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T.S. Eliot's Troubled Spiritual Journey

Roger Kojecký

TOWARDS THE END OF HIS LIFE ELIOT WAS REGARDED AS SOMETHING OF A GURU. HE was much in demand for statements and public appearances of one kind and another. A crowd of nearly 14,000 heard him with respectful attention during an American visit in 1956 at a baseball stadium in Minnesota, when he spoke about literary criticism. In Britain he was one of the twenty-four select elect awarded the Order of Merit. International recognition was marked in the same year, 1948, by the Nobel Prize for literature. In 1967, two years after his death, a large stone was placed to commemorate him on the floor of Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

In the literary establishment of today he is recognised as the leading poet of a broader movement in the early twentieth century, Modernism, and this most especially for his long poem of 1922 *The Waste Land*. Modernism has become a major salient in literary history, but we may note that Eliot did not use the term of himself, and indeed regarded 'Modernism' with suspicion, understanding it in relation to theological developments which were unwelcome to traditionalists, and singled out for criticism in an encyclical of Pope Pius X *Pascendi dominici gregis* in 1907.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images

The 'heap of broken images' in 'The Burial of the Dead' section of *The Waste Land* has been quoted in numerous undergraduate essays as applicable to the entire poem of 433 lines, with its montage of fragments and short passages which leave readers groping for the coherence which their experience of earlier examples of the poetic genre may lead them to expect. The images of stony rubbish, beating sun, and lack of water evoke a land laid waste, a land infertile, perhaps a postwar world, evacuated of hope, oppressed by despair. We notice however, here and elsewhere in the poem, a few Biblical references. 'Son of man', the epithet from Daniel, also used frequently in Ezekiel, was Jesus' way to refer to himself. Yet if the poet was thinking of this, it was not with any overt faith that he brings any greater illumination than an unblinking view of the hopelessly infertile land. But the call to come in under the shadow of this red rock, to find shelter from the hot sun, has what we may call a subtext of longing, if not perhaps of hope. It is from Isaiah's prophecy in his Chapter 32, of Israel's restoration by God, which will be 'like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.'

Eliot's American family were Unitarians, their belief rather ethical and philosophical than specifically Christian. Among their forbears were New England Puritans who espoused Calvinism, and some who took part in the infamous witch trials. On the evidence of his early poems Eliot was sceptical of contemporary expressions of Christianity, witness poems like 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' with its satirical view of churchgoing. His notebook of early poems, published more recently as *The Inventions of the March Hare* contains one or two lyrical poems, and some shockingly obscene. The complete poetic oeuvre was published in two volumes

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in 2015 in a fully annotated edition by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*.

Eliot's journey to baptism and confirmation in 1927 does not conform to the conversion narrative we often expect. There is not a classic 'testimony' recounting a progress through sin and seeking and climaxing in forgiveness and conversion, where the new believer appropriates salvation. Thus his narrative does not resemble the one derived from Paul, the persecutor of Christians who encountered Jesus in a dramatic theophany which altered his sense of identity, life's mission, ultimate destiny and his standing before God. Nor does Eliot's reading of the *Confessions* of Augustine, of which he inserts a fragment into *The Waste Land*, provide him with the conversion model he sought for himself. It is the struggle of Augustine's life that he picked up on, rather than the moment of revelation when Augustine took up and read Romans 13:13, and understood that his life must change in response to the grace of God in Christ.

