INTRODUCTION

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) has made his mark among the litterateurs who have helped shape contemporary English literature and literary criticism. As a critic, he brought fresh insights into the nature of art and the influence of tradition on work of an artist which made it great. And, as a creative writer, he translated his 'poetics' into his poetry and plays. A lot of critical inquiry has centred largely on his major poems like "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" and on his five fullfledged plays: Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman. Quite strangely though, his poems, "Sweeney Agonistes" and "The Rock," which are structured like plays, have not had the full benefit of scholarly research. His prose writings have received attention only in the light of his creative work and seldom independent of it. It is due to this perhaps that one hears like those of McCallum's.

Pamela McCallum's observation that 'Unlike the writings of (I.A.) Richards or (F.R.) Leavis, T.S. Eliot's theoretical
work remains in the shadow of his poetry is representative of a widely-held, albeit somewhat narrow, view of Eliot's poetics (words in parenthesis supplied). One may make bold to say so because it is difficult to see how Eliot's theoretical work may be said to have remained in the shadow his poetry. Far from it. His creative writing has apparently taken shape out of his critical concerns, if one could separate the two. An instance of how this is true is to be found in an article by Donald J Childs titled, 'Knowledge and Experience in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"' in which he has demonstrated Eliot's use of his theory (evolved in his thesis on F H Bradley) in the making of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Childs suggests in the concluding paragraph that 'Knowledge and Experience.... is in part a reinterpretation or rereading of "prufrock".' Also, there is another observation of his which compels attention: "At the same time, "prufrock" suggests a reading for the dissertation; indeed, it writes part of the dissertation insofar as its metaphors surface at important moments in the epistemological inquiry" (added emphasis). This does seem to suggest that there is a simultaneity in the critical and the creative aspects of Eliot's work with reference to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." One need not labour this point any further.

Yet, opinions similar to those of McCallum's persist, maybe, because Eliot was basically a poet who tried to intuite 'the fractured forms of a disintegrating reality' and stabilise
them 'by a theoretical affirmation which fixes it (reality) within the unity of tradition.' At the same time, he also tried to feel 'the phenomenal isolation of each splintered particle in that unity.'\(^4\) The 'contradiction' inherent in this combination of intuition and feeling is, according to McCallum, 'the most characteristic feature of Eliot's thought.'\(^5\) And, she is not the only one to fault Eliot for these and other similar contradictions. The subsequent chapters, we hope, will show how this may not be true.

Eliot's prose writings are the focus of attention in this thesis. He called them his 'prose reflexions.' Unfortunately, these 'prose reflexions' have been generally evaluated, either as exercises in literary interpretation or as social criticism. Hardly have they received attention as essays that record the gradual development of his theory, his poetics, on their own and thus independent of his poetry. Of course, there are exceptions to this. There are some who have tried to draw our attention to this but their number is so small that their saner voices have got lost in the cacophony of charges. As a result, the central thesis of the problem of belief, which the essays handle in one form or the other, has almost been ignored, especially as a criterion for judging a work of art. Whenever this becomes the point of discussion, Eliot's concern with the problem of belief is taken literally in order to dub him a religious poet. More importantly, unfortunate though it be,
the problem is seen only in the context of his poetry.

This thesis makes an attempt at evaluating Eliot's 'prose reflexions', keeping his handling of the problem of belief in his work at the centre, with a view to arriving at a proper understanding of the core concepts in his poetics. Having done that, we would like to reconstruct his poetics. We are aware of the several difficulties that present themselves when one is trying to do this. The foremost among these being the danger of tying oneself down only to the best of the well known essays. The saving grace lies in the form of the many smaller essays which are quite apparently in complementation of the seminal ones and we propose to deal with all such essays as a group.

It may be said that prose writings easily provide any close reader with the opportunity to find in them a very steady process of Eliot's veering round to the problem of belief beginning in 1919 with "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Obviously, Eliot never found the need to repudiate his earlier observations about writers or their works although he did modify some of them, particularly those in the latter essays. With his secret conversion to the Church of England in 1927, the pace of his search for tradition, the Christian tradition, got accelerated and he began increasingly to call for a Christian orientation to be given to literature. A number of researchers have
seen in this development a momentous shift in Eliot's concerns after World War I.

