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Donald J. Childs



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T.S. ELIOT

Mystic, Son and Lover

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For Janet, Kathleen and Emma

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Preface

T.S. Eliot's value in what he once referred to as the stock market of literary reputations began to fall with his death in 1965. Partially responsible for the decline was an *ad hominem* criticism for the most part muted while he was alive. Martin Seymour-Smith's assessment of Eliot's career as poet is an extreme example:

Eliot is a minor poet: he cannot write about love; he lacks real sympathy, or empathy; he is frigid. . . . Skill, accomplishment, sensibility – even these are not enough to make a major poet. 'Prufrock' is the best as well as the earliest of Eliot's important poems: it is the only one that tries to deal, fully, with his own problem: with his lack of feeling . . . but even as early as 'Prufrock' his procedures tend to function as a substitute for an original poetic impulse. This he never has. . . . As a poem [*The Waste Land*] fails: all traces of the experience that prompted it have been carefully removed. . . . The *Four Quartets* . . . represent an evasion of experience, a failure to examine an incapacity for experience. For all the many ambitious exegeses that have been made of them, it is safe to predict that they will not survive as major poetry.¹

Not persuasive as an argument that Eliot fails as a poet, this passage is more interesting as evidence that his success as a critic was not complete, insofar as Seymour-Smith attempts by his complaints – about 'lack of feeling', absence of 'original poetic impulse' and 'evasion of experience' – to re-establish the very romantic criteria of literary value that Eliot strove to disestablish. In short, Seymour-Smith reacts against the New Criticism associated with Eliot. Although he writes in the grip of a nostalgia for a time before New Criticism, Seymour-Smith is at least accurate in sensing that with Eliot's death an old orthodoxy passes. The orthodoxy that replaced New Criticism, however, was not Seymour-Smith's older romantic orthodoxy

but the orthodoxy of the new new criticism – poststructuralism and its descendents.

Universally acknowledged as a seminal influence in the development of New Criticism, Eliot is not surprisingly caught in the poststructural shadow that eclipses it. The aspect of Eliot that poststructuralism suspects of unorthodoxy concerns his so-called ‘mysticism’. The word has never had a precise denotation. In *Mysticism in English Literature* (1913), Caroline Spurgeon notes that ‘Mysticism is a term so irresponsibly applied in English that it has become the first duty of those who use it to explain what they mean by it.’ The problem is that ‘mysticism is often used in a semi-contemptuous way to denote vaguely any kind of occultism or spiritualism, or any specially curious or fantastic views about God and the universe.’² The same is true today in the world of literary criticism, the word ‘mysticism’ being used to denote vaguely any metaphysics of presence in which the signifier is conceived ‘as a transparency yielding an unobstructed view of a privileged and autonomous signified (truth, reality, being).’³ T.S. Eliot’s reputation as something of a mystic therefore spells nothing but trouble for his standing in the stock market of literary reputations.

The offending mysticism is a problem in the criticism and the poetry. In an ingenious analysis of the politics of Eliot’s canon formation, John Guillory identifies Eliot’s mysticism – without identifying it as such – as the element in his criticism that is metaphysically and politically suspect and that Cleanth Brooks elaborates and institutionalizes as New Criticism. Guillory argues that Eliot’s infamous valuing of minor poets above major ones is an assertion of ‘the marginal relation of the poem to truth’. Minor poets are valuable because, whether they know it or not, they are orthodox. That is, they are informed by *doxa* – true opinion, or right tradition. The point to note, suggests Guillory, is that the content of this *doxa* does not matter to Eliot; what matters is ‘the decline of [the] elite [that] delivers orthodoxy to the rulers *and to the poets*.’ It is this elite, according to Guillory, that Eliot and Brooks conspire to reconstitute not as a clergy, but as literary critics. Brooks’s definition of poetry as the ‘language of paradox’ – a development of Eliot’s implicitly aphasic posture before both *doxa* itself and the particular poems that transmit it – constructs the literary critic as a devotee of the *doxa* ‘standing alongside or beyond’ (*para*) the poem:

The poem becomes an ostensive act, beyond which lies a conceivably recoverable *doxa*. I believe that ‘pointing without saying’ is what we mean now by New Critical formalism. The pedagogical device of close reading as well as the prohibition of paraphrase relate to the perceived muteness of the literary work, which is imitated by the gestural aphasia of the teacher. He or she can only point to that truth which must not be spoken.

