MACMILLAN MASTER GUIDES

GENERAL EDITOR: JAMES GIBSON

JANE AUSTEN	<i>Emma</i> Norman Page <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> Judy Simons <i>Persuasion</i> Judy Simons <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> Raymond Wilson <i>Mansfield Park</i> Richard Wirdnam
SAMUEL BECKETT	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> Jennifer Birkett
WILLIAM BLAKE	<i>Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience</i> Alan Tomlinson
ROBERT BOLT	<i>A Man for All Seasons</i> Leonard Smith
CHARLOTTE BRONTË	<i>Jane Eyre</i> Robert Miles
EMILY BRONTË	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> Hilda D. Spear
JOHN BUNYAN	<i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> Beatrice Batson
GEOFFREY CHAUCER	<i>The Miller's Tale</i> Michael Alexander <i>The Pardoner's Tale</i> Geoffrey Lester <i>The Wife of Bath's Tale</i> Nicholas Marsh <i>The Knight's Tale</i> Anne Samson <i>The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales</i> Nigel Thomas and Richard Swan
JOSEPH CONRAD	<i>The Secret Agent</i> Andrew Mayne
CHARLES DICKENS	<i>Bleak House</i> Dennis Butts <i>Great Expectations</i> Dennis Butts <i>Hard Times</i> Norman Page
GEORGE ELIOT	<i>Middlemarch</i> Graham Handley <i>Silas Marner</i> Graham Handley <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> Helen Wheeler
T. S. ELIOT	<i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> Paul Lapworth <i>Selected Poems</i> Andrew Swarbrick
HENRY FIELDING	<i>Joseph Andrews</i> Trevor Johnson
E. M. FORSTER	<i>Howards End</i> Ian Milligan <i>A Passage to India</i> Hilda D. Spear
WILLIAM GOLDING	<i>The Spire</i> Rosemary Sumner <i>Lord of the Flies</i> Raymond Wilson
OLIVER GOLDSMITH	<i>She Stoops to Conquer</i> Paul Ranger
THOMAS HARDY	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i> Ray Evans <i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> James Gibson <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> Colin Temblett-Wood

MACMILLAN MASTER GUIDES

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS	<i>Selected Poems</i> John Garrett
BEN JONSON	<i>Volpone</i> Michael Stout
JOHN KEATS	<i>Selected Poems</i> John Garrett
RUDYARD KIPLING	<i>Kim</i> Leonée Ormond
PHILIP LARKIN	<i>The Whitsun Weddings and The Less Deceived</i> Andrew Swarbrick
D. H. LAWRENCE	<i>Sons and Lovers</i> R. P. Draper
HARPER LEE	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> Jean Armstrong
LAURIE LEE	<i>Cider with Rosie</i> Brian Tarbitt
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE	<i>Doctor Faustus</i> David A. Male
THE METAPHYSICAL POETS	Joan van Emden
THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY	<i>The Changeling</i> Tony Bromham
ARTHUR MILLER	<i>The Crucible</i> Leonard Smith <i>Death of a Salesman</i> Peter Spalding
GEORGE ORWELL	<i>Animal Farm</i> Jean Armstrong
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	<i>Richard II</i> Charles Barber <i>Othello</i> Tony Bromham <i>Hamlet</i> Jean Brooks <i>King Lear</i> Francis Casey <i>Henry V</i> Peter Davison <i>The Winter's Tale</i> Diana Devlin <i>Twelfth Night</i> R. P. Draper <i>Julius Caesar</i> David Elloway <i>Macbeth</i> David Elloway <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> A. M. Kinghorn <i>Measure for Measure</i> Mark Lilly <i>Henry IV Part I</i> Helen Morris <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Helen Morris <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Kenneth Pickering <i>The Tempest</i> Kenneth Pickering <i>Coriolanus</i> Gordon Williams <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> Martin Wine
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW	<i>St Joan</i> Leonée Ormond
RICHARD SHERIDAN	<i>The School for Scandal</i> Paul Ranger <i>The Rivals</i> Jeremy Rowe
ALFRED TENNYSON	<i>In Memoriam</i> Richard Gill
EDWARD THOMAS	<i>Selected Poems</i> Gerald Roberts
ANTHONY TROLLOPE	<i>Barchester Towers</i> K. M. Newton
JOHN WEBSTER	<i>The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi</i> David A. Male
VIRGINIA WOOLF	<i>To the Lighthouse</i> John Mephram <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> Julian Pattison
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	<i>The Prelude Books I and II</i> Helen Wheeler

MACMILLAN MASTER GUIDES

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

BY T. S. ELIOT

PAUL LAPWORTH

M
MACMILLAN
EDUCATION

© Paul Lapworth 1988

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended), or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 33–4 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First edition 1988

Published by
MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Lapworth, Paul

Murder in the cathedral, by T. S. Eliot.—
(Macmillan master guides).

