CHAPTER V

AESTHETIC CRITICISM: PRINCIPLES AND PREJUDICES

The widespread concern with the mask-motif in the literature of the nineties necessarily presupposes a profound mal-adjustment between the creative life and the existing social order. It is not difficult to understand that a man needs wear a mask only when his individual desires could not be reconciled with the social demands. We have already seen in the earlier chapter how Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) brilliantly conjures up the vision of the late nineteenth century wasteland, a truly de-hydrated land unfit to sustain a human being simultaneously in an honourable public life and a joyful private one. Oscar Wilde's social comedies also hint at this deep maladjustment between an individual and the social order. The consequences of Wilde's own life further reinforce this sense of incompatibility between the individual desires and social obligations. The dandy would like to reconcile the conflict by the assumption of a mask as a social pretension. But with the more serious writers it can be seen that the persona only masked their deep sense of anguish, their profound feeling of frustration and despair in failing to come to grips with life. In a way, the aesthetes of the nineties may be said to have been firmly grounded in their social context. They turned to art because they abhorred their wretched society. It is ugly in the full meaning of the word. Sin, vice, perversion are traits they can tolerate, even admire for their 'artificiality' but not vulgarity and ugliness. Hence, they turned to art as their succour. In so doing, they distorted and often inverted
deliberately the bourgeois values of their society. This does not, however, mean that they are superficial or simply cantankerous. They believed in their own ideals of art and beauty. They might well argue, with justification, that the bourgeois has inverted their ideals, deliberately for money, power, things. The true significance of their all-embracing passion for art, their endeavour to establish an alternative religion of art and beauty cannot be properly understood unless we realise how an expansive bourgeois system of values and industrial society gradually undermined the position of the imaginative arts and the artist. The wide chasm between their values and the values of the society led the artist to glorify the arts with a passion and to make art an object freed from all contemporary circumstances. The artists could no longer find any natural place in the social organism and remained content by carving out an enclave of their own withdrawing from all contacts, as far as possible, from society and its values.

In the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century England traces of this 'alienation' can be detected. The artist in Romantic poetry is deemed as a non-conformist, an eccentric and exile, perhaps a genius but certainly not a normal, well adjusted member of society. If he chose external marks of non-conformity --- for example, peculiarities of dress and residence or unconventionalities of behaviour --- these were the superficial signs of an inward detachment and estrangement. Of course, it may be an overstatement to claim the Romantic poets as 'outsiders' but it cannot be denied at the same time that almost all of them
exhibit some symptoms of cultural estrangement or of being a victim to society. One thinks of Shelley's self-portrait in Adonais:

A phantom among men, companionless
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart. 1

[Sts. XXI & XXXII]

Although less self-conscious than Shelley, many others in England as well as in the rest of Europe suffered from the same sense of estrangement from society. The manifestoes of comparatively recent schools such as the Futurist, the Dadaists and the Surrealist around the first world war have expressed a feeling of opposition and disgust to society.

Of the Romantic poets Keats is obviously regarded as a source of inspiration to the aesthetes. In his association of Beauty with Truth (but significantly excluding the third person of the Platonic Trinity, the Good), in his wish for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts and in his high devotion to a life of Art, he was surely closer to the aesthetes than the other Romantic poets. Indeed, Wilde in 1887, called him the "Priest of Beauty slain before his time" and at his grave composed a poem in which he compares Keats to Guido's portrait of St. Sebastian gazing "towards the Eternal Beauty of the opining heavens":

The Youngest of the martyr has here is lain,
Fair as Sebastian and as touchy slain.
Keats's seemingly casual remarks in his letters contain seeds of ethical indifference and his sense of uneasiness because of the wide gap between empirical truth and imaginative truth—between poetry and philosophy. "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth whether it existed before or not" is his valiant but uneasy sounding attempt to assert a unity between the two. Much more characteristically Keats seems to accept poetry as being a purely natural activity, like eating or breathing as opposed to the superior, non-natural field of philosophy or morals. Any "graceful instinctive attitude" constitutes poetry's material and inspiration; and Keats using the same, significant word, remarks a few sentences earlier in the letter to George and Georgiana Keats (March 19, 1819), "I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of". He explains that "though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine"; and that these instinctive energies are "the very thing in which consists poetry; and so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—for the same reason that the eagle is not so fine a thing as truth". Though it would be absurd to attach too much critical importance to hasty exclamations in a letter, the underlying attitude of mind seems to show that Keats accepted the idea of diminution in the status of poetry and the fact that it was imprisoned in the domain of the natural. We must remember, too, that though he had most likely not heard them formulated in any philosophic sense, Kantian notions were much in the air at the time through the influence of Coleridge; and Kant had stressed that there is no goodness in Nature as such, that
all moral values must be non-natural — a view with which Baudelaire would have fully agreed.

Again, if we analyse the statement of Keats, it becomes clear that he makes a distinction between ethics and aesthetics; and he is convinced that the yardstick for the one does not apply to the other. 'A quarrel in the street' is to be hated from the ethical standpoint but when viewed purely from the aesthetic standpoint, 'the energies displayed in it are fine'. The conflict between self-oriented aestheticism and humanitarianism is apparent in Keats's final poetic testament *The Fall of Hyperion*. The pilgrim-poet seeks to reach the summit of poetic knowledge but before he can continue his quest, he is questioned and told that

None can usurp this height,.....
But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.
All else who find a haven in the world,
Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
Rot on the pavement where thou rotted'st half

(BK.I, 11. 147-53)

Barbara Charlesworth in her *Dark Passages: Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965) comes to the conclusion that the poets of the nineties perished on the pavement because in the specious heaven of their own imaginations they slept away their days thoughtlessly. They desired moments of heightened consciousness, of imaginative insight simply for
those moments' sake and by so doing they narrowed such moments into the circle of the individual consciousness and destroyed the possibility of vision. This is undoubtedly a very moral approach and suggests that the withdrawal from the world and total immersion into the individual consciousness led the nineties into an artistic impasse from which they could not recover. Clyde de L. Ryal expresses much the same view when he says that "Decadence is simply a condition inherent in romanticism." The romantic hero, he thinks continually borders on becoming a decadent hero but somehow he restrains his impulses and subordinates them to something beyond his own self. In romanticism the self is not absolutely isolated from the surroundings. As Frank Kermode says with reference to Blake, "To Blake, to be 'myself alone shut up in myself' was to be in no merely individual but in a universal world, that world of imagination whose gates seemed to him to be open to every human being" [Emphasis mine]. Kermode here quotes Arthur Symons verbatim. This suggests that Symons knew about the romantic capability of touching the universal through the immersion into the individual self. That Symons's own creative or critical writings did not very often exemplify this capability may be explained by the fact that the movement they started as a reaction against the Victorian preoccupation with social and moral problems required the nineties to assert the independence of art from all outward human concern with the utmost vigour and intensity. In fact, it is my submission that this extreme aesthetic position of absolute disregard to all realistic concerns only helped the subsequent writers in the first half of the twentieth century to find a sensible middle
course, to maintain the required aesthetic distance between the artist and the audience.

