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TAKING THE RISK:  
A BECKET PRODUCTION JOURNAL

by

KATHLEEN O'FALLON

B.S., Kansas State University, 1972

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

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*Richard M. Howe*  
Major Professor

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MHS DRAMA DEPARTMENT PRESENTS

# BECKE



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## **SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

### **ACT I**

- Scene 1 Canterbury Cathedral
- Scene 2 The King's Room
- Scene 3 The Council Chamber
- Scene 4 A Forest
- Scene 5 A Saxon Hut
- Scene 6 Becket's Palace

### **ACT II**

- Scene 1 A Forest in France
- Scene 2 A Street in France
- Scene 3 The Sacristy of a Cathedral in France
- Scene 4 A Room in Becket's Palace

### **ACT III**

- Scene 1 A Room in the King's Palace
- Scene 2 The Episcopal Palace
- Scene 3 A Room in the King's Palace
- Scene 4 The Court of Louis, King of France
- Scene 5 The Pope's Palace in Rome
- Scene 6 A Convent Cell

### **ACT IV**

- Scene 1 The Court of Louis
- Scene 2 The Plain of La Ferte Bernard
- Scene 3 King Henry's Palace in France
- Scene 4 Canterbury Cathedral

# CAST FOR BECKET

King Henry the Second .....	Cham Ferguson
Thomas Becket .....	Tim Sistrunk
A Page .....	Jocelyn Kitchen
First Soldier .....	Jeff Friesen
The Archbishop of Canterbury .....	Daven Carlson
The Bishop of Oxford .....	Gary Wesche
The Bishop of York .....	Henry Dace
Gilbert Folliot, Bishop of London .....	Dan McCulley
First Baron .....	Matt Hinkin
Second Baron .....	Jordan Fedder
Third Baron .....	Robin Selfridge
Fourth Baron .....	Dan Fink
Saxon Father .....	Mathew Cox
Saxon Girl .....	Dayna Stotesbury
Saxon Boy .....	Thomas Cox
Gwendolen .....	Cindy Fogerson
French Girl .....	Lori Gillespie
Little Monk .....	Richard Hougen
Provost Marshall .....	Matthew Cox
French Priest .....	Dan McCulley
French Choirboy .....	Thomas Cox
Officer .....	Daven Carlson
First Servant .....	Athena Wong
Second Servant .....	Helen Wuscher
Queen Mother .....	Leah Edelman
Young Queen .....	Katie Sinnett
Elder Prince .....	Jeff Friesen
Younger Prince .....	Thomas Cox
English Priest .....	Ramon Fewell
First Monk .....	Jordan Fedder
King Louis of France .....	Keith Brown
First French Baron .....	Dan Fink
Duke of Arundel .....	Matthew Cox
The Pope .....	Robin Selfridge
A Cardinal .....	Matt Hinkin
Sentry .....	Henry Dace
Young Sentry .....	Tom Twiss

## SENIORS IN THE CAST



**CHAMBLEE FERGUSON**, president of Thespian Troupe no. 941, has dedicated much of his high school career to the furthering of drama at Manhattan High. Cham is a talented young actor who was recently selected as a semi-finalist for the Presidential Scholars in the Arts awards. He will compete nationally in forensics tournament this summer with his humorous interpretation from **Feiffer's People**.



**TIM SISTRUNK** has taken on a variety of roles during his three years at MHS, from the narrator in **The Good Doctor** to Ali Hakim, the peddler, in **Oklahoma!** He is an active member of Thespians, the MHS forensics squad, the Student Council where, as secretary, his minutes keep the entire student body amused as well as informed.



**LEAH EDELMAN**, vice-president of Thespians, has worked extremely hard both on stage and backstage. She has been a most dependable student director for this, and several other, productions. Leah can take much of the credit for getting new people interested in drama at MHS. She is active in many other MHS organizations as well.



**CINDY FOGERSON** is making her debut in drama at MHS. She delighted audiences with her portrayal of Aunt Eller in **Oklahoma!** Her lovely voice adds a dimension to the part of Gwendolen.



**JORDAN FEDDER** portrays a baron in **Becket** with as much wit as he did the Rabbi in **Fiddler on the Roof**. He is also assisting the director of the production.



**KATIE SINNETT** has been an active Thespian all three years at MHS. She has served many long hours backstage, as well as adding sparkle to the stage in the many parts she has played.



**DAVEN CARLSON** is working in his second production of this season, having done a fine job in the lead role of **The Importance of Being Earnest** in February. He also works weekly on the MHS News, a program seen on Cable Channel 6.



**KEITH BROWN** is making his debut on the MHS stage in this production. He is a history buff who could not resist the temptation to go back to the 12th Century.



**ROBIN SELFRIDGE** has long been an active Thespian at MHS. He is also a member of the MHS News Staff and participates with the forensics squad.



**DAN MCCULLEY** is a Thespian and a member of the **Mentor** editorial staff. He is often seen strumming his guitar in public, also.

#### AND THE REST OF THE CAST



## PRODUCTION STAFF

Director .....Ms. Kathleen O'Fallon  
Assistant Director .....Leah Edelman  
Assistant Director .....Jordan Fedder  
Stage Manager .....Karen Samelson  
House Manager .....Brad Shores  
Light Technician .....Anne Spangler  
Assistant Light Technician .....Dana Busick  
Make-up Chairman .....Deborah Edelman  
Costume Chairman .....Florence Gatsche  
Props Chairman .....Julie Bennett  
Publicity Chairman .....Ann Cashin  
Box Office Chairmen .....LaDonna Honaker  
Terri Thomas  
Poster and Program Design .....Beth Mingle  
Poster Production .....Cathy Moreland

### Stage Crew

Mark Posler  
Dana Busick  
Matt Hinkin  
Matt Cox  
Thomas Cox  
Jeff Friesen  
Dayna Stotesbury  
Jocelyn Kitchen  
Lori Gillispie  
Leah Edelman  
Terri Thomas  
Anne Spangler  
Keith Brown  
Janell Friesen  
Tom Twiss

### Ushers

Angela Weeks  
Tammy Rothwell  
Mark Posler  
Celeste Hebert  
Kris Dolan  
Chris Nilson

### Make-up Crew

Eve Elliott  
Katie Sinnett  
Janell Friesen  
Susan Leipold  
Susan Fallquist  
Deborah Edelman  
Cheryl Johnson

### Publicity Crew

Beth Mingle  
Leah Edelman  
Tammy Rothwell  
Angela Weeks  
Kris Dolan  
Tim Sistrunk  
Cathy Moreland

### Light Crew

Matt Cox  
Cheryl Johnson  
Terri Thomas

### Box Office Crew

Susan Fallquist  
Dayna Stotesbury  
Leah Edelman

### Costume Crew

Annette Stancombe  
Vicki Busch  
Stephanie Scalf  
Angela Weeks  
Helen Wuscher  
Jocelyn Kitchen  
Margaret Harmon  
Beth Mingle

### Props Crew

Keith Brown  
Sara Trechter  
Leah Edelman  
Cham Ferguson  
Gary Wesche



THE PRODUCTION STAFF IN PICTURES





**The Play:**

Jean Anouilh's intention in writing **Becket** was not historical accuracy. In a 1972 interview he admitted, "I didn't look in any book to find out who Henry II really was, nor even Becket. I created the king I needed, and the ambiguous Becket I needed." Anouilh insists that he is "not a serious man," so he was not fazed by the discovery that his historical source misled him in presenting Becket as a Saxon. He "decided that if history in the next fifty years should go on making progress it will perhaps rediscover that Becket was indubitable of Saxon origin; in any case, for this drama of friendship between two men, between the king and his friend, his companion in pleasure and in work (and this is what gripped me about the story), this friend whom he could not cease to love though he became his worst enemy the night he was named archbishop—for this drama it was a thousand times better that Becket remained a Saxon."

**Becket** is, therefore, a play about the nature of friendship between men. It is specifically about the destruction of a friendship between two men who are controlled by the roles they are destined to play in history. It is a play about a rebel who will not compromise the honor he has found in the service of God and a king who cannot compromise his country, even for his best friend. It is a play about the honor of doing what has to be done, when it has to be done, completely and wholeheartedly.

**The Production:**

**Becket** was the first of Anouilh's plays which he directed completely—an effort which won him an award as best stage director of the year in France. Thus, stage directions are specific and detailed. Anouilh has declared that he writes plays "The way my father (a tailor) cut his suits," so we have tried to keep our production as true to his intentions as possible, given our amateur status. This includes the use of "hobby horses" in the hunting scenes, an element of Anouilh's attempt to present theatre as theatre, not as reality.



At MHS

# *Reviewer praises 'Becket' production*

By LESLIE F. PATHEAL  
A Mercury Reviewer

The Manhattan High School drama department took on a challenging play in their presentation of Jean Anouilh's *Becket*. It is a play about the friendship between two men, King Henry the Second and Thomas Becket, and about the inability of any human to retain honor in a world that

requires compromise as a requisite of continued existence.

Becket is Henry's adviser and mentor, teaching him all he knows about philosophy and intellectual pursuits. Henry sees him as his other half, and makes him the Archbishop of Canterbury, hoping to reconcile a rebellious church to his rule.

Becket warns him that if he is the

church's leader he cannot be Henry's friend, and he defends his position as God's representative with all the honor of his soul. Their friendship is breached though their love for one another is not, causing Becket's death as a martyr.

The performance on Thursday showed an occasional opening night rough spots, but on the whole, its many parts were well assimilated. I had seen Cham Ferguson in Manhattan High productions before, so I expected his portrayal of King Henry to measure up to what I had seen in the past, but he surpassed any previous role. This role required that he bring together both his comic and dramatic talents in one character, and he succeeded most admirably.

Tim Sistrunk, as Becket, gave a controlled performance. He was a convincing moralist, though he was sometimes hard to hear in the first act.

Cindy Fogerson, as Gwendolen, Becket's mistress, sang beautifully, in a lovely, clear soprano. She also provided one of the most moving moments of the first act in her speech to Becket after he gives her to Henry for the night and tells her he will not take her back afterward.

The directing of Ms. Kathleen O'Fallon, with the assistance of Leah Edelman and Jordan Fedder, was kept true to the intentions of Anouilh, who directed *Becket* originally. The set and costumes were also admirably constructed.

MHS DRAMA DEPARTMENT PRESENTS

## **BECKET**

or *The Honor of God*

By Jean Anouilh  
Translated By Lucienne Hill

**April 10-11-12 at 7:30 P.M.**  
**M.H.S. AUDITORIUM - \$2.00**

**Call - 537-2600 For Reserve Seats**  
Produced by Special Arrangement  
with Samuel French Inc.

# *Thespians Stage Successful Production*

by David Kromm

In our society we tend to think of the success of something in terms of how many people saw or heard it. This surely did not apply to the recent school production of Becket a play by Jean Anouilh. On the night I went, the audience was small but the play was great. I have been to events with ten times as many people that weren't half as good.

In case you missed it, the story concerns the deterioration of a friendship. Thomas Becket is the amazingly loyal friend of King

Henry the second until the King makes him Archbishop of Canterbury. Becket cannot divide his loyalty, so he opts for the honor of God and consequently becomes such a thorn in the side of the King that the Kings allows Becket to be killed.

Any production of this play will largely stand or fall on the characterizations of Becket and King Henry. Cham Ferguson's portrayal of Henry was almost perfect. He used enough humor to

make the King human but not ridiculous. Making Becket himself believable is difficult. Tim Sistrunk does it by using exactly the right amount of Jesus-like ambiguity.

Others were also convincing. Richard Hougan so well assumed his character's distaste for Normans that I thought he might go knock one off after the play was over. Cindy Fogerson's singing conveyed its feeling very well, the truest sign of good music. The only thing I found inadequate was the notes on the back of the program. They say that

the friendship between Becket and the King is destroyed by the role they were destined to play in history. I've never been a big fan of the destiny theory of fate. Of course, they were influenced by the main backdrop of the Middle Ages, the conflict between church and state.

This conflict was fed by the same irrational paranoia that feeds the arms race today. But Becket and the King was also at fault for getting too caught up in the assumed irreconcilability of church and state. Becket mouths both sides of the paranoia. When in the service of the King he expresses the dire expectation that soon the Archbishop, he says that if he can't protect his priests soon the

church will be completely subjugated.

Becket, in fact, has a tragic flaw. He always had to be serving a particular thing. In fact, inflexibly "serving" church, state or anything is a mistake. It has to be realized that there are many services we should take up, and it is up to us to find a rational balance. It's not what we have to do but what we think we have to do, and our only destiny is to choose.

Herein lies the glory of this play and this production of it. It suggests as many valid interpretations as real life. If a play that does that cannot be counted a success, then success is meaningless.

## *Acting in 'Becket' Convincingly Real*

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## Problems Facing the High School Director: A Case in Point

Directors of high school theatre programs face a set of problems unique from those inherent to any other branch of theatre, amateur or professional. Some problems, such as meagre budgets and small audiences, are common to many levels of theatrical endeavor; but public high schools lead the way in demanding miraculous results from individuals constrained by limited knowledge and experience, by lack of equipment and resources, and by administrative and community restraints. A university community which offers a variety of cultural experiences to its citizens sets even higher standards for high school productions to meet.

Manhattan High School, with a student population of about 1400, is located in Manhattan, Kansas, home of Kansas State University. Manhattan is home to Manhattan Civic Theatre, the K-State Players, and McCain Auditorium, which attracts professional theatre groups from across the nation. Manhattan Arts Council sponsors many arts residencies each year. In fact, during the school year one can seldom find a weekend which does not afford the chance to view at least one live theatrical production. Thus, one encounters the first, and perhaps the most serious, problem facing the MHS drama instructor: finding a play which will compete well with other community attractions and draw its fair share of the sophisticated, critical Manhattan audience.

A multitude of other considerations affect the choice of a play to be produced at Manhattan High. Budget is, as in most theatrical efforts, a major consideration. At the beginning of each fiscal year, \$300.00 is placed in the "dramatics" account to be used for the production expenses of two plays. (The annual musical has a separate account.) This seed money must cover any costs which are not covered by the gate receipts for each play. Naturally, inflation has affected theatrical supply costs as it has everything else, with set-building and costume-making materials becoming increasingly exorbitant. During the 1979-80 school year, each play made approximately \$300.00 at the box office; and the dramatics account was \$4.19 in the black at the conclusion of the fiscal year. In order to avoid leaving the account in the red, many conservation efforts, such as doing one royalty-free play and buying enough lumber to build the sets for three productions with funds from the comparatively affluent musical account, were undertaken. Keeping budget limitations constantly in mind forces the MHS director to eliminate plays which require lavish sets and costumes or which carry high royalty fees from the production schedule.

Play selection is also strongly influenced by the pool of talent from which one has to draw in casting. At Manhattan High, two to three times more girls than boys invariably audition for plays. Thus, in a play which calls for a large cast one may choose only the

most exceptional actresses and still be forced to cast boys of far less ability.

Although pre-casting is presented as a cardinal sin in most director's handbooks, high school director's need to have some casting scheme in mind when choosing a play. For instance, Manhattan High was fortunate to have two very talented, hard-working young men who were seniors this past school year. They had been the backbone of the drama program for three years, so the director decided to select a play which would challenge them while showcasing their abilities.

Adolescents' level of maturity must be taken into account when judging the suitability of a play for performance in a high school. Lack of life experience may make the portrayal of complex characters in some classic works beyond the ken of the average high school student, but most are mature enough to recognize when they are given a piece of fluff to perform. Most plays written specifically for the high school stage are an insult to the intelligence and sensitivity of the actors involved. The production of a play should be a learning experience; therefore, the play should be a piece of literature from which something may be learned. Its structure should be admirable and its ideas universal. It should demand the best efforts of high school actors while not being beyond their reach. Whether contemporary or classic, the play should be recognized as a worthy example of dramatic literature.

Many high school drama mentors are English teachers who are minimally certified in the area of speech/drama. Therefore, while they may have an abiding interest in the theatre and a wide reading background in dramatic literature, many lack the technical expertise of someone who majored in theatre. A play which places heavy technical demands, such as elaborate sets and complex lighting schemes, is not an apt choice for a director with limited technical knowledge. However, some scope may be added to the available technical know-how through the use of outside experts and crew members who have had the opportunity to work with more technically sophisticated directors. At Manhattan High, the director is able to seek help from professionals in the theatre department at Kansas State University. In addition, many members of the technical crew have been trained with professionals in the Recreation Commission's summer "Arts in the Park" program, and they share their knowledge willingly. These factors allow the choice of plays which require some technical knowledge beyond that which the director, an English teacher, possesses.

Finally, the high school drama instructor has the responsibility of choosing a play which will entertain the community and, thus, draw a good audience. However admirable the play may be in the eyes of a director, it will not be a satisfying experience for the players if, to quote Hamlet out of context, it "pleased not the

million; 'twas caviary to the general." In the final analysis, a play performed for an auditorium of empty seats--no matter how well it is done--is not a complete success.



### The Choosing of Becket: 1, 2, 3

Since seeing the movie Becket as a teenager, I had been fascinated with the history of Thomas Becket and King Henry II of England. Thus, it was with great delight that I encountered Jean Anouilh's Becket among the many scripts which I perused during the summer of 1979 in order to select two plays for production during the following school year. Becket contained the three elements to which I was giving major consideration at the time: it offered two equally important male leads, it afforded a challenge to the actors, and it was a fine piece of dramatic literature.

The roles of the two leads in Becket are as nearly equal as one could wish. King Henry has 256 lines while Becket has 267 lines. The two young men who would play the leads were, for the most part, equally talented; but one had achieved widespread recognition because of his skill in portraying highly visible comic parts, while the other had gone largely unnoticed for his understated, sensitive portrayals of less showy characters. I hoped Becket would bring long-overdue recognition for the latter and allow the former to show that he could play serious as well as comic roles.

The characters in Becket are complex. To play them well would require sophisticated character analysis and sustained concentration. The play is a long, serious one,

broken up surprisingly frequently by Anouilh's (often slapstick) comic relief scenes; it would require a delicate touch to balance the serious and comic elements and to move smoothly from one to the other. The relationship between Henry and Becket was very close, and in the play Henry often declares his love for Becket, demanding that Becket requite it. To depict this relationship accurately without implying homosexuality would ask much subtlety from the actors. In short, Becket was a challenge for the actors involved, an opportunity for them to stretch beyond what had been asked of them in the past.

Becket is a fine example of contemporary theatre. Its vignettes are well integrated through the use of irony, foreshadowing, and flashbacks. The characters are well-conceived, and their motivations are clearly defined when Anouilh wishes them to be and left ambiguous when that better serves his purpose. The themes and ideas propounded in Becket are thought-provoking and timeless. They deal with some universal truths about friendship, honour, and responsibility. They express man's ever-present desire for an ordered universe--one in which people treat each other sensibly, logically...and kindly. Becket is a piece of literature which stands up well to study and analysis.

Having met my three main criteria, Becket was selected to be presented April 10-12, 1980 at Manhattan High School.

### Jean Anouilh: Sources and Concepts

Jean Anouilh directed the original production of his play Becket, which opened in 1959 at the Théâtre Montparnasse-Gaston of Paris. As a reward for his efforts, Anouilh won the "Prix Dominique" for the year's most eminent stage direction. Covering sixteen years of Becket's life, from the time he became Chancellor of England at 36 until he was murdered at 52,<sup>1</sup> the play's Paris debut lasted nearly four hours.<sup>2</sup>

Anouilh drew his historical background for Becket from thirty pages in Augustin Thierry's Conquest of England by the Normans.<sup>3</sup> This old historical tome identified Thomas Becket as a Saxon, a "fact" that Anouilh chose to make one of the focal points of his drama. Even though he learned later that Becket was really a Norman like the King, he chose to stick with his original concept. Anouilh takes a rather frivolous attitude toward historical accuracy, and he admits, "I didn't look in any book to find out who Henry II really was, nor even Becket. I created the king I needed, and the ambiguous Becket I needed."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B. A. Lenski, Jean Anouilh: Stages in Rebellion (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>John Harvey, Anouilh: A Study in Theatrics (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 97.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis W. Falb, Jean Anouilh (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1977), p. 100.

Although Anouilh may not be a stickler for historical detail, he is a careful theatrical craftsman. He says of himself, "I write plays because that is all I know how to do, and I write them the way my father [a tailor] used to cut his suits."<sup>5</sup> As a master tailor would not wish his client to add patches to the elbows of a tuxedo jacket, so Anouilh insists that his lines be spoken exactly as written. He asserts, "A line is effective because of its precise structure. Change it, and it becomes ineffective."<sup>6</sup>

Anouilh utilizes a conscious theatricality in his plays. In Becket, for instance, the stage directions in Act I, Scene 4 call for the Barons, the King, and Becket to ride across the stage on "hobby horses." The buffoonery of the Barons is used as a comic counterpoint to the deadly serious game being played out between the King and Becket. Scenery is unrealistic, with cathedral columns also serving as trees in the forest. The very structure of the play defies the conventions of realism; for, though the play begins with Henry after Becket's death and flashes back to the events that lead up to that time, some scenes are not witnessed by Henry and, therefore, could not have been part of his memory.

One of the most interesting facets of Anouilh's work is the concept of heroism and the image of the rebel which he espouses in his portrayal of Becket and Henry. The hero

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<sup>5</sup>Falb, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>Falb, p. 9

is a sincere man who loves, in Becket's words, "Doing what I have to do and doing it well." He will not accept mediocrity in himself or in others. He not only plays the role of Archbishop the way he believes it should be played, but he also pushes Henry into being the King he should be, admonishing<sup>him</sup> to never forget that he is the King, "even against God."

Becket's unbending determination to uphold the honour he finds in the service of God is sharply contrasted with Henry's readiness to compromise for the sake of his friendship with Becket. In Act III, Scene 1, Henry declares that he "would have gone to war with all England's might behind me, and against England's interests, to defend you Little Saxon. I would have given the honour of the Kingdom laughingly--for you." Even at their last meeting, Henry overlooks Becket's unwillingness to give in to the three most important articles passed by the Bishops in Becket's absence and allows Becket to return to England. The final triumph belongs to Becket, who becomes a saint, while Henry is left behind to continue compromising his values to political expediency.

As one critic states, "The pursuit of honour is strengthened not by God, but by Becket's esthetic sense of how an Archbishop should defend God's honour...the hero's idea of honour can be neither improvised nor defiled by compromise...The concept of an honor to be defended unto death is basic to Anouilh's plays. The

theme, which recurs clearly and frequently, is linked to the playwright's championing of nonconformity, purity, and refusal to compromise."<sup>7</sup>

In creating the hero Becket, who rebels against the humiliating realization that Henry expects him to be a royal pawn for the sake of their "friendship," and the compromiser Henry, who "knows only how to buy affection and refuses to love in the way that will allow him to be a part of Becket's world,"<sup>8</sup> Anouilh has provided two of modern theatre's richest opportunities for character interpretation.

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<sup>7</sup>Alba Della Fazia, Jean Anouilh (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup>Della Fazia, p. 30.

### Becket: An Analysis of the Play and Its Elements

Any fine dramatic work can, when subjected to analysis, be shown to consist of several carefully constructed elements. Becket is no exception. Anouilh uses tightly woven structure, complex characterization, ironic and ominous tones, a variety of conflicts and themes, and distinctive imagery to assist in telling his version of the Henry II-Becket story.

#### Structure

Becket begins and ends with Henry doing penance for the death of Becket. Within this framework, Anouilh provides a series of historical vignettes or tableaux which span the sixteen years between Becket's appointment as Chancellor of England and his murder at the hands of Henry's barons. The scenes vary in intensity, purpose, and effect, as is shown in the following summaries:

Act I, Scene 1--This scene begins with Henry waiting at Becket's tomb to be flogged by the Saxon monks. The fact that Becket was murdered is immediately established and the culprits are identified, so the audience is left only to wonder about the series of events leading up to the deed. Becket's image appears, and Henry speaks to it, recalling their past conflicts, as well as the good times they spent together. As Becket's image fades, the clock is turned back to the day Henry appointed Becket Chancellor.

Act I, Scene 2--Becket joins Henry as he is being readied for the day by a page, and Becket insists upon taking the page's place in serving the King. He declares that he enjoys helping Henry in any way that he can. Some horseplay between the two ensues, following which Henry questions Becket about his father's collaborator activities. In explaining his father's motives, Becket also reveals his own motives for pushing his way in, a Saxon among Norman noblemen. The news that Becket has ordered gold dishes and forks reveals his love for luxury. The two men leave for the Privy Council laughing about the possibilities of introducing the forks to Henry's barons.

Act I, Scene 3--This scene, which takes place only moments after the previous one, shows Henry meeting with his Privy Council, a group which consists of the leading bishops of England. He opens the meeting by revealing his appointment of Becket as Chancellor of England, an honour which catches Becket somewhat by surprise. Although Becket protests his unworthiness, Henry is firm and the Archbishop of Canterbury rises to support the appointment. The main business of the meeting is a discussion of the clergy's refusal to pay the absentee tax due Henry by any vassals who do not send him troops. The argument which follows quickly establishes the conflict between Church and State which is one of the main themes of the play. At this time,



Becket joins the fray on the side of the King, threatening to use any means of coercion at the disposal of the King. The bishops are appalled at Becket's attack, as he is a deacon in the Church and has been the Archbishop's protégé. The Archbishop himself calms the bishops, expressing his view that Becket may not always be the enemy of the Church. Gilbert Folliot's violent hatred of Becket is established in this scene, also.

Act I, Scene 4--Set in a rainy forest, this scene shows Henry and Becket at the hunt. Becket reveals that he feels he has to gamble with his life to feel alive. This is the first of several scenes in which Henry questions Becket's feelings for him. This time Becket sidesteps the issue rather neatly, while disclosing his desire for an ordered, logical world.