Eliot is thus responsible for a radically logocentric critical practice ‘satisfying . . . the longing for consensus, for a metaphysics of the same – a longing expressed by the posited “unity” of the literary work.’⁴ It is this metaphysically naive celebration of the mystical experience of unity against which Guillory and poststructural critics in general react: not only does this logocentric metaphysics invest power in a priesthood guarding the *logos* within the literary canon, but it also reinforces the tyranny of a logocentric culture that represses difference in favour of the same. Such hierarchies must be undone; undoing the mystical Eliot is a step in this direction.

The posture of aphasia before truth or reality that Guillory identifies as the radical hermeneutic posture in Eliot’s and New Criticism’s ideological endeavour is clearly depicted in Eliot’s poetry as a mystical posture – a mystical aphasia before ‘the still point of the turning world’:

Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.⁵

Perry Meisel finds in such poetry a mystical impulse as dangerous as the one Guillory finds in the criticism. Eliot’s poetics by the time of *Four Quartets* comes to rest ‘on an appeal . . . to the authority of a frankly divine agency whose truths the writer simply transcribes as though a prophet newly inspired.’ The result is ‘less responsibility towards language, more toward belief in unquestioned ground.’⁶

Eliot himself might have preferred that Guillory and Meisel represent his critic or poet as pointing not to the truth that ‘must not be spoken’, but rather to the truth that *cannot* be spoken. He regards the inability to speak as a function not of a divine injunction but of a human incapacity: ‘there can be no permanent

reality if there is no permanent truth. I am of course quite ready to admit that human apprehension of truth varies, changes and perhaps develops, but that is a property of human imperfection rather than of truth.⁷ The important point, however, concerns the posture and experience of aphasia – however one explains it – for this mystical aphasia becomes institutionalized as New Criticism on the one hand, and the subject of so much of Eliot’s post-conversion poetry on the other. From Eliot’s turn-of-the-century study of the phenomenon as a philosophy student to his mid-century experience of it as represented in *Four Quartets*, mystical aphasia is the quintessential figure in his poetry and prose for the apparent acceptance of the metaphysics of presence that is so ideologically suspect from the poststructural point of view.

Readers of all sorts are virtually unanimous in acknowledging Eliot’s mystical temperament, but not nearly unanimous in categorizing it. Few would dissent from Kristian Smidt’s observation: ‘Eliot may not strictly speaking be a mystic, . . . but there is an essential similarity between his glimpses of a higher pattern in his personal history and the ecstatic union with the divine which the great mystics have attempted to describe.’⁸ Some, like F.M. Ishak, are less doubtful about Eliot’s status as a mystic: ‘Eliot has endeavoured to draw attention to the fountain-source of mystical reality, not by way of ratiocination, but through the threads of mystical experiences that are woven together in the very texture of his poetry.’⁹ W.H. Auden and Anne Fremantle include Eliot in their collection of Protestant mystics.¹⁰ Still others move beyond the general question of whether or not Eliot was a mystic to the more particular question of what sort of mystic he was. Sister Corona Sharp discovers a Christian mystic drawing inspiration from St John of the Cross, whose works Eliot drew on ‘to formulate the mystical journey in his own intellectual way.’¹¹ F.O. Matthiessen finds in Eliot evidence of the Puritan mind’s ‘trust in moments of vision’.¹² P.S. Sri discovers that ‘Eliot’s approach to “the still point” is remarkably similar to the tolerant and pragmatic approach of the “Forest Philosophers” who composed the Upanishads and of Krishna, the divine author and spokesman of the *Gita*.’¹³ The threads of Eliot’s mystical experiences clearly make a many-coloured coat.