The paradigm Eliot took for his spiritual journey derives from a strand of Catholic spirituality which may be described by the word penance. He admired, even revered, the 14th century Italian poet Dante. Then also he regarded as exemplary the rigorously ascetic life and death of a Catholic priest, Charles de Foucault, murdered in the Sahara in 1916. He not only admired the spirituality of Foucault, he put him forward as an ideal figure, referring to his martyrdom in a BBC broadcast during the Second World War. If people would take to heart such an example, the country would move, in the words of the title of his broadcast, 'Towards a Christian Britain'. Eliot refers to 'the progress towards spiritual perfection which is the Christian goal'. And he commends the biography of Foucault by René Bazin, saying at the end of his broadcast, 'I wish everyone would read it'. Foucault was a man born to wealth and social position said Eliot, and later he

found a vocation for the religious life, lived for a time among the more austere communities, made a pilgrimage as a mendicant to the Holy Land, and finally, ordained a priest, became a missionary in a solitary African outpost. He qualified himself to give medical aid to the tribesmen....His aim was not primarily to convert by teaching, but to live the Christian life, alone among the natives. The people of Islamic countries recognize and venerate holiness whatever the religion of the saint; and the name of Père de Foucault was revered far and wide not only by his converts, but by fanatical Moslem. Almost by an accident, he was killed by a marauding band to which his name and reputation were unknown....

Through the mysterious power of holiness, which is the power of God, he achieved something for the world which should make us feel very modest about all our schemes and plans. I think that it is through such men as Foucault that the reborn Christian consciousness comes; I think that from the point of view which we should take, there is no higher glory of a Christian empire than that which was brought into being by a death in the desert.¹

The faith of Foucault, sincere and zealous as it undoubtedly was, is enmeshed in a Catholic skein of traditions which diverge from the practice and doctrines of the New Testament. Eliot, set on a course of penance, perceived Foucault as a more advanced practitioner. But although he was a student of anthropology who pronounced at length on culture, Eliot failed to see how alien to British sensibility, to contemporary British

¹ 'Towards a Christian Britain', broadcast talk included in *The Church Looks Ahead*, Faber & Faber, 1941, pp 116-117.

culture, all this was when he recommended it to the public in his 1941 broadcast. He commended a higher option such as this for the elect, for the faithful, but failed to see that what he gestured to, in the broadcast and in his play *The Family Reunion* would be seen as an oddity.

Dante's *Commedia* or *Divine Comedy* takes up the pre-Reformation theology of the age of Thomas Aquinas and describes a journey or pilgrimage through imagined space and time in which Dante himself is guided first through hell, then purgatory and finally to paradise. For some years Eliot carried a pocket edition in Italian and English as others might carry a New Testament. A very rough account of Eliot's writing career aligns *The Waste Land* with hell. The 1927 baptism and confirmation mark a transition from hell to purgatory, when he takes the long road of penitence in hopes of finding the grace of God and forgiveness for his past life. Several works bear witness to this protracted penitent struggle through a continuing sense of guilt: *Ash-Wednesday* for instance, or *The Family Reunion*. The goal, paradise, a happy issue from all his afflictions, was to come, if at all (who are we to say?) after many years. There are fleeting glimpses in *Four Quartets*. Then there is the happiness, albeit on another plane, he found in his second marriage, and of which he affords a glimpse in the dedication to his last play *The Elder Statesman*. Other glimpses are in the uncollected pieces available in the 2015 two volume edition of the poems. The biographer who pays closest attention to Eliot's pilgrimage is Lyndall Gordon. Her latest book, revised as *The Imperfect Life of T.S. Eliot*, was published as a single volume in 2012.

The references to guilt and penitence I have made, and that Eliot made, call for some explanation. Why did he feel so acutely that the way to what he called 'spiritual perfection' was so hard, so agonising? And why did he look for salvation not through a conversion like that of Paul or Augustine, but through penance, suffering and religious observance? Was his theological understanding un-Reformed? We might think so, despite the reference in *East Coker* to 'the wounded surgeon', Christ. He set much store in these years on the negative theology of St John of the Cross. He read such mystics on the dark night of the soul. He stayed in Anglican religious communities like the one at Kelham. When he lived in Cheyne Walk in Chelsea, sharing a flat with John Hayward, his monk-like rule was apparent. He left every morning at 6.30, taking the bus to his church, St Stephen's, Gloucester Road, for communion. There he made auricular confession at regular intervals, and he observed the fasts and high mass. In 1928 he took a vow of celibacy.