As an adjectival, 'Christian' would seem to mean something that upholds an organised system of values, not merely limited to being a 'spiritual' institution in its separated aspect. This value system, although it might be 'a direction of religious thought,' it is seen as proceeding inevitably 'to a criticism of political and economic systems.' And, since these systems had to be Catholic in order to be Christian, the word 'Catholic' would suggest that it might mean 'undiluted'. The catholicity was expected to be reflected in the unit's or work's conformity to a tradition — this being the Christian tradition.

Within the time-span of eighteen years between 1919 and 1936, 1927 easily becomes the cut-off point since it is the mid-point on the time-scale. This eighteen-year period appears to be the most productive period of Eliot's career as a writer and must obviously be seen as reflecting the response of Eliot to the proliferation of dictatorships in Europe and the subsequent advance of communism. Hence, Eliot's plea for the consensus between the living and the dead. 1927 is, then, the focal point in the evolution of Eliot's poetics as well if only because it is crucial to our understanding of the way it evolved. There onward, Eliot's prose seems
definitely to project the fervour of a strong believer, firmly entrenched in Christian tradition, pleading for orientating literature in such a way as to make it reflect Christian values. It must be made clear here that this was not a plea to transpose theology into literature as some critics of Eliot's would have us believe.

Another landmark of this eighteen-year period was the year 1934 when Eliot published the three lectures he had delivered in 1933 at the University of Virginia under the title, *After Strange Gods*. These were the lectures delivered at the invitation of the Page-Barbour Lectureship Committee and Eliot subtitled the work as 'A Primer of Heresy.' Although Eliot withdrew the book from publication subsequently in the face of a raging controversy, it contains the genesis of his thought drawn from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and he extended this into his other writings. Since he could never repudiate the stand he had taken in both "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *After Strange Gods*, his action in withdrawing the latter while retaining the former is open to suspicion and doubt. One is bound to suspect in it Eliot's attempt to scotch the controversies the book had given rise to and, at the same time, to doubt whether the withdrawal might have been affected as a tacit measure to create conditions conducive to a wider reading and understanding of the opinions expressed therein. The idea is not to impute
motives but to explore the 'whys' of the withdrawal. Our use of *After Strange Gods* and the wording of the title of this thesis reflects not only this intention of ours but also the measure of high esteem in which we hold Eliot's works.

It must be said to Eliot's credit that he practised what he preached and he preached only what he firmly believed in. The currency he gave to certain concepts like ' Tradition', the theory of 'Impersonality', 'Objective Correlative' and 'Dissociation of Sensibility' were not merely meant for others to use. He used them himself in his works. *After Strange Gods* seems to qualify very easily as the sum and substance of Eliot's philosophy evident both in his creative and critical works. Therefore, one finds it strange to hear Ackroyd (1984; 200) calling this seminal work 'an unsatisfactory attempts to elucidate an important subject'. However, even Ackroyd feels compelled to acknowledge elsewhere in his book how Eliot's essays 'continue the theme which he had inaugurated in *After Strange Gods*. Even if the tone may be one of censure (this in the light of Ackroyd's dissatisfaction with the book), his acceptance of Eliot's other essays takes the sting out of it.

We would like this to be noted, for it is an important concession that Ackroyd makes in his work. Moreover, such other concessions are to be found in other works too. These seem clearly to indicate the significant nature of Eliot's contribution to literature.
Margolis (1972: 174) says more than a decade before Ackroyd that in *After Strange Gods*, Eliot was fulfilling the duty of the Christian in 'testing ... literature against the standards of orthodoxy.' This appears to run contrary to what Huisman (1967) reportedly found as the attempt at a 'theological evaluation of literature.' Huisman noted that the fundamental fault of Eliot's was his failure to acknowledge that this was indeed his real purpose. Lost in these two points of view is the difference between the standards of 'orthodoxy' and 'theology.' While it is true that both are seen as a part of a 'Christian' philosophy, there is a notable difference in etymology. Eliot does not see religion as a substitute for literature. This point must never be lost sight of. Theology may be loosely defined as the science dealing with God and the godly. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, is related to a system of beliefs according to the received or established doctrines, especially in matters of religion. With regard to literature, however, orthodoxy is seen by Eliot as a consensus between the living and the dead. If we term Eliot's attempt in *After Strange Gods* as a theological evaluation of literature, we run the risk of removing from it many other aspects which 'standards of orthodoxy' would allow to it. Moreover, Eliot himself states in "Religion and Literature" that 'Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.'
In other words it is the 'common agreement on ethical and theological matters' that makes literary criticism 'substantive.' The word used by Eliot is 'complete', and literary criticism remains incomplete until the time it is followed by criticism which also takes ethical and theological aspects into consideration.

