



The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry

T. S. Eliot

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While a student at Harvard in the early years of this century, T. S. Eliot immersed himself in the verse of Dante, Donne, and the nineteenth-century French poet Jules Laforgue. His study of the relation of thought and feeling in these poets later led Eliot, as a poet and critic in London, to formulate an original theory of the poetry generally termed "metaphysical"—philosophical and intellectual poetry that revels in startlingly unconventional imagery. Eliot came to perceive a gradual "disintegration of the intellect" following on three "metaphysical moments" of European civilization—the thirteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries. The theory is at once a provocative prism through which to view Western intellectual and literary history and an exceptional insight into Eliot's own intellectual development.

This annotated edition includes the eight Clark Lectures on metaphysical poetry that Eliot delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge in 1926, and their revision and extension for his three Turnball Lectures at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1933. They reveal in great depth the historical currents of poetry and philosophy that shaped Eliot's own metaphysical moment in the twentieth century.

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