This takes us towards the heart of the matter, his troubled relationships with women, with his wife. The biographies by Ackroyd, Lyndall Gordon and Robert Crawford supply most of the detail, as do the several volumes of Eliot letters still being published.² While he was studying at Harvard he fell in love with Emily Hale, whose family moved in the same New England circles as Eliot's. Before he left for Europe, where he was to spend a year at Merton College, Oxford, writing a PhD thesis for Harvard, he declared his love to her, but he wrote later that he 'had no reason to believe, from the way in which his declaration was received, that his feelings were returned "in any degree whatsoever".'³

² The eight volumes of *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition* were completed in 2019. Their digital format allows the insertion of newly discovered documents. <https://about.muse.jhu.edu/muse/eliot-prose/> accessed 16 Jan. 2020.

³ Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Waste Land*, 2015, p. 199. Peter Ackroyd's *T.S.*

In 1915 as his time approached to return home, Ezra Pound, a fellow poet and fellow American in London urged him to stay in England and to pursue a vocation as a poet and man of letters rather than as a teacher of philosophy. At this time Eliot met Vivienne Haigh-Wood. They were both on the rebound from rejections. Vivienne's mood swings and hysteria had caused her mother to 'warn off' (as her brother Maurice put it) a potential suitor, a London schoolteacher named Charles Buckle. Vivienne had been pursuing Eliot's American friend Scofield Thayer who was at Oxford for the same year as Eliot, until he left to return to America. To Eliot she seemed vivacious, and alluringly 'up for it', quite unlike the buttoned-up Unitarian girls back home. They were married in Hampstead Registry Office after knowing each other for five weeks. It was 'a disastrous mistake'.⁴

The John Betjeman connection⁵

John Betjeman's parents moved from Gospel Oak up to West Hill, Highgate in 1909 when he was three years old: 'Deeply I loved thee, 31 West Hill!'. Their semi-detached house was not as high up the hill as The Grove, where Coleridge had lodged. Betjeman spent five terms at Highgate Junior School ('two unsuccessful terms' in his memoir for an Eliot sixtieth birthday tributes volume⁶). He went on to the Dragon School, Oxford, then Marlborough ('unsuccessful'), after which Magdalen College Oxford, where his tutor was C.S. Lewis (also 'unsuccessful') and was rusticated before taking his degree, having failed in divinity. At Highgate Junior School from September 1915 he was made an object of scorn by boys who danced round him chanting, 'Betjeman's a German spy / Shoot him down and let him die.' His family originally were from eighteenth century Bremen, and his father spelt the name with two Ns, but during the war his mother decided to drop the second N to make it appear Dutch. He said afterwards that the school was a rough place. He was ambushed after school by two bullies who debagged him. He hated the headmaster E.H. Kelly whom he depicted in *Summoned By Bells* as a bully. Former pupils wrote to him with confirmatory experiences.

T.S. Eliot, 'the American master', who taught for the three terms of 1916, did not bully. So Betjeman said in the memoir he contributed to the March and Tambimuttu 1948 symposium. It was known among the boys that Eliot wrote poems, and young John, who had long been aspiring in the same way, gave him a manuscript of his own, ambitiously entitled 'The Best of Betjeman'. He didn't remember any response from Eliot, and forgot about it until Eliot reminded him of it in the 1930s, again without comment on the schoolboy efforts. In *Summoned by Bells* he wrote:

That dear good man, with Prufrock in his head
And Sweeney waiting to be agonized,
I wonder what he thought? He never says
When now we meet, across the port and cheese.

Eliot was published in 1984.

⁴ Crawford, p. 231.

⁵ This article was delivered in 2017 as a talk at the Theological Fellowship of St Michael's Church, Highgate, where the late Robert Willoughby was vicar. Robert had been for many years on the CLSG Committee. St Michael's was attended soon after its construction in the nineteenth century by S.T. Coleridge.