The difference between the romantic hero and the decadent hero is, to a great extent, like the difference between the Arnoldian concept of culture and the Paterian concept of self-culture—a point I have tried to develop in the earlier chapter. Arnold’s concept of culture is broader and more socially oriented than the Paterian concept of aesthetic self-culture that envisages the artist as a mere spectator withdrawn from all general purposes of life. Yet Arnold’s attack on the attitude of measuring life merely in terms of means and ends was a real one. But Arnold was far too much in the centre of life to advocate a course of withdrawal from life into the self. Frank Kermode believes that “it is the dominance of the critic-school-inspector that precludes our seeing him in the first place as a fully Romantic, though fully critical, poet”.9 Kermode argues that if Arnold’s Empedocles on Etna (a poem which is little read as Arnold rejected it himself in the 1853 Preface) was seriously read, we should have been less prone to think of the nineties as a group of wayward youngmen. Kermode argues that the ‘Preface’ of the 1853 which rejected the poem " was written by Arnold’s spectre"10. He goes on to claim that: “We might paraphrase Blake’s remark on Wordworth’s criticism, and say of the 1853 Preface, ‘I do not know who wrote this Preface; it is very mischievous, and directly contrary to Arnold’s own practice”11.

One of the most respectable tendencies in modern criticism
is to treat the Victorian period as a continuation of the Romantic period. In fact, traces of the concept of withdrawal and subjectivity, in disregard to the general concerns of life, are not very difficult to be detected even in the major Victorian poets. E.D.H. Johnson in his *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (1952) argues that Tennyson, Browning and Arnold expressed their deepest insights indirectly. Tennyson's fascination with dreams, for instance, or Browning's fascination with the psychology of the rebellious, anti-rational, intuitive mind represent an implicit protest against the values of the poet's society and illustrate their relation to it. Robert Langbeaum in *The Poetry of Experience* (1957) looks at the peculiar possibilities of the dramatic monologue as an art form in which he finds the emergence of a modern, relativist and ironic mode. So, contrary to the accepted notion of treating the major Victorians as complacent and self-reliant we now look at them as voicing the sentiments of an age of uncertainties and transition. Tennyson deplores in *Maud* (1855) that most of the human values were threatened by the fast-growing commercial world. The world of 'speculation', 'villainy' and financial swindling turned Maud to a morbid hate of the 'barbarous opulence' with which everything could be bought. In a society where "pickpockets, each hand lusting for all that is not its own" (1.24), reign supreme, the state of society is no better than civil war. Those who believe in spearheading movements in support of active social causes may look forward to a revolution or a political solution. But the obvious reaction of artists who do not see or seek political solution to such a situation is withdrawal. "I will bury myself in myself" — Tennyson's *Maud*
characteristically resolved. Tennyson, an ardent Victorian that he was, could not obviously recommend this but it is evident that he was alive to the possibility of such a reaction. Aesthetic symptoms occurred even earlier in Tennyson's poetry. In 1831, Arthur Hallam in reviewing Tennyson's poems proclaimed that the poet should concern himself with sensuous beauty to the exclusion of other concerns. In "The Lotos Eaters" (1832), Tennyson himself expresses the gospel of inaction through the resolve of the weary mariners to dream away their days "on the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind." This sense of alienation and withdrawal began to increase as the century advanced and by the nineties, it became the established norm. The decadents gave up the notion of their social obligations of art, withdrawing into a world of personal reverie, producing an art which either reflected their private fantasies or, more simply, their individual technical ingenuity.

In spite of the presence of such aesthetic symptoms in his poems, Tennyson's work as a whole is meant to express in poetry the social and moral structure that his age has built up, even, occasionally to celebrate its political and material triumphs. In fact, Tennyson was always very concerned about the reaction of his readers and seldom hesitated to satisfy popular taste even at the cost of making a compromise with his poetic integrity. Ian Jack makes a very incisive comment in this connection: "If the first half on Tennyson's career is the story of his conquest of the English reading public, the second half is the story of the reading public's conquest of Tennyson." In fact, most of the
major Victorian writers, whether in prose or in verse, adjusted themselves well with the contemporary social organism. They all wrote as parts of a system. The fact that they mostly criticised it did not matter — the necessity of free criticism was also a part of the system, of course, with a view to amending them. But those who lived by their immediate sensibilities found in the later half of the nineteenth century less and less in which the life of imagination could be satisfied. The world for them was steadily getting uglier and the only response possible was withdrawal. Quite naturally the artists in the eighties and nineties saw themselves as exiles from a middle-class society with which they could not enter into any sort of communication.

The sense of being alien in an urbanised industrial society was, of course, accentuated by the influence that came from across the channel. In the second chapter, I have already tried to point out how seminal was the influence of Gautier, Baudelaire and Poe (through Baudelaire, the English artists came to know about Poe) in the emergence of aestheticism. Poe was an avowed champion of a non-utilitarian view of art and advocated the union of poetry with music. The obvious intention was to achieve in poetry the kind of freedom from representationalism that is a major characteristic of music. He identifies verse with song in order to distinguish it still more from the world of prose and fact. Baudelaire was a great admirer of Poe whom he called a "Saint" a prototype of himself, le poët maudit. The French poets after Baudelaire could never think how it could be the function of a poet to justify the ways of imagination to men.
They saw themselves isolated, disinherited like Des Esseintes, the hero of Huysmans’ *A Rebours* (1884), proud and alien figure in a materialistic society in which they had no part. Huysmans’ novel is a record of tastes and habits, of a fantastic plan of life totally divorced from the purposes of ordinary existence. Des Essenties shuts himself up in a house in the suburbs of Paris which he turns into a sort of private pantheon enshrining his own esoteric caprices. He has already exhausted most of the ordinary possibilities of sensation and his aim now is to withdraw himself materially and spiritually as far as possible from the life of his time. And in presenting him thus, Huysmans has succeeded in creating "a type, representative not simply of a group, or of a generation, but of an entire epoch". The sensibility of the French poets, being nurtured in such a milieu, essentially differed from that of the English poets. The difference is plain in their stock romantic image. For Colridge, the albatross is an image of the sacredness of life; it death makes a disruption in the universal order which can only be healed by the suffering of the individual concerned. But for Baudelaire, the albatross represents the poet, forced to submit to the humiliation of an alien world. The albatross is clumsy and ludicrous as a bird on the deck of a ship but graceful and masterful in the sky. The poet is likewise ineffectual in the ordinary world but in the world of his own imagination he reigns supreme. So, he recoils from any touch with actuality and withdraws into the interior world of his own psyche. The nineties were greatly impressed and influenced by this aristocratic attitude towards art and took it
for granted that the artist has nothing to do with the work-a-day world. Here is once again an assimilation of a foreign tradition in the crystallisation of the aesthetic outlook of the nineties.

