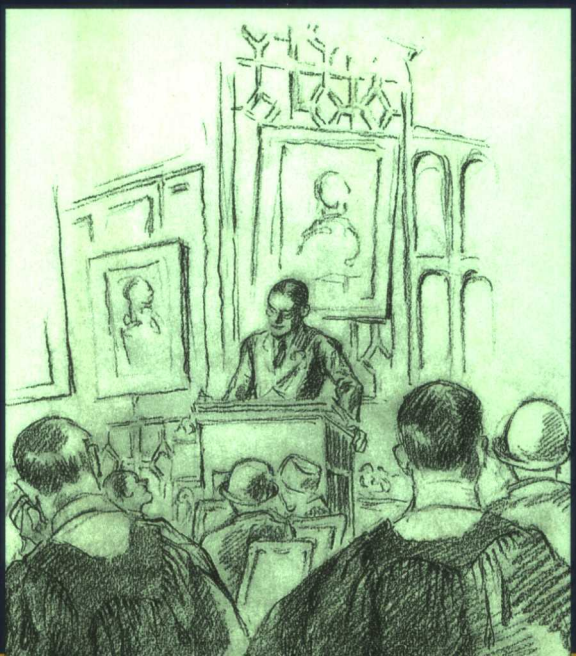
T. S. ELIOT

THE VARIETIES OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY RONALD SCHUCHARD



THE VARIETIES OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

by T. S. Eliot

THE CLARK LECTURES

at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1926

and

THE TURNBULL LECTURES

at The Johns Hopkins University, 1933

Edited and introduced by

RONALD SCHUCHARD

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT FORMS

Principal sources cited or quoted

PUBLISHED

BY T. S. ELIOT

ASG (UK/US)	*After Strange Gods*. London: Faber and Faber, 1934. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1934.
Criterion	*The Criterion*. Collected edition, 18 vols, ed. T. S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.
CPP (UK/US)	*The Complete Poems and Plays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1969. *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1952.
FLA (UK/US)	*For Lancelot Andrewes*. London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1929.
KEPB	*Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964.
L1	*The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vol. I, ed. Valerie Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1988. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.
L2	*The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vol. II, ed. Valerie Eliot. London: Faber and Faber; New York: Harcourt Brace & Company (in preparation).
OPP (UK/US)	*On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957.
SE (UK/US)	*Selected Essays*, third enlarged edition. London: Faber and Faber, 1951. *Selected Essays*, new edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950.
SW	*The Sacred Wood*, second edition. London: Methuen & Co., 1928. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1930.

TCC	*To Criticize the Critic.* London: Faber and Faber, 1965. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965.
UPUC (UK/US)	*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, second edition. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
WLF	*The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1971. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.

OTHER WORKS

CFQ	Helen Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets.* London: Faber and Faber, 1978.
Gosse I	Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, vol. I. London: William Heinemann, 1899.
Gosse II	– *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, vol. II. London: William Heinemann, 1899.
Grierson I	*The Poems of John Donne*, vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.
Grierson II	*The Poems of John Donne*, vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.
LMEP	Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets.* Chandos Classics, new edition. London: Frederick Warne, 1872.
MLPSC	*Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921.
OBEV	*The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918.
PBFV	*The Penguin Book of French Verse*, ed. Brian Woledge, Geoffrey Brereton and Anthony Hartley. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977.
Ser	*The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G. R. Potter and Evelyn M. Spearing, 10 vols. Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1953–62.
TC I	*The Inferno of Dante.* Temple Classics edition. London: J. M. Dent, 1909.

TC II	*The Purgatorio of Dante*. Temple Classics edition. London: J. M. Dent, 1910.
TC III	*The Paradiso of Dante*. Temple Classics edition. London: J. M. Dent, 1910.

PERIODICALS

RES I	Ronald Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916–1919', Part I, *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 25 (May 1974), pp. 163–73.
RES II	– 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer', Part II, *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 25 (August 1974), pp. 292–304.

