Becket: Always Good For A Story

From Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" to a new biography just published, from T. S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" to a Jean Anouilh play and film, the life of St. Thomas a Becket has been an "eternal attraction" to storytellers, historians and playwrights. Why?

That is a question which has greeted "Thomas Becket," a 400-page, $10 biography of the martyred Archbishop of Canterbury, published just three years after another biography, Shelley Mydan's' "Thomas," made the best-seller lists.

Paramount pictures—prompted, certainly, by the success of "A Man for All Seasons," about St. Thomas More, but nevertheless aware of a good story when they have one — recently re-released its 1964 "Becket," with Richard Burton in the title role.

The new biography, by medievalist Richard Winston, is according to a "New York Times" review, "easily . . . the best, the clearest and best-organized of recent studies of the rivalry between Henry II and Thomas Becket of Canterbury." But there is something else besides the high drama of a medieval church-state conflict that is the source of attraction, and that something else can be found in the personality of Becket, as a "Newsweek" reviewer decided:

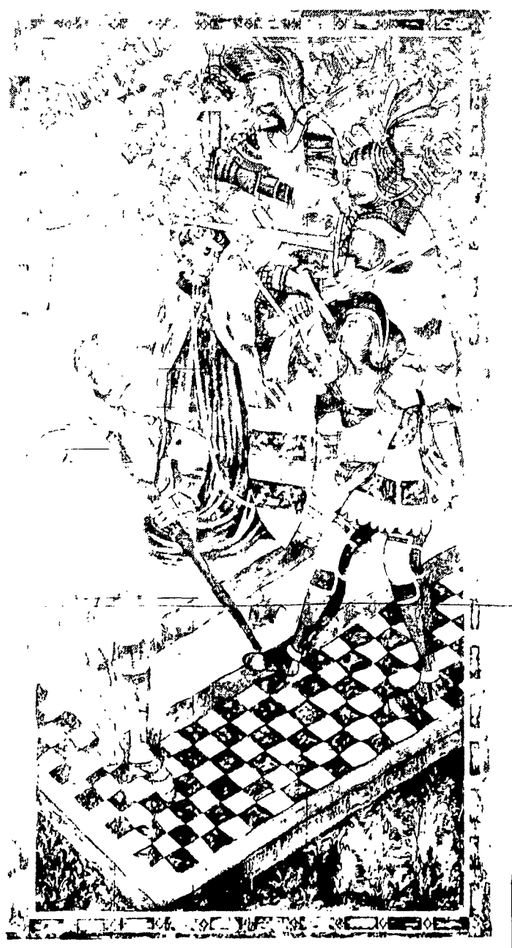
"By what unaccountable process does the most powerful political figures of the realm (Becket), a man who was, in Winston's characterization, 'proud, forceful, stubborn, fond of good wine, more given to luxury and display than asceticism' — by what astonishing transfiguration does such a man bow his head to the blade and find in his death his life's consummation?

"Whatever its name, that is the inexhaustible source of Thomas Becket's eternal attraction for the literary imagination; and for the religious, the mystery of his miraculous blood."

If any saint's blood was miraculous, it was St. Thomas a Becket's, for at least 500 miracles were attributed to him within the first few years after his death, and indeed when he was canonized in 1173 it was less than three years after his martyrdom in 1170 on December 29, his feastday.

"Tiny droplets of blood scraped from the stone floor healed the deaf, the lame, and the blind, cured dropsy, epilepsy, and leprosy, exorcised demons in possession of hapless souls," wrote Winston.

The "stone floor" was that of the Canterbury Cathedral, where Becket was slain by four swordsmen who, it is commonly believed, were sent to kill Becket because Henry II was angered by the opposition Becket was giving him in Church-state affairs. Becket, a layman and longtime friend of Henry's, was made Archbishop of England by the king in hopes that he would cooperate with the king. Instead, Becket became one of England's most zealous protectors of church interests.



"The Martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury," cover illustration for "Thomas Becket," from the panel at the head of the tomb of Henry IV in Canterbury Cathedral

(Winston offers the view that the four knights who killed Becket did so to further their own interests rather than those of the king, and that Henry II would never have ordered his death.)

Immediately, Becket's burial place in the cathedral became a popular pilgrimage site ("Canterbury Tales" were stories the pilgrims would tell one another to pass time while they journeyed to Canterbury, "The holy blisful martyr for to seke.")