There were, of course very important socio-economic factors. J.H. Buckley ascribes this late victorian divorce of art from society to various reasons —— "to the masses and to mass education, to the decline of general culture enriched by common ideals, to the thinkers distrustful of the aesthetic temper and even to the artist himself, despairing of human values, disillusioned by scientific discovery, seeking escape from doubt in the dogma of self-expressiion." Writing from a Marxist point of view, Granville Hicks in Figures in Transition (1939) ascribes the late Victorian Zeitgeist to socio-economic causes. H.V. Routh in his Towards The Twentieth Century (1937) seems to strike the right note when he finds that social causation, which is intensely cultural in nature, accounts for this transition. William York Tindall views the issue from the perspective of artist-audience relationship and suggests that with the spread of literacy, the level of understanding fell and "fewer people could follow what they read." So the general people could hardly appreciate art and the ruling elite, moral and utilitarian in temperament, "had little Tolarence for beauty which at best seemed useless and disreputable." The artists could feel no sympathy with his kind of values and in consequence turned out to be exiles from the society. Lorentz Eckhoff sugests much the same thing when he argues that until well into the eighteenth century men of letters found their public among the aristocratic classes.
So the writers approached their audience with respect addressing people superior to him in rank—Kings, courtiers, noblemen or rich citizens. But "the nineteenth century author, however, speaks to a people he does not necessarily respect: many of his readers are probably his social inferiors and the bulk are undoubtedly his intellectual inferiors." This led the artists to execute their works with total disregard to the reactions of their audience. The idea may seem oversimplified but it partly explains the phenomenon of the artist's exile from the middle-class society which again, in part accounts for the character of modern literature.

On the philosophical level the collapse of any unassailable framework of values led to an intensifying emphasis on the subjective consciousness. Towards the close of the 1880s literary minds sensed that science had moved into a new phase where the fixities and certainties had become fluid and uncertain. Naturally, sensitive minds began to feel acutely this sense of loss of and isolation. Concomitant with this development came the loss the religious faith in God: "God hath died" declared Nietzsche in 1892. This predicament in the field of science and religion gave rise to a number of organisations concerned with mystical and esoteric beliefs. The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875; The Society for Pshycical Research in 1882 and a host of other societies like the Esoteric Buddhist Society, Hermetic Society etc. also came into being during this time. The profusion of organisations in the period concerned with esoteric faith only suggests the prevalence of the forces of anti-
rationalism. Rightly has Rolan N. Stromberg called the period "an age of unreason ...."²³

In the field of literature the writers began to dwell more and more on aspects of human sensibility which were not simply empirical, or in the old sense, sensual. They became very much aware of the growing chasm between the subject and the object. With the increasing conviction that the world is not fully intelligible to human reason there arose a corresponding insistence on the efficacy and finality of subjective reality — it is in the subjective that man must live to find the 'real' realities, the courage to be and the strength to dream. If order had failed man in the external world, he had to fall back on the construction of an internal order. If reality is continually in a state of flux, we can be sure only of our fleeting impressions of reality with no hope at all of a credible world behind sensible phenomena, no means at all of communicating our experiences to others. Walter Pater describes the situation with extraordinary precision in 1868:

Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Everyone of those impressions is the impression of the individual in isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.²⁴

Pater here rightly underlines the accelerated move towards
subjectivism in the imagination of the age in general and its increasingly poignant sense of loneliness and isolation. Actually, the real subject of the 'Conclusion' which first appeared as a part of Pater's essay on Morris in 1868, is neither Morris's poetry nor the historic Renaissance, but a problem deriving from the new science being proclaimed in Pater's time by men like Darwin, Huxley and Tyndall; namely, the new spirit of relativism, of flux. Pater argues in the 'Conclusion' that what is real in our existence is not some supernatural world but the visible existence — the here and now in all its sensuous, fleeting beauty. Since all values are relative; Pater's conclusion is that beauty for its own sake should be a justifiable alternative value system. That the aesthetic life can be actually a life lived in accordance with the scientific formulations and that l'art pour l'art is premised on the most up-to-date theories — this is what the 'Conclusion' intended to prove. It is in response to the challenge of relativism that Pater advocates the passionate observation of nature, the sense of transience of all beauty and the concern to create for the evanescent flame of thought or feeling a visible but pure form in the material structure of word or phrases which could isolate the moment from the flux. "Let us accept the challenge", Pater declared, "let us see what modern philosophy, when it is sincere, really does say about human life and the truth we can attain in it, and the relation of this to the desire of beauty." 25

The German expressionists also wanted to respond to the challenge much in the same fashion. They were convinced that
Artistic creation should be the only value in a meaningless irrational universe and were equally convinced that the artist must express with complete integrity what his instincts moved him to express. He needs pay no attention to the audience. As Nietzsche had said, "Our thoughts, our values, our ifs and buts, our yeas and nays, grows out of us with the same necessity with which a tree bears its fruits .... Suppose they do not please you, these fruits of ours? What concern is that of the trees --- or of us philosophers?" This complete subjectivism was always an ingredient of all the art movements including symbolism and it later grew stronger to lead into the phenomena of the 1920s such as Dadaism and Surrealism. It implied a scorn for the public, for the mass, for all the manner of orthodoxy, conformity, institutionalised literature and learning. Lina Milman's statement gives us an idea of this symptomatic development: "The most exquisite in life are just those passing emotions, those elusive impressions which it behooves the artist to go seeking, over them so cunningly to cast his net of words, or colour as to preserve that rapture of that emotion, that impression, for the delight of mankind for ever." What Milman suggests is that one's impressions of passing experience were both more significant and more actual than external reality if that reality could ever be known. It is absolutely in accord with Pater's definition of aesthetic criticism:

To see the object as in itself it really is has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step
towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly. [Emphasis mine]

The point Pater wants to make here is that one can be sure of only one's own impressions and that is almost equivalent to an objective understanding of an object — whether physical or artistic.