All other published sources are cited in full at the first mention.

UNPUBLISHED

Berg	The Berg Collection, New York Public Library
Hopkins	The Ferdinand Hamburger, Jr Archives, The Johns Hopkins University
Houghton	The Houghton Library, Harvard University.
King's	Modern Archive Centre, King's College Library, Cambridge University
MS VE	Private collection, Mrs Valerie Eliot, London
Nottingham	University of Nottingham Library
Princeton	Princeton University Library
Smith	College Archives, Smith College
Texas	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin
Trinity	Trinity College Library, Cambridge University
Victoria	University of Victoria, British Columbia
Virginia	Alderman Library, University of Virginia

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot's immersion in the poetry of Dante, Donne and Laforgue at Harvard University led him to formulate a major theory of metaphysical poetry during his first decade as a poet and critic in London. Though its development was the driving force behind his critical reading and poetic practice, the theory remained fragmented in his literary reviews until it found sustained expression in his unpublished Clark Lectures, originally entitled 'ON THE METAPHYSICAL POETRY OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY with special reference to Donne, Crashaw and Cowley'. The eight lectures were delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1926, and though he planned to revise them as a book to be entitled *The School of Donne*, the project was gradually and reluctantly abandoned. Some scholars have had the privilege of reading the 184-page typescript at King's College, Cambridge, or the carbon copy at Harvard. Others have quoted from or paraphrased parts of the lectures in critical studies of his work, but most of Eliot's readers have had no access to this extraordinary exposition of learning in the year that preceded his religious conversion. Written under intense pressure during a period of great personal difficulty, the unrevised text survives as a crucial document of his intellectual life: much of his reading and writing for the twenty years preceding the lectures went into them; much of his critical activity in the twenty years following the lectures drew upon them. They were drafted and delivered at the turning point of his career: *The Sacred Wood* (1920) and *The Waste Land* (1922) were behind him; with all that lay before him as poet and playwright, he would never again find occasion to write at such length about the historical currents of poetry and philosophy that determined the shape of his work. It may be that the publication of Eliot's Clark Lectures on metaphysical poetry will have as much impact on our revaluation of his critical mind as did the facsimile

edition of *The Waste Land* (1971) on our comprehension of his poetic mind.

I

Eliot began to exercise his nascent theory of metaphysical poetry in his earliest reviews from 1917 to 1920, drawing upon Donne and Chapman to show the dissociation of object, feeling and thought in nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry. The critical preoccupation first appears in 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry' (1917), where he compares the relation of Donne, Wordsworth and the Georgian poets to their poetic objects, arguing that whereas the others derive their emotion from the object, in Donne the emotion and the object 'preserve exactly their proper proportions'[1]. In 'Observations' (1918) he tried his criterion on a contemporary poet, tentatively comparing the relation of thought and feeling in the poetry of Marianne Moore and Jules Laforgue: 'Even in Laforgue there are unassimilated fragments of metaphysics and, on the other hand, of sentiment floating about. I will not assert that Miss Moore is as interesting in herself as Laforgue, but the fusion of thought and feeling is perhaps more complete.'[2] Though Eliot was the first critic to point out the metaphysical strain in Chapman, he took pains in 'Swinburne and the Elizabethans' (1919) to assert that 'the quality in question is not peculiar to Donne and Chapman . . . In common with the greatest . . . they had some quality of sensuous thought, or of thinking through the senses, or of the senses thinking, of which the exact formula remains to be defined. If you look for it in Shelley or Beddoes . . . you will not find it, though you may find other qualities instead' (*SW* 23). In his first essay on Dante, originally entitled 'Dante as a "Spiritual Leader" ' (1920), he drew upon a book that he had read and mastered at Harvard, a book that had stimulated his theory and that was to become a central document in his Clark Lectures – George Santayana's *Three Philosophical Poets* (1910). Reacting to Santayana's study of Lucretius, Dante and Goethe as poets who give expression to a philosophical system, Eliot makes the distinction that what the philosophical poet really endeavours to find is 'the concrete poetic equivalent for this system – to find its complete equivalent in vision' (*SW* 161). He then declares that Dante's poetry contains 'the most comprehensive, and the