⁶ Tambimuttu and Richard March, *T.S. Eliot A Symposium*, 1948.

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He looks the same as then, long, lean and pale,
Still with the slow, deliberating speech
And enigmatic answers. At the time
A boy called Jelly said: 'He thinks they're bad' --
But he himself is still too kind to say.⁷

In his contribution to the 1948 *festschrift* Betjeman wrote:

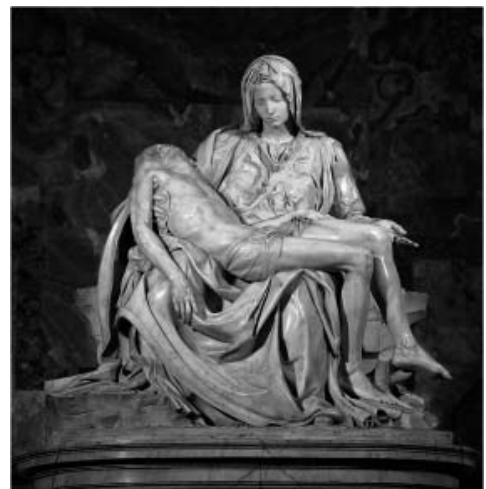
I hesitate to write of his soul's journey though it travels in the same carriage as mine, the dear old rumbling Church of England which is high, low and broad at once. I know that we are both 'high' and object to certain weaknesses of the system and that we both regard the Church of England ... as the Catholic Church of this country. For this reason we remain in it, though it sometimes leads us where we would not (p. 89).

He loved the 'delight in localness', especially London localisation, in Eliot's poems, but Betjeman makes a common mistake when he writes, 'We all remember the Bloomsbury of Prufrock'. Eliot said 'The Love Song' was 'conceived some time in 1910' and finished in Munich in 1911, so it's more likely the brown fog etc. reflect phenomena in St Louis.

In his biography (*Betjeman*, 2006) A.N. Wilson notes the similarity of their interests. Both loved the English music hall, London, the City, City churches, gentlemen's clubs. As the publisher of poetry at Faber & Faber Eliot tried to publish Betjeman in 1936, before he was taken up by John Murray. Faber did however publish Betjeman's *Shell Guides*.

Eliot Turns to the Church

Once he was married Eliot could no longer live the life of a graduate student, and since he had disregarded his parents' wishes that he pursue an academic career in philosophy, he felt he could no longer look to them for financial support. Hence the school teaching at High Wycombe and Highgate, and a stint of adult education lecturing. Later he took a job in Lloyds Bank in the City where he was involved with the international payments of the postwar reparations. The marriage to Vivienne was complicated, fraught. In 1921 he had what might be called a nervous breakdown, and on psychiatric advice took several months away from his work at the bank, going first to Margate, then to a clinic in Switzerland. It was in these circumstances that he put together *The Waste Land*. But the stresses went on. In May 1926 he visited Rome with his brother who had come over from St Louis, and on entering St Peter's he fell on his knees before the *Pietà*. That year he started to attend early morning communion, and in November asked fellow American William Force Stead, an ordained Anglican priest, if he would arrange a private baptism. A year after his visit to Rome he entered the Church of England by baptism and confirmation, and adopted British nationality. The doors at Finstock, near Oxford, were locked on 29 June 1927 for Eliot's baptism, and a verger was on duty to maintain secrecy during the ceremony. The day was long, being June, and after supper they took a walk in Wychwood, and got lost. One may think of



Michelangelo's *Pietà* at St. Peter's, Rome.

