, the will of God."

Becket once again tells the Priests to "unbar" the doors of the Cathedral. He tells them that "we are not here to triumph by fighting, by strategies, or by resistance, not to fight with beasts as men." He then tells them that the beast in them has already been conquered. He perhaps refers here to his own temptations. He says that death which follows it is "the easier victory." It is perceived as the fruit of all the suffering and pain.

The Knights enter humiliating Becket the way Christ was humiliated before his death. They refer to the "mark of the beast" on him and the "blood of the lamb." This is a mockery of Revelation XIX, 20 and VII 14. Their line "Come down Daniel and Join in the feast" is again a mocking allusion to Christ's last supper.

Becket does not argue with the Knights but tells them that he is ready to shed his blood to pay for Christ's death. As the Knights tell Becket to make amends for the wrongs that he has done to the Bishops and the King, Becket says that he is "ready to die" for God, he tells them to do what they want with him but to spare his people. The Knights now collectively call him a traitor. To which Becket says to one of the Knights, Reginald, that he is thrice traitor. That is, to Becket whose man he was, to

God and to the Church. Becket's last words express a total surrender of himself to God. He says that he gives himself up to God, the Virgin mother and all the prophets and saints. When the Knights kill Becket they do so by forming a circle with Becket at the centre. This is symbolic of the wheel and the still point.

Tennyson in his play Becket, adopted the legend of a violent storm after the murder. Eliot gave the storm a symbolic treatment by introducing the Chorus' cry, the Priests speeches etc. The Chorus, in its speech, protests wildly at the pollution of the natural order. All sense of time and place is lost, there is cosmic cacophony. They say that they can no longer go on living quietly as they had done before. Although they have gone through suffering, "the personal loss, the general misery" they have never seen such chaos before. They say, this is out of life, this is out of time, / An instant eternity of evil and wrong." They now state that the whole world is clouded in "filth."

5.2 CRITICAL EXPLANATION OF THE KNIGHT'S PROSE PASSAGES UPTO THE END

After the Knights murder Becket, they address the audience in prose. Eliot follows history upto the martyrdom of Becket and then he makes a jump into the twentieth century. He says that he deliberately did this to shock the audience out of their complacency. In his prose passages, Eliot was influenced by Shaw's *St. Joan*. In a sense, the Knights by addressing the audience politicise the murder of Becket.

The first Knight, Reginald Fitz Urse, is the leader of the group. He tells the audience that since they are English they will listen to both sides of the story which is in keeping with their long established principle of trial by Jury. This was introduced by Henry II. Reginald asks Baron William de Traci the eldest member to speak first. We are given various angles to the murder through the Knights speeches. The third Knight, who is the eldest, says that whatever they have done they have done so, "disinterestedly." By this they do not mean surrendering of their will to God but being "non-partisan." The second Knight, Sir Hugh de Morville, speaks next and tells the audience that he agrees with William de Traci and that they did what they did for the good of the country. He says, "Had Becket concurred with the King's wishes; we should have had an almost ideal state: union of spiritual and temporal administration, under the central government." He tells the people to "appeal not to [their] emotions but to [their] reason." He concludes his speech by saying that the Knights "have served [the] interests" of the people. But it is important to note that Becket has also served their interests in his death. He has died to save the people from sins. The fourth Knight, Richard Brito, speaks next. His speech is important because he refers to Becket's death as the senseless self slaughter of a lunatic, an egotistic man who had "determined upon a death by martyrdom." It is this Knight who renders the verdict on Becket of "suicide while of Unsound Mind." Obviously, the Knights perceive Becket as one conquering the last temptation of pride.

The closing lines of the first Knight's speech which advises people to go home quietly and not to "loiter in groups at street corners" point to their fear of public outbreak against the Archbishop's murder. Perhaps this is why the Knights find the need to give an explanation to the audience. The first Priest's lament after Becket's murder about the church lying "bereft / Alone, desecrated, desolated," expresses the fact that he has not understood the meaning of Becket's death. The third Priest on the other hand says "the Church is stronger for this action." He then tells the Knights: "Go, weak sad men, lost' erring souls, / homeless in earth or / heaven." It is this third Priest who thanks God for giving them another "Saint in Canterbury."