This withdrawal and isolation was, for Pater, not a misfortune but a virtue because it had a further dimension, one involving artistic integrity. There had been premonitions of it before in Victorian literature — in Tennyson's "Palace of Art" (published in 1832, much revised in 1842) and most notably in D.G. Rossetti who, according to Yeats was a subconscious influence and perhaps the most powerful of all" on the Rhymers who "looked consciously" to Pater for their "philosophy." In the second chapter, I have already referred to Rossetti's parable "Hand and Soul" which appeared in the first number of the Pre-Raphaelites' short-lived journal, The Germ, in 1850. It is a story about an imaginary early Tuscan painter, Chiaro dell' Erma who passionately loved the outward manifestations of beauty and tried to capture them worthily in his art. He achieved worldly fame, yet for all his fame, he remains unsatisfied. With all that he had done, he feels that he had mistaken the worship of beauty for faith. And he reacted by taking another aim for his life. He begins creating works of art which had moral instruction as their conscious aim. These were large public paintings, allegorical
depictions of virtue. Still he does not find happiness or fulfilment. Then one day as he was looking out from the window of his room, Chiaro saw the large allegorical fresco of Peace, which he had painted on a Church wall, splattered by the blood of townsmen fighting among themselves in the square. His moral allegories seem useless. At this moment, when Chiaro, convinced of the rootlessness of his earlier faith and the uselessness, and, even mischievousness of his moral fervour, is in a state of bewildered despair, a vision appears to him. It is the vision that appears some time or other to most romantic poets — that of a woman who turns out to be the image of his own soul. She told him to distress himself no further over whether or not he was fulfilling God's will: "What he hath set in thine heart to do, that do thou; and even if thou do it without thought of him, it shall be well done, it is this sacrifice that he asketh of thee ...." In other words, God does not demand that men will be moralists; He demands that they will work from their own hearts, as He works from His. Finally, she lays a charge upon him: "Chiaro, servant of God, take now thine art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know men .... Do this; and so shall thy soul stand before thee always and perplex thee no more."

This seems a new kind of Pre-Raphaelite creed — not fidelity to external nature alone but fidelity to one's own inner experience, which is to be followed even if it contradicts other considerations. This fidelity to experience is all that God demands of the artist, it is as acceptable to him as a formal religious faith and an art carried on in this spirit is itself a
worship and service of God. This principle of fidelity to inner experience was evidently accepted as one of the Pre-Raphaelite canons, for it forms the subject of a sonnet by William Michael Rossetti, specially written to express the aims of the movement and printed on the cover of The Germ:

When whoso merely hath a little thought
Will plainly think the thought which is in him,—
Not imaging 'another's bright or dim,
Nor mangling with new words what others taught.

"What I meant", W.M. Rossetti explained later, "is this: a writer ought to think out his subject honestly and personally, not imitatively, and ought to express it with directness and precision: if he does this, we should respect his performance as truthful, even though it may not be important." What W.M. Rossetti advocates here is an individual genuineness of thought. For Pater it is another name for personality:

The impress of a personal quality, a profound expressiveness, what the French call intimite, by which is meant some subtle sense of originality — the seal on a man's work of what is most inward and peculiar in his moods, and manner of apprehension: ... it is the quality which alone makes work in the imaginative order really worth having at all.

It is, therefore, clear how much importance Pater attached to this concept of fidelity to one's own inward vision, to the precise features of the picture within.
To the nineties, D.G. Rossetti was himself a Chiaro dell'Erma, type of the ideal artist. In their descriptions of him, they put special stress upon his isolation from society. Arthur Symons thinks of him as one who never cared to leave the dream world of his own imagination but who lived, wrote and painted in an interior world "like a perfectly contented prisoner to whom the sense of imprisonment is a joy." Symons was, no doubt, guided by Rossetti's own assertion: "All my life I have dreamt one dream alone." Walter Pater in his essay on D.G. Rossetti speaks approvingly of Rossetti's "mystic isolation" that will only appeal "to a special and limited audience."

By limiting the appeal of Rossetti's poetry "to a special and limited audience" Pater touches on another very central and topical issue of the period — that of elitism and obscurity in art. To some members of the late Victorian reading public the achievement of their major poets, particularly Robert Browning and D.G. Rossetti, was compromised by the apparent obscurity of some passages in their work. To this kind of people, obscurity in poetry seems to deny what they took to be one of the central functions of language i.e. communication. Their argument can be summarised by a quotation from Benjamin Jowett, the liberal theologian, the enormously influential master of Balliol college, Oxford, and reportedly one of Pater's sternest critics. Jowett compared the apparently necessary obscurity of dead languages — in some Greek poetry, for instance, — with what he saw as the avoidable obscurity of some recent English poetry:

There are many passages in some of our great modern
poets which are far too obscure; in which there is no proportion between style and subject; in which any half-expressed figure, any harsh construction, any distorted collocation of words, any remote sequence of ideas is admitted .... The obscurities of early Greek poets arose necessarily out of the state of languages and logic which existed in their age.... For us the use of language ought in every generation to become clearer and clearer.\[37\]

In the above quotation, Jowett emphasises on the social function of language. But to Pater, the question involves artistic integrity in the matter of expression. If the writer insists on giving an exact impression of his own felt experience, he may, of necessity, be obscure and complex. It was in precisely these terms that Pater viewed Rossetti's work:

His own meaning was always personal and even recondite, in a certain sense learned and casuistical, sometimes complex or obscure, but the term was always, one could see, deliberately chosen from many competitors, as the just transcript of that peculiar phase of soul which he alone knew, precisely as he knew it.\[38\] [My emphasis]

In other words, Pater believed that a poem quite simply expressed the poet's inner experience and, therefore, obscurity is an almost inevitable consequence of the artist's fidelity to his own vision and becomes an evidence of the difference that exists between the poet's sharpened sensibility and that of ordinary
humanity. The assertion that the soul or sensibility of the artist is of a different and higher kind from that of most of his audience was broadly a late Romantic commonplace.

For Pater there was a further and equally important point allied to this issue of artistic integrity. Since substance could never be dissociated from form, the individuality of perception naturally involves a concomitant individuality of expression. Pater's concept of style, therefore, was one which, in critical terms, turned out to be both restricted and unhelpful. It ignores, for example, the idea of a style based upon the common features of an age, of a nationality or of a school. Style was, in Pater's eyes, despite his reservations, above all else, a hallmark of individuality. But to return to his example of Rossetti's verse —— Pater's advocacy of a poet's right to create an individual style, if only as a consequence of the uniqueness of his sensibility, accentuated the very charge of elitism and obscurity. It was tantamount to constructing a private language. Within the terms of the expressive aesthetic that Pater had claimed for the modern poets, the formal characteristics became paramount as the aesthetic writers believed that the only morality to observe was that which involved the process of creating art (i.e. the perfection of a work of art within its own terms). And in its expressive and formal qualities, it was music, in Pater's famous definition, which became the model of all the other arts because in music the link with empirical reality is thin and the division between content and form ceases to exist. Here is thus the ground for an assimilation of the different art
forms so as to achieve a higher power of expression — a point I have discussed in the second chapter.

