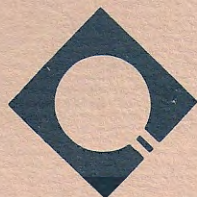


MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

by

T.S. ELIOT

THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY



THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY in THE STUDIO

First performance November 19th 1981

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Thomas Becket, who was of Norman parentage, became as a young man the close friend and confidant of King Henry II of England. Indeed, it is said of him that Henry was the only person he ever loved. He was by all accounts a high-spirited, pleasure-loving person, loyal and generous, with a keen intellect and considerable administrative ability. It was no accident, therefore, that although already a priest in Holy Orders, Henry should have appointed him Chancellor of the realm. In this official capacity, Thomas ably supported Henry in many of the reforms which the king introduced, notably those which established the legal system that exists to the present day. But none could have foreseen that by creating Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury, Henry was forging the very weapon that was to sever the bonds of love and friendship binding the two men, and set in motion the train of events which was to end in treachery and martyrdom.

To Henry, the appointment was a political masterstroke, whereby both Church and State would be brought together under his control in the single person of Thomas. To Thomas, it was the turning point in his life from which he never swerved. Slowly, yet inexorably, the man gave place to the priest and the priest to the saint: the roistering companion of the king became the shepherd to the flock and the instrument of the Divine Will. Thomas resigned his Chancellorship, to the rage and frustration of Henry, and from that moment on there was a steady decline in their relations, so bitter at one point, that Thomas was forced to fly the country and take refuge in France for seven years.

T.S. Eliot's play opens with the return of the Archbishop to Canterbury on 2nd December, 1170 and ends with his assassination there on the 29th of the same month. But this is no chronicle play. What little of historical fact is touched upon is accurate, but Eliot was more concerned to explore the nature of martyrdom and the perpetual struggle between the material and spiritual worlds. The anguish endured by Thomas in his efforts to accept his martyrdom in the right spirit; his battle with the Tempters and his final victory over self and the sin of pride, tempting him to 'do the right deed for the wrong reason' occupy the first part of the play, from which Thomas emerges the victor. All that now remains is for him to 'make perfect my will'; and from the preaching of the marvellous sermon on Christmas Day, we watch the process of reconciliation with the will of God at work within him as Thomas moves closer and closer to the peace 'which passeth all understanding'. His flock, represented by the Chorus of the women of Canterbury, and his own priests cannot follow him, they can only watch and wait, sensing the horror that is to come, accepting their own involvement in it, yet aware of their own limitations. The play reaches its climax in the moment of the murder with the agonized utterance of the women, for whom it seems that Armageddon has come. They are engulfed by a great tidal wave of shock, horror and guilt, for, in the rare perception of the moment, they recognize that they share the sin of the whole world which necessitates Thomas's sacrifice.

The famous scene that follows has variously been described as 'an excrescence upon the play', 'a kind of trick' (Eliot himself) and 'the temptation of the audience'. However one regards it it is, nonetheless, a magnificent piece of theatre and, for me, an integral part of the play — a necessary bridge passage from the disorientation and despair in which Eliot left the Chorus — to the final *Te Deum* of praise, understanding and re-affirmation of faith with which the play closes.

BARBARA HUTCHINS

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CHARACTERS

A CHORUS OF WOMEN OF CANTERBURY

Jean Caleb, Anne Chauveau, Mary Hodlin,
Monyene Kane, Gillian Kerswell,
Marian Malone, Frances Martin,
Ann-Marie Tighe

ARCHBISHOP THOMAS BECKET

Alan Waldock

THREE PRIESTS OF THE CATHEDRAL

Glyn Backshall, Roger de Toney,
David Morgan

with, in PART I

A MESSENGER

John Martin

FOUR TEMPTERS

Ian Clarke, Anthony Diggle,
Ken Ratcliffe, Norman Wilkinson

and in PART II

AN ATTENDANT

John Martin

FOUR KNIGHTS

Ian Clarke, Anthony Diggle,
Ken Ratcliffe, Norman Wilkinson

Directed by BARBARA HUTCHINS

Designed by JOHN ROLFE

The action is continuous while the scene moves between the exterior and interior of the Cathedral, and the Archbishop's Hall.

We would like to record our thanks to the Choir of All Saints Church, Kingston upon Thames, under the direction of Mr David Nield, and to Mr John Francis, for their singing of the plainsong.

STAGE MANAGERS:
assisted by

Carina Choy-Warry and Barbara Yerolemou
Lucinda Angus, Lesley Harris, David Palmer,
Cheryl Robson, Sam Robson, Caroline Goodchild
Martin Boyle

LIGHTING DESIGNER:
LIGHTING ASSISTANT:

Jo Phelps
Roger Kelly

SOUND DESIGNER:

Charles Lacaille

PROPERTIES:

Iris Phelps

assisted by

Jennifer Reid

WARDROBE:

Grace Lacaille

assisted by

Celia Lacaille, Lucy Lacaille, Mary Angus

PROGRAMME PRINTING:

Geoff Powell

COMING UP IN THE MAIN THEATRE

5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12 December

DIMETOS

by Athol Fugard

This play by the modern South African writer (author of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*) explores the devastating results of the pressures that build up through the inability of people to betray their own guilty secrets to those closest to them.

AND THE CHRISTMAS SHOW . . .

31 December — 9 January

ALADDIN

Traditional pantomime hits the Questors stage once again !!!

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE QUESTORS * *

As if *Aladdin* weren't enough, in The Studio you can see Michael Frayn's funniest play

CLOUDS

Forget the winter, come away to sunny Cuba, where rival reporters are having difficulty in finding out THE TRUTH, but are finding out a lot of other things instead

17 — 21 December and

31 December — 2 January

SEEING IN THE NEW YEAR AT THE QUESTORS * * * * *

AND IN THE NEW YEAR IN THE MAIN THEATRE

23 — 30 January

TREATS

by Christopher Hampton

Heard the one about the girl, the journalist and the stuffed shirt?

This is it!

Christopher Hampton's 'eternal triangle' play is . . . 'subtle, powerful and extremely funny'.

AND IN THE STUDIO

14 — 17 January

THE WHIRLER

by Sebastian Baczekiewicz

Two plays by this promising young local playwright have already been presented by The Questors. This, his latest play, is his most evocative and moving piece of writing so far.