Act I, Scene 5--Occurring immediately after the previous scene, this scene takes place in the hut of a poor Saxon family where Henry and Becket have gone to get out of the rain. Henry swaggers in demanding that he be waited upon. Becket treats the frightened peasants more gently, causing Henry to question his motives for defending the poor. Becket declares that he feels fatherly towards England's lower class, as he has so much more than they. In the corner of the hut, Henry discovers a rather dirty young girl cowering under a pile of rags. He declares his intention to take her to the palace and make her a whore, thereby saving her from the <sup>fate</sup> of becoming old and ugly due to deprivation. When Becket goes with the girl's

brother to fetch drink for the King, the boy attacks him with a knife and wounds him. Though he tries to hide the wound from the King, Henry sees Becket's injury and says he dislikes seeing Becket in pain. Although Becket lies about the wound, saying his horse bit him, Henry laughingly declares that Becket has been wounded in the service of the King and should be rewarded. When Henry asks what Becket wants, Becket expresses his desire to have the Saxon girl, thinking to save her from becoming the King's whore. On his way out, he tells the girl's father to keep her better hidden in the future and assures the father that no one will take the girl away this time.

Act I, Scene 6--This scene, which takes place at Becket's palace later that evening, opens with Becket and Gwendolen, his mistress, talking. Gwendolen declares her love for Becket, but he pulls away, insisting that he doesn't like to be loved. The King enters from the banquet hall, where the Barons are heard carousing, and orders Gwendolen to sing a song written for Becket's mother. It is a ballad about the meeting of Becket's parents. As Gwendolen sings, the King is rapt, declaring at the finish that the happy ending of the song makes him sad and asserting that he is a rather soft, sentimental fellow. In nearly the same breath, the King reminds Becket that he promised him a favor if the King would give Becket the Saxon girl. Now the King wants to collect, and he wants Gwendolen. Becket is shocked and tries to prevail on the King's friendship to avert the sacrifice of his mistress. Henry challenges him to say

that he cares for Gwendolen, but when he cannot the King insists on collecting the favour Becket owes him. In their last moments together, Gwendolen suggests to Becket that he cares for nothing in the world, and he acknowledges that this is so. She reproaches him with his lack of honour and goes to join the King in bed, knowing that Becket will not take her back once the King tires of her. The King re-enters with a soldier who is dragging the Saxon girl. He gives her to Becket, pleased with himself for remembering Becket's request and declaring that he is a true friend to Becket, then exits. A few moments later he returns in shock. Gwendolen has killed herself rather than sleep with him. He sends the Saxon girl away and reveals his intention to sleep in Becket's room rather than spend the night alone. As the King sleeps fitfully, Becket sits beside him musing over his precarious position in royal society and questioning the whereabouts of his honour.

Act II, Scene 1--This act opens with a scene of pure comic relief. The four Barons are huddled around a campfire, and the first one is asking just what kind of man Becket is. The 2nd Baron declares that a baron who asks himself questions must be ill. The 3rd Baron defends Becket as being a good fighter. The 4th Baron prefers to reserve judgment until Becket breaks cover and reveals his true nature. Becket then enters to ask for a report on the day's casualties. He discusses his strategy with the Barons, then exits to wake the King.

The King is found with a French girl in his bed, and a contemplation of her form leads to a discussion of aesthetics with Becket. Becket insists they get to work planning battle strategy and encourages Henry to move to crush the power of the clergy before it is grown too great. Becket succeeds in arousing the King's gaming instincts. As the King dresses to go to meet the French Bishop, a young monk is arrested outside the camp and brought before Becket. The young monk was found with a knife under his robe, so Becket tries to get him to confess his intentions. The young monk is a Saxon and full of shame for the oppression of his race. Becket points out how much they have in common and sends the monk back to his abbey in Hastings under protective custody.

Act II, Scene 2--Within a short time, Becket, Henry, and the four Barons are found parading triumphantly down a street in France. Henry is quite pleased with the crowd response until Becket disillusion him with the knowledge that he has paid them off. Henry wants to stop and indulge himself with the pretty French girls along the parade route, but Becket advises him to restrain himself. He warns Henry not to drive his enemies to despair. Henry is bored by his lecturing.

Act II, Scene 3--Immediately following the parade, the King and his entourage arrive at the French cathedral. The King and the barons are cooling their heels in the sacristy waiting for Becket to complete arrangements.

When Becket does enter, it is with the news that he has evacuated the cathedral to prevent a French uprising from breaking out during the ceremony. The barons draw their swords and wish to charge into the crowd and teach them a lesson, but Becket forbids violence and assures them that the King is safe now. The King becomes somewhat paranoid and suspects a French priest and a choirboy of meaning him harm. Just then, the King receives a letter from England proclaiming the death of the Archbishop of Canterbury. At this point Henry decides to appoint Becket Archbishop so that the clergy will be lead by his man. Becket is violently opposed, begging the King to quit joking. When he realizes that Henry is serious, he is anguished. He warns Henry that he cannot serve both God and the King, but Henry demands that Becket accept the appointment.

Act II, Scene 4--This scene takes place in Becket's palace a few days later. His servants are packing away his fine clothing which Becket is planning to sell so he may give the money to the poor. He instructs the servants that the dining hall will be opened to the poor of the streets that evening. After the servants leave, Becket completes the casting off of his old life. He talks to God, expressing the joy he feels in shedding his riches to take up the work of God. He regrets parting with nothing. In fact, the transition seems too easy to him.

Act III, Scene 1--It has been a month since Henry made Becket Archbishop and Henry is restlessly awaiting Becket's first visit to him. The Queen Mother and Young Queen express their dislike for Becket. Henry shouts them down and then has an acid exchange with his elder son. When a messenger arrives instead of Becket, Henry is at first furious, then worried that Becket may be ill. When the messenger explains that the Archbishop is in good health and hands Henry the Seal of England which Becket bade him to return, Henry is devastated. He feels that Becket has deserted him like a little boy who doesn't want to play anymore, and he determines to learn to be alone.

Act III, Scene 2--Becket receives the young monk at his Episcopal Palace. He encourages the boy to take heart and to realize that he is not the only one who carries a burden. He instructs the young monk to listen as he meets with his bishops. The bishops arrive in a state of great agitation. They are upset that Becket has excommunicated two noblemen. William of Aynsford, a companion of the King, had killed a priest which Becket has appointed to his diocese. Gilbert of Clare had indicted a churchman before his lay court, a practice strictly forbidden by the Church at that time. The bishops urge Becket to back down and compromise, but he stands firm. After they leave, the little monk admits that his shame weighs less heavily now.

Act III, Scene 3--Folliot arrives at the palace to consult with the King, revealing that the two are plotting together to discredit Becket. After he leaves, Henry has another shouting match with his wife and mother. A page arrives with an account of Becket's defiance of the charges brought against him by the King and his own bishops. The King is perversely pleased with Becket's brave showing, much to his mother's disgust. She warns him that Becket must be stopped before he seeks asylum from France.

Act III, Scene 4--The scene is the court of King Louis of France. Louis discusses with his barons his obligation to receive the envoys sent by Henry. He reveals that he is bitter against Henry for breaking a treaty and that he may help Becket just to irritate Henry. The envoys are received, but when they beg Louis to forbid asylum to Becket, he denies that Becket is even in France. After the envoys exit, he has Becket brought in. Louis grants Becket asylum but warns him that if relations between England and France should improve, he may have to recall Becket and deny him asylum. He gives Becket safe passage to visit the Pope in Rome, then warns Becket that the Pope will sell him out.

Act III, Scene 5--In Rome, the Pope and one of his Cardinals scheme to play Henry and Becket against each other. The scene is very comical, revealing all the intrigues in the Papal Palace. The Pope decides to send Becket to a monastery--to cure him of sincerity.



Act III, Scene 6--Alone in his convent cell, Becket talks to God. He revels in the sacrifice of monastic rule, but he is afraid that it would be too easy for him to retire to a life of prayer and solitude. Thus, he determines to return to England and carry the conflict with Henry to its conclusion.

Act IV, Scene 1--King Louis fulfills his prediction to Becket. He calls him back and reluctantly banishes him from France. Becket explains that he had already decided to return to England. Louis is surprised at Becket's propensity for martyrdom, but he offers to help him make peace with Henry by interceding for him.

Act IV, Scene 2--Two sentries are stationed on the edge of the plain at La Ferté Bernard, observing the historic meeting between Henry and Becket. They speculate about the nature of the conversation between the two leaders, with one assuring the other that they are discussing the affairs of state, not everyday matters like chilblains and family. Ironically, that is exactly what the two men are talking about as they try to avoid topics which will begin the argument. After exhausting the small talk, Henry accuses Becket of never loving anything. Becket, for the first time, admits that he loved Henry as much as he was able to love anyone. However, his job now is to defend the honour of God against Henry's assaults. He does not ask for compromise from Henry; in fact, he advises against it. Becket believes that each man must do the task for which he has been chosen without shirking. He explains that he feels



he has been entrusted with a special task of defending the vulnerable Church and, in doing so, has found the honour for which he had searched. Henry asks Becket to accept the articles passed by the Bishops in his absence, but Becket agrees to only nine of the twelve. The King still gives Becket leave to return to England. As they part, Becket states that he knows this will be their last meeting. Henry is furious at the insult, for he had given his royal word that Becket could return safely. Henry refuses to give Becket the kiss of peace. As Becket rides away, Henry is left alone on the plain calling after him.

Act IV, Scene 3--Back at the French palace of Henry, the King is preparing a scheme to show Becket that he is dispensable. He sets his elder son on the throne, declaring his intention to have him crowned the next day by the Bishop of York. Since the Archbishop of Canterbury has always crowned the kings of England, this is a grave insult to Becket's authority. Henry's mother advises him against this rather petty revenge. She begs him to consider the welfare of England if, after the prince is crowned, unsavory elements influence him against his father and, therefore, divide the kingdom. As usual, Henry shouts her down and then peevishly drives her and the rest of his unappealing family from the room. He remains with his four barons, enjoining them to get drunk with him. He bemoans the fact that Becket transformed him from a rather stupid creature like the barons into a thinking man. He asks about Becket's arrival in England.

When he hears that Becket has been greeted by huge crowds of cheering Saxons, he feels totally betrayed by his old friend. Henry becomes hysterical and cries out for someone to rid him of Becket. When he looks up, the barons have gone to do his bidding.

Act IV, Scene 4--Becket is being dressed in his clerical robes by the young monk. He senses that this is the day of his death, and he prepares for it with dignity. The young monk expresses the desire to kill one Norman before he dies, feeling that this would be justice. The four barons storm into the cathedral, draw their swords, and kill Becket and the young monk.

The scene then returns to Henry being beaten by the monks. He thanks them bitterly and dismisses them. The barons arrive with the news that the crowds are praising Henry's name in the same breath with Becket's. Henry pompously declares that Becket was his friend and shall be prayed to as a saint from this day forward. Henry puts the First Baron in charge of seeking out and punishing Becket's murderers. As the play concludes, Henry assures the barons of his intention to defend the honour of God and the memory of his friend.

The action of Becket fits fairly well into the structural model of a classic tragedy. Exposition is provided by the first two scenes which establish the nature of the relationship between the two men. Henry's appointment of Becket as Chancellor is the exciting force which sets the rising action in motion. By raising Becket to a

position of power, Henry relinquishes part of his control over his friend. During the rising action, which includes the rest of Act I, all of Acts II and III, and the first scene of Act IV, many conflicts and subplots are introduced by Anouilh. The major conflict which leads to the conflict between Becket and Henry is that between the power of the Church and the power of the State in England. Secondary conflicts include those between England and France, between King Henry and King Louis personally, between Henry and his family, between Becket and his bishops, between Henry's duty to the Realm and his love for Becket, between Becket's duty to God and his compassion for Henry, between Henry's emotionalism and Becket's detachment, between Norman and Saxon, and--the ultimate clash--between Becket the man of honour and Henry the compromiser.

The climax of the play occurs in Act IV, Scene 2, on the plain at La Ferté Bernard. This final meeting between the two protagonists forces Henry to realize the strength of the man that Becket has become as Archbishop. Henry's futile love --which, ironically enough, Becket finally admits that he returned to the extent that he was capable--now begins to turn to hatred. The falling action ensues, and Henry--too weak to lift a hand against Becket himself--maneuvers the barons into murdering Becket, thus providing the catastrophe of the play. The return to Henry as he was at the outset of the play establishes the "glimpse of restored order," as Henry links his political cause with Becket's memory.

### Characters

Although Becket sports a large cast of characters, no characters come close to being as significant as Becket and Henry are. In the distribution of lines, the minor character with the most has over 200 fewer lines than either of the leads. In fact, the play could almost be viewed as a three-hour analysis of character.

The title of the play would suggest that the play is mainly about Becket, but it is just as much King Henry's play. The fact that he begins and concludes the play gives him immediate importance. Henry is a typical Norman aristocrat of the twelfth century who lives for pleasure and does very little thinking. He is a jovial man most of the time, but his moods can swing wildly when he is displeased. He is almost child-like, for he laughs frequently; but when he is crossed, he either becomes furious or sullen.

Henry has an adversary relationship with his family. Every scene in which they are involved becomes a shouting match. His mother views him as weak and vacillating; his wife and children view him as cruel and inattentive. He seems to have no love to give to his family--it is all spent on Becket.

Henry is a manipulator. Having been born to power, he wields it with assurance, never expecting to be gainsaid. Even within his friendship for Becket, Henry uses his power as King to take advantage of his friend. He orders coldly--

as when he takes Gwendolen from Becket--but with an innocence inherent to one who sees power as his natural right, something which is simply not open to challenge.

Henry is not presented as a particularly inspired ruler. He seems to be more interested in the challenges of the bedroom than in the challenges of battle. He confesses that he is bored by the conducting of government until Becket represents politics to him as a game--that catches Henry's attention. Henry lets his bitterness toward Becket guide his political moves, a development which his mother views as highly dangerous to England. In the end, however, he saves his political hide by espousing Becket's views toward the Saxons.

While Henry is a rather well-defined, predictable character, Becket is left ambiguous by his creator. Although he gives us flashes of insights and hints about Becket's background, Anouilh never fully explains why Becket makes such a quick, complete turnabout in character after he becomes Archbishop of Canterbury. He tells Henry that the change was caused by a feeling that he had been entrusted with a grave responsibility, but Henry had entrusted Becket with heavy governing responsibilities already.

Nor is it fully understandable why a seemingly amoral, emotionally detached man as Becket should be so gentle and compassionate toward others, especially those weaker than himself. Anouilh's stage directions do not allow the reader or actor to escape these contrasts, for Becket always seems

to be either (smiling) ironically or speaking (gently).

The motivational force behind Becket seems to be his desire to find order in a chaotic universe. He tells Gwendolen that he thinks God's system is a bit muddled because He allows one race to conquer and oppress another, as the Normans have the Saxons.

This questioning brings up another ambiguity in the play: Becket's feelings toward God. He tells Henry that he has started to love the honour of God, not to actually love God. Just before the barons attack him, Becket cries out, "Oh, how difficult You make it all. And how heavy Your Honour is to bear." These are not the words of a man who has made his peace with God.

The minor characters in Becket seem to do one of two things: they either reflect isolated aspects of the two main characters or they contrast with the two main characters. For instance, the four Barons represent Henry before he was changed by his association with Becket. They are unthinking men who solve problems with violence. It is interesting that Henry reverts to their nature toward the end and uses them to deal with Becket's betrayal.

The Little Monk reflects Becket as a young man. Becket describes their meeting as bringing him "face to face with one's own ghost, when young." The Little Monk is also a Saxon who chafes under the humiliation of being a member of a conquered race. But, while Becket chose to infiltrate the conquerors in order to escape his shame, the Little Monk wants to kill his oppressors.

In contrast to Henry's sometimes fumbling, emotional approach to governing, King Louis of France is presented as a shrewd, intelligent ruler. He is wise politically, and, although he likes Becket and wishes to help him, he refuses to jeopardize his relationship with England for the sake of following his emotions. When Louis sees how unwisely Henry is maneuvering to gain revenge on Becket, he declares that Henry is not doing his job as a king should.

Folliot presents an interesting counterpoint to Becket. According to history, Folliot had expectations of being the Archbishop and was disappointed in his ambition by the appointment of Becket. Although he calls Becket a "viper" during Becket's tenure as Chancellor, Folliot proves to be the viper within the council of bishops. He works with Henry against Becket, even to the point of acting as Henry's envoy to Louis. Folliot is an example of all that was wrong with the Church hierarchy at that time.

Minor characters in Becket serve to strengthen the characterization of both Henry and Becket.

### Tone

Through the use of foreshadowing, Anouilh creates a tone that is sometimes ironic and sometimes ominous. Irony is usually a result of Anouilh's flashes of humor, some of which border on slapstick. For instance, at the end of Act III, Scene 4, King Louis warns Becket to beware of the Pope: "He'll sell you for thirty pieces



of silver. The man needs money." These seem strange words to use about the head of the Church on Earth, but Anouilh wastes no time in proving his point. Act III, Scene 5 involves the Pope talking to one of his Cardinals, and his first words are, "I don't agree, Zambelli. I don't agree at all. It's a very bad plan altogether. We will forfeit our honour all for three thousand silver marks." The scene which ensues gives a rather negative impression of the tawdry political intrigues which go on in Rome and paints the Pope as sly, self-seeking, and distrustful of anyone who is sincere. The scene is very funny, nevertheless. It ends on one of the funniest lines in the play. After the Pope has decided to take the Cardinal's advice and send Becket to a convent, he muses, "The only thing that puzzles me, Zambelli, is why you should want to give me a piece of good advice." Black-out. Shades of "Laugh-in."

In contrast to the irony and humor found throughout Becket, Anouilh also creates an ominous feeling that the tragedy is inevitable because of the roles Becket and Henry are forced to play in history. No where is this more evident than in Act IV, Scene 2 on the plain of La Ferté Bernard. Try as they might to keep the conversation to small talk, it always leads to some matter for contention. Becket expresses their helpless inability to stem the tide of history when he says, "We must only do--absurdly--what we have been given to do--right to the end."

Although Henry is still trying to pretend that all



can be well between the friends once again, Becket seems to see rather clearly into the future. One can almost believe that he has foreseen the day and manner of his death, for his last words to Henry--before Henry has even made up his mind to destroy Becket--are, "Farewell, my prince. I know I shall never see you again."

The ominous tone is also reinforced by Anouilh's use of sound effects. At the end of Act IV, Scene 3, stage directions call for a muffled tom-tom to approximate the sound of heartbeats. Throughout the last scene of the play, these heartbeats grow louder and louder until Becket is killed; then they cease altogether. The implication is that Becket's death is as inevitable as the beating of the King's heart. For Henry to live, Becket must die.

The mixture of humor and ominousness in Becket may seem a bit bizarre at times, but Anouilh's precursors in this technique include dramatists of no less stature than Shakespeare and Marlowe. Comic relief is a time-honored method for giving the audience a chance to lean back in their chairs and delay the inevitable tragedy for a moment. Without comic relief, Becket would be an oppressively gloomy drama.

#### Theme

One could almost say that a good piece of literature has as many themes as its readers can distill from it. After all, if a theme is the message behind what the

author actually states, then the message may be acquired by a variety of receivers. In the case of a play, one may have the message conveyed by a variety of transmitters as well. Thus, unless one is able to read the mind of the playwright, one must assume that a play's themes are whatever the audience culls from the way the actors have presented the play. In guiding the actors, of course, the director will also play a key role in conveying theme.

Becket provides rich thematic material from which the director and actor may draw. Becket's search for a cause to which he can be true seems to make a statement about the nature of honour. Even after Becket becomes Chancellor of England, he asks himself, "Where is Becket's honour?" He finally finds his honour in doing the job of the Archbishop well, not because of religious conviction but because of aesthetic sensibility. Honour, then, must lie in doing well whatever is given us to do.

Anouilh also examines the nature of friendship in Becket. The friendship between Becket and Henry does not survive because it is not a union of equals. As long as Henry possesses--and uses--the power to force Becket to act against his own will, they cannot be true friends. As long as Henry loves Becket more than Becket loves Henry their friendship cannot be fully realized. And as long as each man uses the power he has over the other for hurtful purposes, friendship is doomed.

Anouilh may also be saying that men who wield power have a greater responsibility to their roles in history than to their roles as human beings. Henry is scolded directly by his mother and indirectly by King Louis for allowing his personal feelings to affect his governing strategy.

Finally, in insisting that Becket be written as a Saxon even though historians now know that he was a Norman, Anouilh explores the nature of oppression. He shows the Saxon family, whose members attack Henry's aides and curse behind Henry's back, though they are too frightened of Henry himself to challenge his authority. He presents Gwendolen, who allows herself to submit to a captor whom she loves but kills herself rather than submit to one whom she does not love. Finally, Anouilh gives us Becket, who must abandon the luxury of collaboration in order to find honour. In short, an oppressed people will find some means to strike back. The success of the oppressed Saxons is illustrated when Henry is forced to court their approval at the end of the play.

#### Imagery

Two sets of images dominate Becket. The first image is that of the parent-child relationship. Henry calls Becket "my son" frequently, even though Becket is twelve years older than he, and when Becket returns the Seal of England Henry accuses him of behaving like a child who doesn't want to play any more. On the other hand, Becket is the one who teaches Henry, who calms Henry's emotional outbursts and directs him to the matter at hand--ruling England.

Henry also treats his Barons as children at times. They are the ones with whom he pursues his childish games: drinking, belching at the dinner table, hunting, whoring. He views them as his unschooled self, before he "grew up" under Becket's intellectual influence. However, Henry allows them to take over the parent role when he has grown too weak for the task that faces him. The Barons' murder of Becket conjures up the image of a father doing battle for his weakling son with the neighborhood bully.

Henry's real parent-child relationships are rather acrimonious. He despises his children, constantly taunting them and offering to kick them around. His mother is appalled at his behavior, and each of their encounters ends in bitter words.


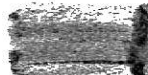
On a more symbolistic level, Henry's relationship to England and Becket's relationship with the Church can be viewed as parent-child. Each man is entrusted with the future of his respective charge, and he must protect it against threats from the outside. In fact, Becket refers to the Church as "this child, who was given, naked, into my care."

Coldness is a persistent image in Becket from the first scene when Henry admits, "It's funny, it's always been cold in our story." Each time Henry insists that Becket do something against his will--forcing Gwendolen to sing the ballad about Becket's parents, giving up Gwendolen to the King, becoming Archbishop--Henry's attitude is characterized in the stage directions as

"cold." Taking the advice he gave Henry to "fight cold with colds' own weapons," Becket fights Henry's cold use of power with a chilly refusal to love him. At Henry and Becket's last meeting, on the cold plain, a chilly wind blows throughout, and Henry complains bitterly about his chilblains. Becket, flaunting the cold in bare feet, is at first unaffected by the chill. However, after the two men have concluded their uneasy truce and, in doing so, sounded the death knell for their friendship, Becket declares, "I feel cold, too, now."

Becket is Anouilh's version of the historical confrontation between Henry II and Thomas Becket. Although it may not be told with strict attention to historical accuracy, it is certainly told with strict attention to artistic detail. The elements of structure, characterization, tone, theme, and imagery are woven into a moving artistic achievement.

Key

 = character revelation  
 = pivotal line  
 = irony  
 = foreshadowing

BECKET

or

The Honour of God

A Play in Four Acts

By Jean Anouilh

Translated by Lucienne Hill

ACT I

SCENE 1

SCENE--Canterbury Cathedral

A skeleton set with pillars and arches, which serve various purposes throughout the play. Becket's tomb is R, a stone slab with a name carved on it.

When the CURTAIN rises, the stage is in darkness, then the lights come up on the area #1  
 C, giving the effect of sunlight through stained-glass windows. Behind the pillars, #2  
 in the shadows, one senses the disquieting presence of unseen lookers-on, and the faint murmur of a crowd is heard. KING HENRY enters up L. He is wearing his crown and is naked, except for his trousers and a big cloak. A PAGE follows at a distance. The KING moves slowly below the tomb, hesitates a moment, then removes his cloak with a swift movement. The PAGE quickly gathers up the cloak and exits with it up L. The KING falls to his knees on the stone floor, and prays, alone in front of the tomb. The lights fade except for a spotlight on the King.

KING. Well, Thomas Becket, are you satisfied? I am naked at your tomb and your monks are coming to flog me.

(The crowd noises fade.)

What an end to our story. You, rotting in this tomb, larded with my Barons' daggers, and I, naked, shivering in the draught, and waiting like an idiot for those brutes to come and thrash me.

(BECKET, in his Archbishop's robes, just as he was on the day of his death, enters in the shadows up L.)

Don't you think we'd have done better to understand each other?

(A spotlight illuminates BECKET, who moves LC.) #3

BECKET (softly) Understand each other? It wasn't possible.

KING. I said, "In everything but the honour of the realm." It was you who taught me that slogan, after all.

BECKET. I answered you, "Everything but the honour of God." We were like two deaf men talking.

KING (after a pause) How cold it was on that bare plain at La Ferte Bernard, the last time we two met. It's funny, it's always been cold in our story. Save at the beginning, when we were friends. We had a few fine summer evenings together, with the girls. (He pauses. Suddenly) Did you love Gwendolen, Archbishop? Did you hate me, that night when I said, "I am the King," and took her from you? Perhaps that's what you never could forgive me for?

BECKET (quietly) I've forgotten.

KING. Yet we were like two brothers, weren't we--you and I? That night it was a childish prank--lusty lad shouting, "I am the King!" I was so young. (He pauses.) ~~And every thought in my head came from you, you know that.~~

BECKET (gently, as if to a little boy) Pray, Henry, and don't talk so much.

KING (irritably) If you think I'm in the mood for praying at the moment...

(The spotlight fades on Becket.)

BECKET quietly withdraws into the darkness and exits up L during the following speech.)