The last Choric speech celebrates the meaning life has obtained through Becket's martyrdom. We see a sea change in the Chorus from fear to glory recognising God's ways. Their earlier outburst which spoke about polluted images in the cosmos is now all cleansed through Becket's death. They see a comic pattern now:

"Thy creatures, both the hunters and the hunted / For all things exist only as seen by thee, only as known by / Thee, all things exist / Only in thy Light." The "poor women" of Canterbury have understood the meaning of the still point. They have understood that human beings whom God has made "must consciously praise thee, in thought and in word and in deed." That is, they must surrender themselves totally to God. In the light of this understanding, the activities of cleaning the hearth" and "scrubbing" and "sweeping" all become meaningful. That the chorus has developed is seen in their accepting responsibility for Becket's death. "We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness, our fault; we acknowledge / That the sin of the world is upon our heads: that the blood / of the martyrs and the agony of the saints / Is upon our heads." They end their speech by asking God for mercy and Thomas to pray for them.

5.3 THE CHORUS IN DEVELOPMENT IN ELIOT'S PLAYS

It is necessary to note at the outset itself that Eliot's use of the choral passages were linked with his own voice. That is, the first voice (See Eliot's *Three Voices of Poetry*) viz, the poet talking to himself.

Eliot's use of the Chorus can be Traced back to "Fragment of the Agon" which was published in 1927. It forms part of Eliot's *Samson Agonistes* now. But, it was his eight choral speeches in *The Rock* - which he was commissioned to write for the Canterbury Festival—that demonstrated Eliot's talent in innovatively adapting the Greek Chorus to modern times. About this Chorus, the critic of *The Church Times* said "The great achievement of *The Rock* is the Chorus. Mr. Eliot is greater as a poet than he is experienced as a dramatist, and he has put the best of his writing into the poetry of the choric comments on religion and life." (1 June, 1934)

The Chorus in *The Rock* consisted of males and females. They wore masks and were very stylised in their movements. Eliot relied entirely on Elsie Fogerty, Principal of the Central School of Speech and Drama, and her colleague Gwynneth Thurnburn for coordinating the Chorus. Thurnburn, in fact, succeeded Miss Fogerty as the principal of the school. She was the person who did most of the voice work in the school. She said, "It so happened that we had a particularly good set of girl speakers who had that year done very well at the Oxford Verse-Speaking Festival. ...They responded well and I think Eliot was impressed; anyway we decided that was what he wanted." Thurnburn further adds that in those days drama schools were not there. It was only after world war II that formal training centres in drama sprang up. Due to the war years men who joined these schools had a much shorter course, sometime as short as two months as compared to the two year required course that women attended. The results were obvious. Women were much better voice trained than the men. Thurnburn says, "The girls had a longer and more secure background of training to rely upon, and they therefore constituted a better team." Eliot's use of the all women Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* is entirely due to the fact that in asking for girls from Fogerty's school, he would get the best.

In **The Family Reunion** the chorus comprised of two sisters and two brothers-in-law. Their role in general is static and they do not advance the action in the play.

The Chorus, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, according to Pieter D. Williams "suggests the collectivity, the generality of mankind, as distinct from its outstanding individual members --- Thomas Becket or Henry II." He adds, "the stasis of the chorus, compared with the movement, sometime violent, of other characters and groups of characters, help to isolate them visually in the kaliedoscope of power politics and reinforces another salient theme: the permanence of common humanity, the impermanence of political systems ... The Chorus has learned a stoical submission to life,... something which Thomas when the play begins has yet to learn." He has to be submissive without the fear of the Chorus. Williams also talks of the importance of the vocal role played by the Chorus that it provides a symphony of female voices, a balanced antithesis to male voices of the Priests, Messenger, Archbishop, Tempters, and Knights. ... The other functions of the Chorus is to give details of time, place, action complementing abstract situations. William says, the Chorus "is used to telescope into ninety minutes the last twenty seven days of Becket's life by suggesting the passage of time."

About the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*, McGill says, "In staging of *Murder in the Cathedral* there are interpretive problems of the presentation of the choral speeches. Textually they appear as odes with no specific instructions to indicate differentiation of voices. But the first starting of the play set the precedent for assigning parts within the choral odes to individual voices or varying ensembles."

It is important to note that in the first part of the play, we the audience empathise with the Chorus in the Interlude we become one with them and in the second part they lead us and guide us as to how we should respond to Becket's murder. They invite us to join them in the Te Deum.