⁷ Quoted in Bevis Hillier, *Young Betjeman*, 1988.

the *selva oscura* at the beginning of Dante's great poem. Stead recalled Eliot's 'pacing under the mighty oaks and pushing his way through hazel thickets attired in a smart suit, a bowler hat, and grey spats'.⁸

The next morning he was driven to Cuddesdon where the Bishop of Oxford, Thomas Strong, spoke to him hurriedly for twenty minutes. No one had prepared Eliot for confirmation but Strong wanted him to get through without impediment, and soon was laying hands on him in his private chapel and praying 'Defend O Lord this thy servant with thy heavenly grace that he may continue thine for ever...'. Nine months later he made his first confession after finding a spiritual director, Francis Underhill. Following this he wrote to Stead of his extraordinary sense of surrender and gain, as if he had crossed a wide and deep river and there was no going back.⁹

Baptism is originally and traditionally a public act, but Eliot was secretive about his, as he had been about his impulsive marriage. But when he had a visit from one of his Harvard teachers, Irving Babbitt, who was in London in 1927 on his way back from Paris, Babbitt suggested that Eliot owed it to his readers to 'come out into the open'. The result was that in the preface to the collection of essays published the following year under the title *For Lancelot Andrewes*, he made a three-toned annunciation, writing that his 'point of view may be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion.'

There was an outcry from the *literati* who had regarded him as their spokesman, expressing in his writing the disillusionment of a generation. But he was also increasingly willing to take part in the public debates in and about the Church, and its role. For example he wrote a 32-page pamphlet 'Thoughts After Lambeth', subsequently included in the *Selected Essays*. It followed the official Report on the 1930 Anglican Lambeth conference. The pamphlet airs the interests and concerns of an Anglo-Catholic layman who doesn't mind pouring scorn on the bishops' report on the subject of 'Youth and its Vocation', saying that they 'had been listening to ordinary popular drivel about what the bishops themselves are supposed to believe.' He is concerned about increasing popular indifference to the Christian religion, and discusses the Anglican Church's establishment, the doctrine of the real presence in the mass (or holy communion), birth control, and ecumenism, including reunion with the Eastern Orthodox churches. For youth and for everybody,

the way of discipline must be emphasised; for even the humblest Christian layman can and must live what, in the modern world, is comparatively an ascetic life. Discipline of the emotions is even rarer, and in the modern world still more difficult, than discipline of the mind.... Thought, study, mortification, sacrifice, it is such notions as these that should be impressed upon the young.

If England is ever to be in any appreciable degree converted to Christianity, it can only be through the Church of England.... I prefer to think of the Church as what I believe it is more and more coming to be, not the 'English Church', but national as 'the Catholic Church in England'.... The Church of England is strengthening its position as a branch of the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church in England. I am not thinking of the deliberate struggles of one party within the Church, but of an inevitable course of events which has not been directed by human hands....

⁸ Lyndall Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T.S. Eliot*, 2012, p. 219 quoting Stead's *Reminiscences* (29 Apr 1940), Osborne Collection, Beinecke Library.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

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The Anglican Church is supposed to be divided, by newspaper verdict, either into Catholics and Modernists, or into Catholics and Evangelicals, or sometimes into Catholics, Modernists and Evangelicals.... It may well seem that nothing keeps it together but inertia, and the unwillingness, for various motives, to scrap an extensive plant of machinery.

Without using the term 'secularism' – as he doesn't use 'ecumenism' – he warns that 'the world is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilised but non-Christian mentality'. For mentality we might say ideology. Eliot says this can only be countered by the Christian faith, which he sees as the heart of true civilisation and the way to save the world (we infer 'from suicide').