1 – *Egoist* (September 1917), p. 118.
2 – *Egoist* (May 1918), p. 70.

most *ordered* presentation of emotions that has ever been made' (*SW* 168). Dante was thus already in place as Eliot's distant point of reference for exploring what constitutes the 'metaphysical' in poetry, but his immediate fascination lay in working out the 'exact formula' of sensuous thought in Donne, Chapman and Laforgue for his own poetry and criticism.

By 1921 the resurgence of interest in metaphysical poetry had flooded the London literary world as critics 'rediscovered' Donne, Crashaw, Cowley and other poets of their school, and Eliot immediately plunged into the swell of commentary. The appearance of the third volume of George Saintsbury's *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period* was but one of several publishing events in 1921 that focused Eliot's mind on all things metaphysical. In these volumes he discovered new matter in the lesser-known metaphysicals – Bishop King, Edward Benlowes and Aurelian Townshend. On 22 April, he wrote to John Middleton Murry, who had recently reviewed *The Sacred Wood*, that he now envisaged 'A seventeenth Century volume to Pope with a *Nachblick* [glance] at Collins and Johnson' (*L1* 447). A tercentenary tribute to Andrew Marvell had afforded him the first of three major reviews in *TLS* between March and October. 'A poet like Donne . . . or Laforgue,' he wrote in 'Andrew Marvell', 'may almost be considered the inventor of an attitude, a system of feeling or of morals' (*SE* 292/251), but as he formulated these tentative statements the publication of Herbert Grierson's comprehensive anthology – *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* – pushed Eliot to 'a brief exposition of a theory' (*SE* 288/248), as he described it in his famous review, 'The Metaphysical Poets'. He looked upon Grierson's anthology as 'a provocation of criticism' (*SE* 281/241), and thus provoked he made his well-known declaration: 'In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation . . . was aggravated by the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden' (*SE* 288/247). There was, however, recognizably a small pocket of recovery in nineteenth-century France: 'Jules Laforgue, and Tristan Corbière', he declared, 'are nearer to the "school of Donne" than any modern English poet . . . they have the same essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind' (*SE* 290/249).

These declarations were yet to be developed, but Eliot had begun to outline a theory based on three metaphysical moments – Dante in Florence in the thirteenth century; Donne in London in the seventeenth century; Laforgue in Paris in the nineteenth century. Implicitly, there was a fourth moment at hand – Eliot in London in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, the

appearance of Mark Van Doren's *John Dryden* allowed Eliot to probe the alleged dissociation in a poet he deeply admired, Dryden, 'the ancestor of nearly all that is best in the poetry of the eighteenth century' (*SE* 305/264). So buoyed up was Eliot's mind by these metaphysical deliberations that it is startling to remember that he was then on the verge of an emotional collapse. In October 1921, after his doctor prescribed three months of rest, Eliot went off to the Albemarle Hotel in Margate, and then to a sanatorium near Lausanne, where he completed *The Waste Land*. During this unsettled period he wrote to his friend Richard Aldington not only about his '*aboulie* and emotional derangement' (*L1* 486), but about his discoveries of King, Cowley, Waller, Denham and Oldham. Moreover, in the pages of *TLS* he engaged Professor Saintsbury in spirited debate about the alleged presence of metaphysical qualities in Swinburne. On 15 November 1922, a month after the publication of *The Waste Land*, he wrote again to Aldington, who had become Eliot's assistant editor on the *Criterion*, and who had published an article on Cowley the previous year: 'Have you studied with any care Bishop King in Saintsbury's collection? He seems to me one of the finest and I have long desired to write a short paper about him. I want to write something about Cowley also, undeterred by the fact that you preceded me and probably know a great deal more about him' (*L1* 596–7).