I can see them through my fingers, spying on me from the aisles. Say what you want, they're an

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oafish lot, those Saxons of yours. To give myself over naked to those ruffians! Me, with my delicate skin. Even you'd be afraid. Besides, I'm ashamed. Ashamed of this whole masquerade. I need them though, that's the trouble. I have to rally them to my cause, against my son, who'll gobble up my kingdom if I let him. So I've come to make my peace with their Saint. You must admit it's funny. You've become a Saint and here am I, the King, desperately in need of that great Saxon mass which is all-powerful now. What use are conquests, when you stop to think? The Saxons are England, now, because of their vast numbers, and the rate at which they breed--like rabbits. But one must always pay the price--that's another thing you taught me, Thomas Becket, when you were still advising me. You taught me everything.

(He rises and removes his crown, dreamily.)

Ah, those were happy times. At the peep of dawn--well, our dawn, that is, around noon, because we always went to bed very late--you'd come into my room, as I was emerging from the bath-house, rested, smiling, debonair, as fresh as if we'd never spent the entire night drinking and whoring through the town. (He moves down C. A little sourly) That's another thing you were better at than me. \_\_\_\_\_

#4

(The spotlight fades on the King and the general lighting comes up.) \_\_\_\_\_

#5

The PAGE enters R with a large white towel and the King's clothes. He puts the clothes on the stone slab down R, crosses to the King, wraps the towel around him, takes the crown from him and puts it on the stone slab. He then returns to the King and rubs him down with the towel. \_\_\_\_\_

#6

The 1ST SOLDIER enters R with a brazier and logs which he sets down C, then exits R. Off-stage is heard for the first time, we will hear it often, BECKET whistling, as he always does, a gay ironical Scottish marching song.

## SCENE 2

SCENE--The King's room.

BECKET enters between the pillars up LC. He is dressed as a nobleman, elegant, young and charming in his short doublet and pointed, upturned shoes. He comes in blithely and greets the King.

BECKET. My respects, my lord.

KING (His face brightening) Oh, Thomas--I thought you were still asleep.

BECKET (moving above the brazier) I've already been for a short gallop to Richmond and back, my Lord. There's a divine nip in the air.

KING (his teeth chattering) To think you actually like the cold. (To the Page) Rub harder, pig!

(BECKET, smiling, pushes the Page aside and towels the King himself.)

(To the Page) Throw a log on the fire and get out. Come back and dress me later.

(The PAGE puts a log in the brazier.)

BECKET. My prince, I shall dress you myself.

(The PAGE runs off L. BECKET rubs the King's shoulders.)

KING. Nobody rubs me down the way you do.

(BECKET slaps the King's sides.)

Thomas, what would I do without you?

(BECKET rubs the King's arms)

You're a nobleman, why do you play at being my valet? ~~If I asked my Barons to do this, they'd start a civil war.~~

BECKET (smiling) ~~They'll come round to it in time, when Kings have learnt to play their role.~~

(They spar together for a few moments.)

I am your servant, my prince, that's all. Helping you to govern or helping you to get warm again is part of the same thing to me. ~~I like helping you~~

KING (with an affectionate little gesture) My little Saxon.

(BECKET goes to the slab R and collects the King's shirt.)

At the beginning, when I told them I was taking you into my service, do you know what they all said? They said you'd knife me in the back one day.

BECKET (moving to the King) Did you believe them, my prince?

KING. N--no. I was a bit scared at first. You know I scare easily.

(BECKET assists the King to put on his shirt.)

But you looked so well brought up, beside those brutes.

(BECKET crosses to R and collects the King's coat.)

However did you come to speak French without a trace of an English accent?

BECKET. My parents were able to keep their lands by agreeing to "collaborate," as they say, with the King your father. They sent me to France as a boy to acquire a good French accent.

KING. To France? Not to Normandy?

BECKET (smiling) That was their one patriotic conceit. They loathed the Norman accent.

(BECKET assists the King to put on his coat.)

KING (distinctly) Only the accent?

(BECKET fastens the coat)

BECKET (lightly and inscrutably) My father was a very severe man. I would never have taken the liberty of questioning him on his personal convictions. He managed, by collaborating, to amass a considerable fortune. As he was also a man of rigid principles, I imagine he contrived to do it in accordance with his conscience. That's a little piece of sleight of hand that men of principle are very adept at in troubled times. (He moves to the stone slab down R.)

KING (following Becket) And you?

BECKET (feigning not to understand the question) I, my Lord? (He bends over the slab to pick up the King's shoes.)

(The KING puts a touch of contempt in his voice as he replies, for despite his admiration for Becket, or perhaps because of it, he would like to score a point against him occasionally.)

KING (kicking Becket) Were you adept at it, too? (He sits on the slab.)

BECKET (still smiling) Mine was a different problem. I was a frivolous man, you'll agree? In fact, it never came up at all. (He hands a shoe to the King.)

(The KING puts on one shoe.)

I adore hunting and only the Normans and their proteges had the right to hunt. I adore luxury and luxury was Norman. I adore life and the Saxon's only birthright was slaughter. (He hands the second shoe to the King.)

(The KING puts on the second shoe.)

I'll add that I adore honour.

KING (with faint surprise) And honour was reconciled with collaboration, too?

BECKET (lightly) I had the right to draw my sword against the first Norman nobleman who tried to lay hands on my sister. I killed him in single combat. It's a detail, but it has its points.

KING (a little slyly) You could always have slit his throat and fled into the forest, as so many did. (He puts on his belt.)

BECKET. That would have been uncomfortable and not a lot of use. (He moves above the brazier.) My sister would have immediately been raped by some other Norman baron, like all the Saxon girls. Today, she is respected.

(The KING rises.)

(Lightly) My lord, did I tell you? My new gold dishes have arrived from Florence. Will my liege do me the honour of christening them with me at my house?

KING. Gold dishes! You lunatic!

BECKET. I'm setting a new fashion.

KING. I'm your King and I eat off silver!

BECKET (moving to the King) My prince, your expenses are heavy and I have only my pleasures to pay for. The trouble is, I'm told they scratch easily. We'll see. I received two forks, as well.

KING. Forks?

BECKET. Yes. It's a devilish little thing to look at--and to use, too. It's for pronging meat with and carrying it to your mouth. It saves you dirtying your fingers.

KING. But then you dirty the fork?

BECKET. Yes. But it's washable.

KING. So are your fingers. I don't see the point.

BECKET. It hasn't any, practically speaking.

(The KING hits Becket.)

But it's refined, it's subtle. It's very un-Norman.

KING (with sudden delight) You must order me a dozen. (He moves to the brazier.)

BECKET (He laughs) A dozen! Easy now, my lord. Forks are very expensive, you know.

KING. I want to see my great fat Barons' faces at the next Court banquet. We won't tell them what they're for. We'll have no end of fun with them.

BECKET (collecting the King's crown) My prince, it's time for the Privy Council. (He puts the crown on the King's head.)

KING (laughing) They won't make head nor tail of them! I bet they'll think they're a new kind of dagger. We'll have a hilarious time.

The KING and BECKET exit R, laughing, as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT. #7

## SCENE 3

SCENE--The Council Chamber.

There is a throne LC, facing down R, and a seat C, facing down L. The stone slab remains down R.

When the LIGHTS come up, the COUNCILLORS are waiting. The ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY is sitting on the seat C. The BISHOP OF OXFORD is standing below the seat C. GILBERT FOLLIOT, BISHOP OF LONDON, is stand down L. He is a thin-lipped, venomous man. The BISHOP OF YORK is standing beside FOLLIOT. The 1ST SOLDIER is standing above the pillars RC and the 2ND SOLDIER is standing up C. The KING and BECKET enter up R, still laughing. The KING crosses and sits on the throne LC. BECKET goes to the stone slab down R. and sits. #8

KING. Gentlemen, the Council is open. I have summoned you here today to deal with the refusal of the clergy to pay the absentee tax. We really must come to an understanding about who rules this kingdom--the Church--

(The ARCHBISHOP tries to speak.)

--just a moment, Archbishop--or me. But before we quarrel, let us take the good news first. I have decided to revive the office of Chancellor of England, Keeper of the Triple Lion Seal, and to entrust it to my loyal servant and subject--Thomas Becket.

(BECKET rises in surprise, the color draining from his face.)

BECKET. My Lord...

KING (roguishly) What's the matter, Becket? Do you want to go and pee already? True, we both had gallons to drink last night. (He looks at Becket with delight.) Well, that's good! I've managed to surprise you for once, little Saxon.

(BECKET moves RC and drops to one knee.)

BECKET (gravely) My Liege, this is a token of your confidence of which I fear I may not be worthy. I am very young, frivolous perhaps...

KING. I am young, too. And you know more than all of us put together. (To the others) He's read books, you know. It's amazing the amount he knows. ~~He'll checkmate the lot of you. Even the Archbishop.~~ As for frivolity, don't let him fool you. He drinks strong wine, he likes to enjoy himself, but he's a lad who thinks every minute of the time. Sometimes it embarrasses me to feel him thinking away beside me. Get up, Thomas.

(BECKET rises.)

I never did anything without your advice, anyway. Nobody knew it, now everybody will, that's all. (He bursts out laughing, pulls a seal from his pocket and tosses it to Becket.)

(BECKET catches the seal.)

There. That's the Seal. Don't lose it. Without the Seal, there's no more England and we'll all have to go back to Normandy. (He claps his hands) Now, to work.

(The ARCHBISHOP rises, all smiles, now the first shock is over.)

ARCHBISHOP. May I crave permission to salute, with my Lord's approval, my young and learned archdeacon here? For I was the first--I am weak enough to be proud of it--to notice him and take him under my wing. The presence at this Council of one of our brethren--our spiritual son in a sense, is a guarantee for the Church that a new era of mutual understanding is dawning for us all and we must now, in a spirit of confident co-operation...

KING (interrupting) Etcetera, etcetera. Thank you, Archbishop. I knew this nomination would please you.

(The ARCHBISHOP resumes his seat.)

~~But don't rely too much on Becket to play your game. He is my man.~~ (He turns to Becket, beaming.) Come to think of it, I'd forgotten you were a deacon, little Saxon.

BECKET (smiling) So had I, my prince.

KING. Tell me--I'm not talking about wenching, that's a venial sin--but on the odd occasions when I've seen you fight it seems to me you have a mighty powerful sword arm, for a



priest. How do you reconcile that with the Church's commandment forbidding a priest to shed blood?

BISHOP OF OXFORD (prudently) Our young friend has not yet taken all his vows, my Lord. The Church in its wisdom knows that youth must have its day and that--under the sacred pretext of a war--a holy war, I mean, of course...

KING (interrupting) All wars are holy wars, Bishop. I defy you to find me a serious belligerent who doesn't have Heaven on his side, in theory. Let's get back to the point.

ARCHBISHOP. By all means, your Highness.

KING. Custom demands that every landowner, and that includes the Church, must send men-at-arms to the quarterly review of troops, fully armed and sword in hand, or pay a tax in silver. Where is my tax?

BISHOP OF OXFORD. Distingo, your Highness.

KING. Distinguish as much as you like. I've made up my mind. I want my money. My purse is open, just drop it in. (He sprawls back in his throne and picks his teeth. To Becket) Thomas, I don't know about you, but I'm starving. Have them bring us something to eat.

(BECKET signs to the 1ST SOLDIER.

The 1ST SOLDIER exits R. There is a pause. BECKET crosses above the pillars and stands up R of the throne.)

ARCHBISHOP. A layman who shirks his duty to the State, which is to assist his Prince with arms, should pay the tax. Nobody will question that.

KING (jovially) Least of all the clergy.

ARCHBISHOP. A churchman's duty is to assist his Prince in his prayers, and in his educational and charitable enterprises. He cannot therefore be liable to such a tax unless he neglects those duties.

BISHOP OF OXFORD. Have we refused to pray?

(The KING rises in fury, takes a step forward then kicks the base of the throne.)

KING. Do you seriously think I'm going to let myself be swindled out of more than two-thirds of my revenues with arguments of that sort? (He turns to Becket.) Come on, Chancellor, say something. Has your new title caught your tongue?



BECKET (moving to R of the King) May I respectfully draw my Lord Archbishop's attention to one small point?

KING (grunting) Respectfully, but firmly. You're the Chancellor now.

BECKET (calmly and casually) England is a ship.

KING (beaming) Why, that's neat. We must use that, some time.

BECKET. In the hazards of sea-faring, the instinct of self-preservation has always told men that there must be one--(He puts his hand on the King's shoulder) and only one Captain on board ship.

ARCHBISHOP. My Lord Chancellor--the Captain is sole master after God. (He thunders suddenly, with a voice one did not suspect from that frail body.) After God! (He crosses himself.)

(The other BISHOPS cross themselves. The wind of excommunication shivers through the Council. The KING, awed, crosses himself.)

KING (mumbling a little cravenly) Nobody's trying to question God's authority, Archbishop.

BECKET (who alone has remained unperturbed) God steers the ship by inspiring the Captain's decisions. But I never heard tell that He gave his instructions directly to the helmsman.

(The KING sits on the throne.)

FOLLIOT (rising) Our young Chancellor is only a deacon--but he is still a member of the church. He cannot have forgotten that it is through the intermediary of our Holy Father the Pope and his Bishops--God's qualified representatives--that He dictates His decisions to men.

BECKET. There is a chaplain on board every ship, but he is not required to determine the size of the crew's rations, nor to take the vessel's bearings. My Reverend Lord the Bishop of London--who is the grandson of a sailor, they tell me, cannot have forgotten that point, either. (He crosses down R and sits on the stone slab.)

FOLLIOT (yelping) I will not allow personal insinuations to compromise the dignity of a debate of this importance! The integrity and honour of the Church are at stake!

KING (cheerfully) No big words, Bishop. You know as well as I do that all that's at stake is its money. I need money for my wars. Will the Church give me any, yes or no?

ARCHBISHOP. Your Highness, I am here to defend the privileges which your illustrious forefather William granted to the Church in England. Would you have the heart to tamper with your forefather's work?

KING. May he rest in peace.

(The ARCHBISHOP crosses himself.)

His work is inviolable. But where he is now he doesn't need money. I am still on earth unfortunately, and I do.

FOLLIOT (moving L of the throne) Your Highness, this is a question of principle.

KING. I'm levying troops, Bishop. I have sent for three thousand Swiss infantry to help fight the King of France. And nobody has ever paid the Swiss with principles.

BECKET (rising suddenly and crossing to C; incisively) I think, your Highness, that it is pointless to pursue a discussion in which neither speaker is listening to the other. The law and the custom of the land give us the means of coercion. We will use them.

FOLLIOT (moving towards Becket, beside himself) Would you dare to plunge a dagger in the bosom of your Mother Church?

BECKET. My Lord and King has given me his Seal with the Three Lions to guard. My mother is England now.

FOLLIOT (frothing, and slightly ridiculous) A deacon! A miserable deacon nourished in our bosom. Traitor! (He moves L of the throne.) Little viper! Libertine! Sycophant! Saxon!

KING (rising) My Reverend friend, I suggest you respect my Chancellor--(He raises his voice a little) or else I'll call my guards.

(The 1ST SOLDIER enters R with a tray of food and moves down RC)

(Surprised) Why, here they are. Oh, no, it's my snack. Excuse me, gentlemen--(He crosses to the Soldier and takes some food) but around noon I need something to peck at or I tend to feel weak. And a King mustn't weaken. I needn't tell you that. I'll have it in my chapel, then I can pray directly afterwards.

(The SOLDIER crosses and exits with the tray up L)

(To Becket) Come and sit with me, son.

(The ARCHBISHOP rises.

The KING kisses the Seal and exits with BECKET up L. The BISHOPS, deeply offended, move together C and murmur to one another with sidelong glances after the King.)

FOLLIOT. We must appeal to Rome. We must take a firm line.

YORK. My Lord Archbishop, you are the Primate of England. You have a weapon against such intransigence: excommunication.

BISHOP OF OXFORD. We must not use it save with a great deal of prudence, Reverend Bishop. Let us bide our time. The King's rages are terrible, but they don't last. They are fires of straw.

FOLLIOT (crossing to R) The little self-seeker he has at his elbow now will make it his business to kindle them.

(BECKET enters up L and crosses to C.)

BECKET. My Lords, the King has decided to adjourn his Privy Council. He thinks that a night of meditation will inspire your Lordships with a wise and equitable solution--which he authorizes you to come and submit to him tomorrow.

FOLLIOT (with a bitter laugh) You mean it's time for the hunt.

BECKET (moving to down C; smiling) Yes, my Lord Bishop, to be perfectly frank with you, it is. Believe me, I am personally most grieved at this difference of opinion, but I cannot go back on what I said as Chancellor of England. We are all bound, laymen as well as priests, by the same feudal oath we took to the King as our Lord and Sovereign; the oath to preserve his life, limbs, dignity and honour. None of you, I think, has forgotten the words of that oath? (He moves RC.)

ARCHBISHOP (moving to L of Becket; quietly) We have not forgotten it, my son. No more than the other oath we took, before that--the oath to God. You are young, and still uncertain of yourself, perhaps. Yet you have, in those few words, taken a resolution the meaning of which has not escaped me. Will you allow an old man, who is very close to death, and who, in this rather sordid argument was defending more perhaps than you suspect--to hope, as a father, that you will never know the bitterness of realizing, one day, that you made a mistake. (He holds out his ring.)

(BECKET kneels and kisses the ring.)

I give you my blessing, my son.

BECKET (lightly) An unworthy son, Father, alas. (He rises.) But when is one worthy? And worthy of what?

(BECKET pirouettes and exits up L, insolent and graceful as a young boy.)

FOLLIOT (moving to the Archbishop; violently) Such insults to your Grace cannot be tolerated. This young rake's impudence must be crushed.

ARCHBISHOP (thoughtfully) He was with me for a long time. His is a strange, elusive nature. Don't imagine that he is the ordinary libertine that outward appearances would suggest. I've had plenty of opportunity to observe him. He is as it were detached. As if seeking his real self.

FOLLIOT. Break him, my Lord, before he finds it. Or the clergy of this country will pay dearly.

ARCHBISHOP. We must be circumspect. Our task is to see into the hearts of men. And I am not sure that this one will always be our enemy.

The four BISHOPS exit L as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#9

## SCENE 4

SCENE--A forest.

The pillars are RC, topped by branches lowered from the flies. They are backed by a clear sky, transforming them into the leafless trees of a forest in winter.

When the LIGHTS come up, the stage is empty.

#10

The sound of hunting-horns is heard. The four BARONS enter L, ride across the stage and exit R. This is effected by richly caparisoned "hobby horses." The KING and BECKET, similarly "mounted," enter down R and cross to C. Each has a hawk on his gauntleted wrist. There is a peal of thunder and the sound of torrential rain.

KING. Here comes the deluge.

(There is a peal of thunder.)

(Unexpectedly) Do you like hunting this way, with hawks?

(The sound of the rain fades slightly.)

BECKET. I don't much care to have my work done for me. I prefer to feel a wild boar on the end of my spear. When he turns and charges there's a moment of delicious personal contact when one feels, at last, responsible for oneself.

KING. It's odd, this craving for danger. Why are you all so hell bent on risking your necks for the most futile reasons?

BECKET. One has to gamble with one's life to feel alive.

KING. Or dead! You make me laugh. I'll tell you one creature that loves hawking, anyway, and that's the hawk. It seems to me we've rubbed our backsides sore with three hours' riding just to give them this royal pleasure.

BECKET (smiling) My Lord, these are Norman hawks. They belong to the master race. They have a right to it.

(The sound of rain ceases.)

KING (suddenly, as he reins his horse) Do you love me, Becket?

BECKET. I am your servant, my Prince.

KING. Did you love me when I made you Chancellor? I wonder sometimes if you're capable of

love. Do you love Gwendolen?

BECKET. She is my mistress, my prince.

KING. Why do you put labels on to every-  
thing to justify your feelings?

BECKET. Because, without labels, the world  
would have no shape, my prince.

KING. Is it so important for the world to  
have a shape?

(The sound of rain recommences.)

BECKET. It's essential, my prince, otherwise  
we can't know what we're doing. The rain is  
getting heavier, my Lord. Come, we can shelter  
in that hut over there.

(BECKET gallops off down L.  
The KING, after a moment of confused inde-  
cision, gallops off after Becket, holding  
his hawk high.)

KING (as he goes; shouting) Becket! You didn't  
answer my question.

The sound of hunting horns is heard.

The four BARONS gallop on R, cross and exit  
down L. There is a flash of lightning and a  
peal of thunder as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT # ||

## SCENE 5

SCENE--A Saxon hut.

A corner of the hut is seen, set LC. The entrance is L. There is a pile of rags against the wall R.

When the LIGHTS come up, the hut is apparently empty, but the SAXON GIRL is concealed under the pile of rags. The sound of rain ceases.

#12

BECKET (off; shouting) Hey, there! You! Fellow! Can we put the horses under cover in your barn? Do you know how to rub down a horse? We'll sit out the storm under your roof.

(The KING enters the hut, followed by BECKET and a hairy SAXON who, cap in hand, bows repeatedly in terrified silence as he moves down R. BECKET stands up C.)

KING (moving down L and shaking himself) What a soaking! I'll catch my death. (He sneezes.) All this just to keep the hawks amused. (He shouts at the man.) What are you waiting for? Light a fire, dog! It's freezing cold in this shack.

(The MAN, terror-stricken, does not move.)

(He sneezes. To Becket) What is he waiting for? BECKET. Wood is scarce, my Lord. I don't suppose he has any left.

KING. What-- in the middle of the forest?

BECKET. They are entitled to two measures of dead wood. One branch more and they're hanged.

KING (astounded) Really? And yet people are always complaining about the amount of dead wood in the forests. Still, that's a problem for my stewards, not me. (He shouts at the Man.) Run and pick up all the wood you can carry and build us a roaring fire. We won't hang you this time, dog.

(The MAN, terrified, dares not obey.)

BECKET (gently) Go, my son. Your King commands it. You've the right.

(The MAN crosses and exits, trembling and bowing repeatedly to the ground.)



KING. Why do you call that old man your son?

BECKET. Why not? You call him dog, my prince.

KING. It's a manner of speaking. Saxons are always called "dog." I can't think why, really. One could just as well have called them "Saxons." But that smelly old rag bag your son! (He sniffs.) What on earth can they eat to make the place stink so--dung?

BECKET. Turnips.

KING. Turnips--what are they?

BECKET. Roots.

KING (amused) Do they eat roots?

BECKET. Those who live in the forest can't grow anything else.

KING. Why don't they move out into the open country, then?

BECKET. They would be hanged if they left their district.

KING. Oh, I see. Mark you, that must make life a lot simpler, if you know you'll be hanged at the least show of initiative. They don't know their luck. (He moves to Becket.) But you still haven't told me why you called the fellow your son.

BECKET (lightly) My prince, he is so poor and so bereft and I am so strong beside him that he really is my son.

KING. We'd go a long way with that theory.

BECKET. Besides, my prince, you're appreciably younger than I am and you call me "son" sometimes.

KING. That's got nothing to do with it. It's because I love you.

BECKET. You are our King. We are all your sons and in your hands.

KING. What, Saxons, too?

BECKET (stripping off his gloves; lightly) England will be fully built when the Saxons are your sons as well.

KING. You are a bore today. I get the feeling that I'm listening to the Archbishop. And I'm dying of thirst. Hunt around and see if you can find us something to drink. Go on, it's your son's house.

(BECKET looks quickly around then exits. The KING looks around, examining the hut with curiosity and touching things with grimaces of distaste. He looks at the heap of rags, then suddenly thrusts out his hand and pulls out the terrified SAXON GIRL.)

(He shouts) Hey, Thomas! Thomas!



(BECKET enters.)

BECKET. Have you found something to drink, Lord?

KING (holding the girl at arm's length) No, something to eat. (He pushes the girl down L.) What do you say to that, if it's cleaned up a bit?

BECKET (coldly) She's pretty.

KING (moving to R of Becket) She stinks a bit, but we could wash her. Look, did you ever see anything so tiny? How old would you say it was--fifteen, sixteen?

BECKET (quietly) It can talk, my Lord. (To the girl, gently) How old are you?

(The GIRL looks at them in terror and says nothing.)

KING. You see? Of course it can't talk.

(The MAN enters with a load of wood and stops in the doorway, terrified.)

How old is your daughter, dog?

(The MAN trembles like a cornered animal and says nothing.)

He's dumb as well, that son of yours. How did you get him--with a deaf girl?

(The MAN moves down L.)

It's funny the amount of dumb people I meet the second I set foot out of my palace. I rule over a kingdom of the dumb.

(The GIRL creeps across to R.)

Can you tell me why?

BECKET. They're afraid, my prince.

(The MAN puts the wood on the floor down L and kneels beside it.)

KING. I know that. And a good thing, too. The populace must live in fear--it's essential. The moment they stop being afraid they have only one thought in mind--to frighten other people instead. Give them a chance to do it and they catch up fast, those sons of yours. (He moves to R of the Man and looks at him. Exasperated) Look at it, will you? It's tongue-tied, it's obtuse, it stinks and the country is crawling with them.

(The GIRL sneaks behind the King and towards the door.)

(He swings round on the girl.) Stay there, you.

(The GIRL crouches on the floor down LC.)

(To Becket) I ask you, what use is it?

BECKET (smiling) It scratches the soil, it makes bread.

KING. Bread, in a land of beef-eaters--I never touch the stuff.

BECKET (smiling) The troops have to be fed. For a King without troops...

KING (struck by this) True enough! Yes, that makes sense. Well, well, you little Saxon philosopher, you. (He moves to Becket.) I don't know how you do it, but you'll turn me into an intelligent man yet. The odd thing is, it's so ugly and yet it makes such pretty daughters. How do you explain that, you who can explain it all?