Christian theology is based on the concepts of the Holy Trinity and Incarnation as well as the hypostatic relationship between God and Man. Also, it revolves around the concept of the duality of Christ in being both Son of God and Son of Man at the same time. Thus, Christian theology views Christ as the bridge between God and Man, for he is partly man. Alongside this theological standpoint, we have the concept of orthodoxy which, in theology, would represent belief in all that the unity of this hypostatic relationship incorporates. When Eliot talks of orthodoxy in literature, he means it to be a reconciliation between the past and the present, a consensus between the living and the dead. And, this is precisely what links up orthodoxy in literature with the concept of tradition and, of course, this is always a Christian tradition. Seen in this perspective, it would help us discover that attempts made at 'theological evaluation' of literature involve an effort made to ascertain whether or not the literary work under evaluation upholds the main planks of the theological assertions.
'Standards' based on orthodoxy would, on the other hand, help evaluate whether or not the concern of the writer under scrutiny focuses on the maintenance of beliefs which are the essential parts of a larger whole. In poetry, one can easily discern these in the symbols which are the correlates of the objects they symbolise. Eliot found that 'the religious poet' is not one who treats 'the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit' but one who deals with 'a confined part of this subject matter' by 'leaving out the major passions.'

This is, to him, a matter of special religious awareness.

Theology, which is the systematic study of God and everything that emanates from His being, if it were to find its way into a literary work, would make much work religious in content. And, this would rob it of its claims to be a literary piece. The work would be seen then as a fine example of 'religious' literature and, worst still, might give to it the colouring of a propagandist piece of writing. Eliot cautions us against these pitfalls in his essay, "Religion and Literature." Given the nature of these arguments of Eliot's about creative work, one may feel it safe to conclude that Eliot would not think of evaluating literature by either using solely the standards of theology or those related to orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy must manifest itself in a literary creation but this is possible only when it is seen within the context of
a tradition, a Christian tradition. We need to remind ourselves that tradition is not merely a restatement of the earlier stance but a reaffirmation of faith which is the result of an unshaken belief. Therefore, it does not seem prudent to dub After Strange Gods as an attempt as a theological evaluation of literature. Contrary to that, it would be to tear Eliot's statements out of their context. It is apparent that a literature steeped in tradition, is to Eliot one that is always out of time although it is very much in time in the same way as beliefs are. Only the canons of the Church, which are laws based on the deliberations of the Conferences of Bishops, are temporal, for these might need modifications and refinements at a later point in time as they usually do.

Eliot's plea for the development of a 'historical sense' makes sense in this context and must be seen in the light of his perception of tradition, for it constitutes an important plank of his theory of literary creation and criticism. Eliot explains that 'historical sense' involves a wholesome perception which is brought to bear on the work of art when a writer feels compelled to write ... with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existences and composes a simultaneous order. (added emphases)
Moreover, as he puts it, it is 'a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal' and even of both put together which is what 'makes a writer traditional.' History, to the Christian West, is a linear progression much in the same way as is time to them, whereas tradition is a part of a cyclical movement. Although time is linear in history, it is cyclical in mythology. Religion, which is a reaffirmation of the existence of God and His creation, is also mythical in structure. In Christian theology, religion appears to be synonymous with Logos or rather it is so, for Logos is 'the Word of God incarnate.' The movement away from Logos to Mythos—which means 'the characteristic or current attitudes of a culture or group, expressed symbolically'—through the medium of poetry, art, drama etc; or from the Word to Myth, which is the meaning of Mythos in Greek; or from imitation to symbolism—saw the birth of romanticism. Similarly, the movement from imitation to symbol and thereon to become an idea, which is both in time and out of it simultaneously, saw the birth of classicism having roots in a tradition.

