

nature and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ with complete seriousness; this is evident in the chapter on 'The Way of Trust' (strong on the role of the body in prayer), both chapters on 'The Healing of the Passions' and that on 'Forgiveness'. The second volume, on 'Prayer in Practice', starts from a point central in the earlier book, namely prayer as gift, but develops this more in the context of God's absolute dominion—one might say with more reference to the freedom of the Father than to the freedom of the Spirit, gift understood in an apophatic rather than in a cataphatic sense. It would be surprising if all the chapters on prayer were of a comparable quality and I must admit that I found that on 'Liturgical Prayer' rather less weighty than the rest, being too much a reaction against contemporary excesses and not sufficiently acknowledging the proper role of liturgical creativity.

It is clearly not accidental that two topics prominent in *Did You Receive the Spirit?* are relegated to Appendices in *Prayer*, viz. 'Shared Prayer' and 'The Gift of Tongues'. The former seems a very sensible address to badgerers and badgered in religious houses divided

over 'shared prayer' and others who are investing group prayer with undue solemnity, though its relationship to the relevant chapters at the start of *Did You Receive the Spirit?* may puzzle some readers. The second appendix is a more schematic treatment of tongues than appeared in the earlier book, though I still feel that Fr Tugwell's best writing on this subject is the article in *The Expository Times* for February 1973. Whereas the relevant chapters in *Did You Receive the Spirit?* have done much to help the hesitant venture forth into tongues, *Prayer* is more likely to help those who have taken the plunge; the presentation here is entirely in terms of personal prayer without reference to the Pentecostal characteristic (mentioned in *Did You Receive the Spirit?*, p. 77) of the connection between tongues and mission.

Those who make exciting discoveries will also make mistakes; *Did You Receive the Spirit?* is more likely to promote the discoveries, *Prayer* to remedy the mistakes. To be read in that sequence, they are both high priorities among the escalating output in spirituality.

PETER HOCKEN

ELIOT, by Stephen Spender. *Fontana*, London, 1975. 251 pp. 80p.

With his collar mounting firmly to the chin and his features of clerical cut, T. S. Eliot is 'usually thought of as a sophisticated writer, an "intellectual"', effete and even priggish; 'the feeling of primitive horror which rises from the depths of his poetry is overlooked'. Stephen Spender sees Eliot as a poet who 'at his greatest is shocking and outrageous', whose 'ritualist sensibility' was a desperate strategy to salvage decency and order from a world 'Driven by daemonic, chthonic/Powers'. Tradition, the liturgical incantations of *Ash Wednesday*, the redemptive patterns of music in the *Quartets*, all express the same urge to impose a salvatory ritualism upon the inchoate impulses of a savage god. Subtly, Spender demonstrates that even Eliot's 'classicism' is ambivalent, disentangling the cool, imperial *civitas* of Virgil's Rome from the barbarous dark of the Greek *phusis*, whose vengeful deities (the Furies of *The Family Reunion*) crave blood-sacrifice. He points out, too, how Eliot's fear of the Dionysian 'dull tom-tom' is curiously fused with

his hatred of secular, humanist rationalism: even the superficially benign *Mr Apollinax* (usually identified with Bertrand Russell, involved in some not fully defined liaison with Eliot's first wife) brings with his priapism undercurrents of loathing and primitive terror, associated with the 'fingers of surf' which pick the 'worried bodies of drowned men'.

The Dantean *selva oscura* of Eliot's 'middle way' was beset by voices of temptation. If the 'sylvan scene' of *The Waste Land* is a world of rapine and destruction, it is also the home of meaning and beauty, where 'Philoel, by the barbarous king; So rudely forced', is changed into the nightingale which yet 'Filled all the desert with inviolable voice': Sweeney's nightingales sing in the 'bloody wood' where murdered Agamemnon cried aloud; the 'sacred wood' is not only the latently sexual symbol of the unpublished poem *Ode*—a brutal post-mortem on a failed marriage—but the title of his first book of criticism—source of a life-giving creativity as well as a delusive grimpen.