But, concluded Winston in his biography, "certainly Thomas Becket does not seem to have been saintly, if we apply to his personality the saccharine or cliche notion of sainthood . . . He had been a thoroughgoing man of the world until his consecration as archbishop — except for the consistency with which he kept a vow of chastity.

"We have seen him leading armies, engaging in single commat, maneuvering in adroit diplomacy, losing his temper, cursing his enemies. He showed little of the sweetness, forbearance, and lovingkindness, and none of the theological originality, that had given his predecessor Anselm the nimbus of sanctity. Yet Anselm waited four hundred years for canonization; Thomas was formally enrolled in the calendar of saints in less than three years."

The miracles made the difference, Winston acknowledge, but "perhaps we may say that the miracles came after Thomas Becket's death because all his life he had attracted love as the tallest tree in the woods attracts lightning."

(Catholic Press Features)

Orators To Compete For Aquinas Scholarships

Eighth grade boys from the Rochester Diocese will have an opportunity to express their views on a variety of world problems while competing for valuable scholarship awards this Sunday, December 17, at Aquinas Institute.

The fifth annual Forensic Scholarship Competition, sponsored by Aquinas, will attract the top elementary school orators of the area. Over $2,500 in scholarships will be awarded to the winning contestants.

According to Father Leon G. Hart, C.S.B., Aquinas principal the grants are offered as an incentive to encourage young men to attain the highest level of accomplishment of which they are capable both in academic and oratorical skills.

The public is invited to attend the competition. Results of the contest will be announced by the school principal in the Aquinas Auditorium at 4:30 p.m.

St. Agnes Christmas Play

The simplicity and directness of Henri Gheon's traveling gypsies will bring the message of Christmas to the stage of St. Agnes High School Tuesday, December 19 with the presentation by the school's drama group, the Stagers, of "Christmas in the Village Square."

In the leading roles are Lucy Mendoza as Bruno, Margaret Mary Lioi as Sara, Maureen Conheady as Josaphat, Callista Card as Melchoir, and Celest Jacques as Mercedes. Stage manager is Molly Foos.

Following the play, the Freshman Chorus and the Glee Club will offer their rendition of the Christmas message. Highlighting the freshmen's first appearance on St. Agnes' stage will be their offerings of two musical styles a calypso Noel and an African Noel. Glee Club selections will include the "Gloria in Excelsis" from the Mozart's Twelfth Mass and the traditional "Hallelujah Chorus" by Handel. Director of the play and the choral selections is Sister Claudia.

The public is invited to this admission-free program. Curtain time is 8:15 p.m.

Wing Announcer Back Again in '68

Joe Cullinane, the "Voice of the Red Wings" for the past six years, again will broadcast Red Wing games in 1968, Club President Morrie Silver announced today.

The radio contract with WHEC has been renewed for the fifth year. Cullinane will originate live broadcasts of all Rochester home games and road games involving the Red Wings at Syracuse and Buffalo.

"Joe Cullinane and the Red Wings are practically synonymous," Silver said. "There is no harder working man in radio than Joe. We are very pleased that he will be our voice again in 1968."

Interracial Leader, G. K. Hunton, Dies

New York —(RNS)— George K. Hunton, a leader of the Catholic interracial movement for more than 30 years, died here Nov. 11, at the age of 79.

He was co-founder with the late Father John LaFarge, S.J., of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York in 1934. This organization was the parent group of some 50 similar units which have been established throughout the United States since that time.

Aquinas Finmen Cop Two Meets

Aquinas Institutes' swimmers made it two in a row last Monday by sinking Edison Tech, 53 to 42, in a meet held at Edison. The previous Friday the Irish edged Geneva High by the same score.

Both matches went right to the wire, with the wins coming in the final event.

Bob Zapf, Paul Noga and Mike Cahill of Aquinas were double winners. Zapf was a member of the 200-yard medley relay and the 400-yard freestyle relay. Noga swam in the 400 freestyle relay and took the 100 butterfly event in 1:06.7. Cahill won the 100 freestyle in :55.1 and also took a first in the 200 individual medley.

Aquinas visits Charlotte tonight at 7 p.m. to renew its annual rivalry with the Lakeside finmen.

Father Robert Chauvin, C.S.B. is the Aquinas swimming coach.

German Catholic Pre-School Units

Berlin —(RNS)— During the last three years the number of Roman Catholic kindergartens in West Germany has jumped from about 500 to 6,452, according to a report here.

These kindergartens are attended by 463,200 children and staffed by 16,424 teachers.

