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The Insistence of Art

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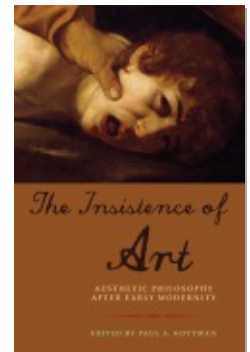
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How Do We Recognize Metaphysical Poetry?

Andrew Cutrofello

Metaphysical poetry, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. Or so T. S. Eliot might have written, had he written in the style of Adorno.¹ Eliot believed that metaphysical poetry, which seemed obsolete to Dryden and Johnson, lived on because the moment to bring it back within the “main current” of English literature was missed when Keats and Shelley died young.² In his 1921 review of Herbert Grierson’s anthology *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, Eliot characterized metaphysical poetry as poetry that expressed the experiential force of thought. Donne was able to write metaphysical poetry because he experienced his thoughts as objects. After Donne, a “dissociation of sensibility” severed the link between thought and experience.³ In the eighteenth century, it was impossible to appreciate Donne, let alone to write like him. The sentimental poets “thought and felt by fits,” while in Keats and Shelley “there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility.” Instead of continuing that struggle, “Tennyson and Browning [merely] ruminated,” that is, expressed their unexperienced thoughts in unmetaphysical verse.⁴ Metaphysical poetry lived on because the spirit of Donne still walked abroad.

However, this critical assessment turned out to be only half of Eliot's story. In his 1926 Clark lectures he argued that in comparison with the metaphysical poetry of Dante and his circle, Donne's metaphysical poetry was metaphysical in a less comprehensive sense. For although Donne gave poetic expression to his experience of his own thoughts, his thoughts were not themselves metaphysical—not, at any rate, systematically metaphysical—as were the thoughts whose experience Dante expressed in the *Vita Nuova* and *Commedia*. While denying that metaphysical poetry could be reduced to philosophical poetry, that is, to poetry that directly expresses philosophical ideas, Eliot nevertheless privileges a variety of metaphysical poetry with respect to which Donne's variety represents a deviation, if not a falling away. Hence the dissociation of sensibility after Donne turns out to be only a secondary aspect of Eliot's larger account of the process by which metaphysical poetry came to seem obsolete at the end of the seventeenth century. Within this larger critical framework, the efforts of Shelley and Keats to revive the metaphysical tendency in poetry would have to be considered not only with respect to the "struggle toward unification of sensibility" that Eliot perceived in *The Triumph of Life* and the second *Hyperion*, but, more fundamentally, with respect to the character of the thought they brought to bear on this struggle.⁵ Instead of simply rehabilitating the School of Donne, Eliot aspired to make sense of the relationship between metaphysics and metaphysical poetry without reducing either to the other. To carry out this critical task it would be necessary to investigate the varieties of metaphysics as well as the varieties of metaphysical poetry. But Eliot only broached this task, while the New Critics largely neglected it. Hence metaphysical poetry, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.

From another point of view, metaphysical poetry is a seventeenth-century genre that was retrospectively dubbed metaphysical by an eighteenth-century critic. As such, it has led a merely posthumous existence. Perhaps by reexamining its christening and subsequent critical reception we can begin to clarify the sense in which it lives on, awaiting a realization still to come.

In the introduction to *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, Grierson distinguished metaphysical poetry in "the full sense of the term" from the metaphysical poetry of "Donne and his followers to Cowley": "Metaphysical poetry, in the full sense of the term, is a poetry which, like that of the *Divina Commedia*, the *De Natura Rerum*, perhaps Goethe's *Faust*, has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the rôle assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of

existence.”⁶ Grierson excludes Milton from this list since “Milton was no philosopher. . . . He proved nothing. The definitely stated argument of [*Paradise Lost*] is an obvious begging of the question.” On the other hand, Grierson acknowledges that Milton is metaphysical in a “large way” that “Donne and his followers to Cowley are not.”⁷ Grierson is less precise about the sense in which the term “metaphysical” applies to Donne and his followers. He associates “the metaphysical strain” with “the more intellectual, less verbal, character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination.”⁸