Like Coleridge in Eliot's own description, Eliot was haunted by the Muse, a ruined man. Poetry was both conjuration and exorcism of that ambiguous 'unknown, dark *psychic material*—the octopus or angel with which the poet struggles'; simultaneously Jacob and Faustus, Captain Nemo and Captain Ahab, the poet

is haunted by a demon, a demon against which he feels powerless, because in its first manifestation it has no face, no name, nothing; and the words, the poem he makes, are a kind of form of exorcism of this demon (*On Poetry and Poets*).

Eliot's universe is one of mysterious reified powers that threaten the inexplicably reprobate self with engulfment: the Christ of *Gerontion* is a devouring tiger, the Virgin in *Ash Wednesday* is more 'Belle Dame Sans Merci' than Madonna, accompanied by leopards which are voracious Bacchic pards. Even Eliot's anti-semitism seems to have its source in infantile sexual anxiety—'Rachel née Rabinovitch/Tears at the grapes with murderous paws': while the 'devil of the stair' in *Ash Wednesday* is that shadow that falls 'Between the desire/And the spasm'—the terror of emasculation which itself unmans:

the stair was dark,

Damp, jagged, like an old man's
mouth drivelling, beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged
shark.

Spender points out the recurring association of sexuality, death and cannibalism in Eliot's poetry, from the allusions to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in *Gerontion* and *The Hollow Men*, through the Wagnerian *Liebestod* of *The Waste Land* and the confession in *Sweeney Agonistes* that 'Any man has to, needs to, wants to/Once in a lifetime, do a girl in' to all those women who meet a terrible end in the plays. The punishment of the possible uxoricide in *The Family Reunion* is described in terms very close to Eliot's account of the poetic vocation, which is also fulfilled through a discipline of self-sacrifice which brings release from personality:

It is possible that you have not known
what sin
You shall expiate, or whose, or why.
It is certain

That the knowledge of it must precede
the expiation.

It is possible that sin may strain and
struggle

In its dark instinctive birth, to come
to consciousness

And so find expurgation. It is possible
You are the consciousness of your
unhappy family.

Beckett's death, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, is similarly the lustration of a polluted world. Spender notes that the passage in *Gerontion* beginning 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' echoes that in *The Revenger's Tragedy* where Vindice rebukes his mistress's skull with the futility of a time-bound world of sexual desire, which sacrifices eternity 'For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute'. History itself, in *Gerontion*, is a maze of insatiable feminine snares, 'cunning passages, contrived corridors' which deceive 'with such supple confusions/That the giving famishes the craving'. Prudently shirking 'The awful daring of a moment's surrender' to the *vagina dentata* of history, Eliot found himself increasingly frozen in the impotence of 'a broken Coriolanus', forced to deny that sexual bond with the 'unhappy family' of mother, bride and child which alone links the self to the world. Unable, except in poetry, to be 'author of himself/And know no other kin', he sought to assuage 'the primitive terror' by 'the completion of its partial ecstasy' in a cathartic 'release from action and suffering . . . , the inner/And the outer compulsion'—

something given

And taken, in a lifetime's death in
love

Ardour and selflessness and self-
surrender.

That orgasmic anxiety which permeates his work was thus sublimed into an 'eternal patience', the 'prayer, observance, discipline' which prepares for 'the unattended/Moment' when the Bridegroom might appear. Spender's book deepens our sympathy for a poet who, in his intense privacy, could not avoid feeling 'the conscience of a blackened street/Impatient to assume the world'. And it refines our sense of the pathos and the tragedy of a man who, asked by W. H. Auden why he liked playing Patience, could reflect gravely for a few moments and then reply:

'Well, I suppose it's because it's the
nearest thing to being dead'.

STAN SMITH