However, Pater had cleverly, and presumably quite deliberately, all but avoided a key issue — that of the way in which works of literature are received by the reader. The topic is, in fact, briefly alluded to in the last paragraph of his essay on "Style" (1889). Contemporary critics had, of course, objected that an expressive aesthetic such as Pater had proposed, failed to take into account that art also has a public dimension, that is, art has a public dimension, that is, art has an audience. It is an issue that assumed much importance in the 1890s and is one of the chief sources of tension in modern art. It may be interesting to point out that much of the obscurity of Hopkins's poetry has been accounted for by Yvor Winters with reference to the Romantic-expressive individualism. In 1949 Yvor Winters delivered two public lectures sponsored by The Hudson Review, in which he accused Hopkins (1884-1889) of "emotional over-emphasis" and "violent assertiveness." Donald Davie is another important critic who treats Hopkins as a 'decadent' poet and critic. Davie argues that Hopkins's own poetry and criticism proceed from the single assumption that the function of poetry is to express a human individuality in its most wilfully uncompromising and provocative form. This self-conscious singularity is what Davie stigmatises as 'decadent'.

Nurtured and nourished in the milieu of such a vehemently individualistic poetic ideals, the writers of the nineties abandoned the notion of the artist as a therapeutic functionary
of the society. They took it for granted that the artist's primary duty was to be scrupulously faithful to his own private vision and in achieving this ideal he must not make any compromise with popular taste. The Yellow Book, that representative magazine of the nineties carried the publisher's note that "it will have the courage of its modernness, and not tremble at the frown of Mrs. Grundy." This anti-victorian emphasis led to the exploration of morally dubious themes, more precisely, the theme of sexuality in literature. More important for our present purpose is the point that this antipathy to any compromise with the public taste served to adjust the poet's relation to his audience resulting in a shift in the poet's function from that of a public figure to that of a private one.

The writers of the nineties withdrew themselves completely into their own interior world resenting the trade and commerce of the bourgeois world. Symons flatly told his father that he would not soil his hands with trade and set himself to become an aristocrat of letters. Describing his ideal of the artist in his first book An Introduction to the Study of Browning (1886), Symons says that Aprile in Paracelsus is the supreme artistic type, "the lover of beauty and beauty alone", so much a type indeed that he is scarcely a "realisable human being." In choosing this ideal Symons seems never to have questioned the necessity of a separation between artist and society, nor to have hoped that each might be of use to the other. He took it as given that the artist was isolated and that he should be so. Roots of this sense of estrangement from and hatred for the middle class
are to be found in his childhood experience of poverty:

We were very poor, and I hated the constraints of poverty. We were surrounded by the commonplace and the middle-classes.... I existed, others also existed; but between us there was an impassable gulf and I had rarely any desire to cross it.... To be let alone and to live my own life that was what I wanted.  

Throughout Symons's essays and critical writings there are innumerable references to the insensitive public whom he calls the "fact-worshippers." To Symons exuberance and extravagance were "characteristics which impress uncritical persons as being the essence of poetic inspiration" and "feverish and blustering" writing was admired "for the quality of its defects." Indiscriminate reviewers contributed to the poor taste of the public by their "hyperboles heaped upon hyperbole, rhodomontade on rhodomontade." Symons was of the conviction that "in considering the question of any individual popularity, it is needful to take into account the general level of taste which can be distinguished in the public which has created the popularity." Convinced that "taste can neither be acquired nor eradicated", Symons emphatically declared that good art "has never been a money-making commodity" — a situation he himself had experienced. Echoing Carlyle he wrote: "What is written for the crowd goes to the crowd; it lives its bustling day there and then is forgotten like today's newspaper tomorrow." He elaborated the point in another context: "The voice of the people, the voice of the gallery, howls for or against qualities
which are never qualities of literature."\(^49\)

This elitist or aristocratic orientation permeates Symons's writings. Great art "appeals for its perfect appreciation to a public within a public; those fine students of what is fine art, who take their artistic pleasure consciously, deliberately, critically with the learned love of the amateur."\(^50\) In another article on Pater he praises Pater because "He was quite content that his mind should 'keep as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world', it was that prisoner's dream of a world that it was his whole business as a writer to remember, to perpetuate."\(^51\) He admired Beardsley for his "immense contempt for the public; and the desire to kick that public into admiration, and then to kick it for admiring the wrong thing or not knowing why it was admiring."\(^52\) The failure of The Savoy which ran for 1895 and 1896 only convinced Symons that attempts for a wider communication could not succeed and provoked this bitter recrimination:

Comparatively few people care for art at all, and most of them care for it because they mistake it for something else. A street-singer... has just been assuring me that 'if you care for art you don't get rich'. No, it is for their faults that any really artistic production becomes popular; art cannot appeal to the multitude. It is wise when it does not attempt to; when it goes contentedly along a narrow path, knowing and caring only to know, in what direction it is moving.\(^53\)
To democratise art, was in Symons's opinion, to undermine the integrity of art, because "with democracy art has nothing to do." On this principle Symons attacked Tolstoy's theory of art which was based on a generous social doctrine of equality and a conviction that true art will surely be intelligible to simple, unperverted peasants and labourers. Symons emphatically contradicts:

No, neither the uneducated judgement nor the instincts of the uneducated can ever come to have more than the very slightest value in the determination of what is true or false in art. A genuine democracy of social conditions may or may not be practically possible; but the democracy of the intellect, happily, is impossible. There at all events we must find aristocracy.

With such a view art could never be "an organ of progress", a concept held by the victorian as well as the Tolstoian critics as the only possible view of art but which appeared to Symons and to the nineties for that matter "demonstrably false."

The necessity and desirability of the artist's exile from society was a life-long conviction of Symons. Writing an essay on Paul Verlaine in 1899 he categorically states:

The artist has no more part in society than a monk in domestic life: he cannot be judged by its rules, he can be neither praised nor blamed for his acceptance or rejection of its conventions. Social rules are made by normal people for normal people and the man of genius is
fundamentally abnormal. It is the poet against society, society against the poet, a direct antagonism.  

Symons repeats the very same lines in a much later book entitled *Wanderings* (1913). The shock of this direct antagonism between artist and society can be avoided only when there is a compromise on the part of the artist with his artistic integrity. The result of this is always a note of falsehood in art and literature. Symons was pleased to note that the compromise was impossible to the nature of Verlaine. Indeed, true creative artists must guard against concessions to the audience. Symons illustrates a failure in this regard by referring to Massinger's striving for effect in his *Studies in the Elizabethan drama* (1919):

> But in many instances, Massinger's very endeavour to wind off his neat play in the neatest manner ... spoils the artistic effect. His persistent aversion to a tragic end, even where a virtual tragedy demands it, his invincible determination to make things come to a fortunate conclusion ..., in a word, his concession to popular taste, no matter at what cost, not unfrequently distorts the conclusions of plays up to this point well-conducted.  

The contemporary dramatists, in Symons's opinion, suffered the same temptation from the insensitive crowd.

Yet Symons was not absolutely unaware of the need to have an audience for art or literature. And his major dilemma was how to
reconcile the rival claims of a scrupulous adherence to one's own imaginative vision and the desire to get across to an audience with a firm grip on the actualities of life. He found in the art of William Morris a sort of resolution of the tension:

That was Morris's great lesson to our time and in stepping outside art itself, in touching life, grasping it with both hands, with that tremendous grip of his, he showed us that the artist need not be isolated from humanity, even in the midst of twenty different forms of art work.59

But Symons himself had never been satisfied with any resolution and he periodically championed the cause of art and the artist throughout his life.