As an explication of metaphysicality this is somewhat vague, but no more so than Dryden’s critical complaint that Donne “affects the metaphysics,” or Johnson’s characterization of Cowley and his “race” as metaphysical poets. When Johnson called Cowley a metaphysical poet, he didn’t mean that Cowley wrote poetry that was inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence. That was something that Cowley’s contemporary Milton did, but Milton was not a metaphysical poet in Johnson’s sense. Cowley was metaphysical not because he wrote poetry about metaphysical topics, but because he wrote in a metaphysical manner. His metaphysicality was a matter of form or style rather than of content. To write metaphysically meant to write “wittily.” True wit consisted in the ability to bring apparently opposite things into harmony with one another. As such, it went beyond mere wordplay. As Cowley put it in his “Ode on Wit”: “’Tis not when two like words make up one noise;/Jests for *Dutch Men*, and *English Boys*. . . . In a true piece of *Wit* all things must be,/Yet all things there agree.”⁹ Johnson criticized Pope for reducing wit to mere verbal cleverness: Pope “depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.”¹⁰ Cowley’s wit was both more intellectual and more object-oriented than Pope’s. It could be said to have a metaphysical dimension insofar as it deals with things rather than with words. But Johnson calls Cowley a metaphysical poet for a different reason, namely, that Cowley displays an excess of wit. He seeks “rather to impress sentences upon the understanding than images on the fancy.” He also writes inelegantly, hiding the “intellectual gold” his wit has mined “in unrefined and plebeian words, that none but philosophers can distinguish it.”¹¹ To grasp his meaning, readers must exercise their own wits. Because Cowley scants fancy and lacks elegance, he is more of a versifier than a

true poet. Fancy and elegance without wit are superficial, but wit without fancy and elegance is (too) metaphysical. Thus metaphysical poetry for Johnson is poetry that dissociates wit (thought) from fancy (sensibility)—a critical assessment that Eliot would have to finesse, if not reverse, in order to maintain that Donne rather than Cowley, and unification rather than dissociation, were truly metaphysical. Hence Johnson's famous critical complaint: "Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions."¹²

We may wonder why it wasn't a distinctive feature of metaphysical poetry as Johnson understood it to draw witty *contrasts* as well as comparisons—for the poet to explain how the right eye of his mistress differed from her left, or why a right-hand glove and its mirror image were incongruent counterparts. For Johnson, wit is exclusively a matter of violently yoking together the most heterogeneous ideas, not of violently dividing the most homogeneous. Drawing distinctions was the prerogative of a different mental faculty, namely, judgment. Distinguishing judgment from wit was something that seventeenth-century English philosophers were doing at the same time that the metaphysical poets were writing their witty poems. As Locke explained in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*: "For *Wit* lying most in the assemblage of *Ideas*, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable Visions in the Fancy: *Judgment*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, *Ideas*, wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another."¹³ As a natural philosopher seeking to understand the nature of human understanding, Locke was exercising his own capacity for judgment when he not only distinguished judgment from wit but ranked judgment higher than wit. Cowley did the opposite in his "Ode on Wit," wittily showing wit to advance human understanding more than judgment ("Some things do through our Judgment pass / As through a *Multiplying Glass*. / And sometimes, if the *Object* be too far, / We take a *Falling Meteor* for a *Star*").¹⁴ Johnson's complaint that Cowley's amalgamating wit pleased the understanding but scanted fancy differed from Locke's assessment only because he expected poetry to please fancy (as did Locke) and because he found Cowley's wit to be sufficiently judicious to avoid making superficial

or irrelevant comparisons. It was *injudicious* wit that yoked anything and everything together.