BECKET. At twenty, before he lost his teeth and took on that indeterminate age the common people have, that man may have been handsome. He may have had one night of love, one minute when he, too, was a King, and shed his fear. Afterwards, his pauper's life went on, eternally the same. And he and his wife no doubt forgot it all. But the seed was sown.

KING (dreamily) You have such a way of telling things. (He looks at the girl.) Do you think she'll grow ugly, too?

BECKET. For sure.

KING (moving to the girl). If we made her a whore and kept her at the palace, would she stay pretty?

BECKET. Perhaps.

KING. Then we'd be doing her a service, don't you think?

BECKET (coldly) No doubt.

(The MAN stiffens. The GIRL cowers in terror.

The SAXON BOY enters, sombre-faced, silent, and threatening.)

KING. Would you believe it? They understand every word, you know. (He looks at the boy.) Who's that one there?

BECKET (taking in the situation at a glance) The brother.

KING. How do you know?

BECKET. Instinct, my Lord. (His hand moves to his dagger.)

KING (bawling suddenly) Why are you staring at me like that? I've had enough of this. (To the Man.) I told you to get us some water, dog.

(The MAN, terrified, scuttles out. The KING moves down L.)

BECKET. Their water will be brackish. I have a gourd of juniper-juice in my saddle-bag. (To the boy.) Come and give me a hand, you. My horse is restive.

(BECKET seizes the BOY roughly by the arm and hustles him out of the hut. They cross behind the hut to RC, BECKET carelessly whistling his little marching song. The KING settles himself on the floor down L of the hut, whistling to himself. The BOY suddenly draws a knife and hurls himself on Becket. There is a short, silent struggle. BECKET gets the knife from the Boy. #13

The BOY escapes and runs off up R. BECKET watches him for a second, holding his wounded hand, then he exits above the hut.) #14

KING (in a murmur) All my sons! (He shakes himself.) That Becket! He wears me out. He keeps making me think. I'm sure it's bad for the health. (He lifts the girl's skirts with his riding-crop and examines her at liesure.)

(BECKET enters, carrying a small gourd. His hand is wrapped in a blood-stained cloth. The MAN follows Becket on, carrying a bowl of water. )

What about that water? How much longer do I have to wait?

BECKET. Here it is, my Lord. But it's dirty. Have some of this juniper-juice instead. (He hands the gourd to the King.)

(The KING drinks and returns the gourd to Becket.)

KING. Drink with me. (He notices Becket's hand.) What's the matter? You're wounded! (He rises.)

BECKET (hiding his hand) No doubt about it, that horse of mine is a nervous brute. (He crosses to R.) He can't bear his saddle touched. He bit me.

KING (with a hearty, delighted laugh) That's funny. Oh, that's very funny. Milord is the best rider in the kingdom.

(BECKET drinks.)

Milord makes us all look silly at the jousts, with his fancy horsemanship, and when he goes to open his saddle-bags he gets himself bitten. (He moves to Becket.) Like a page. (He is almost savagely gleeful, then suddenly his gaze softens.) You're as white as a sheet, little Saxon. Why do I love you? It's funny. I don't like to think of you in pain. Show me that hand. A horse bite can turn nasty. I'll put some of that juniper-gin on it. (He grips Becket's hand.)

BECKET (snatching his hand away) I already have, my lord, it's nothing.

KING. Then why do you look so pale? Show me your hand.

BECKET (with sudden coldness) It's an ugly wound and you know you hate the sight of blood.

KING (stepping back a little and exclaiming with delight) All this just to fetch me a drink. Wounded in the service of the King. We'll tell the others you defended me against a wild boar and I'll present you with a handsome gift this evening. What would you like?

BECKET (softly) This girl. (He pauses.) I fancy her.

(There is a pause. The KING'S face clouds over.)

KING. That's tiresome of you. I fancy her, too. And where that's concerned, friendship goes by the board. (He pauses and his face takes on a cunning look.) All right, then. But favour for favour. You won't forget, will you?

BECKET. No, my prince.

KING. Favour for favour; do you give me your word as a gentleman?

BECKET. Yes, my prince.

KING (suddenly cheerful) Done! She's yours. Do we take her with us or shall we have her sent?

BECKET. I'll send two soldiers to fetch her.

(The BARONS are heard shouting off L.)

Listen. The others have caught up.

KING (To the Man) Wash your daughter, dog, and kill her fleas. She's going to the palace. For Milord here, who's a Saxon, too. You're pleased about that, I hope? (He moves to the door and turns to Becket.) Give him a gold piece. I'm feeling generous this morning.

(The KING exits. The MAN looks at Becket in terror.)

BECKET. No one will ever come and take your daughter away. Keep her better hidden in future. And tell your son to join the others in the forest, he'll be safer there, now. I think one of the soldiers saw us. (He takes out a purse.) Here!

(BECKET throws the purse to the Man and exits. When he has gone the MAN snatches up the purse, then spits venomously, his face twisted with hate.)

MAN. God rot his guts! Pig!

GIRL (unexpectedly) He was handsome, that one. Is it true he's taking me to the palace?

MAN. You whore. (He picks up a stick.) You Norman trollop. (He hurls himself on the Girl and savagely beats her.)

The sound of hunting-horns is heard as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT #15

## SCENE 6

SCENE--Becket's Palace.

A candelabrum is set near one of the pillars.  
There is a bed-couch with cushions on it  
down L. A tapestry up LC, may hang across  
from L to C.

When the LIGHTS come up, singing and roars of #16  
laughter are heard off up L from the BARONS  
and banqueting guests. GWENDOLEN is curled  
up on the couch, playing a stringed instrument.  
BECKET enters up L and moves to Gwendolen,  
while the banqueting and the laughter, punc-  
tuated by hoarse incoherent snatches of song,  
continue. GWENDOLEN stops playing.

GWENDOLEN. Are they still eating?

BECKET. Yes. (He kneels beside Gwendolen.)  
They have an unimaginable capacity for absorb-  
ing food.

(They embrace and kiss.)

GWENDOLEN (softly) How can my Lord spend his  
days and a large part of his nights with such  
creatures?

BECKET (crouching at her feet and caressing her)  
If he spent his time with learned clerics debating  
the sex of angels, your Lord would be even more  
bored, my kitten. They are as far from the true  
knowledge of things as these mindless brutes.

GWENDOLEN (gently) I don't always understand  
everything my Lord condescends to say to me.  
What I do know is that it is always very late  
when he comes to see me.

BECKET (caressing her) The only thing I love  
is coming to you. Beauty is the one thing which  
doesn't shake one's faith in God.

GWENDOLEN. I am my Lord's war captive and I  
belong to him body and soul. God has willed it  
so, since He gave the Normans victory over my  
people. If the Welsh had won the war I would  
have married a man of my own race, at my father's  
castle. God did not will it so.

BECKET (quietly) That belief will do as well  
as any, my kitten. But, as I belong to a con-  
quered race myself, I have a feeling that God's  
system is a little muddled. Go on playing.

(GWENDOLEN plays. The sounds from the banquet  
lessen.)

GWENDOLEN (suddenly; gravely) I'm lying. You are my lord, God or no God. And if the Welsh had been victorious, you could just as easily have stolen me from my father's castle. I should have come with you.

(BECKET turns away)

(She looks at him with anguished eyes and stops playing) Did I say something wrong? What is the matter with my lord?

BECKET. Nothing. I don't like being loved. I told you that.

(The KING enters up L. and BECKET and GWENDOLEN rise)

KING (A little drunk) Well, son, have you deserted us? It worked! I told you. They're fighting with your forks. They've at last discovered that they're for poking one another's eyes out. They think it's a most ingenious little invention. You'd better go in, son, they'll break them in a minute.

(BECKET exits up L. The KING moves to Gwendolen and stares at her.)

BECKET (off) Gentlemen, gentlemen! No, no, they aren't little daggers. No, truly--they're for pronging meat. Look, let me show you again.

(Huge roars of laughter are heard off)

KING. Was that you playing, while we were at table?

GWENDOLEN (with a deep curtsy) Yes, my Lord.

KING. You have every kind of accomplishment, haven't you? Get up. (He lifts her to her feet, caressing her as he does so.)

(The sounds of banqueting fade. GWENDOLEN moves C., ill at ease.)

(He moves behind Gwendolen. With a wicked smile.) Have I frightened you, my heart? We'll soon put that right. (He moves up L. and calls.) Hey there, Becket. That's enough horseplay, my fat lads. Come and hear a little music. When the belly's full, it's good to elevate the mind a bit. (He turns to Gwendolen.) Play! Play!

(GWENDOLEN picks up her instrument and sits on the right end of the couch. The King sprawls on the couch, behind her.)

BECKET enters up L. and moves C.



The four BARONS, bloated with food and drink, follow Becket on. The 1ST BARON carries one of the new forks. He and the 2ND BARON sit at the base of the pillars. The 3RD and 4TH BARONS cross and sit on the floor down R. They all, with much singing and puffing, unclasp their belts and soon fall into a stupor.)

(to Becket) Tell her to sing us something sad. I like sad music after dinner. It helps the digestion.

(BECKET takes the fork from the 1ST BARON)

(he hiccups) You always feed us far too well, Thomas. Where did you steal that cook of yours?

BECKET (moving and standing behind Gwendolen) I bought him, Sire. He's a Frenchman.

KING. Really? Aren't you afraid he might poison you? (He laughs) Tell me, how much does one pay for a French cook?

(GWENDOLEN plays)

BECKET. A good one, like him, costs as much as a horse, my Lord.

KING (genuinely outraged) It's outrageous! What is the country coming to? No man is worth a horse. (He takes the fork from Becket) If I said "favor for favor"--remember--and I asked you to give him to me, would you?

BECKET. Of course, my Lord.

KING (with a smile) Well, I won't. I don't want to eat too well every day; it lowers a man's morale. (He caresses Gwendolen with the fork) Sadder, sadder, my little doe.

(BECKET takes the fork and moves C.)

(He sits up and belches) Oh, that venison. Get her to sing that lament they composed for your mother, Becket. It's my favorite song.

BECKET. I don't like anyone to sing that lament, my Lord.

KING. Why not? Are you ashamed of being a Saracen girl's son? That's half your charm, you fool. There must be some reason why you're more civilized than the rest of us put together. I adore that song.

(GWENDOLEN looks uncertainly at Becket. There is a pause.)

(Coldly) That's an order, little Saxon.



BECKET (to Gwendolen; inscrutably) Sing.

(GWENDOLEN strikes a few opening chords while the KING lies down and makes himself comfortable, belching contentedly. BECKET sits on the ground C.)

GWENDOLEN (singing)  
Handsome Sir Gilbert  
Went to the war  
One fine morning in May  
To deliver the heart  
Of Lord Jesus Our Saviour  
From the Saracen's sway.  
Woe! Woe! Heavy is my heart  
At being without love.  
Woe! Woe! Heavy is my heart  
All the livelong day.

KING AND BARONS (singing)  
All the livelong day.

GWENDOLEN (singing)  
Fierce the battle raged  
And his great sword  
Slew many infidel.  
But his trusty charger  
Stumbled in the fray  
And Sir Gilbert fell.  
Woe! Woe! Heavy is my heart  
At being without love.  
Woe! Woe! Heavy is my heart  
All the livelong day.  
Wounded in the head  
They led Gilbert the Brave  
To the Algiers Market  
Chained hand and foot  
And sold him as a slave.

KING (singing out of key)  
All the livelong day.

GWENDOLEN (singing)  
A Saracen's daughter  
Lovely as the night  
Lost her heart to him  
Swore to love him always  
Vowed to be his wife.  
Woe! Woe! Heavy is my heart  
At being without love.  
Woe! Woe! Heavy is my heart  
All the livelong day.

KING (interrupting) It brings tears to my eyes, you know, that story. I look a brute, but I'm soft as swansdown, really. One can't change one's nature. (He sits up) I can't imagine why you don't like people to sing that song. It's wonderful to be a love child. (He rises and stands R. of the couch) When I look at my august parents' faces, I shudder to think what must have gone on. It's marvellous to think of your mother helping your father to escape and then coming to join him in London with you inside her. (He moves and stands behind Gwendolen and puts his hands on her shoulders) Sing us the end, girl. I adore the end.

GWENDOLEN (singing softly)  
 Then he asked the holy Father  
 For a priest to baptize her  
 And he took her as his wife  
 To cherish with his life  
 Giving her his soul  
 To love and keep alway  
 Gay! Gay! Easy is my heart  
 At being full of love.  
 Gay! Gay! Easy is my heart  
 To be loved alway.

KING (dreamily) Did he really love her all his life? Isn't it altered a bit in the end?

BECKET. No, sire.

KING (moving C.; quite saddened) Funny, it's the happy ending that makes me feel sad. Do you believe in love, Thomas? (He crosses to the pillars.)

BECKET (coldly) For my father's love for my mother, Sire, yes.

(The KING crosses to R., kicking the snoring BARONS as he passes.)

KING. They've fallen asleep, the hogs. That's their way of showing their finer feelings. (He moves up C) You know, my little Saxon, sometimes I have the impression that you and I are the only sensitive men in England. We eat with forks and we have infinitely distinguished sentiments, you and I. You've made a different man of me, in a way. (He moves and stands behind Gwendolen) What you ought to find me now, if you loved me, is a girl to give me a little polish. I've had enough of whores. (He puts his hand on Gwendolen's head and caresses her a little. Suddenly) Favour for favour--do you remember?

(There is a pause during which BECKET rises)

BECKET (pale) I am your servant, my prince, and all I have is yours. But you were gracious enough to say I was your friend.

KING (sitting on the upstage side of the couch)  
That's what I mean. As one friend to another, it's  
the thing to do. (He pauses, smiles maliciously,  
and caresses Gwendolen)

(GWENDOLEN cowers, terrified)

You care about her, then? Can you care for  
something? Go on, tell me if you care about  
her.

(BECKET is silent)

(He smiles) You can't tell a lie. I know you.  
Not because you're afraid of lies--I think you  
must be the only man I know who isn't afraid of  
anything--not even Heaven--but because it's dis-  
tasteful to you. You consider it inelegant. What  
looks like morality in you is nothing more than  
aesthetics. Is that true or isn't it?

BECKET(meeting the King's eyes; softly) It's  
true, my Lord.

KING. I'm not cheating if I ask for her, am  
I? I said "favour for favour" and I asked you  
for your word of honour.

BECKET(icily) And I gave it to you.

(There is a pause. The KING looks at Becket  
with a wicked smile. BECKET does not look at the  
King.)

KING(rising and moving briskly R.) Right.  
I'm off to bed.

(GWENDOLEN rises)

I feel like an early night tonight. Delightful  
evening, Becket. You're the only man in England  
who knows how to give your friends a royal wel-  
come. (He kicks the slumbering BARONS) Call  
my guards and help me wake these porkers.

(The BARONS wake with sighs and belches  
and rise)

(He pushes them about, shouting) Come on, Barons,  
home. I know you're connoisseurs of good music,  
but we can't listen to music all night long. (He  
crosses to Gwendolen, takes her hand and leads her  
R.) Happy evenings end in bed, eh, Becket?

BECKET(stiffly) May I ask your Highness for a  
brief moment's grace?

KING. Granted. Granted. I'm not a savage.  
I'll wait for you both in my litter. You can  
say goodnight to me downstairs.

(The KING exits R.)

The BARONS, singing, follow him off.

BECKET stands motionless for a while under Gwendolen's steady gaze.)

BECKET (crossing to LC; quietly) You'll have to go with him, Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN (composedly) Did my Lord promise me to him?

BECKET. I gave him my word of honour that I would give him anything he asked for. I never thought it would be you.

GWENDOLEN. If he sends me away tomorrow, will my lord take me back?

BECKET. No.

GWENDOLEN. Shall I tell the girls to put my dresses in the coffer?

BECKET. He'll send over for it tomorrow. Go down. One doesn't keep the King waiting. Tell him I wish him a respectful goodnight.

GWENDOLEN. I shall leave my Lord my harp. He can almost play it now. (She asks, quite naturally) My Lord cares for nothing in the whole world, does he?

BECKET. No.

GWENDOLEN (moving to Becket; gently) You belong to a conquered race, too. But through tasting too much of the honey of life, you've forgotten that even those who have been robbed of everything have one thing left to call their own.

BECKET (inscrutably) Yes. I dare say you're right: I had forgotten. There is a gap in me where honour ought to be. Go now.

(GWENDOLEN exits R. BECKET stands quite still for a few moments, then pulls the coverlet from the bed, tosses on the floor C. and starts to unbutton his doublet.

The 1ST SOLDIER enters R., dragging in the SAXON GIRL, throws her on the fur coverlet C., then moves and stands down R.

The KING enters R.)

KING (hilariously) Thomas, my son! You'd forgotten her. You see how careless you are. Luckily, I think of everything. You see--I really am a friend to you, and you're wrong not to love me. You told me you fancied her. I hadn't forgotten that, you see. Sleep well, son.

(The KING picks up the candelabrum and exits.

The 1ST SOLDIER follows him off. The GIRL, still dazed, rises, looks at Becket, recognizes him)

GIRL (after a pause; with a kind of sly coquetry) Shall I undress, my Lord?

BECKET. Of course.

(The GIRL starts to undress. BECKET looks at her, coldly, absentmindedly whistling a few bars of his little march. Suddenly he stops, goes to the Girl, who stands dazed and half-naked, and seizes her by the shoulders)

I hope you're full of noble feelings and that all this strikes you as pretty shabby?

(The KING stumbles in R.  
The 1ST SOLDIER follows him in. Becket releases the Girl and turns)

KING (soberly) I had no pleasure with her, Thomas. She let me lay her down in the litter, limp as a corpse, and then suddenly she pulled out a little knife from somewhere. There was blood everywhere. I feel quite sick. (Haggard) She could easily have killed me instead. (He pauses, abruptly) Send that girl away.

(BECKET motions to the 1ST SOLDIER.  
The 1ST SOLDIER leads the half-naked Girl out R.)

(he crosses to the couch) I'm sleeping in your room tonight. I'm frightened. (He throws himself, fully dressed, onto the couch with an animal-like sigh) Take half the bed.

BECKET. I'll sleep on the floor.

KING. No. Lie down beside me. I don't want to be alone tonight. (He looks at Becket and murmurs) You loathe me. I shan't even be able to trust you now.

BECKET. You gave me your seal to keep, my Prince. And the three lions of England which are engraved on it keep watch over me, too.

KING (his voice already thick with sleep) I shall never know what you're thinking.

BECKET. It will be dawn soon, my prince. (He picks up the fur coverlet from the floor and spreads it over the King.) You must sleep. Tomorrow we are crossing to the Continent. (He lies on the bed alongside the King) In a week we will face the King of France's army and there will be simple answers to everything at last.

(There is a pause during which the King's snoring gradually increases. Suddenly, the King moans and tosses in his sleep)

KING (crying out) They're after me. They're after me. Stop them! Stop them!

#17

(BECKET sits up on one elbow. He touches the KING, who wakes up with a great animal cry)

BECKET. My prince--my prince--sleep in peace. I'm here.

KING. Oh--Thomas, it's you. They were after me. (He turns over and goes back to sleep with a sigh. Gradually he begins to snore again, softly)

(BECKET is still on one elbow. Almost tenderly he draws the coverlet over the King.)

BECKET. My prince. If you were my true prince, if you were one of my race, how simple everything would be. How tenderly I would love you, then, my prince, in an ordered world. Each of us bound in fealty to the other, head, heart, and limbs, with no further questions to ask of oneself, ever.

(There is a pause. The King's snores grow louder)

(He sighs, with a little smile) But I cheated my way in. An alien, a bastard, and stole my place among the conquerors. You can sleep peacefully, though, my prince. So long as Becket is obliged to improvise his honour, he will serve you. And if one day, he meets it face to face... (He pauses briefly) But where is Becket's honour?

BECKET, with a sigh, lies down. The KING's snores grow louder still. The LIGHTS grow dim as-- # 18

the CURTAIN falls

## ACT II

## SCENE 1

SCENE--A Forest in France

The pillars are topped by branches. There is a tent C, which is the KING'S. It has exits both downstage and at the back of it. A bed is visible in the tent. A camp fire is down C.

When the CURTAIN rises, it is dawn. The tent is not yet open for the day. The four BARONS are crouched around the camp fire, having their morning meal in silence. The 1ST BARON is up R of the fire, the 2ND BARON is up L of it, the 3RD BARON is R of it and the 4TH BARON is L of it. After a while, the 1ST BARON speaks. #19

1ST BARON. This fellow Becket, then, who is he?

(There is a pause. All four are fairly slow in their reactions)

2ND BARON (Surprised at the question) The Chancellor of England.

1ST BARON. I know that. But who is he, exactly?

2ND BARON. The Chancellor of England, I tell you. The Chancellor of England is the Chancellor of England. I don't see what else there is to enquire about on that score.

1ST BARON. You don't understand. Look, supposing the Chancellor of England were some other man. Me, for instance...

2ND BARON. That's plain idiotic.

1ST BARON. I said supposing. Now, I would be Chancellor of England, but I wouldn't be the same Chancellor of England as Becket is. You can follow that, can you?

2ND BARON. Yes.

1ST BARON. So, I can ask myself the question.

2ND BARON. What question?

1ST BARON. Who is this man Becket?

2ND BARON. What do you mean, who is this man Becket? He's the Chancellor of England.

1ST BARON. Yes. But I'm asking myself who is he, as a man?

2ND BARON (looking at the 1st Baron; sorrowfully) Have you got a pain?



1ST BARON. No, why?

2ND BARON. A Baron who asks himself questions is a sick Baron.

1ST BARON(vexed) I just meant I didn't like him, that's all.

2ND BARON. Why couldn't you say so, then? That we'd have understood. I don't like him either, come to that. To begin with, he's a Saxon.

1ST BARON. To begin with!

3RD BARON. One thing you can't say, though. You can't say he isn't a fighter. Yesterday when the King was in the thick of it, after his squire was killed, he cut his way right through the French, and he seized the King's banner and drew the enemy off and on to himself.

1ST BARON. All right. He's a good fighter.

3RD BARON (to the 2nd Baron) Isn't he a good fighter?

2ND BARON (stubbornly) Yes. But he's a Saxon.

1ST BARON (to the 4th Baron) How about you, Regnault? What do you think of him?

4TH BARON (swallowing his mouthful of food; placidly) I'm waiting.

1ST BARON. Waiting for what?

4TH BARON. Till he shows himself. Some sorts of game are like that, you follow them all day sometimes through the forest. But it wouldn't do any good to charge ahead with drawn lance, because you don't know for sure what kind of animal it is you're dealing with. You have to wait.

1ST BARON. What for?

4TH BARON. For whatever kind of animal it is you're dealing with to show itself. And if you're patient it always does show itself in the end. With this man Becket--I'll wait.

1ST BARON. What for?

4TH BARON. For him to show himself. For him to break cover. (He goes on eating) The day he does, we'll know who he is.

(BECKET'S little whistled march is heard off.  
BECKET enters R and crosses to C. He is armed)

BECKET. Good morning to you, gentlemen.

(The four BARONS rise politely)

Is the King asleep?

(The 3RD BARON crosses to L)

1ST BARON (stiffly) He hasn't called yet.

BECKET. Has the Camp Marshal presented his list of losses?



1ST BARON. No.

BECKET. Why not?

2ND BARON (surlily) He was part of the losses.

BECKET. Oh?

1ST BARON. I was nearby when it happened. A lance knocked him off his horse. Once on the ground, the foot soldiers dealt with him.

BECKET. Poor Beaumont. He was so proud of his new armour.

2ND BARON. There must have been a chink in it, then. They bled him white. On the ground. French swine!

BECKET (with a light shrug) That's war. The lesson of this battle, which has cost us far too much, is that we will have to form platoons of cut-throats, too, that's all.

1ST BARON. And a soldier's honour, my lord Chancellor, what of that?

BECKET (dryly) A soldier's honour, my Lord Baron, is to win victories. I'll wake the King. Our entry into the city is timed for eight o'clock this morning and the Te Deum in the cathedral for a quarter past nine. It would be bad policy to keep the French Bishop waiting. We want these people to collaborate with good grace.

1ST BARON (grunting) In my day, we slaughtered the lot and marched in afterwards.

BECKET. Yes, into a dead city. I want to give the King living cities to increase his wealth. From eight o'clock this morning, I am the French people's dearest friend.

1ST BARON. And what about England's honour, my Lord Chancellor?

BECKET (quietly) England's honour, my Lord Baron, in the final reckoning, has always been to succeed.

(BECKET exits into the King's tent C, smiling. The four BARONS look at each other, hostile)

1ST BARON (muttering) What a mentality.

4TH BARON (sententiously) We must wait for him. One day he'll break cover.

(The four BARONS exit down L. \_\_\_\_\_)

#20

BECKET, inside the tent, lifts the flap and hooks it back. The KING is revealed, in bed with a FRENCH GIRL. The GIRL laughs)

KING (yawning) Good morning, son.

(The GIRL sits up)

Did you sleep well?

BECKET (moving to L of bed) A little memento from the French on my left shoulder kept me awake, Sire. I took the opportunity to do some thinking.

KING. What do you think of my little French girl? I must say, I adore France.

(The GIRL giggles)

BECKET (smiling) So do I, Sire, like all Englishmen.

KING. The climate's warm, the girls are pretty, the wine is good. I intend to spend at least a month here every winter. (He caresses the Girl)

BECKET. The only snag is, it's expensive. Two thousand casualties yesterday. My prince, shall we get down to work? We haven't dealt with yesterday's dispatches yet.

KING. Does it amuse you--working for the good of my people? Do you mean to say that you love all those folk? To begin with, they're too numerous. One can't love them, one doesn't know them. Anyway, you're lying, you don't love anything or anybody.

BECKET (tersely) There's one thing I do love, my prince, and that I'm sure of. Doing what I have to do and doing it well.