Aquinas, 1-3, Faces Lyons

Aquinas Institute's hoopmen, successful in only one of four starts this season, run into one of their toughest foes Saturday night at RIT's Ritter-Clark gymnasium when the Irish host Lyons Central.

The Irish, slow starters with losses to East Rochester, Monroe and Madison, hope to bounce back with an upset victory over the always-powerful Lyons quintet. Game time is set for 8:30 p.m. with a junior varsity game preceding at 7 p.m.

Falling to Madison, 63-50 in the McQuaid gym last Saturday, Aquinas was ice cold at the start, managing only one field goal in the entire first period. Still smarting from a triple overtime loss to Monroe the previous week, the Irish eagers rebounded during the second period to outscore the Wilson Parkers but the deficit was too much to overcome.

The Irish, checked tenaciously by Madison, found the range in the second half but were unable to catch up. Madison shot a fantastic 66% to a cold 27% for Aquinas.

On the brighter side for the Dewey Avenue boys, the junior varsity, coached by Bob Rosmarino, made it three straight with no losses by downing the Madison juniors, 52-26.

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Mrs. Power, State Regent, At Aquinas Assembly

By WHIT JOHNSON

Aquinas Institute students were urged to set high ideals for themselves by Mrs. Helen B. Power, Regent of the University of the State of New York last Monday.

Addressing over 1200 Aquinas boys at the school's annual academic awards assembly, Mrs. Power said, "Choose daring goals compatible with a right estimation of your capabilities. Then in the vast field of life you will make outstanding contributions to science or to art or in the service of society, which looks to Aquinas students for tomorrow's courageous leaders."

Mrs. Power charmed her exuberant audience by speaking to the problems of youth today in a frank and factual manner. She brought into focus many of the questions regularly asked by high school students and their parents in regard to higher education. She pointed out that the rising cost of a college education should never be a deterrent to any student who seriously wishes to continue his studies.

At the conclusion of her address, Mrs. Power presented awards to 88 students who achieved superior academic performance.

Mrs Power paid special tribute to Randolph Pearce of 458 Maplewood Ave. who has been named a finalist in the National Merit Scholarship. Pearce is among the top 5 per cent of students throughout the nation who attained a finalist standing.

An additional 12 students received letters of commendation for outstanding results on the National Merit Scholarship.

Seventy-five students were awarded St Thomas Club pins for maintaining an average of 90 per cent or above for the entire year.

Father Leon G. Hart, C.S.B., principal, presided and introduced Mrs Power.

Christmas Flicks

In the spirit of the season three Christmas films will be presented on the Family Program at Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences Sun., Dec. 17. The movies will be shown at 2:30 and 3:30 p.m.

Knight Matmen Forge 3-0 Mark

While McQuaid's basketball squad has held the spotlight in winning its first three games, another Knight team has been quietly matching that record.

By taking Jefferson to the tune of 33-15 last Friday, McQuaid's wrestlers upped their mark to 3-0 and will be pointing for number four against Mooney at home tomorrow morning.

Paced by their lighter men, the Knights opened with a 36-18 victory at Fairport and followed with a 30-14 decision at Webster. At Jeff they opened a 33-0 bulge before the homesters rallied to close out the match with 3 pins.

Seven of the Knights are unbeaten, led by senior Paul DeFelice, whose 3 victories in the 112-pound class extended his winning streak to 33 matches in 3 years.

McQuaid's J.V.'s, meanwhile, were having rougher going, bowing to Webster and Jeff before taking East, 31-22, last Saturday.

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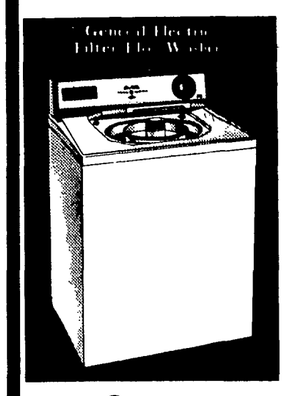

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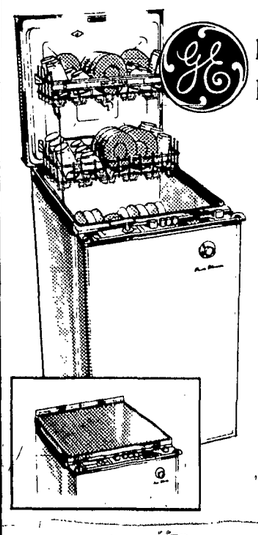

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