He regularly attended an Anglo-Catholic summer school, and it was Bishop George Bell of Chichester who invited him to write *Murder in the Cathedral* to be performed where Becket had been martyred in 1170. As a leading layman he took an active part in, for example, the 1937 Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State, and in subsequent developments of an ecumenical nature. Following this, a weekly periodical, the *Christian News-Letter* was started. Eliot was a member of its small editorial committee, and used to attend meetings each week with J. H. Oldham, the editor. In August 1940 Oldham handed over the editing to Eliot for a three-week spell, and by this time it had a circulation of several thousands. His lectures at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, were published as *The Idea of a Christian Society* in 1939, and Eliot was a leading member of the Moot, a group of prominent intellectuals convened by Oldham after the 1937 Oxford Conference. Papers were presented at weekend conferences.¹⁰ Eliot contributed one on the role of elites in British society. This aspect of his work is discussed in my book *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (1971), now accessible on Amazon Kindle Direct.

Marriage and its aftermath

Vivienne was frequently ill, with 'neurasthenia' and other complaints, and Eliot often was. As time went by she was increasingly unstable, tormented we might say. Only a few months after their marriage she and Bertrand Russell went for a few days to Torquay, the beginning of an affair which went on for about three years, making of Eliot a cuckold. Her demands were relentless on Eliot's time and attention. He was patient and attentive, but not always. The letters show that they cared for each other, but in 1932 the relationship reached breaking point, and Eliot left her. He went to America on a long lecture tour, and made arrangements through his solicitor for separation. She would not accede, and his loyalty to the teaching of the church meant that divorce was not an option. She tried to track him down, called repeatedly at his office, but he refused all contact except through intermediaries like her brother. Her mental condition deteriorated even further, and with her brother's cooperation she was confined against her will in a psychiatric care home until her death from heart failure in 1947.

Relations with Emily Hale, broken off when Eliot came to England, were resumed in 1927. From that time she, a teacher now of drama, would spend summers staying for instance at Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds, and meeting Eliot. Eliot had taken his vow of celibacy, but the friendship meant a great deal to him. Emily understood his punctiliousness about the marriage vow, and there seemed to be an understanding

¹⁰ See Alec R. Vidler, *Scenes from a Clerical Life: An Autobiography*, 1977, pp. 118-119.

that if it were not for Vivienne, they would marry. Lyndall Gordon suggests that Emily represented the hope of the married happiness he had missed. His recourse to penitence and piety were the way through, yet when Vivienne's death made marriage to Emily a possibility the desire had gone.¹¹ In his pilgrimage Emily took on some of the character for Eliot of Dante's Beatrice.¹² Having rejected both Vivienne and Emily, Eliot had some reason to feel that he had guilt to expiate. Then in 1957, when there was no cause or just impediment to their being joined together, Eliot, who had married and been baptized precipitately and in secretive, private ceremonies, did it again with another clandestine marriage, and with multiple rejections of people close to him.

Leaving the flat shared with Hayward for an early 6.30 service he went out, without a word to his flatmate, not to St Stephen's, but to St Barnabas, Addison Road, the church where the French poet from whom the young Eliot had learnt much, Jules Laforgue, married an English girl. Eliot, then 68, married Valerie Fletcher, aged 30, his secretary. Emily took it bravely, courteous and considerate as always, but suffered serious depression and breakdown. Another stalwart friend, Mary Trevelyan, whom he had been seeing on a weekly basis, was similarly shocked not only at receiving no invitation or warning, but at Eliot's abrupt severing of communication with her. There was matter here, as there had been after the thirty years of renewed relations with Emily, for anguish, guilt and penitence.

Eliot's imagining of Becket's sermon of Christmas Day 1170, just before he was killed at the altar in Canterbury Cathedral, gives some idea of Eliot's ideal, 'spiritual perfection'. Martyrdom is a superior form of sainthood, understood in the Catholic rather than the New Testament sense, and is possible to one who has 'lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself.' Perhaps the austerity and rigour of Eliot's Anglo-Catholic observances were an attempt to lose himself in this way, and perhaps he tried to view the rejections as casting away lesser loves.

For an Anglo-Catholic the incarnation is a particularly important doctrine,¹³ and this is reflected in Eliot's contributions to a series published by Faber under the title *Ariel Poems*. 'The Journey of the Magi' in 1927 and 'A Song for Simeon' in 1928 are examples. Other poems followed in the series, such as 'Marina' and 'Triumphal March'.