KING (sitting up--grinning) Always the aes--aes--What's your word again?

BECKET (smiling) Aesthetics?

KING. Aesthetics! Always the aesthetic side, eh?

BECKET. Yes, my prince.

KING (slapping the girl's rump) And isn't that aesthetic, too?

(The GIRL giggles)

Some people go into ecstasies over cathedrals. But this is a work of art, too. Look at that--round as an apple. (Naturally, as if he were offering Becket a sweetmeat) Want her?

BECKET (smiling) Business, my Lord.

KING (pouting like a schoolboy) All right. Business. (He swings his feet out and sits on the right edge of the bed) I'm listening. Sit down.

(BECKET sits on the left edge of the bed, with the girl like a fascinated rabbit between them)

BECKET. The news is not good, my prince.

KING (with a careless wave of the hand) News never is. That's a known fact. Life is one long web of difficulties. The secret of it is to give them no importance whatever. In the long run one difficulty swallows up the other and you find yourself ten years later still alive with no harm done.

(The GIRL embraces the King)

Things always work out.

BECKET. Yes, but badly. My prince, when you play tennis, do you simply sit back and wait for the ball to hit your racquet. or do you...?

KING. Ah, now just a minute. A game of tennis is important, it amuses me. (He picks up his shirt and puts it on)

BECKET. But governing can be just as amusing as a game of tennis. Are we going to let them smash the ball into our court, my prince, or shall we try to score a point, like two good English sportsmen?

KING (suddenly aroused by the sporting instinct) The point, begod, the point! You're right. On the court I fall over my feet. I half kill myself. I cheat if need be, but I never give up the point.

BECKET. Well, then, I'll tell you what the score is, so far. Piecing together all the information I have received from London since we've been on the Continent, one thing strikes me, and that is: that there exists in England a power which has grown until it almost rivals yours, my Lord. It is the power of your clergy.

KING. We did get them to pay the tax. That's something.

BECKET. Yes, it's a small sum of money. And they know that princes can always be pacified with money. But these men are past-masters at taking back with one hand what they were forced to give with the other. That's a little conjuring trick they've had centuries of practice in.

KING (to the Girl) Pay attention, my little sparrow. Now's your chance to educate yourself. The gentleman is saying some very profound things.

BECKET (rising; in the same flippant way) Little French Sparrow, suppose you educate us, instead. When you're married--if you do marry despite the holes in your virtue--which would you prefer, to be mistress in your own kitchen or to have your village priest laying down the law there?

KING. Talk sense, Becket. Priests are always intriguing, I know that. But I also know that I can crush them any time I like.

BECKET. Talk sense, Sire. If you don't do the crushing now, in five year's time there will be two Kings in England, the Archbishop of Canterbury and you. And in ten years' time there will be only one.

KING (a bit shamefaced) And it won't be me?

BECKET (coldly) I rather fear not.

KING (with a sudden shout) Oh, yes, it will! (He rises, picks up the blanket, and throws it over the Girl) We Plantagenets hold on to our own. To horse, Becket, to horse! For England's glory.

(The GIRL emerges, dishevelled and red in the face)

GIRL (pleadingly) My Lord! I can't breathe!

(The KING looks at the Girl in surprise. He had clearly forgotten her. He bursts out laughing)

KING. What are you doing there? Spying for the clergy? Put your clothes on and go home. (He rolls the Girl out of the bed) Give her a gold piece, Thomas.

(The Girl picks up her rags and holds them in front of her)

GIRL. Am I to come back to the camp tonight, my Lord?

KING (exasperated) Yes. No. I don't know. We're concerned with the Archbishop now, not you. Be off.

(The GIRL exits at the back of the tent)

To horse, Thomas, for England's greatness. With my big fist and your big brain we'll do some good work, you and I. (With sudden concern) Wait a second. You can never be sure of finding another one as good in bed. (He goes to the entrance at the rear of the tent and shouts) Come back tonight, my angel. I adore you. You have the prettiest eyes in all the world. (He moves to Becket. Confidentially) You always have to tell them that, even when you pay for it, if you want real pleasure with them. That's high politics, too. (Suddenly anxious, as his childish fear of the clergy returns) What will God say to it all, though? After all, they're His bishops.

BECKET (with an airy gesture) We aren't children. You know one can always come to some arrangement with God, on this earth. Make haste and dress, my prince. We're going to be late.

KING. I'll be ready in a minute. Do I have to shave?

BECKET (smiling) It might be as well, after two days fighting.

KING. What a fuss for a lot of conquered Frenchmen. I wonder sometimes if you aren't a bit too finicky, Thomas.

(BECKET comes from the tent and closes the flap. #21

The two SOLDIERS enter R, bringing on a YOUNG MONK, with his hands tied. They cross to C)

BECKET. What is it?

1ST SOLDIER. We've just arrested this young monk, my Lord. He was loitering round the camp. He had a knife under his robe. We're taking him to the Provost.

BECKET. Have you got the knife?

(The 1ST SOLDIER hands a knife to BECKET, who looks at it and then at the little Monk)

What use do you have for this in your monastery?

MONK. I cut my bread with it.

BECKET (amused) Well, well. (To the Soldiers) Leave him to me. I'll question him.

1ST SOLDIER. He's turbulent, my Lord. It took four of us to tie him up. We'd have finished him then and there, only the Sergeant said there might be some information to be got out of him. That's why we're taking him to the Provost.

BECKET (who has not taken his eyes off the little Monk) Very well. Stand off.

(The SOLDIERS move out of earshot, up R)

(He goes on looking at the Monk, and playing with the knife) What are you doing in France? You're a Saxon.

MONK (crying out despite himself) How do you know?

BECKET. I can tell by your accent. I speak Saxon very well, almost as well as you speak French. In your predicament, it would be as well to be taken for a Frenchman as a Saxon. It's less unpopular.

(There is a pause)

MONK (abruptly) I'm prepared to die.

BECKET (smiling) After the deed. But before, you'll agree, it's stupid. (He looks at the knife which he is holding between two fingers) Where are you from?

MONK (venomously) Hastings.

BECKET. Hastings. And who was this kitchen implement intended for?

(The MONK is silent)

You couldn't hope to kill more than one man with a weapon of this sort. You didn't make the journey for the sake of an ordinary Norman soldier, I imagine.

(The MONK does not answer)

(Tersely) Listen to me, my little man. They're going to put you to the torture. Have you ever seen that? One always talks. If I can vouch that you've made a full confession, it will go easier

for you.

(The Monk does not answer)

Besides, there is an amusing detail to this affair. You are directly under my jurisdiction. The King gave me the deeds and livings of all the Abbeys in Hastings when he made me Chancellor.

MONK. Are you Becket?

BECKET. Yes. (He looks at the knife and sniffs at it with faint distaste) You didn't only use your knife to cut bread. It stinks of onion, like any proper little Saxon's knife. They're good, aren't they, the Hastings onions? (He looks at the knife again with a strange smile) You still haven't told me who it was for.

(The MONK is silent)

If you meant it for the King, there's no sense in that, my lad. He has three sons. Kings spring up again like weeds. Did you imagine you could liberate your race single-handed?

MONK. No. (dully) Not my race. Myself.

BECKET. Liberate yourself from what?

MONK. My shame.

BECKET (with sudden gravity) How old are you?

MONK. Sixteen.

BECKET (quietly) The Normans have occupied the island for a hundred years. Shame is a stale vintage. Your father and your grandfather drank it to the dregs. The cup is empty now.

MONK (shaking his head) No.

(A shadow seems to cross Becket's eyes.)

BECKET (quietly) So, one fine morning, you woke in your cell to the bell of the first offices, while it was still dark. And it was the bells that told you, a boy of sixteen, to take the whole burden of shame on to yourself?

MONK (with the cry of a cornered animal) Who told you that?

BECKET (indifferently) I'm a Saxon, too, did you know that?

MONK (stonily) Yes.

BECKET (smiling) Go on. Spit. You're dying to.

(The MONK looks at Becket, a little dazed, and then spits)

(He smiles) That felt good, didn't it? (Tersely) The King is waiting. And this conversation could go on indefinitely. But I want to keep you alive, so we can continue it one of these days. (Lightly) It's pure selfishness, you know. Your life hasn't



any sort of importance for me, obviously, but it's very rare for Fate to bring one face to face with one's own ghost, when young. (He turns and calls) Soldier.

(The 1ST SOLDIER moves to Becket and springs to clanking attention)

Fetch me the Provost. Run!

(The 1ST SOLDIER runs out down R)

(He turns to the Monk) Delightful day, isn't it? This early morning sun, hot already under this light veil of mist. A beautiful place, France. But I'm like you. I prefer the solid mist of the Sussex downs. Sunshine is luxury. And we belong to a race which used to despise luxury, you and I.

(The PROVOST MARSHAL of the camp enters down R. He is an important personage, but Becket is inaccessible, even for a Provost Marshal, and the man's behaviour shows it. The 1ST SOLDIER follows him on)

Sir Provost. You will make arrangements to have this young monk sent back to England and taken to his convent, in Hastings, where his Abbot will keep him under supervision until my return. I want him treated without brutality, but very closely watched. I hold you personally responsible for him.

PROVOST. Very good, my Lord.

(The PROVOST motions to the Soldiers.

The SOLDIERS surround the MONK and lead him off R, without a further glance from Becket. Left alone, BECKET looks at the knife, smiles and wrinkles his nose)

BECKET (in a murmur; with faint distaste) It's touching, but it stinks all the same. (He flings the knife away, and whistling his little march, goes to the tent, opens it and calls out light-heartedly) Well, my prince, have you put on your Sunday best? It's time to go. We mustn't keep the Bishop waiting.

BECKET goes into the tent as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT #22

There is a sudden joyful peal of bells

## SCENE 2

SCENE--A Street in France

When the lights come up, SOLDIERS enter up L and #23  
hang flags on two or more of the pillars. Then  
BECKET enters up L, on foot, leading the KING  
on horseback. They are followed by the four  
BARONS, also mounted. The procession comes  
through the pillars. Acclamations from the  
crowd, bells and trumpets are heard off.

KING (beaming as he waves) Listen to that!  
They adore us, these French.

(The sounds off quieten)

BECKET. It cost me quite a bit. I had money  
distributed among the populace this morning. The  
prosperous classes are at home, sulking, of course.

KING. Patriots?

BECKET. No. But they would have cost too much.  
There are also a certain number of your Highness's  
soldiers among the crowd, in disguise, to encour-  
age any lukewarm elements.

KING. Why do you always make a game of des-  
troying my illusions? I thought they loved me  
for myself. You're an amoral man, Becket.

(Anxiously) Does one say amoral or immoral?

BECKET (smiling) It depends what one means.

KING (pointing) She's pretty, look--the girl  
on the balcony, to the right there. Suppose we  
stopped a minute...

BECKET. Impossible. The Bishop is waiting in  
the cathedral.

KING. It would be a lot more fun than going to  
see a Bishop.

BECKET. My Lord, do you remember what you have  
to say to him?

KING (waving to the crowd) Yes, yes, yes! As  
if it mattered what I say to a French bishop, whose  
city I've just taken by force.

BECKET. It matters a great deal. For our future  
policy.

KING. Am I the strongest or am I not?

BECKET. You are today. But one must never  
drive one's enemy to despair. It makes him  
strong. A good occupational force must not crush,  
it must corrupt.



KING (waving graciously) What about my pleasure then? Where does that enter into your scheme of things? Suppose I charged into this heap of frog-eaters now instead of acting the goat at their Te Deum? I can indulge in a bit of pleasure, can't I? I'm the conqueror.

BECKET. That would be a fault. Worse, a failing. One can permit oneself anything. Sir, but one must never indulge.

KING. Yes. Papa. right. Papa. What a bore you are today. (He points) Look at that little red-head there, standing on the fountain. Give orders for the procession to follow the same route back.

The KING exits down L, turning on his horse to watch the Girl out of sight.

BECKET and the BARONS follow him off as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#24

Organ music is heard

## SCENE 3

SCENE--The Sacristy of a Cathedral in France

When the LIGHTS come up the sacristy is empty. #25

The organ is heard, swelling chords. The organist is practising in the empty cathedral. The KING, attired for ceremony, and the four BARONS enter down L. A FRENCH PRIEST and a CHOIRBOY follow them on. The CHOIRBOY carries a stool which he sets RC for the King. The KING sits impatiently on the stool. The PRIEST and the CHOIRBOY stand together down LC. The 1ST BARON stands down R. The 2ND BARON is up R of the King, the 3RD BARON is up L of him, and the 4TH BARON stands C. They seem to be waiting for something.

KING. Where's Becket? And what are we waiting for?

(The organ music fades)

1ST BARON. He just said to wait, my Lord. It seems there's something not quite in order.

KING (ill-humouredly) What a lot of fuss for a French bishop. What do I look like, I ask you, hanging about in this sacristy like a village bridegroom?

4TH BARON (moving to L of the King) I quite agree, my Lord. I can't think why we don't march straight in. After all, it's your cathedral now. (Eagerly) Shall we just draw our swords and charge?

(The other BARONS react)

KING (with a worried frown) No. (He rises) Becket wouldn't like it. (He resumes his seat) If he told us to wait, there must be a good reason.

(BECKET enters hurriedly down R and crosses to C)

Well, Becket, what's happening? We're freezing to death in here. What do these French think they're at, keeping us mouldering in this sacristy?

BECKET. The order came from me, Sire. I'm having the cathedral evacuated.

(The KING rises. The 2ND BARON draws his sword. The other three follow suit)

My police are certain that a French rising was to break out during the ceremony.

2ND BARON. God's blood! Shall we go in and deal with it, my Lord?

4TH BARON. We'll make short work of it.

3RD BARON. Just say the word, Sire.

BECKET (curtly) I forbid it. The King is quite safe in here, I've put guards on all the doors. Sheathe your swords.

(The BARONS sheathe their swords)

(he crosses down R) No provocation, please. We are at the mercy of a chance incident and I still have no more than forty men-at-arms in the city.

(The KING moves to L of Becket and tugs at his sleeve)

KING. Becket! Is that priest French?

BECKET. Yes. But he is part of the Bishop's immediate entourage. And the Bishop is our man.

KING. That man has a funny look in his eyes.

BECKET. Who, the Bishop?

KING. No. That priest.

(BECKET glances at the priest and laughs)

BECKET Of course, my prince, he squints. It would be tactless to ask him to leave. (He turns to go)

KING. Becket!

BECKET (stopping and turning) Sire?

KING. The choirboy?

BECKET (laughing) He's only so high.

KING. He may be a dwarf. You never know with the French.

BECKET. I'll come straight back.

(BECKET exits down R. The KING darts anxious looks at the PRIEST as he paces up and down muttering his prayers)

KING. Baron!

(The 4TH BARON moves to L of the King)

4TH BARON (bellowing) My Lord?

KING. Shush! Keep an eye on that man, all four of you, and at the slightest move, leap on him.

(The BARONS surround the Priest. The CHOIRBOY crosses toward the King. The KING shouts. The BARONS draw their swords and move towards the Boy. There is a sudden violent knocking off R.

The boy screams, turns and runs off down L)

(He looks R. With a start) What is it?

(The 1ST SOLDIER enters down R, carrying a letter)

1ST SOLDIER (crossing and handing the letter to the 4TH Baron) An urgent letter from London, my Lord.

(The 4TH BARON hands the letter to the King, who glances through it. The SOLDIER exits down R)

KING. Good news, gentlemen. We have one enemy the less.

(BECKET enters down R)

(Joyfully) Becket!

BECKET. Everything is going according to plan, my prince. The rest of the troops are on their way.

KING (cheerfully) You're right, Becket, everything is going according to plan. God isn't angry with us. He has just recalled the Archbishop.

BECKET (in a murmur) That little old man. How could that feeble body contain so much strength?

KING. Now, now, now! Don't squander your sorrow, my son. I personally consider this an excellent piece of news. (He hands the letter to the 4th Baron)

BECKET. He was the first Norman who took an interest in me. He was a true father to me. God rest his soul.

KING. He will. After all that fellow did for him, he's gone to Heaven, don't worry. Where he'll be infinitely more use to God than he was to us.

(The BARONS move up RC and group together)

(He pulls Becket to him) Becket! My little Becket, I think the ball's in our court now. This is the time to score a point. (He seizes Becket's arm, tense and quite transformed) An extraordinary idea is just creeping into my mind, Becket. A master-stroke. I can't think what's got into me this morning, but I suddenly feel extremely intelligent. It probably comes of making love with a French girl last night. I am subtle, Becket, I am profound. So profound it's making my head spin. Are you sure it isn't dangerous to think too hard? Thomas, my little Thomas, are you listening to me?

BECKET (smiling at the King's excitement) Yes, my prince.

KING (as excited as a little boy) Are you listening carefully? Listen, Thomas. You told me once that the best ideas are the stupidest, but the clever thing is to think of them. Listen, Thomas. Tradition prevents me from touching the privileges of the Primacy. You follow me so far?

BECKET. Yes, my prince.

KING. But what if the Primate is my man? If the Archbishop of Canterbury is for the King, how can his power possibly incommode me?

BECKET. That's an ingenious idea, my prince, but you forget that his election is a free one.

KING. No. You're forgetting the Royal Veto. It's fully a hundred years since the Conclave of Bishops has voted contrary to the wishes of the King.

BECKET. I don't doubt it, my Lord. But we know all your Bishops. Which of them could you rely on? Once the Primate's mitre is on their heads, they grow dizzy with power.

KING. Are you asking me, Becket? I'll tell you. Someone who doesn't know what dizziness means. (He circles to C) Someone who isn't even afraid of God. Thomas, my son, I'm sorry to deprive you of French girls and the fun of battle, but you are going over to England.

BECKET. I am at your service, my prince.

KING. Can you guess what your mission will be?

(A tremor of anguish crosses BECKET'S face at what is to come)

BECKET. No, my prince.

KING. You are going to deliver a personal letter from me to every Bishop in the land. (He moves to Becket) And do you know what those letters will contain, my Thomas, my little brother? My royal wish to have you elected Primate of England.

(BECKET is deathly white)

BECKET (with a forced laugh) You're joking, of course, my Lord. (He opens his fine coat to display an even finer doublet) Just look at the edifying man, the saintly man whom you would be trusting with these holy functions. Why, my prince--

(The KING backs away, clapping his hands)

--you really fooled me for a second.

(The KING bursts out laughing)

(He laughs, rather too loudly in his relief) A fine Archbishop I'd have made. Look at my new shoes. They're the latest fashion in Paris. Attractive,

that little upturned toe, don't you think? Quite full of unction and compunction, isn't it, Sire?

(The KING suddenly stops laughing)

KING. Shut up about your shoes, Thomas. I'm in deadly earnest. I shall write those letters before noon. You will help me.

(BECKET is deathly pale)

BECKET (stammering) But, my Lord, I'm not even a priest.

KING (tersely) You're a deacon. You can take your final vows on Monday and be ordained within a month.

BECKET. But have you considered what the Pope will say?

KING (brutally) I'll pay the price.

BECKET (after an anguished pause) My Lord, I see now that you weren't joking. Don't do this.

KING. Why not?

BECKET. It frightens me.

KING (his face set and hard) Becket, this is an order.

(There is a pause. BECKET stands as if turned to stone)

BECKET (gravely) If I become Archbishop, I can no longer be your friend.

(An OFFICER enters down R)

OFFICER (to Becket) The Church is now empty, my Lord. (To the King) The Bishop and his clergy await your Highness's good pleasure.

KING (to Becket; roughly) Did you hear that, Becket? Pull yourself together. You have an odd way of taking good news. Wake up! They say we are to go in now.

(The procession forms with the PRIEST leading. BECKET takes his place almost reluctantly a pace or so behind the KING. The BARONS form up behind Becket)

BECKET (in a murmur) This is madness, my Lord. Don't do it. I could not serve both God and you.

KING (looking straight ahead; stonily) You've never disappointed me, Thomas. And you are the only man I trust. You will leave tonight.

The KING motions to the Priest. The procession moves off down R as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#26

## SCENE 4

SCENE--A room in Becket's Palace.

There is a large chest LC, and a crucifix on one of the pillars.

When the LIGHTS come up, two servants are piling #27  
costly clothes into the chest. The 2ND SERVANT is the younger of the two.

2ND SERVANT. The coat with the sable trimming, as well?

1ST SERVANT. Everything. You heard what he said.

2ND SERVANT (grumbling) Sables! To beggars! Who'll give them alms if they beg with that on their backs. They'll starve to death.

1ST SERVANT (cackling) They'll eat the sables. Can't you understand, you idiot. He's going to sell all this and give them the money.

2ND SERVANT. But what will he wear himself? He's got nothing left at all.

(BECKET enters up L. He is wearing a plain grey dressing gown)

BECKET. Are the chests full? I want them sent over to the Jew before tonight. I want nothing left in this room but the bare walls. Gil, the fur coverlet.

1ST SERVANT (regretfully) My Lord will be cold at night.

BECKET. Do as I say.

(The 1ST SERVANT regretfully takes the coverlet that was on the couch in Act I, Scene 6 and puts it in the chest)

Has the steward been told about tonight's meal? Supper for forty in the great hall.

1ST SERVANT. Yes, my Lord.

2ND SERVANT. But the steward says could he have your list of invitations fairly soon, my Lord. He has only three runners and he's afraid there won't be time to...

BECKET. There are no invitations. The great doors will be thrown open and you will go out into the street and tell the poor they are dining with me tonight.

1ST SERVANT (appalled) Very good, my Lord.

(The SERVANTS move towards the pillars, to go)



BECKET. I want the service to be impeccable. The dishes presented to each guest first, with full ceremony, just as for princes. Go now.

(The SERVANTS go through the pillars and exit up R)

(He looks casually over one or two articles of clothing in the chest) I must say, it was all very pretty stuff. (He drops the lid and bursts out laughing) A prick of vanity. The mark of an upstart. A truly saintly man would never have done the whole thing in one day. Nobody will ever believe it's genuine. (He turns to the crucifix on the pillar. Simply) I hope You haven't inspired me with all these holy resolutions in order to make me look ridiculous. Lord? It's all so new to me. I'm setting about it a little clumsily perhaps. (He looks at the crucifix and with a swift gesture takes it off the pillar) And You're far too sumptuous, too. Precious stones around Your bleeding Body. I shall give You to some poor village church. (He lays the crucifix on the chest, then looks around the room, happy and light-hearted) It's like leaving for a holiday. Forgive me, Lord, but I never enjoyed myself so much in my whole life. I don't believe You are a sad God. The joy I feel in shedding all my riches must be part of Your divine intentions.

(BECKET goes behind the tapestry up LC, where he can be heard gaily whistling his marching song. He comes back a few seconds later, his bare feet in sandals and wearing a monk's coarse woollen robe)

(He moves to the chest) There. Farewell, Becket. I wish there had been something I regretted parting with, so I could offer it to you. (He picks up the crucifix and looks at it. Simply) Lord, are You sure You are not tempting me? It all seems far too easy.

BECKET drops to his knees and prays as--

the CURTAIN falls \_\_\_\_\_ #28



## ACT III

## SCENE 1

SCENE--A Room in the King's Palace.

The pillars are backed by tapestries.  
There is a bench down R, and an armchair RC.  
The brazier is down C.

When the CURTAIN rises, the QUEEN MOTHER is  
seated RC. The YOUNG QUEEN is seated on the  
bench down R. The PRINCES, the King's two  
sons, are playing cats' cradles on the floor  
down LC. One of them is considerably older  
than the other. The KING, whistling to him-  
self, is standing between the pillars playing  
at cup-and-ball. After several unsuccessful  
attempts to catch the ball in the cup, he moves  
to L of the Queen Mother.

#29

KING(irritably) Forty beggars! He invited  
forty beggars to dinner.

QUEEN MOTHER. The dramatic gesture, as usual.  
I always said you had misplaced your confidence,  
my son.

KING (pacing to LC) Madam, I am very partic-  
ular where I place my confidence. (He tosses the  
cup-and-ball to the younger prince)

(The elder PRINCE sulks)

I only ever did it once in my whole life and I  
am still convinced I was right. (He moves to  
the pillars)

YOUNG QUEEN. It seems he has sold his gold  
plate and all his rich clothes to a Jew. He  
wears an ordinary homespun habit, now.

(The KING moves down C)

QUEEN MOTHER. I see that as a sign of osten-  
tation, if nothing worse. ~~One can become a saint,~~  
~~certainly, but not in a single day.~~ I've never  
liked the man. You were insane to make him so  
powerful.

KING (crying out) He is my friend.

QUEEN MOTHER (acidly) More's the pity.

YOUNG QUEEN. He is your friend in debauchery. It was he who lured you away from your duty towards me. It was he who first took you to the whorehouses.

KING (moving towards the Young Queen; furiously) Rubbish, Madam! I didn't need anybody to lure me away from my duty towards you. I made you three children, very conscientiously. Phew! My duty is done for a while. To be perfectly frank, you bore me. You and your eternal backbiting, over your everlasting tapestry, the pair of you. That's no sustenance for a man. (He paces furiously LC, then back to RC) If at least it had some artistic merit. My ancestress Mathilde, she embroidered a masterpiece--which they left behind in Bayeux, more's the pity. (He points to the Young Queen's tapestry) But that! It's beyond belief it's so mediocre.

YOUNG QUEEN (nettled) We can only use the gifts we're born with.

KING. Yes. And yours are meagre. (He crosses to C. With a sigh) I've been bored to tears for a whole month. Not a soul to talk to. (He moves between the pillars) After his nomination, not wanting to seem in too indecent a hurry, I leave him alone to carry out his pastoral tour. Now, back he comes at last, I summon him to the palace and he's late! (He turns and looks off up R) Ah! Someone at the sentry post. (He turns, disappointed) No, it's only a monk. (He wanders aimlessly LC and watches the Princes playing. Sourly) Charming babes. Men in the making. Sly and obtuse already. And to think one is expected to be dewy-eyed over creatures like that. (To the Princes) Which is the elder of you two?