Returning to the initial argument about the mythical structure of religion, we can safely find in it the reason why so many of its 'truths' cannot be understood by the Intellect. This may be due to the fact that our inability to afford a wholesome perception, which is a prerequisite for the growth and development of a historical sense, results in blasphemy and
heresy. Both these are the result of a grave error which Eliot finds to be springing in the works of writers, who 'in seeking new human emotions to express' end up searching for 'novelty in the wrong place' and discover 'the perverse.'

Of Eliot's prose writings, *After Strange Gods*, in particular, has had to contend with very harsh and, what would appear to us to be, unwarranted criticism. This should become clear at the end of Chapter 2 of this work. Lobb (1981: 8) would have us believe that it is 'a farrago of literary, social and religious criticism.' One finds the use of the word 'farrago' quite uncharitable, for it means 'a disordered' (maybe, even hotch-potch) 'mixture' of ideas. The charge of disorder levelled at Eliot's statements, which formed the basis of his poetics, is far from convincing and might as well reflect Lobb's prejudice. Moreover, the apparent attempt to separate the religious from the social and the social from the literary aspects of literary criticism seem to confirm this suspicion. A writer's perception of his place within the framework of the tradition of his country and, of course, the fact of his use of orthodoxy, are bound to find their reflection in his or her literary creation, if only because literature mirrors the society of its times. Similarly, even if religion is a part of the mythical, tradition and orthodoxy, which religion injects into the social set-up, are to be found in the literature of that social group. Any genuine criticism of a given literary piece
must be able to measure the extent of the impact of tradition, orthodoxy and religious ethos on it. This can be seen as the sum and substance of Eliot's philosophy and his 'poetics'.

Eliot also says as much somewhere in the middle of the first section of "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Discussing the need for the development of historical sense, he notes quite emphatically, 'I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism.' His comment should leave no room for doubt that the religious and the social aspects of his criticism are as much a principle of his aesthetic criticism as is the historical aspect. At least, that is the implication. It would, therefore, be unfair to Eliot if we were to compartmentalise these aspects, not seeing them as an integrated whole. Matthiessen (1958: 202) has quoted a critic called Barber as having said of Eliot's criticism, including *After Strange Gods*, that

most of Eliot's criticism is not directly concerned with religion; yet his comments on literature and culture always prove to be adjusted to religious actuality as he conceives it. (added emphasis)

True enough. The fact that Eliot's comments on literature and culture 'always prove to be adjusted to religious actuality' seems to be the result of Eliot's perception of religion as an important constituent of tradition.
To Eliot, religion represented basically a set of beliefs and culture consisted of the social ethos, beliefs, attitudes etc. Both of these are an intrinsic part of a given tradition shared by a group of people. Literature, as the medium of human expression, translates these beliefs into a work of art. Eliot uses the analogy of a chemical reaction resulting in the formation of sulphuric acid when a fine filament of platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide in order to explain the idea of depersonalisation in art. This analogy may be extended further to show how this is also possible in the case of literature which brings about a fusion not only of the past and the present but also of tradition and the individual talent and of beliefs and social behaviour. We shall leave this discussion at this point.

This thesis has been divided into seven chapters in all. Chapter 1 deals with 'the problem of belief' in Eliot's prose writings. It takes into consideration Eliot's main concerns in "Religion and literature" and looks at them in the light of Eliot's arguments in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and After Strange Gods. Eliot's opinion that the roots of the problem lay in the creative writers writing as they 'want to feel' rather than 'as they do feel' will be under close scrutiny in this Chapter. The chapter also seeks to
to explain (a) Eliot's idea of faith, (b) faith reflected in creative work, (c) the problems modern man faces due to his lack of faith, (d) Eliot's solutions in resolving the problems of belief and faith in literature, and (e) the criteria set up by Eliot for classifying literary works as Christian and heretic.

The tendency on the part of both modern man and creative writers to fall to their knees in the worship of what are, to Eliot, 'Strange Gods' is also what accounts for the growth of the perfidious and the profane in literature. An attempt is made in Chapter 2, titled "After Strange Gods: Perfidy and Profanity", to show how this negates faith. The chapter focuses its attention on Eliot's identification of the 'Strange Gods' in his work, After Strange Gods, and seek to classify these on the basis on six categories: (1) Philosophical, (2) Psychological, (3) Political, (4) Economical, (5) Religious, and (6) Social.