Its many-coloured threads, moreover, are found in poetry as

distinct as *Four Quartets* and the unpublished pieces contemporary with 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. The former, generally seen as the most mystical of Eliot's poems, has attracted the most attention in this regard. Helen Gardner finds in it a clear pattern of Christian mystical contemplation: contemplative focus shifts from grace in 'Burnt Norton', to atonement, incarnation and the holy spirit, respectively, in each of the following quartets.¹⁴ Staffan Bergsten finds that the Eliot of 'Burnt Norton', 'as a Christian, strives . . . to apprehend the timeless pattern in time, to find an eternal purpose in temporal life.'¹⁵ Similarly, R.L. Brett concludes that the quartets 'are meditations upon the Christian understanding of Time and Eternity and lead to a mystical apprehension of a unity beyond the contradictions of human history and experience.'¹⁶ More recently, however, Lyndall Gordon has concluded from her study of Eliot's unpublished poems that he:

began to measure his life by the divine goal as far back as his student days, in 1910 and 1911, and that the turning-point came not when he was baptized in 1927 but in 1914 when he first interested himself in the motives, the ordeals, and the achievements of saints.¹⁷

Largely sympathetic to Eliot's religious quest, these scholars and critics do not represent the only point of view on Eliot's mysticism. Harold Bloom shares Seymour-Smith's disdainful and revisionary attitude toward Eliot and his anti-romanticism – decanonizing the poet and critic in terms uniquely his own. In favour of a 'stronger' poet like Wallace Stevens who is more capable of the transumption of romanticism necessary in the modern world, Bloom seems to identify Eliot's mystical impulse as the source of his 'malign influence'.¹⁸ Eliot's definition of literary tradition envisions 'a simultaneous order defying temporality' and so 'releases literary time from the burden of anxiety that is always a constituent of every other version of temporality'.¹⁹ The aspiration towards a mystical apprehension of a unity beyond the contradictions of human time is the problem. According to the Bloomian Perry Meisel, this aspiration makes Eliot 'unwholesome', 'noxiously . . . protofascist', 'merely pedantic', and 'escapist'.²⁰ C.K. Stead reaches similar conclusions. By the time of 'Burnt Norton', 'Eliot threw his poetry totally into the service of his religious-political commitment. . . . [But] the language does not

give one to believe in Eliot's mystical perceptions, nor even in his philosophical competence.²¹ Terry Eagleton is equally suspicious of the posture of 'self-abnegatingly humble' authoritarianism that he finds in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' – a posture that he characterizes as mystical:

[According to Eliot,] a literary work can be valid only by existing in the Tradition, as a Christian can be saved only by living in God. . . . This, like divine grace, is an inscrutable affair: the Tradition, like the Almighty or some whimsical absolute monarch, sometimes withholds its favour from 'major' literary reputations and bestows it instead on some humble little text buried in the historical backwoods. Membership of the club is by invitation only: some writers, such as T.S. Eliot, just do discover that the Tradition . . . is spontaneously welling up within them, but as with the recipients of divine grace this is not a question of personal merit, and there is nothing you can do about it one way or the other.²²

In each case, the mystical impulse is marked as something that is at best aesthetically irresponsible or at worst politically reprehensible.