5.4 PLAYS BY OTHER DRAMATISTS ON THOMAS BECKET

Alfred Tennyson, T.S. Eliot, Jean Anouilh and Christopher Fry have all written on Thomas Becket. All four writers use the same historical facts but write about them from different perspectives. What all these writers exploit in their works is the friendship that Becket had with King Henry II when he was a Chancellor. Anouilh uses this perspective in his play, *Becket* (1959). In this play, Henry II is hurt by Becket's behaviour after he becomes the Archbishop. He emerges as strongly as Becket for sympathy. He cannot understand why Becket has assumed a new allegiance, the honour of God, which is also the subtitle of the play. Christopher Fry, in his play *Curtmantle* (1961) gives even greater prominence to King Henry II. One of the themes listed by Fry as treated in his play is "a progression toward a portrait of Henry." King Henry II is portrayed in this play as a man who is surrounded by anarchy and chaos and wants order in his Kingdom. The "crown / and the croney" are seen to be working together towards that end. In this play Becket is not as militant in his approach to the King as in Anouilh's play. In fact, he works for the King humbly acknowledging the fact that "there would be no Becket, without the King" and that he is "the King's representative." The King too, in appointing Becket as Archbishop is not influenced by his friendship with him but by the fact that he will be able to stabilize the realm. When Becket after becoming the Archbishop chooses God over the King, Henry is hurt not so much by personal betrayal but for the cause of the nation. In maintaining the stability of the nation he feels that even powers that traditionally belonged to the church should be used which the Archbishop does not accept. Eleanor, King Henry's wife says that issues and personalities have got intertwined. Eleanor's role in Fry's *Curtmantle* is interesting. She is the former French Queen now married to a British King. She has respect for Becket at a personal level and as a statesman. She is different from Tennyson's Eleanor who is directly responsible for the murder of Becket. Tennyson's play *Becket* was written in 1879 but was staged only in 1893.

In Tennyson's *Becket* the conflict between Henry's II and Becket is given focus. Becket's insistence on privileging God before King becomes almost an obsession. Tennyson's plot is complicated by a sub plot involving Henry's mistress Rosamund. This sub plot intersects with the main plot in the animosity that Eleanor, the Queen, shows to Rosamund and also by Rosamund's own spurning of the attention she gets from the four Knights who later murder Becket. However, Rosamund's role in prompting the King to declare what he says about Becket which brings on the murder is clearly seen in Tennyson's play. The Rosamund sub plot confuses the main issue between the King and Becket unlike in the other plays by Fry, Anouilh and Eliot.

Eliot's handling of the Becket issue is different. He focuses on the events that took place in December. This enables him to focus on an issue rather than have a panoramic view of history. Eliot's handling of the Chorus and his theme of martyrdom are also noteworthy.

Again, it is important to note that all these four writers go to different models for their work. Eliot, for instance, uses Classical Greek and Medieval Morality plays. These plays were very ritualistic. Fry is Shavian in his panoramic and historical view. Anouilh says that Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* had an impact on his work. His work is more musical. Interestingly, both Eliot and Fry are Christians and do not appear as existentialist as Anouilh whose Becket refuses to accept any standard other than his own: "I was a man without honour" he says, and "suddenly I found it." If Eliot's play ends with the Chorus understanding the meaning of Becket's martyrdom, Fry's *Curmudgeon* ends with the terror of destruction of Henry's realm and family. Anouilh's *Becket* ends with the ironic compromises, the union of King's and God's honour. Anouilh is more secular, and more radical in his treatment of Becket than Eliot and Fry.

5.5 GREEK AND MEDIEVAL MODELS FOR ELIOT'S *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*

Eliot was acutely aware of the fact that his play was to be performed like Greek tragedy. His play was celebrating a cultic event near the site of the murder of Becket. Eliot aimed at writing a "neutral" verse like the kind used in *Everyman* but he also made modernist use of an abrupt transition to modern dialogue like G.B. Shaw's last scene in *St. Joan* when Eliot's four Knights defend themselves to the audience.

Though Eliot did not consciously develop this play of a Greek dramatic model (as he did each of his subsequent plays), Leo Aylen calls the play "most near in spirit to Greek tragedy, of all the plays written in English or French this century. It is formally similar; it uses a myth in the same way as the Greek tragedies did, and the myth bears the same relation to the religion of Eliot's audience as the myths of the Greek poets did to their audience's religion. It is based on ritual, and the action is carried out principally by the Chorus, not by an actor. It was performed at a festival, not before a theatre going public."

Eliot has openly stated that for the versification of his play he used the medieval play, *Everyman*. Nevill Coghill says:

Everyman is a version, from the late fifteenth century, of a Dutch original called *Elckerlijc*. It tells of how God, perceiving that 'all people be to me unkind,' sends death to summon Everyman before him: he is to bring his Book of Accounts with him. Everyman begs for a respite and tries to persuade his friends his Kinsmen and his Goods to go with him, but they all refuse. His Good-Deeds, however, are willing to stand by him, through death

and after. Everyman confesses his sins, takes the last Sacrament, and creeps into the grave to die. Thereupon a Angel announces 'great joy and melody' above in Heaven, 'where Everyman's soul received shall be.'