Our effort in Chapter 3, which we have called "From the structure of Religion to Poetics", central in many ways to our thesis, is to examine the content of Eliot's thought with a view to arriving at the structure of religion as it seems to unfold in his prose works. The chapter discusses this aspect of Eliot's thought and makes an attempt to show how Eliot used this structure of religion in merging it with his thematic concerns to evolve his 'poetics'. We have, therefore, devoted
this chapter to look at the importance of dogma, the problems of orthodoxy and heresy, and the relationship between religion and literature as the vital elements of this poetics especially with regard to the social functions of literature in general and literary criticism in particular.

Of the various kinds of literature, the two that seem to be very important insofar as Eliot's poetics is concerned, are the 'religious' and the 'pure' varieties. And, these are the subject of scrutiny in Chapter 4. Eliot's three-fold classification of 'religious literature' made in his essay, "Religion and Literature," forms the basis of our discussion of religious literature in Section I of this chapter. Section II is devoted to 'pure literature.' This section of the chapter attempts to trace the evolution of the concept of pure literature and examines the reasons behind it. Oscar Wilde's rejection of the tradition of moral criticism, and the implications flowing out of the reactions to it, form an important part of the discussion.

Chapter 5 examines some of the works of the two main heretical writers identified by Eliot in After Strange Gods: Thomas Hardy and D H Lawrence. The criteria set up on the basis of our inquiry into the problem of belief in Chapter 1 has been used to explore the reasons behind Eliot's dubbing of them as heretical. Our effort is to see whether or not Eliot is
justified in considering them as heretics and this we have done on
the basis of their works from which he has drawn his illustra-
tions to prove his point. Obviously, what is said in Chapter 2
about the 'strange gods', has been used extensively as the bases
of these developments.

Eliot identifies Gerard Manley Hopkins and James Joyce
as the upholders of faith in *After Strange Gods*. Chapter 6 has
been taken up entirely for a discussion of the works of these
two writers used by Eliot to hammer home his contention. Following
the pattern adopted in the preceding chapter, albeit with a minor
modification, we make use of the criteria set up in Chapter 1 to
find out those qualities that help Eliot recognize Hopkins and
Joyce as the upholders of faith. We hope to examine how far Eliot
may be justified in considering them so. Moreover, this chapter
attempts to look at Eliot's continued observations on their work
well beyond *After Strange Gods* in order to ascertain whether
Eliot's views undergo any changes.

"Notes towards Eliot's New Poetics" is the concluding
chapter — Chapter 7 — of this thesis. It draws upon the broad
framework of Eliot's philosophy and thought on literary creation
and criticism laid down at the end of Chapter 3 in order to re-
construct his poetics. Chapter 7 also makes use of the discussion
in the other chapters preceding it as well in an effort to record
the gradual evolution of Eliot's new 'poetics' with its genesis
lying in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and *After Strange
Gods*. 
References and Notes:


3. Ibid.


6. Eliot came to this again and again in his works. The two books that take a look at this (by DES Maxwell and VK Roy) are listed in the bibliography. Chapter Four of Maxwell's *The Poetry of T.S. Eliot* discusses "Poetry and Beliefs" (pp. 80-96) and is very informative. Roy's *T.S. Eliot: Quest for Belief: A Study of His Poetry and Drama* (1979) is a good source of information although quite unsatisfactory in its treatment of the subject.


8. It is common experience that whenever a book or any work of art is banned by the governments of the day or is withdrawn by the writer or artist by himself, the action arouses public interest in it and efforts are made to try and find out why this might have happened. "The last Temptation of Christ", 16/12/76.
a film based on a work of the Greek novelist, Nikos Kazantzakis, and Salman Rushdie's recent novel, *The Satanic Verses*, both of whom had a ban slapped on them, are the two recent cases that support this view. We must hurry to caution that it is not our intention to put Eliot's work on par with the works used to illustrate the point.


10. Ibid., p237.


15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., §390.

17. Eliot talks about this in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and "Thoughts after Lambeth" (1931).


19. Ibid.


21. Ibid., §873.

22. T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in Eliot's *Selected Essays*, 21. We have used the same edition of *Selected Essays* throughout the work as in 14, and 18 above.