ELDER PRINCE (rising) I am, Sir.

KING. What's your name again?

ELDER PRINCE. Henry the Third.

KING (sharply) Not yet, Sir. Number Two is in the best of health.

(The Elder Prince sits on the floor)

(He moves RC. To the Young Queen) You've brought them up well. Do you think of yourself as Regent already? And you wonder that I shun your bedchamber? I don't care to make love with my widow.

(An OFFICER enters between the pillars)

OFFICER. A messenger from the Archbishop, my Lord.

KING (beside himself with rage) A messenger! A messenger! I summoned the Archbishop Primate in person and he sends me a messenger! (He turns to the Queens, suddenly uneasy, almost touching) Perhaps he's ill? That would explain everything.

QUEEN MOTHER (bitterly) That would be too much to hope for.

KING (raging) You'd like to seem him dead, wouldn't you, you females--because he loves me? If he hasn't come, it's because he's dying. (He moves to the Officer) Send the man in, quickly. Oh, my Thomas...

(The OFFICER exits between the pillars and re-enters almost immediately.

ETIENNE, a monk, follows him on)

ETIENNE (falling on one knee) Sire?

(The OFFICER exits between the pillars)

KING. Is your master ill?

ETIENNE. His grace is in good health. He has charged me to deliver this letter with his deepest respects--and to give your Highness this. (He hands a parchment and the Seal to the King)

KING (stunned) The Seal? (He crosses to L of the Queen Mother) Why has he sent me back the Seal? (He unrolls the parchment and reads it in silence. His face hardens. Curtly, without looking at Etienne) Go.

(ETIENNE rises)

ETIENNE. Is there an answer from Your Highness for His Grace the Archbishop?

KING. No.

(ETIENNE exits between the pillars. The KING stands still a moment, at a loss, glowering. The QUEENS exchange a conspiratorial look)

QUEEN MOTHER (rising and moving to the King; insidiously) Well, my son, what does your friend say in his letter?

KING (bawling) Get out! Get out, both of you. And take your royal vermin with you.

(The YOUNG QUEEN and the PRINCES rise and exit hurriedly between the pillars.

The QUEEN MOTHER follows them off)

(He stands a moment, reeling a little as if stunned by the blow, then he moves to the bench down R and collapses on it, moaning) I am alone! Oh, my Thomas! (He remains a moment prostrate, then collects himself and sits up. He looks at the Seal in his hand. Between clenched teeth) You've sent me back the three Lions of England, like a little boy who doesn't want to play with me any more. You think you have God's Honour to defend now. I would have gone to war with

~~all England's might behind me, and against  
England's interests, to defend you, little  
Saxon. I would have given the honour of the  
kingdom laughingly--for you. Only I loved  
you and you didn't love me--that's the difference.  
(His face hardens. Between clenched teeth)  
Thanks all the same for this last gift as you  
desert me. I shall learn to be alone.~~

The LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#30

## SCENE 2

SCENE--The Episcopal Palace.

When the LIGHTS come up, an ENGLISH PRIEST enters up RC, showing in the two MONKS and the YOUNG MONK from Hastings.

#31

PRIEST. His Grace will receive you here.  
(He stands up R)

(The two MONKS are impressed. They push the YOUNG MONK about a little)

1ST MONK. Stand up straight. Kiss his Grace's ring and try to answer his questions with humility, or I'll tan your backside for you.

2ND MONK. I suppose you thought he'd forgotten all about you? Well, don't you act proud with him or you'll be sorry.

(BECKET enters down L and crosses to the Monks. He wears a monk's coarse robe)

BECKET. Well, brothers, is it fine over in Hastings? (He holds out his ringed hand)

(The three MONKS in turn kiss the ring)

1ST MONK. Foggy, my Lord.

BECKET (smiling) Then it's fine in Hastings.  
(He moves C) How has this young man been behaving? Has he given our Abbot much trouble?

2ND MONK. A proper mule, my Lord. The stubborn little wretch is just the same; all defiance and insults. He has fallen into the sin of pride. Nothing I know of will pull him out of that.

1ST MONK. Save a good kick in the rump, perhaps--if Your Grace will pardon the expression. (To the Young Monk) Stand up straight.

BECKET (to the Young Monk) Pay attention to your brother. Stand up straight. As a rule the sin of pride stiffens a man's back. Look me in the face.

(The YOUNG MONK looks at Becket)

Good. (He looks at the Young Monk for a while, then turns to the others) Well, brothers, refresh yourselves in the kitchen before you leave. Don't spurn our hospitality; we relieve you, for today, of your vows of abstinence, and we fondly hope you will do honour to our bill of fare. Greet our father Abbot in Jesus in our behalf.

2ND MONK (hesitantly) And the lad?

BECKET. We will keep him here with us.

1ST MONK. Watch out for him, your Grace. He's vicious.

BECKET (smiling) We are not afraid.

(The two MONKS exit down R. BECKET and the YOUNG MONK remain, facing each other)

Why do you hold yourself so badly?

YOUNG MONK. Because I can't look people in the face anymore.

BECKET. I'll teach you. Look at me.

(The YOUNG MONK gives Becket a sidelong glance)

Are you still bearing the full weight of England's shame on your back?

YOUNG MONK. Yes.

BECKET. If I took over half of it, would it weigh less heavy? (He motions to the Priest)  
Show in their Lordships.

(The PRIEST exits between the pillars)

(Confidentially, with a smile) It is time for my Council with their Lordships the Bishops. You'll see that being alone is not a privilege reserved entirely for you.

(The BISHOP OF OXFORD, the BISHOP OF YORK, and FOLLIOT enter between the pillars)

(He leads the Young Monk down R) You stay here in the corner. I ask only one thing. Don't leap at their throats; you'd complicate everything.  
(He turns and moves LC)

FOLLIOT (moving to R of Becket) Your Grace, I am afraid this meeting may be a pointless one. You insisted--against our advice--on attacking the King openly. But even before the excommunication which you asked us to sanction could be made public, the King has hit back. His Grand Justicer has just arrived in your ante-chamber and is demanding to see you. He is the bearer of an official order summoning you to appear before his assembled Council within twenty-four hours and there to answer the charges made against you.

BECKET. Of what is the King accusing me?

FOLLIOT. Prevarication. His Highness demands a considerable sum of money still outstanding on your administration of the Treasury.

(The other two BISHOPS move to R of Folliot)

BECKET. When I resigned the Chancellorship I handed over my ledgers to his Grand Justicer, who acquitted me of all subsequent dues and claims. What does the King demand?

BISHOP OF OXFORD. Forty thousand marks in fine gold.

BECKET (smiling) I don't believe there was ever that much gold in all the coffers of all England in all the time I was Chancellor. But a clever clerk can soon change that. (He smiles and looks at them) I have the impression, gentlemen, that you must be feeling something very akin to relief.

BISHOP OF YORK. We advised you against open opposition. You insisted on these excommunications.

BECKET. William of Aynsford struck down the priest I had appointed to a parish on his domains, on the pretext that the King disapproved of my choice. Am I to look on while my priests are murdered?

BISHOP OF OXFORD (quietly) This excommunication was bad policy, your Grace. William of Aynsford is a companion of the King.

BISHOP OF YORK (yelping) And his wife is my second cousin.

BECKET. That is a detail I deplore, my Lord Bishop, but he has killed one of my priests. If I do not defend my priests, who will? Gilbert of Clare has indicted before his lay Court of Justice a churchman who was under our exclusive jurisdiction.

BISHOP OF YORK. An interesting victim, I must say. The man was accused of rape and murder. Wouldn't it have been cleverer to let the wretch hang--and have peace?

BECKET. "I bring not peace but the sword." Your Lordship must surely have read that somewhere. If I allow my priests to be tried by a secular tribunal, I don't give much for our chances of survival in five years' time, my Lord. I have excommunicated Gilbert of Clare and William of Aynsford. The Kingdom of God must be defended like any other Kingdom. You passed the burden on to me and now I have to carry it, and nothing will ever make me set it down again. I thank your Lordships. The Council is adjourned. I shall stand by these excommunications. And I shall appear tomorrow before the King's High Court of Justice.



(The BISHOPS and PRIEST look at one another  
in surprise, then bow and exit through the pillars)

(He turns to the Young Monk) Well, does shame weigh  
less heavy now? (He moves to him)

YOUNG MONK. Yes.

BECKET (putting an arm around the Young Monk) Then  
stand up straight.

BECKET, laughing, leads the YOUNG MONK off  
down R as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT #32

## SCENE 3

SCENE--A room in the King's Palace.

The setting is the same as Act III, Scene 1.

When the LIGHTS come up, the armchair is RC.

#33

The KING is pacing up and down, clearly waiting for someone. The sound of distant trumpets is heard. The KING moves to the chair and sits. FOLLIOIOT enters hurriedly down L.

KING. What's happening?

FOLLIOIOT. Legal procedure is taking its course, your Highness. The third summons has been delivered. Becket has not appeared. (He crosses to L of the King) In a moment he will be condemned in absentia. I shall then, as Bishop of London, step forward and publicly accuse Becket of having celebrated, in contempt of the King, a sacriligious mass at the instigation of the Evil Spirit.

KING (anxiously) Isn't that going rather far?

FOLLIOIOT. Of course. It won't fool anyone, but it always works. The assembly will then go out to vote and return a verdict of imprisonment. The sentence is already drawn up.

KING. Unanimously?

FOLLIOIOT. We are all Normans. The rest is your Highness's concern. It will merely be a matter of carrying out the sentence. (He crosses to L)

KING (staggering suddenly) Oh, my Thomas!

FOLLIOIOT (impassively) I can still stop the machine, your Highness.

KING (after a moment's hesitation) No. Go.

(FOLLIOIOT exits down L.)

The QUEEN MOTHER and the YOUNG QUEEN enter through the pillars. The KING rises and moves C. There is a pause)

YOUNG QUEEN (moving to R of the King) He's doomed, isn't he?

KING (dully) Yes.

YOUNG QUEEN. At last!

(The KING turns on the Young Queen, his face twisted with hate)

KING. I forbid you to gloat!

YOUNG QUEEN. At seeing your enemy perish-- why not?

KING (frothing) Becket is my enemy. I am forced to fight him and to crush him. but at least he gave me with open hands. everything that is at all good in me.

(The QUEEN MOTHER moves down LC)

And you have never given me anything but your carping mediocrity, your everlasting obsession with your puny little person and what you thought was due it. That is why I forbid you to smile as he lies dying.

YOUNG QUEEN. I gave you my youth. I gave you your children.

KING (shouting) I don't like my children. And as for your youth--that dusty flower pressed in a hymn book since you were twelve years old--you can say farewell to that without a tear. Your body was an empty desert, Madam--which duty forced me to wander in alone. You have never been a wife to me.

(The YOUNG QUEEN moves R)

And Becket was my friend, red-blooded--(he crosses down L) generous and full of strength. (He is shaken by a sob) Oh, my Thomas!

QUEEN MOTHER (haughtily) And I, my son, I gave you nothing, either, I suppose?

(The KING recovers his composure, moves to L of the Queen Mother and glares at her)

KING (dully) Life. Yes. Thank you. But after that I never saw you save in a passage, ten minutes before official ceremonies. I have always been alone, and no one on this earth has ever loved me except Becket.

QUEEN MOTHER (bitterly) Well, call him back. Absolve him, since he loves you. But do something.

KING. I am. I'm learning to be alone again, Madam. As usual.

(A PAGE enters breathlessly down L)

(He moves to the Page, grabs him and pulls him C) Well? What's happening? How far have they got?

PAGE. My liege, Thomas Becket appeared just when everyone has given him up; sick, deathly pale, in full pontifical regalia and carrying his own heavy silver cross. He walked the whole length of the hall without anyone daring to stop him, and when Robert Duke of Leister began to read out his sentence, he stopped him with a gesture and forbade him, in God's name, to pronounce judgment against him, his spiritual Father. Then he walked back through the crowd, which parted for him in silence. He has just left.

KING (unable to hide his delight) Well played, Thomas! (He checks himself, embarrassed) And what about my Barons?

PAGE. Their hands flew to their swords crying "Traitor!" "Perjurer!" "Arrest him!" But not one of them dared move.

KING (with a roar) The fools! I am surrounded by fools and the only intelligent man in my Kingdom is against me.

PAGE (continuing his story) Then, on the threshold, he turned, looked at them coldly as they stormed and shouted, and he said that not so long ago he could have answered their challenge sword in hand.

KING (jubilantly) He could beat them all! All, I tell you! On horseback, on foot, with a mace, with a lance, with a sword. In the lists they fell to him like ninepins.

PAGE. His eyes were so cold, and so ironic--that one by one, they fell silent. Only then did he turn and go out.

KING (sombrely) And what about the Bishop of London, who was going to reduce him to powder? What about my busy friend, Gilbert Folliot?

PAGE. He had a horrible fit of rage trying to incite the crowd, he let out a screech of foul abuse, and then he fainted. They are bringing him round now.

(The KING suddenly bursts into a shout of irrepressible laughter and, watched by the two outraged QUEENS, collapses into the armchair RC, breathless and helpless with mirth.)

KING. It's too funny! It's too funny!

QUEEN MOTHER (coldly) You will laugh less heartily tomorrow, my son. If you don't stop him, Becket will reach the coast tonight, ask asylum of the King of France and jeer at you, unpunished, from across the Channel.

The QUEEN MOTHER sweeps out between the pillars. The YOUNG QUEEN follows her off. The KING suddenly stops laughing and gazes out front as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#34

## SCENE 4

SCENE--The Court of Louis, King of France.

There is a throne RC. Banners are hanging up RC.

When the LIGHTS come up, KING LOUIS is seated very erect on the throne RC. He is a burly man with intelligent eyes. Two French BARONS are with him. The 1ST BARON stands R of the throne, the 2ND BARON is L of it. A PAGE sits at Louis's feet. #35

LOUIS. Gentlemen, we are in France so phut to the King of England--

1ST BARON. Sire!

LOUIS. --as the old song goes.

1ST BARON. Your Majesty cannot not receive his Ambassadors extraordinary.

LOUIS. Ordinary, or extraordinary, I am at home to all ambassadors. It's my job. I shall receive them.

1ST BARON. They have been waiting in your Majesty's ante-room for over an hour, Sire.

LOUIS. Let them wait. That's their job. I know what they are going to ask me.

2ND BARON. The extradition of a felon is a courtesy due from one crowned head to another.

LOUIS. My dear man, crowned heads can play the little game of courtesy, but nations owe each other none. My right to play the courteous gentleman stops where France's interests begin. And France's interests consist in making things as difficult as possible for England--a thing England never hesitates to do for us. The Archbishop is a millstone around Henry Plantagenet's neck. Long live the Archbishop! Anyway, I like the fellow. Remember our last peace treaty with Henry when he guaranteed to spare the lives of the refugees in Brittany. Two months later all of them had lost their heads. That directly touched my personal honour. I was not strong enough at the time, so I had to pretend I had not heard of these men's executions. And I continued to lavish smiles on my English cousin. But praise God our affairs have taken a turn for the better. And today he needs us. So I will now proceed to remember my honour. Show in the ambassadors.

(The 1ST BARON exits between the pillars up L.

The PAGE rises and stands up L of the throne.

The 1ST BARON re-enters and crosses to C.

FOLLIOT and the DUKE OF ARUNDEL follow him on.

FOLLIOT carries a parchment.)

1ST BARON. Permit me to introduce to your Majesty the two envoys extraordinary from his Highness Henry of England--the Duke of Arundel and His Grace the Bishop of London.

(ARUNDEL and FOLLIOT go down on one knee)

LOUIS (with a friendly wave to Arundel) Greetings to you, Milord. I have not forgotten your amazing exploits at the last tournament at Calais. Do you still wield a lance mightily as you did, Milord?

ARUNDEL (rising and making a gratified bow) I hope so, Sire.

(FOLLIOT rises and unrolls his parchment)

FOLLIOT (reading) "To my Lord and friend, Louis, King of the French, from Henry, King of England, Duke of Normandy, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Anjou. Learn that Thomas, former Archbishop of Canterbury, has been found guilty of fraud, perjury and treason towards me. He has forthwith fled my kingdom as a traitor, and with evil intent. I therefore entreat you not to allow this criminal to reside upon your territories, not to permit any of your vassals to give help, support, or counsel to this my greatest enemy. I expect you to assist me in the vindication of my honour as you would wish me to do for you, should the need arise."

(There is a pause. FOLLIOT bows very low and holds the parchment out to LOUIS, who ignores it)

LOUIS. We have listened attentively to our gracious cousin's request and we take good note of it. Our chancellery will draft a reply which will be sent to you tomorrow. All we can do at the moment is express our surprise. No news has reached us of the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury on our domains.

FOLLIOT (tersely) Sire, the former Archbishop has taken refuge at the Abbey of St. Martin, near St. Omer.

LOUIS (still gracious) My Lord Bishop, we flatter ourselves that there is some order in our kingdom. If he were there, we would certainly have been informed. (He makes a gesture of dismissal)

(FOLLIOT and ARUNDEL bow, and exit backwards through the pillars up L, ushered out by the 1ST BARON)

(To the 2nd Baron) Show in Thomas Becket and leave us.

(The 2ND BARON exits down R. LOUIS dismisses the Page.

The PAGE exits up R.

The 2ND BARON ushers BECKET in down R. Becket is wearing his monk's robe.

The 2ND BARON exits down R. BECKET goes to drop on to one knee)

(Kindly) Rise, Thomas Becket, and greet us as the Primate of England. The bow is enough--and if I know my etiquette--you are entitled to a slight nod of the head from me.

(BECKET bows)

(He nods) There, that's done. I would even be required to kiss your ring, if your visit were an official one. But I have the impression that it isn't--am I right?

BECKET (with a smile) No, Sire, I am only an exile.

LOUIS (graciously) That, too, is an important title in France.

BECKET. I am afraid it is the only one I have left. My property has been seized and distributed to those who served the King against me. John, Bishop of Poitiers, who was suspected of wanting to grant me asylum, has just been poisoned.

LOUIS (smiling) In fact, you are a very dangerous man.

BECKET. I'm afraid so.

LOUIS (unperturbed) We like danger, Becket. And if the King of France started being afraid of the King of England, there would be something sadly amiss in Europe. We grant you our royal protection on whichever of our domains it will please you to choose.

BECKET. I humbly thank your Majesty. I must, however, tell you that I cannot buy this protection with any act hostile to my country.

LOUIS. You do us injury. That was understood. You may be sure we are practised enough in the task of kingship not to make such gross errors in our choice of spies and traitors. The King of France will ask nothing of you. But...(He rises heavily on to his fat legs) There is always a but, as I am sure you are aware, in politics.

(BECKET looks up)

I am only responsible for France's interest, Becket. (He moves R) I really can't afford to shoulder those of Heaven.

(BECKET moves to L of Louis)



In a month or a year I can summon you back here and tell you, just as blandly, that my dealings with the King of England have taken a different turn and that I am obliged to banish you. (He slaps Becket affably on the back, his eyes sparkling with intelligence. With a smile) I believe you have dabbled in politics, too, Archbishop.

BECKET (smiling) Yes, Sire. Not so very long ago.

LOUIS (jovially) I like you very much. Mark you, had you been a French Bishop, I don't say I wouldn't have clapped you into prison myself. But in the present circumstances, you have a right to my royal protection. Do you value candour, Becket?

BECKET. Yes, Sire.

LOUIS. Then we are sure to understand each other. Do you intend to visit the Holy Father?

BECKET. Yes, Sire, if you give me your safe conduct.

LOUIS. You shall have it. But a word in your ear--as a friend. (He puts his hand on Becket's shoulder) Keep this to yourself, won't you? Do go and stir up trouble for me with Rome. Beware the Pope. He'll sell you for thirty pieces of silver.

(There is a slight interjection from BECKET)

The man needs money.

The LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#36

## SCENE 5

SCENE--The Pope's Palace in Rome.

There are two gilt throne-chairs C.

When the LIGHTS come up, the POPE and a CARDINAL  
are seated C. The POPE is a thin, fidgety little  
man with an atrocious Italian accent. The CARDI-  
NAL is swarthy, and his accent is even worse.  
The whole effect is a little grubby, among the  
gilded splendor.

#37

POPE. I don't agree, Zambelli. I don't agree  
at all. It's a very bad plan altogether. We will  
forfeit our honour all for three thousand silver  
marks.

CARDINAL. Holy Father, there is no question  
of forfeiting honour, but merely of taking the  
sum offered by the King of England and thereby  
gaining time.

POPE (concerned) If we take the money from the  
King, I cannot possibly receive the Archbishop.

CARDINAL. Receive the money from the King, Very  
Holy Father, and receive the Archbishop, too. The  
one will neutralize the other.

POPE (gloomily) I don't want to receive him at  
all. I gather he is a sincere man. I am always  
disconcerted by people of that sort. They leave  
me with a bad taste in my mouth.

CARDINAL. Sincerity is a form of strategy,  
just like any other, Holy Father. In certain  
very difficult negotiations, when the usual  
tactics cease to work, I have been known to  
use it myself. The great pitfall, of course,  
is if your opponent starts being sincere at  
the same time as you. Then the game becomes  
horribly confusing.

POPE. You know what they say Becket's been  
meaning to ask me, do you--in the month he's  
spent pacing about my ante-chamber?

CARDINAL (innocently) No, Holy Father.

POPE (impatiently) Zambelli! Don't play the  
fox with me! It was you who told me.

CARDINAL (caught out) I beg your pardon, Holy  
Father, I had forgotten. Or rather, as your  
Holiness asked me the question, I had thought you  
had forgotten and so I took a chance and...

POPE (irritably) Zambelli, if we start outman-  
oeuvring each other to no purpose, we'll be here  
all night.

CARDINAL (in confusion) Force of habit, your Holiness. Excuse me.

POPE. Becket means to ask me to relieve him of his rank and functions as Archbishop of Canterbury--that's the reason Becket is in Rome. And do you know why he wants to ask me that?

CARDINAL (candidly for once) Yes, Holy Father.

POPE. No, you do not know. It was your enemy Rapallo who told me.

CARDINAL (modestly) I know just the same, because I have a spy in Rapallo's palace.

POPE (with a wink) Culograti?

CARDINAL. No. Culograti is only my spy in his master's eyes. I have another man spying on Culograti.

POPE (cutting short the digression) Becket maintains that he owes his election to the Primacy solely to the royal whim and that, consequently, the Honour of God, of which he has now decided he is the champion, does not allow him to bear this usurped title any longer. He wishes to be nothing more than an ordinary priest.

CARDINAL (after a moment's thought) The man is clearly an abyss of ambition.

POPE. And yet he knows that we know that his title and his functions are his only safeguard against the King's anger. I don't give much for his skin, wherever he is, when he is no longer Archbishop.

CARDINAL (thoughtfully) He's playing a deep game. But I have a plan. Your Holiness will pretend to believe in his scruples. You will receive him and relieve him of his titles and functions as Primate, then, immediately after, as a reward for his zeal in defending the Church in England, you will reappoint him Archbishop, in right and due form this time. We thus avert the danger, we score a point against him--and at the same time a point against the King of England.

POPE. The King! That's a dangerous game. The King has a long arm.

CARDINAL. We can cover ourselves. We will send secret letters to the English Court explaining that this new nomination is a pure formality. On the other hand, we will inform Becket of the existence of those secret letters, swearing him to secrecy and begging him to consider them as null and void.

POPE (muddled) In that case, perhaps there isn't much point in the letters being secret?

CARDINAL. Yes, there is. Because that will allow us to manoeuvre with each of them as if the other was ignorant of the contents, while taking the precaution of making it known to them both. The main thing is for them not to know

that we know they know. It's so simple a child of twelve could grasp it.

POPE. But Archbishop or no--what are we going to do with Becket?

CARDINAL (with a lighthearted wave of the hand) We will send him to a convent. A French convent, since King Louis is protecting him--to the Cistercians, say, at Pontigny. The monastic rule is a strict one. It will do that one-time dandy a world of good. Let him learn real poverty. That will teach him to be the comforter of the poor.

POPE. That sounds like good advice, Zambelli.

CARDINAL. Thank you, your Holiness.

POPE. Bread and water and nocturnal prayers are an excellent remedy for sincerity. (He muses a moment) The only thing that puzzles me, Zambelli, is why you should want to give me a piece of good advice.

The CARDINAL looks a little embarrassed as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#38

## SCENE 6

SCENE--A Convent Cell.

A humble wooden crucifix hangs on one of the pillars.  
When the LIGHTS come up, BECKET is on his knees,  
praying.

#39

The LITTLE MONK is crouching on the floor L, carving  
a small wooden cross.

BECKET. Yet, it would be simple enough. Too simple, perhaps. Sanctity is a temptation, too. Oh, how difficult it is to get an answer from You, Lord. I was slow in praying to You, but I cannot believe that others, worthier than myself, who have spent years asking You questions, have been better than I am at deciphering Your real intentions. I am only a beginner and I must make mistake after mistake, as I did in my Latin translations as a boy, when my riotous imagination made the old priest roar with laughter. But I cannot believe that one learns Your language as one learns any human tongue, by hard study, with a dictionary, a grammar, and a set of idioms. I am sure that to the hardened sinner, who drops to his knees for the first time and murmurs Your name, marvelling, You tell all Your secrets, straight away, and that he understands. I have served you like a dilettante, surprised that I could still find pleasure in that service. And for a long time I was on my guard because of it. I could not believe this pleasure could bring me one step nearer You. I could not believe that the road could be a happy one. The hair-shirts, the fasting, the bells in the small hours summoning one to meet You, on the icy paving stones, in the sick misery of the poor ill-treated human animal-- I cannot believe that all these are anything but safeguards for the weak. In power and in luxury, and even in the pleasures of the flesh, I shall not cease to speak to You, I feel this now. You are the God of the rich man and the happy man, too, Lord, and You do not turn away Your eyes from the man who was given everything from birth. And he may be Your true lost sheep. For Your Scheme of Things, which we mistakenly call Justice, is secret and profound and You plumb the hidden depths of poor men's puny frames as carefully as those of Kings. And beneath those outward differences, which blind us, but which to You are barely noticeable; beneath the diadem or the grime, You discern the same pride, the same vanity, the same petty, complacent preoccupation with oneself.