Another very important artist of the nineties who was equally emphatic in championing the cause of art and artists, was George Moore (1852-1933). In a dedicatory essay to Moore, Symons wrote. "Has either of us ever doubted that a work of art has but one reason for existence, that it should be a work of art, a moment of eternity of beauty?"60 Ruth Temple Claims that "in defence of the autonomy of art", no writers were "more outspoken and more faithful than Arthur Symons and George Moore."61 The aristocratic orientation of Moore's sensibility is evident from the very beginning in his slighting references to the common people. He firmly believed in the individuality of sensibility: "Democratic art! Art is the very antithesis of democracy .... The mass can only appreciate simple and naive emotions, pureile
prettiness, above all conventionalities." He knew very well that "in England ... those who loved literature the most purely, who were the least mercenary in their love, were marked out for persecution" because the commercial temperament of the bourgeois middle-class will not brook any sympathy for artists per se. When he thinks of the situation, he is reminded of Baudelaire who tells:

... how a dog will run away howling if you hold to him a bottle of choice scent, but if you offer him some putrid morsel picked out of some gutter hole, he will sniff round it joyfully and will seek to lick your hand for gratitude. Baudelaire compared that dog to the public.

This scathing attack on the popular taste was obviously prompted by Moore's basic assumption that the artistic sensibility is a unique one with which the vulgar masses of an industrial society could feel no sympathy. In his first significant critical work Impressions and opinions (1891), Moore makes the point clearly: "The vulgar do not know that the artist makes but little use of his empirical knowledge of life and that he relies almost entirely upon his consciousness of truth." He believes this to be true not only with reference to literature but with the other fine arts as well: "A portrait is an exact reflection of the painter's state of soul at the moment of sitting down to paint." In another essay in the same volume, he asserts: "The first quality in drawing without which drawing does not exist, is an individual seeing of subject." [Emphasis mine]
Such a frame of mind which firmly believes in individual expressiveness, a unique perceptiveness is naturally hostile to any kind of interference in artistic freedom whether from the bourgeoisie or from the Royalty. When in 1881 the French Government gave the Palais de l'Industrie to the artists, with full power to manage their own affairs, Moore felt ecstatic at this liberation: "Art was at last in the hands of the artists, art was free at last, no more oppression, no more injustice, no more lagging behind in the mire of old aestheticisms."\(^68\) To this extreme concern for freedom in outlook any kind of conventionality was anathema. Moore was sceptical about the utility of the different organisations imparting artistic education because of his conviction that "art cannot he acquired, nor can those who have art in their souls tell how it came there, or how they practice art. Art cannot be repressed, encouraged or explained; it is something that transcends over knowledge, even as the principle of life."\(^69\) His elitist attitude becomes more evident when he says —— "whether everybody should be taught to read and write I leave to the politicians —— the matter is not important but ... systematised education in art means decadence."\(^70\) Two points are worth noting here: Moore is against systematised art education because that will breed a conventional and stereotyped kind of art and is detrimental to the development of creativity. The second point is that the ordinary social issues 'whether everybody should be taught' are absolutely irrelevant to an artist.

The artist is least concerned with all extraneous
considerations and art in this view is not an organ of achieving social justice and progress. Moore says very unequivocally that "all men of inferior genius take refuge in humanitarianism." An artist, according to Moore, should be concerned only with an exact recording of his own imaginative grasp of truth and formal justness. In realising these ends an artist must be very scrupulous and painstaking without any compromise with popular taste. We have already discussed in the third chapter how Moore himself waged a war against the 'domestication of literature' by publishing his polemical pamphlet Literature At Nurse or Circulating Morals (1885). This subjectivity of temperament permeates Moore's outlook so thoroughly that he views criticism "more as the story of the critic's soul than as an exact science." Derek Stanford rightly says that "the strength of Moore as a critic results from the intensely personal nature of his thought." The very titles of Moore's important works — Conessions of A Young Man (1888), Impressions and Opinions (1891), Memoirs of My Dead Life (1915) — imply the subjectivity of his critical discourse.

This extreme individuality of outlook necessarily presupposes a sense of loneliness and isolation which, for Moore, is a precondition for artistic creativity. In a letter to Lady Cunard (September, 1898) Moore writes: "All the winter I shall see no society whatsoever, society is a snare and he who gets entangled will never come to fruition." Indeed, Moore's antipathy to democracy arises out of his belief that man in a mass democracy is systematically robbed of his sense of his own
proper existence separate and apart from others. An important aspect of Moore's genius is that he continually sees this loneliness as an integral part of artistic life. In the "Introduction" to his Celibate Lives Moore has an imaginary conversation in which, with a characteristically light touch, he reveals something of his attitude to the short story. When his imaginary protagonist asks Moore if he is for or against adventures, he replies that he does not deal in adventures but in soul-cries. Here Moore gets to the very core of what has preoccupied Irish short story writers ever since his time --- the problem of man's loneliness. Frank O'Connor, in his extremely perceptive study of the short-story, The Lonely Voice (1963) writes: "There is in the short story as its most significant characteristic something we do not find in the novel --- an intense awareness of human loneliness." It is really true to say that while we often read a familiar novel for companionship, "We approach the short story in a different mood." All the major characters in Celibate Lives opt out of the bustle of daily life in one way or another and Moore in a subtle way, repeats that sexual inadequacy is one of the truest sources of loneliness. Joyce's Dubliners, that remarkable collection of short stories, ends with the same lyrical affirmation that man is essentially alone. Graham Hough concludes his essay on George Moore published in the English Institute Essays (1960) by drawing our attention to the close similarity between Moore's The Untilled Field and Joyce's Dubliners, between Moore's Confessions and Joyce's Portrait of the Artist... Referring specifically to "The Dead" in Dubliners and "The Exile" and "Homesickness" in The
Untilled Field, Hough tries to establish how extraordinarily close is the affinity between "these two lonely antinomian writers." 78

Lionel Johnson in his own life illustrates vividly this sense of isolation and loneliness. Born in a typical Victorian middle-class family whose men traditionally became officers in the army, he developed in his very boyhood a deep sense of hatred for the philistine values of his family. His rejection of the family form of worship by becoming a Roman Catholic in 1891, is part of his general rejection of middle-class values. Roman Catholicism, in his mind, was connected with aristocracy, intellectual superiority and wideness of culture. Newman has pointed out in his "The second Spring" that Catholicism in England is connected with two groups of people: Irish immigrants coming and going at harvest time and a few members of the very good old families. 79 Both of these groups were free in Johnson's mind from any connection with middle-class philistinism. His pride in the deliberately outmoded dignity of catholicism is reflected in his poem "The Church of a Dream":

Sadly the dead leaves rustle in the whistling wind,
Around the weather-worn, grey church, low down the vale
The saints in golden vesture shake before the gale
Still in their golden vesture the old saints prevail
Alone with Christ, desolate else, left by mankind. 80

[Emphasis mine]
The poem was written in 1890, only a year before his conversion to catholicism and as such, its intention, one might presume, was to praise the old, out-worn, yet the strong and grand catholic church. Indeed, it may safely be concluded that his religious faith in stead of serving as a bond between him and the world, only acted as another protective enclosure for his sensibility.