Its versification is extremely irregular, at least in comparison with that of the earlier *Miracle and Morality* plays which, nevertheless, it partly imitates.

The lines are of varying length and have a varying number of stresses; there is a good deal of rhyme and there are touches of alliteration.

Coghill goes on to say that a typical *Everyman* like passage in *Murder in the Cathedral* might be:

Your thoughts have more power than Kings to compel you. (4)

You have also thought /sometimes/at your prayers, (4) Sometimes hesitating sat the angles of Stairs, (4) etc.

The "total effect" Coghill states, "is one of living movement and emphatic speech, that tumbles as if by accident on to the happy rhythmical phrase and compulsive rhyme, unforeseeably, and yet with gratification of a certain indefinable expectancy. These effects of verse are greatly enhanced by the intercalation of the two great prose scenes of the Sermon and the Knights' apology, which provide their reasoned contrasts to the rest of the dialogue, where feeling predominates."

5.6 DIFFERENT READINGS OF ELIOT'S *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*

Murder in the Cathedral as:

- a) Poetic Drama
- b) Christian Play
- c) Integration of Eliot's Dramatic Theories
- d) Biographical Play
- e) Feminist Reading

(a) *Murder in the Cathedral* as a POETIC DRAMA

Poetic form, Eliot felt, is the most apt form of expression in the theatre. In his view, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekov were true poets who felt hampered with the limits of prose. In contrast to them are Yeats and Hofmannsthal, who kept alive the ancient and traditional affinity between drama and poetry.

In "The Music of Poetry" (1942) Eliot acknowledges his bias in favour of the poetry to which he was indebted as a poet, and says that the music of poetry is not independent of the meaning. The meaning of poetry is sometimes beyond the poet's intentions. He saw possibilities of theme recurrence and transitions in poetry as in music, and thought the concert hall more likely to quicken poetry than the opera house. He said that without poets of unusual sensibility and command of language, culture will deteriorate. "Poetry and Drama" is notable for the retrospective attention Eliot gives to his own development as a playwright, he finds that he has been writing variations on the theme of poetic drama throughout his career. For Eliot the highest aim of poetic drama is to bring us to the border of those feelings which are expressible only in music, without leaving the everyday world of dramatic action

(b) ***Murder in the Cathedral as a CHRISTIAN PLAY***

Stephen Spender's "Martyrdom and Motive" states that "The true theme of Eliot's plays written after his conversion is the discovery by heroes of their religious vocation. It is required of the hero that he perfect his will so as to make it conform completely with the will of God." In *Murder in the Cathedral*, according to Spender, these aims are revealed in a very pure state."

Stevie Smith finds the play "a remarkable evocation of Christian fears." He adds that, it should not be forgotten that Eliot had initially considered calling the play, *Fear in the Way*. Smith argues that *Murder in the Cathedral* is "remarkable for the strength of these fears and the horrible beauty in which they are dressed." According to Smith, Eliot perceived modern times as shallow and meaningless. The play with its religious direction was perhaps written as an antidote to the times.

The entire play can be seen as based on the Christian notion of history. Unlike traditional history, Christian history is not linear. It can be described as providentially oriented history of salvation. It starts with the creation and moves towards the last day of judgement when God will come in all his power and glory to sift the good from the bad. In Christ the eternal enters the temporal intersecting the timeless with time, creating a paradox in time. This paradox will only be resolved in God. The preference of Christian dramatists for paradoxical imagery draws its justification from this fact. Saints and martyrs are also like Christ, but on a different scale. In this sense the History of Salvation confronts everyman with the same religious duties to fulfill. Everyman becomes every man whose soul becomes a battlefield for Good and Evil to gain supremacy. It is in the history of the salvation of the world and the soul that Christian history unfolds itself.

The play has also been read as following the structure of a Catholic mass:

- a. Introductory rites
- b. Preparation for the gifts to the Eucharist
- c. Eucharistic Prayer
- d. Communion rite
- e. Concluding rite

(c) ***Murder in the Cathedral as Eliot's most successful integration of his DRAMATIC THEORIES.***

III Poetry and Drama Eliot states that the subject matter of *Murder in the Cathedral* was well suited for verse drama. Interestingly, though he states that a verse drama should be entirely in verse, he justifies the two prose sections by saying that Becket's sermon would not be convincing if it had been in verse. The Knights he said, were made to speak prose to shock the audience out of their complacency.