Lord, I am certain now that You meant to tempt me with this hair-shirt, object of so much vapid self-congratulation; this bare cell, this solitude, this absurdly endured winter cold--and the conveniences of prayer. It would be too easy to buy You like this, at so low a price. I shall leave this convent, where so many precautions hem You round. I shall take up the Mitre and the golden Cope again, and the great silver cross and I shall go back and fight in the place and with the weapons it has pleased You to give me. ~~It has pleased You to make me Archbishop and to set me, like a solitary pawn, face to face with the King, upon the chess-board. I shall go back to my place, humbly, and let the world accuse me of pride so that I may do what I believe is my life's work. For the rest, Your will be done.~~ (He crosses himself)

The LITTLE MONK suddenly throws his knife into the floor at his feet and watches it as it quivers.

CURTAIN

#40

## ACT IV

## SCENE 1

SCENE--The Court of King Louis.

When the CURTAIN rises, LOUIS is seated on his throne RC, reading a letter. The 1ST BARON is standing L of the throne. After a moment LOUIS looks up and nods to the 1ST BARON who exits L. There is a brief pause, then BECKET enters L, crosses to C and bows to LOUIS. LOUIS nods.

#41

LOUIS. I tell you, Becket, intrigue is an ugly thing. You keep the smell about you for ages afterwards. There is a return of good understanding between the Kingdom of England and ourselves. I must protect my rear by a truce with Henry Plantagenet before I march, as I must--against the Roman Emperor. And needless to say, you are one of the items on Henry's bill of charges. I can tell you, that apart from yourself, his demands are negligible. (Musingly) Curious man. England's best policy would have been to take advantage of the Emperor's aggressive intentions and join forces with him. He is deliberately sacrificing this opportunity for the pleasure of seeing you driven out. He really hates you, doesn't he?

BECKET (simply) Sire, we loved each other and I think he cannot forgive me for preferring God to him.

LOUIS. Your King isn't doing his job properly, Archbishop. He is giving way to a passion. However. You are on his bill; I have to pay his price and banish you. I do not do so without a certain shame. Where are you thinking of going?

BECKET. I am a shepherd who has remained too long away from his flock. I intend to go back to England. I had already made my decision before this audience with your Majesty.

LOUIS (surprised) You have a taste for martyrdom? You disappoint me. I thought you more healthy-minded.

BECKET. Would it be healthy-minded to walk the roads of Europe, and beg a refuge where my carcass would be safe? Besides, where would I be safe? I am the Primate of England. That is a rather showy label on my back. The honour of God and



~~common sense. which for once coincide. dictate  
that I should go and have myself killed--if  
killed I must be--among my flock in my own  
cathedral. That is my place.~~

LOUIS (after a pause) I dare say you're right.  
(He sighs) Ah, what a pity it is to be a king,  
sometimes, when one has the surprise of meeting  
a man. You'll tell me, fortunately for me, that  
men are rare. Why weren't you born on this side  
of the Channel. Becket? (He smiles) True, you'd  
have been a thorn in my side, then. The honour  
of God is a very cumbersome thing. (He muses for  
a moment, then rises. Abruptly) Who cares?  
I'll risk it. I like you too much. I'll indulge  
in a moment's humanity. I am meeting Henry in  
a day or two, at La Ferté Bernard, to seal our  
agreement. I shall try to persuade him to make  
his peace with you. Should he agree, would you  
be willing to talk with him?

BECKET. Sire, ever since we stopped seeing  
each other, I have never ceased to talk to him.

The LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#42

## SCENE 2

SCENE--The plain of La Ferté Bernard.

The set is completely empty. Nothing remains but the cyclorama around the bare stage. A vast, arid plain, lashed by the wind.

When the LIGHTS come up, trumpets are heard.

#43

Two SENTRIES are standing down R, watching something in the distance. One of the SENTRIES is much younger than the other.

SENTRY. Open those eyes of yours, lad. And drink it all in. You won't see something like this every day. This is an historic meeting.

YOUNG SENTRY. I dare say, but it's perishing cold. How long are they going to keep us hanging about?

SENTRY. We're sheltered by the wood here, but you can bet they're even colder than we are, out there in the plain.

YOUNG SENTRY. Look! They've come up to each other. I wonder what they're talking about.

SENTRY. ~~What do you think they're talking about, muttonhead. Complaining about their chilblains? Inquiring how things are at home?~~ The fate of the world, that's what they're arguing about. Things you and I won't ever understand. Even the words those bigwigs use--why, you wouldn't even know what they meant.

The SENTRIES exit down R as--

the LIGHTS BLACK-OUT for a few moments

#44

When the LIGHTS come up, BECKET and the KING, on horseback, are alone in the middle of the plain, facing each other. BECKET is R of the KING. Throughout the episode the winter blizzard wails like a shrill dirge beneath their words. And during their silences only the wind is heard.

#45

KING. You look older, Thomas.

BECKET. You, too, Highness. Are you sure you aren't too cold?

KING. I'm frozen stiff. You love it, of course. You're in your element, aren't you? And you're barefooted as well.

BECKET (smiling) That's my latest affectation.

KING. Even with these fur boots on, my chilblains are killing me. Aren't yours, or don't you have any?

BECKET (gently) Of course.

KING (crackling) You're offering them up to God, I hope, holy monk?

BECKET (gravely) I have better things to offer Him.

KING (with a sudden cry) If we start straight away, we're sure to quarrel. Let's talk about trivial things. You know my son is fourteen? He's come of age.

BECKET. Has he improved at all?

KING. He's a little idiot and sly like his mother. Becket, don't you ever marry.

BECKET (smiling) The matter has been taken out of my hands. By your Highness. It was you who had me ordained.

KING (with a cry) Let's not start, yet, I tell you. Talk about something else.

BECKET (lightly) Has your Highness done much hunting lately?

KING (snarling) Yes, every day. And it doesn't amuse me any more.

BECKET. Have you any new hawks?

KING (furiously) The most expensive on the market. But they don't fly straight.

BECKET. And your horses?

KING. The Sultan sent me four superb stallions for the tenth anniversary of my reign. But they throw everyone. Nobody has managed to mount one of them, yet.

BECKET (smiling) I must see what I can do about that some day.

KING. They'll throw you, too. And we'll see your buttocks under your robe. At least, I hope so, or everything would be too dismal.

BECKET (after a pause) Do you know what I miss most, Sire? The horses.

KING. And the women?

BECKET (simply) I've forgotten.

KING. You hypocrite! You turned into a hypocrite when you became a priest. (Abruptly) Did you love Gwendolen?

BECKET. I've forgotten her, too.

KING. You did love her. That's the only way I can account for it.

BECKET (gravely) No, my prince, in my soul and my conscience, I did not love her.

KING. Then you never loved anything, that's worse. (Churlishly) Why are you calling me your prince, like in the old days?

BECKET (gently) Because you have remained my prince.

KING (crying out) Then why are you doing me harm?

BECKET (gently) Let's talk about something else.

KING. Well, what? I'm cold.

BECKET. I've always told you, my prince, that one must fight the cold with cold's own weapons. Strip naked and splash yourself with cold water every morning.

KING. I used to, when you were there to force me into it. I never wash now. I stink. I grew a beard at one time. Did you know?

BECKET (smiling) Yes. I had a good laugh over it.

KING. I cut it off, because it itched. (He cries out suddenly, like a child) Becket, I'm bored.

BECKET (gravely) My prince, I do so wish that I could help you.

KING. Then what are you waiting for? You can see I'm dying for it?

BECKET (quietly) I'm waiting for the honour of God and the honour of the King to become one.

KING. You'll have a long wait, then.

BECKET. Yes. I'm afraid I will.

(There is a pause. Only the wind is heard)

KING (suddenly) If we've nothing more to say to each other, we might as well go and get warm.

BECKET. We have everything to say to each other, my prince. The opportunity may not occur again.

KING. Make haste, then. Or there'll be two frozen statues making their peace in a frozen eternity. I am your King, Becket. And so long as we are on this earth, you owe me the first move. I'm prepared to forget a lot of things, but not the fact that I am King. You taught me that.

BECKET (gravely) Never forget it, my prince. Even against God. You have a different task to do. You have to steer the ship.

KING. And you--what do you have to do?

BECKET. Resist you with all my might, when you steer against the wind.

KING. Do you expect the wind to be behind me, Becket? No such luck! That's fairy-tale navigation. God on the King's side? That's never happened yet. It's a head-on wind. And there must be somebody to keep the watch.

BECKET. And somebody else to direct the wind for God. The tasks have been shared out, once and for all. The pity of it is that it should have been between us two, my prince--who were friends.

KING (crossly) The King of France--I still don't know what he hopes to gain by it--preached at me for three whole days for me to make my peace with you. What good would it do you to provoke me beyond endurance?

BECKET. None.

KING. You know that I am the King, and that I must act like a King. What do you expect of me? Are you hoping I'll weaken?

BECKET. No, that would prostrate me.

KING. Do you hope to conquer me by force, then?

BECKET. You are the strong one.

KING. To win me around?

BECKET. No. Not that, either. It is not for me to win you round. I have only to say no to you.

KING. But you must be logical, Becket.

BECKET. No. That isn't necessary, my Liege. ~~We must only do--absurdly--what we have been given to do--right to the end.~~

KING. I know you well enough, God knows. Ten years we spent together, little Saxon. At the hunt, at the whorehouse, at war; carousing all night long, the two of us; in the same girl's bed, sometimes.

~~"Absurdly." That word isn't like you.~~

BECKET. ~~Perhaps. I am no longer like myself.~~

KING (derisively) Have you been touched by grace?

BECKET (gravely) Not by the one you think. I am not worthy of it.

KING. Did you feel the Saxon in you coming out, despite papa's good collaborator's sentiments?

BECKET. No. Not that, either.

KING. What then?

BECKET. ~~I felt for the first time that I was being entrusted with something, that's all--there in that empty cathedral somewhere in France that day when you ordered me to take up this burden. I was a man without honour. And suddenly I found it--one I never imagined would ever become mine--the honour of God. A frail, incomprehensible honour, vulnerable as a boy-king fleeing from danger.~~

KING (roughly) Suppose we talked a little more precisely, Becket, with words I understand? Otherwise we'll be here all night. I'm cold. And the others are waiting for us on the fringes of this plain.

BECKET. I am being precise.

KING. I'm an idiot, then. Talk to me like an idiot. That's an order. Will you agree to the twelve proposals which my Bishops have accepted in your absence at Northampton?

BECKET. No, Sire.

KING. Will you lift the excommunications which you pronounced on William of Aynsford and others of my liegemen?

BECKET. No, Sire, because that is the only weapon I have to defend this child, who was given, naked, into my care. (He pauses) Nor will I concede that the Bishops should forego the right to appoint priests in their own dioceses, nor that Churchmen should be

subject to any but the Church's jurisdiction. Those are my duties as a pastor--which it is not for me to relinquish. But I shall agree to the nine other articles in a spirit of peace, and because I know that you must remain King, in all save the honour of God.

(There is a pause)

KING (coldly) Very well. I will help you defend your God, since that is your new vocation, in memory of the companion you once were to me--in all save the honour of the Realm. You may come back to England, Thomas.

BECKET. Thank you, my prince. I meant to go back in any case and give myself up to your power, for on this earth you are my King. And in all that concerns this earth I owe you obedience.

(There is a pause)

KING (ill at ease) Well, we've finished. Let's go back now. I'm cold.

BECKET (dully) I feel cold, too, now.

(There is a pause. They look at each other. The wind howls)

KING (suddenly) You never loved me, did you, Becket?

BECKET. In so far as I was capable of love, yes, my prince, I did.

KING. Did you start to love God? (He cries out) You mule! Can't you ever answer a simple question?

BECKET (quietly) I started to love the honour of God.

KING (sombrely) Come back to England. I give you my royal peace. May you find yours. And may you not discover you were wrong about yourself. This is the last time I shall come begging to you. (He cries out) I should never have seen you again. It hurts too much. (His whole body is suddenly shaken by a sob)

BECKET (moving his horse nearer to the King; moved) My prince...

KING (moving his horse away; yelling) No! No pity! It's dirty! Stand away from me. Go back to England. It's too cold out here.

BECKET (gravely) Farewell, my prince. Will you give me the kiss of peace?

KING. No! I can't bear to come near you. I can't bear to look at you. Later! Later! When it doesn't hurt any more.

BECKET. I shall set sail tomorrow. Farewell, my prince. I know I shall never see you again.

KING (his face twisted with hatred) How dare you say that to me after I gave you my royal word? Do you take me for a traitor?

(BECKET looks gravely at the King for a few seconds, with a sort of pity in his eyes, then he slowly turns his horse and rides off up R. The wind howls)

(He calls) Thomas!

But BECKET has not heard.

The KING does not call a second time. He spurs his horse and gallops off up L. The wind howls as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#46



## SCENE 3

SCENE--King Henry's Palace in France.

Two tables, at a close right-angle to each other, one up and downstage and one across it, are set LC. Above the upstage table, the King's throne is C of it with two chairs R and L of the throne. A long bench is L of the table L. In the angle formed by the long tables are two stools.

When the LIGHTS come up, the tables are set for dinner. The QUEEN MOTHER is standing in front of the chair R of the throne. The YOUNG QUEEN is standing in front of the chair L of the throne. The four BARONS are standing behind the bench L of the table L. The YOUNGER PRINCE is standing by a stool. Five SERVANTS are standing in a line RC. The KING enters up R with the ELDER PRINCE and leads him C. The SERVANTS exit R.

#47

KING. Today, gentlemen, I shall not be the first to sit down. (To the Elder Prince, with a comic bow) You are the King, Sir. The honour belongs to you. Take the high chair. Today I shall wait on you.

QUEEN MOTHER (with slight irritation) My son!

KING. I know what I am doing, Madam! (With a sudden shout to the Elder Prince) Go on, you great loon, look sharp.

(The ELDER PRINCE flinches to avoid the blow he was expecting, then runs to the throne above the upstage table and stands, sly and rather ill at ease)

Take your places, gentlemen. I shall remain standing.

(Everyone except the KING sits at the table)

Barons of England, here is your second King. Reviving an ancient custom, we have decided to have our successor crowned during our lifetime and to share our responsibilities with him. We ask you now to give him your homage and to honour him with the same title as ourself.

(The BARONS rise and lift their goblets and make a toast)

BARONS (together) Long live the King! (They drink, then resume their seats)

(The KING claps his hands.

The SERVANTS enter R with silver trays of food. The 1ST SERVANT puts his tray on the upstage table. The other SERVANTS cross to L of the table L and put their trays on it. All the SERVANTS then line up as before, RC)

YOUNG QUEEN (to the Elder Prince) Sit up straight! And try to eat properly for once, now that you've been raised to glory.

KING (grunting) He hasn't the face for it. However, he'll be your King in good earnest one day, so you may as well get used to him. Besides, it's the best I had to offer.

QUEEN MOTHER (indignantly) My son! This game is unworthy of you and us. You insisted on playing it--at least play it with dignity.

KING (rounding on her in fury) I'll play the games that amuse me, Madam--(he moves to R of the upstage table) and I'll play them the way I choose. (He moves to R of the table L. To the Barons) This mummerly, gentlemen, which is, incidentally, without any importance at all--if your new King fidgets, let me know, I'll give him a good kick up his train--will at the very least have the appreciable result of showing our new friend the Archbishop that we can do without him. If there was one ancient privilege the Primacy clung to, tooth and nail, it was the exclusive right to annoint and consecrate the Kings of this Realm. Well, it will be that old toad the Bishop of York--(he crosses below the table L and stands behind the Barons) with letters from the Pope authorizing him to do so--I paid the price--who, tomorrow, will crown our son in the cathedral.

(The BARONS look amazed at the King)

What a joke that's going to be. (He roars with laughter amid the general silence) What a tremendous, marvellous joke! I'd give anything to see the Archbishop's face when he has to swallow that. (He turns to the Elder Prince) Get down from there, you imbecile! Go back to the bottom of the table where you belong and take your victuals with you. You aren't officially crowned until tomorrow.

(The ELDER PRINCE picks up his plate, rises, moves to a stool and sits, casting a cowed, smouldering look at the King)

(Jovially, as he watches the Prince) What a look! Filial sentiments are a fine thing to see, gentlemen. (To the Elder Prince) You'd like to be the

real King, wouldn't you, you young pig? (He moves up L of the tables) You'd like that number "three" after your name, eh, with papa good and stiff under his catafalque. You'll have to wait a bit. Papa is well. Papa is very well indeed. (He sits on the throne)

QUEEN MOTHER. My son, God knows I understand your hatred of that man, but do not let it tempt you into making a gesture you will regret, merely for the sake of wounding his pride. Henry is still a child. Ambitious self-seekers may influence him against you, may rouse a faction against you and use this hasty coronation as a means of dividing the Kingdom.

KING. We are still alive, Madam, and in control. I let Becket cheat me out of one or two articles the other day, but I had something up my sleeve for him.

QUEEN MOTHER. Henry! I bore the weight of state affairs longer than you have. I have been your Queen and I am your mother. You are answerable for the interests of a great Kingdom. It is England you must think of, not your hatred--or disappointed love--for that man.

KING (in a fury) What gives you the right, Madam, to meddle in my loves and hates?

QUEEN MOTHER (rising) You bear a rancor for that man which is neither healthy nor manly. The King, your father, dealt with his enemies more effectively. He had them killed and said no more about it. Sweet Jesus, tear him out of your heart once and for all. (She bawls suddenly) Oh, if I were a man!

KING (grinning) Thanks be to God, Madam, He gave you dugs. Which I never personally benefited from. I suckled a peasant girl.

QUEEN MOTHER (acidly) No doubt that is why you have remained so lumpish, my son. (She resumes her seat)

YOUNG QUEEN. And haven't I a say in the matter, Sir? Becket! Always Becket! I am your wife and your Queen. (She rises) I refuse to be treated like this. I shall complain to my father the Duke of Aquitaine. I shall complain to my uncle the Emperor. I shall complain to all the Kings of Europe, my cousins. I shall complain to God!

KING (shouting rather vulgarly) I should start with God. Be off to your private chapel, Madam, and see if He's at home. (He turns to the Queen Mother) And you, the other Madam, away to your chamber with your secret councillors and go and spin your webs. Get out, both of you! I can't stand the sight of you! I retch with boredom whenever I set eyes on you. And young Henry the Third, too! Go on! Get out! (He rises)

(The QUEEN MOTHER and the PRINCES rise.  
The YOUNG QUEEN exits up R. The QUEEN  
MOTHER scurries after her with a great rustle  
of silk. The PRINCES cross up R)

(He yells) Here's my royal foot in your royal  
buttocks. (he kicks the PRINCES up R) And to  
the devil with my whole family, if he'll have  
you!

(The PRINCES run out up R)

(To the servants) Get out, all of you! Get out!  
Get out!

(The SERVANTS exit up R)

(He moves to the upstage end of the table L.  
More calmly) Let us drink, gentlemen. That's  
about all one can do in your company. (He picks  
up his goblet) Let us get drunk, like men, all  
night--(he moves to R of the table L) until we  
roll under the table, in vomit and oblivion.  
(He fills the Barons' goblets and leans over the  
table to them) Ah, my four idiots! My faithful  
hounds. It's warm beside you, like being in a  
stable. Good sweat! Comfortable nothingness.  
(He taps their skulls) Not the least little  
glimmer inside to spoil the fun. (He straightens  
up) And to think that before he came I was like  
you. A good fat machine for belching after drink,  
for pissing, for mounting girls and punching heads.  
What the devil did you put into it, Becket, to  
stop the wheels from going round? (He moves to R  
of the upstage table. Suddenly, to the 2nd Baron)  
Tell me, do you think sometimes?

2ND BARON (leaning forward) Never, Sire. Think-  
ing has never agreed with an Englishman. It's  
unhealthy.

KING (suddenly quite calm) Drink up. (He moves  
and sits in his throne)

(The BARONS rise and group around the King.  
The 1ST BARON refills the King's goblet and the  
2ND BARON refills the other goblets)

That's always been considered a healthy thing to  
do. Has Becket landed?

(There is a pause)

I'm told the sea has been too rough to cross these  
last few days.

1ST BARON (sombrely) He has landed, Sire, despite  
the sea.

KING. Where?

1ST BARON. On a deserted stretch of coast,  
near Sandwich.

(The BARONS resume their seats)

KING. So God did not choose to drown him?

1ST BARON. No.

KING (in his sly, brutish way) Was nobody there waiting for him? There must be one or two men in England whom he can't call his friends.

1ST BARON. Yes. Gervase and Regnault were lying in wait for him, but the Dean of Oxford went to meet them and charged them not to cause bloodshed and make you look like a traitor, as you had given the Archbishop a safe conduct.

KING (soberly) Yes, I gave him a safe conduct.

1ST BARON. All along the road to Canterbury, the peasants, the artisans, and the small shopkeepers came out to meet him, armed and cheering him and escorting him from village to village. Not a single Noble, not a single Norman showed his face.

KING. Only the Saxons?

1ST BARON. Poor people armed with makeshift shields and rusty lances. Riff-raff. Swarms of them, though, all encamped around Canterbury, to protect him. (Gloomily) Who would have thought there were so many people in England.

KING. A miserable wretch who ate my bread. A fellow I raised up from nothing. A Saxon! A man I loved! (He shouts like a madman) Yes, I loved him! And I believe I still do! Enough, oh God! Enough! Stop, stop, oh God, I've had enough! (He flings himself across the table, sobbing hysterically)

(The BARONS, stupefied, rise and group round the King)

1ST BARON (timidly) Your Highness...

KING. I can do nothing! Nothing! I am as limp and useless as a girl! I tremble before him astonished. And I am the King. (With a sudden cry) Will no one rid me of him? A priest! A priest who jeers at me and does me injury. Are there none but cowards like myself around me? Are there no men left in England? Oh, my heart! My heart is beating too fast to bear! (He lies still as death)

(The four BARONS stand around speechless. Suddenly on a percussion instrument, there rises a rhythmic beating, a sort of muffled tom-tom which is at first only the agitated heartbeats of the King, but which swells and becomes more insistent.

The BARONS look at each other, then they straighten, buckle their sword-belts, pick up their helmets and exit slowly up R, leaving the KING alone with the muffled rhythm of the heartbeats, which will continue until the murder. The KING lies across the table in the deserted hall for a while, then sits up and looks around, sees the Barons have gone and suddenly realizes why. A wild, lost look comes into his eyes. There is a moment's pause, then he collapses with a long, broken moan)

Oh, my Thomas!

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

#48



## SCENE 4

## SCENE--Canterbury Cathedral

The stone slab down R is now an altar. There is a stand down LC on which hang the Archbishop's robes, mitre, etc.

When the LIGHTS come up, the heartbeats are still heard. BECKET is down L. The LITTLE MONK is R of Becket, helping him on with his vestments.

#49

BECKET. I must look my best today. Make haste.

MONK. It's difficult with all those little laces. It wants a girl's hands.

BECKET (softly) A man's hands are better today. Never mind the laces. The alb, quickly. And the stole. And then the cope.

MONK (conscientiously) If it's worth doing it's worth doing well.

BECKET. You're quite right. If it's worth doing it's worth doing well. Do up all the little laces, every one of them. God will give us time.

(There is a pause. The MONK struggles manfully on, putting out his tongue in his concentration. The throbbing grows louder)

(He smiles) Don't put your tongue out like that.

MONK (sweating but content) There. That's all done. But I'd rather have cleaned out our pigsty at home. It's not half such hard work.

BECKET. Now the alb.

(The MONK collects the alb from the stand and helps BECKET to put it on)

Were you fond of your pigs?

MONK (his eyes lighting up) Yes, I was. (He hands the stole to Becket)

BECKET (putting on the stole) At my father's house, we had some pigs, too, when I was a child. (He smiles) We're two rough lads from Hastings, you and I. Give me the chasuble.

(The MONK hands the chasuble to Becket)

(He kisses the chasuble and slips it over his head. Gently) Do you miss your knife?

MONK. Yes. (He pauses) Will it be today?

BECKET (gravely) I think so, my son. Are you afraid?



MONK. Oh, no. Not if we have time to fight. All I want is the chance to strike a few blows first; so I shan't have done nothing but receive them all my life. If I can kill one Norman first--just one, I don't want much--one for one, that will seem fair and right enough to me.

(The MONK helps Becket to don his cope)

BECKET (with a kindly smile) Are you so very set on killing one?

MONK. One for one. That's what justice means, isn't it?

(BECKET smiles and does not answer)

BECKET. Give me the mitre.

(The MONK collects the mitre and hands it to Becket)

(He puts on the mitre. Quietly) Oh Lord, you forbade Peter to strike a blow in the Garden of Olives. But I shall not deprive this lad of that joy. He has had too few joys in his short span on earth. (To the Monk) Now fetch me my silver cross. I must hold it.

(The MONK exits L and re-enters immediately with a silver cross)

MONK (handing cross to Becket) Lord, its heavy. A good swipe with that and they'd feel it. My word, I wish I could have it.

BECKET (stroking the Monk's head) Lucky little Saxon! This black world will have been in order to the end, for you.

(The MONK takes the clothes stand and exits L)

(Gravely) There. I'm ready, all adorned for Your festivities, Lord. Do not, in this interval of waiting, let one last doubt enter my soul.