The fourth section of the fourth *Quartet* written during the Second World War gives as 'the only hope' purgatorial fire by which one may find redemption from sin and error. The shirt of flame seems to have oblique reference to Eliot's troubled situation. Vivienne's behaviour had driven him away, and he was on his penitential pilgrimage, going through the fire. In the Greek myth Heracles is given a shirt made poisonous with the blood of the centaur Nessus. It was given to Heracles by his wife, and in his agony he throws himself onto a funeral pyre, making some analogy with flames of purgatory. Eliot seems to have believed that the narrative patterns he drew down into the *Quartets* could apply generally to human life, not only his own.

New love, New life/wife

With that purgatorial image we might break off from tracing his spiritual journey. In the last eight years of his life, with his second marriage, came a major change. In *Ash-*

¹¹ Lyndall Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T.S. Eliot*, 2012, p. 388.

¹² From 2020 biographers are able to access at Princeton more than a thousand of his letters to Emily Hale written from 1927 to 1956. He had all hers destroyed.

¹³ An excellent account of Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism is Barry Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 2010.

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Wednesday written not long after his baptism, the repeated phrase was 'Because I do not hope to turn again'. Yet now in another turning he turned from asceticism and the negative way, and passed into another, more carnal, perhaps in some way paradisaical mode. In 1960 the publication of an unexpurgated edition by Penguin Books of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a test case for the recent Obscene Publications Act. Eliot, who had found fault with Lawrence in his morally austere *After Strange Gods* (1934)¹⁴ was asked if he would give evidence. He agreed to do so – but for the defence. He was now blissfully married.¹⁵ His last play, *The Elder Statesman*, had a dedication:

To My Wife

To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my senses in our wakingtime
And the rhythm that governs our repose in the sleepingtime,
 The breathing in unison
Of lovers ...
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
And babble the same speech without need of meaning:
To you I dedicate this book, to return as best I can
With words a little part of what you have given me.
The words mean what they say, but some have a further meaning
 For you and me only.

A poem written in *Valerie's Own Book* reveals more:

When my tall girl sits astraddle on my lap,
She with nothing on and I with nothing on
And our middle parts are about their business,
I can stroke her back and her long white legs
And both of us are happy. Because she is a tall girl.

I love a tall girl.
I have a tall girl'
I am glad she is not a small girl.¹⁶

Eliot's troubles brought him from a personal hell to a personal purgatory and finally to a personal paradise. He wrote to Cyril Connolly a few months before he died, 'this last part of my life is the best, in excess of anything I could have deserved.'¹⁷

¹⁴ Eliot there found in Lawrence 'a distinct sexual morbidity', p. 58.

¹⁵ He was not in fact called. See my 'Knowing Good and Evil: T S Eliot and Lady Chatterley's Lover' in *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal*, Heldref Publications, Washington DC, Vol 11 No 3 Summer 1998.

¹⁶ 'How the Tall Girl and I Play Together', Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (eds.), *The Poems of T.S. Eliot: The Annotated Text*, Volume I: *Collected and Uncollected Poems*, and Volume II: *Practical Cats and Further Verses*, Faber & Faber, 2015, I.316. Ricks and McCue quote from Eliot's lecture 'The Three Voices of Poetry' (1953): 'a good love poem, though it may be addressed to one person, is always meant to be overheard by other people.'

¹⁷ Gordon, p. 513.

Notes on Contributors

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THE GLASS

Dr Roger Kojecký's *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, revised (2014) for the Amazon Kindle format, contains first publication of a paper on the role of the clergy contributed by Eliot to an elite discussion group, The Moot. He is among the contributors to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (IVP). He is Secretary of the Christian Literary Studies Group and has lectured at universities in Toronto, Xiamen and Shanghai.

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