Such a poststructural critic as Luce Irigaray, however, suggests that the mystical impulse need not be politically or metaphysically incorrect. She locates in mystical experience a field in which woman escapes marginalization as object of the masculine gaze – the 'only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly.'²³ As Toril Moi explains, Irigaray finds that 'the mystic's ignorance, her utter abjection before the divine, was part and parcel of the feminine condition she was brought up in.' By accepting this patriarchal subjection, she 'paradoxically opens up a space where her own pleasure can unfold. Though still circumscribed by male discourse, this is a space that nevertheless is vast enough for her to feel no longer exiled.'²⁴ As far as women are concerned, then, there is no equation between mysticism and an unhealthy metaphysics and politics. Does the same hold true for men? Irigaray notes that in the history of Western mysticism, 'the poorest in science and the most ignorant were the most eloquent, the richest in revelations. Historically, that is, woman. Or at least the "feminine".'²⁵ Her qualification here allows that a poststructurally 'healthy' version of mysticism may also be accessible to men who have somehow

come to appreciate within phallogocentric discourse some part of the marginalization that defines the 'feminine'.²⁶ From this point of view, to have discovered a mystical impulse in Eliot is not thereby to have discovered a vicious politics, a moribund metaphysics or an uninteresting aesthetics.

It is interesting to note, therefore, that whether scholars and critics admire Eliot's mystical impulse or condemn it, they tend to agree that it represents a version of the logocentric impulse so suspect in a poststructural world. Critics like Gardner, Sharp, Gordon and Paul Murray – sympathetic to Eliot's religious quest – explain his mysticism as fundamentally cognate with the quest for communion with God that informs the mysticism in the Christian tradition. This tradition more often than not represents what Irigaray would call mysticism theologized – mysticism made 'teleological by providing it with a (masculine) object'.²⁷ Those unsympathetic to what appears to be a quest for the One signifier of Truth, Reality or Being tend to regard Eliot's mysticism as synonymous with logocentrism – the general type of the faith in an absolute ground that ostensibly ruins his later poetry. To judge by what scholars and critics have had to say so far, then, Eliot's mysticism is apparently uncompromised by either New Critical irony or deconstructive *différance*. It would seem that his notorious declaration in *For Lancelot Andrewes* – 'The point of view may be expressed as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion' – has made it difficult to conceive of Eliot as anything but uninterestingly and unredeemably logocentric.²⁸ And yet that the mystical moments in Eliot's poetry or that the definitions of mysticism provided in his prose necessarily entail the mystifyingly logocentric metaphysics so regularly located in this writing is by no means clear.

That we ought to revise interpretations of Eliot's work so as to acknowledge the latently poststructural dimension of his sensibility from the time of his early work in philosophy is suggested by the recent work of critics and scholars like Cleo McNelly Kearns, Sanford Schwartz, Walter Benn Michaels, Harriet Davidson, Richard Shusterman, Michael Beehler and James Longenbach. Kearns, for instance, studying the Indic dimension of Eliot's poetry and thought, has suggested that it is possible to interpret the religious dimension of Eliot's poetry as in part a continuation

of the epistemological enquiry begun in the dissertation of 1916, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*.²⁹ She sees the dissertation as 'in part a refutation of mystical philosophy'. It emphasizes the fact that all we can know as human beings is a succession of points of view – the fact that Kearns finds Eliot emphasizing by means of his juxtaposition of Indic and Christian religious traditions: 'Indic tradition, among many other points of view, is essential . . . , for only through its counterpoint can Eliot enact the destabilization of an old perspective and the movement to a new one, which is all we know, at least in this life, of transcendence.'³⁰

Other readings of Eliot's dissertation and related philosophical essays demonstrate the extent to which Eliot was drawn towards the anti-metaphysical position represented by much turn-of-the-century philosophy. In such philosophy in general, and to a large extent in Eliot's particular engagement with it, Schwartz locates what he calls 'the matrix of modernism' – 'the shared assumption' of modern psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and art 'that consciousness is not fully transparent to itself'.³¹ Michaels observes that 'It is customary . . . to regard Eliot as a fairly straightforward idealist and to identify the primacy of experience and of some version of the subjective self as his central philosophical concerns.' But this is a mistake. Michaels argues that Eliot for the most part aligns himself in his dissertation with pragmatism's 'critique of the notion of ground':