(There is a loud knocking off up L.  
A PRIEST runs wildly in up L)

PRIEST (running to R of Becket) Your Grace! There are four armed men outside! I've barricaded the door, but they're breaking it in. Quickly! You must go to the back of the church and have the choir gates closed.

BECKET (calmly) It is time for Vespers, William. Does one close the choir gates during Vespers? I never heard of such a thing.

(The MONK enters L)

PRIEST (nonplussed) I know, but...

BECKET. Everything must be the way it should be. The choir gates will remain open. (To the Monk) Come, boy, let us go up to the altar. This is no place to be.

(BECKET and the MONK move to the stone slab down R. There is a great crash off L.

The four BARONS enter up L and draw their swords. BECKET turns to face them, grave and calm. They stop a moment, uncertain and disconcerted, four statues, huge and threatening. The heartbeats cease. There is a heavy silence.)

(Simply) Here it comes. The supreme folly. This is its hour. (He holds their eyes)

(The BARONS dare not move)

(Coldly) One does not enter armed into God's house. What do you want?

1ST BARON (thickly) Your death.

(There is a pause)

2ND BARON (thickly) You bring shame to the King.

BECKET (softly) It is time for the service. (He turns to face R, without paying any further attention to them)

(The muffled throbbing recommences. The BARONS close in like automata. The MONK suddenly leaps forward, grabs the silver cross and brandishes it in order to protect Becket, but one of the BARONS swings his sword and fells him to the ground)

Not even one. It would have given him so much pleasure, Lord. (With a sudden cry) Oh how difficult You make it all. And how heavy Your honour is to bear. (Quietly) Poor Henry.

(The BARONS hurl themselves on to Becket, who falls at the first blow. They hack at the body, grunting like woodcutters.

The PRIEST flees off R, with a long scream which echoes in the empty cathedral. The heartbeats cease as--

the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT

When the LIGHTS come up, the altar cloth has been removed and the slab is again the tomb. The KING, dressed as at the opening of the play, is on his knees at the slab. Four MONKS are whipping him with ropes, almost duplicating the gestures of the Barons as they killed Becket.

#50

#51

#52

KING (crying out) Are you satisfied now, Becket?  
Does this settle our account? Has the honour of  
God been washed clean?

(The MONKS finish beating the KING, kneel  
and bow their heads. The KING mutters; one  
feels it is part of the ceremony)

Thank you. Yes, yes, of course, it was agreed.  
I forgive you. Many thanks. (He collapses over  
the slab)

(The MONKS rise and exit up R. Organ music  
is heard.)

The PAGE enters L with a vast robe and the  
King's clothes. He crosses to the King, wraps  
the robe around him, puts the clothes on the  
slab, then exits R.

The 2ND BARON enters down R.

The 3RD BARON enters up C.

The 4TH BARON enters down L. The KING rises.  
The BARONS help him to dress. He dresses hurriedly  
with evident bad temper.)

(He grimaces ill-humouredly and growls) The pigs!  
The Norman Bishops just went through the motions,  
but those little Saxon monks--my word, they had  
their money's worth.

(The 1ST BARON enters up L and crosses to C.  
A joyful peal of bells is heard and the sound of  
cheering crowds)

1ST BARON. Sire! Sire! The operation has been  
successful. The Saxon mob is cheering outside the  
cathedral, acclaiming your Majesty's name in the  
same breath as Becket's. If the Saxon's are on our  
side now, Prince Henry's followers have lost the day.

KING (with a touch of hypocritical majesty under  
his slightly loutish manner) The honour of God,  
gentlemen, is a very good thing, and taken all in  
all, one gains by having it on one's side. Thomas  
Becket, who was our friend, used to say so. England  
will owe her ultimate victory over chaos to him and  
it is our wish that, henceforward, he should be  
honoured and prayed to in the Kingdom as a Saint

(The BARONS kneel)

(He crosses to C) Come, gentlemen. We will  
determine, tonight, in council, what posthumous  
honours to render him and what punishment to deal  
out to his murderers.

1ST BARON (imperturbably) Sire, they are unknown.  
KING (impenetrably) Our iustice will seek them  
out. Baron. and you will be specially entrusted  
with this enquiry. so that no one will be in any  
doubt as to our Roval desire to defend the honour  
of God and the memory of our friend from this day  
forward.

The organ swells triumphantly, mingled with  
the sounds of the bells and the cheering crowds.  
The BARONS rise.

The KING and BARONS exit up L as--

the CURTAIN falls

#83

Becket at MHS: A Narrative

Although the performance of Becket was set for April, 1980, casting was begun in December of 1979. At this time I cast both spring productions. The purpose behind this was to give Becket cast members plenty of time to learn lines before we went into rehearsal. I had also hoped to avoid casting anyone in both plays, but this was not practical given the small number of boys from which I had to select. The two Becket leads were not given parts in the February production, but several other boys were cast in both plays.

Rehearsals began on Feb. 27, 1980 with a complete read-through of the first and second acts. The next evening we read through the third and fourth acts. As we completed the reading, we discussed the purpose of each scene and noted the structure of the play. I gave the cast some further historical background on Henry II and Becket.

Blocking rehearsals began the next week. They were interrupted for Spring Break, but that gave actors an opportunity to work on lines. In addition to full-cast rehearsals, I spent many hours discussing characters and motivation with the two leads. We talked for hours about the complexities and nuances of feeling in Anouilh's king and archbishop. We argued about interpretation until we agreed upon the "right way" to portray the two men. We then went over the key scene--the one on the plain at La Ferté Bernard--time after time after time, until it

was just the way we wanted it.

One of the difficulties that we had to work out in rehearsal was the transition from one scene to another. I had elected not to pull the curtain, but to use lighting to distinguish between scenes, so the cast members had to learn quickness and economy of movement when entering and exiting.

The set was simple and constructed early in the preparation process so the cast members could get used to negotiating the platforms and steps in the dark. The set consisted of four white pillars evenly spaced along the back of the stage in front of black velvet curtains. Between and in front of the first and second (upstage right) pillars and the third and fourth (upstage left) pillars were built platform and step units. In the pit a large platform was built with wagons and cinderblocks. Upon this platform was placed a large set piece which doubled as an altar and Becket's tomb.

Other major set pieces consisted of two long tables and six chairs, two of which had high backs and arms to give the impression of thrones, and a backless couch. These were used in various combinations to suggest each of the scenes. No attempt at realistic depiction of royal opulence was made.

For the most part, props were simply handled. The cast rebelled at first when they were told that they had to use

hobby horses in the hunting scenes, but they finally got used to it. The only problem was finding the horses backstage in the dark during performance. One evening Becket and Henry walked while the Barons rode. It's not likely that Henry would have allowed that.

Although there were many people to costume, the costumes themselves were fairly simple. Most costumes consisted of simple tunics worn over drawstring pants that were laced around the calves of the legs with seam binding. The women wore simple tunics over longer underskirts. For the monks, the tunics were made floor length, and they wore tabards cut from felt and rope belts over the robes. Hoods were detachable, made from a pattern found in a costume book. Rounded, detachable hoods were made for the soldiers to simulate chainmail. Clerical garments for the bishops were borrowed from the local Episcopal minister, who took the time to explain how each part of the costume went together. We had to make "copes" for the bishops, but these were merely half circles cut from white sheets and trimmed on the long edge with scrap velvet.

The light crew was intimately involved with the production, since one of its members was also in the cast. This particular young man offered many suggestions for the lighting and spent many hours setting up backlights and sidelights for the pit platform, which could not be lit by any of our set lighting.



The publicity crew was called into action several weeks before performance. They put ads in the local paper and on the local cable channel. Features appeared in the high school paper and on the high school television news program. Posters were printed and put up all over town. A radio spot was heard on the local stations. Notices were sent to school faculty and staff encouraging them to attend. Cast members appeared in classes and at a state English teachers' conference. After all this effort, the local newspaper sported a photograph on its front page of the Manhattan Civic Theatre play which opened the same night that Becket did. The lead in that MCT production just happened to be my publicity chairman for Becket. She will never live it down.

The afternoon that the play was to open, I got a frantic phone call from one of the actors' mother. Jeff had broken his arm that afternoon playing soccer. It could not be set until the next morning. Three phone calls later we decided to let him appear in the play, but we had to eliminate him from scenes in which he had to carry things. Between scenes he must keep his arm elevated. This turn of events did much to help my opening night jitters...increase!

As we drew close to curtain time, I noticed that the audience ~~was~~ no bigger than it had been for any of the other plays we had done in the past two years. I was disappointed, but I tried to conceal it. The basement was frantic with activity. The leads, who appeared unshirted in some scenes,

were giggling while their body make-up was applied. Barons were fencing with the swords that we had borrowed from several sources. The prop crew was trying to keep the cast away from the chicken being used for the banquet scene.

Finally, we all gathered in the carpeted band room for warm-up. The cast lay on the floor and went through their relaxing and breathing exercises. As they lay there, I read to them from Muriel Rukeyser's The Life of Poetry a passage which discusses the importance of audience to the success of a play. It is a beautiful passage, and it set just the right atmosphere. The Cast was ready.

The performances were received well. Only two more disasters occurred--one each performance night. During the second performance, an actor tripped backstage and broke the leg off a chair we had borrowed from a teacher. The last night, an actor swallowed the tab from a can of pop and had to be rushed to the hospital emergency room. The four barons became three barons for the night, but Robin returned in high spirits in time to play the Pope in Act III. I jokingly accused him of engineering the whole thing because, rather than take a bow with the other barons as he had been doing, he got a solo curtain call as the Pope on Saturday night.

The unique "side effect" of doing Becket was the feeling of pride it inspired in everyone involved. Students felt privileged to have been part of

such a difficult undertaking and proud of themselves for taking the risk.

At the cast party, one of the actors read to the others from a history book he had found which detailed the supplies which Becket had taken with him on a diplomatic mission to France. They were fascinated. Several others had done research into the history of Becket and Henry--without being asked to do so.

The two boys who played the leads felt that Becket was a challenging, exciting experience for them. They felt the play taught them history and about people everywhere. They began to see the links between our lives and those of our ancestors. Cham, who played Henry, said that for the first time he really felt the character's emotions, and crying came easily to him. Tim, who portrayed Becket, found himself admiring Becket and seeing him as a role model. For these two boys, Becket was the pinnacle of their acting experiences to date.

As a director, I was very proud of Becket. It was certainly not a perfect show, but it proved to me that high school students will rise to the challenge and accomplish even more than one expects they will. Their performance moved me, gave me chills sometimes, and showed an understanding and maturity unexpected in such young actors. The risk was worth it.

## APPENDICES

## CAST FOR BECKET

King Henry the Second.....	Chamblee Ferguson
Thomas Becket.....	Timothy Sistrunk
A Page.....	Jocelyn Kitchen
First Soldier.....	Jeff Friesen
The Archbishop of Canterbury.....	Daven Carlson
The Bishop of Oxford.....	Gary Wesche
The Bishop of York.....	Henry Dace
Gilbert Folliot, Bishop of London.....	Dan McCulley
First Baron.....	Matt Hinkin
Second Baron.....	Jordan Fedder
Third Baron.....	Robin Selfridge
Fourth Baron.....	Dan Fink
Saxon Father.....	Ted Schulte
Saxon Girl.....	Dayna Stotesbury
Saxon Boy.....	Thomas Cox
Gwendolen.....	Cindy Fogerson
French Girl.....	Lori Gillispie
Little Monk.....	Richard Hougen
Provost Marshal.....	Matthew Cox
French Priest.....	Dan McCulley
French Choirboy.....	Thomas Cox
Officer.....	Daven Carlson
First Servant.....	Athena Wong
Second Servant.....	Helen Wuscher
Queen Mother.....	Leah Edelman
Young Queen.....	Katie Sinnett
Elder Prince.....	Jeff Friesen
Younger Prince.....	Thomas Cox
Etienne.....	Ted Schulte
First Monk.....	Tom Twiss
King Louis of France.....	Keith Brown
First French Baron.....	Gary Wesche
Second French Baron.....	Dan Fink
Duke of Arundel.....	Matthew Cox
The Pope.....	Robin Selfridge
A Cardinal.....	Matt Hinkin
Sentry.....	Henry Dace
Young Sentry.....	Tom Twiss

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE FOR BECKET

Monday, March 3	3:15-5:00	Block Act I, Scenes 1-4
Tuesday, March 4	3:15-5:00	Block Act I, Scenes 5-6
Thursday, March 6	7:00-9:00	Block Act II, Scenes 1-4
March 10-13		Spring Break
Monday, March 17	3:15-5:00	Block Act III, Scenes 1-6
Tuesday, March 18	7:00-9:00	Block Act IV, Scenes 1-4
Wednesday, March 19	7:00-9:00	Act I
Thursday, March 20	4:00-6:00	Act II
Monday, March 24	3:15-5:30	Act III
Tuesday, March 25	7:00-9:30	Act IV
Wednesday, March 26	7:00-9:30	Act I
Thursday, March 27	7:00-9:30	Act II
Monday, March 31	4:00-6:00	Act III
Tuesday, April 1	7:00-9:00	Act IV
Wednesday, April 2	3:15-4:00 4:00-5:30	I, 1/ II, 1/ III, 6/ IV, 4 III, 1/ IV, 3
Thursday, April 3	3:15-4:30 4:30-5:30	I, 3/ III, 2/ III, 4/ III, 3 III, 4/ IV, 1/ III, 3
Friday, April 4	3:15-4:30	III, 5/ II, 4
Saturday, April 5	10:00-12:00 1:00-3:00	Acts I and II Acts III and IV
Monday, April 7	3:15-7:15	Full Run Through
Tuesday, April 8	7:00-10:00	First Dress Rehearsal (5:30 make-up call)
Wednesday, April 9	7:00-10:30	Final Dress Rehearsal (5:30 make-up call)
April 10, 11, 12	7:30	Curtain for Performances

NOTE: Director spent additional time working on character analysis and interpretation with the two leads.

**BECKET:** Breakdown of Characters in Individual Scenes

- I, 1 King Henry, Becket, Monks, Page  
 I, 2 1st Soldier, Becket, King, Page  
 I, 3 Archbishop, Bishop of Oxford, Folliot, Bishop of York, 1st and 2nd Soldiers, King, Becket  
 I, 4 King, Becket, Four Barons  
 I, 5 King, Becket, Saxon Boy, Saxon Girl, Saxon Father  
 I, 6 Four Barons, Gwendolen, Becket, King, 1st Soldier, Saxon Girl
- II, 1 Four Barons, Becket, King, French Girl, 1st and 2nd Soldiers, Young Monk, Provost Marshal  
 II, 2 Becket, King, Four Barons, 1st and 2nd Soldiers  
 II, 3 French Priest, French Choirboy, King, Becket, Four Barons, Officer  
 II, 4 1st and 2nd Servants, Becket
- III, 1 Queen Mother, Young Queen, Princes, King, Officer, Etienne  
 III, 2 English Priest, 1st and 2nd Monks, Young Monk, Becket, Bishop of Oxford, Bishop of York, Folliot  
 III, 3 King, Folliot, Queen Mother, Young Queen, Page  
 III, 4 King Louis, Two French Barons, Folliot, Duke of Arundel, Becket  
 III, 5 Pope, Cardinal  
 III, 6 Becket, Young Monk
- IV, 1 King Louis, 1st French Baron, Becket  
 IV, 2 Sentry, Young Sentry, King, Becket  
 IV, 3 Queen Mother, Young Queen, Princes, Four Barons, Page  
 IV, 4 Becket, Young Monk, English Priest, Four Barons, Monks, King



## COPY FOR RADIO SPOT

The Manhattan High School Drama Department presents Becket, a drama about the conflict between Henry II of England and his friend Thomas Becket, whom Henry appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. The play chronicles the destruction of a friendship by the roles in history which each man is forced to play.

Becket is played by Tim Sistrunk and Henry II is portrayed by Chamblee Ferguson. Both young men are seniors at MHS and have been very active in theater activities.

Becket will open April 10, 1980 and continue through April 12. Curtain time is 7:30 p.m. in the high school auditorium. Reserved seats may be purchased in advance or at the door for \$2.00. Reservations may be made by calling the MHS office at 537-2600 during school hours.

## FACSIMILE OF NOTICE SENT TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Dear Faculty and Staff,

This week an important event is taking place in the MHS auditorium. The play Becket is being presented by the drama department beginning Thursday and continuing through Saturday. The event is important because it involves some major risk-taking by the students involved. This is a serious, difficult play to present, and the students have shown a great deal of courage by being willing to undertake it. I am very proud of them and their efforts.

You can help encourage such serious efforts by attending the play and by encouraging friends and relatives to attend it, also. There is nothing more discouraging than working for months on a production, only to perform for an audience of less than a hundred people. These drama students deserve better support than that.

So, please, strike a blow for quality theatre at MHS by attending Becket. If you will fill out the form below, complimentary tickets (2 for each faculty or staff member) will be placed in your mailbox.

Thanks for your support.

*Kathleen O'Fallon*

---

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF TICKETS DESIRED \_\_\_\_\_ ( 2 are free)

FOR WHICH NIGHT? \_\_\_\_\_

PERFORMANCE BEGINS AT 7:30 P.M.

Return to O'Fallon's mailbox!

## LIGHTING CUES

1. Bring up amber side-light on King, pit platform
2. Bring up purple back lights, between pillars UC
3. Spot Becket, UL
4. Fade spot on Becket
5. Black-out, 15 seconds
6. Bring up area lighting, UR
7. Black-out
8. Bring up area lighting, UL
9. Black-out
10. Bring up general stage lighting
11. Black-out
12. Bring up area lighting, UR
13. Bring up amber back light, between pillars UC
14. Cut back lights
15. Black-out
16. Bring up general stage lighting
17. Dim general lighting, spot on couch
18. Black-out
19. Bring up area lighting with red gels, DC
20. Dim area lighting, spot on King's tent, UL
21. Bring up area lights without red gels, DC
22. Black-out
23. Follow spots on Barons and King, Becket
24. Black-out

25. Bring up colored back lights, UC between pillars
26. Black-out
27. Bring up area lighting, UL
28. Black-out
29. Bring up general stage lighting
30. Black-out
31. Spots on pit platform
32. Black-out
33. Bring up general stage lighting
34. Black-out
35. Bring up area lighting, UR
36. Black-out
37. Bring up area lighting, UL
38. Black-out
39. Spot on Becket and Little Monk, UC
40. Black-out
41. Bring up area lighting, UR
42. Black-out
43. Spot Sentries, DR
44. Black-out, count 5
45. Follow spots on Becket and King
46. Black-out
47. Bring up general stage lighting
48. Black-out after lights dim to spot on King
49. Spots on pit platform
50. Cut spot, bring up red backlights behind altar
51. Blackout, count 10
52. Bring up side-light on King, pit platform
53. Black-out

from THE LIFE OF POETRY by Muriel Rukeyser, pp. 125-127

The darkening of the house. The ring of lights overhead, the lamps on the walls, beginning to dim, the profiles down the row calming, becoming luminous, and then shadowed. The last little shriek of laughter, the clearing of the throat, so that you know just what is going on in the stranger, arranging himself to be an "audience." Now darkness, with a leap, as the house-lights sink completely. The angels of the proscenium, repainted a fashionable off-white, evade, soar, disappear. There is a ripple across the curtain, and it shivers. It begins to rise, showing a foot of brightly-lit floor.

How is it with you, sitting beside me? Our coats are thrown back over the chairs, the little books of the program are on our laps, we almost touch each other's arms in these seats which are not wide enough nor spaced at all, we share an arm-rest, we breathe this air in which the excitement of the young and the diffused after-dinner pre-occupations fuse, in which the air beats with a perfume and a trembling and a mixed hope. The curtain is up, and a landscape is beginning to talk to us. Things are beginning to explain themselves to us. Some people, standing well above the orchestra chairs, grouped so the balcony may understand, are beginning to justify what they have been doing.

The curtain went up with a disclosing motion, the motion of a letter being slid from its envelope. The letter of a stranger? If it is, there will be no strangeness by the time it is half-known. Of a friend? There will be news.

You sit beside me in the house-dark, with the light thrown from the stage on your face, and shadows at your back. When you laugh, I feel it, and I feel the man in front of me throw himself back in his seat and stiffen his back when the dangers make themselves apparent. And then a breaker of laughter runs through all these rows, and seethes itself out, in relief. But we are not separate from the play; we are not a producer's idea of box-office take, of the familiar fan-shaped chart of theatre seats--not that only. We sit here, very different each from the other, until the passion arrives to give us our equality, and to make us part of the play, to make the play part of us. An exchange is being effected.

Backstage in a theatre once, I heard the director speak to the assembled cast. It was opening night. The dress rehearsal had felt good, and during the weak places, many pointed phrases made me see where this--my first play--creaked at the joints, where I needed to understand more. But the director was speaking now: that last minute

of talk to the actors and the electricians, the people in charge of music, those responsible for the revolving of the stage. "You have had good equipment to work with," the words came, after the praise and excitement and the sense of courage, "you've had a theatre with everything you needed, and you are involved with the play; but all the way through, you have been handicapped. One essential has been denied you. Tonight the audience is there; now they are sitting out front; you have everything you need..."

That was Hallie Flanagan, talking to a group of professionals and apprentices. What she said moved a whole period of work and rehearsal into focus.

But they are moving on their stage. But they are lives; they are moving toward each other; they are promises, and their promise is action; they are threats, and their threats are action. And they speak; and they are silent.

## STRIKE CREWS AND DUTIES

Crew #1

Karen Samelson\*  
Jocelyn Kitchen  
Daven Carlson  
Hal Dace  
Dan McCulley  
Matt Hinkin  
Tom Twiss  
Jordan Fedder  
Ted Schulte  
Dayna Stotesbury  
Lori Gillispie  
Richard Hougen

1. Take apart stage platforms
2. Fold canvas and store in costume room
3. Store platform pieces in basement main room
4. Sweep stage

Crew #2

Leah Edelman\*  
Cham Ferguson  
Tim Sistrunk  
Cindy Fogerson  
Thomas Cox  
Robin Selfridge  
Dan Fink  
Athena Wong

1. Take apart pit platform
2. Store black teasers in costume room
3. Take down pillars
4. Carry wagons, cinder blocks, pillars to basement and store in main room
5. Clean carpet in pit

Crew #3

Julie Bennett\*  
Ann Cashin  
Gary Wesche  
Keith Brown

1. Store drama department's props in basement prop room
2. Return borrowed props to owners, if possible
3. Safely store (under lock and key) props to be returned later

Crew #4

Anne Spangler\*  
Matt Cox  
Dana Busick

1. Remove and store extension cords
2. Remove and store light gels
3. Remove and store backlights from pit platform
4. Clean up catwalk and pie room



Crew #5

Flo Gatsche\*  
Beth Mingle  
Helen Wuscher

1. Check in all costumes
2. Make sure all costumes are hung up
3. Clean up trash in costume room
4. Return clerical robes to Father D'Wolf

Crew #6

Deborah Edelman\*  
Katie Sinnett  
Janell Friesen  
Susan Leipold  
Susan Fallquist

1. Clean up make-up room
2. Store make-up (in organized manner)
3. Sweep out make-up room
4. Empty trash

\*denotes head of crew

BUDGET FOR BECKET

Gate Receipts	302.91
-tax	<u>10.24</u>
	292.67
EXPENSES	
Royalty	115.00
Tickets	47.55
Costumes	157.77
Advertising	61.38
Make-up	28.45
Poster Printing (taken out in trade)	??
Program Printing (bill not received)	??
Gasoline (for collecting and returning props)	11.53
Extension cord	23.50
Duct tape	3.85
Paint	32.38
Nails	1.35
Corrugated fasteners	<u>2.12</u>
Total Expenses	484.88
Deficit	192.21+

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TAKING THE RISK:  
A BECKET PRODUCTION JOURNAL

by

KATHLEEN O'FALLON

B.S., Kansas State University, 1972

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1980

This report deals with the production of Jean Anouilh's Becket at Manhattan High School in Manhattan, Kansas. It sets forth some problems faced by high school directors and presents Becket's choice as a response to some of these problems. Anouilh's source for the play and the concepts behind it are explored. This is followed by an analysis of the play and the complete script of Becket. Completing the report are a narrative of the production process and appendices which detail various aspects of production.

Some of the more serious problems facing high school theatre programs today include competition from other theatre groups within the community, meagre budgets, the scarcity of boys to cast in plays, the necessity of some "pre-casting," the need to find plays which are within the grasp of the high school actor while not being an insult to his intelligence, the lack of technical expertise on the part of many secondary school drama instructors, and--finally--the need to reclaim ever dwindling audiences. In response to these problems, Becket was chosen for production at Manhattan High School because it offered two equally important male leads, it afforded a challenge to the actors, and it was a fine piece of dramatic literature.

Jean Anouilh's source for Becket was Augustin Thierry's Conquest of England by the Normans. Although the source's "facts" have since been disproved, Anouilh was more concerned with the story he wished to tell than with historical accuracy. Anouilh's concept of conscious theatricality is evident in stage directions and through the structure of the play. Through Becket and Henry II, Anouilh presents a unique concept of heroism.

An analysis of Becket reveals tightly woven structure, complex characterization, ironic and ominous tones, a variety of conflicts and themes, and distinctive imagery.

A production narrative details casting procedures, rehearsal methods, set construction and props, costuming, lighting, and publicity efforts. Final preparations, warm-ups, and the disasters encountered during performance are described. Finally, the pride of the actors and the director in this production is expounded.

Appendices include the cast list, rehearsal schedule, breakdown of characters in individual scenes, publicity copy for a radio spot, publicity notice sent to school personnel, list of lighting cues (keyed to the script), an excerpt from The Life of Poetry by Muriel Rukeyser which was used during warm-ups, a list of strike crews and their duties, and the budget for Becket.