By the time Johnson was exercising his critical judgment, the seventeenth-century “quarrel” between wit and judgment had been largely decided in favor of judgment.¹⁵ Amalgamating wit involved yoking together heterogeneous phenomena in the expectation that any similarities that came to light must have some metaphysical significance, even if that significance wasn’t self-evident and so had to be interpreted. As Foucault points out in *The Order of Things*, both the strength and the weakness of this model lie in its open-endedness.¹⁶ The world was a metaphysical poem subject to an endless proliferation of interpretations.¹⁷ Metaphysical poets interpreted the world in ever-new ways, lending their poems, as extended parts of the world, to further interpretations. Bacon, like his predecessors, compared apparently different things with an eye toward perceiving hidden resemblances, but he also sought to distinguish things that looked superficially similar. For the classificatory purposes of the new science, comparison became part of the joint activity of comparing *and* contrasting. To amalgamate in this new sense meant to subsume different species under common genera, whereas to differentiate meant to divide genera into distinct species.¹⁸ Amalgamation without differentiation simply mixed things up; it was foolish. Wit had once been the prerogative of the Fool, but now folly had lost its claim to a special type of knowledge.¹⁹ For Galileo, the world was not an ever-expanding metaphysical poem but a structurally stable book written in univocal mathematical prose.

Johnson belonged to this new critical worldview. But so, in a way, did Cowley, whose excessive wit Johnson criticized not because it swung free of judgment, but because it swung free of fancy.²⁰ The metaphysical poetry that Johnson criticized was highly ironic and by no means committed to a philosophical conception of the world as a metaphysical poem. To identify a poet who belongs to the older paradigm we have to go back to Donne, as Eliot did. Donne’s wit is purely comparative, expecting to find genuine metaphysical significance in odd resemblances such as the similarity between the experience of being bitten by the same flea and the exchange of bodily fluids during sexual intercourse. Eliot agrees with Johnson about the dissociated character of the wit of Cowley (“a poor metaphysical”),²¹ but he maintains that Donne’s wit and fancy were fused: “A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience.”²² In “Andrew Marvell,” Eliot places Marvell on the side of Donne; the wit expressed in “To His Coy Mistress” “is not only combined

with, but fused into, the imagination." Marvell's "witty fancy" is contrasted with Cowley's overindulgence not in wit, *pace* Johnson, but fancy.²³ Cowley is a contemporary of Milton's, and well on his way toward Dryden.

By going back to Donne and Marvell, and, ultimately, to Dante and Cavalcanti, Eliot sought "to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling." "The [modern metaphysical] poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning."²⁴ The difference between Dante and Donne was that Dante had a single, systematic thought about a unified world for which he found a poetic equivalent, whereas Donne had fragmented thoughts about a disunified world for which he found a series of poetic equivalents.²⁵ Both deserved the title of metaphysical poet because they both gave poetic expression to the world as they found it; the difference was that the world that Donne found, or found himself in, was in a state of disintegration.²⁶ If Dante emerges in the Clark lectures as a truer metaphysical poet, or a metaphysical poet in a more comprehensive sense, it is insofar as his systematic thought about a unified world is explicitly metaphysical, whereas Donne's fragmented thoughts about a disintegrated world are only implicitly metaphysical, the decline of metaphysical thinking being one of the symptoms of worldly disintegration and fragmentation of thought.

William Empson had a different understanding of Donne's metaphysicallity. What Eliot took to be Donne's disjointed thoughts about a disintegrated world Empson took to be multiple thoughts about plural worlds.²⁷ Donne's metaphysical poetry was the objective correlative of Empson's own celebration of poetic ambiguity.²⁸ Empson's reflections on the nature of poetic ambiguity were later taken up by two very different thinkers who tried to make sense of the relationship between metaphysics and poetry.