During the next three years, the increasing distress of his personal life broke the momentum of Eliot's deliberations on metaphysical poetry. His work at Lloyds Bank, his editing of the *Criterion*, his wife's chronic illness and increasing dependence, together with his own frequent bouts of illness, were taking their physical and psychic toll. By the time the Woolfs persuaded him to collect and publish his three *TLS* reviews as *Homage to John Dryden* at the Hogarth Press in October 1924, he had assumed a weary, exhausted outlook on his work: 'Some apology' was called for, he wrote in his dispirited Preface to the volume, and he announced resignedly that the piecemeal theory represented here had since been abandoned:

> My intention had been to write a series of papers on the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; beginning with Chapman and Donne, and ending with Johnson. This . . . might have filled two volumes . . . the series would have included Aurelian Townshend and Bishop King, and the authors of 'Cooper's Hill' and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes,' as well as Swift and Pope. That which dissipation interrupts, the infirmities of age come to terminate . . . I have abandoned this design in the pursuit of other policies. I have long felt that

> the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries . . . possesses an elegance and a dignity absent from the popular and pretentious verse of the Romantic Poets and their successors. To have urged this claim persuasively would have led me indirectly into considerations of politics, education, and theology which I no longer care to approach in this way. I hope that these three papers may in spite of and partly because of their defects preserve in cryptogram certain notions which, if expressed directly, would be destined to immediate obloquy, followed by perpetual oblivion.[3]

Eliot's new friends at Cambridge, however, particularly I. A. Richards, would accept no apologies or pleas of infirmity from the author of *The Sacred Wood* and *The Waste Land*. Richards, who had enjoyed Eliot's poetry and friendship since he read *Ara Vos Prec* in 1920, had in 1922 become a lecturer for the new Cambridge School of English. Established in 1917, the School allowed students to opt for a course of modern English studies over traditional Anglo-Saxon, philological and editorial studies. To Richards, Eliot was '*the one hope*' for the school.[4] In the hope of luring him away from the bank to Cambridge, he had invited him up on several occasions to lecture or to attend his 'protocols' on Practical Criticism. Richards had also directed to Eliot's work the attention of E. M. W. Tillyard, Secretary of the Faculty Board of English, who was greatly impressed with *The Sacred Wood* and helped prepare the way for Eliot. 'Eliot's unconventional ideas irritated or delighted in the right way', wrote Tillyard. 'They were fresh and stirred people up and some of the people who were stirred up looked a bit more closely on account of the stirring.'[5] To Basil Willey, who became a lecturer for the School in 1923, Eliot 'was only one of many intruders into pre-lapsarian Cambridge. Yet I date the beginning of the climatic change from the day when Tillyard casually

3—*Homage to John Dryden* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 9. F. R. Leavis was to recall that '*The Sacred Wood* . . . had very little influence or attention before the Hogarth Press brought out *Homage to John Dryden* . . . It was with the publication in this form of those essays (the Hogarth Press had recently published *The Waste Land*) that Eliot became the important contemporary critic. It was the impact of this slender new collection that sent one back to *The Sacred Wood* and confirmed with decisive practical effect one's sense of the stimulus to be got from that rare thing, a fine intelligence in literary criticism.' *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), pp. 177–8.

4—'On TSE', in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, ed. Allen Tate (New York: Dell, 1966; London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 3.