Eliot's pragmatism does not consist in any simple repudiation of the ultimate although it generally begins with the denial that certain seemingly fundamental distinctions (between the given and the constructed, for example, or the real and the ideal) have any ultimate justification. And at least one form of the relativism (or scepticism) with which pragmatism is sometimes identified is clearly a possible consequence of this initial denial. But Eliot's argument does not stop here; he insists that the fact that we can adduce no ultimate justification for such distinctions does not mean that they are in any sense 'invalid'. They have their 'practical' significance; they are only local and unstable but they are real.³²

Michaels finds in the dissertation, as Shusterman finds in the subsequent literary and socio-political prose, both pragmatism's

resistance to the metaphysics of presence and its groping towards an understanding of what a universe without an ultimate ground might amount to.³³

Davidson presents a similarly anti-metaphysical interpretation of Eliot's philosophical point of view: 'Eliot is drawn to the lack of essences in Bradley's metaphysics, but is not at all interested in a logical absolute as foundational for truth.'³⁴ She grounds in Eliot's dissertation, therefore, the Heideggerian reading of *The Waste Land* initiated by William V. Spanos. Attempting 'to retrieve the poem . . . for a post-Modern audience', the latter argues that:

The Waste Land, far from achieving a privileged status as autonomous object outside of temporal existence, as has been claimed both by its admirers and detractors alike, is in fact basically *open-ended*, a *historical* poem that demystifies the reader's traditional, i.e. logocentric, expectations and engages him in history in the mode of dis-discovery or dis-closure.³⁵

Yet Davidson finds in the reading by Spanos 'the limits of phenomenological interpretation which does not put the subject in question'; she argues that 'Eliot maintains Bradley's skepticism about the self but joins it with a very modern existentialism and non-subjective pragmatism, all of which sets in motion a spinning hermeneutic.' She finds in the early criticism and poetry:

a hermeneutic ontology, similar to that being developed contemporaneously by Heidegger. . . . Always, Eliot is holding extremes together in a profound phenomenological recognition that neither extreme is sufficient but neither is expendable, and [that] there is no absolute ground on which to stand in judgement.³⁶

Focusing less upon the dissertation, but surveying a wider range of Eliot's prose – both his essays on literature and his later books on orthodoxy, Christianity and culture – Shusterman reaches similar conclusions about Eliot's hermeneutic philosophy. For him, Eliot's hermeneutic impulse is best explained in terms of the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.³⁷

Beehler also returns to the dissertation, recovering the poststructural aspect of this work as a constituent in Eliot's philosophical and poetic voice, not so much through Davidson's recourse to the general '*Zeitgeist* of modernism' as through a study of the particular

influence of the semiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce.³⁸ According to Beehler,

When Eliot refers in the dissertation to signs or symbols, he has in mind Peirce's sense of symbols and icons, but not his sense of index. This exclusion is provocative because it points towards Eliot's emphasis upon the differential aspect of Peirce's semiotics and opens the dissertation to a reading that insists upon difference without appeal to a unique cognitive identity or a unified immediate experience.

Beehler argues that 'Eliot's marginal meditations on signs and symbols interrupt in and radically disturb [the dissertation's] central philosophy.' This marginal aspect of the dissertation – what Beehler calls 'Eliot's semiology' – 'affects any logically coherent theory, for it is the logic of philosophy, the unified *logos* of philosophical knowledge, with which it interferes.' It similarly interrupts and disturbs Eliot's theology, the unified *logos* of his Christian knowledge. Concerned to overcome the critical consensus as to the logocentric nature of Eliot's philosophical, critical and poetic sensibility, Beehler therefore distinguishes between 'Eliot the theologian', the persona heeded so far by most scholars and critics, and 'Eliot the philosopher', the disruptive persona only just beginning to be heard.³⁹