Paul de Man credited Empson with showing that "true poetic ambiguity proceeds from the deep division of Being itself."²⁹ For de Man, a metaphysical poetry worthy of the name would express not a "reconciliation of opposites," but a dissociation of opposites, including that of thought (or spirit) and sensibility: "The ambiguity poetry speaks of is the fundamental one that prevails between the world of the spirit and the world of sentient substance: to ground itself, the spirit must turn itself into sentient substance, but the latter is knowable only in its dissolution into non-being."³⁰ In his critical response to Heidegger's commentaries on Hölderlin, de Man stresses being's "antithetical" character: "The poet may have varied in his way of naming the two dimensions of Being, which he has designed [or 'designated?'] by several pairs of terms: nature and art; chaotic and organic;

divine and human; heaven and earth; but at no point has he wavered with respect to his knowledge of its necessarily antithetical structure.”³¹ This is not just a point about ineffability, which for Eliot would disqualify a poet from counting as metaphysical.³² Nor is it simply a debate with Heidegger about the nature of the limits of metaphysical thinking, and how these limits are expressed in Hölderlin’s poetry. It is also a claim about the nature of a poetic practice that would deserve to be called “metaphysical.”

José Benardete gives Empson’s thesis a different twist. He does so by distinguishing rhetorical tropes from ontological tropes. Rhetorical tropes are expressions that nonliterally designate ways of being, whereas ontological tropes are expressions that *literally* designate ways of being that are “*pros hen* equivocal” with respect to a primary way of being.³³ According to Aristotle, being is said primarily of substance and only secondarily, tertiarily, and so on of the other categories (quality, quantity, relation, etc.). Benardete’s suggestion is that these other categories can be thought of as ontological tropes. Their *pros hen* equivocity with respect to the category of substance would be tropological but not rhetorical, at least not if we can distinguish literal and nonliteral expressions or uses of expressions. If “poetics in the broad sense of the term is the study of the non-literal, as opposed to the literal, use of language,” as Benardete argues, then de Man’s appropriation of Empson’s thesis can be restated as the claim that metaphysics is one of the objects of poetic investigation.³⁴ Benardete puts this proposal to the test by considering the debate between Platonists and nominalists about the nature of abstract singular terms. For a Platonist, an everyday expression such as “the number of apples in this basket” is to be taken as literally referring to an abstract entity, whereas for a nominalist it is to be taken as nonliterally indicating some way in which the apples themselves are being considered.³⁵ Benardete draws several conclusions from this contrast. First, metaphysical debates often turn on whether an expression is being used literally or nonliterally. Second, and somewhat surprisingly, it is not the “visionary Platonist” but the “down-to-earth nominalist” who insists on construing “the number of apples in this basket” nonliterally, i.e., poetically.³⁶ Third, “poetry and ontology [or metaphysics] alike may thus be seen to be incipiently emerging in the ambiguous role played by the abstract singular term in our mother tongue.”³⁷ By way of illustration (and further complication), Benardete invites us to consider the use of the abstract singular term “the anger of Achilles” in the first line of the *Iliad*.³⁸ Does Homer use this phrase literally or nonliterally? If nonliterally, that is, “poetically,” then it is a tropological “nominalization” of “the basic sentence, ‘Achilles is angry.’” If instead we take “the trope literally and

ontologically rather than non-literally and ‘poetically,’” it would then refer not to a Platonic universal, namely, the form of anger, but rather to what D. C. Williams (somewhat confusingly) calls a “trope,” that is, a *particular* anger, Achilles’ anger.³⁹ How are we to choose between these two interpretations, the literal and the nonliteral? More to the point, *can* we choose in a way that would be nonarbitrary? Appealing, as de Man does, to Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Benardete argues that “we should probably rejoice in the ambiguity of ‘the anger . . . of Achilles’ as to whether it is to be taken as involving an ontological or a rhetorical trope.”⁴⁰ After all, “poetry revels in such ambiguity.”⁴¹ To represent “the anger of Achilles” simply as a “reification of a character trait” would be to treat Homer’s ambiguous poem as if it were a prosaic realist novel. Against such a reductive reading, Benardete praises “the efforts of the French school to ‘deconstruct’ the positivistic photo-realism of the nineteenth-century novel.”⁴² To revel in Homer’s ambiguity amounts to recognizing him as a kind of metaphysical poet—a reading that invites us to construe the “ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry” as a quarrel between metaphysics and metaphysical poetry.