1. Eliot, T. S.—Thomas Stearns. Murder
in the cathedral

I. Title II. Eliot, T. S.

822'.912 PS3509.L43M8

ISBN 978-0-333-37205-0

ISBN 978-1-349-07391-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-07391-7

ISBN 978-0-333-41725-6 Pbk export

CONTENTS

<i>General editor's preface</i>		vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>		viii
<i>Summary</i>		ix
1 Life and background	1.1 Life	1
	1.2 Eliot the poetic theorist	2
	1.3 Place in Eliot's writing	4
	1.4 The occasion	6
	1.5 The play's treatment of history	8
2 Summaries and critical commentary	Part One	9
	Interlude: the Sermon	24
	Part Two	25
3 What the play is about	3.1 A process of awareness	37
	3.2 Medieval martyr and the nature of martyrdom	38
	3.3 Relevance of the hero for the 1930s	40
	3.4 Martyrdom's modern significance	41
	3.5 God enters time	42
4 Technical features	4.1 Plot and structure	45
	(a) Exposition and story	45
	(b) Formal structure	46
	(c) The parts of the play	46
	(d) Linking the parts	47
	(e) Tragic pattern	48

4.2	Characterisation	48
	(a) Thomas	50
	(b) The Chorus	51
	(c) The Priests	52
	(d) Tempters and Knights	53
4.3	Verse drama	56
	(a) The choice of verse	56
	(b) Imagery	60
	(c) Dramatic styles	61
5	Specimen passage and commentary	63
6	Critical reception	67
7	The modern verse drama movement	71
	<i>Revision questions</i>	73
	<i>Further reading</i>	75

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The aim of the Macmillan Master Guides is to help you to appreciate the book you are studying by providing information about it and by suggesting ways of reading and thinking about it which will lead to a fuller understanding. The section on the writer's life and background has been designed to illustrate those aspects of the writer's life which have influenced the work, and to place it in its personal and literary context. The summaries and critical commentary are of special importance in that each brief summary of the action is followed by an examination of the significant critical points. The space which might have been given to repetitive explanatory notes has been devoted to a detailed analysis of the kind of passage which might confront you in an examination. Literary criticism is concerned with both the broader aspects of the work being studied and with its detail. The ideas which meet us in reading a great work of literature, and their relevance to us today, are an essential part of our study, and our Guides look at the thought of their subject in some detail. But just as essential is the craft with which the writer has constructed his work of art, and this may be considered under several technical headings – characterisation, language, style and stagecraft, for example.

The authors of these Guides are all teachers and writers of wide experience, and they have chosen to write about books they admire and know well in the belief that they can communicate their admiration to you. But you yourself must read and know intimately the book you are studying. No one can do that for you. You should see this book as a lamp-post. Use it to shed light, not to lean against. If you know your text and know what it is saying about life, and how it says it, then you will enjoy it, and there is no better way of passing an examination in literature.

JAMES GIBSON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author and publishers wish to thank the following who have kindly given permission for the use of copyright material: Faber and Faber Ltd for extracts from *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot; Penguin Books for an extract from *King Oedipus*, translated by E. F. Watling.

The edition used in this Master Guide is *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot, introduction by Nevill Coghill (Educational Edition), Faber & Faber, 1965.

Cover illustration: the painting of the murder of Beckett is reproduced by kind permission of the Cathedral Shop, Canterbury.

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright-holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

SUMMARY

Murder in the Cathedral is T. S. Eliot's most successful play representing his triumphant development from poet into poet-dramatist, and although *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* in particular amongst his plays are performed from time to time, *Murder in the Cathedral* remains the best and most enduring example of the poet's final creative phase. Alone of the plays produced in the verse drama movement which flowered in the years before and after the Second World War, *Murder in the Cathedral* has established itself in the contemporary theatre with frequent revivals on both the professional and amateur stages.

This Master Guide shows how the play grew out of Eliot's theory and practice and how its success gave fresh impetus to the search for a modern verse drama. Eliot considered *Murder in the Cathedral* a success as an occasional play but a failure as a model for a future verse drama. In content and style the play certainly matched its original occasion, the Canterbury Festival of 1935, and this Guide explains Eliot's approach to elucidating and reinterpreting martyrdom for a modern audience, but it also brings out the wider 'truths' the play has offered to readers and onlookers then and since; the play is shown to have 'meaning' beyond its central religious intention.

The meaning of the play is shown to be not merely the expression of ideas in the poetry but also the effect of the total impact of the play. The analysis provided here reveals the subtlety and care lavished upon action, structure, characterisation and verse, all contributing through dramatic form to the themes of the play. Where doubts have been expressed or weaknesses alleged by scholars and critics these have been considered both in the commentaries and in the account of the critical reception of the play.

Throughout this Guide special attention has been paid to the verse effects achieved by Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and the thematic links of the play to Eliot's poems of the same period are also demonstrated.