5—*The Muse Unchained: An Intimate Account of The Revolution in English Studies at Cambridge* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1958), p. 98.

observed, to me, at the end of a walk round Grantchester, that there was a new chap called T. S. Eliot for whom one should be on the look-out.'[6] Both Tillyard and Willey would testify to the immediate impact that the essays in *Homage to John Dryden* had on English studies, and in November 1924 – his apologetic Preface ignored, his wife temporarily in a sanatorium in Paris – Eliot was back at Cambridge lecturing on George Chapman. He now had a student following, and the editor of the undergraduate magazine, *Granta*, noted on 7 November that 'the most discussed of contemporary highbrows' would appear before the Cam Literary Club the following evening at the Tea Shop:

> Mr. Eliot is notorious for his poem 'The Waste Land,' which has occasioned nearly as many disputes as Prohibition . . . many a home has been broken up owing to a difference of opinion as to its poetic merits! The Secretary says that he had hoped to obtain larger premises, but he has not yet been able to. Members or guests are therefore advised to appear fairly punctually, unless they want to sit on the floor.[7]

It happened that Eliot's London friend and intellectual antagonist, John Middleton Murry, now editor of the *Adelphi*, had been elected Clark Lecturer for 1924–5, and in the autumn and winter of that academic year he gave ten lectures on 'Keats and Shakespeare'. In an act of intellectual generosity, Murry, the apologist for Romanticism, nominated Eliot, the apologist for Classicism, to succeed him as Clark Lecturer the following year. On 20 February, while Eliot nursed Vivien through a dreadful illness, he wrote in excited gratitude to Murry:

> £200 would make ~~a vast~~ just all the difference to my inclination to jump out into the world this year – and the appointment is very attractive. Meanwhile could you let me know the terms and conditions – i.e. *subject* of lectures, expenses whether one is put up at Trinity, whether fares paid etc – and anything else – whether it is definitely during the winter term? . . . You must have realised that your proposal of my name, and the hope of this job, would come as a ray of hope just at the *blackest moment of my life*. I think there is no doubt I should accept. (*L* 2)

Murry's thoughtful and encouraging reply brought even more light to Eliot's darkened life. 'The subject you suggest was of course an intuition on

6 – *Cambridge and Other Memories 1920–1953* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. 26.
7 – 'The Waste-Landers', *Granta* (7 November 1924), p. 70.

your part', Eliot wrote on 22 February. 'What I am aching to do if acceptable is to take the 17th C. metaphysicals (not only the poets, but the Cambridge platonists) and compare and contrast them with Dante and his school (Guido, Cino etc.) and this would be a big job – and primarily for the "hypothetical". What you say merely convinces me that I want to do this' (*L* 2). Eliot was immensely grateful to Murry for what he saw as an act of genuine friendship. 'Other people have offered things, gifts, but no one, except you, has ever come with them exactly at the right moment. What is this except friendship?'

'Murry's star sank as Eliot's rose', wrote Murry's biographer, 'rather ironically, since it was due to his own exertions, in the face of staunch opposition to an American, that Eliot was offered the next series of Clark Lectures.'[8] In fact, the Trinity College Council had initially nominated its own Fellow, A. E. Housman, who prudently declined the burden. His letter to the Master of Trinity, Sir Joseph Thomson, was read to the Council on 27 February 1925:

> If I devoted a whole year (and it would not take less) to the composition of six lectures on literature, the result would be nothing which could give me, I do not say satisfaction, but consolation for the wasted time; and the year would be one of anxiety and depression, the more vexatious because it would be subtracted from those minute and pedantic studies in which I am fitted to excel and which give me pleasure. I am sorry if this explanation is tedious, but I would rather be tedious than seem thankless and churlish.[9]

Housman's declination opened the way for Eliot's supporters: at the next meeting on 6 March, 'It was agreed that the lectureship for 1925–26 be offered to Mr. T. S. Eliot' (Trinity). Recovering from a protracted bout of flu, Eliot was exhilarated by this gesture of intellectual acceptance, however controversial he knew the invitation must have been. Here was the chance and the challenge to flesh out his theory, to consider the transformations in metaphysical literature from Dante to Laforgue in relation to the political, philosophical and theological forces that had become central to his intellectual life. At a special meeting convened on 24 April, the minutes record that 'Mr. T. S. Eliot was appointed Lecturer . . . and the subjects proposed for his Lectures approved' (Trinity).

8–F. A. Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 130.
9–*The Letters of A. E. Housman*, ed. Henry Maas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 228.