According to Benardete, the philosopher “who has trained us to hear the music of ontological commitment in all sorts of discourse” is not Heidegger, but Quine.⁴³ Quine’s dictum, “To be is to be the value of a variable,” provides a purely logical definition of a primary sense of being with respect to which all others can be regarded as *pros hen* equivocal.⁴⁴ The litmus test for distinguishing between literal and nonliteral uses of linguistic expressions is what a speaker or writer is prepared to quantify over, that is, to speak about in the idiom of logical quantification. Hence what Benardete characterizes as “Quinean poetics” is the art of determining, as far as possible, what objects a discourse includes in its ontology.

Benardete’s picture of Quinean poetics would have to be complicated by Hilary Putnam’s observation that logical operators such as the existential quantifier are themselves equivocal. Given two disparate models of what there is, the very sense in which they disagree about what there is will be equivocal, since each model will have its own interpretation of the existential quantifier. According to Putnam, we cannot get around this problem by positing a common set of objects that rival conceptual schemes “carve up” in different ways, for there is neither scheme-independent “stuff” nor any scheme-neutral use of the existential quantifier: “What is wrong with the notion of objects existing ‘independently’ of conceptual schemes is that there are no standards for the use of even the logical notions apart

from conceptual choices.”⁴⁵ The logical operator “There exists an x such that . . .” is said in as many ways as there are types of discourse. In addition, there is no primary way with respect to which the others would be *pros hen* equivocal. This is not to say that what there is is completely up for grabs. Once we choose a particular scheme we thereby fix a particular sense of the existential quantifier that is univocal relative to that scheme. We also get worldly constraints on what entities we are entitled to posit. Metaphysical pluralism only goes as far as scheme pluralism; it doesn’t extend to things as they are in themselves, if only because it eliminates the *concept* of scheme-independent things in themselves. Still, this leaves Quinean poetics in the position of having to acknowledge that “to be is to be the value of a variable” is radically equivocal, and not merely equivocal with respect to a primary sense. The very distinction between literal and nonliteral uses of language would have to be regarded as radically equivocal. Should we then conclude that metaphysics is merely a form (perhaps the highest form) of metaphysical poetry? Or can we still affirm the difference between metaphysics and metaphysical poetry while acknowledging their tendency to mutually interfere with each other?

Perhaps we can begin to answer these questions by going back to Aristotle. In chapter 9 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle famously claims that “poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars.”⁴⁶ Since being is the highest universal, the highest form of poetry would be poetry that speaks of being. Such poetry would be more metaphysical than other forms of poetry and so more worthy of the serious attention of the metaphysician. On the basis of the serious attention that Aristotle gives to tragedy, we might justifiably attribute to him the view that tragedy is a type of metaphysical poetry (though we would have to factor in his lost book on comedy, keeping in mind that for Hegel comedy is a higher form of art than tragedy). Aristotle remarks that Euripides is “regarded as the most tragic of our dramatic poets,” thereby suggesting that Euripides is the most metaphysical.⁴⁷ However, he also reports Sophocles’ assertion that he, Sophocles, depicted “people as they ought to be, whereas Euripides portrayed them as they are.”⁴⁸ This could be taken to suggest that Sophocles’ characters are more universal, Euripides’ more particular. Would Sophocles, then, be more metaphysical than Euripides? Or would Euripides, the more tragic, be more metaphysical than Sophocles? Either way, where would we place Shakespeare? Johnson praised Shakespeare for representing ideal character types rather than particular individuals, whereas Coleridge felt it

was the uniqueness of Shakespeare's characters that brought them to life. Would Johnson's Shakespeare be more metaphysical than Coleridge's, or would Coleridge's be more metaphysical than Johnson's?