James Longenbach, however, is the only one so far to have begun to appreciate the role of Eliot's interest in mysticism in the poststructurally prescient philosophical point of view that he had developed by the 1920s. He warns that 'Eliot's invocation of theories of mysticism and vision should not be taken lightly'. Bringing together such apparently disparate texts as Eliot's dissertation, his reviews of turn-of-the-century neo-scholastic theology and many of his various observations about mysticism, Longenbach finds in *The Waste Land* a quest for a mystical vision of reality. He defines the mysticism to which Eliot aspires in this poem as a kind of 'visionary power' that allows one to 'transcend the "normal equipoise" and perceive the "systematic" interconnectedness of all things, earthly and ethereal, past and present.'⁴⁰ Interested primarily in modern poetry's engagement with history as hermeneutic, and only secondarily in Eliot's mysticism as an example of such a hermeneutic, Longenbach nonetheless points the way to an appreciation of the complexity and sophistication of Eliot's

understanding of mysticism – especially in his interpretation of the relationship between Eliot and Dante.⁴¹

These readings of Eliot's early work in philosophy and its continuing influence upon his writing provide a useful general framework for the reconsideration of Eliot's mysticism that I undertake in the following pages. This mysticism cannot be understood without an appreciation of the perspective that Eliot achieved through his work in philosophy at Harvard and Oxford. His research at this time acquainted him not only with turn-of-the-century philosophy, but also with turn-of-the-century studies of mysticism and theology. One can trace through the poetry, criticism and philosophy subsequent to Eliot's early work in these areas mystical moments of one sort or another in which the strains between 'Eliot the theologian' and 'Eliot the philosopher' become evident. Apparently offering intimations of the absolute that resolves all contradictions, Eliot's mystical moments inevitably recall in their very effort to express such intimations the dissertation's insights with regard to the inescapability of difference. As Eliot notes in his dissertation: 'Metaphysical systems are condemned to go up like a rocket and come down like a stick' (KE, 168). So are Eliot's mystical moments.

Yet just as important as the philosophical aspect of my study is its psycho-biographical aspect. In any attempt to understand Eliot's mysticism, an appreciation of the poststructural perspective that Eliot achieved through his study of philosophy at Harvard and Oxford takes us only so far. A fuller understanding requires, on the one hand, an appreciation of the self-diagnosed mother-complex that he found himself sharing with D.H. Lawrence and, on the other, an appreciation of the visionary experiences that attended the almost pathological misogyny that developed during his troubled first marriage. As much as the turn-of-the-century anti-metaphysical academic mood, Eliot's lived experiences led him to appreciate the void that was both the medium and the message of his mystical vision.

As Lyndall Gordon demonstrates in *Eliot's Early Years*, Eliot's interest in mysticism was always more than academic and intellectual. He had his own mystical experiences.⁴² What needs to be emphasized is the extent to which these mystical experiences were functions of his relationships with human beings. In *Eliot's*

New Life, Gordon has revealed how important a role Eliot's unconsummated love for his own Beatrice, Emily Hale, played in his spiritual life.⁴³ Yet just as important in any effort to define Eliot's mystical experiences is an appreciation of the role in his spiritual life of his ambivalently consummated love for his first wife, Vivien. Together, they created a relationship that made possible for Eliot the visions of human emptiness and depravity that he immediately understood as mystical experiences. Eliot constructed from the dark night of his marriage a mystical misogyny with as significant a spiritual import for him as the more traditional mystical experiences documented in the many turn-of-the-century studies of mysticism with which he was familiar.