From this loneliness alcohol served as one escape, his books served as another. In his library he could lose himself, forget the society of his own time. Arthur Waugh recalling his experiences with Lionel Johnson in Oxford (Johnson came to Oxford in 1886) says — "He was essentially a bookman, and to many of us, perhaps the first natural bookman that we have ever been privileged to meet." Renouncing the society almost absolutely he spent his time between reading and bouts of solitary drinking. Yeats is on record to have said that when he visited Johnson in the latter's room in London, he used to be so overpowered by his friend's air of aloofness that he found it hard not to murmur Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's words: "As for living our servants will do that for us". In fact, he cut himself off so effectively from the world that George Santayana remarks: "Lionel Johnson lived only on his upper storey, in a loggia open to the sky; and he forgot that he had climbed there up a lone flight of flinty steps, and that his campanile rested on the vulgar earth". Indeed, Wilde's prophecy that "... as civilization progresses and we become more highly organised, the elect spirits of each age, the critical and cultured spirits, will grow less and less interested in actual life, and will seek to gain their
impressions almost entirely from what Art has touched", had its
fulfilment in the life of Lionel Johnson. 84

It is, however, interesting to note that the tone of
Johnson's criticism is social and urbane and as such it may be
said to form the antithesis to the reality of his isolation. I
have discussed the issue in the fourth chapter suggesting that
his criticism might have sprung from a reaction against the
manner of his life. Here I shall try to point out that though
Johnson pledged his allegiance to all that is sane and central in
art, he was equally emphatic in demanding the artist's
faithfulness to his own imaginative vision. Unlike the other
members of the nineties, he believed that there were certain
"enduring things" or permanent truths in life, truths which every
reader could recognise as such and he also believed that it was
the task of the artist to discover and communicate those
truths. 85 But he was equally convinced that in order to tell the
truth about the world, the artist must tell the truth about
himself. If the artist is false to his own imaginative vision, he
will appear false to his readers. Johnson criticises Charlotte
Bronte for ending Vilette ambiguously on account of her father's
dislike for tragedy, instead of adhering to her original desire
to end it tragically. He argues that in so far as the ambiguous
ending did violence to her own imagination, it appears untrue to
the reader. Similarly, Johnson praises the second, tragic
version of Kipling's The Light That Failed over the earlier
version with a happy ending because, he says, the tragic version
is closer to the novelist's own conception of how the book ought
to have ended, and therefore "appears truer" to us. Thus Johnson holds that the artist must look into his heart and write, a precept, (as we have already seen) suggested by the strange allegory of Rossetti entitled "Hand and Soul". But for Johnson, to look into one's own heart is, in a way, to look into the heart of the world. This is where Johnson presents a very balanced attitude by achieving a synthesis of the subjective and the objective views of art. It is interesting to note that Edward carpenter voiced a similar sentiment: "To your own self be true and ... you will be in touch with all other selves: You will have the Angel-Wings which will carry you in an instant from one end of heaven to the other." The idea thus got a general acceptability towards the turn of the century.

The aesthetic ideal of withdrawal and isolation with its emphasis on the artistic uniqueness of sensibility was a central concept with the nineties permeating the writings of everyone of the group. We have the evidence of Victor Plarr to claim that Ernest Dowson had a deep disgust for "the evil-smelling mob". In an undated letter to Plarr, written probably about October, 1892 Dowson finds fault with William Morris, as Morris, in his opinion, panders to the taste of an "evil-smelling mob ... to the detriment of his art and the offence of his own dignity." Wilde, notwithstanding his secret desire to bask in the glory of public attention and applause, was indefatigable in claiming "the recognition of a separate realm for the artist" on the grounds that it was "a characteristic of all great imaginative work and of all great eras of artistic creation ... Art never harms itself..."
by keeping aloof from the social problems of the day." \(^90\) The main thrust of Wilde's arguments in all his essays is the release of truth from the limitations of outward reality and its transformation into an autonomous entity bound only to the subjective self and its feelings: "Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate ..." \(^91\) Wilde builds his aesthetic theory logically on the foundation of Pater's solipsism —"each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world." \(^92\) Art, as Wilde views it, is a monad, a windowless edifice from which knowledge of life is neither accessible nor desirable. The world transforms itself into an aesthetic construct of our will and our imagination:

Things are because we see them and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then and then only, does it come into existence. \(^93\)

Needless to say, that this is an extreme subjective premise where the very existence of a thing depends on the sensibility of the viewer. The criterion by which art is to be judged cannot, therefore, have anything to do with 'recognition' or 'resemblance' \(^94\) in relation to objective reality, but is based on the work's internal perfection which is the artist's success in representing his ideas of beauty with the tools of style under the conditions laid down by his own sensitive temperament. Herein
lies the essence of artistic expression. Wilde makes this even more clear in a letter concerning a review of *A House of Pomegranates*:

No artist recognises any standard of beauty but that which is suggested by his own temperament. The artist seeks to realise in a certain material his immaterial idea of beauty and thus to transform an idea into an ideal. That is the way an artist makes things. That is why an artist makes things. 95

Through all these illustrations from the different writers, I have tried to establish that the emancipation of artistic reality from a correspondence with empirical or objective reality and making it equivalent to fidelity to one's own imaginative vision without any concession to the popular taste was a central critical notion of the nineties. Barbara Charlesworth is right when she suggests that:

Newman's gentleman, Arnold's man of culture, Rossetti's true artist, Pater's scholar, Wilde's individualist, each represent a very different vision of the good life; nevertheless out of each of them it is possible to extract a single element: an isolated pursuit of and pleasure in a beauty which the mass of men cannot enjoy or even understand, a beauty caught momentarily in one's own fantasies. 96

The basic idea is that beauty and pleasure cannot be validated by
mass observation and can be caught only in one's momentary vision —— this is the only correct episteme.