Whether one privileges the "Sophoclean" side of Shakespeare, as Johnson does, or the "Euripidean" side, as Coleridge does, the way in which Shakespeare "speaks of being" is difficult to pin down. Michael Witmore has argued that "Shakespeare favoured a view of the world in which order and change are seen to emerge holistically from things themselves (immanence) rather than being localized in certain metaphysically isolated pockets of the universe (punctualism)."⁴⁹ Despite its wording, this is a claim about how Shakespeare's dramaturgy works rather than a claim about how Shakespeare actually viewed the world. Witmore is not attributing to Shakespeare what Grierson called "a philosophical conception of the universe and the rôle assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence." But Witmore is right to observe that Shakespeare conveys an overall sense of being, whether it is best expressed in terms of immanence or transcendence, univocity or ambiguity, unification or dissociation. James Bednarz has observed that Grierson pointedly excluded Shakespeare from his anthology of metaphysical poetry.⁵⁰ Yet, as Bednarz points out, "The Phoenix and Turtle" can lay claim to being a metaphysical poem insofar as its "allegory becomes so complex that it might justifiably be termed a metaphysical conceit."⁵¹ George Saintsbury noted the poem's anticipation of Donne's metaphysical style. Bednarz goes further in suggesting that Donne may have read it and been influenced by it.⁵² Shakespeare would then be the founder of the seventeenth-century metaphysical tradition as Eliot originally conceived it. But what about Shakespeare the dramatist?

In his late essay "Eliot and the Shudder," Frank Kermode recalls a time when it was a New Critical commonplace to speak of Donne and "the metaphysical shudder." Eliot professed to have shuddered at Charmian's last words in *Antony and Cleopatra*: "Ah, soldier." Kermode calls attention to another Shakespearean shudder, one that Paulina induces in Leontes, Perdita, and us:

The repentant Leontes is tormented by faint and presumably deceptive signs of life in the supposed statue of his dead wife, until he says: "Still methinks/There is an air comes from her. What fine chisel/Could ever yet cut breath?" However fine the workman, statues cannot be made to breathe; but we nevertheless experience this marvellous intermediate phase when stone is magically refined to breath and the revelation of Hermione's living presence, another even greater miracle, will follow.⁵³

In this quiet critical remark, Kermode explains why he regards the dramatic Shakespeare as a metaphysical poet of a certain sort. We shudder at Paulina's resurrection of Hermione not because she proves a point, nor because her act is equivocal (though it is), but because through it, she invites us to take part in an event: "It is requir'd/You do awake your faith." Like the messianic "sparks" that made Walter Benjamin shudder at *Hamlet*, Paulina's awakening of faith—or of what Coleridge specified as "poetic faith"—makes us shudder at the realization, however fleeting, of metaphysical poetry.⁵⁴

NOTES

1. "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed." Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1973), 3.

2. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 375.

3. *Ibid.*, 380.

4. *Ibid.*, 381.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, Donne to Butler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), xiii. Though he doesn't say so, Grierson's list is evidently borrowed from George Santayana's *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1910). Eliot made the connection explicit in his Clark lectures: "If you identify 'metaphysical' with 'philosophical' and limit 'philosophical' to those poets who have given expression to a system or some view of the universe, and man's place in it, which has some philosophical equivalent . . . Mr. Santayana's three will exhaust the list of metaphysical poets." T. S. Eliot, "The Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1926," in *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 48–49.

7. Grierson, ed., *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems*, xv.

8. *Ibid.*, xv–xvi.

9. Abraham Cowley, "Ode on Wit," in *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems*, ed. Grierson, 188–89.

10. Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works*, vol. 1, ed. Roger Lonsdale (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200.

