

in English. The translation is exceptionally good, and it is a pity that the translator has remained anonymous. The author, in a foreword specially written for this edition, writes of 'assessing a cultural epoch as a whole . . . a more difficult and risky approach, one not previously tried; a comparative study of the essential characteristic features of the ancient Oriental civilizations.' 'To begin with' (he continues) 'it was necessary to define the spatial and temporal limits of the subject', and then in the first chapter, after speaking of what he calls the 'Oriental Renaissance' of our days (beginning in the discovery of Ugarit in 1928), he defines his limits of the 'Ancient Orient' (otherwise the Near East or the Mediterranean East) as including Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Arabia, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Iran (p. 7) as a cultural whole, excluding the 'more outlying cultures of Crete and the Indus', which belong to another field of study, and he then limits his time from the first documents of c. 3000 B.C., to the time of Alexander's conquest in 330 B.C., when the East came under Western domination. This time and space area is then studied by cultural areas: Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian, Egyptian, Hittite and Hurrian, Canaanite and Aramaean (including Ugaritic), Israelite, and finally Persian. In each section a similar plan is followed as explained in the foreword: 'dealing, not with history, but with the historical outlines; not with religion, but with the religious structure; not with literature, but with the literary genres; not with art, but with the artistic types'. In each case there is a complete impression of a whole culture, with many complete examples in each sphere, and of course full scholarly documentation for sources in the footnotes. A curious feature is however the omission, except for a passing reference on page 204 (in the Canaanite and Aramaean chapter), of the Philistines. The last chapter sets out to 'bring together the threads which link up facts and ideas . . . which create an organic whole'. There are thirty-two excellent plates, five plans and a good map.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

THE THIRD VOICE. Modern British and American Verse Drama. By Denis Donoghue. (Oxford University Press; 30s.)

Professor Donoghue's *The Third Voice* is concerned with what Eliot described as 'the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse'. His book is a witty, analytical and profound study of English and American twentieth-century poetic drama. Professor Donoghue shares with American critics such as Yvor Winters and R. P. Blackmur the ability to analyse and evaluate not only carefully but also enticingly. His own excitement communicates itself by means of a style which is vivid, pithy and concrete. He is at ease with generalizations simply because his primary concern is with particulars. Briefly, he is a master of the pertinent paradox.

Professor Donoghue declares that 'a play is "poetic" . . . when its concrete elements (plot, agency, scene, speech, gesture) continuously exhibit in their internal relationships those qualities of mutual coherence and illumination required of the words of a poem'. At the end of his survey he goes further

when he says that dramatic verse 'compels primary attention to the mind speaking rather than to the language being spoken'. Between these two definitions he demonstrates Yeats's concern with drama as ritual, Auden's use of the poetic play as a vehicle for ideas, the essential frivolity of Christopher Fry, and the various attempts at verse drama made by Cummings, Stevens, Pound, Eberhart and MacLeish. The centre of his book, however, is an extraordinarily eloquent and persuasive study of the development of Eliot's plays. Professor Donoghue sees each play as an advance both in the technique of verse for the theatre and also in the presentation of the interplay of one character with another. He praises Eliot for his increasing power to steep his ideas in personality and situation, for achieving in *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman* a poetic drama that is intensely human, that speaks to and for our own time.

Engaging and learned as Professor Donoghue's main thesis appears, it is, I think, wrong-headed. *The Family Reunion* has an ominous power which he too easily disclaims, while *The Cocktail Party* does not present 'the life of the common routine and the way of beatitude as totally discrete'. The latter play, surely, is an illustration of the Christian conception of 'divers gifts'. By rightly applauding the transparency and ease of the verse in the late plays and by perceiving a new warmth in Eliot's handling of character, Professor Donoghue ignores the fact that these plays have a very limp hold on the imagination. 'The disconsolate chimera' has been banished, yes, but what has taken its place is something too nebulous, too abstract to be experienced fully either on the page or in the theatre. The clue to all the plays is, as Professor Donoghue himself points out, the fact that they 'strive toward the condition of prayer'. If he had followed this idea through and seen the *mystical* element as the one important thing all the plays have in common, though in varying degrees, he would, I believe, have resisted the temptation to read into the last two plays a dramatic, human content which is acceptable on several levels. Eliot's vision is always a transcendent one and *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman* fail because they attempt to draw down that vision and imprison it in a secular context which it does not really fit. Thus these two plays are failures, it seems to me, both on the dramatic and the spiritual level. On the other hand, *The Family Reunion* is a success because it is content neither to be too explicit nor to make too many concessions.

It is a proof of Professor Donoghue's stimulating criticism and lively style that he arouses such disagreement. His learning is exuberant, his reading entirely assimilated and judiciously applied. *The Third Voice* is an invaluable contribution to a section of modern literature that too easily makes room for the spurious and the portentous.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

## NOTICES

FONTANA BOOKS have published two new titles, *MIRACLES* by C. S. Lewis and *MORALS AND MAN* by Gerald Vann, O.P. (each 2s. 6d.), which should