

**AP English Notes
October 28, 2004**

These sites contain the historical evidence presented in this play:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/grim-becket.html>

http://historymedren.about.com/library/who/blwwbecketweb.htm?iam=momma_100_SKD&terms=St.+Thomas+a+Becket%2C+death

The following lines are very important in our study.

The point at which Becket receives still point:

“I have had a tremour of bliss, a wink from heaven, a whisper” (Eliot 70).

As the knights run through the cloisters following the Archbishop, he is at peace and says:

“All my life they have been coming, these feet. / All my life I have waited” (Eliot 69).

He also adds: “I am not in danger, only near to death” (Eliot 70).

The knights taunt Becket with this chant concerning the biblical character Daniel:

“Come down Daniel to the lions’ den, / Come down for the mark of the beast” (Eliot 74).

If you do not know the story of Daniel, please look this up on the net.

Before his death, Becket makes this statement:

**“This is the sign of the church always,
The sign of blood” (Eliot75).**

We also reviewed the knights as they attempt to excuse their actions:

**Reginald FitzUrse First Knight
Introduces the Other Knights**

Baron William De Traci (Tracey) (Tracy) Third Knight

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Eldest Member
Reason for Murder:
Loyal to His King
No Personal Gain
Goes Against the Grain to Kill an Archbishop
Awful Row
Live Abroad

Richard Brito Fourth Knight
Family Loyal to the Church
Most Convincing
Asks, "Who killed the Bishop?"
Verdict: "Suicide while of unsound mind."
Becket was determined to be a martyr.
He could have allowed our anger to cool . . . he insisted that the door be unbarred.

Sir Hugh De Morville Second Knight
Reason for Murder:
Requested to Reason with the Crowd
Becket was Growing Too Powerful
Save the State the Expense of a Trial
Sometimes Violence is the Only Answer

Historical Information

On November 30, Becket crossed the Channel returning to his post at Canterbury. Earlier, while in France, Becket had excommunicated the Bishops of London and Salisbury for their support of the king. Now, Becket remained steadfast in his refusal to absolve the bishops. This news threw King Henry (still in France) into a rage in which he was purported to shout: "What sluggards, what cowards have I brought up in my court, who care nothing for their allegiance to their lord. Who will rid me of this meddlesome priest."

The king's exact words have been lost to history but his outrage inspired four knights to sail to England to rid the realm of this annoying prelate. They arrived at Canterbury during the afternoon of December 29 and immediately searched for the Archbishop. Becket fled to the Cathedral where a service was in progress. The knights found him at the altar, drew their swords and began hacking at their victim finally splitting his skull.

The death of Becket unnerved the king. The knights who did the deed to curry the king's favor, fell into disgrace. Several miracles were said to occur at the tomb of the martyr and he was soon canonized. Hordes of pilgrims

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transformed Canterbury Cathedral into a shrine. Four years later, in an act of penance, the king donned a sack-cloth walking barefoot through the streets of Canterbury while eighty monks flogged him with branches. Henry capped his atonement by spending the night in the martyr's crypt. St. Thomas continued as a popular cultist figure for the remainder of the Middle Ages.

Observations of a Monk

Edward Grim, a monk, observed the attack from the safety of a hiding place near the altar. He wrote his account some time after the event. Acceptance of his description must be qualified by the influence that Becket's sainthood had on Grim's perspective. However, the fundamentals of his narrative are no doubt true. We pick up the story after the knights have stormed into the cathedral.

"The murderers followed him; 'Absolve', they cried, 'and restore to communion those whom you have excommunicated, and restore their powers to those whom you have suspended.'"

"He answered, 'There has been no satisfaction, and I will not absolve them.'

'Then you shall die,' they cried, 'and receive what you deserve.'

'I am ready,' he replied, 'to die for my Lord, that in my blood the Church may obtain liberty and peace. But in the name of Almighty God, I forbid you to hurt my people whether clerk or lay.'

"Then they lay sacrilegious hands on him, pulling and dragging him that they may kill him outside the church, or carry him away a prisoner, as they afterwards confessed. But when he could not be forced away from the pillar, one of them pressed on him and clung to him more closely. Him he pushed off calling him 'pander', and saying, 'Touch me not, Reginald; you owe me fealty and subjection; you and your accomplices act like madmen.'

"The knight, fired with a terrible rage at this severe repulse, waved his sword over the sacred head. 'No faith', he cried, 'nor subjection do I owe you against my fealty to my lord the King.'

"Then the unconquered martyr seeing the hour at hand which should put an end to this miserable life and give him straightway the crown of immortality" promised by the Lord, inclined his neck as one who prays and joining his hands he lifted them up, and commended his cause and that of the Church to God, to St. Mary, and to the blessed martyr." Scarce had he said the words than the wicked knight, fearing lest he should be rescued by the people and escape alive, leapt upon him suddenly and wounded this lamb who was sacrificed to God on the head, cutting off the top of the crown which the sacred unction of the chrism had dedicated to God; and by the same blow he

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wounded the arm of him who tells this. For he, when the others, both monks and clerks, fled, stuck close to the sainted Archbishop and held him in his arms till the one he interposed was almost severed.

"Then he received a second blow on the head but still stood firm. At the third blow he fell on his knees and elbows, offering himself a living victim, and saying in a low voice, 'For the Name of Jesus and the protection of the Church I am ready to embrace death.'

"Then the third knight inflicted a terrible wound as he lay, by which the sword was broken against the pavement, and the crown which was large was separated from the head. The fourth knight prevented any from interfering so that the others might freely perpetrate the murder.

"As to the fifth, no knight but that clerk who had entered with the knights, that a fifth blow might not be wanting to the martyr who was in other things like to Christ, he put his foot on the neck of the holy priest and precious martyr, and, horrible to say, scattered his brain and blood over the pavement, calling out to the others, 'Let us away, knights; he will rise no more.'