11. *Ibid.*, 230.
12. *Ibid.*, 200. Cf. Touchstone's remark to Audrey in *As You Like It*: "When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room" (3.3.12–15).
13. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 156.
14. Cowley, "Ode on Wit," 187.
15. A. J. Smith, *Metaphysical Wit* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
16. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. unidentified (New York: Vintage, 1973), chap. 2.
17. Foucault speaks not of "metaphysical poetry" but of "the prose of the world" (the title of chapter 2).
18. Cf. Kant's distinction between the complementary regulative principles of "aggregation" and "specification" and Darwin's remark that "it is good to have hair-splitters and lumpers." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 603 (A666/B694); Charles Darwin, Letter to J. D. Hooker in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin Volume 6: 1856–1857*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 438.
19. Considered as elemental forces rather than as intellectual principles, wit and judgment could be likened to love and strife in Empedocles. Were wit were the only elemental force, its activity would generate a metaphysical muddle not unlike Anaxagoras' primordial mixture (*migma*) prior to the separating activity of understanding (*nous*).
20. I thank Rachel Zuckert for helping me clarify this point.
21. Eliot, "Clark Lectures," 190.
22. Eliot, "Metaphysical Poets," 380.
23. "We can easily recognize a witty fancy in the successive images ('my vegetable love,' 'till the conversion of the Jews'), but this fancy is not indulged, as it sometimes is by Cowley or Cleveland, for its own sake." T. S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 312.
24. Eliot, "Metaphysical Poets," 381.
25. "With Dante and his circle, the feelings are organized according to an organized view of the universe . . . with Donne . . . the peculiarity is the absence of order, the fraction of *thought* into innumerable *thoughts*." "In Donne, . . . you get a system of thought and feeling . . . In Donne you get a sequence of thoughts which are felt." Eliot, "Clark Lectures," 154–55, 182–83.

26. Eliot, "Clark Lectures," 158.
27. William Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature: Volume 1: Donne and the New Philosophy*, ed. John Haffenden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
28. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd ed. (New York: New Directions, 1966).
29. Paul de Man, "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., rev. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 237.
30. Ibid.
31. De Man continues: "Heidegger's proposed identification of language and the sacred fails, in any case, to account for the remainder of the hymn; he keeps on running into the very question he thought he had resolved, but which, for Hölderlin, must remain without answer: if the poet has seen Being immediately, how is he to put it into language?" Paul de Man, "Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin," in *Blindness and Insight*, 261.
32. "It is a postulate implicit in all metaphysical poetry that nothing is ineffable, that the most rarified feeling can be exact and exactly expressed." Eliot, "Clark Lectures," 200.
33. "Both sorts of trope designate ways of being (something or other), the one literally, the other non-literally." José Benardete, *Metaphysics: The Logical Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 42.
34. Ibid., 81.
35. Ibid., 81–82.
36. Ibid., 82–83.
37. Ibid., 82.
38. Ibid., 83.
39. D. C. Williams, "On the Elements of Being: I," *Review of Metaphysics* 7 (September 1953): 3–18.
40. Benardete, *Metaphysics: The Logical Approach*, 85.
41. Ibid., 99.
42. Ibid., 86.
43. Ibid., 83.
44. W. V. O. Quine, "On What There Is," cited in Benardete, *Metaphysics*, 5.
45. Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1987), 35–36.
46. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. Murray and Dorsch (New York: Penguin, 2004), 68–69 (1451b).
47. Ibid., 73 (1453a).

48. Ibid., 93 (1460b).
49. Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 1.
50. James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Truth of Love: The Mystery of "The Phoenix and Turtle"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 163.
51. Ibid., 3.
52. Ibid., 18, 164.
53. Frank Kermode, "Eliot and the Shudder," *London Review of Books* 32, no. 9 (2010), accessed at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n09/frank-kermode/eliot-and-the-shudder>.
54. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998), 158; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 208. For helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper, I thank Paul Kottman, Mena Mitrano, Rachel Zuckert, and an anonymous reviewer for Fordham University Press. I also thank Donovan Irvén and Matthew Kroll for inviting me to present a version of the paper at Purdue University under the auspices of the Philosophy and Literature program's "Illuminations" series. I am grateful for the critical feedback I received on this occasion, especially from Geraldine Friedman, Dan Smith, and my exemplary host Chris Yeomans.