Such studies, however, also made Eliot aware that certain mystical experiences could be explained in terms of psychopathology. Always possessing a lively sense of the liability of others to misinterpret their own intense emotional experience as an experience of the divine, Eliot came to suspect that he had fallen victim to the same temptation, despite extreme vigilance. He worried that he was a repressed version of D.H. Lawrence. Careful attention to the pattern of his alternating identification with and distancing of himself from Lawrence in writing about him that spans twenty years reveals Eliot's fear that he too suffered from what he called Lawrence's 'mother-complex' (a term Eliot preferred to Freud's term 'oedipus complex'). Explaining Lawrence's mysticism in terms of such a psychopathology, Eliot can be seen to be projecting onto Lawrence his anxiety about the part played in his own mysticism by his tortured experience of his roles as obsessed son and misogynistic lover.

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Introduction

In Eliot's neglected short story 'Eeldrop and Appleplex' (1917), Eeldrop – a thinly disguised version of Eliot himself – is described 'as a sceptic, with a taste for mysticism'.¹ There is neither a briefer nor a more accurate way of describing Eliot's own religious and philosophical point of view – whether in 1917 or in the 1940s, when he completed his most 'mystical' poem (*Four Quartets*). In 1917, however, for Eliot to come even this close to acknowledging publicly a mystical sensibility was to run the risk of incurring the disdain of such an admired mentor as Bertrand Russell, who in 1914 – the very year that he instructed Eliot for a term at Harvard and the very year in which Eliot's personal study of mysticism was at its height – attacked the modern taste for mysticism.

In his essay 'Mysticism and Logic', Russell prescribes for the age as a whole the very regime of tempering the mystical sensibility with a dose of scepticism that Eliot would himself adopt. Russell acknowledges the contemporary taste for mysticism reflected in the popularity of Henri Bergson's 'mystical' philosophy and tries to bring the mystically-minded back into the fold of science and logic:

Metaphysics, or the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought, has been developed, from the first, by the union and conflict of two very different human impulses, the one urging men towards mysticism, the other urging them towards science. . . . But the greatest men have felt the need both of science and of mysticism.

When push comes to shove, however, Russell is less charitable: 'Mysticism is, in essence, little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe'; it is 'to be commended as an attitude towards life, not as a creed about the world.' People who take seriously such a 'mysticism' as Bergson's philosophy of intuition 'ought to return to running wild in the woods, dyeing themselves with woad and living on hips and haws.'²

The tension between the mystical and the scientific temperament that Russell highlights was an important element in the European *Zeitgeist* at the beginning of the twentieth century. This tension can be understood as an aspect of what Schwartz calls the 'matrix of modernism':

In seemingly independent developments, the disciplines devoted to the study of the psyche, the sign, and society were reorganizing around the opposition between the world of ordinary awareness and the hidden structures that condition it.

In philosophy, the same tendency appears as an opposition between conceptual abstraction and immediate experience, or, more generally, between the instrumental conventions that shape ordinary life and the original flux of concrete sensations.³

In response to the scientific, materialist rationalism of the nineteenth century, the variety of phenomena gathered into the term 'mysticism' at the beginning of the twentieth century offered an alternative epistemology – opposing the material with the spiritual, the intellectual with the intuitive, the external with the internal.

The taste for mysticism was shared by many more than Eeldrop/Eliot. As an alternative epistemology, 'mysticism' appealed to philosophers like Henri Bergson and William James, certain Roman Catholic and Anglican theologians and a wide variety of people interested in the occult (spiritualists, theosophists and psychical researchers). It also appealed to poets. Pound and Yeats were extremely knowledgeable about the occult.⁴ Other poets as distinct as the Georgian Rupert Brooke and the Imagists Richard Aldington and John Gould Fletcher advertised their mysticism. 'Do not leap or turn pale at the word Mysticism, I do not mean any religious thing . . .' writes Brooke, 'It consists just in looking at people and things as themselves – neither as useful nor moral nor ugly nor anything else; but just as being.'⁵ Aldington's account of the poetic process as an experience of reverence and mystery is similar:

By 'reverence', I understand . . . an intimate and spontaneous conviction that what is not me, what is outside me, is far greater and more interesting than I am. . . . By the sense of mystery I understand the experience of certain places and times when