Marianne Moore states: "one may merely mention the appropriateness of verse to subject matter.... Mr. Eliot steps so reverently as the solemn ground he has essayed, that austerity assumes the dignity of philosophy and the didacticism of the verities incorporated in the play becomes impersonal and persuasive." Carol H. Smith is also of the opinion that *Murder in the Cathedral* integrates very effectively Eliot's dramatic theories. She says, "the levels of the play are intrinsically unified by the skillful interweaving of Thomas' story with the imagery of Christ's Temptation and Passion and with the prototype formula of all religion and drama. The hierarchy of characters within the play who perceive the meaning of Thomas' death on their various levels helps to tighten the unity of the drama and to give it the stylized quality Eliot admires from a fear of spiritual realities and a disavowal of responsibilities to acceptance of and participation in both the sin and glory of martyrdom, Eliot has provided a highly effective vehicle for commentary on the action and participation in it."

(d) Murder in the Cathedral as BIOGRAPHICAL

In *The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays* Martin Browne states that Eliot found in the Becket story something eternal: "at the moment when he was called upon to write his play, he found that the basic conflict of the twentieth century came very near to repeating that of the twelfth." Browne also sees the rise of fascism in the 1930s as a serious form of social threat that Becket fights in his play. Such an approach is also corroborated by Ashley Dukes in "T.S. Eliot in the Theatre." He says, "Other things conspired to remind us of the play's actuality; indeed it was never allowed to become historical drama for a moment. Hitler had been long enough in power to ensure that the four knightly murderers of Becket would be recognized as figures of the day, four perfect Nazis defending their act on the most orthodox totalitarian grounds. Echoes of one war and forebodings of another resounded through the sultry afternoon."

Interestingly, King Edward the VIII abdicated his throne during the play's West End production which according to Dukes refer to the lines about the King's transient power.

Peter Ackroyd argues that the hero of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Becket, shares the writer's first name. This is not a mere coincidence. Lyndall Gordon, in his book *Eliot's New Life*, focuses on the biographical study of Eliot from the late 1920s to the end of Eliot's life, notes several autobiographical overtones in *Murder in the Cathedral*. He says that Eliot found in Becket "a model who was not so different from himself. Here was a man to all appearances not born for sainthood, a man of the world Who moved from worldly success into spiritual danger... Eliot said that a bit of the author may be the germ of a character, but that, too, a certain character may call out latent potentialities in the author. *Murder in the Cathedral* was a biographical play that had its impact on Eliot in shifting the balance of his new life from the shared course of love to the course of religious trial."

(e) A FEMINIST READING of Murder in the Cathedral

Such a reading would focus on Eliot's all women Chorus which comprises of the "poor women" of Canterbury. Guilt and submissiveness which mark the growth of the Chorus in the Christian framework of the play, are viewed as negative qualities according to the feminist perspective. Feminists argue that women under patriarchy have always suffered from a deep sense of guilt and it is this guilt that has stood in the way of their having a sense of "self-worth." Similarly, with "submissiveness." Under patriarchy, submissiveness implies surrendering to male domination which feminists perceive as being inherently destructive to women. For another feminist reading of the play, see *Feminist theory and Modern Drama* edited by Taisha Abraham (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1997)

In giving a feminist reading of *Murder in the Cathedral*, however, one should remember that Eliot chose an all women Chorus for his play not keeping the gender issue in mind, but because he wanted the best trained voices from Ms. Fogerty's Central School of Speech and Drama.

5.7 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH CRITICAL COMMENTS

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(The essays in the volume originated as invited lectures for the T.S. Eliot society which has its headquarters in St. Louis, the poet's birthplace. Some essays in the collection are historical while others focus on language. A few of the essays deal with Eliot's eastward move from the slums of the turn-of-the-century river town in the heart of the American midwest to the more metropolitan river town of Boston and then to river based urban capitals like London and Paris.)

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5.8 EXERCISES

1. Do you think that the development in the Chorus reflects the growth in Becket?
2. Critically analyse the importance of the Knights speeches.
3. Briefly comment on Eliot's use of Greek and Medieval sources for his play, *Murder in the Cathedral*.
4. Attempt a feminist reading of the play.
5. Discuss *Murder in the Cathedral* as a Christian play.
6. Trace the development of Becket's martyrdom in the play.