Thus subjectivism as the only possible way of artistic knowledge is of immense importance to the development of literature in the modern periods since the nineties. Yeats's revolt against 'rhetoric' and 'impurities' in literature is to be understood in the backdrop of this development. Indeed, a significant aspect of the symbolist movement is the assumption that the artist is, and must be isolated from and critical of the society in which he lives. For the symbolist insists on an world of ideal beauty and tries to realise it through an unstinted devotion to his art i.e., craftsmanship, so much so, that it necessarily precludes any concern with other aspects. In the 1890's the young Yeats found in the aesthetic movement a welcome antidote to the Victorian 'rhetoric' —— "that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennyson." He rejected outright the 'public' stance in the twilight world of his early poems. One of his favourite words in this period was 'dreams' and it hardly needs telling that the truths and realities of dreams are not of this world. 'Rhetoric' in the Yeatsian context, seems to include propaganda of all kinds, everything to do with sociology or science, impurities in general. True poetry is to be freed from all rhetoric. The result, he says, "will be a return to imagination" but it is also as he does not say, a withdrawal from areas which had traditionally been subjects of poetry — from physical nature, from morality, from history, from the realm of ideas and the realm of facts:
The beryl stone was enchanted by our fathers that it might unfold the pictures in its heart and not to mirror our own excited faces or the boughs waving outside the window. 98

But the problem is that we do not know what the pictures in the heart of the 'beryl' really are. In other words, when all superfluities and impurities have been cast off, what is to be put into its place? Yeats analyses the problem in an early essay "What is Popular Poetry" (1901) and suggests a return to the source of poetry in the unwritten tradition: "There is only one kind of good poetry, for the poetry of the coterie, which presupposes the written tradition, does not differ in kind from the true poetry of the people which presupposes the unwritten tradition." The point worth-noting here is that Yeats tries to combine the two ideals — the popular and the esoteric. He is firmly convinced that Victorian poetry had lost itself in irrelevancies of all kinds in order to please a large middle-class audience that wants to be instructed by its poets. But it is to be countered not by the creation of pure poetry but by returning to the folk tradition. He writes very perceptively about the whole situation especially in the series of short essays called Discoveries (1906). In the section called "Personality and the Intellectual Essences", he views the history of literature as a movement away from the energy of Villon to the more sophisticated but insubstantial appeal of Shelley. He believes that poetry should be an integrated art, the expression of the whole personality, "blood, imagination, intellect running
together." The aesthetes were devoted to the imagination, the victorians, it might be argued, cultivated the intellect, but the elemental force, the blood, had appealed to neither. From this point onward Yeats strives always to create a poetry with the power of integration. By 1913, Yeats speaks frankly of the nineties' attitude as a 'misunderstanding' and of the aesthetic doctrine in general as a "good switch while the roads were beset with geese." Now, he is in for a "more profound Pre-Raphaelitism" in which all elements of the artist's personality finds expression, a "reintegration of the mind."

But it can never be denied that symbolist premises were central to Yeats's work throughout his life. In his early poetry the use of symbols produces a blurring of the real world while in his later poems he tries to evolve into a new system of symbols that could be valid in a wide world. It is here that Yeats's dramatic mask comes as a solution. Yeats sees the mask as the creative principle: out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry. We have already seen in the earlier chapter how all creative activity in the Yeatsian context, depends on the energy to assume a mask, to be deliberately reborn as something not oneself. Once the poet has attained his mask, he will be supplied with images that come from the Anima Mundi i.e., the Great Memory or the collective unconscious. Thus the poet, the individual is connected with a tradition outside and larger than himself. Yeats dismisses the rhetorician, he dismisses the sentimentalist but art always remains to him "a vision of reality". The word 'vision' implies a transformation of the reality passing through
the individual sensibility i.e., something projected from inside. And his sensibility was fostered and nourished in the nineties before it could emerge into a new territory.

It is possible to show that even Eliot's early work displays a leaning towards aesthetic principles as a means of avoiding the moralist position, although he constructed his own path realising the sterility of the aesthetic stream. The point I want to make is that even Eliot had to assert the aesthetic principles as a means of shaking off of the complacency in an audience who were trained to criticise a poem for the ideas it contained and not for its beauty as a complex, total unit. Thus Eliot in "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (1927) says: "In truth, neither Shakespeare nor Dante did any real thinking — that was not their job; ... The poet makes poetry, the metaphysician makes metaphysics, the bee makes honey, the spider secrets filament; you can hardly say any of these agents believes: he merely does." 103 Again, he insists in his lecture on "Shelley and Keats" that the activities of poet and philosopher are "better performed inside two skulls than one." 104 But once an enlightened audience has begun to appear for his poetry, the aesthetic attitude began to relax. There was a gradual shift in Eliot from the aesthetic to the moral, from the symbolist to the discursive. And his final position, like that of Yeats, shows a recognition and a synthesis of these rival claims of discourse and image. In "The Social Function of Poetry", for example, Eliot writes:

We must avoid being seduced into one or the other of
the two extreme opinions. The first is that it is simply the value of the ideas expressed in a poem which gives value to the poetry. The other is that the ideas, the beliefs, of the poet do not matter at all.\textsuperscript{105}

It would not be too much to claim that this synthesizing vision including both the esoteric and the popular kind of poetry could not have been possible but for the experience of the nineties' emphasis on withdrawal and isolation. They actually achieved "a shift in the poet's conception of his own function from that of a public figure to a private one."\textsuperscript{106} Without their effort, neither Yeats nor Eliot could come out of the tyranny of what the age demanded, the insistence on discourse and externalities of all kinds; nor could they come to realise that total withdrawal into one's own interior world could lead to a rarefied insubstantiality in poetry and may even produce entropy and paralysis of the creative impulses. It is here that the lesson of the nineties is very much relevant even to our times. Melvin Rader has rightly pointed out that in the modern world "mankind, split into the elite and the masses, should be harmonised and made whole. The problem is to achieve a culture high in point of attainment yet broad in terms of participation to achieve the wide sharing of excellence."\textsuperscript{107} Indeed, the greatest artistic problem of our time is to unite vivid individualism against the background of community to achieve neither elitism nor egalitarianism but what may be termed egalitarian elitism or elitist egalitarianism.
Notes and References to Chapter V


13. Ibid, p. 79.


20. Ibid, p. 3.


28. Pater, 'Preface' to The Renaissance, p. xxv. Pater here revises Arnold's famous dictum, taken from his lecture, "On Translating Homer" delivered in 1861, to focus the attention away from the object of contemplation to the contemplating mind.


46. Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 188.


56. Ibid, p. 179.

60. Symons, Studies in Two Literatures, p. vii.
64. Ibid, p. 136.
68. Moore, Impressions and Opinions, p. 190.
69. Moore, Modern Painting, p. 137.
70. Ibid, p. 128.
71. Moore, Confessions, p. 164.
72. It may be noted that Moore fired two onslaughts against circulating libraries --- "A New Censorship of Literature" which was published in the issue for 10 December, 1884 of The Pall Mall Gazette and Literature At Nurse, (1885).
73. Moore, Impressions and Opinions, p. 43.
77. Ibid, p. 19.
93. Ellmann, ed., The Artist As Critic, p. 312.
95. Ibid, p. 302.
98. Ibid, p. 163.
100. Ibid, p. 266.